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# **Heterosexual couples, gender discourse, and the production of relational subjectivity**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

of

**Doctor of Philosophy in Human Development and  
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# Abstract

This study is situated in feminist and poststructural theory. The focus of the study is heterosexual relationships. In particular, the study investigates the shaping effects of patriarchal discourses on the relational subjectivity of a woman partner; how a woman partner responds to and refuses this shaping; and why and how a man might change his positioning in relation to his partner. The data were generated through focus group discussions with women, and individual interviews with men. An initial women's focus group generated core data for analysis, which was followed by interviews with men, and then a final focus group of women. Documentary practices, derived from narrative therapy, were used to capture and bridge discussions between these three stages of data generation. A poststructural analysis investigated the production of relational subjectivity in the context of heterosexual relationships. Analysis of data included a focus on relational subjectivity as reported by one of the initial focus group women. A deconstructive analysis of material from the initial focus group showed the shaping of women's relational subjectivities at the intersection of dominant patriarchal and resistant practices. This deconstructive analysis is supported by analyses of material from the men's interviews, and from the final focus group of women. Further, based in knowledge generated from the initial women's focus group, an idea for heterosexual relationship as egalitarian is developed in the analysis. The thesis argues that heterosexual relationship is often dominated by patriarchal ideas and practices that privilege the male partner. The thesis offers a philosophical location with the potential to reposition heterosexual relationship to a safe and egalitarian place. An exploration is offered about how men might take up ethical practices so that the repositioning of heterosexual relationship can be maintained, and patriarchally sustained male privilege held accountable. The thesis suggests that the ethical ideas and practices offered for egalitarian heterosexual relationship might be extrapolated to gender relations in general. My accountability as a male researcher is embedded in the process of the study, with feminist supervisors, in the research methodology with the final focus group of women, and in critical reflexivity in the data analysis. In particular, an example is provided which shows

the researcher reflexively analysing one moment in the data generation where a research participant was offered a possible non-preferred position. The contribution of this study is to bring Derridean ideas on ethical action to relational subjectivity in heterosexual relationship. Its timeliness is evidenced by the demand from the women participants, and others, for men to engage in respectful and ethical relationship practices. At the same time the study argues that its timeliness is still in the making, produced in the democracy to come that is being brought into existence when the potential for respectful and ethical relationship is enacted in practice. The responsibility for inventing such practices rests with men.

# Acknowledgements

*I am a person through other persons.<sup>1</sup>*

This thesis tells my story, which is really a story of all those who have contributed to my becoming. Each person, or group of persons, I name in these acknowledgements, and many others, deserve credit for contributing in some way to this study, and to the story of my becoming. At the outset, I want to assure you that my becoming was only an offshoot, an accident if you like, of what occurred during the making of this study. The dominant story of this study concerns the relationship men and women produce in heterosexual relationships. This thesis tells that story, which has been contributed to by many persons who are the central players that made this story possible. It is to each of you that I offer my acknowledgment, and say thank you.

Those who began this story, making its presence on these pages possible are a group of six women whose names, for confidentiality reasons, I cannot make public. But their stories are permeated throughout the pages of this thesis. The three meetings we had together in getting this study underway opened my eyes to recognise many things of fundamental importance to this thesis, that I had previously been blind too or ignored in my life. I really hope this thesis does your stories justice.

The way was opened for me to engage with this study through the School of Education at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, Aotearoa, New Zealand. I particularly thank the faculty and staff there who made this study opportunity possible, and an absolutely enjoyable process. In particular, Professor Wendy Drewery's initial engagement with me during the application process brought excitement and hope for a possibility that seemed impossible. My two supervisors, Dr Elmarie Kotzé and Associate Professor Kathie Crocket, are two of the most patient and understanding people I know, and not without a sense of humour that has sustained this journey. I hope this thesis is in some way

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<sup>1</sup> Desmond Tutu translates the African Nguni language word, *ubuntu*, into English as "a person is a person through other persons" (2005, p. 25).

gratifying for you too. I thank you for the courage you showed in taking me on as a male student to do feminist work. Your teaching along the way, your persistence with me, your exhilaration when my work warranted it, and your scholarly demands, are etched into my being as a becoming person. I particularly thank you for introducing me to feminist and poststructural theory which, as I developed a grasp of it, has been a most surprising and stimulating journey. I have indeed been privileged to have my work supervised by you both – thank you!

Those who made possible the continuance of this story, after the group of six women, are five men that I interviewed, and another group of three women. For confidentiality reasons each of your names cannot be made public. Thank you for your time and risky vulnerability in telling me your stories of relationship. Your stories are embedded in this thesis as major contributions to its unfolding story.

My student colleagues at the University of Waikato are also my teachers. Those annual *doctoral weeks* were easily among the most exhilarating and provocative weeks of my life thus far. You took risks in sharing not only your research material, but in sharing with me areas where I could become more ethical in how I conversed with and about other human beings. Particularly, I want to thank Jim Depree, my colleague and friend, who courageously helped me recognise the nuances of language in constituting and shaping ethical subjectivities.

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When I first began this study my employer at that time, Tabor Adelaide, made it possible for me to have time away in New Zealand at the doctoral weeks. Tabor Adelaide has supported me in this project both financially and time-wise, for which I am most grateful.

My family are integral to my becoming. Not because that is what I am supposed to say in an acknowledgments section but because, well before this study began, my partner Helen, and my two daughters, Natalie and Chelsea, provoked change in my behaviour by their constant demand for it. They not only challenged the

way I used and expressed words, but invited me into other preferable and ethical ways to language relationships. This thesis would not even have been thought of if it was not for these three persons who took the time and effort to challenge and persevere with me. I hope you each see something of yourself in this thesis that you can be proud of.

I particularly thank Natalie for her editorial assistance and advice, and the ongoing discussions around feminist concerns.

A number of major personal events have occurred over the time that I have been working on this study. My daughter has got married and given birth to three daughters. The fifty-eight year old marriage of my father and mother ended when my father passed away. My partner has continued to be the partner who has made this whole study process possible with her income and commitment to me and this project.

I especially acknowledge each person involved in these events. First, my father, I honour his example to me. As a man, he worked at finding the fissures in patriarchy and hence, toward egalitarian relations with, not only my mother, but all people he related too. I thank my mother for her ongoing call and example of equality for women in the workplace. I am sure my mother's call and example has contributed to my valuing equality and justice. Second, my daughter Chelsea, and her partner Ryan, thank you for the loving and gentle way that you help develop your daughters. You make my task as a grandparent one of the most joyful in life. Third, to my three granddaughters, Siena, Kiara, and Indiana, thank you for continuing to open my eyes to what you are and can be. My hope and prayer is that this thesis, and many other works like it, will contribute to this world being what you prefer it to be for you to live well. Finally, to Helen, my partner, this all began with you, when you first challenged me rather startlingly, twenty or so years ago, about how you wanted the relationship to be. Because of you, I am still here and a person becoming – thank you!





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# **Three stories and an introduction**

I have come to understand that heterosexual relationship is a prominent site for the production of patriarchal ideas and practices, which thus sets it up as a site for inequity and oppression (Butler, 1990/2006; Dickerson, 2013; Hollway, 1995; Jeffreys, 1990). It is the argument of this thesis that this inequity and oppression in heterosexual relationship generally transpires along gendered lines, where men as a group tend to be privileged by patriarchal ideas and practices, and women as a group tend to be oppressed by those same ideas and practices (Connell, 1987, p. 183; Hare-Mustin, 2004; Pease, 2010, pp. 93-97; Rankin Mahoney & Knudson-Martin, 2009; Weedon, 1997, pp. 2-4). I recognise there is a risk of an essentialising binary in constituting men as a group as privileged and women as a group as oppressed, and that there are local reversals of patriarchal practices and effects (Connell, 2005, p. 74). However, I take the risk based on this study's foundation in the idea that patriarchy produces male privilege and female oppression in heterosexual relationships. My interest in studying heterosexual relationship has origins that are both personal and professional.

## **The three stories**

My interest in this study started with three events that unfolded in my life. I identify these as the narratives of my heterosexual marriage, my counselling practice with heterosexual couples, and a desire for more satisfying theoretical and philosophical grounding for counselling heterosexual couples.

In regard to my own marriage, my partner demanded I give her space to have equal say in co-shaping our relationship practices. I reflected on my own actions and returned to the dialogue with new suggestions and hope that I could change. However, I found it difficult to change in a way that satisfied both my partner and I. I had no idea of the patient and hopeful position my partner held for our relationship at the time.

I worked in Adelaide, South Australia, as a counsellor educator at a private tertiary educational institution and often received inquiries into my knowledge of

narrative therapy. I became curious about narrative therapy and participated in a workshop with Michael White in early 2006, and I remember thinking at the time: “If narrative therapy can have such effects of respect for Michael White, then I want to learn narrative therapy”. I had been trained in Emotion Focussed Therapy (Greenberg & Johnson, 1988), and had only known of counselling theory and practice developed from psychological theory and practice. Psychological theories and practices formed and informed much of my teaching practice of counselling heterosexual couples. In narrative therapy I heard the engagement Michael White made with a number of philosophers as the basis for its theory and practice.

The narratives of my attempted shifts in the marriage with my partner and the development of new counselling practices initiated a migration story. A shift from modernist essentialism to socially constructed discursive paradigms opened up for me, so I searched and (re)searched to understand the philosophical underpinnings that shaped narrative therapy practices.

This study captures the many shifts I brought about as I set out to research the topic, *heterosexual couples, gender discourse, and the production of relational subjectivity*.

## **Early theoretical shaping of the study**

Very early in the process of preparing for this study I read Weedon (1997) which gave me a solid introduction to the philosophical underpinnings for socially constructed discursive paradigms. Drewery (2005) provided me an understanding of the dominant part the use of everyday language plays in the constitution of relational subjectivity and positioning. In regard to discourse and its constitutive practices and positioning, I discovered Davies (1998) and Davies and Harré (1999), and for discourse and power in the context of heterosexual relationship, I started with Benjamin (2003), Hare-Mustin (1991, 1994) and Hollway (1984, 1995). Patriarchy and its shaping effect for heterosexual relationships became an important focus for my study.

In addition to this feminist poststructural literature I was informed by the work of Connell (1987, 2002) and Pease (1997, 2000, 2002a) in regard to patriarchy and its dominant production of men as privileged in relation to women. Because of

this privileged positioning of men, and in conjunction with feminist poststructural thought on the discursive production of language and gender, as an ethical response to these ideas and practices I decided to explore women's experience of heterosexual relationship, and engage with men separately in individual interviews. From the context of psychotherapy, Downing (2000) introduces thought that was beginning to emerge for me in regard to the ethics of heterosexual coupledness. He argues that psychotherapy needs to be balanced with philosophical skills and knowledge otherwise assumptions can be made which have questionable ethical implications.

## **Connecting with a history**

An important historical work which this study aligns with in recognising the collective privileging of men in the joint domination of women is that of Lerner (1986). Lerner has painstakingly conducted an analysis that maps the historical processes by which patriarchy became established and institutionalised in western civilisation (pp. 8-11). This establishment of patriarchy in western civilisation, Lerner argues, occurred in the Ancient Near East over a period of 2,500 years up until approximately 600 B.C. (pp. 7-8). With the development of patriarchy, Lerner suggests the oppression of women occurred through two means, "educational deprivation . . . and male monopoly on definition" (p. 219). Of particular interest to this study is the male monopoly on definition. Male voice and thought has dominated history, subsuming almost anything that might resemble female initiative and enterprise: "women's thought has been imprisoned in a confining and erroneous patriarchal framework" (pp. 220-221). In her second book (1993), which analyses the 1,200 hundred year period up until the year 1870, Lerner highlights how women's thought and voice has been marginalised or ignored in that period, illustrating further the domination of patriarchy as privileging male experience and perspective. All this begs not only an acknowledgement of the history of patriarchy and its effects for women but also reference to the history of heterosexual relationship as a production of patriarchy.

In the work by Coontz (2005) on the history of marriage, one can clearly ascertain that throughout history marriage has privileged the male partner in various ways, which suggests its production by patriarchy (see pp. 79-82, 140-142, 159-160,

176, 237-238). Coontz (2005) details how marriage has changed throughout history from being commitment-based for external political, social, or economic reasons to the current era of being love-based and dependent on negotiation between the couple. While, according to Coontz, love and negotiation might be the new hallmark requirements of a heterosexual relationship, this does not mean that patriarchy no longer produces heterosexual relationships. Heterosexuality has been critiqued for the way “love” is expressed which results in control of the female partner and harm being done to her. This critique has not only come from the early feminists (see Beauvoir, 1949/1953; Benjamin, 1988; Firestone, 1970; Friedan, 1963; Millett, 1970), but also from later works on heterosexual relationship practices (see Jenkins, 2009; Sinclair & Monk, 2004; Toye, 2010), which suggests patriarchy still finds ways to produce heterosexual relationships.

## **An ethical stance**

With this patriarchal production of heterosexual relationship in mind, where patriarchal ideas and practices tend to be privileged, and ideas and practices that do not fit within a patriarchal framework, usually those of women, tend to be marginalised or demeaned, this study takes up a dual ethical stance. One aspect of this ethical stance is to deconstruct patriarchal practices of heterosexual relationship. The other aspect of this ethical stance is to offer possibilities of an alternative heterosexual relationship based in ideas, generated by a particular group of women, that concern egalitarian ethical practices of relationship. This dual ethical stance is made possible by theory that I introduce in the next chapter.

## **Strategic essentialism and relational externalising**

The construction of a binary along traditional gender categories, and the naming of male privilege and the oppression of women, has much support in the literature on gender (see Banyard, 2010; Connell, 1987, 2009; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990a; Kimmel, 2008; Knudson-Martin & Rankin Mahoney, 2009b; Magnusson & Marecek, 2012; Pease, 2010). This binary position is important for recognising and addressing the inequalities and power differential between men as a group and women as a group. In locating my study within a poststructuralist paradigm, I locate the inequalities and power differences in heterosexual relationships in patriarchal discourses. Men in heterosexual relationships take up privileged

positions offered by patriarchal discourses that can limit and define their partner's subjectivity and agency (Dickerson, 2013; Hare-Mustin, 1991; 2004; Hollway, 1995). Throughout this thesis, I refer to both *patriarchy* and *men* in regard to the privileged positions that are oppressively consequential for women in heterosexual relationships. At this stage, it is important to clarify my position on referring to men in a way that does not blame them for their privilege but that does invite to take responsibility for addressing privileged positions that produce harm.

Spivak (1988, 1990), a postcolonial feminist, suggests the idea of “strategic essentialism” as one way to achieve justice for those who are marginalised. With this idea, the groups involved, those perpetrating injustice and those who are oppressed, are given an essentialised quality or name that is then strategically used in an effort to gain justice for the oppressed group. In my study, strategic essentialism is used to name male privilege and the oppressive effects of this privilege for female partners in heterosexual relationships. I use strategic essentialism to name the entry point of patriarchy into heterosexual relationships so that men can be offered a space to seek appropriate ethical approaches to relationship. This differs from essentialism which, while it may be used to address issues of justice, also incorporates blame without recognition of discursive or historical and socio-cultural factors in the constitution of people and relationships.

A further conceptual and practical tool to set alongside strategic essentialism, in the playing out of this study, is the practice and theory of externalising language (White, 1993), or relational externalising (Bird, 2000). These two tools serve the same purpose of using language in such a way as to linguistically and experientially separate a person from a problem. Instead of viewing a person as the problem, these tools help to understand a person as having a relationship with the problem, which is intended to provide them with agentic space to address the problem. In my study, externalising language offers a means to strategically position men, and women, to examine patriarchy and its practices in ways that make it possible for the man to be in a position to take action against the oppressive behaviour without taking action against his own “nature” (White, 1993, p. 31). Secondly, relational externalising language may help a man see where his own pain has derived from, while still acknowledging the oppressive

practices toward women and working toward changing those practices. Relational externalising may take the politics out of men's pain (McLean, 1996) by setting the foundation for that pain in context. An idea that sits well with relational externalising, in this context of taking the politics out of men's pain, is Spivak's idea for achieving justice for those oppressed by privilege – “unlearning one's privilege as loss” (1988, p. 295; 1990, p. 10). Through the use of relational externalising, men in heterosexual relationships can unlearn their loss of privilege as disadvantage and pain and see the oppressive effects of their privilege for their heterosexual partners. The man may then give priority to changing his oppressive practices knowing that his pain and oppressive practices are not dichotomous but are founded in the same discursive practices and ideas (McLean, 1996, p. 25). As Gremillion puts it, “the point of externalising conversations is to create a discursive space to name, unpack, and detail the relational and ideational contexts of problems . . . that keeps conversation in the realm of discourse and practice” (2004, pp. 188, 190). This externalising makes room for a person to perceive themselves as in relationship with the problem (Bird, 2000, pp. 9-11), and thus having responsibility for actions taken in producing change.

In my study, the essentialising use of the plural nouns men and women are used, not to condemn men or to victimise women, but to help recognition of the injustice that is perpetrated on women. The reference to men is best understood alongside the theory of relational externalising in regard to patriarchy, so that men can experience agency in regard to addressing women's oppression as founded in patriarchy, not in men's “nature”, or as dichotomous to men's pain.

## **Gender relations**

To help situate this thesis in the broader location of gender relations I introduce some recent material on unequal gender relations and the call for equality between women and men. During the process of completing this study there have been a number of calls for (Australian) men “to act in concert with women” (Pease, 2010, p. 107) toward egalitarian gender relations. I note that these calls came as a result of recognition that gender relations are far from equal. For example, Australia's first female Prime Minister was castigated and oppressed because she is female (Summers, 2013). This overt abuse was unlike any that a male politician

might be subject to because of his sex. In a recent news article (King, 2014, 8<sup>th</sup> March), the sex discrimination commissioner in Australia, Elizabeth Broderick, is reported as saying: in regard to Australia's political climate, "Power in a country like Australia, in fact any country in the world, sits largely in the hands of men"; then in regard to the inclusion of women at leadership levels in society and public life, "If we don't intentionally include women, what we do is unintentionally exclude them"; and finally, in regard to gender equality in general, "If we want to create change we need men . . . taking the message of gender equality to other men".

These examples are indicative of "public sphere" gender relations that can often have effects for "private sphere" (heterosexual relationships) gender relations (Rudman & Glick, 2008, p. 289). This study acknowledges that relation.

## **Research questions**

My study, however, focused on the "private sphere" of how gender discourses produce relational subjectivity for heterosexual couples. In the process I became interested in how couples change subject positions. I shaped my research curiosity in the following research questions that guided my (re)search:

1. What are the available discourses by which heterosexual couples live their relationships?
2. What are the discursive practices (language and positioning) of heterosexual couples that produce relational subjectivity?
3. How can I help heterosexual couples to investigate the discursive production of relational subjectivity in my work as a counsellor?
4. What are some of the ideas and practices required for an egalitarian heterosexual relationship?
5. How do people change subject positions within a heterosexual relationship?

I explored heterosexual relational subjectivity as reported by two focus groups (Wilkinson, 1998b, 1999, 2004; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, 2011) with women participants and individual interviews with five men. As I introduce each



of the results chapters below I give a brief outline of the methods I employ in analysing the data. I now proceed with an outline of the chapters in this thesis.

## **Introducing the chapters**

The literature review is contained in Chapter Three. I review the feminist critique of family therapy theory and practice and, by association, heterosexual couple counselling. This critique zeros in on an absence of recognition of the socio-cultural basis for the construction of gender-power-relations that privilege men. A review of popular literature which, I suggest, is formative in the construction of heterosexual relationships, indicates assumptions of equality between women and men. These assumptions are set within the context of liberal humanist essentialist ideas. The focus of the feminist critique on gender-power-relations that privilege men is continued by taking up a feminist poststructural analysis of gender construction. Gender, rather than being founded essentially as with liberal humanist ideas, is situated in discourse. In this way, gender is understood as complex and heterogeneous, not tied to sex, and therefore shifting and changing. A review of self-help and academic literature on heterosexual coupledness shows how gender is constructed through essentialist ideas and patriarchal norms and practices. A review of feminist poststructural literature on heterosexual couple counselling indicates the gender constructive power of patriarchal discourses, and the possibilities for movement and difference by engagement with other discourses.

In Chapter Four I discuss an outline of the research methodology. In conjunction with the ideas advocated by the feminist poststructural literature, the first focus group began with discussions concerning the women's experience of conversational practices in their heterosexual relationships. This approach was taken because the control of conversations by the male partner produces and reproduces patriarchally informed heterosexual relationships. The discussions in the first focus group highlighted the effects these practices had for the women. Six women participated in the first focus group, and the group produced a document that I then used as a source for individual discussion with five men.

In engaging with men separately to women I hoped to put the possibility of a social justice agenda in place. In keeping with the feminist agenda for this study,

and with recognition of me as a man constituted by patriarchy, as a form of accountability (see Pease, 1997) a second focus group were recruited to complete the data generation process. This second focus group of women reflected on the document from the initial focus group and a document summarising the content of the men's interviews. The data generated from these three stages of the data generation process provoked a curiosity for theory, particularly from poststructural sources.

In Chapter Five, the first of the results chapters, the relational subjectivity of one participant of the first focus group is explored using the concepts "decomposition" and "mo(ve)ment" (see Davies, Browne, Gannon, Hopkins, McCann, & Wihlborg, 2006). These concepts help name and describe the "messy decomposing" process for a woman as she develops mo(ve)ment in and between discourses in response to her partner's oppressive conversational practices. While this chapter only focuses on one women's experience, it serves to introduce the harsh effects that patriarchally produced language practices can have for a woman – effects which are often invisible to the male partner.

Chapter Six is the mid-point of three chapters that zero in on the data from the first focus group as a concerted effort to understand and deconstruct patriarchally constituted heterosexual relationship and its effects for the six women involved. The relational subjectivity of the group participants, in relation to certain language practices from their partners, is discussed in Chapter Six. In this chapter, I argue that in the light of Deleuze's "ontology of difference" (May, 2005, pp. 26-71; Deleuze, 1962/1983; 1966/1988a; 1968/1990), the focus group discussions provided small "rhizomatic" spaces (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1988) for the women's voices and identities to be performed. Performativity of gender (Butler, 1990/2006) is a poststructural theory that I draw on to assist in deconstructing gender, for breaking down the stereotypes that male equals man, and female equals woman. Performativity of gender is used to analyse data from the first focus group in Chapter Six.

In Chapter Seven, the deconstructive effort is intensified with the use of deconstruction as double (Derrida, 1967/1974, 1972/2002; Lather, 2007). The deconstructive process is aided with the use of Foucault's (1980) ideas on the

relationship between power and knowledge as constitutive of each other, and a particular interpretation of this relationship (see Davies, Britt Flemmen, Gannon, Laws, & Watson, 2002). The women of the first focus group had conceptualised an idea, a knowledge of the possibilities for heterosexual relationship as egalitarian, that I explicate in Chapter Seven. I argue that this knowledge gives the women hope for their heterosexual relationships in the midst of patriarchal power relations and domination. Hence, the women constantly adjust to their partner's position in the relationship by changing their subject positions in an effort to keep the relationship and hope alive. In the analysis of the data I draw on double deconstruction to interpret both the knowledge and hope the women have for egalitarian heterosexual relationship, and the patriarchal practices of heterosexual relationship they constantly adjust to, or had adjusted to. The deconstruction shines the light on how patriarchal power privileging the male partner is produced.

Deconstruction as double continues in Chapter Eight. This time it is applied in application to data from the men's interviews. I utilise a number of theoretical positions to support the thesis of this chapter. Following the work of Levinas, (1961/1969) I theorise the women of the first focus group and their ideas and knowledges as Other, to whom ethical priority must be given. In the light of ethical priority of the other (Levinas, 1961/1969), in the context of Derrida's "democracy to come" (Derrida 1993/1994, 2003/2005a; see Caputo, 1997a; Critchley, 2007; Smith, 2005), women are regarded as Other, toward whom hospitality, justice, and ethical relationship must be practised. I suggest the knowledge the first focus group women have of an egalitarian heterosexual relationship equates to a democracy to come. Hence, I make suggestions, based in poststructural ethical ideas (see Caputo, 1993; Diprose, 2002; Jenkins, 2009; Ziarek, 2001) and with the use of material from the men's interviews, for how men in heterosexual relationships can relate with their partner in an egalitarian manner. Supplementing deconstruction as double and as a refusal to let go of hope that a "democracy to come" is possible, I use deconstruction as affirmative response to the other (Derrida, 1995a), and offer an invitation to men to change their position in heterosexual relationships. With this method, I take into account a history of patriarchy that marginalises the voices of women (Lerner, 1986,

1993), and the patriarchal domination of the institution of heterosexual relationships (Coontz, 2005; Sinclair & Monk, 2004; Toye, 2010; Jenkins, 2009; Weedon, 1997).

The responses of the second focus group of women, to the document generated by the first focus group and the document summarising the men's interviews, are the focus of Chapter Nine. The second focus group of women express solidarity with the first focus group with resistance stories to patriarchal oppression.

In Chapter Ten I use the ideas on accountability from Butler (2005), who situates the emergence of ethical subjectivities within a socially and culturally aware framework that is dependent upon relational scenes of address. With these ideas, I address my accountability to the first and second focus group of women. As an act of accountability, I pause at one moment in the data generation where discourse is in operation. I theorise that moment of conversation between a participant of the first focus group and myself using a number of strategies.

In the final chapter I summarise the core contribution of each of the results chapters, Five through Ten. I then set the contribution of this thesis in the context of an interpretation of Derrida's view of ethical action and responsibility (Mansfield, 2006). I conclude the thesis with argument that while the "democracy to come" (Derrida, 1993/1994, 2003/2005a) is still in the making, it is being brought into existence every time patriarchal privilege is recognised by a man and he engages in ethical conversation with a woman.

## **The three stories and this study**

At the beginning of this introductory chapter I referred to the feminist and poststructural philosophical ideas invited to this study, and I identified three events that unfolded in my life, namely, narratives of my heterosexual marriage, my counselling practice with couples, and a desire for more satisfying theoretical and philosophical grounding for counselling heterosexual couples.

The stories were left discontinued at the point of convergence. In part, these stories may have been continued in the remainder of this introductory chapter with reference to some of the ideas used for analysis in each chapter of this thesis.

However, the more thorough continuation of these stories is this thesis and the study on heterosexual relationship it concerns. Chapter Two, as the next in this thesis, introduces more thoroughly the feminist and philosophical ideas utilised for analysing the data of this study, and thus, the continuation of the three converged stories that brought me to this space.

## **Chapter 2. A double ethical position**

This chapter introduces the work of philosophers and theorists that is central to this thesis. It is a philosophical chapter that puts in place explanations of the conceptual tools I use for the analysis in the results chapters, Five to Ten.

### **Discourse and patriarchy**

This study is situated in a feminist poststructural paradigm which utilises discourse for specific purposes. I turn now to Foucault, who first introduced the concept of discourse for understanding how power and knowledge are related and shape the social world. In his archaeological work on the emergence of the human sciences, Foucault decentres the human subject as the purveyor of truth and knowledge (Foucault, 1969/2002a, pp. 16, 154; Macdonell, 1986, pp. 83-94; McNay, 1994, p. 52-56; Scheurich & McKenzie, 2005, pp. 845-849), and gives priority to discourse. In the context of Foucault's archaeological work, discourses are "discontinuous practices" (1970/1981, p. 67), localised in an historical period, appearing in messy accidental ways (1971/2000b, p. 374), "that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (1969/2002a, p. 54). Later, as part of his genealogical method (1975/1991, 1976/1998, 1971/2000b), Foucault made a "theoretical shift" (1984/1990, p. 6), giving more prominence to "the material conditions of discourse", and the "operations of power, particularly as they target the body to produce knowledge and subjectivity" (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 46; see Foucault, 1980, pp. 113-117; McNay, 1994, pp. 85-100; Scheurich & McKenzie, 2005, pp. 849-857). The more theoretical work in archaeology is joined with the practical work of genealogy to produce a clearer picture of discourse (Best & Kellner, 1991, pp. 46-47; McNay, 1992, p. 27).

Taking into account these theoretical and practical developments by Foucault in explicating discourse, I offer a concise definition. Discourse is a "specific regime of power" that generates knowledge (McNay, 1992, p. 27), which Foucault names "games of truth . . . a set of rules by which truth is produced" (1984/2000c, pp. 296-297). These "games of truth", produce human subjectivity, discursively positioning people to see themselves on the terms that language and knowledge

authorise (Danaher, Schirato, & Webb, 2000, p. 40; Davies, 1990-1999, pp. 43-44; Weedon, 1997, pp. 21-26, 95, 105).

This understanding of discourse fits with a feminist use of poststructural theory for “conceptualising the relationship between language, social institutions and individual consciousness [subjectivity] which focuses on how power is exercised and on the possibilities for change” (Weedon, 1997, p. 19). This thesis argues that men exercise power in heterosexual relationships by utilising language and knowledge from patriarchal and liberal humanist discourses in ways that unhelpfully constitute their partners’ subjectivities. Possibilities for change exist in women using alternate discursive repertoires to those available for their partners. But more significantly for this study, change exists in men taking an ethical position which, first, recognises discourses that disadvantage their partners, and second, locates their practices in alternate egalitarian discourses.

Both terms, patriarchy, or patriarchal discourses, are used in this study. To help ground understanding of patriarchal discourses and how they might be present in ways that disadvantage and oppress women I mention here a few of their effects. Patriarchal discourses are present in violence and sexual coercion or rape (Gavey, 2005; Jenkins, 1990; Pease, 1997), and the unequal domestic and social division of labour (Dixon & Wetherell, 2004). Patriarchy is present in everyday relational practices where male opinions are privileged and regarded as objective truth (Kimmel, 2008, p. 8), along with language practices such as interrupting people with answers to problems (Nylund & Nylund, 2003). In adapting the work of McIntosh (1988/2010) on white privilege, Schacht (2003, p. 169) lists a number of situations where he is or has been privileged. Some of these situations can be read as examples of patriarchal privilege that directly disadvantage women: higher salaries than women in equivalent employment roles; as students a male can often be given higher priority by a teacher or lecturer; and the acknowledgement and validation of men’s voices in preference to those of women when in conversation with women.

Liberal humanist discourse is aligned with patriarchal discourses because it masks the effects of patriarchy (Weedon, 1997, p. 41). Gender discourse is mainly invisible in liberal humanist discourse, and because of this invisibility liberal

humanism commits the error of assuming equality between men and women. This gender invisibility and assumption of equality in liberal humanist discourse leaves power out of the equation in social relations between men and women (Hare-Mustin, 1991, p. 65). Foundational to this assumption in liberal humanism is that “every (ungendered) individual” (Hare-Mustin, 1991, p. 65) has an essentialised human nature which is the “basis . . . for equality of opportunity and the right to self-determination” (Weedon, 1997, p. 77). In the light of this argument concerning liberal humanist discourse Weedon, a feminist poststructural scholar, writes:

The principle of equality of opportunity for women and men in education and work, once established, has not proved any great threat to the balance of power in a society where patriarchal relations inform the very production and regulation of female and male subjects. It is possible for liberal discourses of equality to work against women’s interests and it is only by looking at a discourse *in operation*, in a specific historical context, that it is possible to see whose interests it serves at a particular moment. (1997, p. 108)

To show the inequality that patriarchal and liberal humanist discourses produce, in this study I follow Weedon’s advice and look at discourses in operation to ascertain whose interests they serve. By looking at discourses in operation, and the politics of such, I expose the workings of discourse that privilege men and disadvantage women in heterosexual relationships. An important contribution to this study’s ethical stance and to its exposure of the workings of discourse is the practice of deconstruction.

## **Deconstruction**

I use five applications of deconstruction in this study. Beginning with deconstruction as double, I proceed with an explanation of these.

### **Deconstruction as double**

Deconstruction in this study is a practice of the “double” (Derrida, 1972/2002, p. 38; Lather, 2007, p. 14). In this study, double can have a number of applications, but there are two that are core. Derrida’s early work, where he introduces



deconstruction, is an investigation and critique of western metaphysics (Culler, 1982; Derrida, 1967/1973a, 1967/1974, 1967/1978, 1972/1981, 1972/1982a; Norris, 2004). Western metaphysics is founded upon presuppositions that shape everyday language and practices of living (Derrida, 1972/2002, pp. 18-19; Norris, 2004, p. 15), and among these is the practice of creating and thinking and living with binary oppositions. Of particular interest to Derrida is the hierarchical nature of these oppositions, where one of the pair is regarded as superior to the other, and connected to some *a priori* essence, or being, or self-existent origin. The other of the pair is regarded as opposite to the superior one, or at best, a complicated flawed version of it (Culler, 1982, pp. 92-93; Derrida, 1977b, p. 93; Johnson, 1981, p. viii; Lechte, 1994, p. 106). The first meaning of double is that Derrida stands within this metaphysical system to critique and deconstruct it. It is from within the system that Derrida “problematizes” (Reynolds & Roffe, 2004, p. 2) or deconstructs the system (Derrida, 1967/1974, p. 24; Norris, 2004, pp. 15-16). Nealon refers to this action as “the double necessity of working from within the institutional constraints of a tradition even while trying to expose what that tradition has ignored or forgotten” (1993, p. 101).

The second meaning of double relates to how Derrida deconstructs the binary oppositions foundational to western thought. Because Derrida regards the hierarchy of these oppositions as violent, because “one of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.)”, one of the tasks of deconstruction is to “overturn” this hierarchy (1972/2002, p. 39). This step is important as an effective intervention in the violent hierarchy. However, in reversing the hierarchy Derrida acknowledges he is creating a new hierarchy within the same conceptual order (western metaphysics) that he is endeavouring to displace (1972/1982a, p. 329; 1972/2002, p. 39). Thus, to suitably deconstruct the conceptual order, the new reversed hierarchy “must be displaced, the winning term put under erasure” (Spivak, 1974, p. lxxvii); “a new ‘concept’” inscribed, that never was and never can be included in the previous system, “thereby disorganizing the entire inherited order and invading the entire field” (Derrida, 1972/2002, p. 39). In his investigation of western metaphysics, the prototype of deconstruction offered by Derrida is his overthrowing of the speech-writing hierarchy, where deconstruction challenges the privileging of speech; then he introduces the new concept of

writing within speech (Spivak, 1974, p. lxxvii), which is understood in his neologism, *différance* (1968/1973b, 1972/2002, 39-41), which I describe later in another application of deconstruction.

Deconstruction as double is applied in this study in the deconstruction of heterosexual relationship. I do this, as someone who is committed to a heterosexual relationship. I am a man who has been, and still is at times, caught in patriarchal practices that constitute patriarchal domination of heterosexual relationship. It is from this position that I deconstruct patriarchal heterosexual relationship practices in this study. This orientation connects to the second meaning taken from deconstruction as double, as I intend to expose what the tradition of heterosexual relationship “has ignored or forgotten” (Nealon, 1993, p. 101). The second meaning taken from deconstruction as double in application to this study does not follow the perhaps formulaic order for deconstruction outlined above, where overturning of hierarchy is followed by erasure of the reversed hierarchy, followed by finding a new concept. Derrida himself questions the idea of chronological phases for practising deconstruction, but nonetheless he makes use of a (formulaic) approach for explanatory purposes (1972/2002, p. 39). In application to this study, because of complicating power relations, I erase a hierarchy first by deconstructing both patriarchal expressions of heterosexual relationship and a preferred expression offered by a group of women. Following this, the reversal of hierarchy is put in place in conjunction with the inclusion of a new concept. The new concept comes from ideas offered by women about the possibilities of egalitarian heterosexual relational practices. The reversal of hierarchy involves men stepping back from their privileged position to one of affirmative engagement with the new concept offered. Woven in with this reversed hierarchy are suggested practices that open space for the affirmative engagement in a non-hierarchical egalitarian heterosexual relationship.

### **Deconstruction is not annihilation**

Deconstruction is not annihilation, but a rethinking, “troubling” (David, Coffey, Connolly, Nayak, & Reay, 2006), or problematising (Pease, 2010, p.177; Reynolds & Roffe, 2004, p. 2). I emphasize what deconstruction is not because it can be misunderstood as destruction of one position or system in favour of

another. But, as can be ascertained from the previous discussion on deconstruction as double, as Derrida developed it, destruction is not a goal of deconstruction. Deconstruction can be regarded as a disorganising or an invasion of an inherited order without completely destroying that order (Derrida, 1972/2002, p. 39). Derrida makes this very clear in his *Letter to a Japanese Friend* (1985/2008, pp. 1-6) where he clarifies his reasons for choosing *deconstruction* as the word in the French language to describe the process he was developing. The French “term ‘destruction’ too obviously implied an annihilation or a negative reduction” (1985/2008, p. 2). Hence, Derrida chose the French term deconstruction which is connected to a mechanical sense of disassembling the parts of a whole, deconstructing or dismantling a machine for transportation elsewhere (1985/2008, p. 2; Peeters, 2010/2013, p. 160). To use words such as troubling, problematising, or, as Derrida does, the idea of invasion (1972/2002, p. 39), suggests that the old system is still accessible but it is sufficiently infiltrated or undone that it will no longer occupy its original hegemonic place of authority and power. Via deconstruction, the old system has been dismantled and transported to another place, where it exists again, but without the hegemonic structures and supports that were originally part of that system. In the context of this study, heterosexual relationship still exists after my deconstruction of its patriarchal practices, but it has the potential to exist in a new format, one ordered from non-patriarchal ideas and practices. Deconstruction is not annihilation, quite the contrary; it is affirmation of an ethical position, particularly in response to the other (Caputo, 1997a, p. 53; Critchley, 2007, pp. 28, 41; Derrida, 1995a, pp. 167-168; Smith, 2005).

### **Deconstruction as affirmative response to the other**

Derrida’s deconstruction of binary oppositions that uphold western metaphysics is a response to the other, which is regarded as the lesser, within those oppositions. In an interview, Derrida speaks clearly about deconstruction as affirmation of the other:

Deconstruction is, in itself, a positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls, summons or motivates it. Deconstruction is therefore vocation – a response to a call. The other, as the other than self . . . precedes

philosophy and necessarily invokes and provokes the subject before any genuine questioning can begin. It is in this rapport with the other that affirmation expresses itself. (1995a, p. 168)

With reference to the work of Levinas (1961/1969, 1974/1998; see Caputo, 1997a, p. 127) on ethical relationship with the other, Derrida makes this clear connection between deconstruction and the call of the other. Later in this chapter I develop Levinas' ideas of the other that are helpful for this study. This development will further explain the idea of the other as it is introduced here, and used in this study. In conceptualising heterosexual relationship within the context of a hegemonic patriarchal framework this study takes the other to be women. In this way, this study, in deconstructing heterosexual relationship, has an affirmative response to women as the other in patriarchal heterosexual relationships.

### **Deconstruction as plurality of meaning**

Différance is the neologism coined by Derrida (1968/1973b) that best explains the possibility of plural meanings for a signifier or word. Différance – combining difference, differing, deferring – refers to both the difference, or the gap between signs, that produces signs, and the difference of the sign to the thing or concept signified, and the ongoing deferral of full meaning in regard to the signified (Culler, 1982, p. 97; Derrida, 1968/1973b; Johnson, 1981, p. ix).

In agreement with Saussure (1915/1974, pp. 118, 120), the forerunner of semiotics and structuralism, Derrida argues that signs in language are not positively related, producing meaning in themselves, but rather, a sign is nothing in itself until related to a different sign (Culler, 1982, p. 99; Derrida, 1968/1973b, pp. 142-143; 1972/2002, pp. 23-24). Signs are not only an effect of the difference between them, but the movement or ongoing difference between signs produces difference (Culler, 1982, p. 97; Derrida, 1968/1973b, p. 138). This production of difference is first related to what the signifier signifies. In critiquing the dominant western metaphysical assumption that speech provides direct access to consciousness, and in disagreement with Saussure (1915/1974), where “the voice is consciousness itself” (Derrida, 1972/2002, p. 20), Derrida argues that the sign and the signified are separate. The signifier, whether in speech or writing, is

different to the signified, hence it cannot provide direct access to the signified (1968/1973b, p. 138-141). This leads to the final understanding of *différance*, as the production of deferral, or continual postponement, of complete meaning. A positive way to say this is that *différance* suggests there is the possibility of a plurality of different meanings attached to the signifier. “[D]ifférance is . . . the possibility of conceptuality” (Derrida, 1968/1973b, p. 140). This does not mean that any meaning can be arbitrarily connected to the signifier. Rather, multiple possible meanings relates to “an openness to the other” (Derrida, 1995a, p. 173), that is not random, but relates to that which the system has “ignored or forgotten” (Nealon, 1993, p. 101). Inclusion of “other” meaning challenges and disturbs the fixed identity or system (Stocker, 2006, p. 176). In my study, deconstruction as multiple possible meanings produces different interpretations of heterosexual relationship, a patriarchal version, and more ethical egalitarian versions.

### **Deconstruction as the subject inscribed in language**

Not unlike Foucault (1980, p. 117; 1969/2002a, p. 54) who regards the subject as constituted, or spoken into existence through discourse, Derrida regards the subject as being “inscribed in language” (1968/1973b, p. 145; 1995a, p. 175). In the context of Derrida’s deconstruction of western metaphysics and the place of the subject in such, he says, “The subject is not some metalinguistic substance or identity, some pure *cogito* of self-presence; it is always inscribed in language. My work does not, therefore, destroy the subject; it simply tries to resituate it” (1995a, p. 175). In my study the subject is taken to be situated and inscribed in language. The subject experiences their subjectivity as a result of how they position themselves, or how they are positioned, in conversations with their heterosexual partners. The subject inscribed in language also means the subject must use language to present a version of their subjectivity.

Deconstruction in my study thus has five applications. Deconstruction is understood as a double action of being within an institution while deconstructing or destabilising that institution. The reversal of a hierarchical relationship while placing that reversal under erasure and applying a new concept to the relationship is another application of deconstruction as double. Second, deconstruction is not annihilation but a troubling or disabling of the original hierarchical system so that

alternatives to that system's position are possible. In destabilising the system, the third application of deconstruction for this study is to affirmatively respond to the other, the lesser of the hierarchical pair. The other is that which the system has ignored, which is its "very condition of possibility" (Lechte, 1994, p. 107). Related to being for the other in deconstruction is the possibility of multiple meanings because of *différance* in language. This multiplicity of meanings is guided by the other whom the system does not adequately recognise. Finally, deconstruction means that the subject is not present without language. This implies that language not only inscribes the subject, but that the subject must use language to present a version of their subjectivity. My interpretation and analysis of the versions of subjectivity offered in this study is guided by "an openness towards the other" (Derrida, 1995a, p. 173). I now move from these applications of deconstruction, to the means by which deconstruction is applied in this study.

## **The means of deconstruction**

In this study there are five means by which deconstruction is applied. Beginning with positioning theory, I proceed with an explanation of these.

### **Positioning theory**

Positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999) and its constituent concept subject position posit subjectivity as multiple and contradictory, and hence open to change and political agency (Davies & Harré, 1999, pp. 35, 49; Gavey, 1989, p. 464; Weedon, 1997, p. 21). The concept, subject position, was first introduced into the social sciences by Hollway (1984) in her study on heterosexual relations and gendered subjectivity:

Discourses make available positions for subjects to take up. These positions are in relation to other people. Like the subject and object of a sentence . . . women and men are placed in relation to each other through meanings which a particular discourse makes available. (p. 236)

I explain this concept, subject position, in the context of heterosexual relationship.

### ***Subject position and relational subjectivity***

In the context of heterosexual relationships, the moment one partner speaks in a conversation, with language that makes sense, they use discursive material because they use words that have a common meaning. They are producing, or reproducing, and entering into exchanging discursive material (Winslade, 2005, pp. 352-353). As they speak, they either tacitly or intentionally (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999, pp. 22-23) enunciate with “illocutionary force” a speaking position from which they expect the other person will respond (Winslade, 2005, pp. 352, 362, fn. 2). This initial speaking by a partner structures the relationship at that moment according to a moral sense of who has the speaking rights, and who has a duty to respond in a certain way (Harré, Moghaddam, Pilkerton Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009, pp. 7-8; Linehan & McCarthy, 2000. p. 442; van Langenhove & Harré, 1999, p. 20; Winslade, 2005, p. 353). Hicks (1996, p. 107), uses the term “moment to moment ‘oughtness’”, which I think helpfully names this moral sense that two partners have in responding to each other in a conversation (Winslade, 2005, p. 353). To connect this “moment to moment oughtness” to discourse, I refer to Parker, who offers an analogy using Althusser’s (1971) thoughts on the appeal of ideology. Parker writes “the discourse is hailing us, shouting ‘hey you there’ and making us listen as a certain type of person . . . [directing] what we are expected to do when addressed” (1992, pp. 9-10). “Moment to moment oughtness”, the hailing shout of discourse, highlights the discursive power that is present in conversations when one partner speaks, intentionally or implicitly, from a subject position that demands the other partner respond from an asymmetrical subject position. Even though I have made use of conversation here as a discursive product to illustrate positioning, as that is where it is most relevant to my study, positioning occurs in all the forms discourse takes.

A heterosexual couple can speak from symmetrical subject positions. But that which this study initially explores is the “production of relational subjectivity” (Drewery, 2005), where patriarchal discourses tend to make asymmetrical subject positions available, offering a woman partner subject positions subordinate to her male partner. I use the verb offering as, even though there is a “moment to moment oughtness” in the conversations, the offered subject position can be refused, making way for alternate positions to the one initially offered (Davies,

1991; Davies & Harré, 1999, pp. 39-40; van Langenhove & Harré, 1999, pp. 16-20).

Positioning theory as a means of deconstruction has three important consequences for this study. Language is understood as “a site of political struggle” (Weedon, 1997, p. 79), as meanings are not fixed, but are open to contestation and deconstruction. Language gains power and meaning from its discursive context, a context which can also be deconstructed (Derrida, 1972/1977a, p. 12). Similarly, subjectivity cannot be fixed as it is dependent upon the discursive context and the moment to moment hailings.

In this study a central political interest, to take Weedon’s (1997, p. 40) phrase, is patriarchy and its expression in heterosexual relationship. Discourses of coupledness represent various political interests, “vying for status and power” (p. 40). Heterosexual coupledness then, as a site of a contest for power, shapes available subjectivities for men and for women. It is the concept of positioning that offers possibilities for the woman partner to be “an active but not sovereign protagonist” (Weedon, 1997, p. 40) in the contest for her subjectivity.

### **Decomposition and Mo(ve)ment**

“Decomposition” (Barthes, 1977; Davies et al., 2006) is a helpful poststructural tool for addressing the complexity and messiness of the slow process of transforming the effects of a dominant discourse on the material body. “Mo(ve)ment” (Davies et al., 2006) refers to the moment by moment transformation that takes place at the same time as decomposition, from one non-preferred discourse to a preferred discourse, or at least to a subject position that is more agentic. Davies et al. (2006) take the term, decomposition, from Barthes (1977, p. 63), who proposed decomposition as a means to change, given the impossibility of there being anywhere to go outside of discourse and its constituting effects. Barthes (1977, p. 63) writes:

In order to destroy, in short, we must be able to *overleap*. But overleap where? Into what language? Into which site of good conscience and bad faith? Whereas by decomposing, I agree to accompany such decomposition, to decompose myself as well, in the process: I scrape, catch, and drag.



Barthes (1977, p. 63) uses the metaphor of breaking down a lump of sugar in a glass of water to illustrate decomposition. Davies et al. (2006) join decomposition with deconstruction and mo(ve)ment: in their particular situation, as feminist writers they are transforming from a liberal humanist discourse to a poststructuralist position.

In this mo(ve)ment, we see the possibility of a different discursive constitution opened up, first through a critical poststructuralist deconstruction, and second through work on comprehending the processes of our own subjectification and decomposing those areas of fixity that are tied to discourses we are working to make unthinkable. (p. 100)

Davies et al. connect deconstruction to mo(ve)ment and decomposition in the transformation process. Decomposition and mo(ve)ment add to deconstruction by providing a graphic and visceral sense of the complex and difficult transformation process involved in movements from one discourse to another.

### **Mastery and submission/Utilisation and accommodation**

In conjunction with decomposition and mo(ve)ment, I utilise Butler's (1997a) concepts of mastery and submission, which originate with Althusser (1971) and are explicated and applied by Davies (2006). Mastery and submission are concepts that shed light on how individuals become subjects of discourse, both as a result of direct constitution through discursive power (submission), and then the redirection of power from the subject as effective agentic work (mastery).

In the context of this study, as a male researcher studying women's subjectivity and heterosexual relationships, I prefer not to use the words mastery and submission, as they are affiliated with patriarchal meanings. Davies, in commenting on Butler's work and its application for practice writes:

What Butler does not do, as a philosopher, is link her analysis to the details of everyday lives in educational or other settings. That linkage is left to those of us working in the professions, who want to see what implications her thought has for practice. (2006, p. 425)

For me, a male researcher studying women's subjectivity, Davies' comment provides a means of escape from using Butler's terms, "mastery and submission", to applying terms that more appropriately fit with my study's context. However, before changing, for this study's purposes, the words mastery and submission, I explain what Butler means by them, in acknowledgement of their conceptual contribution to this study.

Foucault suggests that there is a paradoxical double action in forming the subject (Bendix Petersen, 2008, p. 59; Davies, 2006, p. 425). Foucault writes:

It is a form of power that makes individual subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his (*sic*) own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to. (2002b, p. 331)

Butler elaborates on Foucault's work here in explaining the paradoxical double action of forming the subject, particularly with reference to the words, "of power", in the last sentence:

Power acts on the subject in at least two ways: first, as what makes the subject possible, the condition of its possibility and its formative occasion, and second, as what is taken up and reiterated in the subject's "own" acting. As a subject *of* power (where "of" connotes both "belonging to" and "wielding"), the subject eclipses the conditions of its own emergence; it eclipses power with power. The conditions not only make possible the subject but enter into the subject's formation. They are made present in the acts of that formation and in the acts of the subject that follow. (Butler, 1997a, p. 14)

While power can appear as though it originated with the subject it is on these terms a resignification of the power that has originally formed the subject from discourse (Butler, 1995, p. 135; Stern, 2000, p. 113). It is to this paradoxical double action of power on the subject that the terms mastery and submission are applied by Butler. "What Butler's theoretical work has so powerfully elaborated

are the paradoxical conditions through which the accomplishment of subjecthood is made possible” (Davies, 2006, p. 425).

The individual emerges as a subject within a discourse, by accommodation to the dominant discursive repertoires, and then skilfully utilising knowledge of those repertoires agentially. The words, *accommodation* to discourse, and *utilisation* of discourse, replace submission and mastery in this study. Drewery refers to this same accommodation and utilisation of discourse: “With the benefit of Foucault’s work it is possible to think about knowing how to go on as part of being an accomplished discourse user, or as knowing the discursive context” (2005, p. 314).

### **Performativity of gender**

An important means of resisting patriarchal discourses and their constituting effects is to deconstruct gender. To do this deconstructive work I employ Butler’s (1990/2006) theory of performativity.

In developing her theory of performativity, Butler challenges the conventional view that sex and gender are naturally derived from the biology of human beings. Butler argues that sex and gender are discursively and culturally constructed, with sex itself being gendered (Butler, 1990/2006, pp. xxx-xxxi; Jagger, 2007, pp. 1-2). The theory of performativity stands on the argument that gender identity is not the stable category of the masculine and feminine, or man and woman, as the heterosexual matrix<sup>2</sup> and phallogocentrism would have it. Gender identity is not ontologically prior to language, but is rather a performative effect of language (Butler, 1990/2006, pp. 22-34; Chambers & Carver, 2008, p. 41; Jagger, 2007, p. 18). The heterosexual institution has set up the binary gender system of woman and man assuming as an ontological fact, prior to language, a natural and ordered relationship between sex, gender, and desire (Butler, 1990/2006, p. 31). If sexual and gender identity is not metaphysically prior to language, but is the result of language and the heterosexual and phallogocentric urge to power, then “gender is always a doing . . . not a noun” (Butler, 1990/2006, p. 34) that occurs from the

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<sup>2</sup> There is an assumption that gender expresses sex, that both sex and gender are stable with male expressing a masculine gender and female expressing a feminine gender with their binary sets of characteristics, which are hierarchically defined and practiced in heterosexuality.

“repetitious citations of what we understand culturally as sex and gender” (Chambers & Carver, 2008, p. 43). Or, as Butler states, “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (1990/2006, p. 34). Heterosexual and phallogocentric institutions, through power, condone certain practices, and punish others, which result in the setting up of gender discourses, in which people do gender performatively, from which is produced the idea/performance of gender as natural and normal behaviour for male and female (Butler, 1990/2006, p. 190).

### ***Agency within performativity***

The theory of performativity calls forward a poststructural understanding of agency. Any “subject” or “doer” of the deed (Butler, 1990/2006, p. 34) is swamped by discourse. Consequently, Butler writes “gender performativity involves the difficult labour of deriving agency from the power regimes which constitute us, and which we oppose” (1995, p. 136). The subject is historically and culturally constituted by discourse – “power regimes” – and not apart from them. In another context Butler writes, “The historicity of the discourse implies the way in which history is constitutive of discourse itself. It is not simply that discourses are located *in* histories, but that they have their own constitutive historical character” (1993, p. 282, fn. 7). By grasping how one has been historically constituted as a certain gender – to act and speak in certain gender normative ways which fit with a specific historical and cultural milieu – the possibility of agency as the reworking of that historically constitutive signifier now has potential.

This reworking of the historically constitutive signifier, or resignification, is the required action that performs agency for the subject. In order to theorise agency and transformation within discursive regimes (Jagger, 2007, p. 68), I employ further Derridean concepts – iterability, temporality, and citationality (see Derrida, 1972/1977a, 1982b; Butler, 1995, p. 134; Jagger, 2007, pp. 31, 65-69) – which I explain in the following paragraphs.

The term performativity is taken by Butler from Austin (1976; Butler, 1995), and it is Derrida’s reformulation of this term’s meaning that guided Butler’s use of it.

Derrida responds to Austin's (1976) idea that the intention of the speaker appears to be the binding power of an act, such as the pronouncement of a marriage at a marriage ceremony, the opening of a meeting, or the launching of a ship. Derrida argues that the power is due to the idea that the words are a "'coded' and iterable utterance . . . identifiable as conforming with an iterable model . . . identifiable in some way as a 'citation'" (1972/1977a, p. 18). It is because the words are a citation, for a specific repeatable and temporal purpose, that power is attributable to them. Butler takes up this idea, writing:

The binding power . . . is more properly attributable to a citational force of the speaking, the iterability that establishes the authority of the speech act . . . [E]very "act" is an echo or citational chain, and it is its citationality that constitutes its performative force. (1993, p. 282, fn. 5)

Iterability is Derrida's notion, following *différance*, which conceives the difference and deferral of meaning in the performativity of language (1972/1977a, pp. 12, 17-18). Citationality is thus reformulated, not as mechanical repetition of the same meaning, but as an iterable performative language event involving the possibility of difference or otherness of meaning each time citation occurs (Butler, 1993, p. 245, fn. 8; Jagger, 2007, pp. 67-68). In the context of the performativity of gender discourse then, citationality concerns the repetition of gender norms and conventions. Iterability as part of citationality concerns the repeatability of those norms, but always with the possibility of alteration and difference. Butler writes:

By virtue of this reiteration . . . gaps and fissures are opened up . . . as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm. This instability is the *deconstituting* possibility in the very process of repetition. (1993, p. 10)

Because a subject is only temporarily constituted, Derrida's notion of temporality, in the context of gender discourse, refers to the requirement to performatively repeat gender norms so the subject is continually a certain gender. However, iterability, as the possibility of an "'impure' performative" (1972/1977a, p. 17) of discursive gender norms, makes room for agency in the gaps between gender norms and the performative actions of the subject. Butler (1995, p. 135)

summarises this whole process of repetition of norms to resignification as the condition for agency:

That this is a repeated process, an iterable procedure, is *precisely* the condition of agency within discourse. If a subject were constituted once and for all, there would be no possibility of a reiteration of those constituting conventions or norms. That the subject is that which must be constituted again and again implies that it is open to formulations that are not fully constrained in advance. Hence, the insistence on finding agency *as* resignification. . . . [I]f the subject is a reworking of the very discursive processes by which it is worked, then “agency” is to be found in the possibilities of resignification opened up by discourse.

For the purposes of this study, performativity of gender is understood as the repetitive practice of gender norms, dictated by the heterosexual matrix and phallogocentrism – common gender discourses, which constitute the subjectivity of the subject. What looks like the expression of a naturalised gender is the repetition of gender norms which constitute gender subjectivity. Performativity provides agency by its relationship to unstable historically-based gender discourses, and the potential for resignification of the subject either between discourses or within a discourse. This resignification potentially comes about in the moments when gender norms are repeatedly expressed, or iterably cited, because they are temporal in their constitutive effects on the subject.

### **The power/knowledge nexus**

In poststructural terms, power and knowledge are intimately connected, being productive of one another (Davies, et al., 2002, p. 297; Foucault, 1975/1991, p. 27; Gavey, 2005, p. 86). The “power/knowledge nexus” (Gavey, 2005, p. 86) is discursively located (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 100). Of the two French words for knowledge that Foucault utilised in his work, *savoir* is the word that is enmeshed with power. *Savoir* can be defined in English as “implicit knowledge”, “specific rationalities”, or “rationalities of power” (Davies, et al., 2002, pp. 294-295; Foucault, 1966/2000d, p. 261; 2002b, p. 329). *Savoir* is a special, popular, often assumed, implicit social knowledge that is different to the formal and academic knowledges found in institutions of learning and academic texts, what Foucault

(1966/2000d, p. 261-262) calls *connaissance*. Implicit knowledge is common knowledge that works together with power to shape relationships and constitute identity. Power and implicit knowledge cannot be separated in the relationship between discourse and subject.

### ***Power relations***

In Foucauldian terms, power does not have an essence nor is it monopolised by one group over another. Deleuze writes of Foucault's view of power:

Power has no essence; it is simply operational. It is not an attribute but a relation: the power-relation is the set of possible relations between forces, which passes through the dominated forces no less than through the dominating. (1986/1988b, p. 27)

Elsewhere Deleuze explains Foucault's view of power-relations as lines in a relationship which can be broken: "Foucault talked of lines of sedimentation but also of lines of 'breakage' and of 'fracture'" (Deleuze, 1992, p. 159). In Foucault's words, "as soon as there is a power relation, there is the possibility of resistance. We are never trapped by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy" (Foucault, 1977/1996, p. 224).

One of the ways Foucault explains power relations is with the French word that translates into English as "agonism" (2002b, p. 342). Agonism, which Foucault based on the Greek *agōnisma*, meaning "a combat" (2002b, p. 348, n. 3), suggests "a relationship of mutual incitement and struggle", not so much confrontation but "permanent provocation" (Foucault, 2002b, p. 342). In this study, agonism as "mutual incitement and struggle . . . [a]permanent provocation" refers to the struggle between patriarchal and egalitarian practices of heterosexual relationship, along with the adjustments that a woman partner makes in an effort to keep her hope for egalitarian practices alive.

### ***States of domination***

For Foucault (1984/2000c, p. 283), power relations are "mobile, allowing the various participants to adopt strategies modifying them". In contrast, he discusses

“states of domination in which the power relations . . . remain blocked, frozen”. This state of domination comes about, Foucault says, “by economic, political, or military means” (1984/2000c, p. 283). Foucault continues in explaining what he means by “states of domination”:

When an individual or social group succeeds in blocking a field of power relations, immobilising them and preventing any reversibility of movement by economic, political, or military means, one is faced with what may be called a state of domination. In such a state, it is certain that practices of freedom do not exist or exist only unilaterally or are extremely constrained and limited. (1984/2000c, p. 283)

Foucault makes it clear that “power relations understood as strategic games between liberties” (1984/2000c, p. 299) are different from states of domination, where there is limited freedom, and a great deal of constraint. I think this difference between power relations and states of domination is worth noting in the light of possible ambiguity, where, at times, Foucault seems to imply a relationship between them (see Foucault, 2000a, p. 225; 1984/2000c, pp. 283, 299). Best and Kellner (1991, p. 65) offer a succinct summary of Foucault’s position on power and domination:

He continues to hold that all social relations are characterized by power and resistance . . . but he distinguishes now between power and domination, seeing domination as the solidification of power relations such that they become relatively fixed in asymmetrical forms and the spaces of liberty and resistance thus become limited.

I would hold to this view of the difference between “power relations” and “states of domination”, and apply it in this thesis. Domination is applied in this study as the constraint of freedom and limited space for resistance.

Davies et al. (2002, pp. 298, 310, 312) have also applied “states of domination” to Foucault’s reference to “a relationship of violence [that] acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks, it destroys, or it closes off all possibilities” (Foucault, 2002b, p. 340). Foucault’s definition of “a relationship of violence”, appears to fit within the parameters for a state of domination where resistance is



“blocked, frozen”. Davies et al. go on to show how “states of domination” arise not only through “economic, political, or military means”, which may include violence, but they can also occur through non-violent means: “the repeated, minute accretions of everyday practices [that] generate sedimentations of lines of force” (2002, p. 312).

### ***Productive power***

In Foucauldian terms power is not only negative, constraining and limiting, but it is also a positive force, it produces pleasure and possibilities (Davies et al., 2002, p. 297). Foucault says:

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. (1980, p. 119)

The constitution of productive power is understood with the Foucauldian concept of governmentality (see Foucault, 1978/2002e; McNay, 1994, p. 113, 124; Rose, 1998, p. 29).

### **Governmentality**

Foucault defines governmentality as the encounter between technologies of power and technologies of the self. Technologies of power concern the conduct of the conduct of others. Technologies of the self concern the operation of the self on the self, with or without the direct help of others, for the purposes of transformation to a preferred mode of conduct and state of existence (Foucault, 2000a, p. 225). Through governmentality, Foucault developed a theory to demonstrate how people are disciplined productive units for the state or society. Technologies of power and of the self became the way the state governed or regulated and produced its citizens, through the “‘conduct of conducts’, and a management of possibilities” (Foucault, 2002b, p. 341).

In applying Foucault’s technologies and governmentality in this study, I turn to two definitions by Rose (1998, 1999a). Rose defines technology as “any assembly

structured by a practical rationality governed by a more or less conscious goal” (1998, p. 26). And, governmentality is defined “as ‘the conduct of conduct’: programmes, strategies, techniques for acting upon the action of others towards certain ends” (1999a, p. xxi). The relationship between the definitions of technology and government is clear with the dual reference toward some goal or ends. The technology supplies the knowledge which is presided over by a goal. And government is the conduct of others’ conduct through, “programmes, strategies, techniques”, toward the goal defined by the technology.

As well as technologies of power and of self, Foucault refers to two other technologies that are useful for analysis in this study. These two other technologies are technologies of production, and technologies of sign systems. Technologies of production permit production, transformation, or manipulation of things, and technologies of sign systems permit the use of signs, meanings, and communication systems (2000a, pp. 224-225). It needs to be noted that the technology of production is completely separate from power as productive.

While Foucault primarily related governmentality to the encounter between technologies of power, and the self, the other two technologies, production, and sign systems, can be inferred from his work as involved in governmental processes (see Foucault, 1971/2000b, pp. 337-339; 1978/2002e, pp. 219-220; McNay, 1992, pp. 124-126; Pritsch, 2004, p. 138). Rose’s definition of government (1999a) further supports the inclusion of the two technologies, production, and sign systems, for analysis of the data. Of the technologies of production and sign systems, Pritsch (2004) says they are “considered to be ‘political technologies’ that install relations between the self and sociopolitical institutions” (p. 138). This relationship between the self and sociopolitical institutions, and the associated technologies of production and sign systems, is important for understanding governmentality in this study, where heterosexual relationship is regarded as a sociopolitical institution.

## **From deconstruction as ethic to shaping an ethical relationship**

The main focus in this chapter up until this point has been on an ethic of deconstruction which is open to the other. The final section of this chapter has as

its focus shaping an ethical relationship with the other. In between these two main sections of this chapter, is the next section, which engages some of Deleuze's thinking as an intersection between deconstruction as an ethic and shaping an ethical relationship.

### **An ontology of difference**

In chapter six I begin an analysis of the data from the first group of women involved in this study. To do this analysis I make use of Deleuze's "ontology of difference" (May, 2005, p. 26; see Deleuze, 1962/1983, 1966/1988a, 1968/1990), and "the rhizome" figuration (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1988). Traditional western metaphysics has conceived of ontology as investigating what exists (being) with the assumption that there is a transcendent Being or essence behind what exists. It is this idea that Derrida questioned through his deconstruction of the binaries that western metaphysics employed in support of its position on a transcendent essence. Deleuze, however, does not deconstruct the binaries that have been created from the idea of a transcendent essence. Rather, Deleuze develops a whole new ontology which discards the transcendent, replacing it with "immanence of life" (Colebrook, 2002a, p. xxiv), which is the presence of being (life) without any divisions or hierarchies (Deleuze, 1968/1990, p. 178; May, 2005, p. 34).

Within Deleuze's new version of ontology, difference is no longer conceived as qualitative difference between entities such as the case with hierarchical binaries. Difference is conceived as the living multiple expressions, and potential expressions, of the living immanent being (no longer transcendent and removed) which is involved and complicated in all that is in the world (Deleuze, 1968/1990, pp. 16, 175-176; May, 2005, pp 38-40). To enable his new ontology to work without reverting back to the traditional view of a transcendent being behind all that is, Deleuze arrived at ideas that could integrate potential and possibilities with that which is actual and sensible in the world. These ideas are called *the virtual* and *the actual* (Deleuze, 1966/1988a).

### ***The virtual and the actual***

The virtual and the actual are to do with a new arrangement of time, which works in conjunction with all that is in the world, and all that can be. The virtual is the

past that is the common ontological immanent being of all that is in this world. The actual is the many different expressions of that virtual past, but that past is still present for there to be a present. The past and present exist differently, and they coexist. In Deleuze's words:

The past and the present do not denote two successive moments, but two elements which coexist: One is the present, which does not cease to pass, and the other is the past, which does not cease to be but through which all presents pass. (1966/1988a, p. 59)

It is in the present that the virtual past is actualised and experienced directly (May, 2005, pp. 19, 47). May (2005, p. 38) offers an analogy from Japanese origami which explains in a tangible way Deleuze's ontology of difference. Japanese origami is the folding of a single piece of paper into different arrangements resembling anything such as animals, plants, or people. The analogy is useful if the focus is on the paper and the folding: paper folding and unfolding itself. The flat piece of paper, before any folding or unfolding, is likened to being, or the virtual, or virtual difference (May, 2005, p. 60). This piece of paper exists with potential to be actualised into any number of different possibilities which are not fixed but temporal. As the paper folds, unfolds, and refolds into new arrangements these arrangements are likened to the paper's modes, the expression of the paper, or the actualising of the paper's virtual difference. But these arrangements are still the original sheet of paper itself, which helps explain immanence and the co-existence of the past and the present. Each expression of the paper is part of a process of becoming, not a completed being or substance. The arrangements, or expression, of the original flat sheet of paper are likened to identities that exist in the present. These are spatial differences or identities – "*difference in degree*" (Deleuze, 1966/1988a, p. 38). Whereas the piece of paper before, and during its folding, unfolding, and refolding is analogous "*of difference in kind; it is a virtual and continuous multiplicity that cannot be reduced to numbers*" (Deleuze, 1966/1988a, p. 38). With that sheet of paper lies all virtual difference when it comes to the potential actual temporal differences, arrangements it can fulfil in the present (May, 2005, p. 55).

Virtual difference is also the future. Deleuze (1962/1983, p. 48) says the future is the repeat of the past, not a repeat as in the same events or actions, but a repeat of difference. Virtual difference lies in the future as it does in the past. “*What recurs eternally is difference itself*. What faces us always is difference, difference in kind, difference that has yet to be congealed into identities” (May, 2005, p. 60). Returning to the origami to illustrate the virtual difference, the potential for different arrangements will always be past, present, and future, and the only time there will be an actualised arrangement will be in the present. The past is constituted by difference in kind, the present is constituted by actualised difference, and the future is constituted by the return of difference (May, 2005, p. 62).

Not only is this outline of Deleuze’s ontology of difference intended as a basis for understanding his thinking, but it is foundational for the understandings I offer of the original (virtual) significance of the ideas and knowledges of a group of women who participated in this study. In Chapter Six Deleuze’s ontology serves as a philosophical basis for giving preference to the (virtual) ideas and knowledges of those women for this study. This preference continues to be applied in Chapters Seven and Eight.

### **The rhizome figuration**

After the development of his ontology of difference, Deleuze, along with Guattari (1972/1977, 1980/1988) and Parnet (1977/2006), applied this ontology in political and social thought (Colebrook, 2002a, p. 34; May, 2005, pp. 134-135). In the application they develop a number of figurations. These figurations are commonly used by subsequent employers of their material in application to a number of disciplines and to research (see Davies, 2009b; Davies & Gannon, 2009; Lather, 2007; Mazzei and Jackson, 2009; Mazzei & McCoy, 2010; St Pierre, 2002; Winslade, 2009; Wyatt, Gale, Gannon & Davies, 2010). One such figuration that I utilise often in this study is that of the “rhizome” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1988).

The essence of the rhizome is connections; connections between diversity and difference, that is, connection between anything where connection is viable (Grosz 1994, pp. 199-200). There are three important features of the rhizome as

connection. First, there is the multiplicity of connections that can come about from all the different possible actualisations that lay in the virtual. Second, any of these multiplicity of connections can be broken, by disruptions, breaks, discontinuities, thus opening potential for other connections and potential. An actualisation can be unfolded, making way for another different actualisation to be folded in. Third, the rhizome is based on experimentation, searching for actualisations, previously not thought of, from the virtual.

In regard to the application of Deleuze's work, Mazzei and McCoy (2010, p. 504) advise researchers: "Use the figurations presented by Deleuze to think research and data differently. . . . [T]hink with Deleuzian concepts in a way that might produce previously unthought questions, practices, and knowledge". The rhizome figuration offers me an opportunity to provide such analysis of the data this study generated, particularly in Chapter Six. Deleuze's concepts not only provide a link between deconstruction as ethic and shaping an ethical relationship, they also contribute to a theoretical basis for the emergence of that relationship, as I go on to discuss now.

## **An ethical and egalitarian heterosexual relationship**

One of the ways Deleuze's concepts, the virtual and the actual, help in the analyses in this study is to provide part of a theoretical basis for subverting the historically dominant practice of a patriarchal framework interpreting women's thought and voice (Lerner, 1986, 1993). With Deleuze's theory, the ideas and knowledges of a group of women becomes the virtual from which all else in this study is actualised. One virtual idea that this study actualises is an ethical and egalitarian heterosexual relationship. I now turn to the theoretical basis for shaping such relationship.

### **The democracy to come**

In writing on the "democracy to come" Derrida applies the principle of *différance*. Derrida states that this "'idea' as event . . . will never present itself in the form of full presence" (1993/1994, pp. 81-82). Derrida does not mean democracy in the more familiar usage, as in democratic elections of governments, or governments

governing democratically. Rather he is talking about relationships with the other, people regarded as unlike or different from a populist norm. He alludes to war refugees and asylum seekers as an example of this other (2003/2005a, p. 149). Derrida does not mean that the democracy to come is some “indefinitely remote future assigned by some regulative Idea” (2003/2005a, p. 90). Rather, it seems that Derrida means the democracy to come, in his usual play with signs, can be understood as the democracy toward the other to come, and this event can happen in “a here and now” (2003/2005a, pp. 88-92, 148-149). The event of the democracy to come can occur where there is “an openness towards the other” (1995a, p. 173). This openness to the other has four important conditions which are applicable to this study.

The first of these conditions is the other. I explain this condition of the other following the introduction to the other three conditions, but I name it first, as it is core to Derrida’s conceptuality of the democracy to come, and to this study. The second of the conditions for an openness toward the other is the offer of unconditional hospitality (Derrida, 1993/1994, pp. 81-82; 2003/2005a, p. 149). Derrida writes: “Unconditional hospitality exceeds juridical, political, or economic calculation. But no thing and no one happens or arrives without it” (2003/2005a, p. 149). The third condition is “the unconditionality of the *gift* or of *forgiveness*” (2003/2005a, p. 149). Unconditionality, is the operative word here, where the gift or forgiveness is given without any pre or post conditions for this event. The final condition for openness toward the other is that of justice (1993/1994, pp. 211-212; 2003/2005a, p. 88), which concerns fair and equal relationship with the other. St. Pierre in reference to the democracy to come, arrived at through these conditions, succinctly and attractively crystallizes its ethos:

a promise those who work for social justice cannot not want. I think about this democracy often since it promises the possibility of different relations – relations more generous than those I live among, fertile relations in which people thrive. (2005, p. 972)

I model Derrida's conditions for an openness toward the other in the democracy to come with two ethical norms that encompass a number of ethical and egalitarian practices. I detail these norms later in this chapter.

I return to the first of Derrida's conditions, the advent of the other. In my study when I refer to the other I am calling on both Derrida's (1995a) and Levinas's (1961/1969, 1974/1998) use of this term to first of all define who has been treated as inferior to, or colonised by, the dominant group. This use of the term "other" is not a reproduction of inequality but a device to name inequality that has been concealed by, or within, the dominant. Secondly, following Derrida and Levinas, I continue to use the term other as a title, but I use it with the philosophical intent of Levinas in redefining and giving priority to the other as a person, unique in their own right, and appropriately acknowledged apart from any dominant group. In my study the other is women in heterosexual relationships. To show the strategic and ethical importance of this term in this study, from this point on I will use the upper case "O" when referring to the Other of women in heterosexual relationships. In continuing to develop this concept of the other I turn to Levinas who, with his ideas on the other, has influenced poststructural thinkers and changed the course of philosophical thinking in the west (Lechte, 1994, p. 115; Derrida, 2001, p. 202).

### **Levinas – ethics as first philosophy**

Levinas' two major works (1961/1969, 1974/1998) argue for the priority of ethics. In his argument for "ethics as first philosophy" (Levinas, 1984/1989), Levinas critiques the history of western philosophy where the study of being, ontology, and the priority of knowledge over ethics had resulted in a philosophy that did not consider difference, the other, as separate and unique in their own right. Levinas (1961/1969, p. 43) writes, "Western philosophy has most often been an ontology: a reduction of the other to the same". Atterton and Calarco (2005, p. 10) expand this argument and make Levinas's critique palpable:

By being placed under a concept, the Other falls within my powers, and is thus exposed to violence and disrespect. . . . It pertains to every philosophy that, as ontology, seeks to comprehend the otherness of the Other by



subsuming him or her under a concept that is thought within *me*, and thus in some sense *the same* as me.

Ethics as first philosophy does not speak of temporality, as in ethics-came-in-time-before-ontology-or-epistemology, but conceptually and functionally, as the most important idea and practice for understanding human existence (Morgan, 2011, pp. 129-131). Ethics of a relational and social nature are first, because of “the breakdown of moral, religious, and philosophical certainty” (Atterton & Calarco, 2005, pp. 2-3; Levinas, 1995, pp. 194-195). This same ethical argument is called on in regard to human relations in addressing identity assumptions emanating from western philosophy, where the subject attempts to subsume under the subject difference, that is, anyone who is not the subject, thus making them the same as the subject. This same identity assumption in heterosexual relationship – the dominance and subsuming of a woman partner by the male partner through patriarchal practices – is what the work of Levinas will be called on to address in this study. Specifically, I utilise the work of Levinas in regard to women and their ideas and knowledges in heterosexual relationship as Other, where I argue that considerations of the Other become first priority, the ethical priority, in relationship. And this ethical priority is a response to the initiation or call of the Other. I now develop further a philosophical understanding of the other so that its ethical and conceptual importance for this study can be finely grasped.

### **The singularity of the other in relationship**

An ethical heterosexual relationship, on the terms of Levinas’ ethics of the other, is thus dependent upon a “nontotalizable relation with the other” (Critchley, 1996, p. 41). Perpich argues that the complete alterity, or more precisely, the “singularity” (2008, p. 18) of the other is produced only after the nontotalizable relationship is established with the other. She states “singularity is not what this relationship recognizes, but what it *produces*” (Perpich, 2008, p. 189). When the subject engages with the other in a “nontotalizable” relationship, it is then that the other, “singularity”, is produced.

It is important to note Levinas proposes that the relationship with the other is established by the initiating call of the other, and it is in response to this call that the “I”, the subject, then turn toward the other in relationship (Levinas,

1961/1969, pp. 194-201, 215). This turning toward the other by the subject is what interests Levinas, because it is then possible for an ethical relationship to be established, and the complete singularity of the other produced.

The complete singularity of the other means there is no comparison between the subject and the other. The other is an “initiative” completely apart from the ontological self, totally separate and different, “other with an alterity constitutive of the very content of the other” (Levinas, 1961/1969, p. 39). Perpich establishes this alterity, or singularity, in the human context:

Each human being is a unique, irreplaceable self, irreducible to any of the attributes or qualities that could be used to describe her and would inevitably reduce her to what she has in common with others. (2008, p. 188)

Singularity is a production of the social face to face relationship (Perpich, 2008, p. 75). As Eco suggests, “Ethics are born in the presence of the Other” (2012, p. 89). Responding to the singularity of the other is one of the primary ethical stances in poststructural ethics.

Caputo, a poststructural scholar researching and applying the work of Derrida and Levinas, states “ethics ends where singularity begins” (2000, p. 190). For Caputo, this means: ethical rules are provisional; ethical universals are inaccessible to the singular person; the future will need ethical responses we cannot foresee in the present; and generous giving of the gift, particularly love, in excess is required. Ethics is not dependent upon some abstract premise, but occurs “in the singular, in the unprecedented and unrepeatable situations of individual lives” (Caputo, 2000, p. 174).

Following Caputo’s emphasis on ethical action for unique “individual lives”, Benhabib’s “two conceptions of self-other relations” in the form of “the generalised other” and “the concrete other” (1987, pp. 86-87), provide further development of Levinas’ ethics of the other. The generalised other standpoint tends to regard the moral worth of the other from the position of the subject – the values, desires, affects, and so on, that are held in common. There is an expectation that both parties are entitled to expect the same from each other – an assumed equality of rights and obligation. In contrast to the generalised other

standpoint, the concrete other standpoint seeks to understand the other from their unique position, and not from any level of commonality. Equity and complementary reciprocity are the norms that govern the relationship where the focus of behaviour is on the other person as a recognised, individual human being. While the concrete other is recognised as present within general humanity, their uniqueness and individuality is the focus of relationship, where their rights and requirements for life are recognised and given priority with actions depicting friendship, love, and care (Benhabib, 1987, p. 87). In what perhaps offers a summary of this discussion on the ethics of the other, Roffe writes “an ethical relation is based on avoiding all forms of totalisation, and responding to the call of the other without thereby reducing otherness to sameness” (2004, p. 41).

### **Criticisms of Levinas’ work**

I have outlined thus far how I understand Levinas’ ethics of the other, and how this ethic is applied in this thesis in giving priority to women and their ideas and knowledges as the Other in heterosexual relationships. However, within Levinas’ work, either by its presence or its absence, there is material that seems to contradict his central thesis. I outline criticisms of this material before stating my position on those criticisms. The criticisms of Levinas’ work come mainly from feminist philosophers, who address possible contradictions in his thesis and his expression of it. These criticisms and contradictions can possibly collide with my use of Levinas and therefore require attention.

First, there is argument that Levinas offers descriptions of the feminine that are defined through the masculine, or as secondary to the primary other (Chanter, 1991; Irigaray, 1991; Sikka, 2001; see Levinas, 1961/1969, pp. 155-157, 258-263). Secondly, Butler makes two observations on Levinas’ ideas of the ethical: First, the other who is persecuted in the context of violence or war is called on to be responsible for the persecutor as other and be reconciled to them (Butler, 2005, p. 92; see Levinas, 1974/1998, p. 111); second, Levinas’ seems to regard the religions of Judaism and Christianity as the authentic sources for ethical relations, while regarding the rise of other religions as a threat to this authenticity (Butler, 2005, p. 94; see Levinas, 1963/1990, p. 165).

A second group of criticisms of Levinas' work are founded in an absence of material within his work rather than in a contradictory presence. This group raise questions in regard to Levinas' application of his ethics. The first criticism of Levinas here is that he does not address gender at all and by not doing this he is participating in patriarchal discourse (Grosz, 1990, 1995; Loewenthal & Kunz, 2005, p. 2). Related to this criticism, for those seeking justice, is Levinas' refusal to specifically represent the other in conjunction with his idea of radical alterity (Sikka, 2001).

I take different stances on each of these two groups of criticisms. In regard to the first group of criticisms, I agree, and distance myself from Levinas' thought that is the focus of those criticisms. Perpich, a Levinas scholar, acknowledges that Levinas has "misrecognized [groups and] distorted [their lives] in fundamental ways by his remarks" (2008, p. 180). In the context of my study, I state specifically that women in heterosexual relationships as Other are not called on to forgive or be reconciled to their partners. My study represents women in heterosexual relationship as the Other based in the notion that priority is to be given to the Other and their ideas and knowledges because they have been subsumed by patriarchal ideas and practices.

The second group of criticisms can be addressed by clearly understanding Levinas' concept of alterity, and the associated politics that come as a result of recognition of alterity as the other. I draw on the work of Perpich (2008, pp. 180-198) in addressing the second group of criticisms.

The two criticisms of Levinas' work in the second group tend to refer to alterity as difference in contrast to singularity. When the arguments mean alterity as difference there is always something used as the referent for comparison or contrast of that which is regarded as different. The referent in these arguments is often white masculine and middle-class as the norm for comparison or contrast with difference (Brown, 1993, p. 395; Perpich, 2008, pp. 183-184). Two examples for gender-based difference between men and women will help here. One of Sikka's arguments, in her criticism, is that "with Levinas's portrait of the feminine . . . he fails to imagine this Other as another like himself . . . as a subject, and to constitute her alterity on the basis of this recognition" (2001, p. 105). This

point reflects an understanding of alterity that is marked only against the referent of something else – white-middle class male in this case – and not in singularity. The second example from Chanter (1991) highlights the importance of, but difficulty in defining women without essentialising, and without contrasting them with men. She concludes by suggesting that in defining woman in a fixed essentialised way, woman's definition will "still be governed by its opposition to men" (Chanter, 1991, p. 144). Thus, in addressing this second group of criticisms of Levinas it is important to understand alterity as complete singularity, and not qualitative difference between groups or individuals. This understanding is foundational for responding to the criticisms, and it opens the way for a second argument in addressing them, specifically, the seeking of justice with the use of Levinas' concept of radical alterity.

The second argument relates to how justice can be achieved by marginalised different groups. The idea that affirmative recognition of social group differences will bring about justice is effectively challenged in the work of Brown (1993), Fraser (1997), and Nealon (1998). In brief, they argue that while arguments from difference will bring about some form of support for the marginalised groups because they are clearly disadvantaged, the argument from difference alone can depoliticize the group and assimilate them back into a system that requires deeper transformation. This form of "identity politics" can result in an antagonistic backlash toward the marginalised groups from the privileged, thus increasing the vulnerability of disadvantaged groups. While qualitative difference between groups is not to be ignored, this argument highlights the dangers of basing the call for justice solely on difference, because, as Nealon says, "identity politics remains unable to deal with the other *as* other; it continues to thematise differences among persons, groups, and discourses in terms of (the impossibility of their) sameness" (1998, pp. 6-7). As with the concerns cited in the previous paragraph in regard to gender equality, identity politics uses as a referent the dominant group, and the lack of "sameness" of the marginalised group. My argument, in joining with Nealon and Perpich, is that through understanding alterity as the complete singularity of the other justice might then be able to follow.

As Levinas argues (1961/1969, p. 215), singularity is recognised in the relationship with the other. Once a relationship with the other has been entered

into, the complete singularity of the other as a unique human being in their own right can be recognised: then, representation of the other and the group to which they belong can be exercised. In this process, justice begins with relationship, followed by recognition of the complete singularity of the person and the group to which they belong, and then representation of the group to the wider community in the cause of justice. This understanding can be called “alterity politics” (Nealon, 1998; see Perpich, 2008, pp. 193-198). This argument does depend upon stronger dominant groups responding ethically to the call of the marginalised. If the dominant groups do not respond appropriately then the marginalised may well be forced to activate means other than alterity politics for justice. But, in the context of Levinasian ethics, his challenge is to the dominant, to hear the call of the other, and in consideration of the other’s demands, respond responsibly. The argument from alterity politics to achieve justice builds on the foundation to recognise alterity as the unique singularity of the other. I suggest that this argument addresses Levinas’ refusal to represent the other in gendered terms or in the cause of justice for marginalised groups. Levinas was first of all concerned with relationship, which then recognised alterity, before any political or social representational work occurred.

However, I briefly return to the first group of criticisms of Levinas’ work above. Levinas did not always practise his own philosophy: establishing relationship, recognising alterity, and then putting in place political work for justice. When Levinas has inappropriately and stereotypically used feminine and other images and ideas in his work (see for example Levinas, 1961/1969, pp. 155-157, 258-263; 1963/1990, p. 165) he has fallen prey to representation outside of his own ethical thesis. He has represented based on certain cultural and religious values without engaging in relationship that opened him to radical alterity, the complete singularity, of the other.

In concluding my summary and response to the criticisms of Levinas’ work, I agree with criticisms that identify where Levinas has clearly not practised his own philosophy of giving ethical priority to the other, particularly in regard to his use of feminine images and prejudiced religious opinion. I argue that the idea of the other and radical alterity need to be understood as complete singularity: a person, or group of persons, are unique in their own right apart from any other person or

group, and on this basis they deserve justice and fairness. While the criticisms of aspects of Levinas' work can be understood as valid, or a misrepresentation of his concept of alterity, I do not think these criticisms require a change to the application of his most prominent thesis, giving ethical priority to the other when the other is marginalised in being subsumed by the dominant.

### **Ethics of the other as a response to the patriarchal domination of heterosexual relationship**

As stated previously, a contention of this thesis is that heterosexual relationship has been dominated by patriarchal ideas and practices which set it up as a site for inequity and oppression for women (Butler, 1990/2006; Dickerson, 2013; Hollway, 1995; Jeffreys, 1990). To support this position I join it with Lerner's (1986, 1993) conclusions from her historical analysis of women in history that "women's thought has been imprisoned in a confining and erroneous patriarchal framework" (1986, pp. 220-221). I draw a relationship between these ideas on the historical oppression of women in heterosexual relationship and the imprisonment of women's thought in patriarchy, and with the ideas of Levinas on the historical and philosophical subsuming of the other of ethics into ontology (1961/1969, p. 43). As Levinas argues for a new priority to be given to the other of ethics historically and philosophically, so I argue for a new priority to be given to women and their ideas and knowledges as the Other in heterosexual relationships. That is, in contrast to practices and ideas throughout history, an ethical priority in heterosexual coupledness should now be the thought and knowledges of each individual woman as "concrete other" (Benhabib, 1987, p. 87) in heterosexual relationships. The ideas and knowledges of individual women, who came together to discuss these and their experience of heterosexual relationship, is a focus of this study. Collectively, these women voiced knowledge and an idea for ethical heterosexual relationship practices, represented in the results chapters.

### **Two forms of poststructural ethics**

In the context of women in heterosexual relationship and their ideas and knowledges as the Other, I next introduce two particular forms of poststructural ethics that serve as a theoretical basis for the discussion that follows on how men might respond to their heterosexual partners. Within poststructural understandings

of ethics there are two lines of inquiry (Caputo, 1993, pp. 55-62; Ziarek, 2001, pp. 6-7). Caputo names them heteromorphism and heteronomism. Heteromorphic ethics concern openness to becoming different possibilities, “the love of different forms” (1993, p. 55). Heteronomic ethics are about respect for difference, “the love of the *other*” (1993, p. 60). Ziarek names these respectively, “the ethos of becoming and the ethos of obligation” (2001, p. 6). She associates these ethical lines of inquiry with, among others, in the first form, Deleuze and Foucault with their work on people as becoming, not as fixed essences; and in the second form, Levinas and Derrida with their initiative in regard to the other as those who express difference and are thus unjustly marginalised and excluded. A feminist poststructural ethics cannot ignore either of these two lines of ethical inquiry. In the case of this study each is particularly helpful for defining an ethical response from men to their heterosexual partners. In drawing on these two forms of ethics in this next section I connect them to *love* as an important relational response to the Other. Realising that love has a tarnished history in heterosexual relationships I then speak to this concern, clarifying what I mean by love. I then conceptually develop a discussion of two forms of love that I think are a solid ethical basis for men’s response to their heterosexual partners.

### ***Love(s) as response(ible) ethic***

Caputo, with reference to Derrida’s idea of the gift as a condition for the democracy to come, and with allusions to ethics ending where singularity begins, suggests an appropriate relational response to the other is one of “letting love break out” (2000, p. 183). I join this idea of love, with the two forms of poststructural ethics that Ziarek names – “the ethos of becoming and the ethos of obligation” (2001, p. 6) – renaming them, *becoming love* and *obligatory love*. I develop a discussion with reference to a number of poststructural writers in regard to these two forms of love, but first, I must speak to the history of tarnished love in heterosexual relationships.

The intimate relationship between certain practices of love and patriarchal interests in heterosexual relationship is well documented (see for example Hesford, 2009; Toye, 2010). The work of many early feminists critiqued heterosexuality as a social institution for the way it resulted in the domination of



women, and the way that “love” expressed in heterosexual relationships resulted in control of women and their feelings and lives (see Beauvoir, 1953; Benjamin, 1988; Firestone, 1970; Friedan, 1963; Millett, 1970). Emotions were recognised “as a source and conduit of power”, resulting in many heterosexual women feeling “a conundrum of contradictory feelings”, with some form of love conflicting with “feeling trapped and alienated in family life” (Hesford, 2009, pp. 10-11). Perhaps the most common way to name this love, that is questionable as love because it is a technique for abuse, is “romantic love” (Firestone, 1970, pp. 165-175; Hesford, 2009, p. 10; Millett, 1970, pp. 36-37). This term is still used to name a discourse of love that is particularly harmful for heterosexual women (see Sinclair & Monk, 2004, p. 339; Toye, 2010, p. 52). Jenkins (2009, p. 24), who is renowned for his work in the field of counselling men who abuse, has given the name “domestic love” to something that sounds very much like this romantic love. Jenkins writes:

Domestic forms of love . . . reflect a kind of capture by dominant cultural interests. These concepts of *domestic love* prescribe requirements for commonality and sameness, along with the suppression of difference. . . . *Domestic love* is not always repressive but can prescribe ownership and a sense of entitlement to correct the other and enforce sameness.

This description of domestic love connects with Levinas’ description of philosophy as reducing the other to the same (1961/1969, p. 43), with one consequence being the suppression of difference. My contention is that love should be contrasted to domestic or romantic love, giving space for difference (the singularity of the Other) to flourish, and for participation with that difference in egalitarian ways. My ideas of obligatory love and becoming love are intended as concepts that give space to, and guide men towards egalitarian participatory practices with the Other of women in heterosexual relationships.

With these concepts of love, vastly different from those of romantic and domestic love, I join with Toye (2010, p. 39) in arguing that “‘love’ needs to be taken as a serious, valid and crucial subject for academic study”. Such study, Toye suggests, needs to be set in the context of “poststructuralist feminist ethics . . . especially by

those invested in discourses of the other” (2010, p. 41). Toye (2010, p. 41) continues:

we need . . . to engage in the possibility of reconceptualizing our notions of love in order that we can formulate new concepts of love that can be used as necessary grounds for ethical and political relations with others – our family, friends, significant others, communities, neighbours, and nations.

Toye’s conjoining of love with “ethical and political relations” is crucial to the concept of love that I develop in this study, and in my analysis of men’s response to women’s thought.

A number of authors, including Deleuze, have associated love with an ethics of becoming. A Deleuzian understanding suggests that love is creative, productive, and open to possibilities beyond what we know of it in life. Love is not reducible to how it is practised in everyday life, but it can go beyond what is current, toward new horizons (Colebrook, 2002b, p.17; Deleuze, 1964/2000, pp. 71, 140; Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1988, p. 278; Protevi, 2004, p. 191-192). Colebrook, a poststructural scholar on the work of Deleuze among other thinkers, offers a description of love:

Love is the encounter with another person that opens us to a possible world. This concept does not take a form of love – the couple – and then say that this is what love *is*. The *concept* of love as ‘a possible encounter with an other as a whole new world’ allows us to think of forms of love that are not yet given, that are not actual but virtual. (2002b, p. 17)

I use Colebrook here, in the context of Deleuzian thought, to join with Toye’s thought that love needs to be reconceptualised. Colebrook is opening love to new concepts by stating these concepts may well still be in the virtual (in the realms of possibility), yet to be actualised into present practice. The concepts of love Colebrook refers to can, I suggest, fit with concepts of obligatory love and becoming love. “Love as ‘a possible encounter with an other’”, fits with a description of obligatory love that I offer. And love “as a whole new world” fits with a description of becoming love that I employ. Jenkins too, takes up these ideas from Colebrook, calling them “generous love”. He regards generous love as

both a creative expansive love and a love that embraces difference and reaches out to the Other (2009, pp. 24-25), which equates to the concepts I employ, becoming love and obligatory love.

I turn now to specifically develop the two forms of love I have introduced so that there is clarity as to their ethos. This development further separates them from dominant romantic and domestic forms of love, and their tarnished histories.

### **Obligatory love**

Obligation and love are two words and concepts that have perhaps not been regarded as complementary. But, with reference to Toye (2010), this possible difficulty is only dependent upon our conceptions of love. With obligatory love I am engaging with new formulations “of love that can be used as necessary grounds for ethical and political relations with others” (p. 41). Caputo (1993), in his description of heteronomic ethical practice, gives insight into the concept of obligatory love which I propose, and which I envisage men practising toward their heterosexual partner:

There is no squinting here over obligation, no anxiety about gravity and heavy weights, no hand-wringing about being tied down. Here the love of difference is the love of the *other* and being held hostage by the other is not considered demeaning, degrading, ignoble but rather uplifting and challenging work. The other is not rival, competitor, something to be appropriated, but the law and the measure by which freedom measures itself. Freedom is frightened not by the weight of responsibility but by the murderousness of its own aggressive forces, which love to dominate others. Freedom is concerned not with its own free discharge but rather with letting the other be free. (p. 60)

Comte-Sponville (1996/2003), in his treatise on virtue ethics, contextualises this obligatory form of love within one of the four Greek words for conceptualising love – *agapē*. He writes:

This kind of love is the rarest of loves, the most precious and miraculous. You take a step back? He takes two steps back. Why? Simply to give you more room, to avoid crowding you, invading you, or crushing you, to give

you more space and freedom and to let you breathe, and the weaker he feels you are, the more freedom he gives you. He steps back so as not to impose on you his power, or even his joy or love, so as not to take all available space, all available being, or all available power. (p. 276)

These descriptions of what I call obligatory love are intended to give space for heterosexual women as Other to equally contribute to and co-shape relationship practices in ways that have not been possible with the patriarchal oppression of women in heterosexual relationships. In the context of Levinasian ethics I state clearly that this love is not initiated by the subject but by the Other – this love is in response to the call of the Other (Levinas, 1982/1985, pp. 87-89). And, in the context of this study, what Caputo and Comte-Sponville contribute to this obligatory response to the initiative of the Other is to set that response within the possibility of love. This does not mean that the male subject cannot initiate obligatory love, but rather, because of the material proximity of the Other, the call of the Other, it becomes possible for the male subject to practice obligatory love toward the Other. This obligation is not law that is enforced on the male subject from the outside, but rather, it is a self-imposed measure on his actions, so that the Other has a freedom that is contained only by her preferred ethics.

### **Becoming love**

Love and becoming are two concepts that more readily sit together than love and obligation. This is particularly so when becoming love is connected to an idea of creative expansiveness for those in relationship (Jenkins, 2009, pp. 24-25). As I employ it, becoming love involves the conversations that heterosexual couples conduct, with particular emphasis on the male partner's approach to conversation. This conversational emphasis is particularly important for this study, where a core contention is that language is regarded as significant in the construction of subjectivities and practices for those in heterosexual relationships.

Becoming love is taken from Bakhtin's (1984, 1986, 1990, 1993) dialogic approach to conversation. Some Bakhtinian scholars refer to the dialogic process as an artistic and loving process (Emerson, 1997, p. 221). A part of this artistic and loving process is an approach to conversation that interactively evaluates historically and socially situated interpretation, and thus, provides opportunity to

contribute value to those in dialogue (White, 2009). From this dialogical context, I propose becoming love as an approach to conversations which primarily recognises that two people, with their different social histories and interpretive experiences, can constitute each other in their conversations. This constitution can be for better or for worse, but the act of becoming love, in recognising this possibility, looks to respectfully and carefully join in conversation with the Other.

Table 1:

The major theorists and key ideas used in application to the data in the results chapters

Chapter	Theorist	Idea	Applied to
5	Davies & Harré	Positioning theory	Sue. A participant in the first focus group.
	Barthes; Davies et al. (2006)	Decomposition and Mo(ve)ment	
	Butler; Davies	Mastery and Submission	
6	Deleuze; May	Ontology of difference	The first focus group
	Deleuze & Guattari	The rhizome	
	Butler	Performativity of gender	
7	Derrida	Deconstruction	The first focus group
	Foucault	Power/knowledge	
	Deleuze	Lines of sedimentation, breakage and fracture	
	Foucault	Agonism	
	Foucault	States of domination	
	Davies et al. (2002)	Sedimentation of lines of force	
8	Foucault	Governmentality	The men interviewed
	Derrida	Deconstruction and The democracy to come	
	Levinas	The other	
	Caputo; Colebrook; Comte-Sponville; Toye; Ziarek	Poststructural ethics as obligatory love and becoming love	
9	Bakhtin	Dialogical conversation as becoming love	The second focus group
	White	Double listening	
	Denborough	Double story	
10	Bakhtin	Dialogical conversation	Myself
	Butler	Ethics as giving an account of oneself	

## **The emphasis of this chapter**

The overall theme of this chapter has been that this study is based in a double ethical response to patriarchally produced heterosexual relationship and the oppressive experience of women in such. There are doubles in this chapter, from my suggestion of deconstructing heterosexual relationship as a man who is involved in a heterosexual relationship, through to the suggested double ethical response of love from a male partner to a woman partner in heterosexual relationship. However, the central double ethical stance of this chapter has been to suggest that patriarchal heterosexual relationship needs to be deconstructed, and then an alternative form of heterosexual relationship offered, located in ethical egalitarian practices, that respond affirmatively to women's ideas and knowledges. It is this double ethical stance of deconstruction that is developed in the analysis offered in chapters Five through Ten of this thesis.

## **Chapter 3. Literature review**

In Chapter One I located this study in my own professional and personal life, and in the wider history of patriarchally-dominated heterosexual relationship in western society. I noted that the heterosexual couples therapy approach I had adopted for practice carries, like many therapies, a gender blindness that assumes an equality between partners that does not acknowledge lived experience. This despite decades of feminist scholarship across a range of disciplines – including psychology and family therapy – grass roots activism, and efforts of many women and men in their daily lives.

In this chapter I introduce the feminist critique of family therapy practice and, by association, a critique of heterosexual couple counselling practice. The terms of this critique – a blindness to socio-culturally produced gender-power-relations in family and heterosexual couple relationships – are taken up and applied to literature on heterosexual coupledness. I extend the feminist critique of family therapy and heterosexual couple counselling practice, by taking up a related critique offered by feminist poststructural theory and practice. Taking up a discursive reading of gender-power-relations, feminist poststructuralism holds onto the feminist position that power relations are socio-culturally produced, and it furthers this critique by locating the construction of gender across multiple locations in discourses. Thus, feminist poststructuralism addresses the political gaps left by liberal humanist gender essentialist approaches to understanding gender and heterosexual coupledness. Some of these political gaps are noted in a review, conducted through a feminist poststructural lens, of both self-help and academic literature on heterosexual coupledness and counselling. Feminist poststructural approaches for conducting heterosexual couple counselling are reviewed and located in the multiple discursive possibilities for constructing gender and heterosexual relationship practices.

### **A feminist critique of family therapy practice**

Of particular interest to this study is the scholarly contribution of feminists within family therapy. As a practice, heterosexual couple counselling emerged from



family therapy, and the two are closely connected theoretically (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008). Hence, the feminist critique of family therapy practice has the same political relevance for heterosexual coupledness. Beginning with Hare-Mustin (1978), a significant number of leading North American feminist therapists drew attention to the patriarchal nature of heterosexual coupledness, and to how heterosexual couple counselling and family therapy perpetuated patriarchal practice (see for example, Bograd, 1986; Goodrich, Rampage, Ellman, & Halstead, 1988; Goodrich, 1991; Luepnitz, 1988; McGoldrick, Anderson, & Walsh, 1989; Walters, Carter, Papp, & Silverstein, 1988).

Arguments were made that the application of systems theory to the family supported patriarchal ideas and practices. These arguments made visible that gender and power relations were not included in the theory and practice of family therapy. Because gender-power-relations were not taken into account in family or heterosexual couples therapy theory and practice, interventions favoured men and disadvantaged women partners. In a text regarded as highly significant in raising issues of gender for the family therapy field (see Denborough, 2001, p. 86; Silverstein, 2003, p. 19), Walters et al. (1988) argue that in the application of systems concepts to a family, men were favoured and women partner's pathologised because of the non-recognition of the social, cultural, and political construction of family organisation and function (pp. 20-26). While interventions were theorised as taking a gender-neutral stance – an assumption of gender equality – in practice, no intervention is gender-neutral, given the context of couples and family life. Goldner (1985) offers a similar critique, with “the overinvolved mother and peripheral father” (p. 31) being regarded as a clinical problem, without any recognition of this function as a characteristic of socio-historical processes. A non-gender-aware family therapist would attempt to restore the father's patriarchal authority by the implicit blaming of mothers for the father's non-involvement (Goldner, 1985, 1988, p. 55). Thus, Goldner (1988) builds convincing argument for the inclusion of gender in family therapy models and theory so that women are not treated unfairly and unequally in clinical practice.

As suggested in these arguments from Goldner, power is inseparable from gender in the feminist critique of family therapy theory and practice. Central to these

arguments were the idea that power is produced in families and between heterosexual couples from a patriarchal socio-cultural context that privilege the male partner (Goldner, 1991; Hollway, 1984; Hare-Mustin, 1991; Lerner, 1988). A poststructural analysis of these gendered power relations further defines the assumptions that supported the production of patriarchal power. Discourses related to assumptions about equality between the heterosexual couple, the male sexual drive, and the ownership and protection of women by men (Hollway, 1984; Hare-Mustin, 1991), point to male privilege and female subordination in heterosexual coupledness. Hare-Mustin (1994) applied these discourses in an analysis of case examples from a number of therapists, indicating the ease and danger of reproducing patriarchal discourses in therapeutic practice.

In Australia and New Zealand similar arguments were made in regard to gender-power-relations as being unrecognised and unaddressed in family therapy practice (see James & McIntyre, 1983; Pilalis & Anderton, 1986; Pilalis, 1987). For example, Pilalis and Anderton concluded that:

So pervasive are the predominant patriarchal myths out of which most theories of human change and development have been built, that any traveller journeying to the junction of feminist family therapy needs to be positively paranoid about the resistance to real change in the power relations between women and men in the family context. (pp. 112-113)

In attempting to address the pervasiveness of patriarchy, within the Just Therapy team from New Zealand (Tamasese & Waldegrave, 1994; Waldegrave, Tamasese, Tuhaka, & Campbell, 2003), the male therapists as a group are accountable to women therapists for their practice with women. Emerging from the Australian and New Zealand context were Narrative Therapy (White & Epston, 1990), and related approaches to working with men who abuse and for understanding gendered practices (Jenkins, 1990; McLean, Carey, & White, 1996). Narrative therapy is one of the few recognised approaches to therapy that applies the ideas upon which feminist poststructuralism stands (see Freedman & Combs, 2002; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008, pp.369-371; Weingarten, 1995; Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1996).

## **The persistence of gender and power blindness**

Since the publication of this seminal feminist literature, the argument has continued to be advanced, in the face of ambivalence, that gender-power-relations in family therapy and heterosexual couples theory and practice are central concerns to be addressed in regard to family and heterosexual couple relationships (see for example, Goodrich, 2003; Haddock, McPhee, & Zimmerman, 2001; Knudson-Martin, 2008; Knudson-Martin & Rankin Mahoney, 2009a; Nutt, 2005; Rampage, 2002; Silverstein, 2003; Zimmerman, 2001). Despite the contributions and critiques from the original feminist literature and the later contributions, however, much gender and power blindness persists across the literature on heterosexual couple relationships and counselling.

In a relatively recent edited Australian publication (Shaw & Crawley, 2007), for example, there are no specific chapters on feminist therapy models, and questions of gender and power receive little robust attention. The exception is Jenkins (2007) who addresses domestic violence and abuse, and joins a feminist critique with the statement, “Apolitical counselling for [heterosexual] couples has the potential to overlook, or minimise, the political disadvantage of women, through the inference of psychological and interactional explanation and practice” (p. 231). Other chapters in this text (Brown, 2007; Paterson, 2007; Percy, 2007; Ravalico, 2007) briefly mention gender, power, patriarchy, or a focus on equality between heterosexual couples as a goal for therapy, but do not give gender-power-relations significant space as key players in the construction of heterosexual relationships or in the therapeutic endeavour. The concern with a text like this, that addresses gender and power only in the context of domestic violence and abuse, is that unless there is obvious physical violence in a heterosexual couple relationship, gender and power blindness on the part of practitioners may prevail.

## **Popular self-help couples literature and gender and power blindness**

Perhaps an even more significant contribution to the absence of a focus on gender-power-relations in heterosexual coupledness is the popular self-help literature for heterosexual couples (Zimmerman, Holm, & Starrells, 2001). I suggest this genre is playing a significant role in the construction of heterosexual

relationships, as colleagues have often spoken of self-help texts as helpful for use with clients or in teaching counselling. Clients and students have also referred to these texts. Zimmerman et al. state, “Many therapists frequently assign self-help books as part of their plan. . . . [I]ndividuals and couples in therapy may read self-help books before entering therapy and may discuss their reading with their therapists” (2001, p. 165). The texts I have chosen as representative of the self-help heterosexual couples literature have populated the relationship, family, or self-help shelves in bookstores, suggesting they are commonly available and hence contribute to how couples shape their heterosexual relationships.

Since the work of Maslow (1954) the idea that people have psychological needs has held enduring popularity within and outside the field of psychology (see Cherry, 2014). Heterosexual couple relationship theory is no exception. The meeting of psychological or relationship needs in heterosexual relationships tends to be constructed in terms of each partner doing something for the other partner that leaves the recipient feeling loved (see Chapman, 1995; Harley, 1986). Both these authors argue, based in their couple counselling practice, that human beings have specific inbuilt psycho-social needs that require being met by another intimate human being – through heterosexual relationship practices. However, both texts assume equality between men and women and therefore do not address gender-power-relations, their gender and power blindness perpetuating inequalities. By not addressing gender-power-relations the authors open the possibility for their ideas to be misused; for example, when a male partner produces power in a demand for his needs to be met.

The idea of the unconscious as the cause for heterosexual couple relationship problems is made popular by Hendrix (1988). Hendrix explains that power struggles occur between heterosexual couples when a partner unconsciously tries to get their partner to heal the damage from childhood experiences and the other partner does not respond in the required healing mode. His argument for the cause of the power struggle and for addressing it do not include gender and power. The arguments made within feminist therapy and feminist family therapy at the time of this book’s publication are surely relevant here: “as long as gender remains an invisible category in our clinical work, they [women] will remain submerged” (Goldner, 1985, p. 45).

A text highly regarded in both professional and lay circles in Australia is Schnarch (1999). Schnarch's text takes up the concept of differentiation from Bowen (1978) who developed it within his family systems theory. This concept is applied to the couple's sexual relationship which, according to Schnarch, acts as barometer for the health of the whole couple relationship. Differentiation as Bowen proposes it has been critiqued for its closeness to the ways men are traditionally socialised as emotionally distant and separate (Leupnitz, 1988). In the process of differentiation the need for togetherness is used to explain an undifferentiated person, which can make invisible the value and importance of connection to human development (Knudson-Martin, 1994). Along with these feminist critiques Schnarch can also be critiqued for his inaccurate understanding of power in the context of gender. Schnarch (1999, pp. 265-266) makes it clear in theorising power from the context of oral sexual relations between a man and a woman that he understands power to be the power of submission. Along with this understanding, he suggests he takes feminism and power issues seriously. However, Schnarch has turned one understanding of power, the politics of gendered power and inequality, into another completely unrelated understanding of power; the power of submission when partners agree to certain sexual activity. Apart from the implications for power abuse with Schnarch's depiction of power, the deception is that he misrepresents patriarchal gendered power, reducing it to something that is mutual and even enjoyable, thus keeping invisible the unequal production of gender-power-relations in heterosexual relationships.

Arguably one of the most popular texts on heterosexual couple relationships is Gray (1992), having spent 243 weeks in the New York Times bestseller list (Zimmerman, et al., 2001, pp. 174-175). Gray argues that male and female are inherently different in what they value and how they engage in relationships. With this *inherent difference* thesis between male and female Gray exposes why there is conflict between a couple in a heterosexual relationship and hopes that this exposure will help heterosexual couples understand their differences and relate more lovingly with each other. While Gray has essentialised and made universal his view of gender differences, he has not addressed the politics of gender that disadvantage women. Addressing gender difference without addressing power can create an understanding of "gender as mere difference" (Hackett, 2008, p. 211)

and not as a relation of power. In essentialising gender difference without any acknowledgement of power relations and its potential concomitant outcome abuse, power and abuse can also be essentialised and hence legitimated as naturally determined. For example, Gray writes that men “value power, competency, efficiency, and achievement. They [men] are always doing things to prove themselves and develop their power and skills” (p. 16), whereas women, “value love, communication, beauty, and relationships” (p. 18). In suggesting possible reasons for the popularity of this text and others which have an equivalent thesis Zimmerman et al. write:

It is possible that these books are popular because they confirm and support the dominant discourse of a status quo in which men and women are viewed as being inherently different and in which men ultimately hold more power than women. (2001, p. 173)

Despite the critique offered by feminists on gender-power-relations in heterosexual relationships, the absence of attention to these power relations continues in the construction of heterosexual coupledness in the popular literature. This reference from Zimmerman et al., while offering an explanation for why some texts are popular in heterosexual couple literature, also introduces another factor at work in the construction of heterosexual coupledness; the discursive construction of men and women as essentialised gendered beings where power is a man’s rightful possession. Feminist poststructural theory and practice addresses this political anomaly.

## **Feminist poststructural theory and practice**

Feminist poststructural theory developed during and after the initial feminist critique of family therapy (see Davies & Gannon, 2005; Gavey, 1989; Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990b; Weedon, 1997, p. vi) and the development of feminist approaches to therapy. With the use of feminist poststructural theory I take further the critique on gender-power-relations offered from the feminist critique of family therapy. Feminist poststructural theory takes a more complex and heterogeneous view on gender.

## **Gender as complex and heterogeneous**

Gender is regarded as multiply-located and constantly shifting within discourses. Hence Butler (1995) suggests, for example, that gender categories such as “women” continue to be used but not as a fixed and designated field. Rather, gender identity can be designated as an “undesignatable field of differences, one that cannot be totalised or summarized by a descriptive identity category . . . [gender is] a site of permanent openness and resignifiability” (p. 50). Taking up this position on the discursive construction of gender identity, Mouffe (1992, p. 372) explains:

We can . . . conceive the social agent as constituted by an ensemble of “subject positions” that can never be totally fixed in a closed system of differences, constructed by a diversity of discourses among which there is no necessary relation, but a constant movement. . . . The “identity” of such a multiple and contradictory subject is therefore always contingent and precarious, temporarily fixed at the intersection of those subject positions and dependent on specific forms of identification. It is therefore impossible to speak of the social agent as if we were dealing with a unified, homogenous entity. We have rather to approach it as a plurality, dependent on the various subject positions through which it is constituted within various discursive formations.

This discursive, complex and heterogeneous reading of gender identity not only joins the feminist critique of family therapy by continuing to locate power in socio-cultural conditions, but it takes the critique further, by situating gender construction in discourse. In this way, gender is no longer located in human beings as an essential quality, and the assumptions of gender equality have to be examined at the local level in each gendered encounter. With its discursive, multiple and complex reading of gender the ideas of feminist poststructuralism are both theory-based and practical for application at the local level.

After critiquing structuralist interpretations that resulted in binary positions on gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and class, where multiple positions and knowledges are available, Lerner suggests that the question one should be asking is not to do with who develops a theory or the epistemological basis for a theory,

“but rather, what kinds of struggle does it [theory] make possible” (1995, p. 187). Feminist poststructuralist theory and practice is concerned with power produced from discourses in diffuse and decentralised ways that are constitutive and governing of subjectivities at a local level (Pease, 2000, pp. 32-33; Weedon, 1997, p. 107). With a view of gender as discursively constructed in multiple and complex ways, feminist poststructural theory and practice opens up understanding of struggle at the local level, at sites where subjectivities are produced, and resistance to dominant productions of power take place (Weedon, 1997, p. 71).

At this point, to set this development of feminist poststructuralism in the context of a political response to liberal humanist gender essentialism, I provide an overview of gender essentialism and its persistent and popular hold on understanding gender.

Boasting a long history within the development of western philosophy “essentialism is . . . defined as a belief in true essence – that which is most irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing” (Fuss, 1989, p. 2). As noted by the popularity of texts written on the “unique qualities” of the male and/or the female (see for example Biddulph, 2010, 2013a, 2013b; Bly, 1990; Moir & Moir, 1998; Pease & Pease, 2002) gender essentialism “has struck a resonant chord among a broad section of the population” (Petersen, 2003, p. 66).

Even though gender essentialism has been subject to robust critique from those within a number of disciplines (see Fausto-Sterling, 1992; Fine, 2010; Johnson, 1997; Pease, 2000, pp. 26-28; Sayer, 1997; Wilson, 1977), the arguments for gender essentialism persist (Grosz, 1995, p. 47-49).

Common with these arguments is the location of gender “as internal, persistent, and generally separate from the on-going experience of interaction with the daily sociopolitical context of one’s life” (Bohan, 1993, p. 7). Hence, it is important to note the point that Hare-Mustin and Marecek make:

The psychological literature on male-female differences is not a record of cumulative knowledge about the ‘truth’ of what men and women are ‘really’ like. Rather, it is a repository of accounts of gender organised within



particular assumptive frameworks and reflecting various interests. (1994, p. 535)

When the socio-political context of gender goes unrecognised gender essentialism is often based in assumptions and reflects political positions that are not acknowledged. In support of this position, Brown is explicit in joining essentialist ideas with humanism and the obstructive functions of such:

Humanism begins with some notion of an essence of humankind, its basic nature or innate properties, and proceeds to deduce from this the way things must or will be. In spite of the lofty aims apparently espoused by humanism . . . this doctrine invariably functions as a theoretical and political obstacle. (1990, p. 45)

With a position on gender that makes visible the socio-political, discursive construction of subjectivity and identity, feminist poststructuralism speaks into the assumptive and political space produced by the persistent and popular liberal humanist ideas of essentialism. In particular, feminist poststructuralism hones the focus of a universal application of patriarchy to local applications “of individual women in society and the ways in which they are both governed by and resist specific forms of power” (Weedon, 1997, p. 71). In practical terms for this study, this means that the conversations heterosexual couples conduct are a location for political struggle (Weedon, 1997, pp. 23, 79), and thus, a site where transformation can begin.

In the light of this discussion on feminist poststructuralism and gender essentialism I apply a feminist poststructural position on gender-power-relations to both popular and academic literature that takes an essentialist approach to gender. To guide me in this review I use questions informed by feminist poststructural theory from Mouffe:

If the category “woman” does not correspond to any unified and unifying essence, the question can no longer be to try and unearth it. The central issues become: how is “woman” constructed as a category within different discourses? [H]ow is sexual difference made a pertinent distinction in social

relations? [A]nd how are relations of subordination constructed through such a distinction? (1992, p. 373)

## **Heterosexual couple literature through the lens of feminist poststructuralism**

Informed by these questions, I look for: how women and men are constructed in heterosexual relationship; the practice of tying specific practices to one's sex, thus essentialising those practices to sex; and how the essentialised distinctions made in the literature favour the male sex, or construct both male and female in ways that do not helpfully contribute to democratic and egalitarian relationships.

Rabin (1996) is a text written "to facilitate the incorporation by therapists of the experiences of successful equal partners into work with couples" (p. 59). The text arises from research interviews with heterosexual couples whose interview material fitted the criteria for assessing the couple as equal partners. Equal partnership is defined as couples "equal sharing of power which would result in more equal sharing of housework and parenting tasks. . . . [T]he ultimate goal is for *both* partners to reassess their relationship in totality . . . as a fair one" (p. 116). This is an important text with its argument for heterosexual partners to work toward equality. However, the text does reduce heterosexual relationship equality to sharing of housework and parenting tasks, and makes possible the essentialising of gender to sex. Early in the text Rabin states, "Gender and power are like the air we breathe. We rarely think of how our behaviour is conditioned by our sex" (p. 16). In a footnote (p. 257, fn. 4), Rabin makes reference to gender and power being socially generated in favour of men, but she does not elaborate further on what she means by behaviour being conditioned by one's sex, thus leaving open the idea that gender is essentialised with biology. Because it is possible to read gender as essentialised to one's sexual characteristic, the production of power that privileges the male partner is left unaddressed, and the possibility is made available for assuming power can be equally produced between couples without taking socio-political contexts into account.

Considering Rabin's text in the light of the second and third of Mouffe's questions above, sexual difference is made a pertinent distinction in heterosexual couples by the assumption of equality that comes with tying gender to sex, and

thus not recognising the socio-political context. Because of this *assumption* and *absence of recognition*, “relations of subordination” (Mouffe, 1992, p. 373) that are constructed from discursive formations can be held in place. An example of this assumption of gendered equality and absence of recognition of discursive contexts is illustrated with power being connected to a couple’s communication practices. Rabin ties the communication practice of withdrawing or distancing to the male partner and critical engagement with the female partner (pp. 100-106). Following this, a suggestion is made that equal power rests on bridging the gap in the communication practices of men withdrawing and women criticising. This appears to teach that inequality can be changed through communication strategies that are already shaped by gender discourses. With such an approach, the plurality of subject positions and their concomitant production of power available to both the female and male partners are not taken into account. For example, the male partner may not always withdraw when communicating with his partner. Or, if both partners do change their communication approach the production of power is not necessarily addressed, as there are other subject positions available, other than withdrawing during communication, for the production of power. Unless the production of power that privileges the male partner is recognised and addressed it is difficult to envisage equality when it comes to housework and parenting. In conjunction with role-sharing, equality can be developed through recognising and addressing inequity in the production of power and the subject positions made available in the conversational practices of heterosexual couples.

Weiner-Davis’ (1998) text is a self-help book for women in heterosexual relationships and is aimed at helping them change their partners without their partners knowing it. My concern with the text is the inclusion of examples and language practices that are constitutive of men and women in a way that can be interpreted as disrespectful and demeaning. I find problematic Weiner-Davis’ reproduction of the dominant idea that women should stop “nagging” as one tactic to change their partner. In regard to changing men, Weiner-Davis refers to these practices as behaviour modification which is similar to “dog-training” (pp. 109-122); “what works with dogs also works with men” (p. 110). These metaphors and language practices are distancing and objectifying of both women and men, producing human heterosexual relationships as master-dog relationships. In a

different context to heterosexual relationships, but just as pertinent, Hokowhitu (2007) relates how Māori masculinity has been defined in its colonial constructions as hyper physical and non-thinking with limited space for moral action. The same effect is available through Weiner-Davis' text with heterosexual men being produced as non-thinking Pavlovian subjects of animal trainers. Weiner-Davis' approach raises the ethical question in regard to the kind of relationship that might make it possible for men to produce the "democracy to come" (Derrida, 1993/1994; 2003/2005a; see Chapter 2) with their partners. For heterosexual men and women to produce the democracy to come in their relationship they require high regard for each other, valuing the relationship as ethical and egalitarian, and not as a one-sided trainer trainee relationship.

Another text aimed at changing men is Alter (2006). This text is written directly to men and comes out of Alter's counselling experience of working with men. While Alter takes a "tough" approach in confronting men about the need to change how they engage in heterosexual relationships (pp. 12-13), he also exhorts a man not to consider himself as "bad, low, ordinary" (p. 88), but to have respect for himself. Alter indicates recognition of the socio-economic conditions that can leave men feeling trapped without a clear way out (pp. 88, 99). He addresses men's use of demeaning terms for women (p. 121). The text is an admirable and comprehensive attempt to address the problems of men's unfair and abusive heterosexual relationship practices.

However, with its essentialising approach the text reproduces patriarchal power relations. In regard to what men need to learn, Alter writes, "There are techniques, and there is a technology. A woman actually does come with an instruction manual, and a man can learn it" (2006, p. 6). A woman is likened to a machine which a man can learn to drive or control, and in doing this, the man will have corrected his faulty approach to the relationship and his partner will then "fulfil all your dreams of love. She'll help and support and take care of you and praise and thank and appreciate you" (pp. 7-8). The couple are constructed as driver (or owner) and machine. Patriarchal power relations are reproduced with the clear implication that the driver (a man) drives and works on the machine through learning new skills and techniques that his partner apparently prefers, and the machine (a woman) responds with gratitude through her appreciation and support

of him. The instruction manual metaphor for heterosexual relationship can potentially produce ideas and practices that are too close to patriarchal and romantic love ideas of a man “knowing” what is best for his partner, and the expectation that a woman partner will respond gratefully.

Alter describes his therapeutic approach with men, “I will teach, coach, exhort, correct, confront, judge, joke around, and argue with a guy. I’ll talk over him and around him. . . . When I have to, I’ll yell at him. I’ll take the guy on” (p. 12). Unlike Jenkins (2009) who, for ethical reasons, strongly advises against reproducing patriarchal power relations when working with men who abuse, Alter reproduces power as a tactic for change. This approach is confrontational, almost bullying, reflecting something of the patronising and coercive approaches that can be practised in male to male relationships, and thus, reproducing patriarchal practices. While the text addresses important concerns about the production of inappropriate and unethical male behaviour in heterosexual relationships it constructs men, women, and the heterosexual relationship in a way that does not fit with the ethical relationship of a democracy to come.

In a text that initially appears to be equally addressing the practices of women and men in their heterosexual relationships, Real (2007) uses language that reproduces patriarchal power in constructing women as responsible for the poor state of heterosexual relationships. Real’s hypothesis is that the feminist movement has effected changes in many areas of society and, particularly, for women in heterosexual relationships. Hence, women are rightfully demanding more from those relationships, but men have not changed and do not know how to meet that demand. Real offers a program for helping couples negotiate this gap. My concern with Real’s approach is that his hypothesis for the problems in heterosexual relationships does not recognise patriarchal power and reproduces it through his not too subtle use of language. In introducing the approach his text takes, Real states that it offers “a new set of rules that can help men become more responsible and more emotionally available while helping women become less resentful and more effective” (p. 9). With this stereotypical construction of women as angry and resentful, and ultimately, the inference that the women’s movement was unhelpful in regard to heterosexual relationships (pp 6-9), Real reproduces patriarchal power. He writes, “while women’s new empowerment may well equip them to

stand up for themselves, it does a terrible job of teaching them how to stand up for the relationship” (p. 8). By not recognising patriarchal power as an important ongoing player in heterosexual relationships, Real is caught into producing patriarchal power himself with his clear inference that women are the initiators and sustainers of the new problem in heterosexual relationships. This text indicates the inseparable relationship between the production of power and language. By connecting the women’s movement with women not valuing their heterosexual relationship, Real has potentially constructed “woman” as a category in the discourses (Mouffe, 1992, p. 373) of heterosexual relationship as responsible for the problems heterosexual couples face.

In reviewing these four texts I have shown how the categories “man” and “woman” are constructed through essentialising language in ways that can hide or reproduce power relations. Essentialist constructions of gender that hide or reproduce patriarchal power relations are unhelpful and unethical for a democratic egalitarian approach to heterosexual relationship. From a feminist poststructural position, Davies refers to these democratic possibilities which can be applied in a heterosexual relationship:

It is possible to imagine locating ourselves not as halves of a metaphysical dualism, not as divided off from each other according to the genitals we happen to have, each half taking its meaning in opposition to the other, each needing/desiring the other to fill its own lack, but rather as beings capable of developing new storylines, new metaphors, new images through which we can live our lives. (1990-1999, pp. 41-42)

### **Gottman’s research on heterosexual relationship**

Gottman’s work on heterosexual relationships differs from that of the popular self-help literature. Where much of the self-help literature research on heterosexual relationships consists of developing theory from the author’s counselling practice, Gottman’s approach fits within an academic, modernist, and structuralist paradigm. His work is seminal in stimulating interest in couple’s therapy, (Long & Young, 2007, p. xvii), and for the longevity, thoroughness, and mass of research he has completed on heterosexual coupledness (Bambling, 2007, p. 54; Gottman, 1999, pp. 26-30; 2011, pp. 12-14; Gottman, Schwartz Gottman, &

DeClaire, 2006; Gottman & Silver, 2000). I review Gottman's approach to researching heterosexual couple relationships. I then connect aspects of his research to my study with a view to critique any constructions of gender, power, or heterosexual relationship that might hide or reproduce patriarchal power relations.

Gottman's approach to research is to observe heterosexual couples in as natural environment as possible. He writes:

The basic assumption of my approach, laid bare, is that what we need is a real theory of how marriages work and fail to work, and that theory ought to emerge from a study of what real couples do to accomplish the everyday "tasks" of being married. (1999, p. 7)

To achieve this observation and development of theory Gottman and colleagues (1999, pp. 26-30) built an apartment laboratory that housed a couple for a 24 hour period with cameras viewing their behaviour between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. The couples were requested to do what they would normally do on a Sunday in their own home. In this apartment laboratory a multi-method approach was used to measure the couples in the areas of: interactive behaviour, perception, and physiology. At the time of the publication of his text (1999), Gottman had been conducting research in the apartment laboratory for 23 years. The research findings come from a variety of studies conducted during that period of time. While Gottman conducted other research with couples, the main focus of his research stems from his work in observing couples in the apartment laboratory.

Gottman's findings focus on four areas: predictors of divorce, or what keeps couples unhappy when they are attempting to resolve conflict; signs of happy, stable relationships; from these two areas, a theory involving seven principles of why couple relationships either work or do not work was developed; and finally, trust between partners has recently been included in this theory as an essential ingredient to building a sound couple relationship (2011, pp. 15-40).

### ***The relationship of Gottman's research to my study***

There are two particular sets of findings from Gottman's research that are relevant to my study. Both these sets of findings are to do with the dominance of the male

partner in defining his partner's experience and the practices of the relationship. Because Gottman names this dominant defining by the male partner as power or influence, I articulate the different understandings of power from his work and mine. While I take the feminist poststructural position of regarding power as a production from patriarchal discourses that favour men, Gottman conceptualises power as related to the influence the man or woman has to define how the relationship is experienced and played out in practice (1999, p. 52; 2011, pp. 394-395, 428). He seems to regard power as something that is inherently available to either partner in defining experience and relationship practices. This approach suggests power can equally be produced by both partners, thus, Gottman takes up the assumption of gender equality offered by liberal humanism.

However, in contrast to this assumption, Gottman's research indicates that the male partner is pivotal to how well, or not, the heterosexual relationship works. Heterosexual couple relationships "will work to the extent that men accept influence from, share power with, women" (1999, p. 52). Gottman suggests that 80% of those relationships where men did not accept their partner's influence or share power with them ended up separated or divorced. More recently, Gottman established "why male dominance is detrimental to trust and love in close relationships" (2011, p. 394). In heterosexual relationships, where the male partner is influential through his destructive emotional expression and the female partner cannot influence him with her own experience of hurt and painful emotion, then trust and love are more likely to be undermined (2011, pp. 430-432). Even when the male partner is more influential in defining relationship practices in combination with his positive emotions, while it does not appear to affect trust and love in the relationship, Gottman suggests, it "seems to be a highly negative thing" for the heterosexual couple relationship (2011, p. 395). While Gottman constructs power as equally available for both men and women in heterosexual relationship, some of his findings can be taken to support the position of my study; that privileged male power has a major constituting effect on heterosexual relationship experience and practices.

Even though aspects of Gottman's work can be taken to support my study, overall, in the literature, despite the feminist critique of family therapy, and the



critique from feminist poststructuralism, liberal humanism has kept a strong grip on the conceptualisation of heterosexual coupledness and the practice of heterosexual couples counselling. This grip features essentialist ideas about gender and equality that lack attention to discursive productions of power.

## **Feminist poststructural approaches to heterosexual couple counselling**

While liberal humanism maintains a grip on understanding heterosexual coupledness and the practice of heterosexual couple counselling, this grip is highly contested, as I show from literature that takes a feminist poststructural position. Sinclair and Monk (2004) take an approach to working with heterosexual couples that situates in different discursive positions the expectations a couple take up during conflict. This approach provides a process for the couple to explore the conflict without blaming each other. With this approach, the authors practice what they call “temporary essentialism” (p. 341) where they strategically locate themselves in an “equity discourse” for addressing the oppressive practices reproduced from patriarchal discourses that privilege men. In conjunction with temporary essentialism, the authors practice “discursive empathy” (p. 342) which is used to join with the couple in helping them locate the discursive positioning they hold in the conflict. Finally, building on the work of temporary essentialism and discursive empathy, deconstructive questions (p. 343) are used as a practice to explore both the clients’ and the therapist’s assumptions and cultural frameworks for practising relationship. I include an example from Sinclair and Monk of a deconstructive question that addresses the culturally derived romantic love notions that can lead to a woman putting aside her professional aspirations for a male partner. The question is addressed to the woman partner: “Where did you get the idea that it was a good idea to sacrifice your career prospects and move to [name of state] to support [your partner’s] career?” (p. 344).

In a similar manner, Dickerson (2013) outlines an approach she takes in working with heterosexual couples that aligns with narrative therapy and feminist poststructural ideas on discourse. Dickerson is concerned about approaches to therapy where power relations may not be addressed. Hence, she “attend[s] to the *words* the couple uses in their conversations . . . [to] unmask the operations of

power and [male] privilege” (p. 104). Dickerson’s aim is to notice “the influence of patriarchy” and respectfully and sensitively deconstruct “its effects on couples” (p. 104). She concludes the introduction to her approach:

Rather than essentialist thinking about how men and women “are,” noticing the effects of patriarchy allows the couple to be curious about how it is each wants to be, how each prefers to act and relate to his/her partner, and how each wants to be seen and appreciated. (p. 105)

In following a feminist poststructural approach to conceptualising heterosexual coupledness and the practice of counselling heterosexual couples, both the above examples indicate recognition of the discursive production of power relations, and open possibilities for a heterosexual couple to practice their relationship according to preferences that may not be constrained by essentialist constructions of gender.

In a final example of an approach to counselling with heterosexual couples that contests essentialist ideas and practices, I refer to the work of George and Stith (2014) with intimate partner violence. In their practice, George and Stith hold onto a feminist position of patriarchy as a dominant discourse that favours men. However, they also take an intersectional position where they find that other discourses, which include economic factors, race, ethnicity, class, health, can challenge dominant patriarchal discourses and contribute, in some situations, to the development of unsafe symmetrical violence between intimate partners. Thus, George and Stith (2014, p. 191) suggest that “it is important to be aware of gender and culturally essentialist conclusions” that can limit socially just practice with heterosexual couples.

This thesis joins with the work of these three examples of feminist poststructural approaches to heterosexual couple counselling, and speaks into the philosophical and political space left by liberal humanist gender essentialist ideas of equality that leave the socio-cultural production of power relations unrecognised. I take a feminist poststructural approach that recognises the dominance of patriarchy that privileges men as a group, but I maintain a focus at the local level, on patriarchy as “historically specific discourses” (Weedon, 1997, p. 104) that are reproduced in oppression, particularly in the area of conversations in the construction of

heterosexual relationships. In conjunction with this focus on patriarchal oppression at the local level, I recognise competing discourses reproduced in resistance in the conversations heterosexual couples conduct. This position fits with a “poststructuralist account of modern power [that] places us all in the place where power relations are produced and reproduced – that is, in daily conversation” (Monk, Winslade, & Sinclair, 2008, p. 186).

In contrast to the liberal humanist literature that is dominant in the construction of heterosexual relationships as gender blind, and the limit of power to a personal commodity through essentialism, feminist poststructural theory and practice offers an understanding of the experience of women at a local level where there are diverse productions of gender-power-relations which shape their lives. Thus, feminist poststructural theory makes it clear that there is no singular uniform category that is woman. With an understanding of discourses, the production of knowledge and power through a plurality of subject positions, feminist poststructural theory and practice offers unique analytical tools to work with in understanding productions of heterosexual relationship, and the possibilities for egalitarian ethical practices in such.

## **Chapter 4. Method**

The recognition of local and diverse productions of power and the dominance of patriarchal discourses in disadvantaging women were instrumental in planning a research design that limited, as much as possible, the production of power for all participants through this study. Hence, the data generation for this study was divided into three consecutive stages: Stage one was a focus group involving six heterosexual women; stage two was separate interviews with five heterosexual men; stage three was a focus group involving three heterosexual women. These stages were linked by carefully detailed documents that summarised data from the preceding stages.

While the methodologies used for data generation are inseparable from the ethics that prompt their use, I discuss each of them separately: First, I provide an overview of the data generation process; second, I develop the ethical basis for the methods employed in data generation; finally, I conclude this chapter with discussion of the process by which data were selected and analysed.

### **Stage one**

A first focus group was made up of six women who were each in a heterosexual relationship at the time of the data generation, or at some stage before it. The women participants were recruited by written invitations that I had left at the reception of a number of counselling centres and at a private tertiary educational institution. When a woman indicated interest in participating in the study by contacting me by email or telephone, I posted to her three documents: a document with information on the research; a research consent form; and the form for notifying withdrawal from participation in the research (Appendices, A, B, C). The document with information on the research contained information on me; the reasons for the research; research topic and method; safeguards and confidentiality practices; and participant requirements.

If after reading the information on the research, a woman was still interested in participating in the study she then returned to me the signed consent form. The research consent form included space for each participant to notify me of their

preferred way for written communication between her and me during the data generation process. I then responded by either email or telephone with a welcome and appreciation, and clarified with them their preferred days and times of the week for meeting as the focus group. After six women were recruited I then contacted them with a proposed date and time to begin the first focus group.

My position in the focus group discussions was guided by the co-research metaphor named and developed from therapeutic practice by Epston (1999). This co-research metaphor informed me to practice respectful and curious inquiry, without understanding too soon (Weingarten, 2003, p. 198), in regard to the participants' different experiences and knowledges. I explain this metaphor and its application to the data generation for this study in the second section of this chapter.

The first focus group met three times for approximately two hours each time, with one month between the first and second, and the second and third meetings. One of the members, Annie, was unable to participate in the third and final meeting due to an unforeseen family commitment.

After the first and second meetings of the focus group I transcribed the audio recording of the meeting. Then, from that transcription I prepared a narrative research document of the meeting in line with narrative letters utilised in narrative therapy for post-interview reporting on interviews for clients (White, 1995; White & Epston, 1990). The narrative research document was either emailed or posted (using each participant's preferred method) to the focus group members after the first and second meetings. At the beginning of the next focus group meeting, the group discussed the document and suggested any additions or deletions. Other topics were then discussed.

After the third and final focus group meeting I transcribed the audio recording and prepared another narrative research document that differed from the previous two documents in that it did not provide questions for further discussion. I sent this document to the focus group participants with the request that they return it to me within twenty one days as either confirmed, or with any suggested additions or deletions. I also indicated that *the bridging document* (Appendix D), for taking

material from the first focus group discussions to the second and third stages of the data generation process, would be sent to the women by a set date, for their review, editing, and confirmation.

After receiving back the reviewed narrative research document of the third focus group meeting, I completed the bridging document and either emailed or posted it to the first focus group participants. I requested that they review this document, and respond to me within twenty one days, indicating their acceptance of it, or that they had concerns about the document and wanted change. Annie, who was not present in the third and final focus group meeting, was included in this accountability and reviewing process. Each focus group participant responded affirmatively to the bridging document.

The bridging document introduces, to the second and third stages of the data generation process, ideas and practices on heterosexual relationship that “caught my attention in surprising ways in the [focus] group discussions” (Appendix D, bridging document, p. 1). As well as ideas and practices discussed in the focus group meetings, this document offered some reflexive observations on my part in regard to my learning from the first focus group women. I discuss the bridging document in more detail in the third section of this chapter.

## **Stage two**

The second stage of the data generation process comprised interviews with five men who were in heterosexual relationships. I sent invitations to a number of social groups I have contact with, or they were passed to a man via someone who knew of the research. After a man contacted me to indicate interest in the research, I posted him a document outlining information on the research; a research consent form; along with the form for indicating notice of withdrawal from participation in the research (Appendices, E, F, C).

When I received back the signed consent form, I telephoned the man to introduce myself, and indicate I would be posting to him the bridging document for reading, with the indication that this document would be the basis for his discussions with me. A date and time for the interview was also agreed upon at this time.

One change was made in the practice during the data generation from that indicated in the information on the research document sent to the men. The information on the research document stated that along with each man's interview transcript to be checked I would provide a letter which covered relevant themes from the man's interview along with those identified in the literature. While I provided individual transcripts for checking, I did not send a letter outlining relevant themes from the man's interview or the literature. Instead of including this procedure, I negotiated with each man that after all transcripts were revised, as stated in the information on the research document, I would send a combined letter to the men. I made this adjustment because I think it held less potential for individualistic blame, while still maintaining opportunity for ethical reflection on the material from the interviews. The combined letter is named in this thesis as *the men's interviews document* (Appendix, G), and is discussed in more detail in the following paragraph.

Each interview lasted approximately ninety minutes. While discussion of the bridging document was the initial focus of the interview, discussion included the men's experiences of their heterosexual relationship(s), and the conversational practices employed with their partners. After each interview I transcribed the audio recording of the interview and emailed or posted a copy of the transcript to the participant who was invited to check it for accuracy and respond back to me with acceptance or adjustments. After I had received all five transcripts back from the men, I then prepared as noted above, in the form of a narrative research document, the men's interviews document. The men's interviews document includes responses to the bridging document, and other themes the men thought were important for heterosexual relationships. In a right hand margin of this document I included questions and some reflexive comments that were intended to invite further thinking and possible ethical action by the men. This document was then posted or emailed to the men with a request that if they wanted anything changed or added they get back to me within two weeks of receiving it. The bridging document from the first focus group, and the men's interviews document, were both taken to the third stage of the data generation for discussion by a second focus group of three women.

## Stage three

The second focus group of women were recruited through invitations to participate that I left at the reception area of different counselling centres, and a private tertiary education institution. When the invitation was acknowledged by a woman, I posted to her three documents: a document with information on the research; a research consent form; and the form for indicating notice of withdrawal from participation in the research (Appendices, H, I, C).

Once the research consent forms were returned signed I made contact with the participant either by email or telephone with a welcome and appreciation for their response. I also indicated I would be posting or emailing them three documents to guide our discussions. These documents were: the bridging document; the men's interviews document; and a two page document summarising the research design and offering outsider-witness questions (Appendix J) to guide the discussions in the focus group. While I initially had hoped to recruit six women in the second focus group, I facilitated the group with three women because of the slowness of responses to the invitations to participate. In regard to the number of participants for a focus group, a general consensus in the literature is that six to ten are best suited (see Asbury, 1995; Kreuger, 1995; Morgan, 1995; Wilkinson, 2004). However, Wilkinson (2004, p. 178) is flexible with this number, suggesting as few as two participants can serve the purpose of a focus group. Kreuger (1995, pp. 529-530), and Morgan (1995, p. 517) both suggest numbers fewer than six can be more suited to topics that deal with complex experiences and areas where participants have expertise. Thus, in regard to the topics of this study for discussion by the second focus group, I concluded that a group of three could create meaningful discussion and responses.

The second focus group of women met for a one off meeting that went for approximately two hours. The main purpose of the second focus group, as the final stage of the data generation process, was to give women a final say on the generated data as recorded in the two documents they had received from the previous two stages. After the completion of the second focus group meeting I transcribed the conversations from an audio recording of the meeting and sent a copy to each of the three participants. I requested that they review, and revise if



necessary, their contribution to the discussion, as long as other participants' contributions and meanings were not altered. I requested that they return the revised transcript within twenty one days. Along with the transcript, I sent the participants two questions with reference to the focus of their discussions on heterosexual relationship experience and practices, which they could respond to if they chose: If you were a woman in the first focus group what would you appreciate about our discussion if you heard it? And, what hopes would you carry/hold that our conversation would have for men in the interviews, or the men in your own relationships? All transcripts were returned, and two of the participants responded to the two questions.

## **Argument for the methods**

"The choice of one method over another is not simply a technical decision, but an epistemological and theoretical one" suggests Wilkinson (1999, p. 222). In the same vein, Thompson (1992) argues that before the elements of a research methodology can be regarded as useful for achieving a feminist goal they require examination in regard to their correspondence with that methodology. The elements are: the agenda of the research, the epistemology of the methodology, and the ethics of how and why knowledge is accessed from research participants. To these three elements Dankoski (2000) adds a fourth, methods used in data gathering.

Based in argument that the elements of this study correspond ethically and epistemologically I introduce the methods – focus groups and interviews – with the inclusion of outsider-witness practices, narrative documents, and the co-research ethos from narrative therapy.

The agenda of this study was highlighted in Chapter One: to explore the subjectivity of women in heterosexual relationships as addressed in the conversations conducted in those relationships; secondly, to hear the dreams, hopes, and aspirations those women have for their heterosexual relationships. In Chapter Two I introduced feminist poststructural epistemology. This epistemology takes up the principle that discourse and not the individual is the "structuring principle of society, in social institutions, modes of thought and individual subjectivity" (Weedon, 1997, p. 40). Power and knowledge are intimately linked

in discourse (Foucault, 1980) so that certain knowledge is prescribed as central to the particular discursive way of knowing, and other knowledges are hidden or not regarded as important to that particular discourse. Hence, with the dominance of patriarchy, a woman's experience, knowledges, skills, and subjectivities receive very little, if any space as important. That is, unless those experiences, knowledges, skills, and subjectivities fit within certain patriarchal parameters as acceptable for a woman. Conversely, a male's experience, knowledges, skills, and subjectivities, are regarded as important and given priority through patriarchy but, only if they fit within the patriarchal parameters of what it is to be a man. As a result of patriarchal dominance, "power is exercised within discourses" in the constitution and government of women's and men's individual subjectivity (Weedon, 1997, p. 110). Specifically, in regard to this study patriarchy, as a dominant discourse, privileges men in relation to women in the exercise of power (Weedon, 1997, pp. 105, 120, 122; Pease, 2010, pp. 95-97), and the expression of what is acceptable knowledge.

In a feminist study, method must recognise and address this patriarchal production of power as a matter of ethical concern. I took steps for holding myself ethically accountable when engaging with participants. Ethical accountability is also required for the relationship between two groups of participants, the women in the first focus group and the men in the second stage interviews. The combination of methods I chose for the data generation in this study are not only designed for constructing knowledge, but they also serve to minimise re-production of power that disadvantages the participants, particularly the women participants.

### **Ethical epistemological practices – focus groups**

From the 1950s focus groups have been utilised by feminist scholars and activists as consciousness raising groups (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005), and since the mid to late nineties they have been advocated as a constructive research method for researchers operating from a feminist poststructural epistemological position (Asbury, 1995; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, 2011; Madriz, 2000; Wilkinson, 1999). Focus groups reduce the production of power between a male researcher and the female participants (Wilkinson, 1999), and allow for more creative

interaction among participants and for the co-construction of meaning (Wilkinson, 1998b, 1999, 2004).

### ***Ethics: Researcher and gendered power***

I chose to have all-women focus groups. As the researcher I was the sole man present when these groups met. As a male researcher, in following a feminist poststructuralist methodology, I recognised the need to continue working reflexively (D'Cruz, Gillingham, & Melendez 2007; Shacklock & Smyth, 1998). In guarding against the subtle exercise of power: I took care to speak respectfully when guiding the direction of discussions and in asking questions about a woman's story or a topic being discussed; I took care as to how my larger physical body was present in the group; and I made sure evaluative comments addressed concerns of injustice or unethical practice, and not peripheral matters. My role was to facilitate the process of discussion through respectful curious questioning. Because there were more women present, the production of power between me and them would have a greater chance of being minimised, in contrast to an interview or a traditional positivist experimental setting (Dankoski, 2000; Wilkinson, 1998b, 1999). The ethics of choosing focus groups is not only concerned with power between me as a male researcher with the women participants, but also with the process by which data is generated.

### ***Ethics: How data is generated***

Kitzinger (1994), and Wilkinson (1998a, 1998b, 1999) argue that focus groups, as part of a feminist research methodology, fit with a naturalistic method, become a social context for developing meaning, and reduce the possibilities of exploitation. An all-women focus group helps minimise the reproduction of patriarchal power, makes possible the facilitation of knowledge from the women of the focus groups in an unencumbered way as possible, reducing the threats of exploitation, subjugation, and retribution.

The agenda for this study, the respectful approach required to accomplish it, the predominance of women in the focus group, and the focus group method, were steps taken towards the ethical co-production of knowledge. The focus group method has the potential for serving women participants by providing them a space to contribute to this study. Thus, it is possible for them to share their

collective stories, common experiences of power and domination, resistance practices and ideas, in a safe and supportive environment (Madriz, 2000, p. 839; see also Espin, 1995; Norris, Nurius, & Dimeff, 1996).

### **Ethical epistemological practices – interviews**

The two options I had before me as methods for discussing with men the bridging document and their own heterosexual relationship were interviews or focus groups. I chose interviews over focus groups with the men based in ethics inferred from the literature.

#### ***Ethics: Men speaking apart from dominant masculine culture***

Allen (2005), in her research on the construction of young men's sexual identity during focus group discussions, speaks of the young men fluidly constructing both hegemonic versions of masculinity, and less hegemonic constructions that indicated enjoyable relations with women separate from sexual relations. The young men's hegemonic expressions of masculine identity policed the less hegemonic because the presence of male peers created a vulnerability around the expression of the less hegemonic constructions (pp. 43-49). While Allen's research is with young men about sexual identity, I think it helpfully illustrates the power of peers and patriarchal discourses to constitute men's talk and subjectivities, even when they occasionally step into positions outside of dominant patriarchal constructions of masculinity.

The advantage men gain from patriarchal privilege and their difficulty in recognising that privilege (Connell, 2009; Pease, 1997, 2000, 2002a), are part of the patriarchal constitution of men's talk and subjectivities that make it difficult to transform gender inequality. Two of the factors that contribute to the difficulty in recognising male privilege are the pain men experience, and not acknowledging that women are oppressed (Johnson, 1997, pp. 18, 234). While I acknowledge men's pain, and that men can have difficulty in seeing women as oppressed, in a focus group where I could be in the minority with the position I hold on gender inequality, I did not want to risk getting involved in arguments about these points. The potential for competition and abuse of power in a focus group context with men trying to persuade each other, or the alternative, of peer-pressured easy submission to other men's ideas, is delimited in one-on-one interviews. I did not

want to risk the social justice agenda for the second stage of the research with male participants being overrun by their expressions of pain, or the practices that many men embrace, such as competition and domination of relationships (see Pease, 2000, p. 50).

Gaddis (2006) sums up my reasons for one-to-one interviews with men. In respect to adolescent boys, he argued that with an invitational focus for his interviews adolescent boys were more amenable to speak of experiences, feelings, and ethics that are outside of dominant culture. In an interview with an invitational focus there is more opportunity for men to speak of experiences outside dominant discourse than when they are in a group where they might be expected to perform dominant versions of masculinity.

### **Ethical epistemological practices – outsider-witness practices**

Outsider witness practices are a therapeutic practice (Weingarten, 2003, pp. 203-204; White, 2007, pp. 190-192) that I have shaped as a research method for particular purposes. Part of the purpose for the second and third stages of the data generation process was to fulfil the role of outsider-witness to the first stage focus group of women through the bridging document.

The bridging document was prepared by me after the final meeting of the first focus group. In that document I highlighted the material from the first focus group discussions that I was “most drawn to”, that surprised and “moved” me, from which I gained a sense of what the women in the focus group “accord[ed] value to in life” (White, 2007, p. 190, 194-196). In regard to the witnessing done by the second and third stages of the data generation process my hope was that the participants in these stages might also be *drawn to*, and *moved by*, material in the bridging document that would contribute toward achievements such as: gaining a new perspective on their identity; reconnecting with important values for their life; initiating new steps in their life not previously considered; thinking differently to their routine ways of thinking.

In regard to the second stage of data generation particularly, outsider-witness practices served a social justice agenda for this study. This agenda follows a developing social justice focus in qualitative research inquiry (see Denzin &

Giardina, 2009). By asking men in the second stage of data generation to witness to the women of the first stage, the purpose was to do my best to open possibilities for those men to witness their own position in patriarchal discourses, and be transported (moved) to a different more just place in understanding and practising gendered relationships. Research that produces change was my hope for the outsider witness component of this study.

### **Ethical epistemological practices – narrative research documents**

The use of narrative research documents is supported by their use in research with women in regard to therapy and abuse (Dixon, 1999), and in research on teaching practice (Crocket & Kotzé, 2012). Narrative research documents are used in this study, particularly in preference to transcripts for the first focus group, because they serve to integrate therapeutic practices in the data generation process while also fulfilling the role of a research method.

Narrative research documents follow the procedures of narrative letters developed by White and Epston (1990) in narrative therapy. Narrative letters have four guidelines of relevance to the development of narrative research documents in this study: Narrative letters render lived experience into a meaningfully coherent and lifelike story, in contrast to discontinuous apparently unrelated events; narrative letters make the therapist more accountable to the person(s) who are consulting the therapist; the letters are a shared construction with the person(s) consulting the therapist, who can contest, amend, or confirm the letter; the therapist is required to co-create a letter which includes the voice of all parties involved in the conversation, while at the same time avoiding exclusive professional language (White & Epston, 1990, pp. 125-126).

The narrative research documents are the three which were written following each of the meetings of the first focus group, the bridging document, and the men's interviews document. The narrative research documents prepared after each of the three first focus group meetings, along with the bridging document, made possible the acknowledgement of, and responses to the women's experiences of heterosexual relationship throughout this whole study. After each of the three meetings of the first focus group I wrote a narrative research document that included an accurate précis of the transcripts which included questions I had asked

and quotes from members of the group in regard to identified key themes discussed. I also gave an invitation for focus group members to raise any concerns about important topics and words that I may have omitted from the narrative research document. Excepting the document written after the third focus group meeting, I included questions that could be used to facilitate further discussion in the next focus group meeting.

Because the men had individual interviews, and hence, only a small portion of the interview transcript and the ideas discussed might be included in a narrative research document, the men first read and confirmed their individual transcripts before I prepared the men's interviews document. The men read their transcripts as a means of checking their accuracy, whereas the women in the first focus group confirmed the narrative research documents – which I had written – as an accurate representation of the three focus group meetings.

### **Ethical epistemological practices – co-research**

Co-research is a narrative therapy practice initially developed by Epston (1999) in the context of working with families who had a child suffering with chronic, excruciatingly painful, skin disorders. Because his empathic responses to these families and children were limited by his own limited experience of such pain, and the idea of coming to them with “expert knowledge” had been exhausted by others working with these families, Epston decided on the co-research metaphor as a possible way of “seeking out fellow-feeling” with those suffering. The suffering of these people became “the designated problem” for which Epston developed the co-research metaphor (p. 140). Epston says “[the co-research metaphor] brought together the very respectable notion of research with the rather odd idea of the co-production of knowledge by sufferers and therapist . . . in which the problem was a problem for everyone – and here I included myself” (pp. 141-142). The co-research approach is most often marked in narrative therapy by a respectful and curious form of inquiry by the therapist based “on the presumption of difference rather than commonality” (Drewery, 2005, p. 310). Co-research, in the data generation for this study, was marked by this same form of respectful, sometimes naïve, and curious form of inquiry regarding the participant's different experiences and knowledges.

While my approach to inquiry with the participants in each of the three stages of data generation was respectfully curious, the co-research practice as described by Epston, was produced mainly during the first stage. In response to my inquiries on the topic of how conversations in the women's heterosexual relationships constituted their subjectivities and the relationship, the problem the whole study would focus on was disclosed. In much the same vein as Epston's approach to "the problem", the problem(s) the women articulated concerning their experiences of their heterosexual relationships became shared problems, in that they became the problem the remainder of the study explored and sought to address. This co-research practice fits with a feminist method that encourages co-construction and diversity of meaning, and limits the exploitive potential of the researcher.

### **Post data generation reflection on the methods**

I briefly reflect on the effectiveness of focus groups, narrative research documents, and the men's interviews for generating the data in this study. The focus groups were highly effective. I refer in the next section to my response of surprise to the data generated by the first focus group. The capacity of the focus groups to generate data on gender inequality, the effects of this inequality, and the participants' hopes and dreams for heterosexual relationship, is a major contribution to this study. The use of narrative research documents is valued in this study where there were requirements for connection and development of story and ideas between the first focus group meetings, and then between the three different stages, where those stages were required to relate without participants physically meeting. While constructing the documents is a time consuming process, they have the capacity to communicate succinctly and clearly the significant stories and ideas within a stage and between stages, while at the same time stimulating further thought and discussion. The narrative research documents are also a permanent record of data that has been developed and accepted at each relevant stage.

The main area of doubt I hold is in regard to the men's interviews, particularly, whether the social justice agenda was achieved. The first point of doubt is the approach taken by some of the men in reading and absorbing the bridging document. Some of the men had clearly read and absorbed the content of the



document and at the interview reported processing new understandings of heterosexual relationship and thinking about engagement with new ethical practices. Others did not appear to engage with the document at the level of grasping the effects of their practices on their partners, and addressing the possibility of personal change for the relationship. In retrospect, I put this difference between the men down to the different discourses each of the men were subjected to. This leads to the second point of doubt with the men's interviews: my skills and knowledge in being able to articulately and effectively challenge their thinking and practices. At the time of the data generation I was relatively new to understanding male cultures and poststructural ideas and practices, such as discourses and the constitutive nature of language. This limited knowledge and skill, in turn, limited how I worked with the men in their interviews in regard to invitations to alternative ways of thinking about heterosexual relationship practices. Perhaps, the men's interviews document (Appendix G) more fully served the purpose of a social justice agenda than my interviewing. That document certainly reflects some of my own learning and development during the data generation of this study.

## **Data analysis**

I now proceed with introducing the means that guided my selection of data for analysis, and a method that best explains the process of analysis.

### **Selection of data for analysis**

The first focus group women's answers to my questions on conversational practices and their effects on the women formed much of the material in the bridging document, and guided my selection of data for analysis. Because feminist poststructural theory recognises the constitutive power of language my first questions of the first focus group concerned language. Four of these questions can be found on the first page of the narrative research document from the first meeting of the first focus group (Appendix K): Can you share with us the kind of words and tone of language you and your partner use, or used, when talking about an important decision to be made? Would this tone and words be the same for all conversations about important decisions? Would there be differences depending on the decision to be made? Are there situations where either of you

controlled the conversation? These questions and developments of them, asked at different times during the three first focus group meetings, formed the basis for the discussions by the first focus group which, in turn, became the topics recorded in the bridging document that represented those discussions.

### ***The bridging document***

In summarising the bridging document, I comment first here on my attention being captured in surprising ways by what the women in the first focus group disclosed (Appendix D, bridging document, p. 1). The word “surprise”, best articulates at the time of the focus group meetings and the construction of the bridging document the emergence of a new story or a new subjectivity for me. In language already articulated in this thesis the bridging document indicates the peeling away of my own gender blindness. In retrospect, the word “surprise”, covers the rare and unexpected opportunity I had to move into new territories for learning and ethical development. I learned from the first focus group women’s discussion knowledge that I needed to practice in my relationship with my partner, and with any woman I engaged with. While some of the women’s answers were not new information when it comes to women’s experience of men and heterosexual relationship, the readiness to enthusiastically engage with each other, and with a male, about their knowledges and experiences contrasted with dominant masculine culture where there is limited if any knowledge of such matters. If there is knowledge, it is often articulated in a blaming way of one’s partner. This thesis, particularly the results chapters, best develop my surprise into what I hope is an adequate ethical response to the ideas and knowledges articulated by the first focus group women.

Along with my sense of surprise to the discussions of the first focus group the bridging document can be regarded as having three important points to make: A description of the first focus group women’s experience of conversational practices in heterosexual relationship; their hopes and dreams for what heterosexual relationship could become; and my own learning from the first focus group women in application to the heterosexual relationship with my partner. It is the first two of these points that guided me in the selection of data from the first focus group to analyse, and in what I chose to analyse from the men’s interviews.

The first focus group women named three experiences of heterosexual conversational practices that had effects for them: being “shut-off” by the male partner in conversations, that is, a woman is stopped from contributing to the conversation, or not consulted for knowledge that can contribute; a woman is called a “nag”, or her response named a “nagging” response, when there are no other options left for her to gain her partner’s attention; the relationship, and the language practices therein, have the effects of contributing to the woman partner’s identity, for good or for ill.

In response to the question, “what can men do to help grow the hope for equal space in relationship?” in the narrative research document written after the first meeting of the first focus group, the focus group women coined an idea, “a safe, sacred place”. This idea was discussed often in the second and third meetings of the first focus group, and reflects their hopes and dreams for egalitarian and equally-intimate heterosexual relationship practices. This idea plays an important part in the analysis. Hence, I include here words that allude to a safe, sacred place from each of the women participants during the second and third meetings of the first focus group.

Ali: For women I think we seek that from our friends and sometimes we do find that through our friendships, but what we are really wanting is that same level of intimacy in the conversation with our partner. . . . It makes me feel like who I am is important . . . it’s almost like you take away from that place a sense of yourself. . . . Your contribution, your language, your ideas, your thought, your personality, your creativity, all these things are valued in that place because someone else is giving you the time to do that . . . what could be better in life? That’s such an amazing place!

Carmen: [In regard to her relationship with her partner] I believe that God does want to bring us to an egalitarian relationship which is more of a partnership and an equal thing.

Hannah: I was thinking about the intimacy in relationships zone . . . where you can feel really genuine, authentic, who you are, yourself . . . free to be

yourself and not have to protect yourself or protect the other person. . . . For me, it is all stuck together, [with] intimacy in the relationship.

Sarah: What actually makes that strong connection is that equal discussion, that space where you both feel accepted and loved and I think that is not an easy thing that just happens, but that is something I have always wanted. . . . I think the biggest problem was that early on I actually did not know that was what I was looking for. . . . [We have] named it over these discussions.

Sue: [In response to a number of comments] that is what you are saying, such a precious place to be . . . I totally agree with you . . . talking, listening, really understanding each other. . . . I think it's a wonderful thing when you do.

Annie: This is the language I have learned [from a counseling course]. I didn't have the word for it before, but he's [Annie's partner] not connecting emotionally. . . . I realize, just from learning, that's what's missing.

Finally, the bridging document included some of my own learning with my partner, which was a direct effect of the conversations with the women of the first focus group. The voices of the first focus group women were active reminding me of "shut-off" and its effects while I was effectively in the process of shutting-off my partner in a conversation. I was able to stop myself and get involved in the conversation in a more helpful, respectful, egalitarian manner.

### ***A rhizomatic method***

As I introduced in Chapter Two, Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/1988) concept of the rhizome has become a helpful metaphor for understanding the unforeseen development of the theory and meaning that is applied in the results chapters of this study. Lechte (1994, p. 95) says the rhizome represents "horizontal thought, thought always in movement". The rhizome is a figuration that has been taken up by a number of scholars in application to research and writing. Among those scholars is Grosz (1994), who suggests the rhizome figuration can be utilised as a method that is "concerned with what can be done; how texts, concepts and subjects can be put to work, made to do things, make new linkages" (p. 200). Grosz suggests that the rhizome method is akin to cartography or mapping. That

is, it is not about the tracing or reproduction of a model, but rather, it is experimentation, the exploration of new territories and practices (pp. 199-200). In this study, the rhizomatic method helps conceptualise the unforeseeable route of making linkages between data and theory – so that new territory is stepped into. The idea of the rhizome opens space for grasping the complex and unpredictable adventure of writing research.

Kamler and Thomson (2006) in their work on doctoral supervision suggest the term “writing up” research is unhelpful because it constructs writing as “ancillary or marginal to the real work of research” (p. 3). They go on to say the complexity is obliterated by the phrase “writing up” (p. 3). Kamler and Thomson suggest instead, “I’m writing my research, where the present continuous verb *writing* implies a continuous process of inquiry through writing” (p. 4). This thinking is in line with the ideas offered by St.Pierre (2011, p. 622), “It is impossible to disentangle *data, data collection, and data analysis*”. The process of inquiry through writing, entangling data with theory in data analysis, sits with a rhizomatic method, and best describes the approach I have taken in the data analysis in this study.

The analysis in the following chapters is an ethical response to the unfair constitution of women’s subjectivities in heterosexual relationships through the patriarchally dominated conversational practices of their heterosexual partners. In the analysis: I explore the effects for the relational subjectivities of the first focus group women when their partners take control of conversations; I give priority to the ideas and knowledges of the first focus group, particularly an invitation to men to step into a safe, sacred place; I explore and detail possible ethical responses from men to that invitation; I emphasise women’s responses from the second focus group to data generated in the bridging document and the men’s interviews document; and I discuss in detail a moment of discourse in operation as a possible colonising action. Even though I use theory from a range of sources and philosophers, the analysis fits with feminist poststructural theory and practice.

## **Chapter summary**

The research method, guided by feminist literature on gender and power relations, safe and ethical practices for data generation, and narrative therapy ideas, is

designed to fulfil the agenda set for this study. The selection of data for analysis is guided by the two criteria, hearing women's knowledges and experiences in regard to their relational subjectivity, and their hopes and dreams for egalitarian heterosexual relationship practices. The theory applied in the analysis, while rhizomatic and unforeseen in its emergence, is an ethical response on my part intended to contribute to and support the nine women involved in this study, and make visible possible ethical and egalitarian responses and initiatives from men.



## **Chapter 5. A story of decomposition and mo(ve)ment**

This first results chapter takes the ideas of “decomposition” and “mo(ve)ment” (see Davies et al., 2006), and applies them to two episodes from the data. These episodes are within the transcript of the first focus group. In the first episode Sue speaks of a retreating partner who would not engage with her on subjects that were precious to Sue. I theorise this first episode from poststructural perspectives, using the concepts “mastery and submission” – reworked as discussed in Chapter 2 – in regard to being subjected to discourse while using it masterfully for one’s purposes (Butler, 1997a). From a feminist position, a much more extensive theorising of the first episode of Sue’s story is then unfolded, explicating decomposition and mo(ve)ment as processes for change. The second episode further develops decomposition and mo(ve)ment, and mastery and submission, as my analysis shows how Sue works toward agency with her partner in pursuing what is precious to her.

The purpose of this chapter is to recognise and show the complexity of subjectivities when a woman is subjected to patriarchal discourses in heterosexual relationship, and the adjustment and manoeuvring of discourses required for her interests to be addressed. Each of the nine women involved in the data generation for this study report experiences of struggle and oppression with inequitable and subjugating conversational practices in heterosexual relationship. This chapter serves to highlight and theorise that struggle and oppression from the position of one woman, who could be any woman.

### **Sue’s story – first episode**

The first episode I report is based on Sue’s account of trying to engage her partner on important familial concerns, then her withdrawal to engage with more supportive discourses, before attempting to re-engage with her partner.

My partner and I will try to have these discussions, and it will turn into me being frustrated because I want to talk it out. And he [would] just retreat. . . . It was frustrating, and there were times that I would get so angry because



there were things, especially to do with the kids, that we needed to get sorted out. I would just go and sit in the loo [toilet], literally shut the door with pencil and paper and write all these things like: “Did you hear him God? What a so and so!” I would read and think “well, he wasn’t quite that bad. Well, he was!” Then I would rip it up and throw it away. Then I would be calm enough to go out, and have a sensible conversation.

### **A first poststructural interpretation of the first episode of Sue’s story**

I elaborate on a development that provides agency for Sue as she manoeuvres the discourses that she has available to her for conducting herself in the context of a heterosexual relationship.

In an initial reading, the concepts of “submission and mastery” as developed by Butler (1997a, p. 116) from Althusser (1971), and explicated and applied by Davies (2006), appear illuminating for a poststructural understanding of Sue’s actions. Submission and mastery are concepts that Butler (1997a) utilises to shed light on how individuals become subjects of discourse, both as a result of power constituting the subject and power as an effect through the subject from discourse. Because the words submission and mastery can be used in the context of control and abuse by men, I change them to the terms *accommodation* to discourse, and *utilisation* of discourse (see chapter 2). The individual emerges as a subject within discourse, by their accommodating to the dominant discursive repertoires, and then skilfully utilising their knowledge of those repertoires agentially.

In returning to the excerpt from Sue in the first focus group, a brief reading from a poststructural position alone can illustrate the accommodation to, and utilisation of discourse. In retreating, Sue’s partner is enacting power from the patriarchal discourse that provides a position of control for the conversation (see Rankin Mahoney & Knudson-Martin, 2009, pp. 19-20). Sue, with feelings of frustration and anger, is antagonised by this expression of power, but she sees no other way to deal with it than to leave and accommodate this formative expression of discursive power. To openly oppose it, with a full enactment of her anger, or simply challenge her partner’s withdrawal as an act of power and control, might have been too risky for Sue to achieve her goals. At this point Sue’s accommodation to

the patriarchal discourse comes into play, or as Drewery's (2005, p. 314) conceptualising would suggest, Sue is now comprehending "how to go on as part of being an accomplished discourse user". This accommodation to the discourse has "a certain flexibility" (Drewery, 2005, p. 314) as Sue finds a way within acceptable discursive practice to utilise the discourse for her purposes. In accommodating to the discursive display of power Sue is able to access power that the discourse offers her in the relationship. In going into the toilet and secretly expressing her anger about the situation, Sue is, in one moment, accommodating the power of the discursive control as exhibited in her partner's behaviour, and she is utilising an approach that can acceptably subvert that power. This accommodation to, and utilisation of discourse, is to express privately the anger she feels, calm herself, and then "have a sensible conversation", that might be acceptable on patriarchal terms. While this reading of the excerpt from Sue briefly illustrates the poststructural concepts I have termed accommodation and utilisation, a more developed understanding and meaning is possible. In the following reading, I slow the first episode of Sue's story down to a frame-by-frame reading. With this slower reading, the nuanced effects of a patriarchal discourse are noticed, and the concepts, decomposition and mo(ve)ment, are used to give Sue's story further significant meaning and clarity.

### **A further feminist reading of the first episode of Sue's story: The first frame – responsibility for the children**

The first frame, from a feminist perspective, I suggest, is the responsibility that Sue feels for the children while her partner retreats from this topic for discussion. These actions fit with a finding that women are often the parent in a heterosexual relationship who will take the major responsibility for childcare in families (Gerson, 2010, pp. 171-173; Hochschild & Machung 2003; Kimmel, 2008, pp. 149-151). While Sue's specific mention of their children as the topic for discussion allows the issue of gendered childcare to be mentioned here, her story does not indicate that this is what frustrates her. It is clear from Sue's account that there are a number of topics that she brings to her partner for discussion and he retreats. It is the retreating by her partner from Sue's efforts to have a conversation that frustrates her. I regard her partner's retreating as a silencing tactic (Benjamin,

2003) employed from a dominant discourse to marginalise or oppress those operating from a subordinate discourse.

### **The second frame – silencing by dominant discourse**

Another frame in Sue's story from a feminist perspective is that discourses limit what can be said and by whom, thereby limiting access to a discourse (Mills, 2004, pp. 87-88). In the context of Sue's conversation with her partner, silencing is a speaking position offered by a patriarchal discourse that excludes certain topics or experiences from entering a conversation so that they cannot be spoken or, if spoken, cannot be heard (Benjamin, 2003, p. 9; Lorde, 1984, p. 124). The discourses at work in Sue's story provide a means to understand gendered oppression through this silencing practice. Within heterosexual relationships, Benjamin (2003) suggests that the power struggle is between two different meaning structures, or in poststructuralist terms, two different discourses that provide different ways of speaking into existence and understanding heterosexual relationships. A feminist meaning structure – in Benjamin's terms – challenges and resists oppression of women in whatever form that oppression may take. A hierarchical meaning structure, or hegemonic patriarchal discourse, protects and justifies gender hierarchy including the oppression of women. In connecting this theory specifically to heterosexual couples, the idea of "ongoing" (Cultrane, 1989) and "open" (Benjamin, 1998, 2003) couple conversations are an important practice enabling couples to develop equality and negotiate the conduct of daily tasks required in heterosexual coupledness. To silence the conversation, as Sue's partner has done here, is one oppressive practice of a hierarchical meaning structure within heterosexual relationships (Benjamin, 2003).

Davies and Harré (1999), in their work on positioning theory, connect oppressive conversational practice with attempts to resist such:

One speaker can position others by adopting a storyline that incorporates a particular interpretation of cultural stereotypes to which the others are "invited" to conform, indeed are required to conform, if they are to continue to converse with the first speaker in such a way as to contribute to the storyline that the first person has opened up. Of course, they may not wish to do so for all sorts of reasons . . . [one of those reasons being] as an

attempt to resist. Or they may conform because they do not define themselves as having choice but feel angry or oppressed or affronted or some combination of these. (p. 40)

While Sue's partner is not the first speaker in a linear sense, he is the first speaker in a hierarchical sense. He has taken control of the conversation and the available speaking positions by his retreating silent response to Sue's invitation to a conversation. Paradoxically, his control of conversation by silence requires Sue's silence. Sue's response appears to be one of conforming to her partner's initiation for silence, which is a response marked initially by anger, and then by her physical retreat to the toilet. I suggest Sue's response is one of taking a position of resistance to her partner's invitation to conform to his control of the conversation with silence.

### **Third frame – how anger is expressed**

The anger that Sue feels and expresses is yet another frame that feminist thinking can offer this story. Though the work of Lerner (1985) can be regarded as dated, I think it is still relevant to the way patriarchally constituted men can respond to women who openly express anger. When women openly express anger, especially toward men who are patriarchally constituted, they are often regarded in ways that are demeaning and the expression is treated with disdain and dishonoured. The language often used to condemn women when they openly express anger is disparaging and marginalising. They can be regarded as irrational, "unloving and unlovable . . . [c]ertainly, you do not want to become one of *them*", Lerner (1985, p. 2) suggests, with sad irony. Lerner (1985, p. 2) further makes the point that profane and derogatory language that "names" women is nearly always used to refer to any persons who openly express anger. With these discursive conditions, it may be risky for Sue to express the anger. In the light of the discursive conditions that women might experience in regard to the feeling and expression of anger, it could be seen as surprising that Sue acknowledged the anger and was prepared to express it in some way. This point leads into the second view on anger: how it can be utilised by women.

Benjamin (2003) makes a number of points about the helpfulness of emotions in connecting to alternate discourses, and about anger in particular, as a resource that

supports the contesting of the dominant discourse. In regard to emotion, Benjamin (2003, p. 12) writes, “If we are able to connect emotionally to a source of an alternative discourse – through a person, book or media message – this source becomes a power resource that can enable us to unsilence avoided topics in our relationships”. And in regard to anger, Benjamin (2003, p. 13) writes, “The emergence of anger is simultaneously a state in which alternative meaning structures become more powerful and a state that reinforces contestation. Further, anger tends to signify the reluctance to accept positioning by others”.

While, from Sue’s account, the anger cannot be expressed openly with her partner, it is an emotion she acknowledges feeling and begins to utilise effectively. The anger opens an agentic opportunity for Sue to separate from her partner who at this point is the representative of a hierarchical meaning structure. In physically separating from her partner Sue is able to find “a room of her own” (Woolf, 1928/2009) where she has space to connect with some other meaning structure that can become a supporting resource for her to “unsilence avoided topics” – on Benjamin’s terms – with her partner. Anger is a tool that Sue utilises to refuse the positioning offered her by her partner. The anger has supported agentic mo(ve)ment for Sue to re-position herself in contesting the hierarchical meaning structure. This new positioning is made available from another meaning structure that is far more agreeable to what Sue holds precious in life. The meaning structure which helps facilitate Sue’s mo(ve)ment becomes noticeable as she connects with it in this “room of her own”. This room is another feminist frame to her story.

#### **Fourth frame – “a room of her own”**

The idea of women having a room of their own is taken from Virginia Woolf (1928/2009). Woolf, upon being invited to speak on women and fiction in two locations in Britain, realised that for women to write fiction they must have financial means and a room of their own. Woolf found, in the society she observed and the literature she read, a great inequity between women and men. It is this inequity that she focussed on in her speeches, “women and fiction”, to her audiences in Britain in 1928. These speeches were later published as “A room of one’s own” (1928/2009). Woolf’s purpose in giving the speeches was to

encourage women to write, and to do so with pride, so that they could eventually have money and worthy rooms of their own to write in. If women were to do this writing, their obscurity and poverty would be alleviated, Woolf hypothesized. A room of one's own, with the hope Woolf speaks of, sits as a metaphor which contrasts with Sue's "room of one's own". Sue's room, the toilet, sits in direct contrast to what Woolf hoped would eventually occur for women. This could say any number of things about Sue's rights and privileges, or rather, lack thereof, in this house. But to comment on this would be to make presumption, about the size of the house, the privacy of other rooms in the house, aspects of Sue's and her partner's living arrangements and relationship that I know very little about. What can be addressed is dominant discourse, and its power to marginalise and make invisible the life of those who refuse its specifications for conducting relationship and conversation.

The toilet is an invisible place in many houses. Visitors to a home often need to ask where the toilet is, not only because they need to use this amenity, but because the toilet is rarely built in a publicly visible part of the house. The toilet is a room in a house that is meant for privacy, which is very different to Sue's need for privacy. The toilet is rarely if ever a celebrated room in a house, where visitors are invited to be and admire the décor – as they might be to the kind of room of one's own Woolf envisaged. The toilet is meant for one person behind a closed door clearly cut off from the rest of the house. Often the toilet door is closed whether the room is occupied or not. The toilet is a room within a house that is marginalised by nature of its purpose and thus the perception people have of that room, particularly in our "respectable" and "decent" western culture. It is to this room that Sue disappears from her partner and the dominant hierarchical discourse that he is enacting through the silencing tactics that exercise power to refuse conversation. Paradoxically, it is in this invisible and marginalised place that Sue finds connection and possibility with another discourse that is for her far more egalitarian and sustaining in her pursuit of what is precious to her. Foucault (1987) provides a metaphor here that I think is helpful:

As in judo, the best answer to an adversary maneuver is not to retreat, but to go along with it, turning it to one's own advantage, as a resting point for the next phase. (p. 65)

I use this judo analogy from Foucault, Benjamin's (2003) silencing interpretation of anger, and Butler's (1997a) ideas of mastery and submission to theorise Sue's actions while in her "room". Sue retreats, rests, and prepares for the next phase with her partner. She accommodates to the dominant discourse and utilises that discourse to achieve what is precious to her. To use the language of decomposition and mo(ve)ment, Sue decomposes the effects of the hierarchical discourse while in the same moment movement occurs as she accesses an alternative discourse that offers new meaning and knowledge to reengage with her partner. While the room of Sue's own is one frame a feminist interpretation of her story offers, within that frame there is another frame that can shed further light on her story as one of decomposition and mo(ve)ment.

### ***A Sub- frame within the fourth frame – God, pencil and paper, as points of resistance***

The words Sue uses to name her actions when she gets to the toilet are, "I would . . . literally shut the door with pencil and paper and write all these things like: 'Did you hear him, God? What a so and so!' I would read and think 'well, he wasn't quite that bad. Well, he was!'" Within the toilet, God, the pencil and paper, are resources for Sue that provide a safe and accepting environment, where she draws support, before returning to her partner to work within the hierarchical meaning structure and its oppressive tactics. The toilet room, the pencil and paper, provide Sue with tools to see from a distanced position what is happening with her partner. In the safe environment of the toilet, away from a hierarchical meaning structure, Sue is able to openly express, with pencil and paper, her partner's "bad" position toward her. With this reference to her partner as "bad" Sue is acknowledging her experience and not discounting it. This stands in contrast to a possible gendered alternative where Sue could discount her experience of her partner, regard herself at fault for the problem with him, and take responsibility for his behaviour. The pencil and paper, the allocation of "badness" to her partner, provides Sue a sense of agency that makes available a subject position for reengaging with her partner that is not based on guilt, but in what is precious to her.

I suggest that the most helpful way to understand Sue's reference to God in her story is to look at it from what is apparent within her account. Sue does not give

any overt theology or commentary on God. But by her statement and reference to God within the context of her account it might be assumed that for Sue, God can bear the anger she is expressing. Because Sue speaks as if God is listening and interested in her problems it might be taken that for Sue God is a helpful resource and support. Certainly, in this account, God appears as without judgement of her, which is quite contrary to how Sue positions God in relation to her partner and the hierarchical discourse. It might be understood that Sue's reference to God also invokes a spiritual resource.

Hunt (2006) makes the point that spirituality can be both conspiring and a form of resistance. By resistance and conspiracy Hunt does not mean the type of resistance that takes an oppositional or critical stance to that which is being opposed. Hunt suggests that when resistance in the terms of opposing arguments or critique is practised the dominant paradigm being resisted may have its dominance reasserted (p. 53). Hunt goes on to say:

Critique has so far served us well in challenging and opposing oppressive theories and practices, but it is essentially one-dimensional: it operates within a particular way of knowing that is often deliberately disconnected from the lived experience of everyday life, including imagination and spirit. (2006, p. 56)

If Sue were to resist the hierarchical patriarchal meaning structure with open critique and overt oppositional practices it may perpetuate the dominance of that discourse in her relationship with her partner, where he could maintain his position of silencing power. For Sue to resist overtly may well be a disconnect from her everyday lived experience of life. It may separate her from her preferred way of conversation with her partner. Or, another possibility, as narrative therapy suggests (White, 1995), if lives are multistoried, then this may be only one story of her partner's responses. In other stories he may not retreat but may engage. I suggest that Sue is resourcing a way she can respond to her partner that she values, and that fits with her experience of life, but at the same time, how Sue responds begins the subtle diminution of the hierarchical meaning structure in her relationship. Sue, in the secrecy of her own room, is addressing her God as



someone who is safe and resourceful for her, as a co-conspirator, to utilise spirituality as resistance to the hierarchical meaning structure.

In the terms of gender discourses, Sue calls on her God as witness to the patriarchal practices of her partner – thus, also calling God into a patriarchy-disrupting position by invoking a pro-feminist witnessing God. By invoking a God who witnesses and acknowledges her position one could say a definitional ceremony occurs for Sue that provides “a context for rich story development” (White, 2007, p. 165), and invites fresh access to what Sue values, and opens possibilities for resisting the dominant discourse. Myerhoff (1986, p. 267), provides a relevant description of the purpose of definitional ceremonies: “Definitional ceremonies deal with the problems of invisibility and marginality; they are strategies that provide opportunities for being seen and in one’s own terms, garnering witnesses to one’s worth, vitality, and being”. While Sue does not report her sense of worth being affected, the events in the toilet, and her God’s witnessing her situation from an acknowledging position, help deal with the invisibility and marginality imposed on her as a result of her partner’s patriarchal practices.

The toilet, Sue’s God, the paper and pencil, all serve as part of an alternative meaning structure, to decompose the effects of the hierarchical meaning structure, and to provide mo(ve)ment for hopeful re-engagement with her partner on what is precious to Sue. This frame-by-frame reading of decomposition and mo(ve)ment within Sue’s story has slowed the story down so that nuanced effects of the patriarchal discourse can be noted and the imaginative resources of alternate resistant discourses are recognised.

## **Sue’s story – second episode**

The second episode of Sue’s story comes after her account in the toilet room, with pencil, paper, and her God. In this second episode Sue uses the metaphor of a gopher to describe her partner’s reticence to engage with her. Sue provides the metaphor of “swooping around” a gopher to describe the part she plays in the relationship:

I think there was somebody that told me once that some people are like little gophers, these little – you know, an American friend – that pop up and when they see information pop down again, and others are swooping around you know. I’m swooping around with it, and he’s popping up and going, “grrrr”, (Sue laughs). [I would] swoop and talk and then he’d disappear again. So I thought, “I’ve got to tempt him out of here”, so yes I used to, I think I used to play games to try and get him out of it. I can remember the making of little nibblies and a nice drink or something, wine, and [he would] come over. [I would ask him] “let’s talk, what do you think about. . .?” [I would] get him to talk to me first about things he wanted to, and then gradually work him around. You know, women are very manipulative.

In the analysis that follows, I have taken the “swooping” metaphor to mean a bird “swooping around” the gopher.

### **Multiple positionings in Sue’s multistoried account**

The term multistoried means people have many experiences in their life which can potentially be linked together in story form as a way of giving meaning to their experience (White, 1995, 2007). Some experiences are not storied because they do not fit with meanings offered by dominant discourse from the person’s social history or society. The story the person develops generally determines which experiences will be highlighted and performed to the world (Monk, 1997). A person generates their story and makes meaning of their experiences and the world from the discourses available to them (Drewery & Winslade, 1997). Within these discourses people can take up positions from different discourses at the same time – “multiple positionings” (Drewery & Winslade, 1997, p. 38; Weedon, 1997, p. 94). My analysis here highlights the multiple positionings that Sue is taking up in her gopher-and-swooping-bird story.

### ***Positioning within the broader field of patriarchal power relations***

Sue is positioned “within the broader field of patriarchal power relations” (Weedon, 1997, p. 71), and takes up positioning in another discourse in an effort to get her interests addressed. Weedon elaborates on the multiple positioning of a woman, such as Sue, their constitution in patriarchal power relations, and their strategic resistance to those constitutive powers:

Poststructuralism's concern with the discursive construction of subjectivity . . . the heterogeneous forms of power governing social relations is motivated by a primary concern with understanding the position of individual women in society and the ways in which they are both governed by and resist specific forms of power. This involves not a devaluing of women's experience but an understanding of its constitution and its strategic position within the broader field of patriarchal power relations. (p. 71)

The "broader field of patriarchal power relations" is dominant in Sue's story through its positioning her in a disadvantaged relationship with her partner. Sue's story is a response to patriarchal practices that makes it possible for her interests to be addressed in the relationship. Sue's disadvantaged positioning contrasts with her partner's who has the advantage of re-producing patriarchal power in ways that suit his interests and relationship practices.

Sue is also shaped by patriarchal power relations in the way she calls on familiar language to describe herself as a temptress, manipulator, and in playing games, when she says, "I've got to tempt him out of here", "I used to play games", and "women are very manipulative". These words and descriptions, offered by patriarchy of relationship practices, are required of the female partner when patriarchy dominates a relationship. Patriarchy, by its dominance, produces the need for the practices that these words name, but with the use of these words to name the practices, the practices are belittled and demeaned, and the production of power left invisible. Often, women who make use of these so called, tempting, playing games, manipulative practices are accused of enacting power, thus, power is essentialised and the focus kept away from patriarchy and its dominance.

The demeaning words used in the telling of Sue's story can very easily be interpreted to devalue – in Weedon's terms – Sue's experience, and thus leave unrecognisable the constitution of her experience "within the broader field of patriarchal power relations". When terms such as "tempt", "playing games", and "manipulative" are used to name or describe women's actions in heterosexual relationships, what is required is not a devaluing of their experience, but an understanding of women's positioning within "the broader field of patriarchal power relations", and thus, "the ways in which they are both governed by and

resist specific forms of power” (Weedon, 1997, p. 71). I suggest that Sue, in telling her story, is positioned by patriarchy to name required relationship practices in ways that do not do justice to the discursive events taking place in her story.

### ***A strategy of traversing multiple-positions***

The discursive context that Sue is positioned in does not support a direct approach to her partner. Such an approach is fraught with the risk of further dominant patriarchal positioning that could limit Sue’s interests being addressed. However, what Sue can engage with in getting her interests addressed is “a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 101) to patriarchy. To do this resistance, Sue calls on her imagination, which Hunt (2006, pp. 52-53, 56) connects with possibilities for resistance to dominant paradigms. In calling on her imagination Sue accesses another discourse, a liberal-humanist discourse, which emphasises an essentialist nature for human beings (Weedon, 1997, p. 77). In Sue’s story, the essentialism relates to the metaphors of the swooping bird and the gopher, as descriptions of Sue’s and her partner’s “relational natures”. These essentialised metaphors help provide Sue with a humanist agency in understanding her and her partner’s relationship and a strategy for changing the relationship practices. In conjunction with these metaphors, Sue then uses patriarchal terminology – tempt, play games – to name her agentic actions that make possible a conversation with her partner where she can begin to get her interests addressed. Sue is still positioned in a disadvantaged position by patriarchy, but she has now strategically called on another discourse and skills that are agentic as “a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance” (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 101) to patriarchal constitution.

Hence, Sue is obliged to traverse multiple positions from different discourses in her strategic attempt toward achieving what is precious to her. Sue is required to stay governed by patriarchy because a direct approach to her partner potentially puts her interests in jeopardy. Thus, Sue tentatively approaches her partner, with the re-production of another discourse and skills learned in how to work within patriarchy. With these two strategies Sue is resisting the “specific forms of

power” produced through her partner’s actions. In this way, Sue has effectively positioned herself to have a conversation with her partner that can potentially achieve her purposes. Being an effective discourse user, Davies (1991, p. 46; 1998, p. 136) argues, is a strategy for agency. And this, I suggest, is what Sue has done with her multiple-positioned approach to her partner.

Sue’s telling of her story, and the story itself, indicate how a person’s life can be multistoried with multiple subject positions available to them. It indicates the insidiousness of patriarchal intrusion into heterosexual relationships and everyday language practices, and the power of patriarchy to constitute subjectivities. My analysis indicates the strategic, multiple positioning required of a woman to move toward achieving her interests within the broader field of patriarchal power relations.

### **Accommodation and utilisation**

The strategic, multiple positioning required of women “within the broader field of patriarchal power relations . . . in which they are both governed by and resist specific forms of power” (Weedon, 1997, p. 71) resonates with Butler’s (1997a) ideas of mastery and submission, or as suggested for this study, utilisation of, and accommodation to discourse.

Foucault (1984/2000c, p. 292), says “in power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relations at all”. Weedon has effectively utilised these thoughts from Foucault in introducing recognition of the practice that women are strategically positioned as being both governed by and resisting specific forms of power (p. 71). And, I suggest that application of Butler’s (1997a) development of the concepts mastery and submission to the second episode of Sue’s story offers a different, but germane, understanding of this reference from Foucault. Butler (1997a, pp. 116-117) writes:

Submission and mastery take place simultaneously, and this paradoxical simultaneity constitutes the ambivalence of subjection. Though one might expect submission to consist in yielding to an externally imposed dominant

order and to be marked by a loss of control and mastery, paradoxically, it is itself marked by mastery . . . the lived simultaneity of submission as mastery, and mastery as submission, is the condition of possibility for the emergence of the subject.

These ideas are applicable to Sue's account of the gopher and swooping bird story. There are four interconnected points I look at in development of Sue's accommodation to, and utilisation of patriarchal discourse, which lead to the emergence of a new subjectivity. First, in Sue's telling of the gopher and swooping bird story I see evidence of this simultaneous accommodation (submission) to, and utilisation (mastery) of patriarchal discourse. Second, in looking at Sue's story I grasp something of what Butler might mean by the "ambivalence of subjection". Third, the metaphor which Sue accesses in her story, and which enables her resistance, is situated within her culture or social group. Fourth, the story is just one of the "culturally sanctioned signifiers" (Davies, 2006, p. 433) that Sue operates from that indicates her accommodation to, and utilisation of discourse to achieve what is precious to her.

### ***Accommodation to and utilisation of discourse***

In the telling of the account of the gopher and swooping bird, Sue tells the story of resistance to patriarchy's tactics to silence and control her in relation to her partner. In applying the metaphor to the relationship Sue has utilised a means to open the relationship with her partner to a place of conversation on topics that are precious to her. The application of the metaphor to the relationship and to her partner, and Sue's subsequent telling it to the focus group, is an agentic act of utilisation of discourse. In the telling of the story to the focus group, there are still the accommodation points to patriarchy with the use of words such as "I used to play games", and "women are very manipulative". The telling of the story and the story's use of patriarchal commentary are, I suggest, signs of utilisation of, and accommodation to patriarchal discourse.

I suggest there is a vacillation, or an "ambivalence of subjection" (Butler, 1997a, p. 116) in the story when it comes to patriarchy. Sue is both subjected to patriarchy through her disadvantaged position in the relationship with her partner, but she is still in a position to resist, and work within patriarchy towards achieving

her purposes. This two-way positioning is what Butler refers to as “paradoxical simultaneity” where “submission and mastery take place simultaneously” and there is the “possibility for the emergence of . . . [a new] subject” (1997a, pp. 116-117).

### ***Culture or social group as the source of Sue’s metaphor***

At the beginning of the account of this story, Sue mentions to the focus group how she had learnt from someone the analogy of people being either like gophers, or like “others swooping around”. Foucault talks about his interest in how people constitute themselves from ideas or models taken from outside their self, in society. He says of these constituting practices, “They are models that he (*sic*) finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group” (Foucault, 1984/2000c, p. 291). Sue’s model of the gopher and the swooping bird comes from her culture or social group. I would suggest it is an acceptable model to Sue, developed from the pursuer-distancer cycle utilised for understanding coupled relationships (Lerner, 2001, p. 54). It is helpful because it has explanatory power for Sue in regard to her relationship with her partner. But I would like to suggest this explanatory power and metaphor that Sue has received are viable because they fit the dominant cultural paradigm shaped by patriarchal influence – measurement, control, evaluation, essentialising practices; hence, Sue’s accommodation to patriarchal discourse in utilising this metaphor to resist the patriarchal hold on her relationship. The metaphor is useful to Sue because of her imaginative skill in utilising it for what is precious to her. I suggest that the gopher and swooping bird metaphor, that Sue imaginatively turned into a story to benefit her relationship, fits within what Davies (2006, p. 433) calls “culturally sanctioned signifiers”.

### ***Culturally sanctioned signifiers***

Davies (2006, p. 433) writes:

The accomplishment of mastery is not simply an act of willing submission . . . subjects may be involved in taking up subject positions for which they have little or no first-hand knowledge. Their accomplishment of mastery involves both an imaginary capacity to form themselves out of the not-yet-

known, and a set of culturally sanctioned signifiers of the thing they see that they must become.

The “culturally sanctioned signifiers” here refers to what Sue knows is culturally acceptable for her to become in a heterosexual relationship. The story Sue uses is a culturally sanctioned signifier because it makes sense in the context of her culture and the relationship with her partner, where, as a woman who is the pursuer in this story of relationship, she is responsible for connection. Other possible “culturally sanctioned signifiers” that may have guided Sue are assertions such as: women don’t overtly express anger to their partner; women do not bully or push their partner too hard; women look after their partner’s feelings; male partners need to feel they are in charge. These are especially so if a woman wants “to keep” their male partner. Sue hints at some of these signifiers, recorded in the first focus group transcript, straight after the first episode of this story – her retreat to the toilet – discussed earlier in this chapter:

And I talk to him about it later. And it’s like all the anger’s gone. Because we lived in the bush, and so there was nobody else to talk to. So you only had, it was me and God you know, and him, who I love, but made me mad at times.

This quote highlights the dual subjectivity tightrope Sue is traversing, of being “both governed by and resist[ing] specific forms of power” (Weedon, 1997, p. 71), as she works on changing her relationship, while maintaining it as a relationship that is acceptable to her partner. I suggest Sue has accommodated to the culturally sanctioned signifiers of not expressing anger to her partner, looking after his feelings, and being responsible for relational connection. While Sue is accommodating to these patriarchal signifiers, at the same time she utilises these to achieve what is precious to her – being able to talk with her partner about her concerns. Sue, perhaps, in accommodating to the patriarchal signifiers, could foresee that the anger would be an impediment to her partner hearing her or, to her being able to articulate herself clearly. If Sue looks after her partner’s feelings by not expressing anger with him, she invites her partner into a listening position and into relational connection. In accommodating to and utilising these patriarchal



signifiers Sue is paradoxically emerging as a new subject (Butler, 1997a, pp. 116-117).

### **Emergence of a new subjectivity**

This emergence of a new subjectivity for Sue is what Davies (2006, p. 433) refers to as “an imaginary capacity to form themselves out of the not-yet-known, and a set of culturally sanctioned signifiers of the thing they see that they must become”. The “not-yet-known” is now this new skilful subject that can accommodate to and utilise discursive signifiers, without recognisably threatening the production of power that patriarchy has privileged the male partner with. If we are to look at Sue’s story in this chapter as a story of an emerging subjectivity, then one can say that at the beginning of the story where Sue first encountered patriarchal power through her partner, she was at the beginning of “an imaginary capacity to form . . . [herself] out of the not-yet-known”. For Sue, the toilet, God, the paper and pencil, the gopher and swooping bird metaphor, were all part of her imaginary capacity to accommodate to and utilise patriarchal discourse skilfully to achieve what is precious to her – conversation with her partner on important topics.

### **The complex work of decomposition and mo(ve)ment**

Decomposition and mo(ve)ment provide a graphic and visceral sense of the complex and difficult transformation process for a woman in a patriarchally dominated heterosexual relationship. My account of the two episodes of Sue’s story, on the terms of decomposition and mo(ve)ment, are intended to highlight the complex and multistoried nature of (Sue’s) subjectivities in (her) heterosexual relationship. The analysis has recognised the discursive production of power which has subjugated Sue’s interests. The adjustment and traversing of positions required by Sue in using different discourses to get her interests addressed in the relationship with her partner has been theorised to show both governance by patriarchy and resistance to it. Sue’s story, while unique to her situation, could be any woman’s story for “understanding . . . its constitution and its strategic position within the broader field of patriarchal power relations . . . the way in

which they are both governed by and resist specific forms of power” (Weedon, 1997, p. 71).

Because of the dominance of patriarchy in constituting heterosexual relationships, particularly when a male partner is not respectfully responsive to a female partner’s position, if the female partner wants to keep the relationship she has to work from within patriarchal restrictions. Butler (2004, p. 45) refers to a power that can be attributed to patriarchy: “We are outside ourselves, constituted in cultural norms that precede and exceed us, given over to a set of cultural norms and a field of power that condition us fundamentally”. With this understanding I think it is bordering on miraculous that change happens at all in heterosexual relationship when, as it would seem is often the case, only one partner appears to be decomposing the effects of discourse and moving toward change for an egalitarian relationship.

## **Can patriarchal practices be moved?**

The patriarchal practice of controlling conversations seems ubiquitous and incessant. Is there hope that such practices can be moved, particularly in heterosexual relationships? As I have written in Chapter Two, Butler (1990/2006) argues that gender is always a performative action, or as Chambers and Carver write, the “repetitious citations of what we understand culturally as sex and gender” (2008, p. 43). Hence, gender, in Butler’s terms, is a citational enactment of culturally accepted norms for male and female (1990/2006, p. 190; 1993, p. 282, fn. 5). I suggest the controlling of conversations by Sue’s partner, either by silence or other means, is a citational enactment of gender norms re-produced by men from patriarchy. However, because gender norms are a citational enactment each time they are performed the possibility of change is available within the necessity to citationally repeat the gender norms. Taken from Derrida (1972/1977a, pp. 12, 17-18), “iterability” is the action within citationality that makes possible alteration and difference during the repetition process (Butler, 1993, p. 245, fn. 8). Hence, Butler writes:

[By] virtue of this reiteration . . . gaps and fissures are opened up . . . as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined

or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm. This instability is the *deconstituting* possibility in the very process of repetition. (1993, p. 10)

To illustrate Butler's point I draw on a final comment from Sue in regard to the conversational practices produced by her partner:

When he realised that was what he was doing, cutting us off, because we got to the stage, my daughter and I, we would just go, we would start asking or talking about things with him, and he would cut us off, not meaning to. But it would shut us down. And it just took all the joy out of it. We [would] think, "What did I say?". . . He finally realised, and he said to us one day. "I keep ending the conversations don't I? I keep spoiling this." So he has learnt to sit back, and now he says, "Oops, I've been doing it". Which is really good, and it lets us explore.

I suggest Sue's partner, in the reiteration of the gender norm, conversational control, has noticed, or practised the "gaps and fissures" which make it possible for that gender norm to become unstable in his relationship practices. In so doing, he can work toward "deconstituting" the gender norm of conversational control in their heterosexual relationship, in turn constituting more egalitarian conversational practices with Sue. This brings hope that patriarchal practices of conversational control can be moved, especially in heterosexual relationships.

As a result of her partner resisting and working toward transforming patriarchal conversational practices, Sue's final few words perhaps indicate what is important for her in conversation with her partner, something that Sue has worked toward in her story recorded in this chapter – "it lets us explore" [have a conversation without the patriarchal control].

## **Chapter 6. The first focus group as multifunctional**

In this chapter I continue to focus on relational subjectivity as I introduce the experienced and preferred relational subjectivities of the other five women in the first focus group, Sarah, Hannah, Ali, Carmen, and Annie.

In the introduction to their chapter on focus group research Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2011, p. 545) state that in 2005 they argued that focus group researchers are strategic in configuring the intersections of “pedagogy, activism, and interpretive inquiry”. In 2011 they build upon and extend their work “troubling the idea that the intersection of pedagogy, activism, and inquiry is always or primarily strategic” (2011, p. 545). Along with this new proposal for their chapter, they explore “both new possibilities . . . and new dangers faced by focus group research . . . especially in relation to debates around the politics of evidence” (p. 545). In building upon their work and exploring the possible futures of focus group research Kamberelis and Dimitriadis engage in reimagining focus group work as “almost always multifunctional” and situated “within a performative idiom” (p. 545). They refer to the “performative” as a form of qualitative inquiry for reading the texts of people living out or performing their lives in the context of cultural complexity and the ambiguous routines of everyday life (p. 547).

I take up the idea of troubling the intersections of pedagogy, activism, and inquiry as being strategically configured in my research to understand how the first focus group is multifunctional and performative. In the overall design of my study I followed up the first focus group with interviews with men as well as a second focus group of women. These stages were linked by the bridging document. This practice was strategically, or politically and pedagogically propelled by the inquiry with the first focus group. However, the formative material brought to the three first focus group meetings by those involved was not planned.

Some of this formative material is used in this chapter to show the multifunctionality of the first focus group. The inquiry function of the focus group

includes comments from five of the women in regard to their knowledge claims and experience of relational subjectivity. The political function concerns a rhizomatic development that came toward the end of the second of the three meetings of the focus group. This development came as a surprise to me, and in retrospect, I recognise it as a political function of the focus group because the women performed some of their relational subjectivity knowledges as gendered subjectivities. The final material in this chapter that I highlight from the first focus group involves both a pedagogical and a political function. Pedagogically the focus group provided me an opportunity to reflexively engage with my own performance of gender. This analysis of the performative has political consequences for the construction of gender and the production of patriarchal practices. In addition, I value the political function the first focus group offered me, the researcher, through the meetings and in the writing of this chapter.

## **Deleuzian concepts**

As introduced in Chapter Two, the values that propel this study are derived from the ideas of Deleuze, his colleagues, and others who have applied his work. In regard to the use of Deleuzian ideas, Mazzei and McCoy (2010) state “use the figurations presented by Deleuze to think research and data differently . . . think with Deleuzian concepts in a way that might produce previously unthought questions, practices, and knowledge” (p. 504). The three Deleuzian concepts of importance to this chapter are the virtual, the actual, and the rhizome. The virtual is regarded as the meetings of the first focus group from which all else in this study is actualised. This chapter is one actualisation of the first focus group meetings. But also, within this chapter are other actualisations, which can be regarded as rhizomatic because they are connections from the first focus group meetings that were unforeseen and unplanned at that time. These rhizomatic connections relate specifically to the political and pedagogical functions of the focus group. Later in the chapter I introduce another Deleuzian concept “the fold” (1986/1988b, 1993) as a metaphor to explain the effects of the political and pedagogical functions of the focus group.

## **The function(s) of the first focus group**

In regard to the report of their experienced relational subjectivities from Sarah, Hannah, Ali, Carmen, and Annie; it was initiated by my inquiry with questions concerning the kinds of conversations they had with their partners when important decisions were to be made, and whether either of the partners took control of the conversation (see Appendix K). The questions were asked in a spirit of naïve inquiry. I did not understand *a priori* the political and pedagogical ramifications of the questions, or the responses they might produce.

### **The inquiry function – relational subjectivities**

The following excerpts are taken from the transcripts of the second meeting of the focus group. I include comments from five of the women in regard to their experience when in conversation with their partners. The women also refer to their preferred positions for relational subjectivity.

Sarah shares about a preferred practice from her partner of creating safety by listening when she is “sounding things out”:

Sometimes it helps if your partner understands that you as their female partner are just sounding things out. . . . [Initially Sarah’s partner says] “O no, we can’t do that”. . . . Sometimes it takes this kind of negotiation, [where I say], “I’m not saying we definitely have to do it, I am just actually talking about it. . . . It’s in that period [of] negotiation that there is this moment when . . . part of me thinks, “is it worth explaining or justifying why I’m explaining this, or should I just leave it and talk to someone else”? . . . I feel more hope when I know that it’s a safe forum for me to sound things out.

Hannah shares information about her personal experience of being shut-down by her partner, and her preference for sharing with him in conversation and decision-making:

Then you have this big distance, that’s what happened with me . . . [in a number of relationships] I have tried to start. When they shut me down then you are getting further and further apart, you eventually break-up. You can

either make your decision on your own or, if they won't participate, you just get a girlfriend.

Ali talks about being shut down, but then helping her partner see the importance of what she wants from him, which, in this case, is information from him about meetings he has attended that are of interest to Ali:

Me being quite specific about how frustrated I feel when I don't get back information, and that sense of being shut down. . . . [Ali would say to her partner] "This might not be important to you but it really is important to me, and I need you to do it". To be really clear like that, and hopefully you're connected and love somebody. . . . [They think] "O maybe it will make a difference, I'll try it once". Then it happened once and he's like, "wow!"

Carmen talks of her vulnerability with her partner and how his shut downs hurt her. Carmen accommodates this problem with the idea that men and women process things differently:

I can tend to embellish . . . I'm just so vulnerable with him [Carmen's partner]. That's why, when he shuts me down it really hurts. It's like this stranger. [Carmen would say to her partner], "you are not normally like this, what's going on, that hurts you know". But . . . my husband would say to me, "look, it's just that I don't need to hear . . . the whole story". . . . They [men] process things so differently, whereas we [women] . . . are creative.

Annie had spoken of her partner "not connecting emotionally" with her. In response to this practice by her partner Annie develops her position in regard to her preference for emotional connection.

I have never really described men as thinking like women until recently . . . and the men I like are actually men who think like women. . . . I had a conversation . . . on the weekend with . . . a man [I know, but] . . . haven't really connected with him. . . . He revealed how he felt and described things about himself. When I see him again I [can] go, "I know him, how he feels and thinks and everything". Not just what job he does, where he lives, how many kids he has got . . . which is how a lot of men talk.

Each of these comments are painful to read, and as a man, as I reflect on them, somewhat confronting. While each of these comments command an individual response and analysis, I choose to group them together for the purpose of pointing to “collective testimonies” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011, p. 552) of women’s experience in their heterosexual relationships, in the same way as the bridging document (Appendix D) does. With these comments, each of the women name preferred positions in the relationship with their partners – being listened to without shut-down, with safety and emotional connection between them and their partners. While the type and topic of conversations differ, the positioning of each of the women’s partners is the same – taking control of the conversation and relationship practices. This control, while enacted in different forms, shuts down a woman partner’s preferred practices for relationship. This shut down invariably leaves a woman partner with the responsibility of trying a different conversational approach; or finding someone else who can have the conversation with her; or accommodating to her partner’s position with explanations of natural difference between men and women. The male partner’s responses produce effects that limit the space and contribution a woman can make to relational subjectivity.

This material on their relational subjectivities from the focus group is a response to my inquiry that points to the patriarchal dominance of heterosexual relationships. The way this material is then complemented by other content from the focus group is unpredictable and indicates political and pedagogical functions. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis report of a project they had involvement with that began with a focus “primarily on inquiry” that soon “took on communitarian, political, and pedagogical valences” for both researcher and research participants (2011, p. 558). As a result of the discussions of the women in the first focus group, in response to my inquiry, the pedagogical and political functional possibilities for the whole study began to emerge. I note in the bridging document (Appendix D) the effects of the focus group discussions for me, which can be regarded as both pedagogical and political. The bridging document in-turn had political and pedagogical effects for the men’s interviews and the document that resulted from those interviews (Appendix G). While the first focus group was multifunctional in the effects on the following two data generation stages of this study, it also had multifunctional effects within its own meetings that continue



into the writing of this thesis. Hence, I highlight and discuss a political episode in the first focus group; further highlighting its multifunctionality while illustrating the performative.

### **The political function**

“Either from necessity or for strategic purposes, feminist work has always taken the constitutive power of *space* into account”, Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2011, p. 552) state as part of their argument on the political function of focus groups. I use “space” in regard to the locations where the first focus group women produce and perform different subjectivities. The comments above on relational subjectivities from Sarah, Hannah, Ali, Carmen, and Annie, relate to heterosexual relationship space where a man producing patriarchal practices is present. I now move to another space, which is not the intimate space where heterosexual relational subjectivities are produced, but it is a space where gendered subjectivities are produced as a political function of the focus group. This second space is part of the process in a first focus group meeting where the women develop the meeting in a direction I had not envisaged. In this second space, I suggest, the women perform with their gendered subjectivities some of their preferred relational subjectivity knowledges from their heterosexual relationship space.

The performance of some of their relational subjectivity knowledges from a gendered subjectivity position by the women aligns with Kamberelis’ and Dimitriadis’ (2011, p. 547) idea that focus group work, and any form of qualitative inquiry, no longer serve as methods “to solve problems defined *a priori*”; rather, they serve as a performative space to recognise and ask new questions of complex and ambiguous routines of daily life and practice. As Soyini Madison and Harera (2006) state, “when we understand performance beyond theatrics and recognise it as fundamental and inherent to life and culture we are confronted with the ambiguities of different spaces and places that are foreign, contentious, and often under siege” (p. xii). Taken from the final minutes of the second meeting of the first focus group, the following episode indicates the ambiguities of heterosexual relationship and focus group space, as both spaces become contentious and are under siege through the women performing

knowledges of their preferred relational subjectivities with their gendered subjectivities.

### ***A rhizomatic development***

When I suggested we close off the meeting, there were some quiet comments from some of the women about time and clocks, and just general talk that is difficult to define from the audio recording of the meeting. Then a spontaneous development of the meeting occurred that could be described as rhizomatic, as it was unforeseen, and took the meeting in a fresh direction. The women in the group wanted to continue the meeting. I take up the transcript where Sue speaks up.

Sue: In a scale of women's relationships, if we were alone like this even with you; if we were sitting here with a cuppa [cup of tea] talking, we would go beyond even this wouldn't we? [There are sounds of agreement with this on the recording] We would be exploring Annie and trying to help her [with her] hurting [a reference to earlier in the meeting where Annie expressed pain about a family situation].

Sarah: And we'd be trying to sort each other out, like, what happened with you Ali? This was happening here when you were talking about your family [a reference to another of the focus group members, possibly Annie].

Brian: There is something special about this. . . . I really appreciate your honesty about that. Maybe I needed to let you go a bit more and sort out some of the issues [to which there was laughter and unclear comments of support].

Annie: I even think it would be hard for you [Brian]. . . . I actually counted in my head how many were here and you, and then thought, if it was me and six men (Someone: it would be really hard) it would be completely different negotiating for me. I've been doing a lot of negotiating with a man and I got him to apologise but boy it took twenty five minutes of backward, forward, backward. In the end, he said "what do you want from me?" (Someone: an apology). Yeah, basically! I had to put the words in his mouth. . . . I didn't

actually think about it being so different for you. . . . I put myself there with six men, but “Oh”, it is really different for you.

After Annie spoke, I intimated that while it is different for me, the power differential that exists between men and women makes it necessary for me to respond to women differently than if the gender balance in the focus group was reversed with a woman doing research with men. The meeting continued for a brief period after this as the women shared common concerns about relationship.

Before analysing this rhizomatic development as whole event in the context of the focus group meeting I comment on Annie’s response to me as one man in a group of six women. Annie’s response could be explained from a number of different perspectives: such as, caring is what women do naturally (Gilligan, 1982); or it is an action of “emphasized femininity” as a result of Annie being constituted by patriarchy to care for men (Connell 1987, pp. 183, 187-188). However, I suggest Annie is making a political statement about her preferred relational subjectivity knowledges.

When I review Annie’s record of her preferred relational subjectivity in the emotional connection with her partner, she illustrates this with a gendered subjectivity experience of emotional connection with a man who shared emotionally situated knowledge with her. Subsequently, in this space at the end of the focus group meeting, Annie is performing her preferred relational subjectivity knowledges with a gendered performance. Annie talks of standing-up to a man who has difficulty understanding and connecting with the position she holds. She uses this as an example to illustrate the envisaged difficulty for her of working in a focus group with six men. She then uses these examples, from her life of standing-up to a man and the envisaged focus group position, to connect with me in regard to what she perceives I might be struggling with in a focus group with six women. In a reflexive act Annie attempts to make emotional connection for me as she has experienced its lack in her lived and envisaged situations. At the time of Annie’s attempted connection for me I only recognised the power differential that favours men in her envisaged focus group. I did not recognise the attempt at emotional connection for me, while now, it is an action that I acknowledge and value. Annie’s political statement comes within the overall

political function that the focus group takes on at this rhizomatic moment of the meeting.

This spontaneous rhizomatic development, which focuses on the focus group women caring, listening, and working to help each other, serves a political function and separates from the predictable, inquiry direction of the meeting. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2011, p. 550) note the difference women can make to focus groups: “women reconceptualising them [focus groups] in fundamental ways and with simple yet far-reaching political and practical consequences”. I now use Deleuzian concepts of space to develop and understand the micro spaces – inquiry-based function and political function – within the larger macro space of the focus group meeting. Understanding these micro spaces helps clarify the politics of the focus group women in the performance of their relational subjectivity knowledges with gendered subjectivities.

### **Smooth space emerging from striated space**

I refer to Davies (2009a, p. 20), who, in Deleuzian terms, captures what is happening in the rhizomatic development:

Life is emergent in Deleuzian philosophy, it continually evolves through the flows and intensities of each new encounter. One may remain within a habitual repeated series, or take off from the already-known in new lines of flight. Deleuze generates the concept of the smooth space as the space in which such lines of flight take place, in which places locked into the striations of habituated repeated series, might be set loose – de-territorialized.

The focus group in an inquiry based function, can be regarded as striated space or an “habituated repeated series”, up until the rhizomatic development performed by the focus group women. Up until this rhizomatic development I had performed researcher, shaped by patriarchal practices, with a clear inquiry based approach to the focus group. While I had been respectful of each participant, the idea that I was leading the meeting was apparent, until this rhizomatic development. After Sue and Sarah speak at the beginning of this development, I respond with “maybe I needed to let you go a bit more and sort out some of the issues”. The idea of me

*letting* the women continue is yet another patriarchal performance of a man attempting to lead the discussion. Along with this patriarchal performance, I acknowledge that what happened in the focus group is “special”, and the idea that the focus group can continue without being inquiry-based – to “sort out some of the issues” – is one I was invited to value. The language I use indicates my shaping by both a patriarchal discourse, and a competing discourse reproduced in the focus group at this point. I exhibit an uncertainty about the purpose and direction of the focus group, and experienced, as Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2011, p. 545) argue, in focus groups researchers are not primarily strategic at the intersection of pedagogy, activism, and inquiry.

The striated space in the first focus group is inquiry-based, and a smooth space is what emerged with the intervention by the first focus group women. Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007, p. 11) write, “Striated spaces are those which are . . . structured and organised, and which produce particular limited movements and relations between bodies”. Striated spaces, while necessary, with their structure, organisation, security, and predictability, are not productive of freedom for new encounters and difference. However, striated spaces are a place from which smooth spaces can emerge and provide a space for “new movements [to] become possible . . . where new connections can occur; where experimentation can open up a new line of flight” (Davies, 2009a, p. 21). The striated space of the focus group meeting up until this rhizomatic development produced necessary content through inquiry about the women’s experiences, and preferences for relational subjectivity. The smooth space to come after, in this rhizomatic development, is understood in the light of the content on relational subjectivity from the striated space.

During the inquiry-based content function of the focus group the women had articulated their preferred relational subjectivities for their heterosexual relationships by giving examples of where those preferences were not valued. Referred to earlier in this chapter, those preferences not being valued were when a woman was shut-down by her partner, and/or there was a lack of emotional or conversational connection. Each of the five examples given by the women are indicative of a woman partner not being able to exercise agency in the relationship as she would prefer. The implication from the language used in these examples is

that their partner listening and being emotionally connected to them are preferences for how care and love might be practised in their heterosexual relationship.

In the rhizomatic development toward the end of the focus group meeting these preferences are practised by the women with each other in a performance of their gendered subjectivities. Opening space to give and receive care from each other, listening without shut-down, and developing conversation in conjunction with what the previous speaker said, is a political act of resistance to patriarchal control, and are agentic performances by the women of some of their preferred relational subjectivity knowledges. Hence, the rhizomatic space toward the end of the focus group meeting is a smooth space, as “lines of flight” have taken place, “places [preferred subjectivities] locked into the striations of habituated repeated series . . . [are] set loose – de-territorialized [agentially performed]” (Davies, 2009a, p. 20). The first focus group crossed the functionality threshold from an inquiry function to a political function. Or, as Williams (2003, p. 60) writes, “Real difference is a matter of how things become different, how they evolve and continue to evolve beyond the boundaries of the sets they have been distributed into”.

### **The pedagogical function**

The first focus group also developed a pedagogical function in “evolve[ing] beyond the boundaries of the sets” of being inquiry-based for achieving its multifunctional purpose. This pedagogical function, which has political consequences, concerns the group providing me an opportunity to reflexively engage with my own performance of gender. Because of this opportunity, I was able to study and analyse the detailed movement of a performance of gender in the moment. The moment is my gendered performance in the first focus group after a statement Annie made to me during the break in the second meeting.

Before I explore the statement that I reported Annie making to me during the break, I acknowledge a patriarchal practice in reporting this statement to the focus group meeting without the permission of Annie. To assume public disclosure of private comment often occurs with the privilege that patriarchy gives to men. Because Annie and the other women in the focus group accepted my disclosure of

this statement and allowed me the commentary on it, I use it here to compliment what I have already written on the performance of gender.

I report Annie's statement as I understood it, and then continue with my response to it at the time:

It's interesting, Annie just said to me, "I know what you are about, you are trying to think like a woman". That is true, but let me say, I think it is because . . . I want to, and because . . . for me personally, I don't know why. . . . I think men can share power and move into egalitarian relationship because they have been the dominant gender in society. . . . What do we need to do to try and be egalitarian? That is basically what I am trying to learn, and in some ways that is what this PhD is about. . . . I really appreciate your input.

This statement speaks of gender discourses which I now address.

### ***Performativity of gender***

To deconstruct gender is an important means to resisting patriarchal discourse and its constituting effects on people. Davies, clearly suggests "the incorrigibility of the male-female dualism and its construction as a central element of human identity . . . [is] the problem" (1989, p. ix). The male-female dualism is both a constitutive effect of dominant gender discourses and a tool utilised for their continuance. In deconstructing gender, it is Butler's (1993, 1995, 1997b, 1990/2006) theory of performativity of gender, utilising Derrida's (1972/1977a, 1982b) work on citationality, iterability, and temporality, that I apply to Annie's statement as reported by me and my response to it.

### **Competing discourses**

The statement I report Annie making to me in the focus group break, "I know what you are about, you are trying to think like a woman", is in itself a compilation of different discursive statements. Implied in this statement is that women think differently to men. The statement is essentialising, suggesting that women think in a certain way, and men in a different way. This essentialising reflects common binary thinking in western societies, "whatever a 'woman' is has to be 'female'; whatever a 'man' is has to be 'male'" (Lorber, 2008, p. 15).

Gender-based difference is situated in the gender discourse that propagates female-equates-to-woman gendered practices and thinking, and male-equates-to-man gendered practices and thinking (Kimmel & Aronson, 2008, p. 7). This female/male discourse is a most pervasive gender discourse (Lorber, 2008). It is this discourse that gets reproduced in Annie's comment.

Annie's statement also points to a competing discourse, a discourse that allows for distributed non-essentialising thinking by women and men. Annie's intention here may also suggest that I am trying to change my thinking. Whether the change is possible or not is not clear in the statement, but that the statement is made indicates a discourse that suggests changing one's gendered way of thinking is possible. In this one statement then, two contrasting discourses are present. The more dominant discourse that gender is fixed to biology is present in the essentialising of gendered ways of thinking, and the less dominant discourse present is that gendered ways of thinking can be changed regardless of biological sex. This is an example of performativity of gender (Butler, 1990/2006) that supports, and opens understanding, when it comes to changing gendered thinking and practice.

### **Variation of a gender norm as deconstruction and agency for change**

In response to Annie's statement, I first of all say, "That is true". I agree initially with Annie that I am trying to think like a woman. Here is a moment, be it all too brief, where I am actually subverting gender norms – a man acknowledging he is trying to think like a woman. This lasts but a second or two, as I realise what I am saying, and I follow it with:

but let me say, I think it is because . . . I want to, and because . . . for me personally, I don't know why.

As I read these lines in retrospect, I realise I was trying to say that I agreed with Annie, but I really could not bear to fully agree with her, so I compromised the position of completely agreeing with Annie. At this point, power from patriarchal discourses has begun its work of keeping me gendered as a male man: "being a man means 'not being like women'" (Kimmel, 1999, p. 112). Butler's idea that "gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences" (1990/2006, p. 190)



is evident here. I do wonder what people, not present in this group, would think if they knew I agreed to try to think like a woman. While different discourses can have punitive consequences when a person does gender outside the gender norms; in my case, I think the fear of punitive consequences are produced from patriarchal discourses. I, citationally, am being performatively constituted by patriarchy's normative threats. But, performativity does provide opportunity for agency, and even in this compromise and constitution by patriarchy, agency through iterative resignification can be found.

Immediately after the above section of my response to Annie, I state the following as to why I agree in part with Annie that I am trying to think like a woman:

I think men can share power [with women] and move into egalitarian relationship because they have been the dominant gender in society. . . . What do we need to do to try and be egalitarian? That is basically what I am trying to learn.

Even though I compromised my original agreement with Annie in regard to thinking like a woman this thought is still given some space as to how I might learn to act egalitarian in relationship with women. To use Butler's and Derrida's terms, I have participated in citation, iteration, and resignification, in this whole moment. I have citationally acted on the patriarchal gender norm that a man shall not think like a woman. But my citation of that gender norm is, in Derrida's terms, an iteration of the norm. It is not a pure repetitive citation of that norm but a variation of the norm through iteration. This is seen in my conflicting response to Annie's idea that I am trying to think like a woman. This conflict is both citation and iteration of gender norms. It denies I am trying to think like a woman – citation – but, at the same time it introduces why I am trying to think like a woman – iteration – citation with difference. In this moment of “variation on that repetition” of the gender norm there is agency or resignification (Butler, 1990/2006, p. 198). The resignification has come at this moment in the focus group as a result of my growing knowledge of feminist discourse, and the invitation of the focus group women who have created a safe non-punitive place for gender to be varied and re-iterated differently. I can deny I am trying to think like a woman to be like a woman – a strongly patriarchal gender norm at work.

But, I can, in the same moment, say I am trying to think like a woman for the cause of justice and equality between men and women. There is a variation, an iteration of a gender norm, which is resignification of that norm, and which provides agency for me to pursue values of justice and equality between men and women.

My response to Annie's statement, even in a group with six women who had created a safe non-punitive space, indicates the subtle and complex political play of gender discourses in constituting a man. I can see clearly the power of discourse and gender norms at work in constituting subjectivity, and in resisting the transformation of that subjectivity. I can also see how transformation of subjectivity can occur through small variations of those gender norms. Butler (1990/2006, p. 198) summarises the process from citation as the performance of gender to resignification as the possibility for agency:

When the subject is said to be constituted, that means simply that the subject is a consequence of certain rule-governed discourses that govern the intelligible invocation of identity. The subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects. . . . All signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; "agency," then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition.

In this chapter, the inquiry function of the first focus group focuses on the report of the women's relational subjectivities, both experienced and preferred. The preferred relational subjectivities are based in safety, listening, and emotional connection with their partners. In the rhizomatic development at the end of the meeting I suggest the women performed gendered subjectivities as a political function of the focus group in regard to the knowledges of their preferences for relational subjectivity. A pedagogical function was permitted by the women of the first focus group with my response to the statement made by Annie, and in the analysis that has followed. This pedagogical function also served a political function, because it concerned the performativity of gender norms, and variation

on those norms, by a man who reproduces patriarchal practices. These inquiry, political, and pedagogical functions of the first focus group have been central in this chapter to an understanding of the work of the first focus group. I now address why the “intersection of pedagogy, activism, and inquiry” [was not] primarily strategic” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011, p. 545), but was an unforeseen rhizomatic event.

## **A deconstructive reading (writing)**

In regard to the work of deconstruction, Caputo (1997a) writes:

The misbegotten notion that deconstruction is some kind of random intellectual violence, a merely destructive and negative assault on anything still standing, arises from a failure to see what deconstruction *affirms*. (p. 128)

[Deconstruction] always settles into the distance between what the author consciously intends or means to say . . . that is, what she “commands” in her text, and what she does not command, what is going on in the text, as it were, behind her back and so “sur-prises,” over-takes, the author herself. That distance, or gap, is something the deconstructive reading must “*produce*”. (p. 78)

In this chapter, deconstruction is “a moment of affirmation” (Derrida, 1992/1995b, p. 167) for what the first focus group women have produced, in the political and pedagogical functions of their group, which have surprised and overtaken me as the “author” of this study.

In Chapter Two I introduced the Deleuzian concepts of the virtual and the actual for understanding the importance of the first focus group women to this study, and for giving preference to their ideas and knowledges. The first focus group is the virtual life of this study from which all else in this study becomes actualised living expressions. I also introduced the rhizome as one figuration that helps understand and name the connections between the virtual and the actual, particularly connections that are unforeseen or outside known strategies of the researcher – that which has surprised and overtaken me.

In conjunction with the virtual, actual, and the rhizome, the Deleuzian idea, *becoming through writing*, contributes to developing and understanding the “distance, or gap” between what I planned for the first focus group and what I have recorded in this chapter as being produced.

Deleuze’s idea of “becoming” (1962/1983, pp. 23-24; May, 2003, 2005, pp. 59-60) is his response to traditional philosophy’s understanding of being as a fixed state or identity. Becoming does not replace being. In Deleuze’s ontology “becoming is the affirmation of being” (1962/1983, p. 24), not as a fixed identity, but as a continual process of difference – “all becoming is the unfolding of difference” (May, 2003, p. 150). And, on becoming in relation with writing, Deleuze writes “writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience. . . . Writing is inseparable from becoming” (1993/1998, p. 1).

I now bring these concepts together in offering a deconstructive analysis of the events and functions of the first focus group that are addressed in this chapter. My response to the rhizomatic development toward the end of the second meeting of the first focus group was to acknowledge it as “special” while not being sure how to understand it. My response to Annie’s suggestion, that I was trying to think like a woman, was equally unsure, even with the declaration of important values at the end of my response. I suggest now, this lack of surety, based in Kamberelis’ and Dimitriadis’ (2011) idea that the multifunctionality of focus groups is not always strategically planned, is because I came to the data generation stage of this study with a singular line of focus on inquiry. With only an inquiry function for data generation operating for the researcher the political and pedagogical functions can be unrecognised when they present. At the times of both the rhizomatic development at the end of the focus group meeting and the response to the focus group about Annie’s statement, I was confused and unsure because the political and pedagogical functions were unrecognised.

As recorded in the bridging document (Appendix D), in a conversation with my partner after the first focus group meetings, I recognise the pedagogical and political thrust of the first focus group women’s voices in the area of “shut-down”. This recognition concerned my specific action of shutting down my

partner, not the politics of the first focus group in regard to their preferred relational subjectivities. Until the writing of this chapter, I did not recognise the political and pedagogical thrust of the first focus group women's preferred relational subjectivities that were performed as part of the process of the meeting through their gendered subjectivities.

The writing of the bridging document was one rhizomatic connection of the virtual life of the first focus group to the expression of its actualised life. The writing process of this chapter is a rhizome that connects the virtual life of the first focus group to the actual life of its political and pedagogical functions. Thus, the focus group is continually becoming actualised, and as the researcher, I become different, through the pedagogical and political function of the virtual life of the first focus group meetings, and through the actualised life of the first focus group in the writing of this chapter. Writing has provided an opportunity for reflexivity that has shaping effects on my becoming and on the becoming of the function(s) of the focus group; as Deleuze writes, "Writing is inseparable from becoming" (Deleuze, 1993/1998, p. 1).

The political and pedagogical functions of the first focus group that were present but unrecognised in the virtual life of its meeting have, through this writing become actualised and recognised. Thus, this chapter is a deconstructive reading (writing) that produces the gap or distance between what the author planned for the first focus group and what overtook and surprised him that was not strategically planned. As Kamberelis and Dimitriadis write, "Understanding focus groups and their dynamics through multiple lenses of vision forces us always to see the world in new and unexpected ways" (2011, p. 560). As a metaphor for understanding how subjectivity is formed, "The fold" (St Pierre, 2002, p. 61) provides a final example of the multifunction of the first focus group.

## **The fold**

In writing about her own research and the subjectivity of research participants St Pierre (2002) stands on Deleuze's concepts that have been beneficial for her in the process of working ethically with research participants in her writing about that research. One such concept is that of "the fold" (St Pierre, 2002, p. 61). St Pierre

uses the concept of the fold to elucidate how her subjectivity has been folded in from the work she has done with her research participants.

The complex and paradoxical relationship between matter and mind, the interior and the exterior, as both separated and entangled, with “the fold” as the mediator in these complex relationships, is part of a Deleuzian ontology (see Deleuze, 1986/1988b, 1993; Deleuze & Straus, 1991; Watson, 2009). In the context of human social relations, “the fold” has been used to conceptualise the subject folding the outside world into their body thus forming the movements, emotions, and subjectivity that are perceived as uniquely theirs (Boundas, 1994, p. 114; Malins, 2007, p. 157). The fold is a metaphor for understanding the intertwining that occurs between the subjective inside of our bodies and the “outside” world, the breaking down of the “interiority-exteriority binary” (St Pierre, 2002, p. 61). There is an intimacy and strong correlation between the inside of the body and the outside of the body (Badiou, 1994, p. 61; Deleuze, 1986/1988b, pp. 96-97): “Bodies enfold that which surrounds them and, at the same time, they fold out into the world to shape the spaces they encounter” (Hickey-Moody & Malins, 2007, p. 12).

Following St. Pierre, the fold is applicable to the first focus group becoming different, and how my subjectivity is becoming, both as a result of the first focus group meetings, and the writing of this chapter. The fold, as understood in this way, has important political ramifications.

The first focus group’s ideas and knowledges, both from the meetings and through this writing have been enfolded into my body in a political and pedagogical act of my becoming different. The first focus group women, by participating in this study have folded into each other’s subjectivity. This is illustrated in the rhizomatic development where they practise caring and connection as a political statement. The first focus group as a multifunctional group folds knowledges of their relational subjectivities into gendered subjectivities. In doing this, they make the personal political and invite the folding of this study out into this researcher and beyond as a political and pedagogical statement on (their) relational subjectivities, both experienced and preferred, in (their) heterosexual relationships.



## **Chapter 7. Heterosexual relationship: A double deconstruction**

Deconstruction as double serves as the starting point for analysis in this chapter. However, aspects of the deconstruction vary from Derrida's (1972/2002) original ideas as I align my deconstruction with Foucault's (1980) power/knowledge nexus in application to the first focus group women's accounts of their heterosexual relationships.

As introduced in chapter two, deconstruction as double has two applications for this study. The first is deconstructing an institution from within that institution (Derrida, 1967/1974, p. 24; Norris, 2004, pp. 15-16). The second application has a two-step process: first, it involves reversing the binaries that are foundational to a conceptual order; second, the new hierarchy is displaced with the inclusion of a new concept that both deconstructs the hierarchical conceptual order and is foreign to the original system (Derrida, 1972/2002, p. 39). In this chapter I follow the first application of deconstruction as double by deconstructing expressions of heterosexual relationship as someone who is within the institution of heterosexuality, and who at times gets caught into patriarchal expressions myself. In regard to the second application of deconstruction as double, I suggest there is a link between patriarchal expressions of heterosexual relationship and the first focus group women's preferred expression – a safe, sacred place. Because of the link between these two positions on heterosexual relationship, I manipulate the two-step application of deconstruction as double to address the unethical patriarchal production of power.

Foucault's (1980) power/knowledge nexus (see Davies et al., 2002, pp. 294-295) is a means to deconstruction that gives explanation of the link between the patriarchal expressions of heterosexual relationship and the focus group women's preferred expression. In my analysis, I suggest the focus group women are subjected to patriarchal expressions of heterosexual relationship, and various forms of power, as they hold onto their implicit knowledge of a "safe, sacred place" as hope for their preferred expression of heterosexual relationship. Because



of this link between the implicit knowledge of the women's preferred expressions of heterosexual relationship and the power of patriarchal expressions, both expressions of heterosexual relationship are deconstructed. In so doing, as my first step of deconstruction I do not overturn the hierarchy, rather, I put under erasure any hierarchy in heterosexual relationship. This erasure is because, as I argue from the first focus group transcripts, the power of patriarchy is dominant and generally unrecognisable in its work of producing patriarchal expressions of heterosexual relationship.

My second step of deconstruction as double involves combining Derrida's first step (overturing the hierarchy) and part of his second step, the inclusion of a new concept. My second step is introduced toward the end of this chapter, with preference given to the women's ideas in the new concept, their preferred expression of heterosexual relationship. How this second step addresses power and is played out in heterosexual relationship is the focus of the next chapter (Eight).

## **The means to deconstruction**

The deconstruction in this chapter is informed by Foucault's power/knowledge nexus, which includes different applications of power relations. The understanding of knowledge I use is informed by the work of Davies et al. (2002) on the emergence of feminine subjectivities through the actions of power and knowledge. Davies et al. (2002) delineate their approach:

We focus on the ways in which our subjectivities are shaped in terms of rationalities of power – on the ways we become governable and actively engage in the conduct of our own and others' conduct. (p. 295)

To understand how relations of power are put and held in place we examine . . . the specific forms of knowledge, or "rationalities", that make any form of power seem reasonable and inevitable. Research into lived experience, the archaeology of the everyday, necessitates the excavation of the rationalities that underpin these events. (p. 298)

We do not intend to rail against the powers of patriarchal oppression, but rather to look (below) at the forms of rationality through which the particular relations of power . . . are constituted and maintained. (p. 299)

I follow this approach from Davies et al. in my analysis of the first focus group women's accounts of their heterosexual relationships. I take two perspectives in this analysis. One perspective looks "at the forms of rationality through which the particular relations of power manifest" in the first focus group women's heterosexual relationships; second, through the lens of governmentality, I look at "the ways [the women] become governable and actively engage in the conduct of [their] own and others conduct". This analysis of the women's accounts of their heterosexual relationships can be conceived, in the language of Davies et al. (2002, p. 298), as an archaeological dig of the rationality that underpins the everyday events of the women's subjection to patriarchal control and effects in their heterosexual relationships. These means to deconstruction tell the story of how patriarchal positioning unjustly constitutes the subjectivities of the women.

## **Rationalities, subjectivities, power, and governmentality in the first focus group**

I now proceed with the deconstructive process of both heterosexual relationship controlled by patriarchal practices and the focus group women's preferred expression of heterosexual relationship.

### **State of domination**

Early in the first meeting of the first focus group Hannah refers to being "shut down all the time" in her intimate relationship. This is one of the major means of power production in the relationship between the women and their partners that the women described (bridging document, Appendix D). Hannah says:

Then you can't make decisions with your partner. . . . If you are shut down on every front then there is no partnership anymore. I've been told, "shut-up or you will be physically attacked". When you get told that several times, when you get threatened and when it starts happening, you then realise that that will be followed through . . . so you don't have a choice.

Hannah introduces two factors that play a major part in the relationship with her partner. The production of power is one factor, and the other factor is the knowledge she holds for a preferred egalitarian heterosexual relationship – sharing decisions with her partner in partnership. This preferred expression looks akin to what came to be known by the first focus group as a “safe, sacred place”.

The action on Hannah by her partner fits with a state of domination (Foucault, 1984/2000c, p. 283). Hannah’s subject positions within the relationship and opportunities to modify power relations are limited. Foucault writes:

When an individual or social group succeeds in blocking a field of power relations, immobilizing them and preventing any reversibility of movement by economic, political, or military means, one is faced with what may be called a state of domination. In such a state . . . practices of freedom do not exist or exist only unilaterally or are extremely constrained and limited. (1984/2000c, p. 283)

Hannah’s relationship is indicative of the important difference between “a state of domination” (Foucault, 1984/2000c, p. 283) and “a relationship of violence” (Foucault, 2002b, p. 340). While “a relationship of violence . . . closes off all possibilities” (Foucault, 2002b, p. 340), “a state of domination” may leave room for “extremely constrained and limited” practices of freedom (Foucault, 1984/2000c, p. 283). Hannah’s heterosexual relationship is violent, but the one freedom she does have is access to the opportunity to leave her partner and end the relationship. This option is a noticeable possibility in a society that openly condemns domestic violence and creates places for the safety of a women partner who is abused. However, in Hannah’s situation she is constrained, the escape option is limited, by a number of forces that constitute her as the one to repair the relationship, and make it egalitarian.

Later in the first focus group meeting Hannah reveals where she learned her knowledge that guided her preference for how heterosexual relationship should be expressed:

I’ve found, when its women friends, we tend to ask each other, and talk over and over until we both feel that we have had equal time and we feel okay.

My parents actually did that as well together . . . as a couple they talked things over and over. I always saw that modelled, and I always expected that; that things would be mulled over and over and over until there was consensus and both people were happy. . . . Once I got married I felt that was the most sacred and the closest relationship, and I guess for myself, I just gave that the most significance on my part.

Hannah took into her heterosexual relationship knowledge, learned from her parents and in relationship with friends, that heterosexual relationship is safe, in that it involves practices guided by consensus and the happiness of both partners. I suggest this knowledge of what heterosexual relationship can be has hailed Hannah into believing the same is possible for the relationship with her partner. This knowledge works in conjunction with a discourse that constitutes Hannah as the caring and responsible wife who can make the relationship better.

Weingarten (2010) has developed a construct called “reasonable hope” that is not considered an individual attribute but rather, it “flourishes in relationship” (p. 8), and refers to the actions a person takes. “Reasonable hope . . . suggests something both sensible and moderate, directing our attention to what is within reach more than what may be desired but unattainable” (p. 7). With reference to Hannah, I suggest that the hailing of the knowledge of what heterosexual relationship can be, and the constituting discourse of a responsible wife, have called her into an *unreasonable* hope. This unreasonable hope is not sensible or moderate, and it desires what is unattainable. In Hannah’s situation, the hope for the violence to cease and the repair of the relationship do not fall within the construct of reasonable hope because Hannah’s partner does not participate in the hope. Because of the hailing knowledge, the constitutive discourse, and unreasonable hope, Hannah is placed in a vulnerable subject position in regard to the production of power and a state of domination.

During the third meeting of the first focus group, by which time the idea of a safe, sacred place had gained recognisable momentum in the discussion, Hannah confirms why she remained in the relationship for sometime after the controlling and violent behaviour had begun. The following snippet from the transcript begins

with Sue. She is responding to Ali, who has just described the benefits and importance of a safe, sacred place.

Sue: It's true, and it is so important because this is the person that is most important in your life and that's why you were taking from him [a reference to Hannah staying in the violent relationship while maintaining a hope that her partner would change].

Sarah: And perhaps that's why you stayed because it's that mental process of, sort of, thinking "well, I know I can make this better. I am going to keep working at it".

Hannah: Yeah that's right, I kept trying, and trying, and trying.

The hailing knowledge, a constitutive discourse, and unreasonable hope, kept Hannah in the heterosexual relationship, subjected to a state of domination, continually "trying, and trying, and trying" toward a safe, sacred place relationship with her partner. This did not happen. After many attempts at couple counselling, which her partner did not attend, Hannah realised that he would not fulfil his side of the relationship as she hoped, and that her safety was in danger. Eventually Hannah left the relationship, in her words, "I just packed up and disappeared". Packing up and disappearing was the only strategy of power Hannah had left to her, not only for changing the relationship, but for her survival. As I have shown here, a state of domination is one form of patriarchal constitution of heterosexual relationship.

### **Agonism**

Another form of patriarchal constitution is "agonism" (Foucault, 2002b, p. 342), incitement and struggle between partners. Foucault says of agonism, "Rather than speaking of an essential antagonism, it would be better to speak of an 'agonism' – of a relationship that is at the same time mutual incitement and struggle" (2002b, p. 342). A cursory understanding of agonism with its emphasis on mutual struggle as a form of power relations might suggest the mutual production of power in the relationship. But this is not necessarily so. In the following accounts from Ali and Sarah, agonism depicts agentic, and at times, provocative responses to the unequal production of patriarchal power by their partners. This agency is practised to

achieve relationship goals of which one is egalitarian practices where connection, safety, and respect are paramount.

During the second meeting of the first focus group Sarah had talked about discussing things with her partner in an open way where she was “sounding things out”, and how her partner early in this process would attempt to shut her down. Sarah reported that she persisted with her approach in the face of the attempted shut-downs. I suggest that this persistence by Sarah and the attempted shut-downs by her partner are a form of agonism. In the following excerpt from Sarah’s account, even though her partner’s shut-downs are not mentioned, Sarah is offering a brief description of this agonism:

It’s almost like you feel you’ve got . . . these little secrets and you can see how potentially it could help not only you, but them [male partners], and the relationship. And you can see all this thing, in a whole matrix thing, it makes sense, you can see it all. If only they will just understand and come and meet you in this place, it will all kind of make sense. But getting them to come into [this place] . . . it’s not [easy].

Sarah is referring to implicit knowledge she wants to apply, which her partner does not appear to engage in. Sarah’s use of the word “secrets” in the context of this excerpt suggests knowledge that is distinctive but not secretive for helping a relationship become mutually beneficial. Her use of the words “whole matrix” suggests a knowledge that can see the whole picture of what relationship could become. Sarah also connects the “little secrets” and the “whole matrix” to a place where she and her partner can meet and the relationship will “make sense”. However, the above account also indicates a difficulty for Sarah in getting this type of relationship to work with her partner. This account can be read as agonistic as Sarah tries to achieve with her partner the relationship she envisages and he resists. While there appears to be a mutual incitement and struggle between Sarah and her partner it is important to note the production of patriarchal power in his reported resistance to Sarah’s initiative.

After the above account from Sarah, Ali reflected on her comments with some questions: “What specifically is it that makes sense? What is it, do you think, that

stops men from understanding and meeting their partners in this place, and what is this place like?” Ali then responded with a diagram which she had drawn to describe this place. Because I do not have this diagram I will quote Ali’s words from the transcript:

I was imagining. Do this little diagram. This little male-female thing . . . so you have got male and female meeting, and then in a relationship, and then this sort of crossover bit, it’s what I see is like that place. And I think if men come into that and they feel like they have put their imprint on top of the relationship, like that’s the dominance, the cultural thing, and sometimes men, not all men, but some men bring . . . [are] the power person in the relationship. That it’s really hard for them to step back and see that place as building the relationship of two people. . . . You are actually building a new connection in relationship, and that is a place that needs to be sacred and respected from both people. . . . So I am just thinking that maybe women see that place as the respectful part of the relationship, that we can both bring things to meet it.

As I have recorded on the fourth page of the bridging document (Appendix D), Ali, after this reference, described a safe, sacred place further with its benefits and positive contribution to subjectivity and life. While Ali describes this place and notes that she had experienced it at times, she also acknowledges “that would be the ideal”. What is clear from this interaction between Ali and Sarah is the implicit knowledge they have of what might make a heterosexual relationship work as an equal and respectful partnership. I have shown a brief part of the transcript that indicates Sarah’s agonism with her partner concerning a mutually beneficial relationship. I now discuss agonism from Ali’s experience reported during the first focus group. In this account agonism takes a different form.

In this part of her account Ali is responding in the second focus group meeting to a question I had written in the narrative research document from the first focus group meeting. Ali had indicated in that first meeting that she used email at times to communicate with her partner when he was at work. Ali also responds to a conversation that had previously occurred in the second meeting concerning the

idea that men prefer crisp “dot point” communication, whereas, women tend to embellish and want to discuss topics more widely:

I think it relates to one of the questions that you asked about email as a method of communication, and what Sue said about dot points . . . you know, men wanting that dot point thing. That, made me think of . . . email in terms of shutting down. You don’t have the opportunity because the person’s not there . . . it is a much more clipped communication tool. . . . I don’t tend to embellish and give the flourish that I would if I verbalised it because I often go off on tangents [in speaking], and then come back. . . . It gives the space for him as a male to take that stuff on, sometimes solve it, but sometimes just reflect for a bit longer on what I said. Because I have been a bit more succinct maybe it meets his need for not having the embellishment that he sometimes finds frustrating.

Ali reports adjusting positioning in regard to her partner around certain conversational practices. The use of email by Ali, in contrast to spoken communication, avoids her being shut down, controls her embellishing, makes room for her partner to absorb what is being communicated, and keeps his frustration away from the communication process. The new positioning by Ali in communicating with her partner, and the resultant changes, could initially be conceived of as agonism in the relationship but, upon a closer reading, Ali is adjusting to the production of patriarchal power from her partner. Further, in the light of Ali’s preference for a connected, safe, and respectful expression of heterosexual relationship I suggest she has adjusted her positioning to keep the hope alive for this preferred expression.

After the above comments, Ali continues to explain why email with her partner works:

I think there is a opportunity to be a bit cheeky . . . keep it light, and not get emotional. . . . You can write something and put an exclamation mark. . . . You can say what you mean by being kinder and you don’t have that chance to be angry, or one of the kids come in and [interrupt].



The adjusted position in the conversation with her partner gives opportunity for Ali to engage in what can be regarded as agonism, with her use of cheekiness and the exclamation mark. Agonism, with its focus on “mutual incitement and struggle” (Foucault, 2002b, p. 342), in this account of Ali’s, is not to be equated to the equal production of power. Rather, agonism can be evident where one partner is practising agency even when the other partner has more opportunity to produce power relations. It seems to me that this agentic agonism is what Ali is involved in. She adjusts her position to keep in effective contact with her partner, without losing an agentic position in the relationship, while still holding onto her hope for connected, safe, and respectful relationship practices. One more example from Sarah will further illustrate agonism in the power relations of heterosexual couples.

About half-way through the third meeting of the first focus group Ali, in contributing to the conversation on “nagging” and power, quoted someone from her work place situation: “nagging is the language of powerlessness”. In the following piece from the meeting Ali gives a personal comment on this statement, which is followed by Sarah’s agreement and further comment:

Ali: That’s probably how I feel when I am nagging. . . . I can see the situation slipping away here so I am just going to go hell for leather until something changes. . . . And I think men do view it as a threat.

Sarah: It is a threat. . . . But, I think the issue becomes if the woman also doesn’t realise that she is trying to force something by doing so [nagging]. When we are talking about that place where you can talk if you’re nagging, and you’re pushing, you are trying to force . . . there’s a force . . . I have had to learn to let things go. . . . I think [it] wasn’t going to work in lieu of having that safe space where he could talk. . . . But I would let it go, and I would come back to him later, and he would be like, “o yeah I can see that”. I had to learn to be patient, and not forceful, because if I did I would have lost that situation.

Here Sarah is talking about a process of conversation with her partner, showing the “mutual incitement and struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation that

paralyses both sides than a permanent provocation” (Foucault, 2002b, p. 342). This example of agonism reveals the “struggle” for Sarah, to which she responded by changing positions, so that she could achieve her relationship goals.

The first move in the interaction above appears as though it comes from Sarah with her “pushing” or using “force” to move her partner. However, a valid reason for Sarah beginning with force is because her partner has not moved on the topic they are discussing, either on this occasion or previously. In this relationship of agonism, Davies et al. (2002, p. 297) explain further, “The ‘dominated’ are not in binary relation to those who exercise power, but are themselves integral to and operating through the relevant lines of force”. Both Sarah and her partner are operating at this time through “relevant lines of force”. These agonistic lines of force were not working for Sarah so she changes her position.

After talking of this force form of power Sarah says, “I have had to let things go”. What Sarah let go was her position of overt force that threatens. Sarah then takes up a position of safety or non-threat for her partner. Instead of an overt agonism through force, Sarah changes her position and employs an approach to her partner that is informed by her knowledge of his practices. The agonistic relationship is still present in Sarah’s account but it is covert. Sarah says in regard to her changing position, “I had to learn to be patient, and not forceful, because if I did I would have lost that situation”. Patience instead of force now describes Sarah’s position in the relationship. The agonism still exists as power relation as there is still a “situation” not to be “lost” for Sarah. The agonism as “provocation” is not so overt when patience, in contrast with “force” and “pushing”, is involved in the adjusted positioning.

In conjunction with this change in position, which alters the agonism of the relationship, it is apparent that Sarah employs implicit knowledge to help instigate her changing position. This knowledge, referred to in Sarah’s response to Ali, and in her own account, relates to the threat a woman vigorously voicing her position can be to a man, which works in conjunction with knowledge that a safe space will re-position both Sarah and her partner differently. It is through her knowledge that Sarah can adjust her position in regard to power and create a

different agonistic relationship to gain the “situation”. Power relations and relations of knowledge are interdependent (Deleuze, 1988b, pp. 82-83).

Unlike domination and violence, agonism is a power relation where a woman partner can have an agentic voice in the constitution of the relationship in response to the patriarchal production of power exercised by her male partner. Significantly though, as the examples from Ali and Sarah clearly demonstrate, to achieve certain goals in the relationship, a woman partner will often have to change positioning and subjectivity before the male partner will change. While these goals maybe “everyday” requirements for the relationship, I suggest that Ali and Sarah also adjust position because they maintain a hope for a relationship that is akin to a safe, sacred place.

### **Sedimentation, breakage and fracture**

Somewhere in between a state of domination and agonism in regard to power relations is Foucault’s idea of the sedimentation of a relationship. The possibility of resistance to this sedimentation is available with it, and is spoken of as “lines of ‘breakage’ and of ‘fracture’” (Deleuze, 1992, p. 159).

Just after a short break half-way through the second meeting of the first focus group I suggest to the group that each person respond to whatever they would like from the narrative research document I had written from the first meeting. Sarah begins this process. One of her highlights is how she and her partner are working on being respectful in their conversations with each other. Carmen first of all picks up on Sarah’s ideas about being respectful in conversations, saying “[how] positive and beneficial [this is] compared to my generation, married thirty three years ago, that wasn’t available”. Carmen, with this context, then continues to talk about her heterosexual relationship from its inception to what is currently happening for her within the relationship, highlighting her change of positioning and subjectivity:

When you begin a relationship you take the roles where the husband is the provider, and you’re at home doing whatever needs to be done whether it’s the finance or this and the other. But then again through the years, what I can see is my husband in particular will want to try and reclaim the role of

male, and take control [of what] he had handed over. So, therefore it's like, his own manhood . . . had been challenged . . . it touches his insecurities. . . . [He had] abdicated some of the roles and some of the authority by allowing the woman to make a lot of the decisions and things like that . . . and he was challenged by this and at times [try to take back these roles]. At this point, I'm saying "no, this is not okay anymore!" [This is] causing a few problems.

In response to the "sedimentation of husband-wife practices and knowledges" (Davies et al., 2002, p. 310) over the years, Carmen endeavours to fracture these practices with new positioning that has caused a "few problems" in the relationship. Carmen continues to describe why this is happening:

For so many years I thought my role as a woman was to be quiet and just do whatever needs to be done. Therefore, that is a point after thirty three years that we have been challenged with the lack of . . . that understanding [of] initially growing into a relationship and a partnership. And now, [I'm] thinking "hang on a minute, this matters to me. I want to get along well with you and you need to know [what] the sort of things I said mean, the way you speak back to me. . . . I don't want to do this anymore. I want to share that with you. . . . I carry the worry and the burden . . . it's like a non-involvement [until] it becomes an insecurity or a challenge [for you]. But I'm now saying we are a team, we're a family, and I want to share this with you as well . . . two is better than one".

Carmen is now being more explicit about the daily sedimented practices of being a woman in a heterosexual relationship: She is "to be quiet and just do whatever needs to be done". Carmen then talks about why she wants the change that helps her fracture the sedimented practices of power. In a monologue to her partner, as if he is present, Carmen describes why the change is wanted, and what she wants from the relationship; an implicit knowledge, akin to a safe, sacred place, is introduced with words that challenge her partner's privileged position and suggest relational equality, sharing, and teamwork.

Carmen continues, this time, in answer to a question from the narrative research document about the possibility of men offering their partners preferred alternate positions to the asymmetrical positions patriarchy produces. As researcher, I respond at times to attain clarity.

Carmen: [The preferred position] is respect and be respectful.

Brian: That would be ideal if he would do that?

Carmen: exactly . . . but heh, “I’m not against you”. . . . That is where I try and communicate.

Brian: Yeah, but he doesn’t see. . . ?

Carmen: No, he doesn’t see it, and it’s like a blockage there.

Brian: He sees it more as a power thing?

Carmen: Exactly, so he puts a wall up. He thinks I am trying to gain power, but I already have that power. . . . We’re on the same side together and he is not hearing that. [When he reacts to me] . . . first of all I feel shock . . . and then because of my CBT studies I try and analyse it and put it into perspective . . . and try to [sort it out with him]. . . . But he shuts me down, with “there goes your counselling thing again” in a loud voice. In the past that would really hurt me, then I would close up in my emotions. So now I feel more empowered, and what I say is, “look do you realise what you are doing, you are shutting me down”.

The fracture of Carmen’s resistance to the sedimented power relations, where her partner had privilege and priority, occurs in conjunction with Carmen’s implicit knowledge that part of an equal and shared partnership is her partner practising respect toward her. The tone of Carmen’s position in this portion of the transcript is that of an invitation to egalitarian relationship, where she resists her partner’s efforts to control the conversation. In this story of Carmen’s new positioning, challenging her partner’s position, agonism can be noted as a new feature in the relationship. Agonism can occur where the less privileged partner is re-positioning herself toward a possible egalitarian relationship. The relationship

between power and implicit knowledge in Carmen's story did not originate in a vacuum. Carmen reveals above that her story is connected to other stories from which she learned and re-visioned her relational possibilities.

### ***Silence to unsilencing with Carmen's story***

Carmen's story fits well with Benjamin's (2003) theory of how women transform themselves in response to hierarchical power in their heterosexual relationships. Benjamin explicates three levels by which women reposition themselves from a place of silence to "unsilencing" (p. 1). The first of these levels is being able to contest "the hierarchical meaning structure" (p. 8) that a woman's partner is operating from, and which keeps a woman in an oppressed position. This contesting comes about when a woman partner connects to an alternate meaning structure, such as a "feminist meaning structure" (p. 8). From this alternate meaning structure they can gain new meaning about their personhood, and for heterosexual relationship. This new meaning structure "becomes a power resource that can enable [women] to unsilence avoided topics in [their] relationship" (p. 12). The second level follows on from the first in that it enables a woman partner to distance herself somewhat from the emotions of her partner as he reacts to his partner's unsilencing process. A woman partner's connection with the alternate meaning structure enables her to manage the social cost associated with her partner's reaction to her, which may include exclusionary and rejecting actions (p. 13).

Finally, the third level of unsilencing is maintaining the transformation the female partner is undergoing, particularly in regard to "emotion management" (Benjamin, 2003, p. 13). This emotion management includes work with fear and guilt, which may arise as a result of the hierarchical meaning structures' past hegemony in her life, and detaching from old emotion work of placating her partner's anger and efforts at control. The new emotion management is strengthened by a female partner's connection to an egalitarian or feminist meaning structure (p. 13-14). One other point from Benjamin (2003, p. 13), of relevance to Carmen, is naming the "silenced experiences so that they can be validated", hence they are no longer kept silent or remain invisible. I now connect these three levels of unsilencing to Carmen's story.

From the above transcript extracts it is apparent that Carmen has had contact with counselling education and studies in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). Carmen acknowledges training in these areas as providing her with the skill to re-appraise her interactions with her partner and respond to him from a position of unsilencing. At the end of the third focus group meeting Carmen also acknowledges two other meaning structures that may have contributed to her re-positioning from silence. Carmen talks for a long period about these, but I highlight a small portion. Carmen begins by responding to a question about whether the focus group has been of any benefit to her:

I sort of expected to come and talk and not really learn. But I have picked up and learnt a few things for myself and seen some things about aspects of my earlier life. I can see that I married someone that was . . . controlling, dominant, making decisions, all those sort of things. . . . What has happened through the years, and especially having become Christian is that you then change. . . . I find that my greatest growth is my own Christian faith and finding my value.

Through contact with these alternate meaning structures, CBT and counselling studies, the focus group, and Christian faith, I suggest Carmen has experienced “a power resource” that has enabled her “to unsilence avoided topics in [her] relationship” (Benjamin, 2003, p. 12). Through these alternate meaning structures Carmen has gained implicit knowledge of herself as a human being, and of her relationship possibilities, that contribute to her repositioning in the relationship with her partner.

At the second level advocated by Benjamin it appears that connection to these alternate meaning structures has enabled Carmen to distance herself from her partner’s reactions, manage the hurt and, to use Carmen’s words, “[not] close up in my emotions”. Carmen has been able to manage the social cost of her partner’s exclusionary reactions. In much the same terms as Benjamin (2003, p. 13), Carmen says, “So now I feel more empowered”. The third level, Benjamin suggests, is a continuation of the transformation that has begun at the second level. From the transcript it is clear that at the time of the focus group meeting this transformation continues for Carmen. In naming her own silencing experience,

which Benjamin says is important to do at the third level, Carmen uses the language of shut-down from the first focus group. In speaking to her partner, Carmen reports that she says “do you realise what you are doing, you are shutting me down”.

In appropriating Benjamin’s three levels of women’s repositioning from silence to unsilencing in heterosexual relationships, I show an explicit process by which sedimentary practices and knowledges can be fractured, “where thought might insert itself” in a new way (Rose, 1999b, pp. 276-277) so that “thinking altogether differently” (Derrida, 1982b, p. 326) about heterosexual relationships may occur.

“The weak points and lines of fracture” (Rose, 1999b, pp. 276-277), in the hierarchical meaning structure, come from Carmen’s connection with alternate meaning structures. These alternate meaning structures, offer Carmen license and knowledge to think differently about her relationship and about herself as a human being. It is a strategic strength that these new meaning structures are continually connected with for support through the third level of moving to unsilencing. Through these alternate meaning structures Carmen gains implicit knowledge that make it possible for her to think “altogether differently” (Derrida, 1982b, p. 326) about the relationship with her partner. This new thinking and implicit knowledge can be seen in Carmen’s words where she changes her position from that of subservience to one of challenging oppressive acts. A statement such as “no, this is not okay anymore” indicates new positioning for Carmen in relation to her partner’s controlling position.

In Carmen’s account of her heterosexual relationship the implicit knowledge of a safe, sacred place, in equal and shared partnership, plays an important role in her repositioning to a position of power as resistance to her partner’s oppressive control of the relationship. Thought and action are inserted into Carmen’s relationship in new ways that offer potential for transformation.

### **The sedimentation of husband-wife practices as lines of force**

I offer an analysis of Annie’s account of her heterosexual relationship where, I suggest, “the sedimentation of husband-wife practices and knowledges” (Davies et al., 2002, p. 310) in one particular area of the relationship, result in



“sedimentations of lines of force” (Davies et al., 2002, p. 312). The lines of force are the productions of power that keep the relationship caught in a space that limits Annie’s preferred practices for relationship. Neither partner seems to be changing in regard to a particular aspect of the relationship, even though Annie uses an implicit knowledge akin to a safe, sacred place to try and connect with her partner for change.

In discussing this idea of sedimentation in Annie’s relationship, I begin in the second meeting of the first focus group, where Annie responds to the narrative research document. I will then move back to the first meeting where Annie discusses the reason for sedimentation in her relationship:

I guess I just feel disappointed because when I saw your research [document] I thought, “I communicate well with my partner”. I communicate openly on most topics, but not the decision making. When I read it [narrative research document] I thought, “O, he [Brian] really tapped into the hardest part of our relationship”. . . . It [narrative research document] just brought up what I struggle with the most in our relationship. We don’t make decisions. I’m not entirely blaming my partner, because some decisions are mutual, but we both wait for each other, and so it’s not resolved. Some of the really big ones I think he could make, and he doesn’t, or at least take some initiative.

Annie has named decision-making as an area of difficulty in her heterosexual relationship. As we continue with Annie’s account of her heterosexual relationship it becomes clearer as to why this is a difficulty, and how it might contribute to sedimented husband-wife practices. To understand more on this area of decision-making I refer to Annie’s words:

I think decision making would be our biggest weakness. He’s very passive. . . . I am actually thinking my husband is not . . . stereotypically male, he’s not a powerful man, or an aggressive man. [While growing up] he was actually told what to do a lot. Even though he is highly intelligent he is a very, very poor decision maker, so I am the one wasting all this energy. . . . On the big things he trusts me, which is a valuable part of the relationship,

but he doesn't enter into . . . I just go "whooh" [screams loudly]. . . . He just doesn't come to decisions; I waste heaps of energy. That is why I have been very passive [in this meeting] thinking, "I could almost cry here". It's really hard living with someone so passive. It's his strength and his weakness, because he's not dominant and powerful and aggressive and bullying, but he is just so passive. . . . He is a well rounded, thinking, intelligent, creative person. But he doesn't take a leadership role in our family. . . . We talk, but we don't come to any decisions . . . so I'm left feeling open all the time and it's quite vulnerable. . . . It's really, really hard to live with that . . . it's hard in a marriage, so hard in a friendship.

This story of Annie's appears different to other stories of patriarchal control and domination, such as Hannah's and Carmen's stories, but in hearing the emotion in Annie's words I realise that her story speaks of the relationship as powerfully and painfully constitutive for her. I initially struggled to understand how I could analyse and understand Annie's story of relationship, then I remembered Davies and her colleague's guiding words: "To understand how relations of power are put and held in place we examine not violence, but the specific forms of knowledge, or 'rationalities', that make any particular form of power seem reasonable or inevitable" (2002, p. 298).

On an initial reading of Annie's words the rationality that appears to me is the expectation or belief that "leadership is male", a possible connection to the traditional idea and practice that the male is the "head of the home" (Balswick & Balswick, 1999, p. 91; see Rankin Mahoney & Knudson-Martin, 2009, p. 22) who makes the decisions. However, I also offer an alternative reading based on the transcript and points of clarification Annie made when she sought me out after the second focus group meeting.

I ascertain one dominant rationality from the above account that may be at work in Annie's sedimented relationship with her partner. "The marriage-between-equals discourse" is the name given by Hare-Mustin (1994, p. 29) to a discourse that makes it possible in marriage for male domination and female subordination to be concealed. One of the key reasons for this concealment, Hare-Mustin (1994, p. 30) argues, is essentialising the differences between men and women. These

essentialist ideas “disguise what is taking place; they obscure operations of power” (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 30). With Annie’s story there is not only the essentialising of men as “stereotypically . . . powerful . . . aggressive . . . dominant . . . bullying”, but there is the contrasting essentialising of her partner as “highly intelligent . . . well rounded, thinking, intelligent, creative . . . passive . . . very poor decision maker”. I suggest that this essentialising of her partner is obscuring the operations of power that are taking place, which Annie may have recognised more readily if he was “stereotypically male”. Because her partner is not “stereotypically male”, and hence not “powerful, dominant, aggressive”, the operation of power is obscured, and Annie identifies the non decision-making, in the main, as an element of her partner’s “passive” personality, rather than of power relations.

In this essentialising of Annie’s partner not making decisions I think there is an important taken-for-granted knowledge, a rationality, which keeps power functioning silently and invisibly. This rationality is the western idea, derived from certain social and psychological sciences, that people have an essentialised and permanent set of traits, from which truth and meaning can be ascertained about their “real nature”, behaviours, and potential trajectory in life (Geertz, 1979; Rose, 1998, 1999a; McNamee, 2004). This rationality is so pervasive that to think, to see, to speak, in other ways would likely be unfathomable for many. Davies et al. (2002, p. 298), in regard to the obscurity of the power behind taken-for-granted knowledge write, “The lines of force of power relations make us see and speak in certain ways, though they themselves do not see and speak”. I propose that this taken-for-granted rationality of essentialised personality traits is not only blinding Annie to the operations of power behind such knowledge, but it is also keeping her blind to the operations of power in the relationship with her partner expressed through the “passive” non decision-making.

There are two other rationalities at work in Annie’s account. These are the ideas that emotional connection and equally shared leadership are important practices for her heterosexual relationship. These rationalities appear to be much the same idea as a safe, sacred place. During the second meeting of the first focus group Annie says the following in regard to emotional connection in her relationship:

[My partner] will often say we talked about something, “it was really great we talked about” . . . I said “no I didn’t”. It’s because . . . he’s not connecting emotionally. I, being a fairly emotional person, realise from learning, that’s what’s missing. We can talk, and talk, and talk, oh, didn’t get anywhere. Then I’ve gone, “you didn’t understand what I felt, you understood what I thought, but you did not connect with me”.

In conjunction with this emphasis on emotional connection Annie spoke of her hope for “shared leadership together” in her heterosexual relationship. Annie says, “Leadership is putting things in place so that they will work, for example, filling the car with petrol . . . shared responsibility for relationship and domestic duties”.

Annie’s account of her heterosexual relationship now includes other concerns along with the non decision-making of her partner. The absence of emotional connection with her partner, along with her recognition that she desires emotional connection, and her hope for shared leadership in the relationship, are now important aspects of Annie’s account of her heterosexual relationship. In the first focus group meeting Annie gave a simple, perhaps humorous, but nonetheless real example of the absence of shared leadership and responsibility in the relationship.

Yesterday I had to buy a kettle, and I said [to her partner], do you have any opinion, and he said, “No”. And I said, “well, actually, I don’t have any opinions about kettles either” (group laughter). I didn’t want to make any decision on a kettle, but I did, because I went to the catalogue and I went, “that will do”, cos’ I don’t really care.

While this example from Annie on the absence of shared leadership and decision-making may appear trivial on its own, in the context of Annie’s overall account it serves to show what is important for Annie – a partner who is involved with her in the relationship. This involvement means emotional connection, shared leadership and decision-making.

The two rationalities, emotional connection and shared leadership, join with the rationality of Annie’s partner’s essentialised traits and the power produced in the relationship through his withdrawn non-involvement, to produce Annie’s subjectivity. To recap on Annie’s subjectivity from her words mentioned earlier;

Annie mentions almost crying as she listens to the other women in the focus group talk about their relationships. Annie uses the word “hard” a number of times to name the emotional difficulties of living with a partner who lives closely with passivity. Her sense of pain and frustration is expressed in the scream Annie lets out as she responds to Hannah’s input. Annie also mentions vulnerability and “feeling open” because she and her partner talk, “but we don’t come to any decisions”. I suggest Annie’s pain, and the subject position she finds herself in, leave her feeling like she has limited options left in regard to how she can change the relationship. In regard to their story of sedimentation of husband-wife practices and knowledges Davies et al. (2002) write something that is perhaps just as applicable to Annie: “His wife is completely silenced, and made vulnerable. Not through a state of domination based on ‘economic, political, or military means’ but on the sedimentation of husband-wife practices and knowledges” (p. 310).

Even though Annie has provocatively, in an agonistic sense, hinted that change for the relationship is required according to her two knowledges of emotional connection and shared leadership, her sedimented knowledge of her partner’s essentialised traits, and his sedimented passive practices of power, continue to act as lines of force that paralyse the relationship. To play on the words of Foucault, the relationship is not agonistic as in a permanent provocation, but is more “of a face-to-face confrontation that paralyses both sides” (2002b, p. 342).

### **The lens of governmentality**

As applied to this study, governmentality is the encounter between any of the four technologies defined by Foucault; technologies of power, the self, production, and sign systems (2000a, p. 224-225; 1971/2000b, pp. 337-339; 2002b, p. 341; 1978/2002e, pp. 219-220). Each of these technologies is arranged around a rationality that is governed by a goal (Rose, 1998, p. 26). Technologies of power conduct the conduct of others toward a goal; technologies of the self operate on the self toward a goal; technologies of production produce, transform, or manipulate things toward a goal; technologies of sign systems permit the use of signs, meanings, and communication systems toward a goal. Governmentality employs these technologies “for acting upon the action of others towards certain

ends” (Rose, 1999a, p. xxi). I now apply the concept of governmentality, as an action of patriarchal power, and as a lens on Hannah’s relationship, and then on the relationships of Ali and Sarah, followed by Carmen then Annie, as the excerpts from the focus group meetings have presented them in this chapter.

I analysed Hannah’s relationship as a state of domination because of the control and violence practised by her partner. In the face of this domination Hannah stayed in the relationship in the hope that the relationship would change according to her preferences. Looking at Hannah’s relationship through the lens of governmentality, I suggest she joins a technology of the self with a technology of production. While the technology of production, a safe, sacred place, was an original goal Hannah had for her relationship, the technology of self came about because of Hannah’s partner’s use of a technology of power with her. Technologies of the self concern Hannah’s efforts on the relationship, and even though she does not explicitly say it, I suggest, work on herself as well. This work on Hannah’s relationship and self is constituted and maintained by the technology of power in which her partner engages, and Hannah’s hope that the technology of production, a safe, sacred place, may come about in the relationship.

With both Ali and Sarah, a technology of self operates in response to their partner’s utilising a technology of power. Ali and Sarah change their positions and work on the relationship with their partners as a result of the technology of power governing their approach to conducting relationship. In their application of a technology of self both Ali and Sarah hold onto the technology of production, a safe, sacred place, as a hope for their relationship. Ali has been alerted to a technology of sign systems that works alongside her partner’s technology of power for government. According to Ali she notes the type of crisp, clipped, and unembellished form of communication her partner prefers. Consequently, Ali, in response to these two technologies, power and sign systems, adjusts her positioning with the use of email.

In Ali’s and Sarah’s relationships governmentality is a form of power that is productive. It produces possibilities (Davies et al., 2002, p. 297), “traverses and produces things” (Foucault, 1980, p. 119). Ali and Sarah creatively utilise a technology of sign systems to produce a different strategy of response to the

governmental practices reproduced by their partners. Ali, in using email, makes use of signs within it, such as the exclamation mark, to communicate her opinion. And Sarah changes the way she communicates with her partner by letting things go, not forcing, and producing patience, so that she can still achieve her goals with her partner. In this process of governmentality, and the responses to it from Ali and Sarah, noticeable are “the ways we [women might] become governable and actively engage in the conduct of our own and others’ conduct. . . . [Thus], women might be said to be powerful, even when they are complicit in their own subjection” (Davies et al., 2002, pp. 295, 312).

Governmentality, on the basis of patriarchal discourses, can be seen from the transcript where Carmen says, “For so many years I thought my role as a woman was to be quiet and just do whatever needs to be done”. Through the three technologies of power, self, and production, the governmental development of a woman partner who does not upset the patriarchal *status quo*, is apparent here. Then later, in the envisaged monologue to her partner, Carmen says, “But I’m now saying we are a team, we’re a family, and I want to share this with you as well . . . two is better than one”. At this point Carmen has taken up a different technology of production of heterosexual relationship. It is this technology of production, in conjunction with a technology of power, a governmental action, which Carmen responds to her partner with as “a ‘conduct of conducts’, and a management of [new] possibilities” (Foucault, 2002b, p. 341) for her heterosexual relationship. This is indicative of the change in Carmen’s positioning.

In Annie’s heterosexual relationship patriarchal governmentality is in place through the non-decision-making, lack of emotional connection, and no shared leadership. In the words of Davies et al., “the repeated, minute accretions of everyday practices can generate lines of force” (2002, pp. 312) that paralyse Annie’s relationship in these areas. A technology of power results in the relationship being shaped by an impasse. While the technology of power may have invited Annie into a technology of the self, where work on Annie’s subjectivity and self may have moderated the impasse, it does not appear from Annie’s story that this invitation to work on self is taken up. Instead Annie, to use Foucault’s word, agonistically challenges her partner about his contribution to the relationship and domestic requirements. This can be seen as Annie voicing a

preference for her partner to practise a technology of the self and change the deadlocked relationship practices on his part. However, his stuck response keeps the relationship dominated by a technology of power that privileges patriarchal productions of heterosexual relationship and keeps Annie's preferred practices away.

### **Where does this analysis leave a woman in heterosexual relationship?**

The dual analysis, offered from the perspective of the power/knowledge nexus, and through the lens of governmentality, on the first focus group women's heterosexual relationships, come to the same conclusion. Unless a male partner positions himself to cooperate with a woman partner, a woman partner's knowledge and egalitarian goals for the relationship will not be implemented. From a governmental perspective, even where a male partner is seen as cooperating with a woman partner, it is possibly only because she has applied a technology of self, adjusted her positioning and subjectivity, in relation to the male partner. But, as can be judged from Hannah's situation, this adjustment does not always work for a woman partner. Whatever way the first focus group women's heterosexual relationships are analysed, from a governmental, or power/knowledge perspective, the consequences are unethical in response to an egalitarian ethic sought by the women.

In the context of government, the women, in initiating moves towards a safe, sacred place are, I argue, practising an ethic both on their own self and for the relationship. Valverde defines ethics as "the reflexive government of the self by the self" (2004, p. 77; cf. Foucault, 1984/2000c, pp. 282, 284). The focus group women, while being governed by the collision between patriarchal power, and their implicit knowledge of relationship, are also governing their own selves, as selves that hope and desire for a safe, sacred place. The women in each situation either change their subjectivity and positioning to keep the hope alive for the relationship as they would like it, and/or they continue to bear the physical or emotional pain that comes from carrying the unequal load of the relationship. While the women hope for an ethical relationship to come about, they continue in a relationship that is unethical.



## **Back to deconstruction as double: A double ethical position**

To reiterate briefly, double deconstruction involves two applications: one, a deconstruction from within the system being deconstructed; second, overturning, any binary hierarchy that may exist in the system, and the inclusion of a completely new concept into the system that was not previously present, thus removing any hierarchy. In this chapter, through Foucault's power/knowledge nexus, and governmentality, I have offered a deconstruction of heterosexual relationship as a person who is involved in a heterosexual relationship. This deconstruction has highlighted the unethical patriarchal practices of power that privilege the male partner and subject the female partner to subject positions that are unjust. These subject positions position the female partner as subservient to her partner. Hence, for her to hold hope of realising her preferred expressions of heterosexual relationship she needs to adjust and manoeuvre her position in the relationship.

However, the implicit knowledge of the women's preferred expressions of heterosexual relationship contributes to the emotional pain of not having a relationship as they would prefer, and/or, as I have suggested, the implicit knowledge is the grounds for the women to change their position and practices in the relationship. Whatever position is taken by the women, their preferred expression of heterosexual relationship is either not realised, or only partially realised, leaving the women subservient to various practices of patriarchy. Hence, the deconstruction of heterosexual relationship in this chapter not only deconstructs patriarchal practices as unethical, but it also acts as a deconstruction of the preferred expressions for heterosexual relationship of the first focus group women. In the terms of Caputo (1997a, p. 78) on deconstruction, "A deconstructive reading . . . settles into the distance between what the author consciously intends . . . that is, what she "commands" in her text, and what she does not command, what is going on in the text . . . behind her back".

The first focus group women "command" a safe, sacred place for their relationship, but what they do not command, what is going on behind their backs, I suggest, are the practices of power from patriarchal discourses. These practices

of power constitute the women both before and after any adjustment and manoeuvring of their subjectivity in an effort to realise a safe, sacred place for their relationship.

Because of the dominant and here unrecognised position of power held by patriarchal practices in heterosexual relationship, to overturn the hierarchy of patriarchal practices controlling the women's preferred expressions would not necessarily effect change. I argue that the actual point of entry of patriarchal practices into heterosexual relationship needs addressing. This point to be addressed is the male partner's position in heterosexual relationship. The next chapter takes up this addressing of the male partner's position in heterosexual relationship.

In concluding this chapter I return to the first focus group women's preferred expression of heterosexual relationship represented in the idea of a safe, sacred place. This conclusion serves as an introduction to the ethical basis for the continued deconstruction in the next chapter.

## **A place of hope**

In writing this chapter, it has become clear to me that, on one hand, a safe, sacred place is an implicit knowledge working with power, and on the other hand, a safe, sacred place works with hope. The glimpses the women have received of a safe, sacred place in practice have provided them with hope that it can materialise in their heterosexual relationships more consistently. In this chapter, while I have conducted an "archaeological dig" of a safe, sacred place as an implicit knowledge of the first focus group women that allies with power, I have, alongside this, also conducted an "archaeology of hope" (Monk, Winslade, Crocket, & Epston, 1997).

Much of the second and third focus group meetings were responses to two questions, one of which was, "what can men do to help grow the hope for equal space in a relationship?" Indeed the women did respond to this question, suggesting that their partners join them in this safe, sacred place of egalitarian conversation and partnership. Then finally, after the three first focus group meetings, and with careful effort and time in preparation, and with the support of

the first focus group women, I included the following in the bridging document (Appendix D):

Thinking about what the women value in their relationships with male partners, I heard how they spoke about hopes, aspirations and dreams they hold . . . I was struck by the energy and enthusiasm they had for the task of sharing their stories and connecting with each other. . . . As I participated in this . . . I became aware that these women trusted me with the sacredness of their stories. I was aware that as a man I could have been seen as representing those who had hurt them, in some cases quite violently. . . . “Why would they trust me, and be so open in talking about their lives?” I think it was because they valued and hoped for egalitarian relationships with their partners. Their enthusiasm I think not only reflected what was happening between them with each other, but it reflected what they hoped for and had experienced at times with their partners.

A safe, sacred place is not only a place implicated with power, but it is also a sign and place of hope that reflects the aspirations and dreams the women have for relationship with their partners. Ali, Sarah, and Sue, in the focus group suggested that their partners were responding in varying degrees to the invitation to meet them at this place. Hannah however had to leave the particular relationship. In Annie’s and Carmen’s relationships, at the time of the focus group meetings, there was no report on the response of their partners to the invitation.

This chapter highlights the adjustment and re-positioning that is required by the women for change in their relationship to occur. Along with this adjustment, the production of patriarchal power that resists such change is indicated. This production of patriarchal power and resistance to change invites the question, “If the relationship is so difficult and costly to change why persist with it?” As I have proposed in the bridging document, I think the women’s hopes, aspirations, and dreams for relationship are part of the answer. And, I also recognise in my position as a man, I am not able to adequately answer that question. But I am in a position to suggest that men change and take up an invitation to join their women partners in a safe, sacred place of egalitarian heterosexual partnership. As Benjamin writes, “In the realm of heterosexual relationships . . . cooperation is

unlikely unless “dominant masculinity” as a structure of men’s entitlements is successfully challenged by an alternative care-based masculinity” (2003, p. 15). It is to this conversation that I turn in the next chapter.



## **Chapter 8. A double deconstruction: Inviting men to respond otherwise**

From the first focus group I took the bridging document (Appendix D) into the individual interviews with five men. The men received this document at least one week before their interview. One of the aspects that the women talked about in the first focus group, in naming their preferred relational space and declared in the bridging document, is a safe, sacred place. A safe, sacred place is the relational space that I theorise men are invited to, for responses that are ethical and egalitarian.

As a man who had witnessed the discussions of the first focus group I was well positioned to ask questions of the men. These questions, included in the bridging document, were designed as a reading guide, and to obtain their responses to the material produced in the document: What is there in this document that stands out for you or maybe catches your attention in surprising ways? Why is it that women partners can feel there is no option other than to speak this way – “nagging”? Is there anything men can do about this that is fair and helpful for both men and women? The excerpts in this chapter come from the interviews as the men answered these questions and reflected on their heterosexual relationship practices and experience.

My approach to deconstruction as double continues in this chapter. By joining the first step – overturning a hierarchy – with part of the second step – the inclusion of a new concept – I vary from Derrida’s original linear two-step proposal. I take this step to approach deconstruction in this way because of unrecognised inequality that heterosexual relationship may produce between the male and female partners. I use the concept of a safe, sacred place as the new concept for an expression of heterosexual relationship that is egalitarian. This deconstructive step, while instructed by deconstruction as double, is the application of another approach to deconstruction: deconstruction as affirmative response to the Other (Derrida, 1995a, p. 168; Caputo, 1997a; Critchley, 2007; Smith, 2005). This

chapter moves from deconstruction as ethic to deconstruction as shaping an ethical relationship.

I situate this ethical relationship in Derrida's "democracy to come" (1993/1994, pp. 81-82, 2003/2005a, pp. 88-92, 148-149), where the predominant figure is "the other" (Levinas 1961/1969, 1974/1998) as those toward whom hospitality and justice are to be practised (Derrida, 1993/1994, pp. 211-212, 2003/2005a, pp. 88, 149). I suggest an appropriate ethical response to the Other is with the practices of obligatory love and becoming love. I read the men's interviews transcripts to trace how the two practices of obligatory love and becoming love are visible or absent and how these shape their heterosexual relationships. I analyse the interview transcripts with the above in mind in order to investigate and show a possible path towards egalitarian heterosexual relationships – meeting a woman partner at a safe, sacred place.

As I identify the two practices of obligatory love and becoming love, I am aware that I step in and out of strategic essentialism and relational externalising. I step into strategic essentialism when, for example, I write of a man appropriating his experience of shame as a guide to his relational ethics. I step into relational externalising to speak about the shaping effect of discourse when, for example, I write of a man being shaped by self and relational understandings that are produced from biologically deterministic discourses.

The analysis in this chapter is divided into two distinct parts: Obligatory love guides the analysis first, followed with becoming love. I suggest that obligatory love be divided into three distinct ethical expressions: recognition of privilege, the ability of not-knowing, and as space and interested distance.

## **Obligatory love as recognition of privilege**

In interpreting Derrida and Dufourmantelle (2000) for his practice in counselling, Jenkins (2009, p. 25) says of hospitality, "The practice of *hospitality* requires that we recognise our privilege and attend to the needs and feelings of those who may be experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation." Recognising our privilege as men is arguably one of the most difficult aspects of obligatory love because of the familiar liberal humanist assumption that there is equality between men and

women. An alternative explanation, but still with the assumption of equality, is noted by Pease, “As most men’s beliefs about male superiority are experienced as being natural and normal and are institutionalised and culturally exalted, they generally do not notice their advantages” (2010, p. 95). Even if a man is to recognise his privilege, the change is difficult. Hegemonic patriarchal power can have far-reaching effects on the identity of men when they are faced with the possibility of recognising and changing their privileged position. Acker (2006, p. 455) writes, “Advantage is hard to give up: Increasing equality with devalued groups can be seen and felt as an assault on dignity and masculinity”. Additional to this difficulty is the personal threat that men may experience in response to the autonomy of women and the contradiction this autonomy offers to men’s culturally derived sense of women being their possession (Pease, 2010, pp. 106-107). Many men do not want to change their patriarchal socially derived interests because they have internalised and essentialised those interests as their own, separating the personal from the political (White, 1996, p. 163).

An important requirement for ethical change and gender justice, I suggest, is the discursive reconstitution of men’s social and personal identities so that their interests are non-patriarchal (Pease, 2002b, p. 172).

Ethics are not at odds with self-interest; rather, it changes our sense of what constitutes our self-interest. Such a view enables us to move away from a repressive view of ethics as simply something that stops us from doing what we want toward a reconstitution of our self-interest as ethical beings. (Pease, 2002b, p. 174)

I suggest an important place to begin work toward men’s self-interest becoming ethical is recognising privilege and attending to those who experience marginalisation in men’s familial relationships, beginning with women (Connell, 2000, pp. 203-204). “It is men’s relationship with partners, daughters, mothers and sisters that will provide the basis upon which men will come to support change” (Pease, 2010, p. 107). In these familial relationships, we as men can begin to change inequality and privilege by a “generous love” (Jenkins, 2009, pp. 24-25) to our partner as an expression of ethical heterosexual relationship.



## **Struggle with emotional engagement**

In this study an ethical heterosexual relationship is understood as situated in the possibilities of a safe, sacred place. I read Peter's interview transcript to look for examples of where he has been invited by his partner to a relational space akin to a safe, sacred place. How Peter responds to this invitation assists in grasping how obligatory love has, or has not been practised with his partner. Where I regard Peter as resisting or struggling with this invitation I discern the discourses at work, "the corridor of voices" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 121), which capture him into resistance to practising obligatory love.

In the following excerpt Peter alludes to relational space akin to a safe, sacred place:

Women say they don't know what their fellows [partners] are thinking. [The women partner might suggest] "I don't know, you don't tell me anything." So the words that we [my partner and I] use to describe connecting, like *connecting with each other*, [are] more [appropriate] than just *listening to me*. But if we have a particularly busy couple of weeks, and we haven't spent time together, she is a much better barometer of our togetherness than I am. I will eventually notice, but hardly ever before her. Now that fact in itself annoys her.

Having read the bridging document of women discussing the repetitive pattern labelled, in patriarchal terms, as "nagging" Peter is reticent to name his partner's response as nagging. He regards his forgetfulness as the initiator of this repetitive pattern. The comments above are made in the context of this forgetfulness and "nagging" theme, and serve as a bridge to what Peter believes his partner wants from the relationship – connection with him, also named "togetherness". Peter recognises the safe, sacred place possibilities, but also acknowledges his struggle with achieving such relationship practices.

## **"Impotence" and discourses of biological determinism**

To further establish this recognition and struggle with the idea of a safe, sacred place in Peter's story I move to further discussion that came just after his words above:

Where I think it relates to this nagging response for my partner . . . me not listening, nagging, [that] is her frustration . . . often comes to a head when . . . she feels I don't make the effort to engage with her in an emotionally intimate way. . . . "It hasn't changed you know. We have had this conversation before and nothing has changed". My memories of those times [is] . . . the resolutions are that I open up more . . . there is a lot more connection. . . . Part of what frustrates me when my partner does have those moments, is that I know she's right. . . . There is this sort of . . . an impotence in being able to sustain this kind of [emotional connection].

The plot in Peter's story is made visible at this point. He recognises his partner's call for emotional engagement, but he is unable to sustain that connection with her due to what he names "impotence" in reference to his emotional connection skills. The use of "impotence" by Peter is startling, particularly with its obvious connections to discourses of sexual virility and reproductive ability. In current mainstream patriarchal cultures not many men would openly disclose an experience of impotence. Yet, here is Peter using this word. The allusion between sexual connection and emotional connection is clear. Peter suggests he is emotionally and relationally impotent – unable to engage with his partner through reproducing longevity of emotional and relational connection, even after her invitation. The word impotence suggests that there is a force beyond Peter's ability or knowledge to change. He alludes to biological forces at work, as with sexual impotence, which prevent him from connecting with his partner as she would prefer.

To begin a wider deconstructive reading of Peter's use of the word impotence I refer to Spivak's (1974, p. lxxv) writing on metaphors and deconstruction:

If a metaphor seems to suppress its implications, we shall catch at that metaphor. We shall follow its adventures through the text and see the text coming undone as a structure of concealment, revealing its self-transgression, its undecidability.

During Peter's interview the metaphor "impotence" suppressed its implications. However, I now recognise at least three implications of the metaphor. First, there

is the implication that emotional and relational skills and practices are essentially and biologically determined. Second, Peter's use of *impotence* alludes to failure to achieve the hyper-masculine sexual practices (Tiefer, 1997). However, Peter indicates impotence relates to his inability to be emotionally close to his partner and monitor levels of closeness in that relationship. Hence, thirdly, impotence equates to the non-achievement of hyper-femininity and its practices. I join these three implications together to "catch at that metaphor" of impotence. In Peter's declaration of impotence (which the corridor of voices, winks, nods, and nudges us to think about sexual prowess and its absence), we have this intersection between sexual impotence and relational and emotional impotence. Impotence, from a hyper-masculine sexual context, is regarded as a failure of masculinity. The use of impotence, in regard to the hyper-feminine, concerns success at avoiding practices of femininity. However, in some kind of ironic subversion, the use of impotence by Peter is potently successful at hyper-masculinity in being impotent in practices of femininity through the use of discourses of biological determinism.

Peter recognises his partner's invitation to emotional engagement but his unrecognised struggle is not with his "abilities" to sustain that relational connection, it is with discourses that potently constitute Peter as impotent to sustain connection. I now turn to recognising the essentialist discourses of biological determinism in Peter's words which, in turn, make way for further discussion of Peter's ironic hyper-masculine success at impotence. I begin with further reference from Peter in regard to his partner's desires for the relationship:

She wants me to be more in tune with our relationship. . . . But what I think about that is, it's the relationship as she perceives it, or that closeness as it . . . helps her feel loved. Because the way she feels loved and the way I feel loved primarily are not the same. . . [I am to look after] her needs. There is a responsibility for me to act in accordance with how she likes to receive, and you know, conversely her for me. You are familiar I guess, with the five love languages thing [Chapman, 1995]?

Peter's reference to Chapman (1995), and the idea that he and his partner's relationship is about getting needs met, suggest a "corridor of voices" (Bakhtin,

1986, p. 121) and a “theory [that] produces people” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 620). Both Chapman’s book and the idea of needs-based relationship are rationalities that draw discursive power into Peter’s life and relationship, supporting essentialist ideas and a discourse of biological determinism. I suggest needs-based relationship ideas and associated discourses when practised effectively can contribute to relationship, but they can also limit and obscure relationship possibilities. Peter acknowledges the difference between his partner and himself, based in the ideas from Chapman’s book that people have different preferences for how they experience love. A man’s recognition that his partner might experience love in a different way to him, and the practice of expressing that love as she prefers, can contribute valuably to the relationship. The popularity of some self-help relationship books which emphasize difference as needs suggests these ideas make sense of what people struggle with in their relationships. Certainly, in Peter’s case, with his reference to Chapman (1995), it appears that this text makes sense of the difference between how he and his partner feel and express love.

Davies (1998) argues that discourses can be utilised for purposes that are useful to us without that discourse defining our identity. A needs-based discourse, such as that Peter refers to, can possibly be utilised for obligatory love, but as Davies also suggests, discourses should be examined for “any unintended negative effects” (p. 136). A needs-based discourse can constitute people as believing the need they identify as theirs must be met by their partner. This can lead to an approach that is contractual, where partners only meet needs if their own are met. Argument can occur as to whose position on needs is the truth (Bird, 2004, p. 253). Both partners’ identity can become so connected with the need that the need can become a totalising description of themselves (Sinclair & Monk, 2004; Talbot, 2012, p. 69). Any of these unintended effects of a needs-based discourse can result in conflict that constitutes both individuals in the relationship and their relational subjectivity.

While these problems are potential by-products of a needs-based discourse, one of the greatest dangers is when couples have access to it as the only discourse available for them to live their relationship by. When this occurs the needs-based discourse can quickly become dominated by a discourse of biological determinism. The determinism of needs-based discourse as the only discourse

available for Peter is noted when he returns to the impotence metaphor soon after the above discussion:

My impotence in that area, it is a frustration . . . we talk about it and we both agree. . . . You can commit all your faculties to agreeing and in three or four months time the whole thing blows up again. I think fundamentally people remain the same, with the same ingrained traits. I think my partner and I will always have the same kind of struggle with the same kind of issues in our marriage.

In regards to the dominance of biological determinism, for explaining the difference in male and female experience, Kimmel writes “a large number of people believe that the differences in male and female anatomy are decisive and provide the basis for the differences in men’s and women’s experiences” (2008, p. 19). Once a needs-based discourse is connected to biological determinism, the couple are constituted by discourse as believing their needs, how they express and feel love for each other, is based in their pre-determined biological differences, thus limiting the relationship possibilities. Hence, while a needs-based approach to heterosexual relationship can provide explanations for difference, it can also limit the couple and produce “stuckness” for what is available. In Peter’s case, he takes up a position on his relationship and reproduces the idea of needs because he does not appear to have another discourse to step into in order to question the discourse he uses.

The language Peter uses, “I think fundamentally people remain the same, with the same ingrained traits”, is a clear connection to a biologically deterministic and essentialist view of people where change is not possible. Not only does the needs-based discourse, when connected to biological determinism, limit available options for a couple in heterosexual relationships, it excludes the possibility of transformation. Peter is resigned to discursive ideas that human beings have a pre-determined essentialist nature, and hence, to himself remaining emotionally and relationally impotent. The coming together of “specific forms of knowledge”, *people remain the same with the same ingrained traits*, from deterministic discourses, and “how relations of power are put and held in place” (Davies et al., 2002, p. 298) are evident in Peter’s conclusions about the “impotence” and the

relationship with his partner. While it appears Peter initially chose the word “impotence” to describe his relational practices, one can say the word chose Peter because of the presence and power of the essentialising and deterministic discourse reproduced in his life. These same discourses that Peter reproduces, giving him hyper-masculine success at impotency, also provide success for not recognising male privilege. If people “fundamentally . . . remain the same with the same ingrained traits” what better word is available than “impotence” when it comes to the “impossibility” of transformation?

### **Assumptions of equality that make male privilege invisible**

A further rationality available to Peter is the assumption of equality between men and women, that keeps male privilege invisible. By utilising the work of Chapman (1995) to make sense of his relationship Peter is reproducing a liberal humanist discourse. Chapman’s idea of “five love languages” suggests people have an essentialised nature that is the “basis . . . for equality of opportunity and the right to self-determination” (Weedon, 1997, p. 77). Additional to this, Chapman does not address gender or power which insinuates that every individual is “ungendered” (Hare-Mustin, 1991, p. 65). While a love language perspective can be helpful for heterosexual couples in producing love and thoughtfulness and mitigating inequality, because gender and power are not addressed it is possible for “liberal discourses of equality to work against women’s interests” (Weedon, 1997, p. 108). Hence, Weedon suggests, to find whose interests a discourse serves we look at that “discourse in *operation*, in a specific historical context” (p. 108).

I return to Peter’s transcript referred to earlier to look for the “discourse in operation” with its rationality of assumed equality. In response to his own comment about his partner’s desire for him “to be more in tune with the relationship”, Peter, says “but what I think about that is, it’s the relationship as she perceives it, or that closeness as it . . . helps her feel loved”. This comes straight after an earlier comment from Peter that his partner wants connection and “togetherness” for their relationship. Informed by Chapman’s text and the liberal humanist discourse it reproduces Peter then begins to argue for his rights in the relationship based on an assumption of equality between partners:

The way she feels loved and the way I feel loved primarily are not the same. . . . There is a responsibility for me to act in accordance with how she likes to receive [love], and you know, conversely her for me.

As Peter utilises Chapman's text for making sense of his relationship he propounds a *quid pro quo* understanding of the relationship, where he and his partner give love in return for receiving love, according to each other's rights, as their preferred love language determines. However, while such actions look equal they do not engage with privileged patriarchal male power as it maybe practised in the relationship. Toward the end of our conversation the topics of power and vulnerability come up, which lead to a disclosure of Peter's privileged position:

Going back to this idea of vulnerability in terms of it being about power . . . I haven't really articulated it in this way, so it might be a bit convoluted. I don't know that my impotence in that arena is about my wanting control. Maybe it is in an unspoken way. In my head I can readily agree with what my partner is saying to me, being upset with me not engaging with her in that way. I'm not unwilling to do it, and in fact engage with it on that level. . . . I don't know, at my stage of life, you know, job, mortgage, own business, kids, you know, life's busy. It's an energy thing. You know, when your resources are down you close up because you got to protect things.

Peter briefly moves into a reflexive position, where he reflects differently on his positioning, and he reflects on some effects of that positioning for his partner. This reflexive stance can happen when a discourse is intersected with another discourse, creating the opportunity to think differently, and hence bring about change in one's actions. In Butler's (1993, p. 10; 1995, p. 135) terms, agency is possible when reiteration of discursive norms is interrupted or redefined. Peter's words, "I haven't really articulated it in this way, so it might be a bit convoluted", suggest entry into new thinking for Peter, which can be taken as an indication that discursive norms might be interrupted. Peter continues, "I don't know that my impotence in that arena is about my wanting control. Maybe it is in an unspoken way". The discursive norm of impotence concerning Peter's relational skills with his partner is interrupted as Peter joins it with the ideas of vulnerability and power.

The possibility of the impotence being about Peter “wanting control” to avoid vulnerability with his partner lessens the production of power from the discourse of biological determinism. In doing so, the idea of impotence and its allusion to actions being determined without opportunities for personal agency are questioned. The intersection of biological deterministic discourses with discourses that explain Peter’s impotence actions in another way occurs with Peter briefly reflecting in more detail on the engagement with his partner.

I suggest the intersection of different discourses has produced two small steps for possible change with Peter, and one major step, where he accesses another discourse that resists change. First, Peter begins to separate out what happens in his body when engaging with his partner about her desires for the relationship. He agrees with her, “in my head”, about her desires. Peter can think differently with his partner about their relationship, and he does engage with her at some “level”, thus suggesting that there are other levels where engagement could occur. Secondly, he acknowledges the effects of his actions for his partner with his reference to her “being upset” with him not engaging with her as she would like. This recognition of the effects of one’s behaviour for the Other can lead to change and “*reaching towards the world of the other*” (Jenkins, 2009, p. 118).

However, these two small steps that could be catalysts for bigger steps to change are quickly annulled when Peter calls on a different discourse, with similarities in production, to a biological determinism discourse. Peter says, “I don’t know, at my stage of life, you know, job, mortgage, own business, kids, you know, life’s busy. It’s an energy thing”. I see two possible readings for understanding this new approach from Peter. Peter has got to another place where he feels impotent – the demands of his busy life apart from the relationship with his partner. Perhaps, the impotency at the relationship level is a repercussion of an impotency at the level of Peter’s busy and committed life outside the relationship with his partner. From Peter’s words, I suggest, discourses of a market ideology, or neoliberalism, capture Peter, render him impotent, time and energy-wise, to emotional engagement with his partner, and place him in a position of primarily being the economic provider for the family. Connell (2011) writes insightfully of the effects on family relationships of market forces, arguing that “economy and home are now interwoven in new ways” (p. 57). In referring to the general effect of this



market economy on people, Connell, states “these are not simple or easy changes, but often involve great tension in people’s lives as they face conflicting pressures and impossible demands” (p. 55). Peter’s words allude to this tension and pressure which contribute to producing his heterosexual relationship.

A second reading of Peter’s words is that his new discursive repertoire of business and the demands of life is another hyper-masculine ploy to avoid the feminine of his partner’s preferred relationship expressions. Whatever way one interprets Peter’s words, it is his woman partner who is left with keeping alive the hope for a different relationship, and who retains the responsibility for the relationship’s survival.

From my readings of Peter’s account of his heterosexual relationship it is obvious that male privilege is not totalised. Peter’s story is an example of how discourse can position a man as both privileged and non-privileged. This dual positioning can be the experience of many men, but so often it is the pain or non-privilege that is responded to at the expense of their privilege and its effects (see Johnson, 1997, pp. 174-180). For change to occur, the privileged position that men hold requires recognition and an ethical response.

For example, with Peter’s situation, if he wanted agency to define his heterosexual relationship along the lines his partner desires, he could begin to enter into dialogue with her, not only about her hopes as he has already done, but he could begin to address with her the constraints he feels are placed upon him which limit those possibilities. Such a dialogical conversation could potentially discursively reconstitute Peter’s social and personal identities away from patriarchal interests toward a reconstitution of himself, in relation to his partner, as an ethical being (Pease, 2002b, pp. 172, 174). In this way, unrecognised male privilege as a player in the production of relational subjectivity can begin to be addressed.

When Peter’s story of relationship is read along with the associated defining discourses, it can too easily be read as a story of disadvantage and loss of agency – a requirement to primarily live as economic provider for his family. Men may regard their disadvantage or loss as personal, without connecting it to the privilege

they have (Pease, 2010, p. 103) and the oppressive effect it has for women. When men unlearn their privilege as disadvantage and pain, they may see the specific oppressive effects of their privilege for their heterosexual partners. It is then possible to turn to their partners in dialogue, not for their partners to solve the problem, but that the conversation may continue and not be shut-down.

This ethical stance fits with ideas of social justice and long-term benefits for all (Connell, 2011, p. 24; Pease, 2008, p. 12-13), and with Derrida's (1993/1994, p. 81) vision of "a democracy to come". I argue for the ethical stance of recognising privilege as one possible aspect of obligatory love. I now turn to another suggestion for obligatory love, the ability of not-knowing.

## **Obligatory love as the ability of not-knowing**

I take ideas on subordinating love to knowledge, generated by Davis (2002) in a post-colonial critique of the colonial mission with its benevolence toward the indigenous peoples of the world, and apply those ideas to gender in heterosexual relationships. Davis argues that what appears as love is driven by knowledge based in the benevolent assumption of what is best for the colonised people.

Davis's (2002) critique of benevolence as love is instructive, particularly with the connections between romantic love and "chivalry", where patriarchal discourses lead the man to believe his love is saving his dependent partner (Millett, 2000, p. 37-38). This fits with Spivak's (1990, pp. 19-20) observation of "phallocentrism . . . a certain sort of understanding that the hero of this scenario, of this narrative, has been in fact western man". When "love" transmits benevolence, the subject can be regarded as the hero who has come to save, benevolently, the other in their marginalised and non-privileged position (Davis, 2002, p. 149). Or, as Kristeva (1987, p. 182) describes this practice, "violence of mystical dualism [is committed]. Its unifying kindness prepares the reign of the subject that has been unified by his own judgment, no longer affective but knowing". Davis (2002, p. 149) summarises this critique of love as benevolence which is founded in knowledge:

Romanticized unity and its presumed benevolence always threaten violence in the context of unequal power relations. . . . [L]ove, as a feminist anti-

imperialist strategy, must fall into its own alienated history – situated within systems of domination – in order to comprehend the impossibility of its epistemological basis.

As I will show in the analysis of the research data that follows, Davis introduces the idea of love that has the ability of not knowing what the other wants, which can work within the context of unequal power relations. Love must work as an ethic that acknowledges the other as one who speaks for themselves, and to whom love responds by listening. Understanding the other does not happen in totality at any one moment, either from any disclosure by the other, or by knowledge the subject has of the person (Davis, 2002, pp. 146-147). The practice of love and understanding for the other is an ongoing project. One aspect of obligatory love is the practise of an ongoing act of not-knowing – an ongoing curiosity to engage with the other and hear what they prefer in a relationship.

### **The path that is right for everybody, and a curiosity to engage the Other**

A hint of the practise of benevolence – the male hero coming to save his partner with love informed by knowledge – is available from the transcript of Russell's interview. Russell also provides an example of how to approach loving one's partner in a non-colonising way. I enter Russell's account where he expresses what he has learned for application to his second heterosexual relationship in contrast with his first:

I have learnt more about my partner's needs. . . . Upon reflection, that is probably because I have tried to find out more, and she has been willing to come forward with that information, whereas, in my first relationship it wasn't something you did, so you just went on a path that you thought was right for everybody, and it turned out not to be the right path. . . . It is almost an auto pilot thing.

This excerpt from Russell shows ethical movement from one relationship to another. The first sentence, "I have learnt more about my partner's needs" indicates a learning posture by Russell toward the Other, his partner. He continues, "I have tried to find out more". There is a curiosity to engage with his

second partner around what she wants from the relationship. Russell is expressing a not-knowing approach to his partner as the Other who can speak for herself. Russell treats his partner as a “concrete other” (see Benhabib, 1987, p. 86-87), that is, he regards her position as unique. In seeking out her voice on what she wants from the relationship Russell recognises the possibility of difference from that of his position on the relationship.

The contrasting auto pilot metaphor that Russell applies to his practices with his first relationship is an insightful way to describe the determining effects of hegemonic patriarchal discourses that constitute men. Pease (2010, p. 95), following Derrida’s (1967/1974) use of phallogentrism to describe the privilege that is associated with the male phallus, says that this privilege operates at the discursive level and refers to the “assumed dominance of masculinity and male-centredness across multiple sites of cultural and social relations”. The idea that “you just went on a path that you thought was right for everybody”, is an example of the “assumed dominance of masculinity and male-centredness”; in Davis’s (2002) terms, colonising knowledge that benevolently knows what the other needs. This approach fits within the category offered by Benhabib (1987, pp. 86-87) as “the generalised other”, that understands the other from the position of the subject, with a particular emphasis on what might be held in common and assumptions of equality of rights and obligation.

I continue with further learning from Russell, in regard to engaging curiously with one’s partner about their preferred relationship practices as love that comes from a position of not-knowing. Before Russell changed his approach to his second partner he took a reflexive stance:

[I realised that] there is a pattern forming here and it is me. I’m not meeting her needs, so what is it? What is it about me that is actually causing this to happen?

These reflexive questions can be the beginning of ethical movement. Russell is thinking about both his position in the relationship and the Other, in his partner, and her relationship preferences. Russell continues in this reflexive position:

Why is it? . . . I was actually saying “what is it that it means to be in a relationship where both parties are happy with the relationship, and not just assuming things?” Not just saying, “well okay, cos’ you have got this feeling of love for someone that that means that’s it!” That is your panacea and the relationship will work happily ever after. Obviously it did not work last time, so why was it going to work this time?

In this reflexive stance there are at least three shifts that can lead to Russell taking a different position on the relationship. First, he recognises the importance of “not just assuming things”. This is movement away from taking “a path that you thought was right for everybody”. Second, as a result of “not just assuming” Russell recognises the Other, in his partner, in the relationship. He seeks answers to how “*both* parties [can be] happy with the relationship”. Third, Russell questions his own basis for relationship, in the “feeling of love for someone” that is supposed to be the “panacea” for relationship. The reflexive recognition of his own basis for relationship, and of his partner in the relationship, is a shift that begins the possibility of a different relationship for Russell and his partner. In the context of Lyotard’s and Therbaud’s (1979/1985, p. 100) game metaphor for justice, Russell is beginning to “invent new moves, perhaps new rules” for his part in the relationship. Russell reflexively asks questions that challenge the relationship he has with dominant discursive knowledge of heterosexual relationship and love. He then moves onto mentioning a source of different knowledge and its effects:

Reading Gary Chapman’s book [1995] . . . that was revolutionary . . . to recognise differences. To actually recognise there are differences in people around me. Recognise that in my kids . . . and particularly in my partner. . . . Seeing what her primary love language [is], has just been the greatest thing ever.

### **Différance and discourse**

I notice the different discursive practices in the interpretation and application of Chapman’s book. The practice of *différance* and the constituting power of discourse stand out here. Peter, captured by a dominant patriarchal discourse, I suggest, interpreted Chapman’s text according to Benhabib’s (1987, p. 86)

“standpoint of the generalized other”. The moral categories that fit the practice of relationship according to the generalised other, Benhabib (1987, p. 87) writes, “are those of right, obligation and entitlement”. In Peter’s interpretation of Chapman’s book, he is cognizant of his own rights to be loved in his heterosexual relationship. Russell highlights difference, the different ways people feel and express love. “Our differences in this case complement rather than exclude one another”, Benhabib (1987, p. 87) writes, in discussing the standpoint of the concrete other. Russell questions the whole idea of a generalised and universal knowledge that is “right for everybody”, and he questions the part he personally plays in that. In the steps of undoing his constitution by dominant patriarchal practices, Russell asks questions of himself and his discursive practices that perhaps begin to answer Butler’s question: How do “we become available for transformation of who we are, a contestation that compels us to rethink ourselves?” (1995, p. 132). Russell’s questions, which challenge his previous discursive practices and knowledge, open the door to knowledge from a different discourse. Both Peter and Russell speak of love and both read the sign offered from Chapman’s book differently – *différance* and discourse at work.

### **Knowledge’s invitation to know for the Other**

Russell now continues with the discussion of how he uses Chapman’s text:

To actually understand what mine is [love language]. . . to actually *help* [emphasis added] my partner understand what hers is, and then to make a conscious decision that I actually want to love her that way so that she feels the most loved.

The sincerity of Russell’s language is not under question. However, there is also benevolence present in the language. The knowledge Russell has gained has invited him to know, and the word “help” suggests benevolently knowing for his partner. The “hero” has stolen his way into the process with Russell’s new knowledge about love and relationship. From being in a not-knowing position when Russell was earlier asking his reflexive questions, he is now in a knowing position of what can save his relationship, and perhaps his partner with it. I suggest love dressed up as benevolent knowledge has crept into the relationship

with Russell's desire to help his partner understand how she best experiences love.

This love as benevolent knowledge can repeat the dangers of romantic love and so continue the control and limitation of what becomes possible in the relationship. If dialogue is not entered into there is a danger that Russell's new knowledge can repeat the problem of going "on a path that you thought was right for everybody". The "violence of mystical dualism" can easily occur because "unifying kindness prepares the reign of the subject" (Kristeva, 1987, p. 182). As Davis (2002, p. 149) puts it, "romanticized unity and its presumed benevolence always threaten violence in the context of unequal power relations." Even in Russell's account of heterosexual relationship practices, where he shows reflexivity in critiquing and changing his original position on love and knowledge of his partner's preferences, he still gets captured into the desire to use new knowledge benevolently to help his partner within the context of their relationship.

Unless patriarchally constituted power relations produced in heterosexual relationships are recognised and addressed, they will continue to play a part in expressions of those relationships. One way of addressing patriarchal power relations, as an expression of obligatory love, is the suggestion of *not-knowing* and engaging in dialogue with a woman partner as concrete Other. In this way, she is positioned to express her desires and preferences for the relationship.

Another suggestion for obligatory love, which can supplement the previous two suggestions, is love as space and interested distance. This practice can help prevent the "romanticized unity" and "threaten[ed] violence" (Davis, 2002, p. 149) when the male heterosexual partner discovers new knowledge and is curious to engage with his partner. I now turn to theory for obligatory love as space and interested distance before applying it to material from the men's interviews.

## **Obligatory love as space and interested distance**

I have taken the idea of obligatory love as space and interested distance from Toye (2010, pp. 46, 48), who writes:

The establishment of a certain kind of space which allows for words to emerge and for an ethical relation to take place creates the possibility of a relation that does not reduce the other to the self. Yet this process of distancing and spacing is a very particular one: of interested rather than disinterested distance. (p. 46).

Love, therefore, I propose, is an ethical concept that names not only a particular qualitative relation between self and an Other, but a particular distance or spacing between them. (p. 48).

In the application of love as space and interested distance to material from the men's interviews, I utilise an interpretation of shame experienced by the male in a heterosexual relationship. The shame is an embodied sign that he is too close; he has overstepped the ethical space or distance between himself and his partner.

I take up a number of perspectives on shame that I think are valuable for this study. One of those perspectives is that of Epstein from his work in Melanesia. He writes, "instead of starting from some theoretically-grounded definition of shame . . . [rather] start with the vernacular terms themselves and . . . trace out their meanings as [they emerge] in various social contexts" (1984, p. 46). The social context for my study is shame experienced by a male in the context of heterosexual relationship. This experience of shame I would name "privilege shame" – the shame experienced by a male as he has disconnected from his relational ethics (Jenkins, 2009, p. 68). This shame stands in contrast to what might be called "victim shame" which can be experienced by the abused as the result of abuse. Privilege shame and victim shame fit closely with Weingarten's categories of "righteous shame and toxic shame" (2003, p. 169). Toxic shame is the self attacking shame that seems to bypass perpetrators of abuse and is taken in by the victim. Righteous shame, Weingarten (2003, p. 168) helpfully develops from the Greek word *aidos* (see "Aidos", 2010; Schneider, 1977/1992, pp. 21-22), which is associated with integrity, personal honour or values, that are guided by a sense of shame. The shame studied in this section, I emphasise, is shame experienced by a man, and is interpreted by him as a guide for the expression of important personal values in the social context of heterosexual relationship.



A second guideline I take from Epstein's (1984) approach is to begin with the vernacular terms for shame. From the interview with a man, I utilise his vernacular terms for shame, which contrast with the terms I use, and which open the way for shame as a guide to his reclaiming relational ethics (Jenkins, 2009, pp. 67-68). This relational and value-based approach to shame fits with that of Probyn (2005) whose work guides much of the analysis in this section. Probyn writes, "Shame is an affect of proximity. . . . [I]t teaches us about our relations to others" (pp. 34-35).

Another topic for theorising space and interested distance between heterosexual partners that briefly appears in the men's interviews is that of silence. I interpret silence between heterosexual partners, when it is initiated by a woman partner, as a sign that space is needed for her. The silence is not an invitation to fill the space with knowledgeable talk, but rather it is an invitation to respond otherwise. There are two brief moments from the men's interviews where this silence can be theorized and inform men's practice in heterosexual relationships.

### **Shame, indicative of interest in practising personal values**

Probyn (2005, p. ix) states that "shame is not usually thought of in a positive light". It was with this thinking about shame that I introduced the topic of shame into the research conversation. However, the man I was interviewing, Andrew, responded in a positive manner about shame:

I tend to feel shame more than embarrassment in those sorts of things. . . . When it is an area where I might have more pride in the fact that this is in an area where I normally work well . . . particularly [as] an encouraging and affirming person . . . then, if I snapped or said a passing comment that I haven't thought through, that has been interpreted as a negative, that is when I feel the shame. . . . A comment that was actually not misunderstood, but should never have been said, or was said in a context that just does not work or fit. There is a real shame of the fact that you know I just, I wish that wasn't me, that wasn't part of who I was.

Andrew connects interest and personal values with shame. He connects shame to his interest in the value of practicing as "an encouraging and affirming person".

In her work on shame, Probyn utilizes the work of Tomkins, a seminal researcher of shame who developed the notion of shame as productive and intimately connected to interest. Shame, Tompkins (1995, p. 134) argues, “operates only after interest or enjoyment has been activated”. Shame associated with interest, Probyn writes, includes personal values:

The things that make me ashamed have to do with a strong interest in being a good person. . . . What makes shame remarkable is that it reveals with precision our values, hopes, and aspirations, beyond the generalities of good manners and cultural norms. (2005, p. x)

The shame operates for Andrew after he has established personal ethics around how he is interested in behaving in his relationships. When Andrew’s actions in relationship cross the boundaries of his personal relational ethics he feels shame. Andrew makes a clear connection between his personal values regarding his desired actions – “encouraging and affirming” – and his sense of self or identity. In response to his actions not matching his values, Andrew says, “I wish that wasn’t me, that wasn’t part of who I was”. Probyn also regards shame as indicating when some important aspect of personal identity or sense of self is crossed, “Whatever it is that shames you will be something important to you, an essential part of yourself” (2005, p. x). Probyn’s and Andrew’s language fits with Spivak’s ideas of strategic essentialism. The idea of connecting shame to personal values and a valued sense of self is strategically essentialist, which can be helpful for re-establishing ethical practice.

### **Shame, indicative of a breach of ethics in relationship with the Other**

Andrew continues to talk about shame in the relationship with his partner:

I think the place where I feel shame the most in that sort of thing [with his partner] is when an issue has been raised, or a conflict. . . . And instead of accepting [what his partner has to say] . . . in the justification or the heat of things, actually throwing up things about my partner’s inadequacies, back at her, that is where I feel the most shame. It really is an abuse of power.

While clear connection can be made in this stanza to Andrew breaching his personal ethics of performing encouragement and affirmation toward others, in the context of heterosexual relationship there is another core ethic to note. The abuse of power in heterosexual relationships is the breaching of an egalitarian ethic that is central to ethical heterosexual relationships. Andrew has named abuse of power even though he does not overtly state that one of his personal ethics is to not abuse power. It is almost a tag line at the end of this story. But it is a tag line that recognizes the gravity of his abusive words to his partner. Shame has guided Andrew to recognise his serious breach of ethics.

Shame also brings Andrew back to an ethic that is important to him in the context of his heterosexual relationship. In reflecting on his actions referred to in the above account, Andrew says, “I have acted out of self-preservation instead of another understanding. That is where I feel the most shame”. Andrew had previously declared that he has a value of “love being other-person centred”. This is probably what Andrew is referring to with his words “another understanding”. The part shame plays here is significant in rerouting Andrew’s active breach of ethics back to recognition of a core relational ethic, “love as being other-person centred”. The importance of shame in this context cannot be ignored. As Probyn writes, “I want everyone to understand that shame is interesting and important: we cannot live without it, nor should we try” (2005, p. ix). In the context of heterosexual relationships it is important for men to hold the possibility of interpreting shame as indicating they have breached relational ethics, and shame is a call back to those relational ethics.

### **Shame, indicative of epistemological violence in relationship space**

Shame can be used as an indicator that interested distance has been breached in the context of obligatory love within heterosexual relationships. In Andrew’s situation, it is the abuse of intimate knowledge that he has of his “partner’s inadequacies” that breach that space. In the previous discussion with Russell, interested distance was threatened by his enthusiasm to “help” his partner with knowledge of how she might feel more loved – something she may well already know from her own experience and knowledge. In both scenarios, knowledge and ignorance propagate getting too close, or abusing the partner with lack of respect

for their own voice and relational resources. I suggest shame can be a relational resource for men in regard to any form of knowledge abuse that violates the relational space between partners.

### **Shame, a guide to learn and to reconciliation**

Shame, as a relational resource for knowledge abuse, is addressed by Probyn (2005, pp. 105-106) with her discussion on shame in the context of reconciliation between indigenous women and white women in Australia:

Shame has the task of making . . . interest urgent. . . . Shame works at a bodily level to open and close connection: shame is a switching point rerouting the dynamics of knowing and ignorance. But unlike empathy, shame does not permit any automatic sharing of commonality; rather, it poses deep limits to communication. This marking of incommensurability may, however, produce localized action, reconciliation performed in local realities, bringing the past into the present. It certainly produces interest that overwhelms the possibility of remaining in ignorance.

Shame helps Andrew recognise an “automatic sharing of commonality” with his partner, with the failure to practise his preferred relational ethic – “love as being other-person centred”. Hence, the shame has posed “deep limits to communication” with his partner. In talking of his response to the shame that comes from the breach of relational ethics Andrew says:

I will hold on a bit more to shame [as opposed to guilt] . . . I have got to re-establish my relationship back with the person. So, I have got to go and say, “Sorry”.

And sometime after that, he says:

There is times when shame will actually make me go quiet and so in some ways for me I wouldn't say anything more because I will just make it worse. So there is times when it is not necessarily helpful [with] the facts that I should actually apologise quickly. I need that time and space. . . . It is not shutting down . . . it is actually internalizing it.

It seems for Andrew, that where there are not deep limits to communication during his breach of relational ethics, there are after the breach. The recognition of his breach of relational ethics, the incommensurability between himself and the other person, is used by Andrew, possibly for learning and reflection, as indicated with “I need that time and space. . . . [I]t is actually internalising it”. This position, where Andrew “hold[s] on a bit more to shame” is, I suggest, one of deliberately using shame as an informative tool in the reconciliation process with his partner.

Andrew uses shame as a reflexive tool to guide and teach him about his breach of ethics and what is needed in the reconciliation process. Jenkins (2009, p. 68), writes that the experience of staying with the shame for a man who has used abuse “might foster accountability for his actions and an ethical reclamation with a sense of integrity”. And, as Probyn (2005, p. 106) writes in regard to reconciliation events in Australia, “The reconciliation events produced shame that posed a challenge to *learn*, and not to *know*”. I suggest shame in Andrew’s story issues the same challenge, which Andrew appears to take up in regard to obligatory love as space and interested distance between him and his partner.

With, or without shame, “a challenge to learn”, a *learning posture*, may be a concrete way to maintain space and interested distance by the male partner, in regard to a woman partner in a heterosexual relationship.

### **Silence when the conversation ceases**

There are two other practices that come out of the men’s interviews which I think can be helpful in holding a learning posture and makes possible obligatory love as space and interested distance. One of the men, Chris, recognises when he is shutting-off his partner in conversation. He states that it is mainly his partner who alerts him to this, but also, “I am able to assess it myself because you notice the conversation has ceased”. It is this noticing that the conversation has ceased that I want to theorise as silence. In Chris’s case, as a result of the shut-off, his partner ceases to participate in the conversation by remaining silent. The female partner in heterosexual relationships could also go silent for other reasons, such as those referred to previously – men delivering “saving knowledge”, or using knowledge to overtly abuse.

While the silence of women is often a response to oppression, and it is essential to recognise the oppressive aspect, I want to recognise something else that is “absent but implicit” (White, 2000, pp. 35-58; see Carey, Walther & Russell, 2009; Duvall & Béres, 2011, p. 99), which may also be present in the response of silence by women. In the same vein as White’s idea of “the absent but implicit” in therapy, in qualitative research Mazzei (2007, p. 2) theorises silence as the “absent presence”. Silence is present in qualitative research but it is usually ignored, along with what that silence might be speaking. With the silence of women in heterosexual relationships, in the midst of oppression, I suggest there may be an “absent presence” in their silence, other than what might be interpreted as acquiescence to the oppressive acts.

Silence can be regarded as one way for women in heterosexual relationship to speak up so that their voice might be heard. As Chris says, “I am able to assess it myself [the shut-off] because you notice the conversation has ceased.” Mazzei says “speaking without speaking is understood as a view of silence that places it not in opposition to speech, but that positions silent speech on a continuum with voiced speech” (2007, p. 40). Silence is a discursive move (Mazzei, 2007, p. 41) which can be regarded as resisting the positioning offered by the first speaker when the second speaker does not want to take up the position offered them.

Clair (1998, p. 147) repeats a story of an indigenous widow in mourning, who kept for twenty four years the imposed two year mourning period of silence for women in her community. In commenting on this story, Clair (1998, p. 147) writes, “Her silence speaks to us; it speaks of oppression; it enunciates defiance; it articulates resistance. . . . [I]t evidences creativity; it demonstrates control; it languishes in frustration. . . . It is both a local story and the collective story of all women”.

I include this brief story and the comments from Clair because it gives me, a man, a glimpse into the multi-subjective world of women when patriarchy and men dominate conversations and living space. Combined with Clair’s comments, I think the story poignantly articulates the power of silence to speak clearly into oppression. When silence is understood as giving voice to something it can

contribute to the speaking subject re-positioning to a learning posture in relation to the subject who is silent.

When a woman in a heterosexual relationship goes silent – as the conversation ceases – the male partner can contribute obligatory love by learning what a female partner may be voicing in her silence. He can invite her into a speaking space to articulate her knowledge of the relationship. In the words of Mazzei (2007, p. 42), who utilises Dauenhauer's (1980, p. 19) ideas, "attentiveness to the practice of keeping silent . . . might lead to a better understanding of the to-be-said and the ought-to-be-said, embedded in what-is-said dialogue".

### **The everyday discipline of listening and formulaic ways of response**

In his interview, Chris coined the phrase "everyday discipline of listening" as a preferred way for men to learn to consistently respond to their partners. This response is one important way men can respect and honour the alterity of their partners as a concrete Other. This "everyday discipline of listening", Chris says, is in contrast to the "formulaic" ways men relate to their partners, where the female partner is regarded as an object of treatment who is expected to respond gratefully to romantic patriarchal knowledge and practices.

These two contrasting practices appropriately sum-up this section on obligatory love. The "formulaic" response represents what obligatory love is intended to recognise and address in patriarchal heterosexual relationships: male privilege, assumptions of equality, oppressive unequal power relations, epistemological violence, breaches in respectful relational ethics, and controlling conversational practices. The "everyday discipline of listening" response reflects valued practices of obligatory love, such as entering into dialogue with a woman partner while being positioned in a respectfully curious learning posture. In moving to analysis that concerns *becoming love* in the men's interviews, I begin where the analysis involving obligatory love has brought this discussion, dialogue between partners.

### **Becoming love as dialogical conversation**

Becoming love, specifically for this study, involves conversations taking a dialogical form in contrast to those dominated by patriarchal power. Becoming

love, I propose, can be core to the production of a safe, sacred place. In developing conversational practices that fit with love in a safe, sacred place I use the work of Bakhtin (1984, 1986, 1990, 1993) on a dialogic approach to conversation. Becoming love, as a dialogic approach to conversation, is not only a respectful and negotiable approach to conversation with the other, it also recognises the constitutive nature of language in conversation. Hence, becoming love positions a male partner as not only recognising the constitutive nature of language, but also, through the conduct of dialogical conversations he and his partner will be in a process of becoming different. Emerson (1997, p. 221), a Bahktinian scholar, provides a metaphor for dialogical conversation that sits close to my ethical notion of becoming love; dialogical conversation is likened to “making art and creating love”. The constituent elements of this artistic and loving process, as dialogical conversation, are important to the analysis of the men’s interview material.

One of the elements in this process is “Outsidedness” (Emerson, 1997, pp. 207-264), or what Bakhtin (1990, p. 22) names “excess of seeing”. Outsidedness involves taking a step outside of a conversation to make sense of what the other in the conversation sees (White, 2009). This relates particularly to understanding language as historically and socially situated. In the practice of outsidedness, respect is given to the other by allowing room for the contribution of difference and multiplicity in dialogue (Sullivan, 2007, pp. 109-110; White, 2009). Intimacy, understood as shared or co-created meaning, and not as an individual or relationship quality (Weingarten, 1991), is an important partner with outsidedness in the artistic and loving dialogic process (White, 2009).

Outsidedness and intimacy can be understood for this section’s analysis as men reflecting on the bridging document from a different social and discursive location to the women of the first focus group, with an endeavour to understand the women’s meaning, and to contribute meaning that does not impose new meaning. There is “mutual-meaning making” (Weingarten, 1991, p. 286), where value is contributed to each person in dialogue; a dialogue that can be regarded as both ethical and intimate (Sullivan, 2007, p. 111; White, 2009).



Another important component of the dialogic process is “answerability” (Emerson, 1997, p. 218; White, 2009). Answerability refers to the requirement to respond to the uncertainty of truth and meaning by not closing down conversations with responses that have fixed truth or meaning. Answerability protects from the possibility of either partner overriding the other with some form of dominating truth. A practice that is employed with answerability is the “loophole” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 233). The loophole is the tentative use of language that provides space for the other in the conversation to amend meaning according to their understanding.

Finally, the dialogic process is only meaningful to those “who are related by some common conditions of life” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 166). Heterosexual relationship is one common condition of life that can allow for dialogical conversation. Another is the common conditions of this study. The common conditions of this study allow for the use of the dialogic elements – outsidedness, intimacy as mutual-meaning making, answerability and the loophole – to serve as the analytical bases for becoming love, and for aspects of this analysis to continue into Chapter Nine.

My approach to analysis for the dialogic process concerns the responses to the bridging document (Appendix D) of two of the men interviewed. Hence, it is not a pure dialogic process where both parties can continue in dialogue. But nonetheless, two of the men’s responses serve to illustrate the constituent elements of dialogical conversation, and make it possible for application to heterosexual relationships.

### **Outsidedness, potential mutual-meaning making, the loophole**

As with all the men interviewed, at the beginning of the interview with Chris I asked him, “what stood out in the bridging document and caught your attention in surprising ways?” Chris’s response is to the topic in the bridging document related to *conversations shaping relationship and identity*:

This is my answer to that question. I was unaware of the power of conversation in influencing individuals, especially in relation to behaviour, self-esteem, and identity, and how important that was. . . . I think a lot of it was to do with, the way the women were talking about how, I guess, how

they felt when they were being shut-down, when they were told they were nagging. . . . It was almost changing like their self-view, and then also their view of the relationship. . . . I don't know whether it is a male thing, but I don't generally consider conversation to be that powerful in terms of shaping.

Outsidedness, intimacy, and the loophole, are the aspects of dialogism I see in Chris's response to the bridging document. First, he accepts what the women of the first focus group have to offer in regard to conversation shaping identity. He believes what they have to say as genuinely being their experience. This equates to "outsidedness" (Emerson, 1997, pp.207-264), or "excess of seeing" (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 22); Chris has been able "to make sense of the moment, based on what can be seen by another" (White, 2009, "Dialogism and the aesthetic act," para. 2). A further helpful interpretation of outsidedness comes from Anderson (1997, p. 138-144), who makes the point that an important part of her dialogical approach to doing therapy is to "trust and believe" the clients. This "trust and believe" approach appears to be that taken by Chris in his response to the bridging document.

Secondly, while he accepts what the women say through the bridging document, Chris acknowledges his different position to the women: "I don't know whether it is a male thing, but I don't generally consider conversation to be that powerful in terms of shaping". Chris, I suggest, is not denying the experience of the women in this statement, rather, he is stating his experience and knowledge, which come to him as a man from a different social and discursive location. Importantly, from a dialogical process, Chris is not subjugating the women's position and experience to his. He states his position and social location as different to that of the women after he acknowledges and witnesses what the women have to say. In so doing, if the dialogue with the women of the first focus group were to continue, Chris has opened up the possibility of intimacy as mutual meaning-making.

My final point in regard to Chris's response to the bridging document is to how he has utilised words in leaving a "loophole" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 233) for meaning to be adjusted in the dialogue. Chris's use of the term, "I guess", half way through the above excerpt, might suggest some tentativeness in his response to the

bridging document that allows for an amendment to meaning from the first focus group, if that were possible. The tone of Chris's whole response above is one of new learning from the women and the bridging document. This tentativeness and new learning suggest an openness to responses back to him, to further dialogue. White (2009, "A Bakhtinian approach to dialogue," para. 1), says of Bakhtin's approach to dialogue, "Bakhtin's view of language extends beyond the written or spoken word alone to embrace . . . [that] which includes a consideration of tone, sound and body language as it is interpreted in dialogue." I interpret Chris's response to the bridging document as having a dialogical tone, and in so doing I suggest becoming love in action is illustrated.

### **A metaphor as the practice of outsidedness**

I continue in discussion of the dialogical process as becoming love with a metaphor offered by William. This metaphor comes from William's reflections on the bridging document topic *conversations shaping relationship and identity*. William briefly reflected on each of his committed heterosexual relationships in regard to how he may have shaped those relationships and his partners. He then introduces the metaphor of a sculpture to illustrate heterosexual partners shaping each other:

It is almost like sculpture . . . we are sculpting each other in the conversations and day to day lives . . . you do little bits here and there. You get a little mallet out and you tap away. You don't sort of get a hammer out and take great chunks because that is very damaging. . . . I would like to think that I am looking at my partner in twenty or thirty years, and thinking, she has developed in interesting ways, and I would like to think I have had a role in that. . . . I think you can express that a bit generally. Any time you are in contact with someone you are shaping that sandstone just a little tiny bit. It may not be much, but you just don't know that you might be walking through with a chisel, and you might accidentally take a chunk out of someone without realizing it.

Like Chris, but with some difference, I suggest in this excerpt William has utilised the dialogical practice of outsidedness. William shows acknowledgement and respect for the idea of conversation and relationship shaping identity by his

considered and sincere engagement with the idea through the use of the sculpting metaphor. While William's use of this metaphor can be questioned in terms of possible power production, he is engaging with the women's idea from his social location and discursive position as a man. William brings his unique perspective to the idea with a metaphorical form that provides him with meaning. While William is appropriating meaning for himself, he is not taking away from or subjugating the meaning the women originally intend, that conversation and relationship shape identity. William's metaphor does not reflect "patriarchal discourses of life and identity" that favour individualism, but he stays with the "relational understandings of life" (White, 2007, p. 30) that the women presented – partner's shaping each other. While William practises outsidedness through the use of the sculpting metaphor, that metaphor does require some critique.

### **Care, uncertainty, and humble mutual practice**

It is a strange coincidence that William uses a sculpting metaphor from the artistic world to engage with the idea of conversation and relationship shaping identity, as Bakhtin (1993, p. 64) does, to shape and explain the dialogical process. William has helpfully emphasized the danger of misshaping and injuring people in conversation with his use of the sculpting metaphor. However, he also uses a violent metaphor with the use of tools for shaping, "you get a little mallet out and you tap away", which is better than the "hammer" that "take[s] great chunks" out of people. The metaphor, even though amended, conjures up a painful and unwelcome process for dialogical conversations. This potentially painful process contrasts with Bakhtin's (1993, p. 64) use of the sculpting metaphor to explain the dialogic process as "[love] *linger[ing] intently* over an object, to hold and sculpt every detail in it, however minute." Anderson (1997, pp. 134-136) suggests Bakhtin's explanation of the sculpting metaphor for dialogism reflects care, humility, and uncertainty in practice.

The art form of sculpting is a helpful metaphor from William, clearly fitting with a Bakhtinian metaphor for dialogic processes. But William's use of tools, the little mallet tapping away, may suggest a "mastery" approach to relationship (Shotter, 2003, pp. 461-462), that stands in contrast to Anderson's (1997) understanding of Bakhtin's design for dialogue. In the same vein as Anderson, Shotter (2003, p.

462) suggests a “disorienting” approach to dialogical relationship. Disorientation can arise because of the presentation of unfamiliar knowledge and different practices for relationship and life. The disorientation is best responded to by staying in responsive dialogue with the other, and not resorting to the known and familiar of giving solutions or explanations from our knowledge repertoire (Shotter, 2003, pp. 461-463). The art form, or sculpture, maybe an appropriate metaphor for dialogue, but the process does not require mastery or foreknowledge. Dialogue is a process sculpted by a humble approach, and a deliberate practice of two people together, carefully, “making art and creating love” (Emerson, 1997, p. 221).

### **Answerability to come**

With his application of the sculpting metaphor William has attempted to co-construct meaning with the women of the first focus group. Whether William has engaged and contributed meaningfully for the women of the first focus group cannot be known. But, because of the “common conditions” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 166) of “simultaneous but different [research] space” (Holquist, 2002, p. 21) William’s, and Chris’s, attempts at mutual-meaning making have opened the possibilities for further dialogue with the women of the second focus group. Both Chris’s contribution and William’s metaphor, situated within a dialogical process, are answerable to the women of the second focus group. The women from the second focus group do respond to William’s metaphor. This response is taken up and discussed in the next chapter.

### **Double deconstruction and the democracy to come**

In this chapter I have invited men in heterosexual relationships to an ethical heterosexual relationship. This invitation serves as the second part of a double deconstruction begun in the previous chapter. This second part of the double deconstruction has intended to overturn the hierarchy of patriarchally dominated heterosexual relationship practices and to introduce a safe, sacred place as the new concept for heterosexual relationship. Utilising the idea of Derrida’s democracy to come with its priority given to the other, and poststructural ethics on responding to the other, I developed the practices of obligatory love and becoming love as ethical responses men can make to their partners in heterosexual relationships.

These two practices of love, when taken up by men, serve to re-position men in heterosexual relationships so that patriarchal practices might be minimised and an egalitarian heterosexual relationship made possible.

## **Deleuze and the first and second focus groups**

Chapters Five through to this chapter have been written as a response to the data produced by the first focus group. This response has focussed on their relational subjectivities that are shaped by patriarchally controlled heterosexual relationship practices, and on their preference for heterosexual relationship to be expressed in an egalitarian and ethical manner, as indicated in the invitation to a safe, sacred place. In Chapter Six I made use of Deleuze's thought to give priority to the ideas and knowledges of the women involved in this study. In the following Chapter (Nine), this practice is continued with priority given to the thought and knowledges of the second focus group of women as they respond to the document from the men's interviews (Appendix G) and the bridging document (Appendix D) from the first focus group. But first, I conclude here by acknowledging the priority of the first focus group by once again joining the ideas of Deleuze with theirs as an expression of hope that the women's ideas and knowledges may continue to be effective.

Based on the application of Spinoza's provocative statement "we do not even know of what a body is capable" (Deleuze, 1968/1990, p. 226), Deleuze's philosophy always looked to ask the question "how might we think about things in ways that would open up new regions for living" (May, 2005, p. 3)? I conclude with the same form of question regarding the first focus group and their idea of a safe, sacred place. Of what is a focus group of six women capable? What may they cause us to think about that would open up new regions for men and women to live ethically and lovingly in heterosexual relationship?



## Chapter 9. Resistance stories

I close off the data generation with a final contribution from the second focus group of women. Following the format of data generation and now in the thesis I hope to make a small contribution of accountability as suggested by Pease (1997, p. 147). I invited the second focus group women to respond to the bridging document generated by the first focus group (Appendix D) and the men's interviews document (Appendix G). Between one and two weeks before the second focus group met I emailed or posted to the women these two documents and a further document (Appendix J) that briefly outlined the three stage process of data generation. Appendix J included outsider-witness questions to guide the group discussion. I introduced the discussion: "My hope is that you can speak of what interests you particularly, without a sense of particular expectation or evaluation".

My approach to analysis in this chapter is to take a double-listening (White, 2006) position that hears both dominant stories of patriarchal practice, and stories of resistance from the second focus group. Thus, the second focus group story can be read as "double-storied" (Denborough, 2006, p. 116).

From their reading of the bridging document, and in solidarity with the women of the first focus group, the stories the second focus group women tell are of the effects of dominant patriarchal practice that shaped their identity, or subjectivity. On the other hand the women also tell stories of resisting patriarchal constitution or reclaiming a valued subjectivity. This same double-storying continues with the women's response to the men's interview document. The women respond to Andrew's story – laughing with his partner about her scratching the car – as a story that stands outside of patriarchal practice. The women challenge the sculpture metaphor from William, offering instead, a dance metaphor that indicates agency and freedom, particularly for a woman partner. In the last section of the chapter I include a spectrum of strategies the women offer for achieving egalitarian heterosexual relationship. These strategies are taken from their concluding observations of the bridging document and the men's interviews document.



## **Responses to the bridging document**

I tell three stories of resistance from each of the women. These stories express their resistance to, and/or reclamation of their identity, or subjectivity, in response to their partners' patriarchal practices. These stories are told in response to the women's reading of the bridging document.

### **Migration of identity**

The difficult and painful transition people can experience in moving from the effects of an abusive relationship to a place of experiencing and reclaiming a preferred identity is given the metaphor of "migration" by White (1995, pp. 99-104). The women of the second focus group each talk of this "migration" from patriarchal abuses to an identity, or subjectivity, that is free of abuse and reclaiming of practices for living that they value.

In a response to her reading of the bridging document, Alice says:

It has an impact. What one person does has an impact on the other. If you tried talking and you are not heard then you are left with no choice but to nag. . . . That is what I ask myself repeatedly through this [reading the bridging document]: "Who is this relationship for?"

Alice's question, "who is this relationship for?" acts as her guide for understanding the bridging document. Alice then continues her reflections on the bridging document. As a guide to understanding her own relational subjectivity Alice resonates with Hannah's story (first focus group) of her partner not using her name in the constitution of her identity:

Personally I have [lost my identity]. . . . It used to bug me that my partner would not use my name. . . . I think in some ways I have [lost my identity]. That is what I have only come to terms with in the last couple of days, because I still can't leave. I've left [physically] but I haven't left.

Alice connects with Hannah's experience of namelessness when her partner refused to use her name. This "namelessness" has constitutive power for their subjectivity. Alice continues to explain why she still experiences a loss of identity

after physically leaving her partner. She expresses the difficulty of emotionally leaving the relationship because her identity is still connected to the man.

Alice continues with further exploration of her experience of identity in the context of this relationship:

To honour myself as a person, to take myself out of the situation, which was basically neglect. . . . [He was neglecting] me, the relationship, the needs of the family, material needs, like money, house. . . . It was not knowing my identity. I think the depression came about from the neglect, and that nothing changed. . . . That feeds into a depression cycle. . . . I would put my needs on the table but they weren't heard. In fact the opposite would happen. That is where the neglect comes in. . . . [I tried] to change my mindset, and in the end if that does not make a difference then I honour myself by taking myself out [of the relationship]. . . . It's been a process though. It was nine months ago, physically nine months ago, but emotionally [I'm] still doing it. . . . Cutting it off [the relationship] because in the end, it's the relationship that we have that is good for my partner, but it still is not what I want. . . . That is my original question like, who is the relationship serving? Who does it work for? Does it work for both of them [both partners], or just one? . . . It worked well for him [Alice's partner].

Alice ties her experience of her relationship to her question "who is this relationship for?" In standing in solidarity with the first focus group, the answer to the question makes visible patriarchal male privilege in Alice's heterosexual relationship. Alice "speaks herself into existence" (Davies, 1990-1999, p. 25) as a woman who both experiences the effects of patriarchal practices and enacts resistance to those practices. Alice's practice of resistance is to physically leave the relationship, and to do so in honour of her identity: "I honour myself by taking myself out". Then, Alice talks of the difficult process of emotionally leaving the relationship after physically leaving her partner nine months previously. In commenting on the migration of identity process, White (1995, p. 100), says "in this space, as in any migratory process, women characteristically go through a range of experiences, many of them difficult . . . confusion and disorientation reigns". While Alice does not name the emotions she experiences, she indicates

the difficult struggle of leaving the emotional attachment to the relationship. The migratory process is difficult for Alice – feelings of “confusion and disorientation” may or may not be part of it. Nonetheless, Alice’s story indicates that while physically resisting patriarchy may take courageous steps, the migratory process of emotional resistance, recovering a preferred relational subjectivity, takes many more difficult steps – some of which may bring confusion and disorientation.

Sandra’s story of resistance joins with Alice’s story, as the bridging document and the women’s discussion in the second focus group opened up a “reflecting surface” (White, 2011, p. 119) that provided opportunity to remember and reflect on personal stories of resistance to patriarchal abuse. Sandra gives a personal account that resonates with the bridging document story of Hannah’s identity being constituted by patriarchal relationship practices:

I was thinking also about identity. It wouldn’t be such an extreme [as Hannah’s], but it is really this thing about, my partner told me sometimes, I’m controlling and I’m not tolerant. . . . I was completely stunned, because I was thinking that is absolutely not correct. That is not true! But, on the other side [I] was asking [myself], “am I really doing this?” [I was] asking myself a question, “am I doing this?”. . . . Men are more in [a] position [of] never asking the question. If they are doing something, it is always “you are the one [who is doing something wrong]!”. . . . A lot of time in [my] relationships, it’s more that they are blaming me for something I am not doing. But they are not asking themselves what is their [part in it]. . . . It is really interesting because I am going through this process now with my partner, ex partner. To look at our relationship and what went wrong . . . [I] ask him now, “did you really think that I was controlling and intolerant?” Now he says, “no, you are not”. This is something, my god, and I was sitting there all the time wondering what else can I do? How much more tolerant do I have to be? I was really tolerant in most of those cases.

Sandra’s partner’s oppressive accusations and the exercise of power invited Sandra to practise self-surveillance in response to those accusations. In articulating the therapeutic importance of recognising resistance when working with people who

have experienced abuse, Wade (1997, p. 23), writes “alongside each history of violence and oppression there runs a parallel history of prudent, creative, and determined resistance”. Parallel with Sandra’s story of accusations and self-surveillance is a story of resistance. Sandra expresses opposition to her partner’s accusations with her statement, “I was thinking that is absolutely not correct. That is not true!” She cites the unfairness of the accusations where the men in her life, in “blaming me for something I am not doing . . . are not asking themselves what is their [part in it]”. These statements reflect a “parallel history” of resistance with the history of patriarchal attempts at constituting Sandra’s subjectivity. The resistance continues to the present time for Sandra, when she confronts her ex-partner and asks him “did you really think that I was controlling and intolerant?” This is a question that puts into action the resistance Sandra had positioned herself in throughout the relationship. The question positions her partner as accountable to Sandra for his accusations. In concluding with the self-witnessing statement – “I was really tolerant in most of those cases” – Sandra reclaims a subjectivity that is no longer abused by accusation that is made from a privileged position.

Deidre, the third woman in the second women’s focus group, also tells a story of resistance to patriarchal abuse in her heterosexual relationship. Her story is in solidarity with the first focus group and connects with the topic in the bridging document, *conversation and relationship shaping identity*.

Straight after Alice had completed her story, Deidre talked of her experience of her partner centring his ideas:

I was in a relationship where he wasn’t neglectful but he knew what he wanted and he thought that I should want the same. And that if I did not want what he wanted there was something wrong with me. . . . I think I doubted myself. I thought, what is wrong with me? Why don’t I want to spend time with him? I musn’t love him, but I knew I loved him. I just did not want what he wanted. I could not make him want what I wanted. I could only put on the table, “this is the kind of relationship that I want”. He would go, “O, yeah, yeah, that is what I want too”. But that wasn’t how he would act or behave. So, in the end I said we just want different things. “No, no we don’t”, he would say. He didn’t want to hear it because it was too scary for

him to hear it. Sometimes that might be perhaps why guys don't listen, or they shut down. They don't want to hear what their wife or partner has to say. Maybe it challenges something for them.

I hear in Deidre's words, Levinas' "reduction of the other to the same" (1961/1969, p. 43). When there are unequal power relations an attempt to reduce the Other to the same can result in abuse. In the context of inappropriate expressions of love, Davis (2002, p. 149), writes "romanticized unity and its presumed benevolence always threaten violence in the context of unequal power relations". Deidre says "I doubted myself", in regard to her partner's thinking that she "should want the same" as him for the relationship. Deidre's resistance to this "reduction of the other to the same" (Levinas, 1961/1969, p. 43) is noticed in her not wanting to spend time with her partner, and in her putting "on the table . . . the kind of relationship that I want". Deidre's resistance, not only takes these two forms but, I suggest, it is also in how she presents the kind of relationship she wants. The use of the term, "put on the table", is colloquial for a mediatory and dialogical approach to a conversation, where the other party in the dialogue can then respond by placing their response back "on the table" as part of the negotiating process.

Deidre's approach to dialogue, as she reports it, in Bakhtinian terms, is not monologic, but rather, a dialogical approach. A monologic approach may be indicative of that taken by Deidre's partner: "This performs a kind of discursive 'death' of the other, who, [is] unheard and unrecognised" (Robinson, 2011, July 19, Polyphony and Dialogism, para. 6). Deidre, in resistance to this possible monologic approach, puts her preference "on the table" as an invitation to dialogue and negotiation with her partner: "In a fully dialogical world-view, the structure of the text should itself be subordinate to the right of all characters to be treated as subjects rather than objects" (Robinson, 2011, July 19, Polyphony and Dialogism, para. 15). I suggest, in resistance to potential monologic control of the relationship, Deidre is dialogically offering an opportunity for her partner to relate to her as a subject with her own preferences for the relationship. If this opportunity were taken up, Deidre and her partner, and not patriarchy, would define the "structure of the text" of their heterosexual relationship. However, her partner does not take up Deidre's invitation. At the end of the excerpt, Deidre

expresses continued resistance to patriarchal productions of power by making meaning of the problem of the relationship in ways that are separate from her identity – “it was too scary for him to hear it. . . . [T]hat might be perhaps why guys don’t listen, or they shut down. They don’t want to hear what their wife or partner has to say”.

The three women in the second focus group, Alice, Sandra, and Deidre, tell personal relationship stories of patriarchal privilege and abuse that define their subjectivities in painful and subjugating ways. In parallel with these stories, they tell stories of resistance that indicate a journey to preferred subjectivities with, or without, their partner’s participation.

## **Responses to the men’s interviews document**

The second focus group women’s resistance to patriarchal productions of power continues with their selection of one story that they liked from the men’s interviews (Appendix G) and one that they did not like. The first selection is Andrew’s story of his response to his partner scratching their car. The second selection is the sculpting metaphor for relationship offered by William. In choosing these two stories the women were responding to a question I asked, “What stands out for you as you reflect on the men’s interviews document?”

### **A story of preferred relationship practice**

Deidre introduces her preference for Andrew’s story:

What stood out for me in the document, probably because it relates to some of my past, and some of the things I dealt with, was the bit about Andrew. How he said his wife scratched the car, and she was terrified in telling him about it. However when she did, that jumped out at me. . . . They laughed about it together. . . . Being able to be yourself.

Alice responds to Deidre’s comments:

Yeah, I liked that too. I just think that shows the potential if that connecting is working well, and she has got this history of being terrified. . . . What would have happened if he had’ve reacted [to her with judgement]?

Both Deidre and Alice are clear in their preference for this story and their reasons for this preference. Deidre ends her caption by stating “[b]eing able to be yourself”. This story supports Deidre’s preferred identity claim that she has a right to express herself as a unique human being in a heterosexual relationship: In the terms of my analysis above, in a heterosexual relationship “all characters [have the right] to be treated as subjects rather than objects” (Robinson, 2011, July 19, Polyphony and Dialogism, para. 15). Deidre recognises, in Andrew’s story, an opportunity for a woman in a heterosexual relationship to be free of abuse, to experience laughter, instead of experiencing her subjectivity being shaped by control and abuse. The practice of a man not blaming a mistake or accident on his woman partner and, contrary to patriarchal practice, responding to her with humour as an equal, is a preferred practice for heterosexual relationships recognised by Deidre.

Alice’s question in response to Andrew’s practice – “what would have happened if he had’ve reacted?” – recognises the potential for patriarchally abusive responses to a woman in a heterosexual relationship. Because of male privilege that comes with the production of patriarchal power the man’s responses matter when it comes to the female partner’s experience of self and preferred subjectivities. Alice’s question indicates that a man can respond either critically or with affirmation to his partner, and his response has powerful constitutive effects. Two examples of those contrasting responses and effects are Deidre’s and Alice’s reported experiences of abuse in their heterosexual relationships, and Andrew’s account where Deidre acknowledges the laughter, and recognises the sense of agency for a preferred identity. Without naming it, Alice’s question invites the idea that patriarchally produced male privilege can define a heterosexual relationship and the subjectivity of a woman partner. The question acknowledges that a man can relate to his partner in ways that may include abuse or affirmation. Hence, Alice and Deidre choose Andrew’s practice of responding to his partner as he did, in resistance to the patriarchal alternatives of abusive belittlement or reprimand that treat a woman partner as an object.

While Alice’s question invites the possibility of understanding that because of male privilege a man can choose how to respond, this knowledge of privileged choice is invisible in Alice’s and Deidre’s responses to Andrews story. This

invisible privilege Andrew has to define the terms of the relationship is indicative of invisible male privilege. Alice and Deidre express resistance to patriarchal abuse through their choice of Andrew's story as naming a preferred relationship practice. In cooperation with Alice's and Deidre's resistance, the invisibility of patriarchally produced male privilege is good reason for men to join women in resisting and confronting that privilege and oppression (Mullaly, 2010, p. 293).

### **A story of resistance to violence and abuse**

As indicated in the previous chapter, an important component in dialogical conversation is "answerability" (Emerson, 1997, p. 218; White, 2009) of which the "loophole" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 233) is a strategic component. Answerability concerns the approach in dialogical conversation of being tentative with truth and meaning. This approach makes space for the other person to respond with their understanding. In the previous chapter I indicated that this answerability process may occur with a second focus group response to two of the contributions from the men's interviews: Chris's thoughts on everyday listening and William's sculpture metaphor for heterosexual relationship as shaping subjectivity. The second focus group participate in this answerability process with a response to William's sculpture metaphor. Alice questions the metaphor:

I found myself reacting to the metaphor of sculpting and the mallet. . . . I have put, "there is too much power". . . . It sort of goes against autonomy. . . . The mallet holder [has too much power] even though they are saying they both have got a mallet. . . . I am reacting to that. . . . It is almost more enmeshing, rather than keeping separateness. . . . You know, just being with people is going to affect us. But yeah, I don't know, maybe it is just a violent metaphor because it involves a mallet and blows. Maybe it is just something about the violence.

Alice introduces the idea of the mallet working on a sculpture as being a violent metaphor for how people shape each other in conversation and relationship. My critique of this metaphor in the previous chapter, which is sequentially predated by Alice's critique, takes the same position as Alice's critique. I noted that Bakhtin (1993, p. 64), in referring to art as a metaphor for the dialogical process, emphasizes the care and attention that goes into that process. This care and



attention perspective seems to be the different meaning Alice is taking as she responds dialogically to William's sculpting metaphor. Like other rhetorical devices, "metaphor allows different listeners to hear the same passage of speech in radically different ways" (Adams, Towns, & Gavey, 1995, p. 396). Alice, in reading William's metaphor differently is not discounting his idea. Rather, Alice is stating an alternative meaning for the metaphor. This alternate meaning makes possible recognition of the metaphor's limitations, and begins a process of looking for another metaphor that allows for understandings of heterosexual relationship that fit with Alice's preferences. This dialogical process, where meaning can be recognised and altered, is important to heterosexual relationships. Deliberately or inadvertently, the male partner can introduce rhetorical devices into the conversation that support patriarchal discourses of male entitlement and privilege (Adams et al., 1995).

Alice continues, as she works on understanding her reaction to the sculpting metaphor and the search for a more appropriate one:

Maybe that mallet is like believing what somebody else says [about me]. So that is the way I am taking it. . . . It is like giving the other person power. . . . To have autonomy [is a personal goal], that I say what I want and who I am. I haven't had it [autonomy]. I have had somebody else, in my childhood experience particularly, saying this is how you are going to be. . . . It is quite a violent metaphor. . . . Rather than being a beauty . . . like a dance. . . . In that [a dance metaphor], each has still the autonomy to say "I don't want to dance anymore", and actually sit down.

Alice states her reasons for disliking the sculpting and mallet metaphor, and alludes to heterosexual relationship "being a beauty . . . like a dance". By introducing the dance metaphor into the conversation Alice expresses resistance to ideas and practices from the sculpting metaphor that represent too much of her history of abuse. The sculpture metaphor suggests the person with the mallet produces power that limits the possibilities for agentic movement by the person being shaped. This limiting of agency is connected to the constitution of Alice's subjectivity with her words, "what somebody else says. . . . [T]his is how you are going to be". In positioning theory terms, Alice recognises subject positions, and

the importance of accepting or refusing them when it comes to power and the constitution of subjectivities. As an acceptable metaphor for heterosexual relationship, the dance metaphor offers more space for personal agency in refusing or accepting subject positions. The dance metaphor invites equality, while the sculpture metaphor can be understood as one partner shaping another. Thus, with the dance metaphor for heterosexual relationship, one has room to say “what I want and who I am” – the exercising of agency in naming one’s preferred identity. The dance metaphor appears to fit much more with Emerson’s idea of dialogical conversations as two people together “making art and creating love” (1997, p. 221).

Alice’s response to, and recognition of unequal power relations and violence in the metaphor offered by William, serves to illustrate the importance of the “answerability” (Emerson, 1997, p. 218; White, 2009) space provided in dialogical conversations. With this space in operation, those who do not have the same privilege as their conversational partner have the opportunity to be heard, and the adjustment of meaning can occur for the production of preferred relational subjectivities. The second focus group response to William’s sculpture metaphor not only serves as an example of the importance of dialogical conversations, but also, as an act of resistance to a metaphor that can be interpreted as validating patriarchal abuse.

## **A spectrum of strategies**

Both the first focus group and the second focus group women offered resistance strategies to challenge the patriarchal constitution of heterosexual relationship in their partner’s practices. I have selected three resistance strategies offered by the second focus group that I think a man can take up in joining a woman partner in resisting the patriarchal constitution of heterosexual relationship.

### **Discursive empathy**

The first of these strategies comes from Deidre. Deidre’s comments come in the context of a conversation about the research method of individually interviewing men in preference to using a focus group for them. Deidre’s comment is generic, related to any form of relationship:

Sounds like it is harder for the guys . . . this whole relating stuff. . . . [Relating] doesn't come as naturally to them. Like, I can sit here and talk until the cows come home about this stuff.

From her social location as a woman, Deidre's empathic understanding of the struggle many men have with conversations in relationship raises the idea of "discursive empathy" (Sinclair & Monk, 2004, p. 342; 2005). Discursive empathy acknowledges the struggle and pain people experience, but it extends this acknowledgement beyond the individual by locating the struggle or problem in socio-cultural and political contexts (Sinclair & Monk, 2005). As White (1997, p. 223) suggests, "We can explore the ways in which identity, subjectivity, and relationship are all products of cultural knowledges and practices". In the context of therapy, Sinclair and Monk say that "discursive empathy points to developing an awareness of the discourses and positioning of ourselves and of our clients" (2004, p. 343). Discursive empathy acknowledges the different locations of different people "amongst a sea of discourses" (p. 343). This discursive empathy is what Deidre's words can be interpreted as providing, in acknowledging the difference between her and many men in being able to relate, or talk helpfully about a relationship.

Each of the five men interviewed, in varying ways, struggled with relating to their heterosexual partners in an egalitarian manner through conversation. One of my personal struggles in writing about the men interviewed has been to acknowledge male privilege and the oppression or restriction this has caused their partners, knowing that many men do not see that they are privileged. Individual men feel the struggle, vulnerability, and anxiety about their heterosexual relationships and the idea of male privilege seems foreign and unfair to them (Brooks, 2003, pp. 166-167; Parker, 2003, p. 228; Rampage, 2003, p. 203). But, as Pease (2010, p. 103) writes, "Men can be both privileged and miserable at the same time". It is important to acknowledge the struggle that many men experience in many aspects of life, and also, in this study, in regard to heterosexual relationship conversations, without diminishing the knowledge that being male has generally privileged men in relation to women. An emphasis on the individual unhappiness and lack of fulfilment in men's lives can be used to deny the existence of privilege, and can act as "significant obstacles to the struggle for equality" (Pease, 2007, p. 503). An

acknowledgement of struggle for men without an awareness and acknowledgement of their privilege changes nothing of the oppression and inequality that the privilege has maintained.

In response to literature on men and masculinities where men, the fissures between men, and the pain men experience are the focus, Macleod (2007), states that this focus “never undoes the masculinity/femininity binary . . . [and] women once again become invisible” (pp. 9-10); thus male privilege in relation to women is not addressed. The focus in addressing both men’s pain and the privilege men participate in must occur together, with patriarchy and power treated as the dominant signifiers (MacLeod, 2007; McLean, 1996, p. 24; Pease, 2002a, p. 47). Taking this discursive approach to men’s pain, struggle with egalitarian relationship practices, and privilege, is an act of discursive empathy. The cultural and discursive positions that men take up in patriarchal discourses is where the problem of pain and privilege is produced. Taking a discursive empathy approach is a strategy that can provide men with agency as they work to re-position themselves culturally and discursively (Sinclair & Monk, 2005, pp. 344-346) for egalitarian relationship practices.

### **I’m the toilet cleaner: How egalitarian are these egalitarian relationships?**

During general discussion about this study, male privilege and equality in heterosexual relationships entered into the second focus group conversations. From this context, Alice offers a story from her own experience of the practice of male privilege and inequality:

I have written a question here . . . we are talking about . . . egalitarian and non-egalitarian relationships. And I have got this question, “who cleans the toilet?” It’s expectations isn’t it, I think. . . . The reason is, the experience was, even after I have separated . . . my partner was getting ready doing a whole lot of cooking for a family occasion. So I went over there, [to his residence] and said to him “how could I help?” And he said “clean the toilet”.

In commenting on this request for her to clean the toilet, Alice states what she experiences as her position or role in the family, “I’m the toilet cleaner”. Immediately, Alice follows this with the question, “How egalitarian are these egalitarian relationships?” With this question, Alice brings into focus the purpose of this study – addressing inequitable heterosexual relationship practices. I read Alice’s commentary and question as indicative of unrecognised male privilege in practice. Instead of, perhaps, asking Alice what she might like to do, or offering her the opportunity to work alongside him in the kitchen in preparing for the family occasion, her partner assigns Alice the task of cleaning the toilet. “Who cleans the toilet?” is a question that invites the exploration of how inequity can occur and be addressed in the household chores of heterosexual couples.

The question, “who cleans the toilet?”, reflects something of the work of the feminist consciousness raising groups in the 1970s where “women’s roles and experiences” were examined (Enns, 1993, p. 6), particularly the disproportionate amount of household labour they worked at (Ehrenreich, 2000). One important point about this household labour was not so much that it was demeaning, but that it resulted in an inequitable relationship, with the woman partner constantly being the one to clean-up after her male partner (Ehrenreich, 2000). As then, when women were beginning to address these inequities in households, so now, where the female partner carries out household labour that cleans-up after her male partner, it is regarded as a production of power (Parker, 2003, p. 226). This production of power is “doing gender” (West & Zimmerman, 1987) where women are constituted as inferior to men or “designed” to privilege men. While questions regarding who cleans the toilet and the like in regard to household chores are not new, they remain critical to understanding gender relations and power, and hence, equality in heterosexual relationships.

The question, “who cleans the toilet?”, also takes me back to Chapter Five with Sue. The toilet was the only room Sue could go to for solace and to have space to work out how to respond to her partner and develop a strategy to get him involved in the family. The toilet is where Alice is told to go to, to clean, by her separated partner after volunteering help in preparing for a family occasion. In each case, the woman partners are positioned to end up in the toilet because of discrepancies in the production of power. I suggest that these two stories are symbolic of the

inequality between men and women in heterosexual relationship, and the inappropriate exercise of power afforded by male privilege through patriarchy. The question, “who cleans the toilet?”, is specifically symbolic for this study in that it invites both heterosexual partners to answer any question to do with the tasks and roles each attends to in their household. Answers to this question, and others like it, can make the way possible for asking why a particular person is the one to do certain tasks. These “why” questions can open conversations on the topic, and begin the process of exposing assumptions, or to use Alice’s words, the “expectations” that the woman partner will be “the toilet cleaner”.

This study emphasizes the centrality of conversation to produce egalitarian heterosexual relationships. Alice’s question is a symbolic, and practical, reminder of the conversational requirement for ethical heterosexual relationships. Heterosexual relationship conversations that are “ongoing” (Cultrane, 1989) and “open” (Benjamin, 2003) are integral to the continual negotiation of meaning and practices within the relationship. Alice’s question, “who cleans the toilet?” can then be reframed as, “how have you both arrived at a place of deciding who cleans the toilet?” This requirement, that egalitarian heterosexual relationships be framed by dialogic, open and ongoing conversations between partners brings us to the final strategy, offered by Sandra.

### **Dialogical conversations must recognise power inequity and privilege**

In the context of discussing the contribution this study might make to men and women and heterosexual relationships, Sandra said, rather pragmatically, “The only thing which needs to happen is that men and women are coming together and talking together”.

I highlight this comment because it fits with how I concluded the previous chapter, and have reiterated in this chapter, that dialogical conversations are important to ethical heterosexual relationships. There are two points I add to Sandra’s suggestion, and to the idea of dialogical conversation.

First, in the process of talking together, men are required to recognise the power and privilege that has been afforded them in gendered relationships and

conversations. The assumption of equality needs to be exposed and replaced by recognition of gender inequality, so that conversations, “men and women . . . talking together”, can be equitable and ethical. To help with this process of equitable conversation I suggest the “partnership accountability” model offered by Hall (1996) following Tamasese and Waldegrave (1996). In this approach the model of hierarchical accountability upwards is reversed. The group who has suffered injustice is the one to whom the group(s) who have practised injustice are accountable. “The best judges of injustice are the groups that have been unjustly treated. Thus, the women are accorded the role of guardians of gender equity” (Tamasese & Waldegrave, 1996, p. 55). Sandra’s suggestion, that men and women come together and talk together, is essential for ethical heterosexual relationships. But, for equitable conversation to occur, the acknowledgement of power and privilege inequity is required, which in turn can be addressed by adopting a partnership accountability model.

The second point I raise supports Sandra’s suggestion by highlighting the obligation that men talk with women about egalitarian relationships, and not just with other men. When men do not include women in conversation about resolving any gender-based problem, including problems in heterosexual relationship, the real possibility of not addressing power and privilege can occur. I take this idea from writing on the “men’s movement” (Flood, 2007), where only a minority of men within that movement belong to pro-feminist groups who address male privilege and power in relation to women. While not addressing power and privilege is one concern when women are not included in conversations on gender, the other major ethical concern is that women’s voices are excluded from that conversation (Hearn, 2004, p. 50). In the light of the rise of interest in men and masculinity studies over recent years, Macleod makes the fine point that there is a danger that the dominant signifier in gender relations becomes men again, and not patriarchy. “Patriarchy, thus, recedes into the background and with it an understanding of gendered power relations, while debates about men and masculinities become foregrounded” (2007, p. 10). In the context of heterosexual relationships, patriarchy, as the “structural dominance of women by men in all aspects of life” (Rahman, 2007, p. 468), needs to be addressed between women and men in conversation. MacLeod highlights another point, in speaking of

patriarchy as a “network of patriarchies” (2007, p. 10). As a network of patriarchies, patriarchy is understood as power that is “exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations” (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 94). An understanding of power and patriarchies as a discursive network that produces oppression for both men and women can help keep the focus on that network of discourses as the producer of men’s and women’s pain and oppression. In this way, the preference is not for men to exclude women in talking about their pain, but that “men and women are coming together and talking together” in resisting patriarchal discourses and working toward egalitarian relationships. The second focus group, in offering the three strategies, contributes to this resistance to patriarchal discourses and the abuse reproduced by men positioned in them.

In double-listening (White, 2006) to the stories of the second focus group I have written a “double-storied” (Denborough, 2006, p. 116) account of their stories of resistance to patriarchal abuse and control. These resistance stories express a journey toward and/or reclamation of preferred identities. Preferred heterosexual relationship practices from the focus group’s reading of the men’s interview document, and a metaphor that strengthens the possibility of agency for women in heterosexual relationship contribute to the resistance stories. The resistance stories conclude with three strategies for ongoing resistance that men can take up for practising egalitarian heterosexual relationships.





## Chapter 10. Giving an account of myself

I have borrowed the term that titles this chapter from Butler's title (2005), "giving an account of oneself". Butler (2005) suggests a view of ethics that recognises social and cultural conditions, and is dependent upon relational scenes of address for the emergence of the ethical subject, where accountability concerns making plain what one has done and the reasons for the action taken (pp. 6-8, 13-14). The story of my emerging ethical subjectivity is instigated from relational "scenes of address" (Butler, 2005, p. 9) with the first and second focus group of women. I put a voice to my emerging ethical subjectivity by stating how I have been accountable in making plain what I have done as a result of these two relational scenes of address. My action, dependent upon these relational scenes of address, is ongoing learning from the women in the two focus groups and from the many theorists read and applied in this thesis. In this chapter, this learning is typified through my theorising one moment during the data generation, pausing at that moment as an act of accountability to look at discourse in operation, and theorising what is in operation using a number of strategies. First, I introduce theory that weaves with Butler's view of ethics.

### Equality and difference

Along with the ethic of giving an account of myself, theory for recognising unequal relationship practices and for the equal inclusion of difference in relationship, underpins the analysis of the one moment during the data generation. The feminist poststructural scholar, Weedon, writes:

The principle of equality of opportunity for women and men in education and work, once established, has not proved any great threat to the balance of power in a society where patriarchal relations inform the very production and regulation of female and male subjects. It is possible for liberal discourses of equality to work against women's interests and it is only by looking at a discourse *in operation*, in a specific historical context, that it is possible to see whose interests it serves at a particular moment (1997, p. 108).

Regardless of any principle that suggests men and women are equal, at a local level, the level of “a discourse *in operation*”, is where one can see if equality is being practised or not. As Weedon suggests, at a local discursive level it is possible that women’s interests are not being served. Dominant liberal humanist and patriarchal discourses may not recognise inequality at a local level because of the idea of a commonality or sameness between men and women (being human with an essential nature). Alternatively, men and women are regarded as so different (equal but different, with difference being less than men), that a statement like Weedon’s, suggesting women’s interests are not being served, is treated as incongruous.

To shed further light on the above reference from Weedon, and as a response to the ideas of dominant discourses, I refer to Grosz, another feminist poststructural scholar, who pays tribute to Derrida’s contribution to feminism:

[Derrida] . . . bequeathed to feminist thought and politics a conceptual infection, a germ of an idea . . . *difference . . . neither as a relation of sameness, equivalence or identity, nor as a relation of opposition or dichotomy* [emphasis added] . . . that transformed it [feminism] from its nineteenth-century impulse to equal inclusion into a twenty-first-century impulse to proliferate and maximise difference. (Grosz, 2005, p. 91-92)

In the context of my study, what feminist poststructuralism has highlighted, with its fresh emphasis on the proliferation of difference, is not the traditional emphasis on equality of rights for women, or equal roles between men and women within the heterosexual relationship and the family. Rather, it has found where equality does not exist, and is often disregarded. In the conversational practices of heterosexual relationships, where difference can be expressed and explored, and different subjectivities constituted with language, discourses have been exposed that produce power which suppress and minimise a poststructural conception of difference; that minimised difference being the ideas, knowledges, and interests of women in regard to contributions to heterosexual relationship and life.

In the moment during the data generation – which I introduce shortly – the focus is on an interaction between Sue (the first focus group) and myself that can be

regarded as an everyday conversational practice where difference is unrecognised and its expression hindered. I use this moment to understand that equality is not equality until discourses in operation are exposed for their production of power that suppress and minimise difference. I argue this moment and my theorising of it offer me an opportunity for the emergence of ethical subjectivity.

## **Ethics as an account of relational response**

Butler (2005, p. 21) writes “the question of ethics emerges precisely at the limits of our schemes of intelligibility”. When confronted with thinking about my interaction with Sue, I was taken to the limits of my schemes of intelligibility in recognising and understanding the effects of language and discursive production; the cultural and social conditions for ethical relational practices. The words of Foucault on the focus of criticism make clear what happened for my thinking and actions when confronted by those limits:

Criticism consists in uncovering that thought and trying to change it: showing that things are not as obvious as people believe, making it so that what is taken for granted is no longer taken for granted. To do criticism is to make harder those acts which are now too easy. (1981/2002c, p. 456)

When confronted with my thinking about Sue’s and my interaction, I began to think with critical and informed thinking from theorists that uncovered thought, exposed the obvious and taken for granted, and which made it harder to return to what was too easy.

## **The relational context for my learning**

The following dialogue occurred between Sue and me during one of the first focus group meetings. I asked Sue how she got a change to occur in the relationship with her partner. Sue provided a metaphor to explain the process of helping her partner change, and how she put the metaphor into practice. Sue concluded her point with the following: “[I would] get him to talk to me first about things he wanted to, and then gradually work him around. You know, women are very manipulative”. To this statement I responded, “Are you manipulative or are you being smart about getting what you need?” “Maybe it is that”, was Sue’s equivocal response to my statement. I go on to read this fragment through a series

of overlapping theories: reproduction of patriarchal knowing (Lather, 2007); deconstructive ethics (Lather, 2007; Caputo, 1997b); salvation (Lather, 2007), colonisation (Rober & Seltzer, 2010), and therapy (Paré & Lerner, 2004); gendered power (Davies et al., 2002); and feminist standpoint epistemology (Dankoski, 2000; Marecek, 1989). I then return to the relational scenes of address where my learning and ethical subjectivity began to emerge. And I reconsider my responsibility to respond ethically to the address of the Other.

### **An intentionally admirable, but relationally unsuitable ethic**

My original reason for the statement posing as a question – “Are you manipulative or are you being smart about getting what you need?” – was a critique of the word “manipulative”, which I think is derogatory when it is used to describe the actions of women working to get what they want in a patriarchal context. In a gendered context the use of the word “manipulative”, to describe women’s actions, lacks the recognition of power relations between men and women. Sue is calling on the terms of dominant discourse in describing women in this way. My purpose with the statement posing as a question was to affirmatively correct the injustice I heard; Sue speaking as she accepted a patriarchal interpretation of her actions. But upon review, I suggest that while the intention I held was admirable, the process was ethically and epistemologically unsuitable. The intended politics were feminist; the process and effects were patriarchal, knowing what is best for an Other.

After the above interaction with Sue, I read on feminist postfoundational approaches to research (Lather, 2007). This began a movement from the “knowing” position a patriarchal discourse offers to the less certain and more respectful position a feminist discourse offers for conducting and interpreting research. Weedon (1997, p. 134-135) writes of the conflict and change which competing discourses can offer:

The meaning and the social and political implications of a reading will be determined by the position within the discursive field from which the critic reads and the knowledges inscribed in the discourses with which she reads . . . discourses which are in competition for meaning. It is the conflict

between these discourses which creates the possibility of new ways of thinking and new forms of subjectivity.

Weedon's words name my conflicting but energising discursive experience after reading Lather (2007). I had come into the conversation with Sue informed by a number of discourses, but patriarchy, being the dominant discourse in my life, won the "competition for meaning" (Weedon, 1997, p. 135), and would not easily let go. However, after I had read Lather (2007) the conflict for my allegiance between a patriarchal discourse and a feminist discourse was underway, creating "the possibility of new ways of thinking and new forms of subjectivity" (Weedon, 1997, p. 135). "Criticism", to use Foucault's (1981/2002c, p. 456) term in context, was beginning, along with the emergence of the new ethical subjectivity.

### **Epistemology and deconstructive ethics**

I now explore in more detail the learning that came with this emerging ethical subjectivity. "Self-reflexivity", stemming from an "engagement" (Lather, 2007, p. 126) with an ethical epistemology from poststructural feminist scholarship, sparked the emergence of a critical ethical subjectivity.

A question that I asked about my response to Sue was, "Who is getting to make meaning in this dialogue between Sue and me?" To extend this question beyond the subject to discourse, I asked, "Which discourse is at work in my response to Sue?" My response to Sue had the effect of placing me in a position of power, where I am the one who makes meaning of Sue's story – a privileged researcher speaking from a patriarchal ethic and epistemology. Without any quest to understand Sue's reason for using the word "manipulative" I voiced my interpretation of it. Looking back, I would have preferred to respond to Sue's story from a position of less certainty: "In postfoundational thought, as opposed to the more typical mastery project, one epistemologically situates oneself as curious and unknowing" (Lather, 2007, p. 9). This curious and unknowing position recognises a need for positional awareness and self-conscious, partial knowing (Harraway, 1988; Lather, 2007).

The curious and unknowing position I now advocate is supported by the ethical practice of deconstruction. My response to Sue's use of the word "manipulative"

was what I had supposed was deconstructive. However, a poststructural feminist approach to deconstruction maintains a position of uncertainty, while focussing on one's responsibility to the other (Lather, 2007, pp. 146-147). In utilising the work of Derrida (1979, pp. 101-102), Lather (2007, p. 146) suggests deconstruction is about doubly effacing both "the knower's mastering point of view and the authority of the metastory". My response to Sue was from the position of a knower with a "mastering point of view" with "the authority of the metastory" that a patriarchal all-knowing discourse offers. What this "mastering" and "metastory" discourse does not recognise is "that we often do not know what we are seeing, how much we are missing, what we are not understanding, or even how to locate those lacks" (Lather, 2007, p. 146). I was learning that to engage in research conversations, or everyday conversations, from a discursive position that offers sure interpretations of both language and story limits the possibilities for all involved in the conversation. In continuing the effacement metaphor for deconstruction; if "double effacement" is the removal of the mastering knower and the metastory of knowledge, then the additive in deconstruction is the responsibility to the other in the conversation (Caputo, 1997b, p. 149; Lather, 2007, pp. 146-147).

Deconstruction emphasizes not my rights but the right of the Other One to be different . . . even as it is moved by the plight of the one who is left out, ground under, excluded, erased, or silenced, and hence by that Other's right to be heard, to be addressed, to be given standing. . . . To that claim of the Other, corresponds the responsibility of deconstruction. (Caputo, 1997b, p. 149)

I learned that my approach to Sue was not deconstructive. My intervention with Sue could be understood as "nihilistic" and "sceptical" (Caputo, 1997b, p. 145) of Sue's knowledge, emphasizing my interpretive rights over Sue's. Deconstruction is, rather, an ethical action that erodes the privilege and undercuts the certainty (Lather, 2007, p. 146) of the subject, while offering space for the voice of the other to be heard.

The reading of postfoundational feminist scholarship (Lather, 2007) along with other relevant poststructural sources (for example Caputo, 1997a, 1997b), lead to

my engagement with a different discourse, that enabled the ethical critique of my response to Sue, the emergence of a new ethical subjectivity. Further theorising of my response to Sue helps strengthen the development of the emerging critical ethical subjectivity.

### **Ideas from salvation, colonisation, and therapy**

Popkewitz (1998), from the context of education, argues that pedagogical research within education and the social sciences, when focussing on certain ideas of progress and redemption, which are the effects of power, can easily smother the possibility of transformation by re-inscribing the very practices and rules that need to be stood-up-against. Lather (2007, p. 169) calls this “the dangers of academic salvation work”. This dangerous orientation describes my response to Sue. The offer of redemption or salvation from certain discursive positions infers that the offerer comes from a position of knowledge and power superior to that of the potential receiver of salvation. The “god trick . . . the view from above” is how Harraway (1988, p. 589) names this “salvation” practice. My intentions were grounded in a sense of justice for Sue. While the merit of this position might be said to be worthy, the practice of it was ethically untenable because I did not respect and investigate Sue’s knowledges and position. With a paraphrase of Sawicki (1988, p. 166), Lather (2007, p. 108) suggests an alternative to this well-intentioned, but unethical practice: “a deconstructive problematic tries to trouble, to look for dangers, normalising tendencies, tendencies toward dominance in spite of liberatory intentions”. In the different context of therapy, and highlighting the gap between intentions and practice, Morss and Nichterlein (1999) warn of the incongruence between an analysis of society as oppressive and the therapeutic contract as intentionally optimistic about emancipation. To highlight the unlikelihood of therapy delivering complete freedom, and the extreme claims of some therapies, Morss and Nichterlein (1999, p. 173) draw examples from other areas of life where such extreme claims have been made: “Where else have we encountered such extremes of black and white, of death and life? In fundamentalist religious movements, and in fundamentalist political movements; in crusades against alcohol, against drugs; salvation, redemption”.



To make a claim that one can offer justice or freedom is questionable ethics because of the improbability of being able to deliver such. On the other hand, engaging in “a deconstructive problematic” not only “tries to trouble, to look for dangers, normalising tendencies, tendencies toward dominance” (Lather, 2007, p. 108) in research and conversation, but it can open the way for a person to have space to discover their own preferred identities for living (Duvall & Béres, 2011, pp. 82-83; Madigan, 2011, p. 36).

Another problem I identify with my response to Sue, that takes the “salvation” danger a step further, is the “colonizer position” (Rober & Seltzer, 2010). While Rober and Seltzer write from a family therapy context, the principle they suggest is relevant to feminist research practices and ethics. As a basis for their position Rober and Seltzer (2010) refer to the work of Aimé Césaire (1955/1972) on the effects of colonialism. In summarising Césaire’s work, Rober and Seltzer say colonialism not only robbed “colonized peoples of their natural resources but, perhaps more destructively, robbed them of confidence in their own strengths and resources” (p. 124). Since the original work of Césaire in 1955, others have written about the effects of colonisation on the indigenous peoples around the world (see Anderson, 2002; Fanon, 1967, 1968; Nandy, 1983; Stoler, 2006). What is of interest for this study is that much of the undermining of indigenous people’s reality, self-confidence, and existence as they knew it, came from more “benevolent” colonisers such as missionaries, teachers, and those in caring positions; well-intentioned people desiring to help and protect the colonised people (Rober & Seltzer, 2010, pp. 124-125). The comparison can be made between the “benevolent” colonisers and a well intentioned researcher in research or therapy where the skills and knowledges of the “colonised” are not respected and honoured and further investigated. While such colonising practices can vary in the effects they have in people’s lives and culture, the ethics of these practices are always questionable. Also, from the domain of therapy, Paré and Larner (2004, p. 4) caution that practitioners of postmodern approaches to therapy “should engage in constructive self-critique” least their approach “unfold along colonial dynamics”.

After theorising my response to Sue from ideas of salvation, colonisation, and therapy, I learn, not only of the importance of self-critique, but also of the

possible effects for the other when one speaks for them and does not engage with them around their preferences for relationship and life. Theorising of my response to Sue, as a learning process, continues with reference to gender, arguably, the social and cultural condition (Butler, 2005) that is most relevant to my emerging ethical subjectivity.

### **Recognition of gendered power and privilege**

With reference to the knowledge/power link (Davies et al., 2002; Foucault, 1980; Deleuze, 1986/1988b, p. 83), and positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999), I use the interaction with Sue to show how conversations between men and women can too easily produce privilege and power that unethically limit conversational and relational possibilities.

In commenting on Foucault's conception of power, not as a possession of any group or person, but as "relations between forces . . . it is simply operational" (Deleuze, 1986/1988b, p. 27), Bordo (1993, p. 191) writes:

This "impersonal" conception of power does not entail that there are no dominant positions, social structures or ideologies emerging from the play of forces; the fact that power is not held by *anyone* does not entail that it is equally held by *all*. It is "held" by no one; but people and groups *are* positioned differently within it. No one may control the rules of the game. But not all players on the field are equal.

When men take up positioning, in relation to women, production of power from a patriarchal discourse is very possible. Because power is relational a woman can resist in various ways, but if recognition of the inequality and power present in the game is not readily available a woman may play with limited awareness of what is being played out. This inequality can be seen in "everyday practices" (Davies et al., 2002, p. 312) between men and women. My response to Sue is one such example of an everyday practice where my "rationality", or "implicit knowledge" (Davies et al., 2002, pp. 298-299) of Sue's "need for justice" introduced unequal power relations into the conversation. However, Sue's response to my question/statement on the word "manipulative" – "maybe it is that" – might suggest resistance to playing the game entirely on patriarchal terms.

“The forms of rationality through which the particular relations of power manifest” (Davies et al., 2002, p. 299) are helpful for analysing power relations in conversations. Rationalities provide meaning to events (Davies et al., 2002, p. 294), and can often be connected with morality (Rose, 1999b; Davies et al., 2002, p. 303). Rationalities have a relationship with legitimate authority in diverse spheres of government including pedagogy and the family. Rationalities that underlie “particular relations of power” have clear connections to the values or morals that “should guide the exercise of authority: freedom, justice, equality, responsibility” (Rose, 1999b, p. 26).

In the conversation with Sue, my knowledge of the word “manipulative” in the context of gender relations was informed by the implicit knowledge that Sue’s use of this word to describe herself and women was morally unjust. The moral rationalities of justice, and responsibility to do something about the injustice, worked with patriarchy to privilege me as the one to give Sue the justice she was owed. In questioning Sue’s use of the word “manipulative”, I put my knowledge and understanding before hers, thus producing power in the conversation that placed Sue in a “one down” position. By being positioned as one down, Sue was left with limited positions for a response to my question. Because of my production of power, whatever Sue’s response might be, her response would either contribute to a production of power, or reinscribe patriarchal power. Along with this confined positioning offered from my position of “moral authority”, I also positioned Sue as lacking such moral authority and knowledge.

After I questioned Sue’s use of the word “manipulative”, and suggested she was smart about getting what she needed, her response to me was, “maybe it is that”. With this equivocal response, Sue is possibly repositioning herself, as having a different opinion to me, even a different moral authority to me, while not directly opposing or agreeing with my opinion. Sue produced power in her response to me with this equivocal response. With the response – “maybe it is that” – Sue destabilises my moral authority as being the one with the only possible meaningful opinion. At the same time, in not directly opposing me, Sue creates a space for dialogue about possible new meaning, and an invitation to change the status of power in the game. While I positioned Sue unequally, Sue’s response

invites me to reconsider my position, and perhaps, play a different game, where our relationship is more important than my moral authority or opinion.

The use of power/knowledge and positioning theory in this analysis of Sue's and my interaction around the word "manipulative" shows how an everyday practice between men and women can be unequal, privileging the man to re-produce patriarchal power, and positioning the woman with limited options for responding. This is a personal learning for me of the privileged "acts which are . . . too easy" (Foucault, 1981/2002c, p. 456) for men in relation to women. Further, because of Sue's equivocal response to my questioning of the word "manipulative", one expression of my emerging ethical subjectivity takes the form of learning to listen for and valuing the slightest ways women might resist mine, and any man's, offered subject position.

### **Privilege and subjugated knowledges**

I complete the theorising of Sue's and my interaction with reference to the "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault, 1980, pp. 81-82) of those who are not in a privileged position in their social and cultural context. Subjugated knowledges can be defined as those that have been "disqualified . . . insufficiently elaborated . . . naïve . . . located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of . . . scientificity" (Foucault, 1980, p. 82), which do not reflect "the predominant modes of thought" (Riger, 1992, p. 734). This definition fits neatly with my suggestion that I had a correct understanding of the word, "manipulative". Being caught in patriarchal thinking, I used privilege to pursue my knowledge at the expense of Sue, whose knowledges were subjugated.

Even though its argument is essentialist, feminist standpoint epistemology offers ideas for reflexion for those caught up in dominant patriarchal thinking and practices. Feminist standpoint epistemology argues that it is because women's knowledge has been subjugated that they can offer clearer and more helpful knowledge concerning relationship situations and events (Dankoski, 2000, p. 8). Standpoint theory argues that people who are members of a subordinated group know how to live in both their own world and the world of the dominant group. Those in the dominant group do not need to know or are not aware of any world of a subordinate group separate from their own dominant world (Dankoski, 2000,

pp. 8-9). Harding (1991, pp. 119-133) presents a number of arguments as to why women's lives, rather than men's, should be the starting point for research with human beings. These arguments are all based in the idea that because of women's non-privileged social position, they have a privileged epistemological position for understanding sociality (Marecek, 1989, pp. 372-373). Women, and those who do not have privileged patriarchal positions, have had to work within patriarchy, possibly utilising other discourses, for their survival.

## **Returning to the relational scenes of address**

Beginning and ending with women's lives in the context of heterosexual relationships, the research design for this study was designed to address privilege and recognise power relations. I suggest this design made it possible for me to learn of what is possibly subjugated knowledge women have for their heterosexual relationships, in the idea of a safe, sacred place. It seems to me, in hearing the first and second focus group women talk of this place from different epistemic positions and vantage points, that they might have some useful knowledge about how a heterosexual relationship might work effectively and lovingly. Certainly, the women's knowledge and egalitarian conversational practices, along with the theorising their ideas have prompted for me as represented in this thesis, suggest relational possibilities that are ethical and loving in contrast to patriarchally produced alternatives.

This theorising and application to my learning from the interaction with Sue typifies the learning from the relational "scenes of address" (Butler, 2005, p. 9) with the first and second focus group women. Through feminist poststructural theory I located the stories of the first and second focus group women in social and cultural conditions – patriarchal discourses. As a result of being addressed by the women of the first and second focus groups I became constituted as recognising a problem, the invisibility of patriarchal power that privileges men and disadvantages women in heterosexual relationships (Knudson-Martin & Rankin Mahoney, 2009a; Pease, 2010).

The emergence of a new ethical subjectivity for me was produced through theory (St. Pierre, 2011, pp. 614, 620) as a result of being relationally addressed with the stories from the women of the first and second focus groups. As Butler writes,

“The terms by which we give an account, by which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves and to others are not of our making. They are social in character” (2005, p. 21). Desmond Tutu, in referring to African idiom and a word from the Nguni languages in Africa, succinctly names the process I have written about here in regard to my emerging ethical subjectivity. The Nguni word that depicts our human interdependence is *ubuntu*, which can be translated, “A person is a person *through* other persons” (Tutu, 2005, p. 25). As a result of this study both theory from people and people in relationship with me, have produced an emerging ethical subjectivity for me.

I return to Foucault’s thoughts on uncovering thought and thinking differently as transformation: “As soon as people begin to have trouble thinking things the way they have been thought, transformation becomes at the same time very urgent, very difficult, and entirely possible” (1981/2002c, p. 457). With the emergence of an ethical subjectivity, not only was my transformation underway, but the transformation of this study was beginning to emerge. This transformation takes the form of an ethical response to the women of the first and second focus groups as a critical ethical and political engagement with injustice and unethical practice in heterosexual relationship.

## **Responsiveness to the address from Other(s)**

In a development of Butler’s view of the emergence of the ethical subject, especially in the context of responding to the other, Thiem (2008, p. 4) writes:

Responsibility framed as accountability turns responsibility into a narcissistic endeavour that centers on the subject and the subject’s moral status. By instead foregrounding the dimension of responding to an address by the other, the agent’s justifiability, moral guilt, or glory take second seat to the concrete address and actions that need to be determined. . . . Responsibility . . . [framed as] . . . responsiveness [is] not primarily as a matter of justifying and evaluating actions but as a matter of being addressed by others and of having to respond and – more specifically – of having to respond well.

In this chapter I have endeavoured to indicate how I have been responsive to Sue. I paused at a moment of discourse in operation, and used a number of interrelated theories to recognise the address from the Other and to endeavour to respond well.

# Chapter 11. Deconstruction and the Future

*Deconstruction offers not a plan for the future, but a means of getting there*

(Scott, 2005, p. 129)

This thesis deconstructively repositions heterosexual relationship from patriarchy to a philosophical place that opens possibilities for a man to engage in ethical egalitarian practices that affirmatively respond to a woman partner as Other (Derrida, 1995a, 1985/2008; Peeters, 2010/2013, p. 160). I first provide a review of how this deconstructive thesis has addressed the research questions. Finally, I discuss the implications of this thesis as deconstructive means toward a possible egalitarian future for both heterosexual relationships and gender relations in general.

## Addressing the research questions

I restate the research questions with which I began this study:

1. What are the available discourses by which heterosexual couples live their relationships?
2. What are the discursive practices (language and positioning) of couples that produce relational subjectivity?
3. How can I help heterosexual couples to investigate the discursive production of relational subjectivity in my work as a counsellor?
4. What are some of the ideas and practices required for an egalitarian heterosexual relationship?
5. How do people change subject positions within a heterosexual relationship?

The results chapters, Five through Ten, address these questions. By taking different positions on heterosexual relationship, Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, provide a picture of the effects of the dominance of patriarchal discourses in constituting heterosexual relationship practices and a women partners' relational subjectivity. In Chapter Five I explore relational subjectivity as Sue responds and repositions herself in relation to the patriarchal withdrawing and controlling



language practices of her partner. I show how, by accommodating to and utilising different skills and knowledges that might be regarded as acceptable to patriarchy, Sue is able to position herself in ways that get her preferences addressed.

In Chapter Six I introduce the experienced and preferred relational subjectivities of women in the first focus group. The experienced relational subjectivities concern the women's experience of their partners not listening or distancing themselves from matters of importance to the women. The preferred relational subjectivities are expressed through gendered subjectivities as the women position themselves as listening, supporting, and caring for each other in relation to topics that arose in the focus group discussions. With the use of performativity of gender theory (Butler, 1990/2006) I deconstruct rigid gendered positions offered by patriarchy, through analysing my own gendered practices in conversation with the women.

I begin a double deconstruction (Derrida, 1972/1982a, 1972/2002) in Chapter Seven, which responds to patriarchal abuse that the women discuss even while they hold on to a preferred notion of heterosexual relationship as a safe, sacred place. The women constantly reposition their subjectivities in response to their partners' patriarchal relationship practices, as they hold onto a hope for heterosexual relationship as a safe, sacred place. Hence, deconstruction of both patriarchal practices and a preferred egalitarian and safe idea for heterosexual relationship serves to investigate the discursive production of relational subjectivity.

Chapters Eight and Nine address the final two research questions, on ideas and practices for egalitarian heterosexual relationship, and how a person might change subject positions. Through a discussion of a moment in a gendered relationship Chapter Ten addresses language and positioning in ways that are applicable to heterosexual relationship.

Deconstruction means that a new concept needs to be put in place, and the system under deconstruction relocated (Derrida, 1972/2002, 1985/2008). This part of the deconstructive process occurs in Chapter Eight, where I suggest that heterosexual relationship be relocated to the new concept of a safe, sacred place. I align this

safe, sacred place with Derrida's "democracy to come" (1993/1994, 2003/2005a), where the Other is responded to with ethical and egalitarian practices.

In taking up the women's suggestion of relocating heterosexual relationship to a safe, sacred place, I offer deconstructive means in Chapter Eight that a male partner can take up to establish ethical egalitarian relationship practices. These deconstructive means I name as *obligatory love* and *becoming love*. As actions of obligatory love, I suggest that men practise: *recognising male privilege* in the constitution of heterosexual relationships; relating to their partner from a position of *not knowing* what their partner's preferences for the relationship are; and responding to this not knowing by creating respectful *interested space* between their partner and them. As an action of becoming love, I suggest men practise *dialogical conversation* with their partners that allow for the co-construction of meaning.

In Chapter Nine my analysis shows the second focus group women demonstrating solidarity with the first focus group women. This solidarity takes the form of resistance to a male partner's practices of heterosexual relationship that are unethical, disrespectful of a woman partner's position and preferences, or that have harmful constitutive effects. For the second focus group this resistance is practised with a woman repositioning her subjectivity as separate from her partner; putting her preferences for the relationship on the table for discussion; questioning her partner about his abusive conversational practices; or leaving the relationship. The analysis of the women's discussion also offered strategies for men to join with women in resisting patriarchy and working toward egalitarian relationships.

Finally, in Chapter Ten I take one moment from a conversation with Sue to show patriarchal discourse in operation within the research itself. A number of interrelated poststructural theories are applied to that moment. These theories recognise the detrimental and colonising practices of patriarchy, and invite recognition of the address from the Other.

## **Deconstructive means toward an egalitarian future**

The above overview is a linear progression of the development of this thesis in addressing the research questions. The discussion that follows on the implications for this thesis, while conducted in a linear fashion are, in practice, non-linear and interdependent. As a guide, I use an interpretation of Derrida's understanding of ethical action: "Derrida insists that politics requires decision-making that is accountable to the Other, that acknowledges its own impossibility, and that is thus subject to absolute risk" (Mansfield, 2006, p. 473). This statement is supported by Derrida's thinking on aporia, with its implications for ethical action – the ambiguity that comes with needing to take responsible action when one cannot see, or foresee, the availability of a right decision (Derrida, 1993; Wang, 2005; Raffoul, 2008, p. 285; Kotzé & Crocket, 2011, p. 49). I match words and ideas from this Mansfield quote to the implications of this study under the headings: politics, accountability, the other, the impossibility and risk of ongoing new ethical action. I suggest the implications of this study as deconstructive means toward an egalitarian future are both pertinent to heterosexual relationship practices and the wider story of gender relations. I offer possibilities that constitute a potential route toward a respectful *inventiveness* for egalitarian relationships between men and women. I discuss the value of inventiveness later as a contribution of this thesis, but for now, I propose a route toward it that constitutes a contribution to offering a possible deconstructive means toward an egalitarian future.

### **Politics**

Patriarchy confers both an invisible male sense of superiority and an invisible male privilege. Pease (2010) writes, "As most men's beliefs about male superiority are experienced as being natural and normal and are institutionalised and culturally exalted, they generally do not notice their advantages" (p. 95). A major step for a man in any form of gender relations is to recognise patriarchally conferred invisible privilege. I suggest deconstructive means for making visible a male sense of superiority and male privilege.

### ***Making visible the socially constructed self***

In realising the implications of Derrida's thinking on aporia for multicultural education, Wang (2005) writes that one of the impasses of such education is the "strong commitment of mainstream students to the rhetoric of the individual" (p. 55). While this commitment secures a sense of "the self", it justifies a "refusal to encounter the other . . . in which one sees the individual but not his or her culture, [thus erasing] the concreteness and singularity of the person in social contexts" (p. 55). I suggest that men captured by patriarchy often have the same commitment to the rhetoric of the individual, which makes invisible the social and discursive context for their self-understanding and their recognition of the Other. Wang (2005) continues with her experience of those committed to the rhetoric of the individual:

[They] often find the notion of a socially constructed self difficult, even threatening, to think about. . . . Only when an individual becomes aware of social and cultural limitations can he or she make responsible choices about how to negotiate these limits. Dwelling in the aporia between individuality and relationality, we need to articulate a contextualised sense of individuality that is both socially situated and personally creative. (p. 55)

Even though it may be difficult – an aporia – I suggest that the relocation of men's self-understanding from the "rhetoric of the individual" to a "contextualised sense of individuality that is both socially situated and personally creative" is important for making visible patriarchally conferred male privilege. I offer three suggestions as means towards this visibility.

First, I suggest that men ask the question raised by Foucault (1988/2002d, p. 403), as he sought to undertake an historical analysis of the relationship between thought and practices in western society: "what are we today?". In Chapter Eight I introduced the struggle Peter had in changing his actions toward his partner. I suggested that one of the possible reasons for this struggle was that Peter practised relationship according to a pre-determined essentialist nature which kept him emotionally and relationally stuck. This essentialist position is one possible answer that might be given to Foucault's question. But I have argued in this thesis, in the context of patriarchal practice in heterosexual relationships, that

men's self understanding be separated from "discover[ing] something about 'given' nature" (White, 1997, p. 223), the rhetoric of individuality, and placed within historical socio-cultural productions of patriarchal discourses. This relocation to historical socio-cultural productions helpfully explains dominant male privilege and practices, and can contribute to freeing a man from debilitating deficit self-understandings that limit the possibilities for change. By repositioning in discourses outside of patriarchy, men can experience personal agency in regard to preferred ethical practices for conducting relationship and for new self-understanding.

In Chapter Nine I introduced discursive empathy (Sinclair & Monk, 2004, 2005) as a tool men can engage with for reading their discursive, socio-cultural location. As a second suggestion to help men relocate their self-understanding, discursive empathy is a tool for not only helping men read what they might struggle with in common with other men, but it can help them recognise the prevalence of male privilege in relation to women. Hence, I suggest men not only use discursive empathy for themselves but also in relation to women. In this way, men can begin to see the effects for women of patriarchal male privilege. Discursive empathy can be conceived as a man producing openness to women's stories of oppression; as Wang (2005) says, "The creativity of the self in his or her movement is preconditioned by openness to the other" (p. 55). Pease (2002b) suggests "social empathy" as an important practice for men in understanding the effects of their "structural power and privilege" (p. 173). I prefer to use "discursive empathy", because its poststructural location suggests the possibility of a man not only recognising his and a woman's position in discourse, but it opens the possibility for a man to change his subject position for respectful ethical responses to a woman in each conversational encounter. One such example of this *recognition* and *change* by a man, I suggest, is offered by Chris, recorded in Chapter Eight. Chris, while recognising his different discursive location as a man, does not permit this location to interfere with his position on offering acknowledgment and witness to the stories of oppression from the first focus group.

One other contribution of this study for helping men move their self-understanding from the "rhetoric of the individual" to a contextualised socially situated self is to acknowledge their personal pain and to locate it with the

position they take up in the relations of gender offered by patriarchy (Pease, 2002b, p. 173). This step can address the “misframing” (Kimmel, 2010) of men in individualised positions where the focus is on personal pain without any recognition of men’s positioning and social location in patriarchy (Pease, 2002b, p. 174).

Shame is a common painful experience in relationship for many men (Jenkins, 2009) and is an experience that can point to important relational values which a man may have stepped away from (Probyn, 2005; Schneider, 1977/1992; Weingarten, 2003). Probyn writes, “Shame is an affect of proximity. . . . [I]t teaches us about our relations to others” (2005, pp. 34-35). While the voice of shame in men’s experience often speaks so loudly that only the pain is heard, I suggest that men also listen to shame as a pointer to important relational values that they may have stepped away from. In doing this, they can use shame helpfully to support the practice of those values. This approach to working with shame is taken up by Jenkins (2009) in his work to help men change their practice of using violence and abuse in heterosexual relationships. As indicated by Andrew’s use of shame, recorded in Chapter Eight, shame is a tool that can be effectively used by a man, who has breached any relational value of importance to him, to step back into practising those respectful relational values.

As men begin to recognise their own history of privilege and pain, there is the possibility that they then “form alliances with the oppressed”, and in so doing “recreate themselves as subjects in their ethical activity” (Pease, 2002b, p. 174). In making visible the invisible of their socio-cultural history, and then by participating with the oppressed against oppressive practices, men can form new self-understanding.

### **Accountability**

An important step in this process of men stepping out of patriarchal privilege and control is not to assume a woman will want to dialogue on matters related to gender. Women are capable, without the assistance of men, in working out how to live while still being oppressed with marginalised positions (see Davies et al., 2002), as the women involved in this study show. However, to work toward egalitarian gender relations collaboration is required. For example, Segal (1994),

and hooks (2000), both feminists, argue that to transform the social inequalities of gender it is important that men and women form alliances and work together. “Alliance politics” is the name Pease (2000, p. 111) gives this political cooperation between men and women. While men can initiate this alliance, with their acknowledgement of privilege and the associated oppression of women, it is important, considering the violent history of gender relations, that men respect the right of women to invite them, or not, into further conversation and participation in the alliance.

### ***Dialogue between women and men***

Three findings in this study help contribute to clarifying the grounds for dialogue between women and men as they progress toward egalitarian gender relations. First, in Chapter Nine I refer to Sandra from the second focus group who said, “The only thing which needs to happen is that men and women are coming together and talking together”. While this statement may appear to be making an obvious point, it is important that the dialogue occurs between men and women, and not men using their privilege to talk among themselves about gender relations. In support of this point I refer to, Glen, a woman research participant (Pease, 2000) on the possibility of a coalition between feminists and pro-feminist men in working toward egalitarian gender relations:

The old patterns are hard to break, when men get together in men’s groups. They are so deeply ingrained. For five thousand years you have been trained as the dominant ones and so it is very understandable that when you would get together, those patterns would emerge and that unknowingly, unconsciously and unwittingly, you would perpetuate them. (cited in Pease, 2000, p. 112)

A second point that I offer in contributing to the dialogue between men and women, I take from a comment made by Alice from the second focus group: “I’m the toilet cleaner! How egalitarian are these egalitarian relationships?” Alice, in volunteering to help her ex-partner, was not consulted in regard to her preferences for work in preparing for a family occasion; she was told what to do – to clean the toilet. Alice’s ex-partner made assumptions that did not allow for consultation or dialogue on the part Alice might play. In any dialogue with women, we as men do

well to guard against making assumptions. A respect for any difference from the way a man sees and understands is important in any dialogical process. This respect for difference is built into Bakhtin's dialogical process with the concepts, "answerability" (Emerson, 1997, p. 218; White, 2009), and the "loophole" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 233): no one dominates the conversation with a hold on the truth, and language is used tentatively in regard to meaning, which allows for the other in the conversation to alter meaning according to their perspective. This approach invites the Other, with their point-of-view, into the conversation.

A final point, as a contribution to the dialogue between women and men in the process of accountability for men in gender relations, comes from a phrase coined by Chris in his interview: "everyday discipline of listening". This discipline refers to a particular listening; a listening for alterity, difference, or singularity, which invites responses from a man that are not formulaic, or guided by colonising patriarchal knowledges. These three points on dialogue between men and women as a form of accountability for men, I argue, are strengthened when men recognise a woman as Other, whether that be in heterosexual relationships, or gender relations.

## **The Other**

Derrida writes:

That which defies anticipation, reappropriation, calculation – any form of pre-determination – is *singularity*. There can be no future as such unless there is radical otherness, and respect for this radical otherness. It is here – in that which ties together as non-reappropriable the future and radical otherness – that justice . . . participates in the future. (Derrida & Ferraris, 1997/2001, p. 21)

Derrida gives the name, "singularity", to Levinas' (1961/1969, 1974/1998) concept of the other (see Perpich, 2008). Singularity means that the other is not singular, but multiple and different every time we engage with the other. The other is an intersection of multiple positionings and becomings that we cannot know in advance. Consequently, in the context of Derrida's thinking on ethical action in relation to the Other, decision-making that is accountable is not



dependent on pre-arranged formulae, systems, or what might have worked previously. Rather, it relies on singular encounter-to-encounter respectful responses by the subject with the Other (Derrida, 1992, 2001/2005b, p. 128-129; Wang, 2005, pp. 49-52). Hence, Raffoul writes, “Ethical responsibility is thus a matter of *invention*, not application of a rule” (2008, p. 284). Caputo brings together Derrida’s thinking on the practice of invention and ethical responsibility to the other: “Derrida is neither an essentialist nor a conventionalist, but an *inventionalist* . . . which means that deconstruction keeps an inventionalist eye open for the other” (Caputo, 1997a, p. 131).

In this thesis, I argue that a deconstructive means toward an egalitarian future has as its “inventionalist eye open for the other” men recognising male privilege and relocating their self-understanding from the rhetoric of individuality to a historical socio-cultural context. At the invitation of women, men form political alliances with women in resistance to patriarchy and its effects for relations of gender. Integral to this recognition, relocation, and resistance process, men recognise each woman as Other, and in so doing, as an egalitarian ethic, practice an ethic of respect. From this position, men can practise *invention* with respectful responses in each encounter with a woman as Other.

### **The impossibility and risk of ongoing new ethical action**

Where “event” is to be regarded as the ongoing arrival of the Other that cannot be calculated for (see Derrida, 1993, pp. 33-34; 2003/2005a, p. 148; Raffoul, 2008, p. 287, fn. 25), Derrida (2003, p. 35), writes “an event or invention is possible only as im-possible”. The “im-possible” and risk with the implications for this study as deconstructive means toward an egalitarian future is that egalitarian relations between men and women are dependent upon a man’s practice in each single encounter with a woman. There is no plan or formula that makes the path clear as to what a man must do for an egalitarian relationship with a woman other than, in each encounter, “invent” respectful ethical responses to her address as Other.

There is no “politics” of law or ethics without the responsibility of a decision. In order for the decision to be just, it is not enough for it to apply existing norms or rules, but it must take the absolute risk, in each individual

situation, of rejustifying itself, alone, as if for the very first time. (Derrida, 2001/2005b, p. 128)

In this thesis, I have suggested a platform on which a male partner can stand so that he can practice heterosexual relationship in a respectful, ethical egalitarian manner in each encounter with a woman partner. Particularly, in Chapter Eight, under the idea of obligatory love, I suggest that men: recognise their privilege and its oppressive effects for women; take up an unknowing approach, in regard to what a woman prefers in relationships, as a helpful position for learning what her preferences are; and, in conjunction with this unknowing position, maintain a position of interested space, where the male partner holds respectful interest in his partner's interests, and also invites her into agentic space for practising relationship as she prefers. These suggestions may be applicable to gender relations generally. But the "invention" of new respectful ethical responses with each encounter between a man, and a woman as Other, as an ongoing deconstructive means to an egalitarian future is, I argue, constructed on the platform of these three actions of obligatory love.

## **Hope for the future**

One important feature of completing this study has been my personal movement from the "rhetoric of the individual . . . to a contextualised sense of individuality that is both socially situated and personally creative" (Wang, 2005, p.55). The risk that comes with change has not lessened during this process, but the study has established new knowledge and meaning that is situated with the "socially constructed" self. This knowledge makes the risk that comes with change addressable, even with the associated struggle and disorientation that comes with "thinking [and doing] altogether differently" (Derrida, 1982b, p. 326). As Wang (2005, p. 53) says, "The openness to something *other and different* is the precondition for any transformative learning, and disequilibrium is necessary for reaching another level of understanding".

Responding to the address of the Other, at times, can seem impossible, as the dominance of patriarchal practices are so evident in heterosexual relationships and in gender relations generally. Kimmel (2010) cites, for example, men responding to their identity problems unethically, violently, blind to racism and sexism.

However, alongside the impossibility, there is the address of the Other that invites men into new thinking for ethical ways of doing gender relations. From his experience of doing something that is new, Derrida writes:

It is a matter of looking for something that is not yet well received, but that waits to be received. . . . [E]ach time I have attempted to make a gesture that was . . . bizarre or untimely, it was because I had the impression that it was demanded, more or less silently, by other areas of the field, by other forces that were still in the minority, but that were there. . . . [T]here is a sort of calculation in the incalculable here, and the untimeliness is a sort of timeliness still in the making. (Derrida & Ferraris, 1997/2001, p. 16)

Derrida hints at the possible in the impossible in his own experience of taking risks to achieve something new: “other forces that were still in the minority, but that were there” and, “there is a sort of calculation in the incalculable here” and, “the untimeliness [of the action] is a sort of timeliness still in the making”. As Derrida can be understood as framing hope in the language of the im-possibility of taking a risk to achieve something new, so Connell, a world renowned sociologist and gender researcher, offers hope in regard to changing gender relations: “Inviting men to end men’s privileges and to remake masculinity to sustain gender equality, strikes many people as a strange or utopian project. Yet this project is already underway. Many men around the world are engaged in gender reforms” (2011, p. 21). The contribution I wish to make with this thesis is to suggest that it stands as some evidence that there is hope, a possibility in the impossible, for a safe, sacred place, a democracy to come, in heterosexual relationships and gender relations.

In ending, I turn to Cornell, a significant feminist philosopher in the application of Derrida’s work to law and justice (see Caputo, 1997b; Cornell, Rosefeld, & Carlson, 1992; Benhabib, Butler, Cornell, & Fraser, 1995), who suggests:

There is a deep, profound, and even scary sense in which the future and our responsibility for the future cannot be in any other hands but our own. It is up to us to take on the task of bringing into existence a timeliness still in the making. (Connell, 2005, p. 71)

To some, the conversations heterosexual couples conduct may not seem important, a “bizarre or untimely” topic for research, or a “utopian project”. But, for the women involved in this study, and many others, I now have “the impression that it was demanded”. The conversations conducted in heterosexual couple or gendered relationships matter, as that is where invisible patriarchal power does much of its work in shaping the relationship with unfair effects. This thesis concludes that while the democracy to come is still in the making, every time a man recognises his patriarchal privileging and its effects, and engages in respectfully inventive ethical conversation with a woman, the democracy to come is being brought into existence.



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# Appendices

## Appendix A

### First focus group further written information on the research

#### Further written information on the research

#### “Heterosexual couples, gender discourse, and the production of relational subjectivity”.

Thankyou for expressing interest in this research project. This research is toward a Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. I will outline in the following a little about myself and the reason for this research, my research topic, the research method, safeguards and confidentiality procedures for participants, and the process you will be involved in if you wish to participate in this research.

A little about me

My name is Brian Morris. I am currently a lecturer in counselling at Tabor College Adelaide, where I have been since 2004. Before being at Tabor I was involved in counselling in private practice at Clovercrest Baptist Church in the northern suburbs. Before getting involved in counselling I had some time to study full-time, and worked with the Salvation Army. I am a parent and have been married for 27 years.

Reason for this research

My main area of interest is couples and family counselling and it is from my experience in counselling and teaching in these areas that my interest in the topic for this research came about. I want that this research will contribute to more effective counselling and teaching in the area of couple's relationships, and positively to the relationship between women and men generally.

Research topic



As you would have read in the invitation to participate in this research, this research is exploring the experience of women and men in heterosexual relationships, including the types of conversations they have with each other, what produces the couple's experience of the relationship, and how an egalitarian relationship might be conducted.

I realise for many people this is a personal and sensitive aspect of their lives so I will have in place safeguards and confidentiality procedures as far as the participant's information and identity is concerned. I will detail these later in this information letter after I have further explained the details and procedure of this research.

### Research method

If you agree to participate in this research you will be involved in the first of three stages of the research. That will be a focus group that will meet three times for two hours each discussing the above topics. I will be facilitating this focus group of six women with various questions that will help stimulate the discussion of the topics. The focus group meetings will be video and audio taped so that I can transcribe the discussions in a way that most accurately represents what each participant has said. After the first two meetings and from my transcription of those meetings I will write a letter to each woman involved in the focus group outlining the essence of the discussion and highlighting a significant aspect of her contribution to the discussion. Those letters will also help contribute to what is discussed in the next focus group meeting. After the third focus group meeting I will write a concluding letter to each woman once again outlining the essence of the discussion from that meeting and clarifying from each of them what information they want taken to the next stages of the research. Pseudonyms will be used when the information is offered to the next two research stages. The final two stages of the research involves a group of men who I will individually interview around suggestions and themes that have been offered by the first focus group, and then a second focus group that will discuss the reflections of the men and the themes and suggestions offered by the first focus group. I plan to conduct all this research at my work address, Tabor College Adelaide Goodwood Campus,

164 Goodwood Rd, Goodwood, because a comfortable room is available there for video and audio taping.

### Safeguards and Confidentiality

From the tapes of the three focus group discussions I will write up transcripts from which I will then send to each woman a letter outlining the essence of the previous meeting's discussion. Each woman can check this letter for accuracy that it correctly represents what was discussed within the group. The video and audio tapes and transcripts of the three discussions are confidential and the only persons who will be able view or listen to the tapes or see the full transcripts are myself and my two supervisors in New Zealand, Dr Elmarie Kotzé and Dr Kathie Crocket whose contact details are at the end of this information sheet. All transcripts, documents and tapes related to the research will be stored securely.

Withdrawal from being a research participant in this first stage of the research can occur anytime up until two weeks after the participants receive my final letter outlining the previous third focus group meeting. To withdraw you can complete and post to me in the reply paid envelope the form attached at the end of this information sheet, "Notice of withdrawal from participation in the research". If you do need to withdraw for any reason whatsoever this is entirely appropriate and acceptable in this research.

Your confidentiality is assured during and after this project on the grounds that I will not deliberately reveal any information gained from this project to anyone through my doctoral thesis, or through being published, or presented at professional conferences, other than my supervisors. In doing this I will use pseudonyms, which you and I can decide on, which will indicate your sex, but I will not use any other identifying features except that which is given in the actual group discussions and which you state I can use.

### Process for Participants

If after reading this information sheet you choose to participate in this research you can read and sign the attached informed consent form and return it to me in the reply paid envelope. After I have received the informed consent form I will

then send you a schedule of possible times for when the focus group meetings can be held on which you can mark your preferred times and send it back to me.

When I have received six time schedules back that indicate the same time then I will contact those six women regarding the time the meetings are to be held. If you are not one of those six I will contact you to let you know, and then see if you want to be a reserve for the research or whether you would prefer to withdraw your offer of participation.

Kind regards,

Brian Morris

Contact details for Brian's supervisors are:

- Dr Elmarie Kotzé (Email: [elmariek@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:elmariek@waikato.ac.nz)) and
- Dr Kathie Crocket (Email: [kcrocket@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:kcrocket@waikato.ac.nz))  
Department of Human Development and Counselling

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Private Bag 3105

Hamilton

New Zealand

Phone: 0011 or 0018 647 838 4176

## Appendix B

### First focus group research consent form

#### Research Consent Form. (Focus Group One).

**Research Title:** Heterosexual couples, gender discourse and the production of relational subjectivity.

**Researcher:** Brian Morris.

I have read and understood the information for participants in this research which was given to me by Brian and have met with him to discuss this research.

I confirm that:

I understand that this project is guided by the University of Waikato's Human Research Ethics Regulations. Brian has given me information about how he will take responsibility to safeguard my rights and ethical entitlements.

I agree to the video and audio taping of the focus group which will be facilitated by Brian. I understand that any recordings or written notes of the focus group will be kept securely and used for the purposes of this research project. I agree that the material as it is used in Brian's doctoral thesis may be published, or presented at professional conferences by Brian.

I understand that not all of the material transcribed from the video and audio recordings of the focus group will be used in Brian's thesis.

I understand that the material discussed in the focus group is confidential and cannot be discussed or used outside of that focus group except, that material which I personally disclosed, and for use by Brian in his doctoral thesis and any published material or presentations at conferences.

I understand that the video and audio tapes and transcripts along with this consent form will be accessible to Brian's supervisors to enable them to hold Brian accountable to professional standards and ethics and to provide safeguards to all participants. The supervisors will not reveal any identifying information about the participants to any other person.

Contact details for Brian's supervisors are:

- Dr Elmarie Kotzé (Email: [elmariek@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:elmariek@waikato.ac.nz)) and
- Dr Kathie Crocket (Email: [kcrocket@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:kcrocket@waikato.ac.nz))  
Department of Human Development and Counselling

University of Waikato

Private Bag 3105

Hamilton

New Zealand

Phone: 0011 or 0018 647 838 4176

I understand that I have the right to remove or alter identifying information from my transcripts (if I choose to read them) but not change the content of the discussion as recorded in the transcript in ways that alters the meaning of the discussion. This also applies to the letters Brian will send to us after each discussion group which outline the essence of the previous meeting's discussion. My preferred way of Brian sending me the written material and letters during the actual research process is recorded on the form attached to the end of this research consent form.

I understand that I will be participating in three focus group meetings for two hours each which Brian will be facilitating, and that I have been notified what the general themes will be for discussion in those meetings.

I understand that I may withdraw from this research at any time up until two weeks after I receive the final letter from Brian outlining the essence of the discussion in the final focus group meeting. I understand that to withdraw from this research all I need to do is mail to him the "notice of withdrawal from participation in research" which is attached to the information sheet Brian has previously given to me. I understand that I do not need to provide an explanation for my withdrawal.

I understand that if I want counselling after participating in this research I may contact Brian who will arrange for me to be referred to a reputable counsellor.

I understand that I can ask questions at any time and that these will be welcomed. This can be when we meet to conduct the research or via telephone or email as follows: (deleted for this thesis appendix)

Both the mobile and email are confidential.

I understand that I have received the information I believe is necessary for me to give informed consent to participating in Brian Morris' research project and I agree to the terms outlined.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Preferred way of written communication being sent to me and returned to Brian during the research process is:**

Email.

Ordinary post.

Registered post.

Courier.

(Circle the mode you prefer).

## Appendix C

### Notice of withdrawal from participation in research

#### Notice of withdrawal from participation in research

“Heterosexual couples, gender discourse and the production of relational subjectivity”.

Researcher: Brian Morris.

I ..... wish to withdraw from the research being conducted by Brian Morris.

I know I do not need to give any reason for this decision to Brian.

I wish/do not wish to discuss my reasons for withdrawing. (circle your preference).

I know that I can discuss my reasons for withdrawing directly or in writing with Brian or his supervisors.

I understand that my information given thus far in this research will not be used in the thesis unless I discuss this with Brian and agree on the details of this.

Please contact me/do not contact me to discuss this further. (circle your preference).

Preferred means of contact:

.....

I understand that Brian will be able to note in his thesis statistical information relating to my withdrawal. That is, he will be able to state the number of participants and what stage of the research they withdrew from, without giving any identifying information.

Signed: .....

Date: .....

## Appendix D

### The bridging document

#### **Bridging Document. For Brian Morris' PhD Research.**

Hi .....,

Thanks again for agreeing to participate in this research with me.

As I mentioned previously to you this document contains more information on the research I am undertaking with women on their experience of their relationship with their male partners. This next stage, involving you as one of the participants, is centred on discussion and reflection on this document with me. When you and I get together for the interview on... it is this document and your responses to it that I would like to discuss with you.

This document focuses on what I particularly noticed and learned from three group discussions I had with the women. In preparation for writing the document I asked myself some questions. These are listed below:

1. What was it in the accounts of their experience that caught my attention in surprising ways?
2. Why was I surprised by these specific aspects of their experience?
3. Is there something from the accounts of their experience that would help me learn about their values, hopes, aspirations, dreams for their relationships with their male partners?
4. As a result of witnessing these women's accounts of their experience in relationship with their male partners what effects has this had for me? For example, concerning my own relationships and conversations with people?

Although there was much that caught my attention in surprising ways in the group discussions, here I have decided to tell you about three aspects which opened my eyes to women's experience of their relationship with their male partners.

1. First, there is the experience the women called "shut off". This happens when they are trying to have a conversation with their partner. This 'shutting off' seems to be expressed in three main ways:



- When a man cuts his partner off from talking or expressing her opinion at all;
  - When his partner is making a request for time or help with something, and he doesn't complete the listening process and just tries to fix 'the problem' quickly;
  - When the couple are making major decisions or buying something, the man can make the decision, without much consultation and discussion with his partner.
2. The second aspect that caught my attention was the women's experience of being called a 'nag', or the experience of stepping into what others called a 'nagging' response, when they had no other options to get their partner's attention.

One of the questions we explored in the group was, "why do women at times step into a 'nagging' response"? Ali talked about experiences of powerlessness and using 'nagging' as a last resort. She says, "I thought that is probably how I feel when I am nagging. It is that sense of I can see this situation slipping away here so I am just going to go hell for leather until something changes".

Carmen talked about women's experience of unfairly being defined as a 'nag' or as 'nagging' by their male partners. She says, "men can actually misuse the word nagging to shut you down so that a request, or something you need to ask for, or a job that needs to be done [gets the response from them], 'O stop nagging'. Carmen went on to describe the effects of this definition, "then you feel devalued because you feel that next time you better be quiet because it is not going to be understood, you are going to be called a nag...[that] takes away...your spontaneity, your individuality as a person, and value".

3. A third aspect that caught my attention from the women's account of their experience in relationship with their partners is how they see themselves influenced by that relationship. Hannah tells her story of identity in relationship with her partner and other people. While growing up Hannah

learnt about mutual respect and equality between men and women from her parents' relationship which gave shape to a confident, happy and sociable story for her life. Then from her relationship with her partner who used abuse and control, Hannah says, "I feel devalued.... I feel like I am being cut down as a person, dissected and limited, some things are not okay to say....I doubt my own ideas and judgements, my own beliefs....The last eighteen months he would not use my name. So I lost my name....His description of me was who I was". Hannah went on to explain how she later called on others and their knowledge of her to reconstruct her identity, "when we split up I had to actually build myself up and remember who I was. I had to do a lot of journaling to remember what I was like, and talk to my family and my school friends. I contacted a lot of my school friends and actually talked to them about what they remembered about me, things we had done, interests we had".

Sarah also speaks of being influenced by relationship, but differently to Hannah's experience. "It is so encouraging. I feel like when my partner hears my ideas and says stuff like, 'O that was really good!' It's affirming. I come up with good ideas, I have good thoughts, and I think he feels the same....So it becomes this thing where you are walking away into other situations more confident, because even if they do not like my idea there, I know somebody at home does".

In reflecting on the three aspects of the discussions that caught my attention – being shut-off, the 'nagging' definition and, relationship influencing how we see ourselves – I wondered what it was about these that got me thinking differently, opening up new ideas for me?

The shutting-off stood out for me because it kept coming up in the discussions as something that gets a grip on the relationship with painful effects for the women. With this, the hope for equal opportunities in conversations with their partner diminishes.

When the word ‘nag’ came up in the discussions I felt very uncomfortable with it. The word ‘nag’ was always derogatory in my experience of its use in describing women or their speech. So I was surprised when some of the women used the word to describe their own behaviour toward their partner’s at times. We explored this idea, and I learned this was used as a last resort to engage in a conversation with their partner. I was left with the question, “Why though... why does this happen?”

I wonder if we can think about this question together. Why is it that women partners can feel there is no option other than to speak this way – ‘nagging’? Is there anything men can do about this that is fair and helpful for both men and women?

Before doing this research I adhered to the idea (without thinking about it much) that identity was stable, individually based, and influenced while a person is growing up as a child and teenager. In doing preparatory reading for this research I read much on the idea that identity is not necessarily stable, but is shaped by relationships and the conversations within those relationships throughout one’s life. This actually made sense to me as I could see how my partner and I had influenced each other’s identity in various ways over our married life. It made even more sense to me when I got involved in discussions with these women, and heard them talk about changes in their identity and how they saw themselves as a result of their relationship with their partners. I have already given some examples of this from the women when their partners take an active role (either affirming or derogatory) in the relationship conversations, but here is an example where the two partners can both have a bearing on each others identity and sense of self. Annie spoke of feeling disappointed because aspects of the research had “tapped into the hardest part of our relationship ...decision-making....[The research] just brought up what I struggle with the most in our relationship. We don’t make decisions, and I’m not entirely blaming [my partner] because some decisions are mutual, but we both wait for each other, and so it’s not resolved”.

Thinking about what the women value in their relationships with male partners, I heard how they spoke about hopes, aspirations and dreams that they hold.

As I sat and listened to the women and participated in the conversation I was struck by the energy and enthusiasm they had for the task of sharing their stories and connecting with each other. There were not only painful stories, some of which I have referred to above, but there was a sense of joy in being able to connect and listen to each other. As I participated in this and listened I became aware that these women trusted me with the sacredness of their stories. Here they were talking about sacred aspects of their lives and they trusted me. I was aware that as a man I could have been seen as representing those who had hurt them, in some cases quite violently. I must admit I felt an unexpected and surprising privilege in being able to listen and participate as I was.

In asking myself the question as to why they would trust me, and be so open in talking about their lives, I think it was because they valued and hoped for egalitarian relationships with their partners. Their enthusiasm I think not only reflected what was happening between them with each other, but it reflected what they hoped for and had experienced at times with their partners. This egalitarian, safe, sacred relationship with their partners came up as a topic constantly. They called it “a safe, sacred place”. Sarah reflects on this, “what actually makes that strong connection is that equal discussion, that space where you both feel accepted and loved and I think that is not an easy thing that just happens, but that is something I have always wanted.... I think the biggest problem was that early on I actually did not know that was what I was looking for....[We have] named it over these discussions”.

Ali continued to talk about this safe, sacred place and sums up the importance of such a place for these women when she said, “For women I think we seek that from our friends and sometimes we do find that through our friendships, but what we are really wanting is that same level of intimacy in the conversation with our partner....It makes me feel like who I am is important...it’s almost like you take away from that place a sense of yourself....your contribution, your language, your ideas, your thought, your personality, your creativity, all these things are valued in that place because someone else is giving you the time to do that...what could be better in life? That’s such an amazing place!”

So, what effects have these discussions had on me?

I became aware when and how I responded in hurtful ways to my partner - particularly the shutting-down behaviour. My partner and I were having a discussion at home, and she was making a suggestion about something concerning our home. I went into “shut down mode” and cut her off with some terse comment. I realized I had just done exactly as the women in the focus group had named and discussed – I had “shut off” my partner. I had assumed she was coming with a set agenda and wanted done something that she wanted just to discuss with me.

I can remember I actually heard the voices of the women in my head about men closing off when they assume their partner’s ideas are already set in concrete. Fortunately I was able to swallow my embarrassment and shame - which I am sure would like me to have continued arguing and ‘win the point’ - and apologise to my partner, adjust and listen to her suggestion. The interesting conclusion to this is that after listening to her I was actually able to see her position and agree that her idea had possibilities. And in case you are wondering whether this story has any continuing substance, sometime after this event I read a letter my partner had written to our family where she said the research was actually changing our relationship for the better.

I conclude this document with a similar story from one of the participants in the focus group whose partner came to much the same realization that I did above. Sue tells the story that when her partner came with the short answer to fix a problem or issue she wanted to discuss with him she would feel, “cut off and shut down and it just took all the joy out of it”. Eventually her partner came to her when he became aware of this effect of his behaviour and said, “I keep ending the conversations don’t I? I keep spoiling this”.

As a result of participating in the focus group with the women I have made some change already and am continuing to make movement toward watching and taking care in my conversations with my partner. I am doing this because I am beginning to realize how powerful my responses can be in shaping a relationship and the identity of each person within that relationship.

When we meet, perhaps it might be useful if we start our conversation with a question similar to the one I asked myself. What is there in this document that stands out for you or maybe catches your attention in surprising ways?

Cheers,

Brian.

## **Appendix E**

### **Men's interviews further written information on the research**

**(stage two, men's interview).**

#### **Further written information on the research**

#### **“Heterosexual couples, gender discourse, and the production of relational subjectivity”.**

Thankyou for expressing interest in this research project. This research is toward a Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. I will outline in the following a little about myself and the reason for this research, my research topic, the research method, safeguards and confidentiality procedures for participants, and the process you will be involved in if you wish to participate in this research.

A little about me

My name is Brian Morris. I am currently a lecturer in counselling at Tabor College Adelaide, where I have been since 2004. Before being at Tabor I was involved in counselling in private practice at Clovercrest Baptist Church in the northern suburbs. Before getting involved in counselling I had some time to study full-time, and worked with the Salvation Army. I am a parent and have been married for 27 years.

Reason for this research

My main area of interest is couples and family counselling and it is from my experience in counselling and teaching in these areas that my interest in the topic for this research came about. I want that this research will contribute to more effective counselling and teaching in the area of couple's relationships, and positively to the relationship between women and men generally.

Research topic

As you would have read in the invitation to participate in this research, this research is exploring the experience of women and men in heterosexual relationships, including the types of conversations they have with each other, what produces the couple's experience of the relationship, and how an egalitarian relationship might be conducted. In particular where this research will concern you, if you agree to participate, is the response of men to women's experience of their relationship with men. What I will be seeking from you in the interview will be your responses and comments on themes and suggestions offered by a women's focus group which discussed the above topics in an earlier stage of this research. I realise some of the responses and comments participants may make could be quite personal so I will have in place safeguards and confidentiality procedures as far as the participant's information and identity is concerned. I will detail these later in this information letter after I have further explained the details and procedure of this research.

#### Research method

If you agree to participate in this research you will be involved in the second of three stages of the research. That will be an interview with me that will run for one and a half hours which will be focussed on the ideas mentioned above. I am planning to interview five men in total around these ideas. The interview will be video and audio taped so that I can transcribe the discussion in a way that most accurately represents what has been discussed. After the interview and after I have transcribed the conversation between myself and the participant I will send to them a copy of this transcription for them to review and revise. In conjunction with this I will also send a letter covering some of what other men in their interviews have said, using pseudonyms, so that each male participant can have some idea of what the other men have contributed, but within the bounds of confidentiality. This letter will also detail suggestions from me that can be offered to a second women's focus group that will compose the third stage of this research. Each man can respond to this letter with their ideas for what is to be offered to the women in the third stage of the research. In response to this I will then write each man a concluding letter outlining what will be taken to the next stage of the research under a neutral pseudonym that will help protect confidentiality.



This third stage of the research involving a second focus group of women will discuss the reflections of the men from their interviews, and the themes and suggestions offered by the first focus group of women. I plan to conduct all this research at my work address, Tabor College Adelaide Goodwood Campus, 164 Goodwood Rd, Goodwood, because a comfortable room is available there for video and audio taping.

#### Safeguards and Confidentiality

From the tapes of the interview I will write up transcripts which I will then send to each man along with a letter as referred to above. Each man can check the transcript for accuracy so that it correctly represents what was discussed within the interview. The video and audio tapes and transcripts of the interview are confidential and the only persons who will be able view or listen to the tapes are myself and my two supervisors in New Zealand, Dr Elmarie Kotzé and Dr Kathie Crocket whose contact details are at the end of this information sheet. All transcripts, documents and tapes related to the research will be stored securely.

Withdrawal from being a research participant in this second stage of the research can occur anytime up until three weeks after the participants receive the transcripts of their interview. To withdraw you can complete and post to me in the reply paid envelope the form attached at the end of this information sheet, "Notice of withdrawal from participation in the research". If you do need to withdraw for any reason whatsoever this is entirely appropriate and acceptable in this research.

Your confidentiality is assured during and after this project on the grounds that I will not deliberately reveal any information gained from this project to anyone through my doctoral thesis, or through being published, or through being presented at professional conferences, other than my supervisors. In doing this I will use pseudonyms, which you and I can agree on, which will indicate your sex, but I will not use any other identifying features except that which is given in the actual interviews and in your revised transcripts.

#### Process for Participants

If after reading this information sheet you choose to participate in this research you can read and sign the attached informed consent form and return it to me in the reply paid envelope. After I have received the informed consent form I will then send you a schedule of possible times for the interview on which you can mark your preferred times and send it back to me. The first five time schedules I receive back will be how I will choose the men for the interviews. If you are not one of those five I will contact you to let you know, and then see if you want to be a reserve for the research or whether you would prefer to withdraw your offer of participation.

Kind regards,

Brian Morris

Contact details for Brian's supervisors are:

- Dr Elmarie Kotzé (Email: [elmariek@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:elmariek@waikato.ac.nz)) and
- Dr Kathie Crocket (Email: [kcrocket@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:kcrocket@waikato.ac.nz))  
Department of Human Development and Counselling

University of Waikato

Private Bag 3105

Hamilton

New Zealand

Phone: 0011 or 0018 647 838 4176

## Appendix F

### Men's interviews research consent form

#### Research Consent Form. (Men's interviews).

**Research Title:** Heterosexual couples, gender discourse and the production of relational subjectivity.

**Researcher:** Brian Morris.

I have read and understood the information for participants in this research which was given to me by Brian and have met with him to discuss this research.

I confirm that:

I understand that this project is guided by the University of Waikato's Human Research Ethics Regulations. Brian has given me information about how he will take responsibility to safeguard my rights and ethical entitlements.

I agree to the video and audio taping of the interview which will be facilitated by Brian. I understand that any recordings or written notes of the interview will be kept securely and used for the purposes of this research project. I agree that the material as it is used in Brian's doctoral thesis may be published, or presented at professional conferences by Brian.

I understand that not all of the material transcribed from the video and audio recordings of the interview will be used in Brian's thesis.

I understand that the material discussed in the interview and used with pseudonyms in conjunction with other research participants is confidential and cannot be discussed or used outside of the research context except, that material which I personally disclosed, and for use by Brian in his doctoral thesis and any published material or presentations at conferences.

I understand that the video and audio tapes and transcripts along with this consent form will be accessible to Brian's supervisors to enable them to hold Brian accountable to professional standards and ethics and to provide safeguards to all

participants. The supervisors will not reveal any identifying information about the participants to any other person.

Contact details for Brian's supervisors are:

- Dr Elmarie Kotzé (Email: [elmariek@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:elmariek@waikato.ac.nz)) and
- Dr Kathie Crocket (Email: [kcrocket@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:kcrocket@waikato.ac.nz))  
Department of Human Development and Counselling

University of Waikato

Private Bag 3105

Hamilton

New Zealand

Phone: 0011 or 0018 647 838 4176

I understand that I have the right to remove or alter identifying information from my transcripts and to revise them after the interview as I deem appropriate for fair representation of my voice. This also applies to the letter Brian will send to me with the transcript after the interview. My preferred way of Brian sending me the written material and letters during the actual research process is recorded on the form attached to the end of this research consent form.

I understand that I will be participating in one interview with Brian for one and a half hours and that I have been notified what the purpose of this interview is.

I understand that I may withdraw from this research at any time up until three weeks after I receive the transcript of the interview from Brian. I understand that to withdraw from this research all I need to do is mail to him the "notice of withdrawal from participation in research" which is attached to the information sheet Brian has previously given to me. I understand that I do not need to provide an explanation for my withdrawal.

I understand that if I want counselling after participating in this research I may contact Brian who will arrange for me to be referred to a reputable counsellor.

I understand that I can ask questions at any time and that these will be welcomed.  
This can be when we meet to conduct the research or via telephone or email as follows: (Deleted for this thesis appendix)

Both the mobile and email are confidential.

I understand that I have received the information I believe is necessary for me to give informed consent to participating in Brian Morris' research project and I agree to the terms outlined.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Preferred way of written communication being sent to me and returned to Brian during the research process is:**

Email.

Ordinary post.

Registered post.

Courier.

(Circle the mode you prefer).

## **Appendix G**

### **Men's interviews document**

PLEASE NOTE: (This document was sent in landscape orientation to the men. It is copied for this thesis appendix in portrait orientation. As in the original landscape copy of this document, in this appendix, all records from the men's transcripts align with the relevant questions in the right hand margin).

Dear Peter, Chris, Andrew, Russell, and William,

Thankyou to each of you for your willingness to spend time with me offering reflections on the document from the women's focus group and discussing your own practices of relationship with your partner. The interviews with each of you have contributed very helpfully to the research because you were prepared to speak openly of yourself, and your knowledge and experience in relationship.

This document is a summary of the themes and ideas that I have brought together from each of our interviews. I apologise that it has taken some time to get this document to you. The collation of information from the interviews and the crafting of this document has taken longer than I expected.

I invite you to read this document, for your own interest's sake, and also to check that it includes fairly aspects of our conversations. I will then take it forward, with the first focus group document, to the final focus group of women for their reflection and learning. If you could get your response back to me via email, or letter, within two weeks, I would greatly appreciate that. Please let me know if that will not be possible for you.

I have arranged the information in this document into a number of themes that were common across most, if not all our interviews. In doing this I have only included some of your responses from our discussions. If there are responses from your interview with me that you would like to have seen included in this document, or you want to add or change something, then I invite you to let me know when you get back to me in your response to this document. In the column to the right of the following pages I have occasionally included questions and

responses that reflect my own curiosity and learning at this stage of the research. I would appreciate any reflections you want to offer to these.

In the first section of this document I have focussed on the responses from you each to three of the themes in the women's focus group document. You possibly will remember those themes:

- on the practice of 'shut-offs',
- 'nagging' responses,
- the influence of the relationship and conversations on the identity of the women.

After this section the document then focuses on the other themes which came up consistently in our discussions. These will be clearly headed as you read through the document.

*Responses to Women's focus group document.*

a). Shut-off

The presence of 'shut-off' when in conversation with your partner was something that each of you recognised. Some of you tended to employ 'cut-offs' when your partner was endeavouring to share an opinion, usually when the relationship was not your central focus at that moment. The most common way for you to engage in 'shut-off' was through the 'fix-it' position before the listening process was completed in a way that was satisfying to your partner.

William, you made a reflective comment about the effects of cutting off through moving into a fix-it position, "how disempowering the idea or the

I have a couple of questions in response to this recognition: What relational effects have you noticed when this 'shut-off' is employed? Have there perhaps been other ways of listening or 'fixing it' that you have noticed or employed?

I found William's comment offered me new understanding about the

attempt to find solutions can be, when your partner is trying to talk to you about something”.

Along these lines, Chris you expressed how you had learnt anew the power of conversations to shape people’s experience by reading how the women represented in the focus group document felt when they were shut down or told they were nagging.

#### b). Nagging

Most of you had a comment to make on nagging and why it occurred or why men refer to it as ‘nagging’. You suggested, Andrew, when a woman moves into a ‘nagging’ response she is asking her male partner, “Well have you heard me?” Connected to this thought was the idea from William that the ‘nag’ response “comes from a sense of powerlessness for the woman”, and by not listening the male partner is endeavouring to control her position in the conversation at this time. Peter, you said, “I guess in the nagging she feels she is not being respected... not being listened to. And ultimately I guess that is an issue of power. If I choose not to listen then I’m holding the power, and she is powerless because no matter how she voices or what she does, action won’t get taken on that”. Chris, you suggested a reason men might refer to their partner’s requests or voice as nagging or ‘a nag’, is a tool to shut them down so

effects of cutting off my partner, or anyone. What can you imagine are some of the other effects, when having a conversation, that being shut-down or being called a ‘nag’ may invite into a women’s experience?

I am curious about this relationship between the ‘nagging response’, shutting down our partners, and power. As I re-read the women’s focus group document what is referred to as the ‘nagging response’ seems to me to be a call for connection. Whereas I wonder, when I read these responses here and look at my own relational history, whether it perhaps is interpreted by men as enacting power, and thus we offer responses that limit connection, and keep the position of power in regard to our partners?



that men can be left alone. William, after reading the women's focus group document and in reflecting on a relationship you had been involved in, before your current relationship, you could see that as you isolated yourself emotionally from your partner she responded to this isolation with 'nagging' as she did not know what else to do to repair the relationship. "That sense of nagging as a response to powerlessness makes me think that perhaps I had more power in my relationship, my first relationship than I thought I had".

c). Relationship and conversation shaping identity

I have included here some responses from the interviews where more time and in depth discussion was dedicated to this theme.

Chris, you said, "I was unaware of the power of conversation in influencing individuals especially in relation to behaviour, self-esteem and identity, and how important that was".

Andrew, you gave an example of how your partner was shaped by her Father's abuse which resulted in her experience of men being perceived within the limits of abuse and control, ringing true with some of the expressions in the focus group

Our combined reflections have led me to the following questions: If we experience our partners stepping into a nagging response now, what might you suggest we do to offer respect and listening to them? If we were to consult the focus group women what do you think they might suggest?

I can identify fully with Chris here. Until I began this research I did not understand the extent to which language shaped people's experience. Needless to say I try and watch what I say very closely now. I have become more aware too of the potential effect of other people's words in shaping my own identity and experience.

I have some questions around this captivating moment in your relationship, Andrew. What do you think this experience opened up

document. You then talked about how over time in your relationship with each other, this changed, and she became more responsive to the shaping that came from relationship and conversation with you. A big turning point was after she scratched the motor car, and was terrified in telling you about it, you were relaxed about it, and both of you were able to laugh about it.

Andrew, you also mentioned how your partner has offered influence to you, “particularly in some of those insecurities which were to do with learning difficulties. She has nurtured me very well in those things as well....It’s certainly not a one-sided thing”.

Finally, William, you suggested a metaphor, sculpting, which reflects how our relationships and conversations shape us. “We are sculpting each other in the conversations and the day to day lives”. You took the metaphor further and suggested that a gentle tapping of a mallet might reflect helpful shaping that happens in our relationships, but that the blows of a hammer will be damaging taking chunks out of people. This is related to any contact with people, you said, “Any time you are in contact with someone you are shaping that sandstone just a little tiny bit. It may not be much but you just don’t know that you might be walking through with a chisel and you

for your partner as far as her hopes and dreams for relationship with you were concerned? What were you standing for in terms of your partner and the relationship?

I wonder where Andrew’s two nurturing stories take each one of us? They offer me an opportunity to reflect on reciprocal care and nurturing in relationship with my partner.

This metaphor has helped me be more aware of my conversations. I am often aware of when someone is taking “a chunk” out of me during a conversation. This metaphor has once again alerted me to my responsibility to watch what I say so that I do not take chunks out of others, but that the shaping effect of my engagement with them is sculpting in a way that

might accidentally take a chunk out of someone without realising it”.

contributes beauty to their form.

I want to move now from this focus on responses to the women’s focus group document to other themes I have noted from our interviews, and finally, the action you have taken for the relationship with your partners.

### *Friendship and honouring in relationship*

The first theme that came out of some of the conversations with you was the notion of your relationship being based in friendship and honouring of each other as opposed to romantic notions of heterosexual couple relationships. Peter, you and your partner early in your own relationship after you had witnessed the end of close friend’s marital relationship, “were confronted with this idea that there is no guarantee” in couple relationships. In reflecting on this you and your partner decided that, “I can say that I will love you, [but] can I say that I will love you in twenty years time? Well actually you can’t. It’s a romantic notion that sounds nice, but actually I can’t say that, because I don’t know what will happen”. You both came to the commitment of saying, “the only guarantee that I can make to you is that today I will make decisions that honour you”.

Russell, you were expressing to me this same movement in your own understanding of couple relationships using a play on the words “in-love”. Together we paraphrased this as meaning “moving from a romantic understanding of love to a strong friendship base”. In reflecting on what really makes a relationship work you said, “What is it that it means to be in relationship where both parties are happy with the relationship, and not just assuming things, and not just saying, “okay”, because you have got this feeling of love for someone that’s it. That is your panacea and the relationship will work happily ever after. Obviously it didn’t work last time, so why was it going to work this time?” After this reflection Russell you went on to talk about how you realised you had a choice to make about the relationship with your partner. This choice is referred to later in this document.

#### *Cultural and societal ideas*

Through our conversation, Chris and I were able to make more visible how cultural and societal ideas play a role in how we do relationships. In participating in counselling before you got married, Chris, you learned that the western culture you were raised in ascribes power to men. And men may not be aware of this until they move into a major relationship where that power has been misused in various ways. Russell, you also

Understanding and coming to terms with patriarchy during this research has been new learning for me. This has been integral to understanding the discrepancies between men and women in regard to power and privilege in society and heterosexual relationships. What I have

talked about this without initially being aware that your behaviour was culturally influenced. In reflecting upon your first marriage and now in your current relationship, you observed that your “second marriage was going to end the same way as the first...there is a pattern forming here and it is me”. In our continued discussion we developed our understanding further from your experience and observation of the “auto pilot” or, “this is how men do it, and this is how women do it” approach to relationship that is culturally driven. We eventually came to a position of seeing that patriarchy “fits the description” of these cultural influences on couple relationships that we had discussed.

In elaborating on how present and pervasive cultural and societal ideas are in our lives William who supports “domestic and social equality” but acknowledges the personal struggles between working toward this and being caught into non-egalitarian practices at times said, “it is interesting from the point of view of a guy who thinks that equal relationships are a good thing, and who thinks that he doesn’t do to badly in that respect, it is still interesting to see that nobody escapes the social milieu they find themselves in”.

*Partner awareness*

found most helpful in addressing it is that it is not about ‘bagging’ men, or feeling guilty or even angry about patriarchy, but finding ways to help men and women to recognise its distancing and damaging effects on their relationship and resist its influence together.

Is this recognition of the pervasiveness of cultural ideas (eg. patriarchy) in our lives one of the ways that can help us question the practices attached to them, such as ‘cut-offs’? Does this recognition help us build egalitarian relationship practices through friendship, honouring, and considerate conversations?

With different emphases a quite common theme was how each of you gave attention to your partners. Peter and Russell, you both referred to reading you had done which helped you turn toward ascertaining and endeavouring to meet your partner's relational needs. Chris, you used the phrase "everyday discipline of listening" as a way of both developing and practising partner awareness which is essential to learning about your partner and learning from your partner. And, William you gave some indicator on how this might be required to happen at times with your partner when discussing concerns that are important to her but do not carry the same weight of importance with you as the male partner. "I have got to be aware that when we are discussing stuff that is going to be important for her ...that I don't dismiss those sorts of concerns. I have to try, even if I don't understand what the emotion is, I have to understand the impact and the importance it has for her".

### *Vulnerability*

While vulnerability can be abused by either partner in the relationship it came through from some of you as a position men can learn to take more often in the relationship, both in helping our partners, but also in learning something from them. Andrew, you referred to humbling yourself [vulnerably], as part of a spiritual act you participate in with your partner, and in admitting you make mistakes and apologising to her. In

I find placing myself in a position of vulnerability with my partner difficult at times because I get caught into 'who has the power' in the relationship.

My conversations with each of you, and with the women's focus group, along with some reading, have helped

doing this you evened out the power inequity that can exist in intimate relationships, and placed yourself in a position where your partner could see that you were approachable on concerns she had about the relationship with you. Peter, you talked about how difficult vulnerability is in your couple relationship even when you know it is something that will enrich the relationship. You agreed that the sense of power that can be experienced in couple relationships can interfere when a member of the couple may need to place themselves in a position of vulnerability in the relationship.

me understand that power is not attached to people but to the ideas we practice our relationships by. For example patriarchal ideas would have us enact certain practices of power in our relationships. If we want to practice relationship according to egalitarian ideas then power becomes something far more negotiable between two equals. This understanding of power has lessened the threat of vulnerability for me, opening new ways of doing relationship with my partner.

#### *Action taken for the relationship*

This could be coined action that is turning toward the relationship in contrast with action that is turning away from the relationship.

##### a). Self-reflection

Every one of you indicated that you had done or continue to do serious self-reflection on your relationship and the part you play in it. Peter, I have already mentioned the reflection you

I am reminded here of an email one of the women from the focus group sent me after that was completed. The core of her comment

participated in when early in your relationship you witnessed the demise of a friend's relationship. Chris, counselling was a catalyst for you taking a reflective position on your relationship. Andrew, you take a reflective position on how you respond to your partner when she has raised a concern with you. Often, as a deliberate act, you will raise the concern again later, after the pain from the initial moment has lifted, which serves to help your partner know that you have heard her and you are working on the issue raised. Russell, I have mentioned your reflective work around the "auto-pilot" mode of conducting a relationship as you became aware that your current relationship was heading in the direction of your first. And, William, you commented on the impact of the focus group document for you saying, "It helps me be more self-aware...in the context of relationships...that sense that the way we do things impacts our partners, and the way that we sometimes aren't aware. I think that self-awareness in relationships is really what was of interest for me. It has been a very good reflecting tool...that sort of self-reflection is invaluable."

b). A deliberate choice for the relationship

What I also noted from our discussions in regard to action that you took for the relationship was, deliberately making a choice for the relationship. While each of you have done this in different ways and something of your choices has been articulated in this document I will mention three

was that for men to change they needed to engage in serious self-reflection on the relationship with their female partners, and the impact they as men have on that relationship. From my own experience and from the discussions I have had with each of you this certainly is important groundwork for change.

It was special to hear how each of you made a choice for the relationship. After reading the transcripts of our discussions, and in preparing this document, it is apparent that that choice had with it



examples here that I think resonate with your individual responses.

implications for how you would conduct yourself in the relationship.

Russell, you spoke of three choices that lay before you when you realised that your relationship was “slipping away”. The choice “to do nothing about it”; the choice “to make the break then and there” and end the relationship; and the third possibility, “this is something we want to rescue and we want to make a commitment to make it work again”. In a number of places in this document I have referred to the action you then took after making this third choice for your relationship.

What is it that you value Russell that you should choose for the relationship? What is it that each one of us values that we should choose for our relationship with our partners? How is that value being practiced in the relationship now?

William you talked about deliberately having a dialogue with yourself at times to make sure you question unhelpful assumptions when having a conversation with your partner. “You need to speak honestly [in your conversations] but I think it is important that you sometimes need to think, ‘is what’s going through my head, is it what I really think, is it something that I just take for granted’. You know it’s almost as if you have got to have a dialogue with yourself about your assumptions [before you converse with your partner]”.

Finally, Chris, you talked about the need to deliberately reciprocate the effort women put into

a relationship. You said, “If you are appreciating and realising the effort that is being put in then I think you should be reciprocating that. [Men] need to realise the value women hold in the relationship, and how much that feeds them...I think if you are improving that, and working at that then I think it is freeing for them [your partner] to be, to try new things, to bring up suggestions, to do things”. Andrew, you gave an example of this reciprocity in your relationship. Because you cook, one of the things you do is cook for your partner and her friends when they meet at your house. In commenting on this you said, “To actually go to the effort of putting as much effort in for her, as [I would] a group that I really am more interested in, that’s important because it says I honour and recognise the value of that [your partner’s] group”.

I want to say thankyou to each of you for your contribution to the ongoing conversation about relationship practices available to us as men in heterosexual relationships. Thankyou for the stand each of you are taking for the relationship with your partner, and for the reflections you have shared with me about the purposeful action you are taking for relationship. I hope that it has been a helpful experience for each of you, and even productive in some way for you and your relationships. It has contributed very beneficially to my research, and to me personally, and will continue to do so, for which I am most appreciative of you each. Thanks again!

As I suggested earlier, if there is anything that you would like to see changed or added then let me know and I will work with that. If you could get this back to me within two weeks of receiving it that would be great. Cheers, Brian.

## **Appendix H**

### **Second focus group further written information on the research (third stage, second focus group).**

#### **Further written information on the research**

#### **“Heterosexual couples, gender discourse, and the production of relational subjectivity”.**

Thankyou for expressing interest in this research project. This research is toward a Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. I will outline in the following a little about myself and the reason for this research, my research topic, the research method, safeguards and confidentiality procedures for participants, and the process you will be involved in if you wish to participate in this research.

#### **A little about me**

My name is Brian Morris. I am currently a lecturer in counselling at Tabor College Adelaide, where I have been since 2004. Before being at Tabor I was involved in counselling in private practice at Clovercrest Baptist Church in the northern suburbs. Before getting involved in counselling I had some time to study full-time, and worked with the Salvation Army. I am a parent and have been married for 27 years.

#### **Reason for this research**

My main area of interest is couples and family counselling and it is from my experience in counselling and teaching in these areas that my interest in the topic for this research came about. I want that this research will contribute to more effective counselling and teaching in the area of couple's relationships, and positively to the relationship between women and men generally.

## Research topic

As you would have read in the invitation to participate in this research, this research is exploring the experience of women and men in heterosexual relationships, including the types of conversations they have with each other, what produces the couple's experience of the relationship, and how an egalitarian relationship might be conducted. If you agree to participate in this research the part you will be involved in will be the third and final stage which is a women's focus group. In this group participants will respond to themes and suggestions offered by another women's focus group (stage one of the research), and responses and reflections offered by men, who I interviewed (stage two), to those themes and suggestions from the first women's group.

I realise that some of the material to be discussed could be personal for many people so I will have in place safeguards and confidentiality procedures as far as the participant's information and identity is concerned. I will detail these later in this information letter after I have further explained the details and procedure of this research.

## Research method

If you agree to participate in this research you will be involved in the final of three stages of the research. This will be a focus group that will meet once for two hours discussing the information I outlined above from the previous two stages of this research. I will be facilitating this focus group of six women with the offerings from the previous stages of the research. The focus group meeting will be video and audio taped so that I can transcribe the discussion in a way that most accurately represents what each participant has said. After I have transcribed the discussion I will then send to each participant a copy of this transcription from which they can review and revise their own contribution so that they feel their voice is most adequately represented in the transcript. The only proviso on this revision is that the meaning of the discussion is not altered and no other participant's contribution is altered. These revised transcripts will need to be returned to me within twenty one days of the participants receiving them. That will conclude the participant's involvement in this research. I plan to conduct all

this research at my work address, Tabor College Adelaide Goodwood Campus, 164 Goodwood Rd, Goodwood, because a comfortable room is available there for video and audio taping.

#### Safeguards and Confidentiality

From the tapes of the focus group discussion I will write up transcripts which I will send to each woman for them to check that it correctly represents their contribution to the group discussion. The video and audio tapes and transcripts of the discussion are confidential and the only persons who will be able view or listen to the tapes are myself and my two supervisors in New Zealand, Dr Elmarie Kotzé and Dr Kathie Crocket whose contact details are at the end of this information sheet. All transcripts, documents and tapes related to the research will be stored securely.

Withdrawal from being a research participant in this third stage of the research can occur anytime up until three weeks after the participants receive the transcript of the focus group meeting. To withdraw you can complete and post to me in the reply paid envelope the form attached at the end of this information sheet, "Notice of withdrawal from participation in the research". If you do need to withdraw for any reason whatsoever this is entirely appropriate and acceptable in this research.

Your confidentiality is assured during and after this project on the grounds that I will not deliberately reveal any information gained from this project to anyone through my doctoral thesis, or through being published, or presented at professional conferences, other than my supervisors. In doing this I will use pseudonyms, which you and I can agree on, which will indicate your sex, but I will not use any other identifying features except that which is given in the actual group discussion and which you state I can use.

#### Process for Participants

If after reading this information sheet you choose to participate in this research you can read and sign the attached informed consent form and return it to me in the reply paid envelope. After I have received the informed consent form I will then send you a schedule of possible times for when the focus group meeting can

be held on which you can mark your preferred times and send it back to me. When I have received six time schedules back that indicate the same time then I will contact those six women regarding the time the meetings are to be held. If you are not one of those six I will contact you to let you know, and then see if you want to be a reserve for the research or whether you would prefer to withdraw your offer of participation.

Kind regards,

Brian Morris

Contact details for Brian's supervisors are:

- Dr Elmarie Kotzé (Email: [elmariek@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:elmariek@waikato.ac.nz)) and
- Dr Kathie Crocket (Email: [kcrocket@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:kcrocket@waikato.ac.nz))  
Department of Human Development and Counselling

University of Waikato

Private Bag 3105

Hamilton

New Zealand

Phone: 0011 or 0018 647 838 4176

# Appendix I

## Second focus group research consent form

### Research Consent Form. (Focus Group Two).

**Research Title:** Heterosexual couples, gender discourse and the production of relational subjectivity.

**Researcher:** Brian Morris.

I have read and understood the information for participants in this research which was given to me by Brian and have met with him to discuss this research.

I confirm that:

I understand that this project is guided by the University of Waikato's Human Research Ethics Regulations. Brian has given me information about how he will take responsibility to safeguard my rights and ethical entitlements.

I agree to the video and audio taping of the focus group which will be facilitated by Brian. I understand that any recordings or written notes of the focus group will be kept securely and used for the purposes of this research project. I agree that the material as it is used in Brian's doctoral thesis may be published, or presented at professional conferences by Brian.

I understand that not all of the material transcribed from the video and audio recordings of the focus group will be used in Brian's thesis.

I understand that the material discussed in the focus group is confidential and cannot be discussed or used outside of that focus group except, that material which I personally disclosed, and for use by Brian in his doctoral thesis and any published material or presentations at conferences.

I understand that the video and audio tapes and transcripts along with this consent form will be accessible to Brian's supervisors to enable them to hold Brian accountable to professional standards and ethics and to provide safeguards to all participants. The supervisors will not reveal any identifying information about the participants to any other person.

Contact details for Brian's supervisors are:

- Dr Elmarie Kotzé (Email: [elmariek@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:elmariek@waikato.ac.nz)) and
- Dr Kathie Crocket (Email: [kcrocket@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:kcrocket@waikato.ac.nz))  
Department of Human Development and Counselling

University of Waikato

Private Bag 3105

Hamilton

New Zealand

Phone: 0011 or 0018 647 838 4176

I understand that I have the right to remove or alter identifying information from my transcripts but not change the content of the discussion as recorded in the transcript in ways that alters the meaning of the discussion. My preferred way of Brian sending me the transcripts after the focus group meeting is recorded on the form attached to the end of this research consent form.

I understand that I will be participating in one focus group meeting for two hours which Brian will be facilitating, and that I have been notified what the purpose will be for that focus group meeting.

I understand that I may withdraw from this research at any time up until three weeks after I receive the focus group transcript from Brian. I understand that to withdraw from this research all I need to do is mail to him the "notice of withdrawal from participation in research" which is attached to the information sheet Brian has previously given to me. I understand that I do not need to provide an explanation for my withdrawal.

I understand that if I want counselling after participating in this research I may contact Brian who will arrange for me to be referred to a reputable counsellor.

I understand that I can ask questions at any time and that these will be welcomed. This can be when we meet to conduct the research or via telephone or email as follows: (Deleted for this thesis appendix)



Both the mobile and email are confidential.

I understand that I have received the information I believe is necessary for me to give informed consent to participating in Brian Morris' research project and I agree to the terms outlined.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Preferred way of written communication being sent to me and returned to Brian during the research process is:**

Email.

Ordinary post.

Registered post.

Courier.

(Circle the mode you prefer).

## **Appendix J**

### **Second focus group, research design summary and discussion guide**

#### **Questions for second focus group.**

Before going on to the questions for our focus group, I will briefly outline the project so far to give the history of how the two documents I have sent you came about.

#### **The women's group document.**

The first document is the culmination of three focus group sessions with six women held over a period of two months toward the end of 2008. In those three sessions we discussed a number of relationship themes which emerged from their experience of heterosexual relationships with their partners, or ex-partners. In between the first and second sessions and the second and third sessions I sent them each a summary document of the previous session which they would check for accuracy and then accept or reject as a reliable representation of the session. A major focus was how the women's experience was shaped by conversations with their partner, particularly where there was a power imbalance as to who directed and controlled the conversations. After the final session, in conjunction with my research supervisors I sent the participants the document you now have which summarises the core themes of our three discussions. They each approved and accepted this document as a reliable representation of the themes discussed over the three meetings we had together.

#### **The men's document.**

The women's group document was then taken to separate interviews I had with five men as an invitation for them to respond by exploring their own experience of the identified dimensions of heterosexual relationship(s). In these interviews I used questions much like what I have prepared below, for your exploration, to invite the men to reflect on and respond to the women's focus group document. The second document you have is a summary of those five interviews with the men conducted during mid 2009. After I interviewed each man I sent him a

transcript of our interview, then he would accept it or suggest some alteration according to his memory of the interview. After all five interviews, in conjunction with my research supervisors, I then prepared the document you have which summarises the main themes and ideas from all the men's interviews. I also added, in a right margin some of my own questions and thoughts in conjunction with the summary and responses from the men. This document was sent to the men so they could check that their contribution to this document was a fair and reliable representation.

### **The next step in the process.**

The research design concludes the consultations with a third stage of presenting these documents from the previous two stages of the research to a new focus group of women. I invite the women in this second group to reflect on and respond to both these documents. My intention in this structure is to enable a final perspective to be offered by a women's group. This final stage is the part I am inviting you to engage in.

The names in the two documents you have are pseudonyms. And I invite you also to come up with a pseudonym for yourself that can be used with any documents that will be viewed outside of this focus group, including my thesis.

### **Your part in the research.**

The position I am inviting you to take in regard to these two documents is that of a witness to the women and men whose ideas and discussions led to these documents. I am interested in and would like to invite you to discuss your first impressions, anything that particularly stands out for you, and ideas that you hold after having read these documents. Below I offer four types of questions that can act as an initial invitation for reflection on each group/document. If you have your own questions in response to these documents you are welcome to bring them as well, or you can shape the questions below to suit. My hope is that you can speak of what interests you particularly, without a sense of particular expectation or evaluation.

**Questions for the first document. The Women's Focus group.**

1. After you have read the first document of the women's focus group, may I ask what stands out for you if you reflect on the document? This could be something specific or an overview or an impression. Was there anything that captured your attention that stayed with you, or invited you to think about something they said?
2. As you read through the document or if you reflected on it afterwards were there any images, metaphors, pictures that came to mind that might help me grasp something of your response to the document?
3. Connecting back to the first question. If something did stand out for you, or captured your attention, or invited you to think about something they said do you have an idea why it did so?
4. As you read the document or reflected on it may I ask you where, if anywhere, did this document take you in regard to your thinking about relationships?

**Questions for the second document. Interviews with the men.**

1. After you have read the second document of the men's interviews, may I ask what stands out for you if you reflect on the document? This could be something specific or an overview or an impression. Was there anything that captured your attention that stayed with you, or invited you to think about something they said?
2. As you read through the document or if you reflected on it afterwards were there any images, metaphors, pictures that came to mind that might help me grasp something of your response to the document?
3. Relating back to the first question, if anything did stand out or invited you to be curious, either by its presence or absence in the document, may I ask you, why it did so?
4. As you read these two documents or reflect on them can you tell me what meaning you make of the documents, heterosexual relationships, or on relationships in general, or anything else...?

Thanks for your time with this research thus far, and for your willingness to participate. I look forward to meeting with you and the other women in the group and sharing in conversation about your responses to these documents and the ideas they offer about relationships.

Brian.

## **Appendix K**

### **First focus group first meeting narrative research document**

First Focus Group, meeting one, narrative document.

Dear Ali, Carmen, Hannah, Annie, Sue, Sarah,

First of all I want to say thankyou so much for your contribution to this first meeting we have had. As I said toward the end of the meeting that just hearing each of you speak about your experience was a powerful learning for me. I am honoured and privileged by the sharing of your stories and hope that I will do these justice.

To briefly explain the purpose and format of this document: First of all it is intended to be a brief summary of the group discussion around the themes and ideas that were discussed by each of us and, secondly, some questions that are possible areas of further discussion that you might like to take up when we meet next time. I acknowledge that this document is a summary of the group's discussion, which I have taken from my transcription of the meeting, and hence you may have said something of importance that I have not picked up and included here. If this is so don't hesitate to include them in your feedback to me the next time we meet.

The group discussion touched on several questions such as for example:

- Can you share with us the kind of words and tone of language you and your partner use, or used, when talking about an important decision to be made?
- Would this tone and words be the same for all conversations about important decisions?
- Would there be differences depending on the decision to be made?
- Are there situations where either of you controlled the conversation?

Carmen: You spoke of the tone in a conversation being dependent upon the times when insecurity starts having a voice in your relationship, and the conversation and decision being focussed on something that either of you might feel personally

attached to. You gave the example of your partner wanting to buy something that he really had become “personally connected” to, but you had suggested this was not possible financially, to which he would initially respond with frustration in his tone (a kind of growl was the noise you made to imitate this), and then after thinking about it himself, you said he would calm down and agree with you.

Sarah: In taking up the themes that Carmen had introduced you spoke of how in your experience the tone of language is associated with conversations around something that is “very precious to you”. You went on to say, “In some of my experiences you know my partner won’t necessarily always understand straight away, and then I may explain things which obviously will make sense, but for me it can get quite frustrating. I can get more tense, my tone kind of raises, my voice raises or it lowers, but it is usually a direct stress related thing where I feel anxious, so that is sort of, ‘why don’t you just understand’? But I think that’s because there is a really big personal investment in it, and that’s usually when I think it occurs in big decisions.” Then Sarah, you suggested, that this probably goes for your partner when conversing with you as well, as you both, when bringing something for discussion and a decision to be made presume the partner has also been thinking about it. Then you talked about the importance of “having the opportunity to communicate enough.”

Sarah, you went on to explain “communicate enough” to mean the following, “If you don’t spend enough time communicating its just sort of shut off, then it can really deflate your confidence in the relationship about, can I make these big decisions with someone, who am I going to talk to? And, like not to get too big but, leading to a point where maybe you turn to other people with your bigger decisions instead of your partner”.

I note that this being “shut off” is referred to off and on throughout our first meeting. I wonder then, whether this is a practice that happens often, or is significant in relationships, to be discussed further by the group? If so, perhaps the following questions can contribute to the discussion. How can “shutting off” not have the final say about the relationship, and for equal opportunities in the conversation between partners? What can men do to help grow the hope for equal space in a relationship?

Hannah: You joined in and spoke about “shutting off”. “If you’re shut down all the time then you can’t share decisions with your partner, you haven’t got a choice. And if you shut down on every front, then there is no partnership anymore.” You also said how the threat of physical violence leaves you without a choice in a heterosexual relationship, and even when this is not present, your experience spoke of men ending the relationship when you bring into the conversation topics that they don’t want to talk about. Hannah, do you think this leaving the relationship is an action that stands against, staying in the relationship, or hanging in there when the going gets tough?

Sarah: You then spoke and elaborated on your experience by describing how your partner, even though “he’s not aggressive”, would sometimes use his power as a man to try and control conversations to show that he knows what is going on. This frightened you, and eventually he got counselling at your suggestion. How was this for you Sarah, to experience him taking up your suggestion? Would he have been able to recommend this to himself or was it your suggestions that brought this idea forward?

Sue: you talked about how early in your marriage your partner would retreat from your wanting to have a conversation with him on important matters to you, “especially to do with the kids”, and that would leave you with the feelings of frustration and anger. You spoke of how writing down the things that gave rise to the frustration, what your partner had said, and talking about this with God at the same time, would help settle the frustration and anger. “And then I would rip it up and throw it away, and then I’d be calm enough to go out and have a sensible conversation”. “Gradually”, you said Sue, “I think he began to enjoy the talking out, eventually we learned to talk everything out.” Looking at the way in which the “talking out” aspect of the relationship developed, is there an incident that stands out as very significant when you did not have to invite him back but he instead turned towards the dialogue?

Ali: You said how Sue’s experience resonates with you a bit. That early in your relationship it took a lot for you to get your partner to the point that “he was

actually listening and wanting to engage”. But at times he did not want to be engaged and talk about what you were raising, so he would escape because he’d never experienced the type of conversation you wanted to engage him in. However now, you said Ali, “we have worked it out, so now we don’t get to that point.” Earlier you referred to one of those ways I think, of conducting an ‘open’ conversation between each other by the use of emails when he is at work. You mentioned how the email provides “that space in between, so he has time to look at it and respond if he wants to, or we can talk about it when you get home if it is important enough”. You mentioned later that some of your verbal discussions can get “very energetic” and that sometimes, not as often now though, he may still not want to engage, and escape the conversation. What are your thoughts Ali, about what the email provides for your partner, for you, and for the relationship?

Annie: You spoke of your partner taking a passive stance, especially in the area of making decisions. You made the distinction between your partner communicating clearly and intelligently to an audience in his employment, and the communicating required in his personal responsibilities, especially decision-making at home. Annie, you said this passive stance then positions you to make a decision and, “...I just resent that it ends up being me.” What does that resentment speak of Annie? Does the resentment speak of the discomfort of being positioned to step up into making a decision, or a resentment that passivity got the last word in the relationship? Does it speak of a sadness of what gets left out of the relationship, or does it speak more of the hopes and possibilities you hold for the relationship?

I mentioned earlier about the “shutting off” idea that gets a grip on how relationships are conducted, and that because it appeared throughout the group’s discussion it might be a possible further topic to take up when we next meet. Some further questions around this theme that could contribute to the discussion are: What happens for you when responsibility and meaning in the relationship cannot be negotiated any longer and shutting off takes over the relationship? How are you placed when this happens? What would you prefer shared responsibility or negotiation to look like? Has there ever been a time when what you prefer a conversation to look like has happened? How do you feel at times like this?



Carmen: You spoke of how you are in a similar situation where you take on “more and more things as far as responsibilities”, and you spoke of your partner being focussed on “one-track, the business” referring to his employment situation, and how “there are many things that are not important to men”. Carmen, is it your experience that women are being responsible for much of what happens in the home, while the men tend to maintain responsibility mainly for employment or the work outside of domestic and relational responsibilities? If so, how does this position women? How is this for you?

Toward the end of the first hour Ali you raised a point, but before you could continue and explain your situation I unfortunately interrupted you. You said, “I feel like I pretty much drive the relationship, and drive the decisions ...” (Unfortunately I interrupted you there, and I apologize). If I had given you the opportunity to complete, may I ask, what would you have said?

One example, that the group raised, where this driving of the decisions happens was the area of finances. Some of you shared how often the responsibility for organising the finances will fall with you. For some, you do all of the finances, for others of you the finances are shared with your partner. May I ask, regarding the finances (and other relational and home responsibilities) have you just taken these responsibilities on because “someone has got to do it” or have you been able to have a conversation around this with your partner and come to an agreement you are both happy with? In conjunction with the discussion around finances Ali and Sarah, raised the idea of “letting go”, where your partner has capably managed the finances when you have been ill, or when you have asked him to do a task, “he’s fine” with it.

With the idea of “letting go”: What do you let go of? When do you know it is the right time to let go of something? What knowledge do you use to make the decision of letting go of something?

Sue: You used the metaphor of the gopher as your partner and yourself as the bird swooping and giving information and ‘the gopher’ would then hide again, but then you would work at inducing ‘the gopher’ out of the hole so a conversation

could take place. Do you see this as a woman partner taking responsibility for the health of the relationship, or steps towards an equal sharing of the relational and home responsibilities? What are your hopes for these investments you make in the relationship? This is obviously open for discussion if you would like to take this up when next the group meets.

When it came to the experience of the relationship each person in the group had much to share. I will now briefly summarise this with some questions added on that you might like to take up for discussion when we meet next.

Sarah: You shared how the controlling angry behaviour that your partner sometimes exerted would leave you scared and shocked. At your suggestion he got counselling. What made it possible for you to respond to him from a position of suggesting he get counselling and stop the inappropriate power use? How was it for you to step into such a position? Then a little later on you said in relation to your partner getting counselling, "I just thought it was so amazing that he was willing first of all to go there, he was really scared .... In so many ways he is such a hero to be able to do that in my eyes because that's so huge." Do you hear these words as admiration on your part Sarah, as a result of your partner participating in counselling, in contrast to the fear and shock you have also experienced in this relationship?

I don't know if you are interested in talking further about this range of emotions Sarah, but if you are I have included some questions which may help with this. How did your partner going to counselling result in such a change in emotions for you? Did these emotions then impact on how you related to him? Is there a relationship between how the two of you relate to each other and the changes the counselling brought about?

Ali: Early in our discussion in regard to you and your partner communicating via email you said, "But I think it's quite nice, it's that writing thing, but I send it and say this is what I've been thinking, do you think we should do this?"

What is it about this way of communicating that makes it special, for you and the relationship, and maybe for him? What does this emailing make possible that would not have been there if you had not explored this way of communicating?

Whose idea or suggestion was it to talk in this way? How did you come to an agreement that this was a helpful way of talking?

Annie: You spoke of your partner not taking “a leadership role in our family”. You went on to describe how your partner enjoys talking and being with you, “but we didn’t come to any decisions, we didn’t...so I’m left feeling open all the time and its quite vulnerable, like I think, I could decide to pack up and go overseas and he’d go ‘that’s great’.... Yes, so it’s really, really hard to live with that.”

Annie, I wonder, does this mean that he doesn’t want to take control and, in not doing this, is acting against dominant ideas of male leadership? Or, is he acting from a power position by not saying clearly how these ideas are for him? Are there ideas around leadership that you would prefer to hang on to, and others that you would like to negotiate with your partner?

In the second half of the second hour together we spent time talking about your experiences in response to your partner’s varying expressions of anger, even when these expressions are rare or a small percentage of time. I have already mentioned some of the discussion from this time in the meeting, and I will now outline the other contributions from the group.

Carmen: You began this part of the discussion by talking about your experience of the feelings of confusion and hurt when your partner takes on a position in your relationship that you do not expect, and it is harmful to you. You said, “It’s almost like a double, like two people sometimes and that kind of confuses me, and it hurts me because it’s almost, like it’s a stranger, because it’s not the person I feel safe with....that can be actually quite harmful, you know can cause some wounds....It’s such a shock because we get along so well. I’ll just do my role and I’ll do whatever and then this side comes up, and I find that really difficult to live with.”

This sharing by Carmen then opened the way for the sharing of equivalent type experiences from others in the group.

Hannah: Earlier in the conversation you shared how your partner brings violence into the relationship. At this point in the discussion you shared how you began to take self-defence classes so you could feel confident in protecting yourself. You

also mentioned how you learnt not to show fear and “be calm and matter of fact and casual”, and to “wear clothes he didn’t like, to say, ‘right I’m not under your control...I’m making this decision’”. The important thing to you was that he did not know what you were feeling and that you gave him the message that you were in control. If I may ask, where did the ideas, the skills and knowledge, come from for you to re-position yourself in relation to him like this? How important a development was this for you and the relationship? Were these skills the ones that kept you safe in the relationship?

Annie: You commented on the cane laundry basket having a kick from your partner in the side of it, and how this event while not leaving you feeling unsafe it did threaten your emotional state. Your children also commented on this kick in the basket that your partner had put there. Does your partner now use this as a reminder of how he prefers not to act? Or is this something that is not talked about in your house?

Ali: You talked about an incident where you and your partner had a heated discussion in front of your children recently. The experience for you was one of asking, “who is that person that is saying that?” Were these words speaking of your non-recognition of your partner’s presentation of himself? What else did these words speak of for you?

Sarah: You expressed confusion, I think, at the unpredictable behaviour of your partner when first he would display much anger, and then afterwards he would return very apologetic and “almost cowering”. You mentioned how for you this behaviour was just “so odd”, and wondered why if he felt bad about doing this behaviour why he would do it in the first place. You explained later, how at times when your partner is expressing anger, “you feel extremely clear headed at that time...all the radars are going...this is not a good situation, you need to calm down, you need to leave, lets sort this out....This is almost instinctive...you just know you have to get them either out or deal with this....Its like you can feel that its going to, could be danger...” How did you know that you needed the radar going for your safety? How do you get this radar operating? Have you successfully used this radar in the past?

Hannah: In response to Sarah here you explained how you never had this radar or warning system operating in your relationship. You expressed how you did ask the question, “who is this person, where did they come from?” You went on to say in response to this, “I just ignored him. And then sometimes he would walk out. And I’d go, ‘why have you left?’” You said, how you were “totally bamboozled”.... “I was totally confused” by his behaviour, but you did not experience fear until he became physically violent. You explained how you did not have this radar for danger or experience fear because, “I hadn’t seen my father be angry with my mother....I’d not been fearful of my dad, and my mum had never been fearful of my dad.” I wonder Hannah, even though your relationship with your parents did not teach you about fear, and physically violent relationships where fear is present, how it may have prepared you to know what you do not want in a relationship? Is there something that you took from your parent’s relationship with each other, and with you, that has contributed in helpful ways to your relationships?

I really appreciated the group’s open sharing around this topic of unpacking your experience when your partner expresses anger and takes up a power-full position in relation to you. Anything from fear through to surprise and shock at the unexpected behaviour from your partner describes the experience of yourselves in response to your partner’s position at times like this.

The additional questions I would like to ask that we may take up in the next meeting are: Are there alternate position(s) to the one he is offering you when he is in this power-full position? Obviously when hearing your stories it is different for each relationship, but what do you use to read the situation with your partner? How do you know what to do?

How can men be challenged and made aware of the effects of their actions? What do you think needs to happen for this to be possible?

Finally I just want to say thankyou again for your contributions to this research. And, once again, if you think I have missed anything important in this document from the first focus group meeting, then please let me know when we meet next time.

I look forward to meeting up with you all again on November the 4<sup>th</sup>.

Cheers,

Brian.

## **Appendix L**

### **First focus group second meeting narrative research document**

#### **First focus group, meeting two, narrative document.**

Dear Sue, Sarah, Annie, Ali, Hannah and Carmen,

Thankyou very much for your very helpful contribution to the second meeting we had. I have found the two times we have met together now most exhilarating and a great opportunity for me to learn much about your experience. It is a unique opportunity for me and I am indeed privileged to be doing this research with you. In this narrative document I hope I do your stories justice, and that the questions I put forward are helpful for you to take your stories further along in a way that is beneficial for you.

In the first part of the first hour of our second meeting I sought your feedback to the first narrative document that you had received after the first meeting, and whether I had missed anything significant from that meeting.

Carmen: Your immediate response was that the document was helpful for “remembering what we all said”, and that “even beyond some of the things that I shared it made me think”. You went on to say how in your thinking it helped you understand what was happening for you, particularly in the area of being shut down, and that you were trying to find a solution to this.

Sarah: You mentioned how the “questions were really clear and they helped. I felt that they helped push it further.” That the document “gave me a moment to kind of process what you (Brian) were asking.” You spoke of the difference in answer you would have given if the questions were asked “on the spot. The answer would be very different probably it wouldn’t have been very reflective.” But later on gave you the opportunity to say “more of what I wanted to say.”

Hannah: You responded to the document by agreeing with Carmen and Sarah, saying “Both of those things,” in reference to remembering what we had all said in the first meeting, and how the questions were clear and helped you process what we had been discussing in that meeting.

Annie: You spoke of feeling disappointed because the document “tapped into the hardest part of our relationship...decision-making”. You went on to talk about this, saying how the document “just brought up what I struggle with the most in our relationship. We don’t make decisions, and I’m not entirely blaming (my partner) because some decisions are mutual, but we both wait for each other, and so it’s not resolved. And some of the really big ones I think he could make and he doesn’t, or at least take some initiative.” Reflecting on this Annie, what aspects of the decision-making do you value?

As a part of the conversation with Annie I also asked the whole group then how I as a male researcher could work in a way that is respectful and validating of your feelings?

Hannah: Your response was to suggest that this was happening by saying, “I guess listening, and the fact that you have shown us in the document that you have picked up and noticed things”.

Sue: You commented how the discussion is validating for each of the women in this group because of the common problems you are sharing. You said, “we have all had problems communicating at some time, we don’t as women with women, but we have all had with the one’s we love the most, nearest and dearest, the opposite sex.” There were much sounds of agreement around this idea from the group.

After this we then moved into discussion for the rest of the first hour around the shutting off theme that had arisen from the first meeting and highlighted in the first document. The questions in that document related to shutting off and having the final say in the relationship or for equal opportunities in discussion.

Sarah: You said how it helps if your partner understands that you are “just sounding things out, and that they don’t presume it is sorted, so they don’t shut it down.” You continued to explain how, sometimes you negotiate with you partner when you are sounding things out and he thinks this is what you actually want to do, that you at times feel “is it worth it, is it worth explaining or justifying why I’m explaining this, or should I just leave it and talk to someone else?”



If I could ask a question of this Sarah? What does this last sentence in the, “is it worth explaining”, or “justifying why” speak of?

You went on to explain in regard to talking to someone else, “I won’t do it anyway, which defeats the purpose of that communication.” And in regard to sounding things out and men growing hope you said, “what men can do to help grow that hope is ... I feel more hope when I know that it is a safe forum for me to sound things out. And lots of things come out of that when we are talking in that kind of zone. Things come out that I didn’t even think of that help me. You know it’s the idea of doing something alone or together. Two heads are better than one kind of thing.”

Sarah, you talked about how you “just want to resolve things” at times, and that it might be confusing for a man trying to work out which you were doing, sounding things out, or resolving things. You suggested it might be helpful to let them know when you want to resolve things or just sound them out.

Carmen asked a question around the difference between men and women when it came to giving information and discussion around important decisions, where some women can tend to “embellish ... explore and listen” whereas men tend to say, “Just tell me what you want me to do and I’ll do it ... don’t bother me with all the details.” You also mentioned Carmen that some women you know get to the point and do not embellish or explore.

Some discussion ensued around the idea that these differences are constructed in society and the way we talk in our everyday conversations, because we do see where these differences are not simply divided down traditional gender lines.

Sue, you then came in with comments from your own relationship where “it’s like turning on the light” for your partner when he realised his impact on the relationship when he tried to fix things quickly without further discussion. You said Sue how when he came with the “short answer” to “fix it” it would kill the discussion and the opportunity of solving the problem together. You were “cut off” and “shut down” at times like this, “and it just took all the joy out of it.” You then went on to say how your partner from his own reading and counsellor training realised what he was doing and said, “I keep ending the conversations

don't I. I keep spoiling this." This then gave more room for exploration and open discussion in your relationship.

Sarah, you raised the point then that "the equal opportunities ... opened up things" for your partner. You gave the example of shopping today for a mattress where he did the sounding board thing with you, and that during the day both of you were communicating with each other equally even to the point you said, "I think he was sort of a bit surprised by today, and he suggested things I wouldn't have thought of." The equal opportunities are positive in that "he doesn't have to have a solution.... He has got opportunities to discuss things... and have suggestions from the female that they wouldn't have thought of." After some further discussion you went onto say Sarah how this type of process builds the relationship, "I think that once the man does that it fosters a really good environment, they feel encouraged and trust to do it again."

How would you describe this kind of talk Sarah, and what would you call the "other" kind of talk? What do you see as the difference? What does the one bring into the relationship that the "other" kind of talk doesn't?

Sarah, you said, "It's weird isn't it. It's almost like you feel like you've got this, sounds terrible, but you've almost got like these little secrets and you can see how potentially it could help not only you but them and the relationship. And you can see all this thing in a whole matrix thing, it makes sense, you can see it all. If only they will just understand and come and meet me in this place." The difficulty you said is then getting them into this place, "but when you get there it is great".

Conversely to this you shared how easy it is for shutting off to quickly separate the two of you. It only needs to happen a few times and then you do not persist in trying to connect, you end up doing your own thing, "and then it wouldn't be very enjoyable".

If it is okay, I have some questions for the whole group around these ideas. What specifically is it, that makes sense, that can potentially help you, them and the relationship? What is it, do you think, that stops men from understanding and meeting their partners "in this place"? What is "this place" like?

Hannah: You took up the theme of shutting off creating a “big distance” between you and your partner, “When they shut me down then you are getting further and further apart, and then you eventually break-up”. In reference to the “sounding things out” mentioned earlier you said, “it’s more sort of a brainstorming. Like, what do you know, what do I know, what have you heard, and just ...gathering information.” You talked about part of being in a relationship was valuing what your partner wants to say and wanting to hear what they have to say. You gave an example of something a partner may say when they are not in this valuing position, “O, well I don’t care, (or) I’m not interested, (or) you can do something on your own”, this leaves you with the idea that, “okay well I’m not valuable”.

If I may ask you a few questions around this valuing theme Hannah? Is it right to say that when your partner was not in a valuing position in relation to you, that this left you in a de-valued position? What effect does this have on your identity? When this happens in the relationship what do you do?

Ali: You referred to a question in the first narrative document concerning you and your partner’s communication where you sometimes use email, and how this related to the shutting down theme being discussed at this time. With email you said how it protects against you embellishing too much while providing the opportunity to use the “dot point” approach which gives the information needed for your partner, but you can still communicate something of what you are feeling without “the flourish that I would if I verbalised it because often I go off on tangents.” This provides your partner with “the space for him as a male to take this stuff on, and sometimes solve it, but sometimes just reflect for a bit longer on what I said, and because I have been a bit more succinct maybe it meets his need for not having the embellishment that he sometimes finds frustrating”.

You thought the email was working because it gave you the “opportunity to be a bit cheeky” communicating emotion without getting emotional, being kinder and not have the chance to be angry.” The email also provided you with the opportunity to have a protected conversation without the kids being present. The emails are part of the process, making it possible to move “onto the next stage of the discussion”.

Sue: You said when you want to discuss something important with your partner you give him little bits of information at a time, so that he has time to think about it in between the times you give him the information, and eventually you can have a discussion around the point you raised.

Ali: You talked about your partner having a telephone conversation with his mother. In a rather humorous way you told how when he gets off the phone to his mother all he could say was that “we are going for lunch on Sunday”. But you knew there was more to it than that, so you devised a plan by taking notes of the conversation from what he says on the phone, then when the phone call is completed you repeat back to him what he said which then sparks his memory of what his mother said to him. Now he remembers what these telephone conversations are about because he knows you “like this stuff”.

Ali: you then further illustrated how your partner does things that are important for you in the context of reporting to you conversations that are had at school meetings. “He literally now takes pages and pages of notes and writes down exactly what people said, because he knows when he gets home that reporting to me is the most important thing ...”. As a result of this you said, “I just feel so connected to him because he’s made that effort”. You felt your partner did this because, “it helps our relationship. I don’t think he really cares about the other stuff.” You confirmed that it was because he cared about you.

You also shared Ali how specific you are in your requests of your partner to do what is important for you, and the frustration you feel when you don’t get the information back that you would like, or he attempts to shut down the conversation. The example was, “this may not be important to you but it’s really important to me, and I need you to do it”. Then you said how when he does it it’s rewarding for both you and him, and it helps him to do this again for you.

A question in regard to the specific position you take when he attempts to shut you down or has not done what is important to you. How do you manage to take steps to challenge this “shut down” or “this is not important enough” position? Where do you find the other position to take, that of refusing the “shut down” or “this is not important enough” invitation? How do you plan the invitation you

communicate to him that he needs to consider what is important to you? What hopes do you hold when you communicate the expectations?

There are two things that stand out for me from this section in our conversations: First, is your resourcefulness to get what is important to you when you are unable to do it yourself, and secondly, the part your male partner plays in doing what is important for you. I have two questions related to these ideas which anyone in the group can respond to if you want:

If you see this gaining what is important to you as significant, what drives this resourcefulness? And, what do you think happens for your partner that he would change and work hard at doing what is important for you?

Annie: you then came into the conversation and offered information from your relationship concerning being shut down and how men can offer hope to a relationship. You shared in regard to your partner how “he is not connecting emotionally”. You shared how he is not empathic with you, giving the example of a recent difficulty you have had with an assignment where while you had a good discussion around the problem he did not once empathise with your emotional position concerning the problem. You then gave examples from your partner’s family concerning their non-connection emotionally as a family. How when they meet, or when they telephone each other, it is not for connecting purposes but for other reasons such as wanting to give something away or talking politics, “when I’m with them I just think, no one’s talking, they are talking politics, and they are talking about success and all these things, no one’s talking to each other. I get quite frustrated”.

Your partner’s mother connected with people, but now that she has died, the men cannot connect emotionally. Because of the parents’ missionary history, and the sons including your partner, all being separate from the parents for a great deal of time it was always intensely emotional for the children either when they were separate from their parents or when they were together. So you are saying the best way to deal with all this emotion was to keep it in, as you said, in regard to the parents and the children while they were growing up, “when they are with them

it's intensely emotional, you are not going to let it all out, and when you are not with them it's intensely emotional so you are not going to let it out, so you are just on this tightrope the whole time ... as young boys growing up ....there is that history of not communicating the whole hurt."

You went on to explain Annie, that your partner expressed more emotion than any of his brothers, but that it is still held in because it may open a "floodgate" if it is expressed completely. You mentioned how he does not show empathy when you are struggling with something, and as I read your story through the transcript, I also wonder if part of the story is that your partner does not disclose any emotion to you, especially pain or hurt.

That was the conclusion of the first hour. In the second hour we decided to just go around the group and answer any of the questions from the first narrative document that each of you may want to answer.

Sarah: You responded first of all to the question about your partner taking up counselling at your suggestion or would he have been able to recommend this to himself? You said you did not think he would have "initiated" counselling, but that he did respond to your "advice" to get counselling. In terms of what made it possible for you to suggest he get counselling and how was it for you to step into such a position, you responded that early in the relationship he got angry and suggested he get counselling. He "agreed that he was getting angry". After trying a couple of different counselling places and during pre-marriage education it was clearly revealed that anger was a concern, one of the educator's suggested he do some anger management training at a men's health organisation. This is where you said he was challenged by a counsellor who asked him "are you happy to be called an abuser?" She was "suddenly very specific ... which stepped it up a level". You felt that it was "that specifcness (which) made him address it". In terms of him as hero, you said "I think what it was for me is that I see he's trying to create the new path for his life...which is really difficult, which why in my mind I see him as a hero, and then yes it does change the relationship." You talked about how the problem is for you now to "trust him again...I have to re-learn to trust him". Your partner's anger is "a weakness and every now and then he might need counselling to refresh....Our relationship is positive because for me

I feel a sense of safety, and a knowledge if worse comes to worse he'll go back to the counsellor."

Sarah, you said you needed the radar for safety as well as your intuition, and assessing social situations. You related this to "the flip" your partner would make and how it initially surprised you, but you soon picked up "this is a bit dangerous". So you became sensitive to this, and would not ignore it and "push" him to the point where he may have been physically violent. You would let him go for a walk, and have some space. It was from your mother that you said you learnt to be aware of social situations, with advice such as not walking alone at night and being extra cautious in social settings by knowing an escape route if you needed one. Thinking about how can men be challenged, you said: "the biggest thing is that men need to understand that change isn't weakness....Men need to teach boys that introspection is not weakness." You referred to men seeming to change but it is often just "a front". What is needed, is for men to get "internal" and "deeper", and you used your own partner as an example of someone who is changing by going internal and deeper. The other point you made regarding men being challenged is that "society does not treat men's emotional needs the same as women." Society might label a man's emotion by saying, "he has just got a temper, but sometimes it's not as explored as deeply as with women." You are saying that women will often go deeper and explore these things whereas with men it is often just labelled and not addressed.

Carmen: You spoke of how at the beginning of a relationship you take the roles in the home that need to be done while the husband is the provider outside of the home. This specifically related to you because you had been married 33 years, and now your partner is wanting to "reclaim the role of the male, and take control from somewhere that he had handed over to me so to speak". You felt he is acting out of insecurity on his part, and that while his responses to you are hurtful and confusing for you, you also are able to respond to him in a way that is respectful but gently challenging of his behaviour. You expressed how you feel that he is threatened by the loss of power, whereas for you it is about intimacy and relationship. You said it is like you saying to him, "listen to me, I am not trying to get my own way". However, "... it's like a bit of a power play because he has got to hold on because, 'I'm the man here, you know I got to stand my ground, I can't

listen, ... I can't take on what you are saying because it's like I'm surrendering my role as man by actually hearing what you are saying.'" You summarised your position in relation to your partner here by saying, "I want to get along with you, I want to have this level of intimacy where I can be honest with you, and you not shoot me down or cut me down or be sarcastic, and then really make me feel like I want to withdraw from you and just shut up. I want to make you understand that what I'm saying is important. It's very important to both of us." In saying this Carmen you were not only talking about your own relationship concerns, but also indicating how important it is to sort through these types of concerns early in a relationship.

Carmen you talked about women taking on more and more responsibilities in the relationship. You related this to the above point where the male partner early in the relationship "abdicates some of the roles and some of the authority by allowing the woman to make a lot of the decisions". For thirty three years you have taken responsibility for a number of things, he has not shown great interest in what you are doing, and now you would like to share some of these roles and responsibilities with him. You said while his responses to you can be frustrating and hurtful, you are being "assertive" and saying, "no this is not okay anymore....I want to share this with you as well. I want to have your input, that you may provide valuable things like insight and ideas ... to make the choice even better because ... two is better than one". You want to say, "I'm not against you...but he doesn't see it, it's like a blockage there...he puts a wall up.... He thinks I'm trying to gain power". But what you are trying to convey to him, even though he may not hear it, is, in your words, "can you listen to me ... I'm getting frustrated, I'm telling you because I want things to be better. I want you to understand I am on your side. We're on the same side together". You continued to say that, "I'm not going to at this point in my life be insecure or threatened or intimidated". You invite him into a more egalitarian type relationship with you by using some of your counselling skills, which you said he does not like. You actually have challenged him about shutting you down, but he continually seems to see that your invitation is about power and not relationship, particularly "intimacy".



In terms of how men can be challenged, you said that men need to realise that their partners, “want intimacy .... “I just want to get along.... Realise we are on the same side”. Sue you responded to this by suggesting that “it’s almost at the heart of it in a way, because everybody here is trying to... offer intimacy, inviting it all the time”.

Is intimacy the issue here for all of you, the heart of your concerns when it comes to your relationship with you partner? It became clear from the second meeting that intimacy is important to a woman partner. What do you think needs to happen for the male partner to see that your invitations are just that, invitations, and not some kind of power struggle where insecurity and threat seem to be strongly present for him?

Hannah: You confirmed for your own relationships that intimacy was important, “it’s just trying to get close and not have distance really, that is what it’s about”. About skills and knowledges you said: “From counselling and then reading and learning, and observing other people’s behaviours and what worked and what didn’t”, you had learnt from picking up from your partner when his behaviour did not match what he was saying.

Ali: You spoke of the power and control that had been a theme in this meeting, saying, “I don’t always think that it’s just men what have this power and control stuff. I think that sometimes I exhibit those behaviours and I don’t necessarily like that. I’m not quite sure where I picked that up from, but I read that (in reference to the first narrative document where you said you drive the relationship and the decisions) and I thought mmm, I acknowledge that causes issues in our relationship too. I do like to have a lot of power and control and so it is about driving decisions and driving the relationship and sometimes that can be good, but sometimes I think it isn’t always a gender thing. It is about that quality of valuing the relationship and valuing the journey that that partnership is on rather than power or any particular gender or person”. You gave an example of how at times you take control by sharing things with other women and making decisions while not acknowledging that your partner would have a place in those decisions and he feels left out and hurt. You then went on to say how you felt that trust was

important, “when we’ve talked about this stuff and it’s got to a deep level, trust is the word that comes out, like letting go...and I think that is a key thing for me”.

A few questions that came up for me while I was typing: Are there different types of power and control for men and women? If so, how do men use their power and control, and how do women use their power and control? Regarding trust, is it something we give away blindly, or is it something that we gain evidence for before we can bring its presence into a relationship? If it is the latter, how do we and our partners then make space for trust to enter into the relationship?

Soon after this the ‘official’ session finished, but, Sue then challenged me, “In a scale of women’s relationships, if we were alone like this even with you, if we were sitting here with a cuppa talking we would go beyond even this wouldn’t we?” To which there was a strong general sound of agreement from the group as a whole.

Sarah: You said how “we’d be trying to sort each other out ...and that’s how women grow quickly, I reckon because they get all this kind of feedback all the time”.

Annie: You shared about how it must be for me with six women sharing in the room by comparing it with if there were six men in the room with you. You illustrated this difficulty by drawing on your recent experience when negotiating with a male lecturer about an assignment, and how hard it was to get an apology from him.

We then talked briefly about the power imbalance that exists between men and women and how I felt it would be far more difficult for a woman in a room with six men than it is for me. We also discussed the idea that it took the male lecturer twenty five minutes to give an apology, but I felt that a woman would give me an apology without my asking. This was to illustrate the power imbalance that exists between men and women.

Annie: you responded by saying that your female friends were impressed with your speaking to the lecturer as you did, and that you did not see it as a power

imbalance because, “I would always negotiate something like that if it was important to me. So I don’t see it as imbalance, but the imbalance was the effort, it just took so long”.

Sarah: you responded then saying that you felt this was a difference between men and women where women will look internally to deal with a concern, whereas men do not do this.

Carmen: you also responded suggesting that men seem to struggle to admit “weaknesses” and “apologising” when it is needed.

Sarah: you responded by saying to the above context and understanding of weakness, “that if men could learn that weakness is actually a strength”. This is something women do, admit fault and improve themselves, but men don’t seem to recognise this as a strength.

Sue: you raised the question of, “are we doing that with little boys? Are we teaching them to be like that? Where is it coming from?”

We talked briefly as a group about these questions, and Sarah added that her partner was “going to teach my boys about being able to be strong in that weakness, and that you can make mistakes...”.

Hannah: added that schools and kindergartens are where they inadvertently teach boys and girls to be different socially, how they relate, and deal with emotions. Sarah then cited research from psychology that supported these observations of babies being treated differently based on people’s perceptions of their gender.

In this brief time after our ‘official’ ending I think some further clarity was given to the answer to the last two questions of the first narrative document. How can men be challenged and made aware of the effects of their actions? What do you think needs to happen for this to be possible? In summary you have said, they need to embrace change, understand weakness is strength, admit their faults, improve themselves – grow, go deeper internally.

I have one last question for us on this before my concluding comments regarding our next meeting: What do you think men need to do to look past the shame,

insecurity and threat that so often come when suggestions like those above are offered?

Can you come to the next meeting (Tuesday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December, 7pm) prepared with a pseudonym that I will use in place of your actual name in any public documents associated with this research? To make it easier for me, and perhaps you, if the pseudonym could be a relatively short name, that would be great. Also in the next meeting, if it is okay with each of you, if we could look at this document and respond to any questions from it in the first hour, then in the second hour look at what aspects of your stories, and the ideas and suggestions, we want to take forward to the next two stages of the research.

Thanks again for your wonderful contributions to this research. I appreciate it very much.

I am looking forward to our discussion next week.

Cheers,

Brian.