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Reflexive audiencing practices for couple relationships-in-action

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Abstract

This doctoral study offers couples opportunities to be audiences to their own lives as a couple. It does this on the premise that a reflexive, recursive, process of acting and reviewing and acting enhances relationship possibilities. The study researches what couples say about their experiences of the effects of a process that offers them opportunities to go beyond readily available, perhaps at times rather limited, understandings of coupledness. In going beyond what is readily available, the study investigates what couples' value in the unique and original ways two people reflexively select to live out their lives and relationships. This study is located in poststructural and social constructionist theoretical landscapes. It constructs and then investigates reflexive audiencing practices.

Reflexive audiencing draws from diverse but related theoretical perspectives such as narrative therapy, relational language-making conversations, positioning theory, deconstruction, reflexivity, performance and Appreciative Inquiry. Video, a facilitated process of preparation, and inquiry guides provide a scaffold for partners to take up and investigate relationship conversations as couples. The video/audio technology provides layers of positions from which to speak, view, re-view and review their relationship conversations as spect-actors – actors, audience and critics to their relationship performances. Through these reflexive audiencing processes, couples identify discursive practices that shape their relationships. They deconstruct these practices and reconstruct them on terms that take into account their preferences, purposes and unique relationship contexts.

The thesis argues that through reflexive audiencing, couples can reposition themselves to look at, and hear, and speak their relationship conversations-in-action. It proposes that reflexive audiencing makes practices such as relations of gender/power, humour, meaning-making, and understanding, visible and audible in ways that extend couples' discursive repertoires. It conceptualises these practices of couple relationship as complex, dynamic, situated and dialogic, and shows that reflexive audiencing practices have benefits for a couple's conversations.

The study also provides an illustration of researcher reflexive-practice-in-action and shows the work of reflexive audiencing processes unfold in a doctoral research supervision relationship. It argues that reflexive audiencing practices have possibilities for contexts outside coupledness, such as therapy, supervision and research.

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Ehara taku toa, he taki tahi, he toa taki tini

*My success should not be bestowed onto me alone, as it was not individual
success but success of a collective.*

Whakatauki¹

This thesis tells a story penned in the possessive pronoun “I”. But, in John Shotter’s (1989) terms, it is a “communitarian” tale (p. 137). The study is a production made possible by the contributions of an extensive cast of people. It is a co-creation of our joint endeavours.

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¹ Maori proverb

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Naku te rourou nau te rourou ka ora ai te iwi
With your basket and my basket the people will live.
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Table of contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of contents	vii
List of tables.....	xiii
List of figures	xiv
Prologue	1
Chapter 1. An introduction to the study	2
Research Questions	5
Reflexivity.....	7
Poststructuralism and social constructionism	11
Multiplicity of meaning and experience	12
Relationship as multi-storied and dynamic	13
Productivity of discourse and language	13
Relations of power	16
Elucidating the processes of lived experience	18
Stance of inquiry and critique	18
Knowledge/power	19
Subjectivities	20
Relational ethics	20
Language, subjectivity, discourse and power relations.....	22
Positioning theory, agency and mo(ve)ment.....	22
Narratives and Storying.....	23
Performance	25
Performance psychology	26
Performance as drama	26
Reflexive/liminal performance space.....	27
Dialogical performance	28
Definitional Ceremony.....	29
Video	29
Audience positioning	33
Introducing the chapters.....	35
Chapter 2. Setting the scene for reflexive audiencing performances	40
Setting the theoretical scene.....	40

Identity is a social achievement	41
Meaning-making as relational.....	43
Language is the means by which identity is produced.....	44
Discourse.....	45
Discursive Repertoires	46
Positioning	46
The props and technology	47
Setting the audiencing scene	47
Narrative therapy.....	47
Witnessing.....	50
Deconstruction	51
Positioning for inquiry	54
Reflexion of the chapter	58
Chapter 3. Couple Relationship Literature	59
Readily available couple literature	60
Romantic love discourse	64
Selected audience	65
The satisfying relationship ideal	66
One-size-fits-almost-all approaches.....	66
Essentialism	69
Modern power	72
Partnership equality.....	73
Couple relationship education programmes and research.....	76
Historical overview	77
Reproducing prevailing practices of coupledness.....	78
Cultural considerations.....	79
Essentialist and individualistic influence	80
Implications of gender equity discourses	81
The need for couple relationship research	83
Discursive perspectives for intimate relationships.....	84
Further perspectives of coupledness	85
Relational language-making practice	88
Positioning theory and coupledness.....	89
Discursive positioning.....	90

Discourses of intimacy	90
Emotions	91
Therapeutic contexts	92
Couple relationship injury	92
Narrative therapy with couples	93
Reflexion of the chapter	96
Chapter 4. Composing a research design and method	98
Part 1. Conducting the research method	98
Ethical research practice	98
Co-operative inquiry	99
Focus Groups	100
Narrative Inquiry	101
Performance ethnography	102
Pragmatics of the production	103
An outline of the method.....	104
Conceptualising a collaborative method of inquiry	107
Taking a collaborative orientation	110
Recruitment: Processes and ethics	112
Introducing the research participants	125
Part 2. Generating research stories: Reflexive audiencing performances	126
Part 3. Analysis	141
Positioning myself for the analysis	141
Reflexive audiencing as a method of analysis	142
Reflexion of the chapter	150
Chapter 5. Reflexive audiencing practices: A deconstruction	151
Section 1: Discourses of communication	153
Discourse.....	153
Deconstruction	158
Positioning theory	159
Shaping discourse through dialogue	160
Subjectification: The simultaneous process of mastery and submission	163
Section 2: Components of reflexive audiencing practices	168
A stance of inquiry - Reflexive eye/I, curiosity, relational “we”	168
Reflexivity.....	175

Stepping into questions of curiosity	176
Fostering an appreciative stance of inquiry	177
A communitarian perspective on negotiating style	180
Third-person perspective.....	187
Externalising conversations	191
Visual/audio technology.....	195
Section 3: Preparation for reflexive audiencing practices.....	198
Taking up a looking stance	200
Audiencing through the eyes of a respected, valued third party	201
Looking relationally	202
Seeing and hearing the self	203
Moving between discursive repertoires	204
Reflexion of the chapter	206
Chapter 6. Originating meaning in meaningful ways.....	207
Meaning-making and understanding make a difference	208
Meaning-making and understanding in practice: Laura and Andrew	210
Conceptualising independence/neediness and support	211
Making meaning of independence	216
A reflexive audiencing approach to meaning-making	220
Meaning-making, understanding and change	224
Landscapes of action and meaning	226
Meaning-making: An intentional process for change	228
Reflexion of the chapter	229
Chapter 7. Audiencing gender and power relations	230
Anne and MJ discuss dominance	231
Susan and Geena discuss dominance	242
Reflexion of the chapter	260
Chapter 8. Humour: A relational production	262
The audience plays a part.....	262
The performance	263
Act 1: Humour talks theory.....	263
Humour takes the stage	264
Act 2: Reflexive audiencing the work of humour.....	275
Scene 1: Humour – important, complex, multiple	276

Scene 2: The butt of humour	277
Scene 3: Women lose their sense of humour at forty.....	284
Act 3: Amber, Philip and the functions of Humour	291
Scene 1: Playful humour	291
Act 4: Conclusion – A reflexion of the chapter by Amber and Philip.....	301
Chapter 9. Researcher reflexivity: A relational production	302
Scene 1: Taking up the call to audience researcher practice.....	305
Scene 2: Enacting researcher reflexivity.....	308
Scene 3: A Reflexion of a reflexion.....	309
Scene 4: Reflexions on reflexions: A multi-phase process.....	330
A reflexion of the chapter	335
Chapter 10. Reflexion and conclusion.....	338
Reflexive audiencing practices	339
The technologies of reflexive audiencing practices	340
Making familiar practices visible and negotiable	349
Closing reflexions	353
Epilogue.....	355
References	356
Appendices	369
Appendix 1	369
Advertisement	369
Appendix 2.....	370
Research participation consent form.....	370
Appendix 3.....	374
Withdrawal from the research form	374
Appendix 4.....	376
Information Pack.....	376
Appendix 5.....	380
Scene 2 Conversation Inquiry Guide	380
Appendix 6.....	384
Reflexive letter for Anne and MJ.....	384
Appendix 7.....	389
Scene 3 Conversation Inquiry Guide for Anne and MJ	389
Appendix 8.....	393

Scene 3 Conversation Inquiry Guide for Andrew and Laura.....	393
Appendix 9.....	399
Scene 3 Conversation Inquiry Guide – Generic version.....	399
Appendix 10.....	405
Scene 4 Review of the Research Process Inquiry Guide	405
Appendix 11	407
Original Transcript Text example	407
Appendix 12.....	413
Edited transcript text example.....	413

List of tables

Table 1: Outline of five-phase research process	106
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List of figures

Figure 1 Operating the Orbitor.....	289
Figure 2 Orbitor	289

Prologue

The Truman Show (Niccol, 1998) is a feature film in which the main character, Truman Burbank, unknowingly lives his life according to a script. He carries out his life, work and relationships with the routines and practices that represent ‘normal’ day-to-day life in Seahaven, a small town in the United States. Unbeknown to Truman, every move he makes is televised as a reality television show, to the rest of the world who are all an avid audience to his life. What is more, the townspeople in Seahaven are all knowing actors in, as well as an audience to, his life. They get to act in, and review, Truman’s life. However, Truman himself is only an actor: his life is lived without reflexion as he follows the routines and expectations scripted for him by others.

When TV host Logan Kirksley asks Christof, the conceiver and creator of the reality TV show, “Why do you think Truman has never come close to discovering the true nature of his world?” Christof replies, “We accept the reality of the world which we are presented. It’s as simple as that” (Niccol, 1998).

What would have happened if Truman had been a viewer of the television show and thus an audience to the scripted constructions of his life?

If he were to take up reflexive audience positions, would he draw from the same discursive repertoires scripted for him, or would he venture into different discursive landscapes?

.

Chapter 1. An introduction to the study

Whilst I accept the nomination of primary author in this research endeavour, authors before me have charted the paths I tread. My words and my ideas are biographically situated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 21) and carry the traces of other speakers. For example, like many practitioner researchers whose work has shaped this project, I came to this study from various apprenticeships in therapeutic relationships (Crocket, 2001; Gaddis, 2002; Speedy, 2008; Winslade, 2003). Practice and projects, which I broadly describe as poststructuralist and social constructionist in approach, spoke further to the kinship ties that linked my migration from practice to research, with theirs. Their research territories included counselling supervision, counselling practice and mediation. With their maps and journals as guides, I stepped into the terrain of co/researching couple relationships. As I introduce the term *couple* into this thesis for the first time, I draw attention to its effectiveness as a broad term that speaks to the kinds of relationship this study addresses. However, its use also crosses muddled boundaries of inclusion/exclusion, particularly for those whose adult, non-biologically connected, intimate relationships extend beyond two people. I return to this point in Chapter 4 (see page 112).

My apprenticeships in counselling and group-work conversations over twenty years provided me with first-hand encounters of the added discursive repertoires that ideas informed by constructionism and poststructuralism offered people in couple relationships. Spurred on by the dearth of readily available poststructuralist and social constructionist literature for people in intimate relationships and the paucity of research that investigates these relationships outside of counselling contexts, I investigated how ideas and practices shaped by discursive perspectives might serve partners who wished to develop their couple relationships.

Whilst literature that addressed people in intimate relationships directly, and included constructionist and poststructuralist discursive approaches, was not currently readily available, there was a growing body of texts from, and for, narrative counselling practitioners. Some of these accounts spoke to the benefits

for couples of theory and practice informed by these postmodern perspectives. I introduce this literature in Chapter 3, discuss its contributions to the discursive production of couple relationship practice and its relevance for the argument I propose and investigate in this project. This argument is that poststructural and constructionist practices of couple relationships add to the discursive repertoires available to couples, and extend the options that are available to them to draw from as they negotiate their relationships. My task as researcher was to find ways to make the ideas this literature offered couples in intimate relationships readily accessible to them. To take up this task I turned to my counselling and group-work practice for inspiration.

As a practitioner, I have found video and audio recordings to be invaluable for the reflexive process of investigation and critique of my counselling and group-work practice. The value of audio-visual technology, in that context, led me to consider its use as the “prosthetic device” (Shotter, 1993, p. 27) – a technology with which to engage with the field of investigation – for couples to reflexively investigate their relationship conversations in this research. The audio-visual recordings provided a reflecting surface (Myerhoff, 1978) from which the couples who participated could view, re-view, and review their conversations and the relating practices they employed to shape these conversations.

This study constructed and investigated a dialogic videoed process for couples. It involved research participants having a videotaped conversation together as a couple, and then taking up audience positions from which to engage in reflexive analysis of this conversation. As the research developed, and I swam in both familiar and new ethical, theoretical and philosophical waters, a practice emerged that I came to call reflexive audiencing. When I started out this term was not part of my vocabulary. This development exemplifies the ways this research has constituted, and will continue to constitute, moment-by-moment knowledge-in-the-making.

With Laurel Richardson’s (2005) notion in mind, that writing is “*a method of inquiry*” (p. 960, emphasis in original), I move between past and present tense at times, in the construction of this research report. As I write this project into

existence by way of this thesis document, change and development continue to be produced in the writing. Michel Foucault (2001) said:

I write a book only because I still don't exactly know what to think about this thing I want so much to think about, so that the book transforms me and transforms what I think....I write in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before. (pp. 239-240)

Michel Foucault's words speak to my experience. I embarked on this research journey with budding ideas and an interest in ripening those ideas through the investigation process. As I write, my researcher/counsellor/group-worker identity has ripened and transformed and will continue to do so. What I think in this conversational moment is very different from my thoughts when I set out. I expect that I will re-shape these words many times before I make the call to hand the bound copy over to you, the audience.

The research participants took similar steps as they stepped into territory that was unknown to them, and through the research process produced narratives of change and transformation. They entrusted their stories to me and to you, the audience. Chapters 5 to 8 are my re-telling of their telling and speak to some of the changes and transformations they identified.

As I begin to tell the story of reflexive audiencing and show its work in the participants' - and my own professional and private - relationship conversations, I venture into further unknown territory. I take up the task of conveying, in a written narrative form, the contingent, evolving, dynamic and constitutive production of this research story. Poised on the edge of what seems like a very deep pool, I prepare to dive, encouraged by Michel Foucault's (2001) assertion that writing produces knowledge. I proceed, spurred on by Elizabeth St. Pierre (2005), who said that, thought happens "in the writing" (p. 970). These words are echoed by Barbara Kamler and Pat Thomson (2006), "We write to work out what we think" (p. 4).

Research Questions

As I read and wrote, and developed the research project's method, I also transformed the research questions I set out to investigate. These are the questions I began with:

- How are partners, as individuals and as a couple, shaped by stories of relationship and how to do relationships? How well are couples served by these currently available styles or models?
- How do partners, as individuals and as a couple, shape stories of relationship and how to do relationships? How well are couples served by these currently available styles or models?
- What particular relational practices are expressions of these stories?
- What are the effects for couples of co-searching their relationships and relationship practices from audiencing positions?

The emphasis of these questions was on the identification and critique of discourses of relationships. However, as I developed the method which participants would use to engage in the process of taping and audiencing their couple relationship conversations, reflexive audiencing as a practice began to take shape. I describe this process for acting, viewing, re-viewing and reviewing relationship practice, in Chapter 4. Given that I was asking participants to use particular strategies – reflexive audiencing practices - for investigating their relationship conversations, I thought it important that I shape the research questions to address the means by which participants audienced their conversations. The practice of identifying and critiquing discourses of relationship continued to be of interest to me. However, the emphasis moved to the ways participants shaped discursive practices and how the practices shaped couples when they took up reflexive audiencing positions in their conversations. Reflexive audiencing practices, which I soon describe, became the lens through which couples and I investigated couple and research conversations. The following questions reflect this change in emphasis.

- What are the particular scaffolding strategies that create a context and process for couples to reflexively review relationship practices?
- How are partners, as individuals and as a couple, shaped by stories of relationship, and how to do relationships, when they take up reflexive audiencing positions?
- How do partners, as individuals and as a couple, shape stories of relationship, and how to do relationships, when they take up reflexive audiencing positions?
- What particular relational practices are expressions of these stories?
- What are the effects for couples of co-searching their relationships and relationship practices from reflexive audiencing positions?

In the proceeding chapters, I present reflexive audiencing as an amalgam of diverse yet related theoretical, philosophical and ethical factors. I propose reflexive audiencing as a set of practices: an approach which creates space for “transformative **conversational practice**” (Speedy, 2008, p. 84, emphasis in original). Reflexive audiencing practices are composed of a carefully gathered but loosely stitched bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Myerhoff, 1978) of finely crafted, purposefully brought together, theory and practice.

Of these artefacts of theory and practice, three key areas stand out as important in the implementation of the reflexive audiencing practices I propose. The first of these is the use of audio-visual technology that provided layered positions that were available to participants to view and critically reflect on their relational practices. The second was a process of guided preparation. Chapter 5 describes this process and details the steps I took to create a “receiving context” (Bateson, 1979, p. 15) in which participants could step into respectful, appreciative, curious inquiry as they viewed, re-viewed and reviewed their relational practices as audiences. The third was the use of inquiry guides that shaped the inquiry that participants and I had together. I provide detailed discussion of these three areas as this document continues, and particularly in Chapters 4 and 5.

The study proposes that through reflexive audiencing couples can reposition themselves to look at, and hear, and speak their relationship conversations from constructionist and poststructural perspectives. It argues that reflexive audiencing practices make visible and audible meaning-making and understanding (Chapter 6), relations of gender/power (Chapter 7) and humour (Chapter 8), for example, as situated, dynamic, relationally constituted practices, in ways that extend couples' discursive repertoires. It proposes that these reflexive audiencing practices have benefits for couple conversations.

These claims I make are small in that they emerged from the local stories of five couples' everyday relationship practice. However, I suggest these stories may resonate and produce possibilities for other couples and for different relational contexts (Chapter 10). My use of reflexive audiencing practices to shape this study's analysis (Chapter 4) and to explore researcher reflexivity (Chapter 9), illustrates two of these different contexts.

In the development of reflexive audiencing, and other components of this research project, there are five particular landscapes from which I have drawn that locate this study theoretically and philosophically. These are reflexivity, social constructionism, poststructuralism, narrative theory and performance. I now go on to extrapolate each of these areas in turn.

Reflexivity

I understand research to be a relational process that produces and is produced by researchers, participants, supervisors, literature and others who speak and act in the performance. This research project investigates discursive practices which are performed in "reflexive/liminal spaces" (Speedy, 2008, p. 28). These spaces are "highly political, personal, imaginative and social spaces" (Speedy, 2008, p. 28). Discursive practices are produced among "spect-actors" (Park-Fuller, 2003, p. 300) who act in, audience and critique the research conversations. The following excerpt of transcript text, drawn from a research conversation between participants, Charlotte and Doug, illustrates this spect-actor position and the power relations that the reflexive/liminal space makes available to explore. Charlotte is voicing her reflexion of a moment in a videotaped conversation

between Doug and herself that they were watching as a couple, and then paused the DVD to discuss.

Charlotte	Watching that [DVD], it feels like [she is] being his [Doug's] mother at times. It looks like the upper and lower to me there in that DVD. That doesn't look equitable at all.
-----------	--

This excerpt shows Charlotte reflexively turning her gaze back on the conversational space that the DVD has captured. She is a spect-actor as she is involved as actor ("it feels like"), audience ("it looks like") and critic ("that doesn't look equitable at all"). Whilst Charlotte is present in the conversation, she is looking in on the conversation as audience and refers to Doug as "he". In the reflexive/liminal space between Charlotte who is speaking these words, and Doug and herself as a couple she is audiencing on the DVD, she uses a parental metaphor to identify a position offered to her in this interaction. Also, her words "that doesn't look equitable at all" illustrate Charlotte making an evaluation of the power relation which this position produces.

I suggest that people ongoingly constitute and reconstitute knowledge, meaning and relationships in these reflexive/liminal spaces. Bronwyn Davies and colleagues (2004) drew attention to the ways reflexivity works to show how knowledge, meaning and relationships are constituted.

Reflexivity involves turning one's reflexive gaze on discourse - turning language back on itself to see the work it does in constituting the world. The subject/researcher sees simultaneously the object of her or his gaze and the means by which the object (which may include oneself as subject) is being constituted. (p. 360)

There are multiple reflexivities (Myerhoff & Ruby, 1982; Webster, 2008). This poststructural account of reflexivity conceptualises culture, and the agentic steps people take as they enact cultural practices, as "constantly reinventing and reproducing each other, inscribing our lives-as-lived and our texts-as-written on each other" (Speedy, 2008, pp. 30-31). This constitutive process of cultural and

relational development is multi-layered. The dialogue, produced in the reflexive/liminal space between people, is available for investigation in a further reflexive space created when conversational partners position themselves to review their interactions as audiences. It was in this audience space that Charlotte spoke her comments. The different perspective, which is available in this space, creates an environment in which further development and change can occur.

The work of reflexivity and its effects, that I wish to draw attention to, were articulated by Barbara Myerhoff and Jay Ruby (1982):

Reflexivity generates heightened awareness and vertigo, the creative intensity of a possibility that loosens us from habit and custom and turns us back to contemplate ourselves.... (p. 1)

Once we take into account our role in our own productions, we may be led into new possibilities....We may achieve greater originality and responsibility than before, a deeper understanding at once of ourselves ... (p. 2)

I echo these claims that a reflexive stance requires a purposeful, deliberate and consciousness-raising ethos. Kaethe Weingarten (2003) described this kind of conscious and intentional reflexivity as “aware” and “empowered” witnessing of self (p. 27). Awareness, in this instance, involves having access to understanding the implications of lived experience, and empowerment requires having access to the means to act on these events.

As researcher, I took up this reflexive stance as I engaged in this project and I invited research participants to investigate their conversational practices in similar reflexive ways. This stance seeks to reveal to self and others, an understanding of the process they witnessed. For those involved, the implications of their own productions are visible through the kind of reflexivity I am drawing together here. Those who produced the process can then evaluate and act on their understandings and the implications.

This reflexivity is a relational and expansive practice, the aim of which “is to realize more fully the linguistic implications of preferred positions, and to invite the expression of alternative voices or perspectives into one’s activities” (Gergen & Gergen, 1991, p. 79). For reflexivity the reflecting mirrors “must be doubled, creating the endless regress of possibilities, opening out into infinity, dissolving the clear boundaries of the ‘real’ world” (Myerhoff & Ruby, 1982, p. 3). In part, this study investigated what becomes visible and audible when partners double the mirrors on their relationship conversations. Doubling the mirrors provides more to see and hear, and different perspectives from which to look and listen, to do the seeing and hearing, as Bronwyn Davies and her colleagues (2004) described:

Being held within a hall of mirrors...Standing in front of one mirror, our reflection is caught in another, and that other reflects yet another image in a ceaseless infinite regression ... [that] draws attention to the backward looking of reflexivity, as if the process is always a return, a looking back. Yet the act of reflexivity creates new thoughts and ideas at the same time as going back over old thoughts and ideas. (p. 386)

I suggest that, as well as doubling the mirror, it is important to consider possible responses to the multiple images the mirrors produce. Frederick Steier (1991a) described two opposing meanings for acting reflexively: long circuit and small circuit reflexivity. The former involves a contemplative thinking process and the latter an instinctive, knee-jerk response that precedes thought. Both of these definitions are relevant to this study. As people engage in the various conversations in their lives, they speak in both spontaneous and taken for granted ways as well as deliberate, thought through interactions. Both of these responses have implications for the relationships they ongoingly produce together. I suggest that paying attention to both the instinctive and contemplative reflexivities make them salient and create space for “in-sight into the blindnesses that our knowing activities create” (Steier, 1991a, p. 164).

I use this to-and-fro, recursive and discursive account of reflexion in two particular ways. The first is in the production of a framework of practices that the research participants draw from to investigate the relationship conversations they

have together as couples over the course of the data generation phase of the study. The second is to employ these practices of reflexivity to over-view and account for the steps I take in the development of this study. This over-view - and account-able position - extends to and attends to the ways the research process constitutes and shapes my researcher practice and identity and to how I shape and constitute the research process. Each of these reflexive emphases weaves through and shapes the research story. I now turn to the next two landscapes - poststructuralism and social constructionism – that I draw from to formulate the ethos and practices for this research project.

Poststructuralism and social constructionism

Earlier in the chapter, I claimed kinship with the work of other practitioner researchers that I broadly described as poststructuralist and social constructionist in approach. Throughout this thesis, I often place the terms *poststructuralism* and *social constructionism* side-by-side as a broad descriptor of the theory and practice to which I am referring. I therefore begin this section with a rationale for this juxtaposition of terms by briefly outlining them in turn.

Poststructuralism and social constructionism have developed out of different disciplines and contexts. Poststructuralism emerged in France in the 1960s (Besley & Edwards, 2005) as a “radical theoretical break” with structuralism’s “liberal humanist individual” (Davies, et al., 2006, p. 87) considered to be “rational, autonomous and self-transparent” (Besley & Edwards, 2005, p. 278). Poststructural theory posed a challenge to an understanding of “language and culture as linguistic and symbolic systems”, and a “belief in unconscious and hidden structures or socio-historical forces that order and govern our behaviour” (Besley & Edwards, 2005, p. 278). Through a poststructural lens a subject “would see its own fictionality, its precarious, contradictory, constantly-in-process subjecthood”, would be “able to turn a reflexive eye on discourse and [be] able to work on discourse itself in order to reconstitute the world in less oppressive ways” (Davies, et al., 2006, p. 89).

The emergence of social constructionism in psychology is associated with Kenneth Gergen’s (1973) paper *Social psychology as history* (Burr, 2003). This

paper marked the beginning for psychology of a departure from, and critical alternative to, traditions of mainstream psychology and social psychology. Social constructionism heralded “a recognition that people construct their lives and identities socially and culturally through language, discourse and communication” (Speedy, 2008, p. 15). I became familiar with social constructionism through my apprenticeships in counselling. Social constructionism draws on poststructural theory (Burr, 2003). However, social constructionism is a term used almost exclusively by psychologists (Burr, 2003; Speedy, 2008). Jane Speedy (2008) suggested that ideas and practices of social constructionism, developed in psychology, were already familiar to sociologists and anthropologists who described them as ‘socio-cultural theory’. These perspectives, therefore, describe similar theories and practices developed in different disciplines and named differently by these disciplines. Both poststructural and social constructionist perspectives are associated with the “postmodern break with totalizing, universalizing ‘metanarratives’” (Lather, 1991). This break involves “less adherence to one overarching truth or belief system” and “rather, aspires to an acceptance of many possible truths, many ethics to live by, multiple cultures, various forms of social organization and so forth” (Speedy, 2008, pp. 11-12).

My intention is not to step into a discussion that attempts to detail definitions of these perspectives, their similarities and differences, or their genealogical emergence. My intention is to highlight that there are areas of similarity and difference and to draw from both poststructural and social constructionist authors to describe aspects of theory and practice from these perspectives that are integral to this study. Where the boundaries between poststructuralism and social constructionism are muddy, or where I seek to provide a succinct term for the theoretical location of my overall counselling or research practice, I link these terms together when I write them in the text.

Multiplicity of meaning and experience

The first integral and held-in-common aspect of social constructionism and poststructuralism is the proposition that there are many possible accounts and meanings which can be made of experience (Gergen & Gergen, 1992; Weedon, 1987). This notion of multiplicity is evident in my earlier account of reflexivity

as plural – reflexivities – and in Jane Speedy’s (2008) suggestion that cultural practices are ongoingly reinventing, reproducing and re-inscribing each other. This view of multiplicity makes it possible to conceptualise couple relationships as multi-storied and dynamic. I therefore use this view of relationships to investigate the meanings and experiences couples produced and reproduced in their relationship conversations during the data generation phase of the research.

Relationship as multi-storied and dynamic

A second held-in-common aspect is that meanings and experiences are constituted in the conversations people have together. The language we use in dialogue with ourselves and others is constitutive of identities and relationships (Shotter, 1987, 1989, 1993) and is the means by which we make knowledge. Language on these terms is performative (Gergen, 2001, p. 167) as are subjectivities that are discursively and contextually accomplished through dialogue (Davies, et al., 2006).

From the perspective I draw together here, couple relationships are relationally and therefore culturally and socially determined. Furthermore, the third aspect is that the meanings and accounts of relationship, which couples produce together, are drawn from the discourses partners have available to them.

Productivity of discourse and language

Discourses are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p. 49) and “each discourse contains the power to ... embrace a plurality of meanings” (p. 118). It follows then that discourses give access to, and limit, the meanings couples make of their lived experience. The multiple meanings that couples can make in these discursive contexts produce their relationships in unique and dynamic ways. For example, ethno-cultural, gender, age, ability, educational, familial and socio-economic discourses shape partners in couple relationships and partners shape these discourses.

Michel Foucault (1972) proposed that discourses are linguistically produced through social interaction and crystallized through the development of terms and conditions which serve particular functions, in particular social contexts, in

particular historical eras. Couples, therefore, have access to a range of discursive repertoires and to a range of meanings and experiences produced in and by these repertoires. As discourses are dynamic and multi-faceted so, too, are the possible meanings that couples can make and re make.

So far, I have suggested that meanings and accounts of relationship are social artefacts produced in discourse. From this perspective, language is the means by which conversational partners produce and reproduce discursive practices. Language is also the means by which partners constitute and reconstitute individual and relational identities. I have also drawn attention to the wider cultural context that produce discourses as historically and culturally situated. These discursive shifts highlight Kenneth Gergen's (1985a) claim that "the rules for 'what counts as what' [in discourse] are inherently ambiguous [and] continuously evolving" (p. 6).

I select four historical examples of movements in discourses of marriage and coupledness that show the evolution and ambiguity inherent in discourse. Firstly, the currently popular western notion that couples choose their partners and elect to marry on the basis of romantic love is a relatively recent development in the history of coupledness which began to emerge towards the end of the eighteenth century in Western Europe (Coontz, 2005). In times past, it was more of a common practice for others such as kin, neighbours, government officials and judges to select marriage partners for the purpose of furthering political and economic alliances and increasing the family labour force. Arranged marriages are still common practice in some geographical and ethno-cultural contexts such as India (Bhopal, 2011), for example, but do not feature so strongly in some other parts of the world such as Aotearoa² New Zealand where this study was undertaken.

Secondly, the development towards love-based marriage highlighted a further aspect that shaped couple relationships. The earlier emphasis of marriage, as constructed by and for the wider community, moved into a more individualised perspective of marriage constructed by, and for, individual marriage partners in

² The Maori name for New Zealand.

many geographical contexts. With this individualisation of marriage, a rights-based approach to relationship emerged. Stephanie Coontz (2005) drew attention to this historical social movement toward advocacy for individual rights of men and women in some historical and geographical contexts.

The movement towards individual rights and the ways these are enacted in the relationships between men and women also highlights a third aspect of discourse that takes into account the ways power is conceptualised and negotiated in couple relationships. History has shown examples of shifting roles of husbands from a monarchic model, for example, in which he was considered king and ruler over his dependents, towards a less militant role of protector and provider (Coontz, 2005; Foucault, 1985). More recently, in the late 1960s, second wave feminism critiqued the taken for granted practices that arose out of heterosexism and patriarchy (Delphy & Leonard, 1992). Out of this critique, the currently accepted concept of equitable relations between men and women emerged. The boundaries of these movements are muddy. For example, in Chapter 7 I show instances when some of the participants' attempts to develop more egalitarian relations were stymied by terms and conditions of patriarchal discourse that were also accessible and productive in their relationships.

The topic of gender relations highlights my fourth point, the challenge to and radical critique of the separate spheres which had previously but not always delineated women's work from men's work (Coontz, 2005). In Chapter 7, I show how two couples who participated in the research, Geena and Susan and Anne and MJ, negotiate the complex, dynamic, discursive territory of gender relations and the positions offered them in these discursive contexts with regard to what they see as their roles in their relationships.

Michel Foucault's (1972) proposal that discourses are "always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function" (p. 117), is illustrated in these four points I have drawn attention to. These developments of marriage discourse also show, over time, the institutionalisation of discourses. The institution of the family was discussed by

Michel Foucault (1982). Marriage is also referred to as an institution: an ensemble of terms and conditions shaped by legal structures, customs, religious doctrines and various principles of regulation that define who may be included and who are excluded based on age, legal status and gender, for example. Particular discourses produce particular subjectivities depending on how people meet, or fail to meet, the terms and conditions prescribed by that discourse at that given time and place. These terms and conditions create an environment in which particular discourses prevail in a particular society and become the centralized or most accessible discourses available in that context. For example, one prevailing discourse of couple relationship is that partners are heterosexual and married thus privileging love-based, equitable partnerships and the procreation of children. As groups of people live out the terms of these discourses, they are involved in the production of cultural stories that they shape and are shaped by.

Relations of power

As couples negotiate their relationships within these cultural stories they also encounter what Michel Foucault (1978) described as inevitable, omnipresent, complex relations of power – the fourth held-in-common area of social constructionist and poststructural theoretical perspectives that is relevant for this study. As I write about discourse and relations of power, I think about the couple relationships that this research investigates. I also think about the research context in which relations of power are inherent, and shape the relationships among the research participants, academic discourses and me. I speak first of the research context.

As a researcher I echo Johnella Bird's (2000) sentiments. She wrote, "we cannot stand outside of power relations...we can however undertake conversations about how we ethically engage with power difference" (p. 129). Like Michael White (1997), who spoke from a therapy context, I believe that practitioners have ethical responsibilities to those seeking counselling that those people do not have to practitioners. I take this position of responsibility as a research practitioner with those who participate in my research. For example, I take into account ethics of safety and care which research practice implicates participants in, but does not hold them responsible. I also heed Michael White's (1997) caution about the

perils of obscuring power relations, especially in the light of Johnella Bird's (2000) suggestion that obscuring power relations can be unintentional:

Our economic and social privileging may dull us to the experience of others. We may find our selves so much on the inside of privilege that we are unable to see the other sides. If this happens we risk becoming agents of social control. When we recognise our subjectivity then ethically we are challenged to expose our work and our selves to ongoing critique... (p. 127)

These words spoken in the context of therapy were also relevant to me in this study. I could not step outside of the discursive cultural context that has positioned me as Pakeha³, middle class, heterosexual, (able)bodied and with access to schooling and education. The discourses all offer positions from which I could inadvertently engage in practices that might unintentionally marginalise others. Any discourse I use in this project inevitably shapes the research story. However, my intention for this research is to identify and refuse calls that may contribute to problematic practices of colonisation, imposition or subjugation of the research participants' knowledge. Wakeful to this risk, I took steps to foster egalitarian relations. These steps involved addressing power relations by adopting "an approach of openness, reciprocity, mutual disclosure, and shared risk" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 181). I invited research participants into reflexive engagement with power relations. Chapter 4 speaks at length to ways I created space for egalitarian relations. Chapter 7 is another site in which I show the ways couples identified and investigated relations of power in the research conversations. I, too, engage in reflexive critique of relations of power and, as this discussion shows, make these transparent and negotiable for couples who participated in the study.

The second context that I think about as I write about discourse and relations of power, and which I referred to earlier, is the couple relationships that this research investigates. Like me, research participants are geographically situated and subject to inevitable relations of power that they cannot stand outside. It is likely

³ New Zealander of European descent.

that aspects of discourse they have access to, and power relations inherent in these discursive practices, are obscured and taken-for-granted.

I sought to develop a research process that could identify and address the ways terms and conditions of discourse and relations of power operate in couple relationships to produce effects that enable, limit, transform, marginalise and normalise those who use them. I was after research practices which created an environment in which the research participants and I could draw attention to and “de-naturalize some of our taken-for-granted assumptions about everyday life” (Gavey, 2005, p. 7). Put another way, my intention was to use Victor Turner’s (1978, p. ix) analogy, to exoticise the familiar: to make the commonplace marvellous.

Elucidating the processes of lived experience

A fifth held-in-common aspect of social constructionist and poststructuralist practice involves people taking steps to elucidate the processes they use to understand and account for their lived experience and their world as they know it (Gergen, 1985a; 1985b). Implicit in this practice is the idea, which I have already proposed, that there are multiple ways people can understand and account for experience. Reflexivity is the means the research participants and I use to elucidate the practices by which we understand and account for experience.

Stance of inquiry and critique

Elucidating these processes requires a sixth aspect of practice: “a radical doubt in the taken-for-granted world” (Gergen, 1985a, p. 4). This stance involves “a scholarship of critique, a scholarship that continuously sensitizes us to the taken for granted and its imprisoning effects” (Gergen, 1992, p. 26). In an environment of doubt and critique “normalized beliefs become targets of demystification; accepted truths are rendered curious ... matters of cognition, motivation, perception, information processing and the like, become candidates for historical and cross cultural comparison” (Gergen, 1985a, p. 11).

Investigations into the terms by which people understand the world and the processes they use, directs attention to the cross cultural and “the social, moral,

political and economic institutions that sustain and are sustained by current assumptions about human activity” (Gergen, 1985a, p. 5). These investigations call into question the taken-for-granted world and require two particular considerations. The first is the adoption of a stance of inquiry. In Chapter 2, I theorise a stance of inquiry that I call appreciative curiosity. The participants took up a stance of appreciative curiosity to identify and critically investigate the processes they used to produce their conversations. I employed this same kind of appreciative curiosity as I engaged in my reflexions on the data the research participants and I generated in the research conversations. The second consideration involves having access to the means by which lived experience is available for inquiry. As I mentioned earlier, video was the device that I used to elucidate the processes by which the participants and I identified, made sense of and accounted for our lived experience. Video provided a reflecting surface for us to see our world and make it available for inquiry and critique.

Knowledge/power

Foucauldian discourse theory informs the seventh shared aspect of poststructural and social constructionist theory. The practice of elucidating the processes of lived experience, of rendering the taken-for-granted as curious and embracing the multiplicity of meanings in discourse, produces knowledge. This knowledge is constituted in conversation as Kenneth Gergen pointed out (1985a): “[k]nowledge is not something individuals possess, but rather, something they do” (p. 10). I have argued that discourses produce persons’ individual and relational subjectivities in social interaction and that persons’ individual and relational subjectivities produce discourses. Participation in discourse requires that people have knowledge of the terms and conditions of that discourse: this knowledge may be implicit or explicit. The terms and conditions of discourse involve inevitable power relations that make multiple, and at times limited, positions available to take up, “resist, subvert and change” (Davies, 1991, p. 51) within that discursive landscape. In this way, “techniques of knowledge and strategies of power ... are linked together” (Foucault, 1978, p. 98). Furthermore, if these discourses are experienced as the only possible way of doing couple relationships then other possible discursive constructions and access to alternative knowledge/power are obscured.

One of my intentions for this study was to create a receiving context that offered research participants positions from which to identify some of the discursive repertoires they employ in their relationships. When participants identify these repertoires as one or some of many possible repertoires, then they extend the knowledge/power nexus and have access to a wider discursive repertoire from which to negotiate their relationships. Chapters 5 to 9 recount stories of how the participants and I produced knowledge in the conversational spaces we inhabited. This knowledge was generated across the various phases of the research process.

Subjectivities

Discourses at once produce us as subjects, and subjectivities produce discourses that we take up and use as we engage together in the various relationships involved in this project. I use the plural form of subjectivity to emphasise the perspective that people and their identities are multiple, fragmented and incoherent. Subjectivities produce and are produced by the range of discourses people have access to. Subjectivity, which is “understood as the lived and imaginary experience of the subject, is itself derived from the material rituals by which subjects are constituted” (Butler, 1995, p. 19). This research investigates and makes salient some of these material rituals or discursive practices. Through this process, research participants, and I as researcher, engage in wakefulness about how we shape and are shaped by the accessible discursive repertoires. Wakefulness is “a kind of inquiry that necessitates ongoing reflection” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 184).

Relational ethics

As I draw attention to the need for wakefulness as research participants and I engage in the enactment and production of discourse, I suggest that attention also goes to the relational ethics we employ in this process. I concur with Jean Clandinin and Michael Connolly’s (2000) claim that relational consideration underpins the entire narrative research process. The discursive, reflexive, constitutive account of research I have so far proposed is inevitably relational. Kenneth Gergen and Mary Gergen (1987) said that “each participant’s biographical constructions are dependent on the construals of others” (p. 274).

As a researcher, my “biographical construction” also shapes and constitutes the research story. Therefore, to understand research as a relational narrative and to employ language of relatedness, a term proposed by Kenneth Gergen and Mary Gergen (1987), is to produce relational ethics and practices into this study’s ethos and structure. Furthermore, I argue that the notion of *participatory consciousness* (Heshusius, 1994) conceptualises a process of relational ethics.

Participatory consciousness is the awareness of a deeper level of kinship between the knower and the known [which necessarily involves] [a]n inner desire to let go of perceived boundaries that constitute ‘self’ – and that construct the perception of difference between the self and the other. (Heshusius, p. 16)

On these terms, this kinship is produced in an environment in which the knower and the known come together and co-create knowledge through their encounter that would not have been possible without their encounter. The knowledge generated in this environment cannot be attributed to either the knower or the known, but to the relational process in which knowledge is produced. Vivien Burr (2003) drew attention to the importance of placing a focus on the relational encounter:

If we are looking for explanations of the social world, either in terms of what individual people do and feel or in terms of groups, classes or societies, we should not look inside the individual, but out into the linguistic space in which they move with other people. (p. 54)

Earlier in the chapter, I used the term reflexive/liminal space (Speedy, 2008) to describe what I suggest is similar to the linguistic space Vivien Burr (2003) spoke of. I believe that the participants and I produced knowledge together in this kind of reflexive, liminal, linguistic territory. We were involved in *joint action*: “those ambiguous, uncertain social activities ... in which people do *not* seem to act in a wholly individual or autonomous manner and which are intrinsically *unaccountable*” (Shotter, 1992, p. 20, emphasis in original).

This study accounts for knowledge and practice co-produced in the relational territory of joint action. It is interested in the relationships produced in the linguistic space between people. These relationships include those between participants as couples and the participants and me as researcher. “[T]his kind of contact with the others and othernesses around us, within which they reveal their inner lives to us, does not just occur by happenstance. It is a human achievement” (Shotter, 2005, p. 110).

As I developed the research process, I paid particular attention to ethics as I created a receiving context in which the research relationships, between participants as couples and between participants and me, could unfold in rich and generative ways. One way I did this was to hold the participants’ reflexions up for appreciation and to include them, alongside mine, in this account of the research story. These steps contribute to the production of relational ethics.

Language, subjectivity, discourse and power relations

“Actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences” are defined and contested in language (Weedon, 1987, p. 21). Language is the site in which discursive practices are produced, subjectivities are constituted, power relations are contested and meaning is made (Weedon, 1987). This study is interested in the discursive structures of relationship practice and how these structures produce and maintain couple relationships that are primarily shaped by individualist, essentialist, humanistic perspectives, whilst other perspectives, such as those shaped by constructionist and poststructuralist theory and practice, for example, are not so accessible or widely used by couples. This research investigates the effects of different constructions of relationship practice in terms of power and gender relations, for example. It draws from feminist poststructuralist theory that is concerned with the production of gendered subjectivity (Davies, 1993b; Weedon, 1987).

Positioning theory, agency and mo(ve)ment

I use positioning theory (Davies & Harre, 1990; Harre, 2004) to consider the discursive positioning which partners were offered in their relationship conversations. Positioning theory focuses on the ways in which discursive

practices constitute people in the moment-by-moment unfolding of conversation, and the ways people negotiate the positions they are offered as they speak and are spoken to (Davies & Harre, 1990). I also draw on the concept of agency (Davies, 1991) and mo(ve)ment (Davies, et al., 2006) to investigate the moment-by-moment position calls which partners took up, refused, accepted and subverted (Davies, 1991) in their conversations as couples. I pick up and describe the work of these poststructuralist concepts in more detail in the chapters that follow. I now provide an account of the means I employ to conceptualise and tell the story of this study.

Narratives and Storying

The narrative metaphor of storying, the fourth theoretical landscape, provides the conceptual ground on which I stand to articulate and archive the accounts, or stories, produced in this research project. Generally, stories provide the structure for accounts to be plotted chronologically and coherently in a linear fashion (Bruner, 1986; Gergen & Gergen, 1987; White & Epston, 1990, p. 10). Whilst stories may be linear, their lines are not necessarily straight. Stories cross paths, weave together and shift and change as they are told and re told. I prefer to think of stories as circular, an idea I have borrowed from Terry Tafoya (1995). He proposed that “stories go in circles they don’t go in straight lines....there are stories inside and between stories” (p. 11) This research is a narrative account, made up of many intersecting and interwoven stories. The use of narrative inquiry to tell stories of human experience has a long history in qualitative research (Polkinghorne, 1988; Schaafsma, Pagnucci, Wallace, & Stock, 2007). Narratives have benefits for this research story because, as Donald Polkinghorne (1997) suggested, “the narrative provides a more epistemologically adequate discourse form for reporting and assessing research within the context of a post positivistic understanding of knowledge generation” (pp. 6-7).

Stories are sites of meaning-making and, as this thesis goes on to show, meaning-making is a central tenet of this research project. “In order to make sense of our lives and to express ourselves, experience must be ‘storied’, and it is this storying that determines the meaning ascribed to experience” (White & Epston, 1990, pp. 9-10). People look to stories to make sense of their lives (Frank, 2002;

Polkinghorne, 1997). Stories are more than accounts of meaning. The process of storying produces meanings. In a recursive loop, stories constitute meaning and sense-making, and meaning and sense-making constitute stories. Stories, therefore, are sites of change and development (Frank, 2002).

This research project is interested in the stories couples tell about their relationship conversations and how, through these stories, the partners and their relationships change and develop. Chapters 2, 4 and 5 describe the process I developed to capture and investigate stories of change and development that were told and re-told, constituted and reconstituted, through the research process.

So far, I have argued that storying creates a context in which complex and multiple stories can be woven together to constitute dynamic stories of change and development. These stories can produce wider stories such as the one this thesis tells, and they can produce moment-by-moment local stories of relationship practice. Chapter 6 illustrates this multiply layered process. It investigates meaning-making, identified by couples as a topic of interest to them. Then, as couples deconstructed the notion of meaning-making in the research conversations, they made and storied new meanings into their discursive repertoires and into this research story.

Thus, this research tells and produces versions of many stories. Implicit in these stories are the other possible accounts that lurk unseen in the shadows of the stories told - they are at once present and invisible. Michael White (1990) drew attention to the partiality and discursive politics of stories:

Only a fraction of [lived] experience can be storied and expressed at any one time, and that a great deal of lived experience inevitably falls outside the dominant stories about the lives and relationships of persons. (p. 15)

The stories in this research – the wider research story and the stories participants tell of their relationships - draw from familiar and sometimes dominant cultural stories. The process of enacting, viewing, re-viewing and reviewing, produced

new and different stories. They are stories-in-the-making and are therefore constitutive and dynamic.

Of these stories, I write two particular meta-stories into this thesis document. The first is the story of relationships, told and critically investigated by the research participants and narrated and theorised by me. The other is the story of the research, of which I am both participant and primary storyteller. Social constructionist research constructs the world “with researchers included in, rather than outside, the body of their own research” (Steier, 1991b, p. 2). The task I take up is to represent these multiple, complex and dynamic stories in ways that hold the participants’ stories up for appreciation whilst heeding the theoretical and ethical claims I make for this research. I do so mindful of Frederick Steier’s (1991b) claim that research is “not a self-centred product, but a reciprocal process” (p. 7). This dynamic reciprocal process, in which research participants, including researchers, ongoingly produce knowledge and experience together, conceptualises research as a performance. When researchers write this knowledge and experience into a research thesis, the private performance between researchers and participants is public and necessarily involves an audience.

Performance

I now turn to performance, the fifth theoretical landscape, in which I locate this study. I have drawn these theories and practices of performance from diverse yet complementary locations - performance psychology and anthropology – and I weave them together to produce this research performance as an amalgam of performances.

Performance is a means through which audiences can experience embodied accounts of cultural expressions. This performance of culture is then made available as “*a critical reflective and refractive lens* to view the human condition and a form of *reflexive agency* that initiates action” (Alexander, 2005, p. 412, emphasis in original). Performance has the capacity to be a strategic tool and practice through which cultural awareness and social change can be incited (Alexander, 2005). I am drawn to the aspects of performance that contribute to cultural awareness and social change. In performance a “practical place and

liminal space” is available from which to stand and to observe (Alexander, 2005, p. 417). These three aspects of reflexivity, awareness and change are central to this research endeavour.

Performance psychology

I turn first to performance psychology that, like this study, attempts to bridge the theoretical divide between social sciences and the arts by employing performance to inform research. Mary Gergen (2001) provided three theoretical and philosophical ideas which I use to link performance psychology with this study, and which I have already articulated earlier in the chapter. Firstly, performance psychology and this study share the perspective that “meanings emerge from our togetherness” (2001, p. 168): meanings are discursive and are generated in relationship with others. Secondly, power relations are considered by acknowledging “the knowledge/power nexus” and blurring “[t]he boundaries between the roles of researcher, researched and reviewer” (Gergen, 2001, p. 168). Thirdly, both actors and audience are involved in reflexive inquiry about the performance.

Performance as drama

A link was also drawn by Donald Polkinghorne (1997) between the dramaturgical metaphor and narrative research. As a researcher, I produce myself as a protagonist “in the drama of [my quest] for understanding” (Polkinghorne, 1997, p. 9). Through the process of spect-acting, I invited research participants to be protagonists in their quests for understanding. By performing their narratives to themselves and to me, and through me to others, this understanding is shared and enriched by the participants and those who audience their stories. Arthur Frank (2000, p. 361) drew attention to the impact performed stories have on the social and cultural experience of those who tell and audience them.

People I call storytellers tell stories to remind those who share their form of life what it is they share; people’s sense of being together is enriched within the storytelling relation. Storytellers also offer those who do not share their form of life a glimpse of what it means to live informed by such values, meanings, relationships, and commitments. Others can

witness what lives within the storyteller's community actually look, feel, and sound like. (p. 361)

This claim is echoed by Linda Park-Fuller (2003) who said, “[p]erformance invites us to stand with others, to feel one another's fears and joys, to expand our lived-world, and then to strive to make it a better one, for us all” (p. 307). Linda Park-Fuller's account shows the capacity of performance to produce social action.

I argue, and show in Chapters 5 to 8, that the process of couples performing their life worlds in the presence of each other and then taking up reflexive audiencing positions to view these life worlds, provides a unique glimpse of how their values, meanings, relationships and commitments look, feel and sound. At the same time, these performances have the capacity to expand and improve the lived worlds of those involved in them as audiences. These performances are cultural and provide an ideal way to make partners' lives visible to themselves, to me, and, through me, to others who engage in the performance. Cultural performances are “*capable of being reflexive, arousing consciousness of ourselves as we see ourselves. As heroes in our own dramas, we are made self-aware, conscious of our consciousness*” (Myerhoff, 1982, p. 105, emphasis in original). On these terms, performance provides an ideal opportunity to perform and produce reflexive, discursive narratives.

Reflexive/liminal performance space

Performance also makes visible the production of relational narratives, which I spoke of earlier, as well as the production of relational subjectivities. Soyini Madison (2003) drew attention to the possibilities of performance research as a place in which the boundaries of self and other become muddled.

Performance becomes the vehicle by which we travel to the worlds of Subjects and enter domains of intersubjectivity that problematize how we categorize who is “us” and who is “them”, and how we see *ourselves* with “other” and different eyes. (Madison, 2003, p. 478, emphasis in original)

This research proposes that the self-other relationship is troubled and transformed in the hyphen produced between actor and spectator - actor-spectator. This domain, as I argued earlier, is a “highly political, personal, imaginative and social”, reflexive/liminal space (Speedy, 2008, p. 28). In the space between participants as actors in the performance and participants as audience to the performance, participants are offered the opportunity to witness themselves at once as “us” and “them”, with “other” and different eyes, as Soyini Madison (2003) proposed. As well as an emphasis on self-reflection and relational-reflection, the research process is about “using the public space and performance as an act of critically reflecting culture, an act of *seeing the self see the self through and as the other*” (Alexander, 2005, p. 423, italics in original).

Dialogical performance

The public and performative process of critically reflecting the territories of self-other-culture also creates space for ongoing change and development. The concept of dialogical performance produces an environment for change and development (Conquergood, 2003). Dialogical performance occurs in a conversational site in which self and other come together to “question, debate and challenge one another” when they “bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs” (Conquergood, 2003, pp. 407-408).

This research involved the bringing together of the different discursive practices which partners in couples relationships negotiated together as a couple. In a dialogical performance of acting, viewing, re-viewing and critique, couples engaged in inquiry, together as a couple, and with me, about the discursive repertoires they shaped and about the ways these repertoires shaped them and their relationships.

However, the practice of reflexive audiencing was new to participants and therefore not something that they had routinely learned or engaged with in everyday life. It is also not something that happens perchance. Reflexive performances require skills, arenas, audiences and legitimated processes for productions.

Definitional Ceremony

As I developed the research project, I turned to the research and counselling literature to create a context in which participants could engage in a process of reflexive audiencing. The “definitional ceremonies” proposed by Barbara Myerhoff (1982, p. 105), share much of the theoretical and philosophical tenets of this research. I enlarge on the work of Barbara Myerhoff, definitional ceremonies and reflexive audiencing practices, in Chapter 2.

In this research context, definitional ceremony refers to a ritualised process in which couples perform a relationship conversation that I videotaped. In a second phase, couples become reflexive, appreciative, curious audiences to the conversation. They then engage in a telling, or witnessing of the conversation in ways that generate rich, and at times, celebratory and meaningful accounts of their relational practices. In this way, they are actors, audiences and critics in their own enactments of lived experience. This process involves a reflexive stance, or “self-consciousness” (Myerhoff, 1982), which provides another, fuller angle of self-understanding” in which:

[S]ubjects know that their knowing is a component of their conduct. They assume responsibility for inventing themselves ... It may lead to a realization of personal power and serve as a source of pleasure and understanding in the workings of consciousness ...it may bring one into a greater fullness of being. (p. 100, italics in original)

This study is interested in self-conscious attention to practices of relating. It argues that in a ritualised, performative space, reflexivity, or turning one’s gaze back on lived experience, can, in a context of respectful, appreciative inquiry, produce rich understanding, knowledge and change.

Video

Audio-visual technology was an integral part of the definitional ceremonies that I set up and that the participants and I engaged in. It was the prosthetic device (Shotter, 1993) I employed because it contributed significantly to making aspects of lived experience available to reflexive critique. For example, the visual

dimension captures “the *performativities* of identity” and “allows a glimpse of the configuration of these cultural products as they are mapped out on bodies, homes and other adjacent milieu” (Holliday, 2000, p. 509, emphasis in original). Video makes both the tale and its telling visible and available for reflexion and review. Furthermore, video can make visible and render negotiable, taken-for-granted and unspoken knowledge and practices (Carroll, Iedema, & Kerridge, 2008, p. 381).

The process that this research employs, of telling the story on video, watching the story that has been told and then telling the story of what has been watched, becomes more than merely watching a film. It becomes a theatrical performance. “In theater, the arts of watching and of being watched are intertwined, and each affects the other” (Woodruff, 2008, p. 43). I argue that what audiences see in this relational performance moves them. In my study, DVDs and transcripts of the taped performances are some of the texts – the research data - that the participants and I use to engage processes of reflexion and review. These texts, which are translations of research conversations, make repeated viewing and re-viewing possible. The audio-visual text can become an externalised entity that the actors can engage with, from alternative vantage points. Reflexion on video graphic material also has the potential to generate explanations for how culture shapes people’s identities, and lives shape and are shaped by culture (Holliday, 2000). Additionally, video creates space for exploration of the meanings and the evolving narratives of self that the reflexion process subsequently weaves and constitutes.

Video, in this project, made visible the “heterogeneity” which Katherine Carroll and colleagues (2008) argued is “at the heart of in situ practice” (p. 383). Video produced close and tangible versions of in-situ conversations between participants as couples, which participants and I then used to audience and critically investigate the taped conversations.

This research uses both visual and written text. According to Mary Gergen (2001), “written text allows time for reflection, which is missing in a visual staging of the piece. In this sense, the visual and the textual forms can complement each other” (p. 170). Each performance of reflexively watching the DVD or film and consulting the written texts of this performance, creates new opportunities for

knowledge, understanding and further development of the story told. Thus, a process of reflexive, recursive audiencing produces and makes visible the development of relationship stories. I have suggested that viewing a single performance through multiple and changing lenses makes possible a range of meanings.

Research, using video technology in a collaborative investigation with clinicians in a medical intensive care department (Carroll, et al., 2008), made four claims about the use of audio-visual technology that are relevant for my research context. I list these four aspects and then speak to their relevance for my study. Firstly, following David MacDougall (2006), the authors claimed that the visual component highlights taken for granted language, knowledge and practice, producing dramatic effects for how practice is experienced (Carroll, et al.). Again citing David MacDougall (2006), the authors argued a second point, that the visual perspective intensifies experience by foregrounding particular aspects and back-grounding other aspects (Carroll, et al.). Thirdly, meaning-making can be appreciated in new or different ways thus bringing the life-world closer by presencing it in a new way (Carroll, et al.). Finally, vision can destabilise the view of lived experience and create space for people to re view and renegotiate aspects of their experience (Carroll, et al.). I was interested in video technology for its capacity to capture in-situ practice and to make taken-as-given relational practice available for participants to reflexively investigate and shape. Foregrounding some aspects and backgrounding other aspects can position participants well to unsettle and to agentially re-view and re-appreciate the meanings they make and the relational practices they produce and reproduce together. Video offers participants positions of performer, audience and critic/researcher in the production of their conversations.

Several authors have drawn attention to the potential for ethnographic video to empower and disempower depending on how it is employed (Carroll, 2009; Kindon, 2003; Pink, 2007). For some time, video has been utilised in therapeutic environments as a way of making couple relationship practice visible for exploration and review by therapists and couples (Gaddis, 2002; Gottman, 1994; Padgett, 1983).

There are also examples in therapeutic contexts, of people who consult therapists using video as a reflexive, therapeutic tool. Wendel Ray and William Saxon (1992) described the use of video playback which they employed with families in Brief Family Therapy. They found that video playback allowed for non-threatening re experience of interactional patterns and the consideration of different productive meaning-making. Marina Zelenko and Anne Benham (2000) discussed video playback reflection which they conducted with mothers as part of psychodynamic therapeutic work with infant-parent dyads. Videotape replay promoted accelerated access to early memories, enlightening awareness, insight and positive therapeutic change. Valerie Padgett (1983) discussed the use of videotape replay in marital therapy with couples. They reported “an enhancement effect for at least some forms of psychotherapy” (p. 232) with the use of video therapy. David Gasman (1992) used video-replay in psychotherapy with outpatients of a mental health practice and suggested that video homework assisted the therapeutic process, contributed to enhanced objectivity, self-esteem and insight. Judy Katz-Charny and Anat Goldstein (1995) used video-replay in their individual and family therapy work with an incest survivor. Video-provided a “protective shield” (p. 689), making it possible to view a family conversation without being present at the time of the conversation. Whilst each of these examples comes from therapy contexts, they support my contention that the use of video-replay in research could provide an opportunity for enhanced relationship development, meaning-making and understanding.

In the 1970s John Gottman (1994) made a series of videotapes of counselling sessions with a couple who he had been stymied in his attempts to help. He then selected certain segments of the tapes that he had the couple watch with him during counselling. The couples were astonished at the problematic communication patterns evident in the tapes they viewed. John Gottman reported that the couple were shocked into relating better. He then went on to use videotapes of couple counselling to “develop a science of marital interaction” (Gottman, 1994, p. 43). His research sought to identify the factors that contributed to marriage failure.

I am also interested in the couples' responses to the videotaped conversations they have together. However, there are some distinctions between my research and John Gottman's (1994) which take the two studies into different philosophical and theoretical territories. For example, exploration of the research participants' responses may include identification of the communication patterns and interactions in the relationship, as well as extend into the wider cultural contexts that inform the couples' relationships. Furthermore, it is not the intention of this study to generalise the stories couples tell and have these stories stand for all couples. My attention is on identifying and storying the local, unique and diverse understandings of coupledness that the research participants produce in and through the use of video, and to make these stories available for research participants and me to audience and critique.

Audience positioning

The practice of audiencing is central to this project. Audience members include the research participants, my supervisors, the readers of this thesis, and me the researcher. These audiences all shape what is spoken and written. Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2000) referred, for example, to some of the audiences that they took into account as they composed their research texts.

[W]e needed to be thoughtful of our research participants as our first audience and, indeed, our most important audience, for it is to them that we owe our care to compose a text that does not rupture life stories that sustain them. But as researchers we also owe our care and responsibility to a larger audience, to the conversation of a scholarly discourse, and our research texts need also to speak of how we lived and told our stories within the particular field of inquiry. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 173-174)

As audiences to their conversations, which perform and express their knowledge claims, the couples in this study stepped into forums in which they re-viewed, authenticated and acknowledged their knowledge claims. I then worked to carefully authenticate and acknowledge their claims in the research texts I produced for the larger audience who would read this thesis.

Speaking of audience in the context of writing practice, Peggy Penn and Marilyn Frankfurt (1994) theorised that writing can create a “dialogic space” between author-as-writer and author-as-listener to his/her own story (p. 222). The recursive process of writing and witnessing one’s writing, can produce a multi-vocal interaction through which persons can change negative monologues into internal evolving dialogues (Penn & Frankfurt). The reflexive audiencing practices that I used for this project provided written and audio-visual research texts. They invited participants, readers, and me as researcher to step into and investigate the events that went on in that space. This dialogic process, across person and text, produced new knowledge, meanings and relational change. On these terms, audiences play a significant role in the reflexive process of relational development.

[T]he response of the audience is not passive, but is an active and knowing response. ... reflections are a re-telling of the knowledges that are evident in the person’s expressions, and these re-tellings contribute significantly to the knowledges known. (White, 1997, p. 13)

Stephen Gaddis’s (2004) research also noted developments for couples which occurred during his research, when he and the research participants audienced DVDs of the couple counselling conversations with their therapists. Whilst Stephen Gaddis’s (2004) study focussed on counselling practice, his study and mine involved couples in a process of audiencing videotaped conversations about their relationships and then engaging in research conversations which investigated the initial taped conversation. He reported:

It seemed to me that the clients developed richer understandings about their lives and relationships, and that this made possible for new ways of relating with one another [sic]. I wonder if these new understandings had something to do with being placed in a position where they witnessed on videotape their own behaviour, thoughts, and interactions. (Gaddis, 2004, p. 46)

A further example of the generative effects of audiencing can be found in Cate Ingram and Amaryll Perlesz's (2004) study. They investigated the therapeutic outcomes of individuals and families who were currently in therapy when they audienced the written narratives of previous clients, whose circumstances were similar. The persons and families whose stories were originally documented, reported that the process of authoring these stories and then reading them back was very worthwhile. The researchers speculated that:

Perhaps some of the value is due to the fact that putting one's experience in writing and reading these back, or having them read back, means that one becomes an audience to oneself. Perhaps it is this audience position that enables different actions in relation to the issue that is presented in therapy. (Ingram & Perlesz, 2004, p. 55)

I propose that, in a research context, drawing together the threads of performance and audiencing and using audio-visual technology for couples to capture and investigate the tellings and re-tellings of their relationship conversations, creates a space in which meaning, knowledge and change can be produced. This making of meaning, knowledge and change also extended to me as researcher when I employed the reflexive audiencing process to investigate my practice. I tell this story in Chapter 9.

Introducing the chapters

So far, in this chapter I have introduced five key theoretical and philosophical landscapes in which I locate this study. Firstly, I have drawn together theories and practices of reflexivity that involve participants as spect-actors who turn their gaze back on a taped relationship conversation to view and review their relationship practice. In the reflexive/liminal space between the couple and their taped conversations, the relationship practice is available to them to identify, to investigate and to deconstruct the moment-by-moment conversational process.

I drew together accounts of poststructural and social constructionist theory and practices that conceptualise research, and couple practice, as constituted in dialogic interaction. In these relational contexts, reflexive attention goes to the

discursive practices enacted in the dialogical interactions, the accounts of lived experience produced in these dialogues, and on the discursive production of individual and relational subjectivity.

I then introduced a fourth landscape: narrative and storying. I argued that the narrative metaphor provides an ideal structure for telling and re-telling multiple research stories that cross paths and interweave in dynamic and emergent ways. The fifth territory – performance – creates the space for enactment of the many stories generated in the research conversations, and the stories that I continue to tell, re tell and write in this thesis. In the performance arena the involvement of performers and audience – as spect-actors – in the dynamic, emergent, production and re-production of individual and relational subjectivity is available for reflexion and analysis.

Chapter 2 sets the theoretical stage for the construction of reflexive audiencing practices that I invited research participants into and go on to develop further in Chapter 4. I take up a position of artistic director to create the arena for performances in later chapters that illustrate the theoretical and structural composition of reflexive audiencing, and show its practices enacted.

Chapter 3 discusses the literature I have consulted which provided the rationale and background for this study. This literature included the popular psychology self-help genre for people in intimate relationships, which is currently readily available on the shelves of local bookstores. It also includes approaches to coupledness currently offered through a range of couple relationship education programmes. In the chapter, I identify discursive repertoires that authors use to account for couple relationship practice and to provide strategies for couples to address this practice. I draw attention to some of the limitations of these repertoires and argue for a wider range of discursive repertoires of coupledness to be more readily accessible to couples seeking to develop their relationships. The chapter discusses literature that is emerging from poststructural and social constructionist writers in contexts related to academia, therapy and research. I show how this literature, which is not currently readily available to couples outside of these contexts, offers possibilities for couples who seek to develop their

relationships. Chapter 3 argues that there is space for social constructionist and poststructural research that investigates theory and practices of coupledness for couples seeking to develop their relationships outside of therapeutic and academic contexts.

In Chapter 4, I move between researcher/co-researcher positions as I give an account of the project's method and the theoretical and ethical practices that shape the method. I describe the receiving context into which the participants and I step to engage in the phases of the project as spect-actors – actors, audience and critics – of the various research conversations which we produced and investigated.

Chapter 5 is the first results chapter. It provides a deconstruction of the reflexive audiencing practices that I constructed in Chapter 2. I conflate the voices of ten participants – five couples – and present them as two participants – one couple – to create a context in which I can draw attention to the discursive practices of relationship-talk-in-action. The chapter shows Alex and Chris employing reflexive audiencing practices to identify, question and deregulate somewhat regulatory terms of the discursive practices of looking, listening and questioning. In the unfolding conversation, Alex and Chris negotiate different discursive positions, and, in so doing, deconstruct and transform the discourses. Through this process, the discursive formations are troubled and renegotiated, done and undone, as Alex and Chris shift from an analysis based solely on the terms and conditions of the discourse to an analysis that takes into account the unique context of their relationship-in-action.

Meaning-making is the focus of Chapter 6. It offers extracts of transcript text to show one couple, Laura and Andrew, involved in a process of meaning-making and producing understanding. The chapter traces the steps Laura and Andrew take as they engage in a critical reflexion of the meaning-making process from third-person positions as spect-actors. The chapter shows how, through this process, the couple identify given-meanings of independence; trouble these meanings; and originate new meaning, understanding and change. I show them engaged in a reflexion of their reflexions. In this doubled reflexive arc (Davies, et al., 2004), they describe the work of meaning-making and they identify questions

and practices of inquiry that they might use in future conversations to reproduce meaning-making inquiry.

Chapter 7 follows a similar structure to Chapter 6 to address relations of gender and power. I provide examples, using extracts of data from Anne and MJ and Susan and Geena's research conversations, of the ways in which these couples identify, negotiate and critique gender and power relations in their relationship conversations. The chapter takes a moment-by-moment look at the ways gender and power relations shape couples conversations, and the ways partners shape these relations of gender and power.

Chapter 8, the last of the results chapters, addresses Humour, the fourth topic that emerged as an important and influential aspect of couple practice. In a dramatic presentation, Humour, personified, takes the stage as a reflexive audience to its presence and participation in the couples' conversations. In this chapter, I bring the participants together as a group by selecting extracts of transcript text from the research conversations and combining them to script a theatrical production that the participants then perform. In this performance, the participants, Humour, and I, are spect-actors. I take up interviewer and narrator roles to develop the story of Humour as a complex, dynamic, social practice constituted in relationship conversations, and which constitutes these conversations.

In Chapter 9, I place my research practice under the spotlight and show how I draw from reflexive audiencing practices to investigate researcher reflexivity. I show-case an example in which I take up an invitation by one of my doctoral supervisors to consider how we, as supervisors and researcher, produce reflexivity in doctoral research supervision. My explorations investigate the production of reflexivity through my participation in doctoral supervision meetings, engagement with literature, video diaries, self-reflexion and email conversations. The chapter shows researcher reflexivity-in-action as a multi-layered, multi-directional, collaborative, constitutive, dialogic, relational practice.

Chapter 10, the final chapter, is a reflexion on the processes of reflexive audiencing practices that critically investigate couple relationship talk-in-action.

It identifies important contributions that the process offers couples, and it discusses how the study's findings are particularly meaningful for couples and for my personal and professional practice. The chapter offers, to couples, and to my professional and academic communities, reflexions on the possibilities of reflexive audiencing practices for couple relationships, research, supervision, group-work and counselling contexts.

Chapter 2. Setting the scene for reflexive audiencing performances

Set in the theatre, this chapter builds on the theoretical and conceptual territories introduced in Chapter 1. As theatrical director, I take the stage and set the scene for a construction of the theoretical components of reflexive audiencing practices that research participants will use, as couples, to investigate their relationships in the data generation phase of the study.

Setting the theoretical scene

I suggest that a theatrical director's task is to take their audiences to particular locations and moments in time in which the performances they direct are located. The director creates these settings with lighting, props and sound effects. These aesthetics evoke the imaginations of the audience members and they provide audiences with important information. This information shapes what the audience members see and hear of the performance, and how they make meaning of what they see and hear.

You are stepping into an empty auditorium, with a bare stage. My task is to create the theoretical locale of this research production so that you, as audience, can position yourselves to see and hear performances of reflexive audiencing practices that unfold in later chapters. This production begins with me positioned on the stage. The process of setting the stage is part of the performance, and you, the audience, get to experience what is usually a behind-the-scenes process.

As I have crafted the overall research production, I have done so with the intention of creating an environment in which the audience, the participants and I can in some way be transported to new and different places; that through our involvement we will be transformed. This transformation process is akin to the theatrical metaphor of katharsis, derived from Greek tragedy (Lear, 1988, p. 7). In this classical account of katharsis the process of audiencing a performance contributes to new knowledge, understanding and identities being shaped through

the kathartic experience that might not otherwise have been available had the person not been present to the performance (White, 2007).

As I set up the lighting and place the props, I do so with the research participants in mind. They are partners in five couple relationships whose stories will be enacted and told in later chapters.

I draw attention to the five theoretical perspectives I introduced and theorised in Chapter 1: reflexivity, social constructionism, poststructuralism, narrative theory and performance theory. In this chapter, I present these perspectives as differently coloured clusters of spotlights that I use to set the theoretical scene for performances of relationship stories. For example, the blue lights illuminate aspects of social constructionism and poststructuralism. They make visible the multiple meanings that can be made of the performances, the discursive practices that are available and the different subjectivities that these meanings and discursive practices produce. The green lights illuminate reflexivity. They make it possible for participants and audience to gain perspectives of the performances and to see the constitution and reconstitution of the performances as they are played out. The yellow lights of narrative theory make up the third cluster and show the performances as stories produced in particular moments in time, geographical locations and cultural contexts. Finally, the red lights emphasise the performances as theatrical productions: dramatic enactments in which partners, as actors and audience, interweave in recursive processes of individual and relational identity development.

The different lights will turn on and off in the unfolding performances, each illuminating particular aspects of reflexive audiencing practices and each intersecting with the other lights in dynamic and nuanced ways. I now introduce these different lights one by one and theorise the work they do in shaping how audiences look in on performances in this production.

Identity is a social achievement

The first beam of light will show the partners positioned through the lens of what John Shotter (1989) called a communitarian perspective. This perspective

illuminates “not the inner subjectivity of the individual, but the practical social processes going on ‘between’” them (Shotter, 1989, p. 137). The hue of a communitarian perspective highlights the constitution of the identities of the partners in the relationships they co-produce together as couples. Identity is characterised as public and social, cultural and historical (White, 2007, p. 182).

What I illuminate here is a relational approach that conceptualises communication as a dynamic process of relating that “constitutes relationships and, in so doing, it reconstitutes the entities that are related” (Condit, 2006, p. 4). In this case, the entities I refer to are the couples who will perform in later chapters. There are other lights, which are available to turn on, each of which represent different discursive repertoires and conceptualise the partners individual and relationship identities differently. For example, the light of possessive individualism assumes that from birth people are “separate, isolated individuals *already* containing ‘minds’ or ‘mentalities’ wholly within ourselves, set over against a material world itself devoid of any mental processes” (Shotter, 1989, p. 136, emphasis in original). Romanticism offers another conceptualisation of identity, and of relationships as the communion of souls, each guided by morality, emotions, loyalties and instincts (Gergen, 1991). There are also other discursive repertoires, which I draw attention to in Chapter 3, that emerge from a range of ethno-cultural contexts in which individual and relational responsibility is to the community as a collective, and community and collective well-being shapes the purpose of relationship and individual identity.

These discursive repertoires all circulate in and shape the current, local, Aotearoa New Zealand cultural context in which this production is located. The repertoires are accessible to couples through the literature, media, relationships and institutions that couples engage with, and couples produce and reproduce these repertoires in their interactions. The discursive repertoires are more or less available and more or less visible in different cultural contexts. For example, my education in postmodern, constructionist and poststructural theory and practice makes these relational concepts more readily available to me than they are to participants whose prior involvement in this production has not given them access. In Chapter 3, I discuss how current prevailing stories and practices of coupledness

informed by modernist and romantic views of relationship are more readily accessible to couples than other discourses. For example, ideas of coupledness informed by a range of ethno-cultural discourses, such as those I referred to earlier, or postmodern paradigms – social constructionism and poststructuralism – are not so readily available to them.

The light which predominantly shines on this production is John Shotter's (1989) communitarian perspective, or what Celeste Condit (2006) described as a "relationality perspective" (p. 7). I use this light because I wish to illuminate the relational identities performed throughout the production and to make these visible to the audience for critique.

Meaning-making as relational

A further light intersects with the relational communitarian beam to incorporate meaning-making as a relational process. Meaning is made in the social interactions between people as they collectively generate knowledge and experience (Gergen & Gergen, 1991). Robert Cotter and Sharon Cotter (1999) made similar claims and linked the process of meaning-making to the development of stories of lived experience. They suggested that meaning-making is:

[A] "we" phenomenon, a relational process within a social context. "Mind" is social. We believe that we construct our meanings in our relationships and that the resulting collectives of meaning are organized into stories. These stories give direction to our beliefs, values, and future actions in that social context. (Cotter & Cotter, 1999, p. 163)

The task for the partners as couples in these performances is to story, together, the meanings they make as two people in an intimate relationship. The task for the audience is to witness and reflect on the meanings they make of the social processes going on between these partners who tell their stories. There is no predetermined script in these performances. The couples perform their relationship conversations ad libitum. In a further twist, they also audience their own performances.

In Scenes 2, 3 and 4 of the reflexive audiencing process (see Table 1, page 106) the partners take up positions to view and review their performances from a deconstructive and curious stance. I describe how I prepare couples to take up these stances and other reflexive audiencing steps in Chapter 4. From deconstructive and curious stances, couples evaluate their relational ideas and practices and explore how their conversations and contexts express their cultural experience. I echo the idea that in life, generally, “without critical questioning, people continue to hold cultural meanings about the way their lives ought to be, even when their situations are oppressive” (Jessup & Rogerson, 1999, p. 166). Therefore, the practice of the partners identifying and evaluating the meanings they produce, as they collectively generate understandings of their cultural experience, is one key purpose for a communitarian inquiry process and the reason this light shines on the performances. Such an inquiry assumes that the conversational space is a “language-generating” and “meaning-generating” space (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992, p. 27). From this perspective, “meaning and understanding are socially constructed” (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992, p. 27).

Language is the means by which identity is produced

Conceptualising human systems as language-generating systems calls for another light to be added to the stage: the beam that illuminates the formative and rhetorical medium of communication. From this perspective, the utterances of the partners contribute to the constitution of their identities as they speak together in the forthcoming chapters. The relationships which are produced in conversation are “both constituted and mediated by talk” (Shotter, 1993, p. 183). When two or more people speak, the relationship they produce becomes an “otherness” (Shotter, 2005, p. 104): “a shared form of life” (p. 114).

It is important to note that the voices of the partners are not necessarily equal. “[D]ifferent ways of talking work to ‘propose’ different forms of social relationship, different statuses, different ways of ‘positioning’ ourselves in relation to others, different patterns of rights and privileges, duties and obligations” (Shotter, 1989, p. 149). In these terms, what is said in the conversational context may shape each person in different ways. When one conversational partner encounters the effects of another’s utterances, previous

utterances shape how they then speak into other similar conversations. “Addressivity” was the term that Mikael Bakhtin (1986, p. 95) coined to suggest that the “voice” of the other with whom we engage in conversation is always present in our own utterance.

The idea that one is positioned in conversations with a multitude of other voices one has historically associated with carries with it implications for yet-to-be-encountered conversations. For example, if one of the partner’s conversations with others have typically produced criticism, then those previous conversations are likely to shape how they speak into current conversations with the other partner. The potential for criticism, for example, produces an element of risk inherent in each utterance that the partner makes. With this risk comes apprehension that may constrain or alter the way in which the person speaks into their conversations in this context. Hence, the conversation might include other voices and emotional expressions, informed by previous conversations, which may be inaudible in this performance. Thus, the relational space into which partners speak is fraught with politics, power relations, context and history.

As each of these stage lights is illuminated and they merge, it becomes evident that the stories the partners tell and the relationship stories that they fashion will be complex. The stage lights that reflect the many perspectives that make up the performance do not shine separately but merge into the space on the stage that the partners, as actors, occupy. Given the constantly shifting kaleidoscope of lights, it is likely that audience members will have different stories to tell of what they see and hear in each performance. There might be multiple possibilities for the relationship produced between the partners as they talk together. What might capture the attention of some witnesses might be different for others. In addition, there might be a multiplicity of meanings to be made of the kaleidoscopic milieu produced from the intersecting light beams.

Discourse

There is another light to add to the scene of this production. This light, a silver mirror ball, hangs from the roof of the stage. The ball radiates lights as it rotates. These lights reflect the many discourses which are available to the partners and

which position them. Michel Foucault (1972) described discourse as “a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function” (p. 117).

The partners will come to the stage from a variety of social communities and institutions including familial, educational, economic, gender, age and professional contexts, for example. These communities and institutions constitute the available discourses out of which these partners speak and act. Agency involves the capacity to identify and shape the discursive environment through practices of resistance and subversion, as well as acceptance (Davies, 1991). As the couples perform, they produce stories and these stories provide the texts that the partners speak and are spoken by. Some texts will always be more accessible than others because of history, culture, gender, embodiment and other discursive resources on which we have to call (Crocket, 2001).

Discursive Repertoires

As the mirror ball spins, the stage lights illuminate some pieces of the glass whilst other pieces remain in the shadows. In certain times and contexts, discourses of communication such as those shaped by possessive individualism (Shotter, 1989) serve as prevailing communication practices whilst other discursive repertoires, such as a communitarian approach, for example, are located in the shadows. Yet, there are times when it would be beneficial if both of these repertoires of communication were readily accessible to conversationalists to inform their relationships. People in intimate partnerships, for example, might move from a relational communitarian position into a possessive individualistic position in an instant. As the mirror ball spins, it makes both communitarian and individualistic discourses available to the couple. They therefore have access to a range of discursive repertoires and possible positions to take up in their performances.

Positioning

A final spotlight joins the rest. The positioning theory strobe “helps focus attention on dynamic aspects of encounters” (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 43). The concept of positioning can assist partners to recognise the shaping effects of

discourses, illuminate the positions that are available, and point to the efforts the partners make to accept, decline or renegotiate the discursive positions they are called into in conversations (Davies, 1991).

The props and technology

The lights are now all in place for the performances. A camera operator wheels the first prop, a video camera, on to the stage to prepare to record each performance. In Chapter 1, I discussed the purpose and implications of the use of video as the prosthetic device for the recording of couple conversations. Another prop drops from the shadows of the stage. It is a large white TV screen that hovers in the background. The recorded Scene 1 performances will be replayed on the screen in later scenes. The stage is coming to life. The ever-present streams of light dance about, at times they will illuminate the partners on stage, and, at times, will shine on the relational space between them. Sometimes the beams shine separately and sometimes they merge together, changing colour and shape as they intersect.

Finally, those responsible for setting the stage place mirrors around the perimeter. They position the mirrors at an angle to provide a reflecting surface to show the multi-dimensioned perspectives of the forthcoming performances produced by the partners. The stage is ready.

Setting the audiencing scene

To set the scene that prepares each individual couple, and you, the audience, to view and reflect on the performances, I now describe the theoretical concepts that inform the preparation process – narrative therapy, witnessing, deconstruction, listening and positioning. I tell of the origins of these audiencing practices, how I developed them, and how they shaped the hopes I hold for the couples as they audience their conversations.

Narrative therapy

I think of particular ideas and practices that I brought from narrative therapy which was originally developed by Michael White and David Epston (1990) in the

1980s and has continued to be progressed and elaborated internationally by them and by other scholars and practitioners (Freedman & Combs, 2002; Monk, Winslade, Crocket, & Epston, 1997; White, 1997, 2007; Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1996). The ideas and practices of narrative therapy have extended into research contexts by narrative therapists/researchers such as Stephen Gaddis (2002), Kathie Crocket (2001) and Andrew Tootell (2004), who have employed ideas and practices shared both by narrative therapy and by wider research and theory communities. For example, Andrew Tootell wrote about producing “de-centred research practice based on an ethic of collaboration and equity, which sought to document the ‘local’ skills and knowledge of the research participants” (Tootell, 2004, p. 54). He called on cultural theorist Clifford Geertz’s (1983) ideas of documenting the research participants local skills and knowledge. Clifford Geertz suggested that local skills and knowledge are produced when people’s experiences are accounted for within the framework of their own ideas about those experiences. I have also taken up these ideas and woven them into this research production as a way of adding to the conversational repertoires to which the couples have access.

Narrative therapy conversations provide therapists, researchers, and, I suggest, the couple:

[W]ith the opportunity to join with persons over matters of life that are of very considerable importance – to be with these persons in explorations that are informed by their hopes that things might be different, and by their resolve to step into ways of living that are more in tune with the preferred purposes of their lives. (White, 1997, p. 135)

Thus, narrative therapy inquiry provides one framework, which I have drawn from and included in this performance, for the partners to use in their investigations of their relationship conversation. In particular, inquiry shaped by narrative therapy emphasizes investigation of the partners’ relational experience and invites them to evaluate these ideas in terms of their preferred hopes and purposes for their lives.

I also prepare the couple to investigate their conversations using an externalising approach which was introduced by Michael White (1988/89) as a narrative therapy practice. Externalising conversations separate persons from totalizing, problematic accounts of themselves and their lives. Externalising language, which produces externalising conversations, involves the use of “particular grammatical forms that create a space between the person and the problem” (Crocket, 2008, p. 502). This space provides a perspective for reflexion.

Johnella Bird’s (2000) language strategy, which she called relational externalising conversational practice, and which I draw from and extend into my research practice, shares some similarities to narrative therapy conversations in terms of externalising. Relational externalising conversations create a linguistic space which “provides people (clients) with a perspective of distance which illuminates the relational paradigm” (Bird, pp. 7-8). Relational externalising implies “that the self and all that constitutes the self exists relationally” (Bird, p. 15). A relational externalising conversation “shifts linguistically what has been or is subjectified (i.e. attributes, ideas, feelings and experiences that are conceptualised as belonging to the person) to the status of an object in relationship to the person” (Bird, p. 40). These terms consider people to be always in relationship with themselves, others, cultural ideas, past, present and future. When persons situate themselves as separate from and in relation to their experience they position themselves well to take up a reflexive stance in response to matters pertaining to their lives and relationships. I use the term externalising in this study to encompass Michael White’s (1988/89) practices whilst emphasising the relational aspect that Johnella Bird proposed.

To illustrate the positions that externalising practices produce, I use the metaphor of a maze. If the maze represents the lived experience that the partners produce in conversation together, then they can take up different positions from which to make sense of that experience. These different positions include maze dweller - being in the maze or experience – and maze viewer⁴ – viewing the maze or

⁴ The maze metaphor was also used by Rom Harrè and Luk van Langenhove to show how positioning theory provides a conceptual tool to theorise the different perspectives which are possible when people move between positions of “*maze traders*, those who are within the labyrinth”, and “*maze viewers*, those who can see the labyrinth from above” (1999, pp. 12-13).

experience from the perspective of a raised platform, for example. Whilst the partners can stand at a distance to view the maze or experience, they maintain a relationship with that maze or experience. They produce this relationship as they simultaneously embody the experience, see or imagine themselves negotiating the territory, and hold knowledge of the landscape in which they produce the experience. This landscape includes the view they have from within the maze and the perspective as they view the maze from an elevated position.

Viewing experience from a position of vantage makes a reflexive stance possible. From this stance enhanced options for action can become available (Pare & Lysack, 2004). In therapeutic conversations, a practitioner is present to facilitate an externalising conversation. I argue that concepts of externalizing and relational externalising, which have their origins in therapeutic conversations, have possibilities for everyday intimate relationship contexts such as the one which the partners perform in Scene 1 (see Table 1, page 106) and go on to view, re-view and reflect on in Scenes 2 and 3.

Witnessing

Inviting the partners into maze viewer perspectives from which to experience both an embodied and a linguistic externalising, draws from the concept of outsider witnessing which Michael White (1995; 2007) brought into narrative therapy through anthropology (Myerhoff, 1982, 1986). Cultural anthropologist, Barbara Myerhoff (1982; 1986), was involved in field work with a community of elderly Jewish people in Venice, Los Angeles. Through this work, she became acquainted with the “performances of identity” which she coined, “definitional ceremonies” (1982, p. 105). Members of this community organised and took part in ceremonies, and Barbara Myerhoff was herself a witness. These celebrations had the effect of acknowledging and celebrating the identities of members disconnected and isolated from family and social relationships by situations such as migration, war, age and economic circumstances

In narrative therapy, Michael White (1997) developed a definitional ceremony framework that provided outsider witnesses with a forum “in which the audience is conscious of the responsibility they have to contribute to the lives of others

being more richly described” (1997, p. 94). I now outline Michael White’s framework which guides the audiencing phase of performances in this research because I suggest it has possibilities for the process of reflexion in which the partners will be involved.

The first phase of this framework begins with a conversation in which one or more persons is/are interviewed about some aspect of their life. An audience witnesses this conversation. The audience also consists of one or more people listening for expressions that capture them and reflect particular intentions, hopes, values and ways of living that the person being interviewed holds dear. The interviewer engages the audience in a dialogue about the expressions that they heard and then into conversations about what captured them personally and what this means for the audience member’s life. Intended to centre, ultimately, on the life of the person/s interviewed, the process contributes to enriching the experience and acknowledgement of both the person/s at the centre of the interview or conversations and the audience.

The couples in this research take up positions as both the persons at the centre of the conversation and witnesses to their own conversation that they enact as a couple. They take up maze-viewer positions on that experience to notice the expressions that captured their attention and to engage in a dialogue with each other about how these expressions informed their preferred intentions, hopes, values and ways of living. From these positions, they are not outsider witnesses as such but witnesses with insider knowledge and experience. Rather than look in on their lives from the outside they have access to the reflexive/liminal space (Speedy, 2008) I introduced in Chapter 1. Rather than positioned separately as spectators and actors, they become spect-actors (Park-Fuller, 2003) who get to act in, audience and critically investigate their conversations.

Deconstruction

I propose the practice of deconstruction as a way of unsettling, re-appreciating, revisiting, and, if applicable, re shaping the conversations the two partners have together when they critically investigate their conversations. Deconstruction is a practice of unravelling the ways meaning systems operate and are influential in

the cultural stories of persons' lives, and a practice of critiquing these meaning systems (Parker, 1999a). The concept of deconstruction that I employ here was introduced by Jacques Derrida (1984) to highlight the contextual and contingent meanings in texts. He suggested that in order to attribute meaning to texts it is important to deconstruct – to undo but not destroy – the text by identifying the context that produced it.

Chapter 5 illustrates a deconstructive process in which a couple, Alex and Chris, identify, question and deregulate somewhat regulatory terms of the discursive practices of looking, listening and questioning. They negotiate different discursive positions, and, in so doing, deconstruct and transform the discourses. Edward Sampson (1989) made the point that “the person is the mediated product of society and also, in acting, reproduces or potentially transforms that society. People can transform themselves by transforming the structures by which they are formed” (p. 6). In these terms, the couple transform themselves and the communication structures they use by engaging in practices of deconstruction which focus “on the self-contradictions in a text, on the tensions between what the text means to say and what it is none the less constrained to mean” (Kvale, 1992, p. 13). Deconstruction provides an opportunity to “undo the very notions of identity and hierarchy” inherent in the tradition under investigation (Sampson, 1989, p. 8).

There are some constraints at work here for the partners: they cannot just do as they please. “Different ways of talking work to ‘propose’ ... different patterns of rights and privileges, duties and obligations” (Shotter, 1989, p. 148). However, if people recognise the discourses that they are shaped by, there will be steps they can take that might go some way to re shaping those discourses or taking up alternative, preferred discursive positions in their lives (Davies, 1991). The practice of deconstruction involves a process of analysis and a stance of inquiry that asks two questions of discourses. The first is *how has this come to be so?* The second is *could this be otherwise?*

As the partners step into the audience arena, there are many discourses that offer them positions from which to witness their replayed conversations and to ask

these two questions. For example, a communication discourse might have one or both of the partners measuring the efficacy of their listening, and monitoring communication practices such as eye-contact. If they were to draw from a romantic love discourse, they might understand their communication practice as a gauge of intimacy. The health of their communication might be the topic of investigation through a medical discourse. Also, through the discursive lens of intimacy, which uses the quality of their relatedness as a measure, they may be looking for how well they are “able deeply and extensively to know each other” (Weingarten, 1991, p. 287).

Before the partners audience their conversations in the Scene 2 phase I prepare them for a process of reflexion. Soyini Madison (2003) suggested that when an audience has witnessed a performance they move “from the performance space to the social world or the interrogative field” (p. 476). Opportunities for everyday acts of resistance, she suggested, lie in the interrogative field.

The interrogative field is the point where the performance of possibilities aims to create or contribute to a discursive space where unjust systems and processes are identified and interrogated. It is where what has been expressed through illumination of voice and the encounter with subjectivity motivates individuals to some level of informed and strategic action. The greatest benefit to Subjects is for those who bear witness to their stories to interrogate actively and purposefully those processes that limit their health and freedom. (Madison, 2003, p. 476)

In this research production, the spect-actors prepare to bear witness to their performances from a deconstructive stance of inquiry, and from what Kenneth Gergen (1992) called a “scholarship of critique, a scholarship that continuously sensitizes us to the taken for granted and its imprisoning effects” (p. 26).

Positioning for inquiry

My hopes for the positions spect-actors take up to look at and listen to their conversations are threefold. Firstly, I hope that the spect-actors will see in their conversations their identities as dynamic and evolving: they will identify as persons who are “always an open question with a shifting answer” (Davies & Harre, 1999, p. 35). Secondly, I hope that I prepare them well to notice this dynamic and evolving view of identity in the relational interactions they are audiencing together. Thirdly, I hope that they can engage in the kind of uncertainty that involves treating themselves, each other and their relationships “not as an already known ‘problem’ to be solved, but as still radically unknown” and “unknowable” to them (Shotter, 2005, p. 122).

Harlene Anderson and Harold Goolishian (1992) argued for a “not-knowing” approach to therapy which entails the communication of “an abundant, genuine curiosity” (p. 29). Gianfranco Cecchin (1987) suggested that in counselling relationships, a state of curiosity leads to a recursive process of exploration and invention of alternative views and moves” (p. 405) which in turn breed curiosity. He posited that curiosity is generative and “facilitates the development of multiplicity and polyphony” (Cecchin, 1987, p. 406). This kind of curiosity has shaped the stance of inquiry I have taken up in my counselling practice and which I have extended into this research inquiry.

My hopes are that the partners can be curious with each other, “not presuming to know what the speaker means but wanting very much eventually to understand” (Weingarten, 2003, p. 198). Through this practice of curiosity, I hope they will see and generate some of the multiplicity and polyphony which Gianfranco Cecchin (1987) spoke of. I suggest this stance of curiosity is a necessary component of the kind of reflexive practices I have developed for the partners, and for myself, in this production. Michel Foucault (1985) suggested “curiosity ... enables one to get free of oneself. ... the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all” (p. 8).

Appreciative curiosity

In my preparation with each couple, before watching the DVD enactment of their conversation, I will invite them into a particular kind of curiosity and reflexion that involves an appreciative stance. This kind of appreciation that I have drawn together here was partly shaped by Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000). I was drawn to this framework because it shares many of the philosophical and conceptual threads I have already woven into this account. For example, Appreciative Inquiry has its roots in social constructionism and emphasises generative, dialogical, relational processes. It invites people to radically question taken-as-given discursive practices and processes and to develop stories of positive and life-giving aspects of organizational life. Whilst the development of Appreciative Inquiry was primarily for use in organizational contexts, I suggest that its emphases on generative, dialogical, relational processes and on change and development, make it a relevant concept for the partners to engage with in this production.

Another source that has informed the concept of appreciative curiosity is narrative therapy, which I introduced earlier. For example, I drew attention to how practices of outsider witnessing involve acknowledgement of the ways the witnessing of stories of lived experience of others can be richly shaping of the lives of those who witnessed the stories. In this production, the partners become witnesses to their stories in the conversations they have together. Then, through the audiencing process they acknowledge the contributions they make to the production of preferred stories: those stories which the partners determine “to be preferred ways of living and interacting with themselves and each other” (White, 1995, p. 19).

Presence listening

The practices of inquiry and critique I am developing for the couples to engage with invites them into particular kinds of listening positions. Referring to counselling practice, Johnella Bird (2000) has defined one style of listening practice, “presence listening”, as:

[A] turning of all our facilities towards the other/s ... [t]his depth of listening involves our emotional, intellectual and physical selves.... It is listening that positions us on the line between knowing and not knowing. In this listening place we make our selves available to have our life knowledges overturned, added to and/or confirmed. (p. 14)

I have brought Johnella Bird's concept of presence listening into this inquiry process because it offers possibilities for the partners and for their relationship conversation that they listen to in Scene 2. From their positions on the line between knowing and not knowing, I suggest they have access to the *reflexive/liminal space* (Speedy, 2008) I referred to in Chapter 1, in which they can identify lived experience, reflect upon and re/negotiate that experience.

Positioning to look/watch

I now turn to the final component of the preparation and reflexive audiencing process: positioning to look/watch. Different looking practices have effects for the relationships they centre on, and I contend that it is important for the partners who investigate the DVD of the enactment of their conversation to take into account different looking practices. The curious appreciative stance of inquiry, which I drew together, above, invites the partners to consider the particular ways of looking that they take up and the effects of these looking practices on their relationships. I drew attention to some of the looking practices that other authors have proposed as I prepared the couples to audience their conversations. I did this to illustrate the complexity, the potential and the hazards of looking that inevitably shape stories of relationship, and to highlight the different options the partners might take up to look at their conversations.

For example, they might employ a "normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish" (Foucault, 1977, p. 184). Such a gaze invites the couple to examine themselves and their relationships against standardised measures of normality prescribed by the discourses they draw from. "The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement" to produce a normalizing gaze (Foucault, 1977, p. 184).

Julianne Cheek (2000) drew on the work of Judith Parker and John Wiltshire (1995) to highlight the different practices of looking, such as the nursing *gaze*, which are evident in medical and healthcare settings. The nursing gaze is produced out of “objective technicalized and medicalized knowledge about a patient’s body, in which the patient is designated as an object” (Cheek, 2000, p. 50). This gaze tends to involve emotional detachment, professional distance and an emphasis on what carers must do to people in order to care for them. She distinguished between this gaze and practice of caring for people, and the nursing *look* that is associated with caring about people and involves affective connection and empathic understanding. These different positions shape how carers conceptualise and engage with those they care for, and they shape the relationships between nurses and those for whom they care. Texts, such as files and notes, privilege the nursing gaze and the more subjective practices of the nursing look are less visible and often considered unprofessional. However, all of these discursive positions are relevant and necessary practices of care. I mention these ideas which Julianne Cheek (2000) developed because she also proposed that the process of colonization of bodies and the relational effects go beyond those persons vested with institutional authority, such as medical practitioners, to individuals who subject themselves and others to a normalizing gaze and practices of surveillance, judgment and punishment. This claim suggests that these practices of looking are likely to shape and be shaped by people in intimate relationships, including the partners in their performances.

Bronwyn Davies (2004) and her colleagues also made distinctions between two different practices of looking which they termed “judgement eye/I” and “reflexive eye/I” (p. 376). The authors identified these positions in their research that involved reflexions on experiences from their own lives for the purpose of producing and investigating collective biographies. They described a judgement eye/I as one involving a “gaze that judges”, a “moral gaze”, “a surveilling, governing eye” which is “potentially always switched on, gazing at and containing my actions” (Davies, et al., 2004, p. 376). The reflexive eye/I “ideally gazes without judgement, ...finds the unexpected, the surprising - the contradictions, the 'good' and the 'bad' in all its detail ...to say with fascination,

'oh so that's how it is!'" (Davies, et al., 2004, p. 376) This example again suggests that the gaze shapes the story produced, audienced, and investigated.

Each of these practices of looking - the normalizing gaze, the nursing gaze, the nursing look, the judgement eye/I and the reflexive eye/I - may all help or hinder the partners as they watch their conversations on DVD and go on discuss their reflexions. The preparation process, that I undertook with each couple prior to watching the DVDs of their conversations, took into account these practices, drew the partners' attention to the benefits and hazards and invited them to consider how they might act on them as they audienced their unfolding conversations. These practical steps in the audiencing preparation process are discussed in Chapter 5.

Reflexion of the chapter

This chapter has produced a theoretical composition of reflexive audiencing as situated dialogical practice. It has drawn together diverse yet complementary theories of discourse and positioning and reached into territories of performance, theatre, research and therapy to compose a conceptual practice for investigating intimate relationship conversations. Located in the theatre, the chapter has set the scene for later performances that show how partners take up audiencing positions from which to view and review conversations they have together as couples. The chapter provides a conceptual overview of some of the theoretical and philosophical perspectives which I developed for couples to investigate their relationship conversations, and which I employed to investigate the research process and my research practice. I describe and further develop the work of much of this theory and practice in Chapter 4, which addresses the research design and method, and in Chapter 5, which shows reflexive audiencing practices at work in the research conversations with couples. I return to the theatre in later chapters, but now move into the territory of couple relationship literature.

Chapter 3. Couple Relationship Literature

This chapter argues that spaces exist in the literatures for research that investigates what I broadly call poststructural and social constructionist perspectives of couple relationships. To identify these spaces the chapter discusses and critically investigates some of the books that are currently readily available for couples as self-help texts. It shows how these literatures employ modernist, essentialist theoretical traditions to propose somewhat prescriptive models of relationship practice for couples. While offering couples opportunity for relationship development these conceptual repertoires have limitations for some couples. The chapter draws attention to these limitations.

It argues that self-help books and education programmes draw from repertoires of coupledness that have emerged over time as the most visible and popular stories of doing couple relationships in some contexts. As couples use and re use the ideas and practices these books and programmes offer, they reproduce these popular repertoires in ways that run the risk of reifying them, and endorsing them as the right and best way to do relationships. A possible consequence of these effects is the maintenance and reproduction of prevailing models of coupledness whilst other, less visible and less accessible, repertoires that also have possibilities for couples are subjugated and not so readily available to them.

By drawing attention to the particular theoretical and historical traditions of these repertoires, and by showing their limitations, I trouble the idea that there is a one-size-fits-almost-all approach to couple relationship development. Furthermore, by offering a practice that draws from social constructionist and poststructuralist theoretical and historical traditions, I introduce the couples in this study to the notion that there is a range of discursive repertoires that they can draw from and make use of.

The chapter selects literature written for the academy, couple relationship education and therapeutic contexts to show how discursive repertoires, informed by social constructionist and poststructuralist perspectives, can benefit couples when they employ these repertoires in their relationship conversations. The

chapter proposes that an investigation of poststructuralist and social constructionist approaches to coupledom offers possibilities. Furthermore, it argues for juxtaposition with those perspectives currently readily accessible so that couples can have access to a range of discursive repertoires. I suggest that when extended discursive practices are available, couples take up more agentic positions from which to consider and act on the discursive environment that shapes their relationships, and their preferences for these relationships.

Readily available couple literature

I begin by turning attention to the self-help literature written for couples. From the extensive assortment of popular books that address the development of couple relationships, I selected three from the shelf of my local bookstore. These three acclaimed bestsellers have all featured on the New York Times Bestseller List and have been in print for more than a decade - *The Five Love Languages: How to express heartfelt commitment to your mate* (Chapman, 1994); *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (Gray, 1992); and *Getting the love you want: A guide for couples* (Hendrix, 1988).

I chose these particular books for this discussion for three reasons. Firstly, they were popular: recommended from various sources to people I have worked alongside in counselling and couples courses. The enduring popularity of the books suggested to me that they have informed and enriched the lives of many couples who have consulted them, and were therefore important to consider in a study that addresses couple relationship practice. Secondly, the variation of the feedback I received from people about their experiences of using the ideas and practices that the books offered, sparked my interest in investigating them. This feedback alerted me to the potential for the ideas and practices promoted in the texts to produce a range of different effects for those who consulted them, and for these effects to shape relationships in very different ways. Finally, I also chose these books because I propose that they represent, theoretically and pragmatically, a sample of the range of literatures that are currently readily available to couples as self-help books.

These books each offer different understandings for relational disharmony, such as gender difference, different linguistic practices and familial influence. They also propose different methods for developing couple relationship practice. I now outline some key aspects of each of these three methods to highlight the philosophical and methodological differences between them that I suggest are relevant for this study.

I begin with Harville Hendrix's (1988) theory of couple relationships which is based on the notion that, ultimately, partners select their mates in response to the brain's drive for satisfying "a compelling need to heal old childhood wounds" (p. 12). He argued that the marriage partner we choose embodies the character traits of those who raised us, predominantly our parents. We unconsciously consider this partner to be "the ideal candidate to make up for the [inevitable] psychological and emotional damage" we experienced in childhood (Hendrix, 1988, p. 12). Harville Hendrix (1988) proposed that "we enter marriage with the expectation that our partners will magically restore [the] feeling of wholeness" and oneness, which begins in the womb, and which comes to an abrupt end in the early months of life as we are born and respond to the innate drive to be a distinct and unitary self (p. 15). I read in Harville Hendrix's (1988) account that a tension exists between the force to be unified and connected with the universe, and the drive to be a distinct and unitary individual.

These tensions, suggested Harville Hendrix (1988), are addressed when partners engage with ten key characteristics of a conscious marriage. These characteristics include:

- Identifying the purpose of healing childhood wounds.
- Creating an image of partners as also struggling for the satisfaction of unmet needs and healed wounds.
- Communicating needs and desires to each other.
- Acting more intentionally with each other.
- Valuing each other's needs and wishes equally.
- Accepting responsibility for negative traits.
- Learning new ways to satisfy needs and desires.

- Identifying and developing own lacking strengths and abilities.
- Acknowledging innate abilities to experience oneness with the world.
- Accepting marriage as challenging and hard work.

Getting the love you want: A guide for couples, offers couples the techniques to address these characteristics and to identify, respond to and satisfy the continual cycle of needs with which partners are born, and which they generate in their lives.

The ideas which Gary Chapman (1994) proposed in his book *The five love languages: How to express heartfelt commitment to your mate* are also based on the premise that persons have an inherent human need to be loved, which is considered “fundamental to our nature” (p. 22). He claimed that this need is satisfied when each partner’s internal, invisible, emotional love tank is full. In order to maintain enduring romantic love the goals for marriage partners’ are to identify their own and their spouse’s primary love language, and to learn ways to meet each other’s need for intimacy and love. Gary Chapman (1994) cited what he considered to be the five primary love languages. These primary love languages are *Words of affirmation*, *Quality time*, *Receiving gifts*, *Acts of Service* and *Physical Touch*. He suggested that people learn an emotional love language in similar ways that they learn to speak the language of their native tongue. From this perspective, effective communication relies upon individuals knowing their own love language, and learning and taking into account their spouse’s language of love.

Like Gary Chapman, John Gray (1992) suggested that misunderstandings occur because partners speak different languages. On John Gray’s (1992) terms, these different languages are gender specific: men and women speak different languages. A key premise is that men and women “communicate, ... think, feel, perceive, react, respond, love, need, and appreciate differently” (Gray, 1992, p. 5). Identifying and accommodating the differences between men and women is paramount and is the task for couples who he addressed in his book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. What John Gray (1992) described as a manual for

loving relationships teaches strategies for “successfully relating with, listening to, and supporting the opposite sex” (p. 5)⁵.

Whilst these books differ in the ways I have outlined, they share some common points that, I suggest, highlight potential limitations for couples they seek to help. In their feminist analysis of self-help bestsellers for couples, Toni Zimmerman, Kristen Holm and Marjorie Starrels (2001) drew attention to the potential for self-help books to be detrimental to couples when authors do not clearly distinguish their opinions from research findings, and when they do not recognise or address gender and diversity issues. A central concern I share with Toni Zimmerman and colleagues, and take steps to address in this research, is the effects for couples of limited attention to gender and cultural diversity in self-help literature.

In my analysis of the three self-help books, I identified seven common and potentially problematic areas that have relevance for this research. These areas are romantic love discourse; selected audience; satisfying relationship ideal; one-size-fits-almost-all approach; essentialism and individualism; modern power and partnership equality.

Before going on to discuss each of the areas I first speak to the discursive context out of which I believe these ideas have emerged. I am not suggesting that authors have been particularly remiss in favouring these discursive repertoires. The models they draw from have emerged from modernist traditions, for example, which have prevailed over time and across disciplines. These traditions have informed how persons’ identities are conceptualised as stable and unitary and as independent and autonomous. Edward Sampson (2000) pointed out that the field of psychology “has been fascinated by issues of individuality and autonomy”, and “the pursuit of independence, autonomy and individual uniqueness....has become a central concern in psychological inquiry and practice” (p. 1431). Analysis of the individual in society has dominated scientific thought since the seventeenth century (Gottman, 1982), so it makes sense to me that individualistic and

⁵ For readers who may be interested in the ways male-female differences are publicly popularised and promoted by media and literature, and the effects of this for couples, Deborah Cameron (2007) gives a critical account of what she calls the myths of Mars and Venus. She provides relevant research to dispel these myths which account for male and female difference in terms of language and communication.

essentialist understandings of personhood and relationship shape most of the literature currently readily available to couples.

However, I do point out some constraints of these discursive repertoires that have effects for those they set out to serve. I refer to the group of couples, for example, who do not define their relationships as married or heterosexual. My intention is to bring into the spotlight some discursive practices that have not been particularly visible in prevailing constructions of coupledness and to juxtapose those with more familiar and popular repertoires. Such a move, I believe, would provide couples with access to a wider range of discursive repertoires from which to draw and employ, if they choose to do so. I introduce these less visible discursive practices later in the chapter but before doing so I draw attention to the constraints.

Romantic love discourse

Firstly, each of the books uses discourses of romantic love to define and shape the relationships they suggest are necessary for marital satisfaction. For example, Gary Chapman (1994) acknowledged the prevalence of romantic love, citing it as “deeply rooted in our psychological makeup” (p. 13). He also outlined how the media makes the goal of keeping love alive salient through various means of psychological self-help. John Gray (1992) spoke of achieving a loving relationship by “deepening intimacy and increasing love, caring, and trust” (p. 6). Harville Hendrix (1988) said “many of our joyful feelings of romantic love come from projecting positive aspects of our imago onto our partners” (p. 63)⁶. He provided an evolutionary and theoretical account of romantic love. An aspect that I suggest is not visible in these texts is attention to limitations that the cultural and historical locatedness of discourses of coupledness and romantic love can produce for some couples.

⁶ The extracts of text I select in this chapter to emphasise particular aspects, such as the presence of romantic love discourse, inevitably create a partial and selective account of the author’s work. Through this process of re-presentation I run the risk of producing a thin description of complex ideas offered by the authors. For example, Harville Hendrix distinguished between romantic love and conscious marriage as different stages of marriage. He also provided an account of the physiology of romantic love and drew attention to some of the general limitations of romantic love, for couples.

In Chapter 1, I spoke of the history of romantic love discourses and how this history shaped what has become a familiar and prevailing story of coupledness in many cultural contexts and I described how these contexts have shaped the discourses. However, romantic love discourses are not the only discursive practices that couples take into account to inform their choice of marriage partner or to live out their relationships at different times and in different contexts.

In Indian communities, for example, arranged marriages are common practice (Bhopal, 2011). In that context, the basis for arranged marriages is to further economic and social bonds, and family members usually introduce partners to each other. Whilst romantic love may be a factor in these relationships, discourses of romantic love do not determine the key purpose of courtship and marriage. Also, for some people who have grown up in families under the influence of the Chinese Communist Party, marriage is seen as a practical choice and romantic expression is considered to mean a sign of weakness (Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002).

As well as ethno-cultural factors that shape discursive diversity of coupledness, there are also other cultural practices for marriage that are counter to the romantic love ideal. I'm thinking, for example, of those who I have met in counselling conversations and couples' courses who have spoken of marrying or staying married for pragmatic purposes such as to meet regulatory requirements to emigrate abroad; survive or succeed financially; and maintain nuclear family structures for the sake of the children, extended family or social status. It is possible that relationships in these situations are not altogether safe or preferable to those who engage in them. However, they may fit with the preferences of those involved. The point I make is that self-help literature and programmes, which romantic love discourses unquestioningly draw on and shape, run the risk of producing or reproducing subjugating or exclusionary practices for some couples they seek to help.

Selected audience

The second point-in-common with the three books is the audience for whom the authors write. This audience consists primarily of those who are involved in

married, heterosexual relationships. The texts address this particular audience through the predominant use of linguistic signifiers commonly associated with heterosexual married relationships. These descriptors include, for example, husband, wife and spouse. The scenarios the authors provide in the texts to illustrate couple practice all refer to heterosexual married couples. These practices produce the assumption that the couples who refer to the books are heterosexual. I suggest that the prevailing use of these terms and practices produces implications for those who do not define their relationships as married and heterosexual. These implications may involve practices of exclusion, marginalisation and colonisation.

The satisfying relationship ideal

A third point in common in these texts is an assumption that satisfying couple relationships are the ideal to be reached, and that satisfaction is assured if couples engage with the prescribed practices proposed by the authors. Implicit in this assurance is the notion that there is a measure of a satisfying relationship to which one aspires. Readers of the books, who engage with the particular understanding of relationship, produce this satisfaction when they take up the prescribed steps to attain this ideal. Two aspects of this way of measuring relationships concern me. Firstly, it seems to me that the discourses of relationship that the authors employ determine what constitutes a satisfying relationship. These terms are implicit in the texts at a sub-textual level. Secondly, I argue that if partners do not experience the relationship satisfaction that the books suggest is possible, then implicit, also at a sub-textual level, is the idea that the couple have failed to achieve the required measure. In this context, discourses do not position couples well to determine whether the terms of relationship, or the means by which they assess the relationship, fit with their ideas and preferences. Nor are they well positioned to attribute relationship dissatisfaction to the model or framework they used.

One-size-fits-almost-all approaches

I propose that the current prevalence of some discursive practices of couple relationships runs the risk of producing these repertoires as the most visible, dominant, and possibly only, modes available. Implied in this situation is the

fourth area of this discussion – that there are one-size-fits-almost-all approaches to couple relationship practice. This implication is supported in the texts with claims such as “Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus is a *manual* for loving relationships” (Gray, 1992, p. 5, emphasis added). Harville Hendrix (1988) asserted that his book “can help you create a more loving and supportive relationship ... within this ... you will find peace and joy” (p. xvi). Gary Chapman (1994) made the claim that “[o]nce you identify and learn to speak your spouse’s primary love language, I believe that you will have discovered the key to a long-lasting, loving marriage” (p. 16). The many people who I have met in counselling and group-work contexts, who have enhanced their relationships by employing the ideas and practices suggested in these books, attest to these claims. The enduring popularity of the texts is testimony to the contributions they may make to the lives and relationships of many who refer to them.

However, whilst there are benefits, there are also limitations of one-size-fits-almost-all approaches. Intimate couple relationships are changing dramatically in structure and style (Bumpass, 2006). Over the last 35 years trends indicate that marriage rates have declined, divorce rates have remained reasonably stable, non married cohabiting couple relationships have increased and more people are remaining single and marrying older (Statistics New Zealand, 2001, 2006). Single-parent families and re-partnered families have increased (Bumpass, 2006; Statistics New Zealand, 2010). “[M]arriage has become a variable in family life, and not the defining characteristic” (Bumpass, 2006, p. 214). Statistics New Zealand reported that there are now far more variety in family structures and circumstances (2001; 2006). Due to the diversity of family situations, census surveys in New Zealand, and internationally, are no longer able to adequately measure and classify family structures (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). Same gender relationships are included in couple and family statistics and the Civil Union Act 2004 came into force in New Zealand in April 2005 that introduced a new form of legal relationship for same gender and heterosexual couples (Statistics New Zealand, 2011). The majority of civil unions in 2010 were same gender couples (Statistics New Zealand, 2011). These examples expose the range of intimate relationships that descriptors such as husband, wife, married and heterosexual do not serve. Additionally, in the New Zealand census people

identifying with multiple ethnicities have been increasing and “New Zealand has a high intermarriage rate between ethnic groups” (Statistics New Zealand, 2007, p. 9). These statistics highlight the diverse and changing cultural environment that couples negotiate.

Intimate relationships have also changed over time from a focus on social obligations in pre-industrial couples to contemporary negotiated intimacies (Bumpass, 1990; Gillies, 2003). Val Gillies (2003) suggested this shift has been influenced by post-industrialisation and the de-traditionalisation and individualisation of social life.

Stephanie Coontz (2005) provided an historical account of marriage which traced the social and political impact of marriages. She showed that popular conceptions of the so-called traditional and permanent form of marriage relationship in which men took up roles as bread-winners, and women as home-makers, is a relatively short lived phenomenon which developed in the late 1940s. Other historians of marriage (Delphy & Leonard, 1992; Foucault, 1985) have also shown the discursive conceptualisation of marriage as an institutional practice which is produced and reproduced according to cultural, political and historical contexts. What I read from historical accounts of marriage, such as those proposed by Stephanie Coontz, Michel Foucault, Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard, is a conceptualisation of intimate relationships as dynamic, contextually and historically situated social practices that discourse shapes and which those who engage in relationships can also shape.

Given the diversity of couple structures, practices and cultural contexts, one-size-fits-almost-all approaches run the risk of colonising relationships and marginalising those whose relational practices and structures do not subscribe to the one-size-fits-almost-all schema. I am thinking, for example, of those for whom collective approaches to notions of community shape their relationships. In these contexts, privileging individualistic and essentialist theory and practices of intimate relationships can have the effect of colonising or marginalising partners and their relationships.

Essentialism

I now turn to the fifth area of the discussion and what I argue are limitations of essentialist theory and practice. Essentialism is based on the idea that the self is viewed as a separate entity, having an essence or stable identity, and is thus seen as distinct from others (Byrne & McCarthy, 1999; Weingarten, 2003). Each of the relationship books depend upon an essentialist perspective. Gary Chapman (1994) illustrated the use of an essentialist repertoire: “She was by nature a disciplined, conscientious, organized, thoughtful and caring person” (p. 27). This essentialist view of personhood was also proffered by John Gray (1992): “Even a strong, confident, and successful woman will need to visit her well from time to time” (p. 121). Harville Hendrix (1988) wrote: “...Brad was in fact an immature, unreliable man” (p. 46). These quotes suggest that there are different categories of person – disciplined, conscientious, organized, thoughtful, caring, strong, confident, successful, immature and unreliable. Category systems “may or may not be useful (or obfuscatory) in any particular context or time” (Davies, 1998, p. 135). For example, partners may take up oppositional positions and become involved in a process of “getting lost in competing values or beliefs” (Bird, 2004, p. 253) that are associated with essentialist identity descriptions. They could begin arguing “for the explanation they hold as more true or more real than the other’s position” (Bird, 2004, p. 253). Opposition is created by competing interests or needs and can harden into polarising positions (Winslade & Monk, p. 32). Taking up blaming or oppositional positions can lead to an escalation of problems (Sinclair & Monk, 2004).

Just as it is possible for persons to be understood and constituted in essentialist and individualistic terms so, too, can relationships or relationship practices such as communication or conflict. For example, definitions such as *effective* communication; *loving* marriage or relationship (Chapman, 1994; Gray, 1992, p. 5); *conscious* or *unconscious* marriage (Hendrix, 1988); *healthy* relationships (Dunn & Schwebel, 1995); and *distressed* couples (Halford, 2011) can have the effect of conceptualising relationships, or features of them, in binary terms, and as more-or-less stable, distinct, unitary entities.

When essentialist or individualistic terms linguistically define relationships or features of them they may obscure, or fail to consider, more momentary contextual and dynamic conceptualisations. In a momentary and dynamic conceptualisation, for example, a focus might be on the recursive movement between territories of what couples consider effective practices of communication and not so effective practices. Mary Gergen (Gergen & Gergen, 2003) asserted that it is “essential that we don’t view the relational bond, the ‘us,’ as an independent, autonomous entity, unrelated to others” (p. 470). She offered a notion of marriage as a dynamic constitutive process, “a relational bond ... becoming the ‘we’ or the ‘us’ that holds us in its thrall” (Gergen & Gergen, 2003, p. 470). John Shotter (1987) also emphasised the ways relationships are dynamically produced in an ongoing process of *joint action* in which people “respond in a moment by moment fashion to the specific, local contingencies arising, moment by moment in the settings they create between themselves” (p. 231). Different ways of talking about relationships, different experiences and understandings of reality are constituted in the discursive practices which are available to persons to speak from (Shotter, 1987).

Needs-based approach

The three books all offer problem-solving approaches that involve couples in practices of need-meeting. John Winslade and Gerald Monk (2000) suggested that “[a]t the heart of the problem-solving approach, is the idea that when human need or interest is frustrated, some form of conflict results” (p. 32). The problem-solving approach considers conflict from an individual psychological perspective that achieves resolution by attempting to meet the needs of those involved in the conflict.

I suggest that a needs-based approach constructs relationships in essentialist and individualistic terms. Individualistic discourses conceptualise persons as independent of one another and whose identities and personal accomplishments are based on personal autonomy and self-fulfilment (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). These terms centre the individuals in the relationship and place emphasis on meeting the needs of the individual in order to achieve relational harmony. Chapter 6 shows research participants, Laura and Andrew,

negotiating a needs-based discursive repertoire and it provides an analysis of this repertoire at work in their relationship conversation. I argue that an essentialist understanding of identity tends to centre the satisfaction of individual needs and de-emphasise the relational interaction that produces the repertoires. When essentialist practices de-emphasise the relational interaction they also obscure the discursive practices which produce and shape the interaction.

The authors in the three self-help books all subscribed to a needs-based approach to couple relationships. For example, this approach is evident in the following three quotes; “Men primarily *need* a kind of love that is trusting, accepting, and appreciative. Women primarily *need* a kind of love that is caring, understanding, and respectful” (Gray, 1992, p. 12, emphasis added). “[F]rom the very moment you were born you were a complex, dependent creature with a never-ending cycle of *needs*” (Hendrix, 1988, p. 13, emphasis added). “Psychologists have concluded that the *need* to feel loved is a primary human emotional need” (Chapman, 1994, p. 19, emphasis added).

I digress, for a moment, to make the point that each of these three statements illustrates what I call given-meaning. In this instance, the authors of bestselling books are positioned as those generally considered to have access to “expert knowledge and expert language” (Law & Madigan, 1992, p. 31). They are vested with the authority to offer this knowledge and language to partners who seek to develop their relationships. Toni Zimmerman, Kristen Holm and Marjorie Starrels (2001) suggested that “[i]n many cases, the popularity of self-help books makes the authors’ messages or guidance seem important, right, or truthful, regardless of its accuracy” (p. 165). On these terms, I suggest that it is likely that partners take up the meanings that the knowledge and language convey, as given, without question, and then reproduce these meanings in their couple relationships. Chapter 6 pays particular attention to the process of meaning-making and it illustrates couple participants engaging in a process of originating meanings rather than accepting given-meanings.

I now return to the discussion that draws attention to the constraints that essentialist needs-based approaches can impose on those they seek to serve.

Another implication can occur when an identity description which is assigned to a person, such as “immature and unreliable man” (Hendrix, 1988, p. 46), can leave the person with a sense of personal failure. For example, if Brad took up the idea that he was an immature and unreliable man, he may well feel that he has failed as a person or a partner. In these situations essentialism can have the effect of trapping “people inside personalities and identities that are limiting for them and are sometimes pathologised by psychology, which then becomes an even more oppressive practice” (Burr, 2003, p. 6). This potential for partners to be unwittingly oppressed by the discursive repertoires they use is one reason why I draw attention to constraints and call for the range of available repertoires for couples to be enlarged to include those informed by discursive theoretical perspectives.

Modern power

Oppression also informs the sixth area of similarity across the books which I propose can produce limitations and have detrimental effects for some couples’ relationships. For example, the personal failure that Brad might experience, as a result of essentialist discourses positioning him as “an immature, unreliable man”, illustrates normalizing judgement. Michel Foucault (2002) suggested that “personal failure is associated with the rise of a distinctly modern version of power that establishes an effective system of social control through what can be referred to as ‘normalizing judgement’” (p. 43). The concept of normalizing judgment was first introduced by Michel Foucault (1977). Taking this concept into narrative therapy, Michael White (2007) described normalizing judgment as “a mechanism of social control that incites people to measure their own and each other’s actions and thoughts against norms about life and development that are constructed within the professional disciplines” (p. 25). This social control, a technology of modern power (Foucault, 1972), “employs various schemes and continuums of normality/abnormality, tables of performance, scales for the rating of every human expression imaginable, and formulae for the ranking of persons in relation to each other” (White, 2002, p. 43).

I argue that the majority of currently available relationship enhancement models reflect essentialist understandings that are predicated on technologies of modern

power and involve people in practices of normalizing judgement. Norms have their origins in particular times and contexts and can produce implications for some people. For example, in a society which privileges gender roles that position men as primarily responsible for income earning and women as primarily responsible for child rearing, people who refuse these assigned roles, or take up different roles, may find they are judged unfavourably by partners, family or some members of society. This judgement may restrict persons' access to financial, familial, practical or emotional support. For example, a recent study of non-resident mothers - mothers not living with their children - identified a range of social attitudes that positioned those women as inadequate mothers and left them silenced and isolated in their lives (Snowdon, 2007).

For these women, and for other persons whose lives are subjugated by the effects of normalizing judgement, simply having access to a range of discourses will not necessarily promise freedom from the bounds and constraints of those discourses. The patriarchal heritages and practices of gender discourses in our society continue to produce real effects for women and children, for example: “[s]tories and practices that take for granted male privilege may have the effect that a woman lets go of preferences for care for herself or her children in order to preserve a relationship with a male partner” (Crocket, 2008, p. 512).

In Chapter 7, two research participants, Geena and Susan, speak of some of the effects they encounter as a same gender couple negotiating coupledness within the constraints of the cultural stories of relationship to which they have access. These stories position Susan and Geena on the outside of what they consider to be a “normal couple”. They aspire to normality but its terms, which favour partners who are heterosexual, exclude them from achieving it. Furthermore, when they refuse to comply with “normal” terms of relationship and create different terms, which they give value to, they do not have access to discursive repertoires that sanction this practice of partners defining the terms of their relationship.

Partnership equality

The seventh and final area of similarity and potential constraint for couples, which I have identified in the three self-help books, is what I consider a pervasive notion

that men and women are equal and can negotiate equitable relationships. This feminist principle of equity (Zimmerman, et al., 2001) is evident in the written text. It is also evident in the absence of attention the books give to gender and power discourses that produce men and women differently in terms of power and gender relations. I give one example from each of the three books, which draw attention to practices of conflict, violence and abuse, to show how they portray gender equity in a non-problematic way. I then comment on the three quotes collectively. I make the point that whilst these extracts do give some indication of the presence of notions of gender equality, and suffice as examples for my purposes in this chapter, the pervasiveness of these ideas was more visible to me, as reader, across the texts than can be shown in the following discrete extracts. Harville Hendrix (1988) described a graph which is indicative of couples' degree of expressed anger.

Moving along the graph would be the couples who criticize each other, yell, and pick fights. Farther along the graph would be those who occasionally hit each other. At the far right side of the graph would be the desperately troubled couples who physically abuse each other. (p. 144)

In an account of the Four F's for avoiding hurt, strategies which include fight, flight, fake and fold in response to conflict, John Gray (1992) made the suggestion that:

In each of the above four strategies our intention is to protect ourselves from being hurt. Unfortunately, it does not work. What works is to identify arguments and stop. Take time-out to cool off and then come back and talk again. (p. 156)

Speaking about different practices of "touching" in marriage, Gary Chapman (1994) claimed that:

Within marriage ... what is appropriate and inappropriate touching is determined by the couple themselves, within certain broad guidelines. Physical abuse is of course deemed inappropriate by society, and social

organizations have been formed to help the battered wife and the battered husband. (p. 108)

Each of the author's quotes portrays practices of violence and abuse as problematic practices of intimate relationships. Two particular aspects about the ways the texts write about violent and abusive practices concern me. Firstly, I infer from the books that they are suggesting that men and women engage in violent practices in ways that are more-or-less equal⁷. For example, the claim that couples determine what is inappropriate touching suggests to me an assumption that partners in the couple have an equal say in determining what is appropriate and inappropriate touching. In addition, the reference to social organizations that help "the battered wife and the battered husband" does not take into account the different gendered and cultural contexts that shape violence, and the effects of these practices on those who are the subjects of violence. I argue that these aforementioned claims from the self-help books obscure what I believe to be important and influential gender inequities that position men and women very differently in terms of entitlement and agency in their relationships. Research indicates that equality in relationships between partners is "imperative" and "conducive to successful and stable intimate relationships" (Zimmerman, et al., 2001, pp. 166, 174). However, it is possible for authors to inadvertently "endorse and encourage power differentials ... and traditional roles for men and women" (Zimmerman, et al., 2001, p. 166). I have shown this potential to be possible in my critique of the three books that address couple relationship development.

Secondly, in many cases, one or more partners in a relationship are not aware of these inequities or of the discursive contexts that produce them. Absence of awareness does not position partners well to recognise inequities or act on them in their relationships. For example, Chapter 7 in this thesis illustrates that when research participant MJ recognises inequitable discursive practices of dominance he does not have access to the discursive repertoires from which he can draw to address the inequity. I echo the point that "[w]hen couples understand the

⁷ Violence perpetrated by men on female partners is not the same phenomenon as violence perpetrated by women as shown in New Zealand family violence statistics of women killed by male partners in family violence-related incidents. For example, between 2000 and 2004, 45 women were murdered by their male partner or ex-partner and 3 men were murdered their female partner or ex-partner (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2009).

influence of the social construction of gender on them as individuals and on their relationships, they can better resist pressures and constraints” (Zimmerman, et al., 2001, p. 166). I therefore argue that couples can benefit from literature and education that addresses the social construction of gender.

Furthermore, whilst one partner may seek to address violence in a relationship the other partner may refuse, or not know how, to collaborate. I suggest that these three couple relationship books obscure the complex discursive territories of power and gender relations that produce intimate relationship violence and abuse, and in which partners negotiate equal/unequal relations. To create space for readers of a text to subscribe to the notion that husband or wife battering is similar for women and men, and to suggest that couples can simply stop an argument and “take time-out and cool off”, is to imply discourses of equity that are not readily available or attainable for some couples. This final point suggests the potential benefits for partners, of couples, to have access to a range of discursive repertoires that address gender and power relations.

So far, in this chapter, I have highlighted some of the ways that I believe three self-help books for couples subscribe to discourses that can have the effect of producing and reproducing romantic love discourse, essentialist and individualistic categories, one-size-fits-almost-all notions of couple relationship, practices of modern power and ideas of partnership equity. In particular, I have noted the potential limitations of these effects as a way of producing an argument for the consideration and investigation of other possible discursive practices. Before going on to introduce the other possible discursive practices I turn to a further area of self-help for couples – couple relationship education programmes.

Couple relationship education programmes and research

When I went to the research that has investigated couple education programmes I was not surprised to find that the programmes are shaped by the same traditions and stories of coupledness as the self-help books I have critically investigated. The programmes, in turn, shape the theoretical traditions and cultural stories of coupledness. The areas of pre-marriage education and marriage and relationship enrichment have long histories and use diverse theoretical and methodological

perspectives. I begin with a brief general look at these theoretical traditions that provide the foundations for couple education programmes, to illustrate some of the ways they inform current prevailing cultural stories of coupledness. Research indicates both the benefits of these programmes for couples and the limitations. My focus for this chapter is on limitations: my intention is to highlight the spaces that I believe exist for consideration and investigation of poststructural and social constructionist perspectives of couple practice. My discussion on the limitations follows this historical overview.

Historical overview

Pre-marriage education for engaged couples was initiated in the 1930s (Christensen & Heavey, 1999; Silliman & Schumm, 2000) and the marriage enrichment movement, a faith-based, educational approach, emerged in the 1960s for the purpose of helping to enhance married couple relationships (Bowling, Hill, & Jencius, 2005). The theoretical traditions that these programmes drew from were predominantly informed by humanistic psychology which focused on the expression of feelings and the development of relationships that rely on personal competencies of marriage partners (Bowling, et al.). For example, a Rogerian psychotherapeutic approach was commonly used to assist couples to explore and share thoughts and feelings and to develop self-awareness, empathy, and intimacy (Bowling, et al.). Behavioural modification approaches were also introduced to teach skills such as effective communication (Bowling, et al., 2005; Silliman & Schumm, 2000). Over the years ideas informed by cognitive behavioural therapy, developmental psychology, and systemic family therapy have also been used in programme development and delivery (Silliman & Schumm). Felicity Goodyear-Smith and Tannis Laidlaw (2003) offered a New Zealand example in their evaluation of a community-based course teaching communication and conflict resolution skills to couples. This course was an early intervention aimed at improving and strengthening relationships in order to prevent domestic violence. Their pilot evaluation suggested that attending a Cognitive Behavioural Course, such as the one evaluated, could lead to “significant and sustained improvements in couples communication and conflict resolution abilities” (Goodyear-Smith & Laidlaw, 2003, p. 268). This claim was based on outcome measures at the end of the programme and at a six-month follow up.

Whilst programmes use a variety of theoretical approaches and methods of delivery they generally tend to follow similar formats. These include individual or groups of couples in a programme which involves some didactic teaching component and modelling of what are considered to be effective skills for couples, such as communication or conflict resolution (Bowling, et al., 2005; Christensen & Heavey, 1999; Halford, Markman, Kline, & Stanley, 2003). Group leaders model couple practice and/or use case illustrations or audio-visual technology to teach skills to couples. Couples are encouraged to practice the skills together as a couple and then partners assess their awareness and mastery of the skills (Halford, et al., 2003) using a variety of assessment tools such as questionnaires.

Reproducing prevailing practices of coupledness

Through this educational process, in similar ways to the self-help books, those vested with authority impart given-meaning, knowledge and skills to couples. Discourses of therapy and education inform the development of relationship education programmes. The terms of educational discourses, for example, offer partners positions as learners and position teachers as experts with expert knowledge. In these discursive structures partners who seek guidance and help, which emerge from educational and therapeutic discourses, can be positioned as passive recipients of this knowledge, or what Michel Foucault (1977) termed “docile bodies”. Under these conditions, it is understandable that couples take up, without question, positions offered by prevailing cultural ideas and practices of coupledness. Furthermore, assessment tools measure individual and relationship effectiveness in terms of how couples master and reproduce the given-meanings, skills and knowledge. I suggest that the power relation which is produced by a system in which people are given and take up meaning without question does not leave much space for them to produce or take up meanings, knowledge and preferences, which may not fit with those that have been given, and deemed appropriate expressions of couple practice. In this educational and therapeutic environment of couple education, practices of modern power (Foucault, 1972) and normalizing judgement (Foucault, 1977; White, 2002) are inadvertently produced and reproduced.

Also, I suggest that the discourses “hail” (Parker, 1992, p. 9) relational partners to be particular kinds of individuals and shape their couple relationships in particular ways. For example, as couples accept the terms of these discourses they “speak into existence” (Davies, 1991) their identities and relationships in particular ways which are offered them by the discourses. In this way, some practices prevail and other possible constructions of individual and relational identities are obscured. I discuss these constructions in the next section of the chapter. Before doing so, I return to my discussion of the literature that addresses couple relationship education.

Cultural considerations

Like the self-help literature I investigated, relationship enrichment programmes predominantly target heterosexual marriage partnerships and assume romantic love and egalitarian relationship norms. In their review of the literature of marriage preparation programmes, Benjamin Silliman and Walter Schumm (2000) also noted that “[p]rogrammes generally assume companionate and egalitarian norms [and] heterosexual partnerships” (p. 136). I noted that couple education programmes do not generally address aspects such as gender and power relations or take into account the ethno-cultural effects of programmes for couples.

Kim Halford (2011) mentioned that most research on committed couple relationships has focussed on heterosexual married couples. He suggested that most of the ideas for couple education that he presents are also relevant for couples in a variety of forms of committed relationships, including heterosexual, homosexual and cohabiting couples. Nonetheless, all of the scenarios in the book that provide illustrations of couple relationship experience refer to heterosexual couples’ relationships. However, Kim Halford (2011) took an inclusive step of using the term “couple relationship” rather than the word “marriage” in his book unless he referred to a research finding based on married couples.

Some authors have noted that education programmes for couples have not adequately addressed socio-cultural contexts. For example, Benjamin Silliman and Walter Schumm (2000) suggested that “few programs offer even a passing mention of the social environment” (p. 136) although they did note that an

emphasis was placed on family of origin influences for couple relationships. In their overview of five leading marriage enrichment programmes, Tiffany Bowling, Carmella Hill and Marty Jencius (2005) drew attention to the dearth of marriage enrichment programme research which addresses cultural diversity or the influence of culture. These authors suggested that this claim was a limitation of research on these programmes, and I argue that cultural diversity and the impact of culture for partners and their relationships is hardly visible in the research, the education programmes and the books I have so far critically investigated. Kim Halford (2011) commented that “much existing [couple relationship education] fails to attend to the heterogeneity of couple relationship profiles. Almost all existing relationship skill training programs have relatively fixed curriculum” (p. 34). Tiffany Bowling and colleagues (2005) called for issues such as wider application of marriage enrichment to a diverse group of couples, cultural sensitivity and taking into account the social redefinition of partnerships as future challenges for marriage enrichment programme developers. I echo this call out of concern for the potential effects these limitations have on partners and their couple relationships.

The dearth of marriage education programmes that address cultural diversity highlights the idea, which I identified in the self-help books, that there is generally a one-size-fits-almost-all approach to couple relationship education. However, these programmes aim at couples whose lived experience is culturally diverse and dynamic. Whilst research has shown that programmes generally contribute to enhanced couple relationship practice, I argue that the limitations I have outlined mean that we cannot assume beneficence in all situations and settings. Benjamin Silliman and Walter Schumm (2000) offered an example in their suggestion that “emphasis on partner intimacy and couple autonomy characteristic of most programs may ill-serve role-focused systems with strong extended kin rules and support” (p. 126).

Essentialist and individualistic influence

Another held-in-common theme across many marriage education programmes, again shared with the self-help literature, is their emphasis on essentialist and individualistic repertoires of identity. For example, individualistic and essentialist

approaches are evident in this quote from a research report of the SANCTUS marriage enrichment programme: “the individual person is called to manage their four internal servants: their will, their mind, their emotions, and their body” (Sager & Sager, 2005, p. 213). As I draw attention to individualistic and essentialist repertoires of identity I illustrate the ways these ideas are culturally produced and reproduced. Programme developers draw their ideas from available research and literature that promote these theories and practices as effective for couples. The programme developers reproduce the ideas by modelling them and teaching them to couples. Couples take these ideas and practices into their relationships and reproduce them. Additionally, programme developers may also research their programmes. This research adds to literature of relationship education practice that addresses some discursive perspectives of coupledness. Through this recursive to-and-fro process, these stories of relationship become familiar prevailing stories of coupledness, and they continue to shape couples, researchers and educators who use them.

A further theme in the research literature that addresses couple education relates to individualistic and essentialist repertoires. It is the emphasis on a needs-based approach to coupledness. For example, a needs-based repertoire is evident in this quote: “The expressive skills help the couples understand their *individual needs* and feelings in order to express them effectively” (Bowling, et al., 2005, emphasis added). Whilst the authors in this article do not name these practices as needs based, the theory and practice is visible in the language authors use to speak and write their practices into programmes and books. In this way, language both conveys and constitutes relationship practice.

Implications of gender equity discourses

Finally, I suggest that the gender equity discourse prevails in the programme literature in similar ways as the self-help books. I use the topic of violence as an example in my discussion of gender equity discourses, to show how these discourses inadvertently obscure violence.

In the relationship education literature that I investigated, authors either did not mention violence or touched on it only briefly. In the most up-to-date book

available, Kim Halford (2011) addressed the topic of violence briefly but directly. He defined two distinctive types of violence. One, the most severe, is male violence perpetrated on a female partner. The second type, which is less severe and more prevalent, is “characterized by infrequent, low-level violence” (Halford, 2011, p. 27) and most often involves both male-to-female and female-to-male. A concern I have is that language such as “interpartner violence” (Halford, 2011, p. 70) and speaking of male-to-female and female-to-male violence in the same breath as if it is the same phenomenon can have the effect of obscuring the complex gender and power relations territories which couples live in and negotiate. The language strategies authors use are inevitably, what Bronwyn Davies called, “discursive act[s] of categorization” (Davies, 1998, p. 134). Therefore, how practices are languaged and addressed by authors and programme developers have the effect of categorizing equitable relations, for example, in particular ways. Language is littered with category systems (Davies, 1998) and these categories have implications for how couples learn, understand and practice equitable relations.

Bronwyn Davies proposed questions that I have found useful to ask of the self-help and relationship education literature that I have critically investigated. These questions are:

[W]hat is achieved by each of these apparently innocent descriptive acts? That is, how have we constituted each act of speaking or writing in so naming it? How has that constitutive act been read by the various speakers and writers, listeners and readers? (1998, p. 135)

With these questions in mind, I have developed an account of some of the ways self-help books, and marriage (or couple relationship) enrichment research and programmes, can achieve particular conceptualisations of couple relationship practice. I have offered my critical reading of the texts in order to locate these practices of couple relationship in particular theoretical perspectives and to highlight some of the limitations that may have effects for couples. I have also shown how it is possible for couples to read these theories and practices as the right, best and possibly only ways of doing relationship. When they read these

books and practices in these ways, they also reproduce the ideas and practices, often unreflectively, in their relationships. The process of reading theories and practices as the right, best and possibly only ways of doing relationship, constitutes and reconstitutes these prevailing stories and their constraints.

The need for couple relationship research

The limitations, which I have identified in the self-help books and couple relationship education programme and research literature, highlight spaces for consideration and investigation of approaches to coupledness associated with poststructural and social constructionist approaches to couple relationship education. I argue that discursive approaches not only offer couples extended relationship repertoires from which to draw, but they also take into account the wider cultural stories in which couple practice is produced. Furthermore, they invite couples into reflexive investigations of the ways these stories shape them and the ways they shape these stories in their unique couple contexts. However, studies that evaluate relationship education programmes have focussed on some ideas of coupledness based on individualistic and essentialist constructions of identity, for example, but have not evaluated others such as social constructionist and poststructural approaches. I concur with Kim Halford, Howard Markman, Galena Kline and Scott Stanley (2003) that a systematic evaluation of couple education appears to be needed, and I add that an evaluation should also include a broader range of theory and practice such as those informed by social constructionist and poststructural approaches.

This study does not intend to produce an evaluation of this kind. Rather, it investigates how five couples take up and use poststructural and social constructionist informed approaches to make sense of conversations they each have together as a couple.

This study's focus is, in part, a response to the call made by John Shotter (1989; 2000). In 1989 he drew attention to the limitations of research which he suggested has "failed to study what goes on 'between' people as first – and second-persons, the *sense-making practices* ..." (p. 143, emphasis in original). A decade later he argued that "we need to set ourselves new goals in research: that

of critically refining and elaborating our already existing practices by intertwining into them reflective practices of a dialogical kind” (Shotter, 2000, p. 119). This research project emphasises the sense, or meanings, couples make of their relationships. Furthermore, it does this by employing critique, reflection and dialogical practice. This study invites participants, as couples, to investigate their relationship conversations in reflexive ways and to draw attention to the meanings they make and the relationships they dialogically produce together. I suggest that the step of having participants engage in reflexive investigations of conversations they have as a couple, and to notice and review the meanings they make, is one way this study differs conceptually from other self-help relationship enhancement research.

The discursive perspectives I introduce and investigate in this study draw from social constructionist and poststructuralist traditions. However, as Bronwyn Davies (1998) reminded, relationships are “bounded and constrained” (p. 136) by the discourses which people have access to and the discourses others, with whom people interact, have access to. As a way of investigating approaches with couples that social constructionist and poststructural perspectives inform, it was necessary for the research participants to have access to practices of these approaches. I introduced participants to social constructionist and poststructural practices by creating a context in which they could take up third-person perspectives to critically investigate their relationship practices. This receiving context involved me facilitating a careful process of preparation with couples to assist them to identify different listening and speaking positions that they might take up and use. I also produced inquiry guides that asked questions that sought to deconstruct, review and negotiate the meanings of those practices in the unique context of each couple’s relationship.

Discursive perspectives for intimate relationships

This research process involved couples in the kind of dialogic, reflexive and critical stance in their relationships that, John Shotter argued, was important for research. Critical questioning creates space in which couples can identify and investigate the cultural meanings they hold about their lived experience as well as the effects of this experience on their relationships. Helen Jessup and Steve

Rogerson (1999) warned that “without critical questioning, people continue to hold cultural meanings about the way their lives ought to be, even when their situations are oppressive” (p. 166). This point was illustrated earlier, (see page 73), when I spoke of Susan and Geena’s experience of seeking to achieve a “normal relationship” even though they are marginalised by the terms of the normal relationships to which they aspire. The prevailing idea of a “normal relationship”, which Susan and Geena aspired to, obscured other possible views of how their relationship could be.

John Sturrock (1979) drew attention to the potential effects of subscribing to prevailing ideas. He said “the prevailing view of things ... very often prevails to the extent that people are unaware that it is only one of several possible alternative views” (p. 54). This research proceeded on the basis that by engaging in a dialogic process of reflexion and critique of their relationship conversations couples have access to positions from which to identify other possible alternative views. For example, in this study, Susan and Geena engaged in a process of critically examining a conversation they had together as a couple. They identified prevailing heterosexist discourses that subjected them to prejudice. This process of reflexion and critique created space in which they could view and review the cultural stories that produce prejudice. By reviewing these discursive practices, they were able to set the terms by which they could respond to prejudice and thus contribute to shaping the cultural stories, which informed their relationship, in preferred ways. The literature I discuss in this next section creates space for people to step into dialogic, reflexive and critical investigation of the ways they shape and are shaped by the discursive territories of their lived experience of coupledness.

Further perspectives of coupledness

When I began this project there was a growing body of couple literature written for the academy and for practitioners who worked alongside couples that offered possibilities, for couples, of repertoires shaped by social constructionist and poststructuralist theory and practices. However, this literature primarily focussed on therapeutic contexts and was not readily available to couples directly.

Likewise, constructionist and poststructuralist research projects which involved couples as participants' emphasised therapy and practitioner practice rather than focusing on couple relationship development. Stephen Gaddis's (2002) study is one example. His project investigated the practices of therapists who employed narrative therapy in their work alongside couples. He found that couple relationships were enhanced through the process of couples reflecting on their relationships from a discursive therapeutic approach. Participants used videotaped conversations to reflect on their experiences of therapeutic conversations.

Four aspects of Stephen Gaddis's (2002) study are helpful for my purposes. He drew from social constructionist theory and practice to construct and conduct his study, highlighting for me that research participants could engage, as couples, with constructionist theory and practice in a research environment.

His research also offered me opportunity to reflect on participants' experiences of a process of audiencing DVDs of conversations in which they were conversational participants and reflexive critics. For example, "watching the tapes slowed down the process of therapy so that the couples could gain a better understanding for themselves and each other" (Gaddis, 2002, p. 127). Creating space in which the participants in my study could have access to the moment-by-moment process of conversation, in order to gain understanding, fits with hopes I had for participants.

Stephen Gaddis's study also highlighted the benefits and developments that are possible through a process of viewing and reflecting on a taped conversation. He speculated that it was likely that these benefits and developments were possible because "the research position creates enough distance from the affect connected to the problem that it allows people to make meaning in new ways" (Gaddis, 2002, p. 125). I also suggest that the spatial and temporal distance between speaking in a conversation and reflecting on it offers partners opportunities to originate meaning and contribute to relationship development. Stephen Gaddis suggested that follow-up studies include an inquiry about the benefits of the research process for participants. Chapter 4 of this study shows how I took up Stephen Gaddis's call and included this inquiry of participants in my study.

Another example of a constructionist approach to the investigation of couple relationship practice was Julia Davis's (2005) research. She produced an analysis of the discourses that she identified from conversations with people in their twenties, about their heterosexual relationships with boyfriends or girlfriends. This study was interested in the discursive practices that produce couple relationships and that produce conflict through what the author called "(mis)communication" (p. ii). The research involved interviews with individual people about their retrospective experiences of couple practice. Her analysis then identified different discourses that informed and shaped couple communication and conflict. She illustrated how poststructural theory provides a useful lens through which to investigate couple relationships and articulate their practices from discursive perspectives.

Her findings showed that couples produce and reproduce relationship practice in a complex web of multiple discourses. Discourses that couples use offer partners subject positions that entail particular rights and obligations. These discourses intersect, producing positions that are at times contradictory and at times complementary. The subject positions shape gender and power relations in ways that can enable and constrain partners in different ways. Julia Davis found that the incompatible assumptions of discourses and the contradictory positioning between these discourses enables (mis)communication and arguments between partners (Davis, 2005).

My study is similar to Julia Davis's in that social constructionist and poststructural theory and practice inform it. Both studies seek to identify discourses that inform couple relationship practice and to offer accounts of how individual and relational subjectivity is produced in discourse. I now highlight two particular areas that differentiate my study and Julia Davis's.

Firstly, my research conversations involve both partners together as a couple. It investigates the stories couples tell of relationship, and how to do relationships, when they take up reflexive audiencing positions. It is interested in how these stories shape couples and the effects for couples of co-searching their relationships and relationship practices from reflexive audiencing positions. I

have described the theory of reflexive audiencing in Chapter 2 and speak further to the practice in Chapters 4 and 5.

Secondly, this audiencing process generates participants' retrospective accounts of relationship experience in similar ways that Julia Davis's study did. However, in my study participants pay attention to particular in situ moments of their couple practice by audiencing DVDs of themselves engaged in conversation and then reflecting on the DVD. Therefore, the constitutive and dynamic moment-by-moment process of couple conversation-in-action is available for investigation. So too are the conversations that develop as the couples speak their reflexions. This process of speaking, viewing and reflecting takes into account and contributes to the ongoing constitution of relationship-in-action and holds up the development for reflexion and review. Participants and I engage in critical inquiry about the meanings couples make of the cultural stories they live and tell and the effects of these stories for their couple practice. The results chapters illustrate some of the discursive repertoires couples draw from, how these repertoires shape couple relationships and how couples shape the repertoires.

I now turn to the literature that informs the discursive approaches of coupledness that I advocate for this research. I begin with theories and practices that are relevant for people generally and then move into literature that address couples specifically.

Relational language-making practice

I turn to an important contributor to my thinking and practice, Johnella Bird (2004), whose own work in couple therapy paid attention to relational enquiry. She distinguished between "conventional use of language" and "relational language-making" (Bird, 2004, p. 7) and suggested that the former creates "definitive internal states" and totalising descriptions of people through the use of "the pronoun you, your, my or mine" (p. 22). The debate style of conversation is a common practice in couple relationships that illustrates the use of this essentialist construction of identity. The debate style of conversation "is based on the idea that knowing is located in the individual and that there is a hierarchy of knowing, i.e. one person may know more than another" (Bird, 2000, p. 260). This

conversational style involves listening “to find flaws in someone else’s reasoning” (Bird, 2000, p. 260), and can have the effect of producing definitive positions that locate partners in oppositional relation to each other.

Relational language-making constructs the relationship as a separate entity (Bird, 2004) in which partners are always in relation (Bird, 2000). Engagement with the self in relationship to significant or meaningful aspects of lived experience creates the linguistic space in which partners can explore their relationship to ideas and practices (Bird, 2004). Relational language-making is shaped by social constructionist perspectives in which relational partners can be “actively involved in identity formation” (Bird, 2004, p. 43). Johnella Bird (2004) claimed that “fluidity, movement and thus change” are possible in the space in which people are positioned relationally (p. 43). I suggest that relational language-making contributes to an environment in which couples can take up positions alongside each other and conceptualise the relationship as a relational entity from a position of vantage. This research invited participants into relational third-person positions and it investigates this positioning.

Positioning theory and coupledness

A further contribution to my thinking about couple practice came from the work of Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré (1990). These authors discussed the limitations of role theory and asserted that the shift away from the emphasis on roles and toward the emphasis of positioning “helps focus attention on dynamic aspects of encounters in contrast to the way in which the use of ‘role’ serves to highlight static, formal and ritualistic aspects” (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 43). The concept of positioning invites a focus on the discursive positions offered to couples in their conversations. These investigations can create space for them to consider and review, as individuals and as a couple, the ways they take-up, refuse, accept or subvert these positions. I suggest that video replay, which I use in this study, provides the opportunity for couples to see, hear and speak the dynamic encounters in their couple conversations and creates a context in which partners can take up positions as active agents in the production of their relationship conversations-in-action. The concept of positioning can make options available

for people to decide to take up preferred positions and explore other possible alternatives.

Discursive positioning

John Winslade (2005) discussed the concept of discursive positioning and the benefits for counselling contexts: “[t]he concept of discursive positioning has particular value for counselling because it shows how people are positioned in discourse in particular moments by their own and by others’ utterances” (p. 351). The moment-by-moment attention to the discursive practices couples employ in their relationship conversations and “the efforts people make to resist and refuse discursive positions they are called into” (Winslade, p. 351) was a focus of this research. Discursive positioning is:

[A] concept that offers us some leverage in addressing local and particular experiences without losing sight of powerful social discourses within which subjectivity is constructed. It is in this relationship between the personal and the social that people live their lives and it is here too that they experience the problems that they bring to counselling. (Winslade, p. 352)

Positioning theory, therefore, provides strategies that couples can employ to investigate their local and particular relationship experiences whilst considering the wider cultural stories of relationship that they produce and which produce them. Chapter 7 illustrates how Geena and Susan demonstrate discursive positioning as they investigate and negotiate the personal and social territory in which cultural stories of prejudice are produced.

Discourses of intimacy

The potential for couples to consider the ways wider cultural discursive contexts speak into their local and particular experience is visible in Kaethe Weingarten’s (1991) discursive account of intimacy. She used a feminist and social constructionist lens in a critical investigation of what she described as two prevailing discourses of intimacy both of which rely on essentialist repertoires. The first of these two discourses she named as “the *Individual Capacity*

discourse” which implies that “intimacy is a capacity that rests within an individual”, and which is often expressed by way of self-disclosure of personal feelings (Weingarten, 1991, p. 287, emphasis in original). Secondly, “the *Quality of Relatedness* discourse construes intimacy as a product of a kind of relatedness in which individuals are able deeply and extensively to know each other” (Weingarten, 1991, p. 287, emphasis in original).

These two discourses describe a fairly generalised, stable and limited, understanding of intimacy, predicated on essentialist repertoires, and which is evaluated according to the extent individual partners express themselves emotionally and/or on the quality of the relationship in terms of interpersonal emotional sharing. Kaethe Weingarten (1991) proposed a constructionist perspective on intimacy which she suggested is concerned with meaning-making. Intimacy is a fluid and dynamic process produced in the relational space that exists when partners are involved in practices that co-create or share meaning.

This social constructionist perspective adds to more familiar and prevailing repertoires of intimacy. Furthermore, Kaethe Weingarten makes distinctions between different constructions of intimacy and shows the possibility for different constructions and meanings of intimacy to co-exist and be accessible to couples. These different ideas about intimacy provide one example of the multiple meanings that can be made and the different positions partners might take up if they were to engage in an inquiry about intimacy.

Emotions

Like discourses of intimacy, discourses of emotion are varied and some cultural stories are more readily accessible to couples than others are. For example, James Averill (1985) distinguished between constructionist and essentialist repertoires. He suggested that “[p]eople attribute emotions to themselves, based on paradigms provided by the culture, and on their acceptance of, or attitudes toward, those paradigms” (p. 93). He defined emotions as “socially constituted syndromes (transitory social roles) that include a person’s appraisal of the situation and that are interpreted as passions rather than as actions” (Averill, 1985, p. 98).

This social constructionist account of emotions differs from an account that portrays emotions as physiological responses that are mediated by the brain and manifested by the “nervous system and reflexive expressive reactions” (Averill, 1985, p. 89). This account provides a further example of the multiple ways discursive practices can be understood and of the different positions partners can take up in relation to them. These different ideas have the potential to shape relationships in different ways. If I set up this research process with couples, holding these ideas of multiplicity in mind, a richer more open discursive space becomes available where they can consider different discursive expressions of emotions and their positions in relation to them.

Therapeutic contexts

There is a growing body of literature that suggests that poststructural and social constructionist perspectives offer alternative ways of approaching therapeutic practices with couples (Bird, 2004; Dickerson & Crocket, 2010; Freedman & Combs, 2002; Sinclair & Monk, 2004; White, 1984; Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1993). In this section, I discuss this work and its relevance for couple relationships outside of therapeutic contexts.

I highlight two different therapeutic approaches in this discussion. The first of these draws from *relational language-making practice* (Bird, 2000), which I outlined earlier, and addresses the notion of relationship injury. The second approach is narrative therapy and involves the work of several therapists and authors.

Couple relationship injury

Johnella Bird (2004) proposed that relationship injury occurs when there has been “a violation of the agreed upon understandings that constitute the essence of the relationship” (Bird, 2004, p. 264). The emphasis on relationship injury draws attention to the effects of violation/s on the relationship and creates space for partners to engage in conversations that address the context in which the injury occurred, and the effects on the relationship for those involved. Relational language making involves partners in conversations that redress the injury as a relational construct. I propose that when injury is positioned as a relational

construct partners have access to maze-viewer positions as third persons in relationship to the injury. Furthermore, the practice of conceptualising conflict in terms of relationship injury provides an added metaphor - that of injury and healing - to the more familiar and readily available conflict metaphor.

Narrative therapy with couples

Narrative therapy is a process of therapeutic inquiry for couples that identifies and explores cultural stories. Jill Freedman and Gene Combs (2002) pointed out that cultural stories which are not always visible can be identified and articulated in this narrative therapeutic context. The discourses are made available for couples to consider and to evaluate. From this position of critique, cultural assumptions and expectations can be unpacked and negotiated in terms of the values and preferences couples hold for their relationships.

I now offer five examples that illustrate the work of narrative therapy practice in couple relationship contexts. These examples each show the ways poststructuralist and social constructionist approaches to intimate relationship practice offer couples frameworks that they can draw from and that can contribute to rich and generative accounts of couple relationships.

The first of these examples is Michael White's (1984) work with couples in the early 1980s that conceptualised problems in relationships in terms of "a classification of processes rather than a classification of persons" (p. 27). On these relational terms, when couples encounter conflict they are "pitted against their habits of interaction rather than against each other" (p. 32). These relational processes are emphasised as the site for therapeutic exploration. Cultural stories involve "formulas" for living out relationships that discourse defines and couples enact in their relationships. Michael White's work involved exploration of the histories and effects of these formulas and invited couples to consider defining and devising the terms of the formulas in their relational contexts. This work also involved a process of repositioning in which partners disrupted "habitual and impoverishing interchanges" between them (p. 43).

David Epston (1998) further developed Michael White's approach to therapy for couples who were stymied by longstanding and debilitating problems. He engaged couples in what he described as a "meta-commentary on the direction of their relationship" (p. 68). From this meta perspective a "double externalisation" is possible as couples investigate "both the problem(s) the partners are experiencing *and* the relationship itself" (p. 68 italics in original). Building on the work of Michael White and Karl Tomm, David Epston (1998) articulated a method of questioning that he referred to as "cross-referential questioning" (p. 62) to create a receiving context for people to step into meta-commentaries. This process of questioning creates a meta vantage position by inviting "the respondent to answer from his or her experience of the other's experience" (p. 68). I sought to create a similar meta-vantage position for partners in this research. I used videotaped conversations as a way of creating a space for research participants in this study to respond to my invitation to consider each other's experience from meta-vantage positions.

Thirdly, Sally Ann Roth and Richard Chasin (1994) also suggested that couples can be positioned in the immediacy of their relationship experience and often cannot see themselves or their relationships from an outside position. They employed narrative therapy in their work with couples in the 1980s. Their therapeutic methods involved the therapist engaging partners in dramatic enactments of past and possible future events as a way of partners repositioning themselves in relation to the difficulties that constrain them. These positions involve partners as witnesses, reflectors, authors and actors. These enactments invite partners into curiosity, openness and multiple possibilities as they enact multiple perspectives of their cultural experience and their partners'. The authors proposed that these enactments made possible a shift in "how partners see what they have regarded as the fixed past and the inevitable future, can engender hope and vitality, and can provide a springboard for lasting change" (p. 192).

I also drew on a theatrical metaphor to create a possible shift in how the research participants in my study experienced their pasts and futures and to create space for change. I suggest that a theatrical metaphor provides a strategy that offers partners similar spect-actor positions of actor, audience and critic. By

repositioning themselves in these ways, couples can take up perspectives on their relationships in which they can audience the cultural stories they enact from an outside, or third-person, vantage position.

Fourthly, Stacey Sinclair and Gerald Monk (2004) proposed a discursive approach to negotiating conflict in couple relationships as an alternative to more interest-based approaches. They contrasted essentialist and constructionist paradigms to show the different emphases in these approaches and to illustrate the constructionist discursive repertoire as a method of practice for addressing couple conflict in therapeutic contexts. They suggested that from a discursive perspective people speak from and into various discourses or assumptions about the world. For example, constructionist discourses propose that meaning is made and knowledge is constructed in the social spaces between people. “[E]mphasis falls on the way meaning is constructed within discourse rather than on the individual” (Winslade & Monk, 2000, p. 42) and when differences are present in relationships this meaning is negotiated by conversational partners. When conflict is conceived of from a discursive perspective it is understood as “socially constructed and positioned within particular social and historical cultural settings, or discourses” (Sinclair & Monk, 2004, p. 338), whereas, in essentialist terms, problems that produce conflict in couple relationships are understood to reside “within the individual couple, which is expressed in the relationship” (p. 338). I propose that access to a range of repertoires from which to understand and negotiate practices such as conflict or difference, better positions couples to select from and use the repertoire that best serves their purposes at particular times.

Other authors have also drawn attention to the emphasis on the discursive production of meaning, conflict and difference which couples negotiate in their relationships (Dickerson & Crocket, 2010; Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1993). These authors pay particular attention to the wider social and relational contexts that shape couple relationships. They propose that these contexts contribute to the reproduction of relational patterns and conflict stories in couple relationships. For example, stories of gender and power circulate in couple relationships and contribute to the development of patterns that couples enact and reproduce. Often these patterns are taken-for-granted and can become problematic. The goal of

therapy is to identify these patterns and explore the partners' understandings of them.

I suggest the theories and practices that inform therapeutic frameworks such as relational language-making practice and narrative therapy, offers couples opportunities to research the relational patterns, conflict stories and relationship injuries that they encounter in their day-to-day couple relationship conversations in different ways than those the readily available familiar self-help and relationship education theories and practices provide. However, these discursive approaches are not readily available to couples outside of some counselling or mediation rooms.

The illustrations I have provided from relational language-making practice and narrative therapy have emerged over a thirty-year period but have not found their way into the books and programmes currently readily available to couples. I argue that the theory and practices of narrative therapy have relevance for couples seeking to develop their relationships outside of therapeutic contexts.

For these reasons, I have drawn from discursive theory and practice to shape this research in ways that assisted the couples who participated to take up similar positions to those narrative therapists would take, and to involve each other in critiques that make visible and negotiable cultural stories at work in their relationship conversations.

Reflexion of the chapter

This chapter offered a critique of selected self-help books and couple relationship education research to highlight how these literatures shape particular discourses that inform couple relationships. It showed how these discourses, when presented as models of practice for couples, produce and reproduce prevailing, one-size-fits-almost-all cultural stories of coupledness. These discursive practices can produce limitations and can have the effect of marginalising and excluding some couples from the books and programmes that seek to help them. This critique has also shown how books and programmes are inevitably involved in discursive acts of categorization that can shape relationships and obscure the complexity and

diversity of relationship practice. This critical investigation highlighted spaces in the literature for theory and practice that can add to the discursive repertoires currently readily available to those who seek to develop their relationships.

The chapter has shown how literature and research that has emerged out of social constructionist and poststructuralist traditions has possibilities for couples but is not so-readily available to them outside of some consulting rooms. The chapter argued that literature and research informed by discursive approaches can contribute to extended social constructionist and poststructuralist discursive repertoires for couples. Furthermore, these repertoires can create a context in which couples can reflexively investigate the wider cultural stories, and the local and specific stories, which shape couples.

Research indicates that couple relationships can benefit from the process of reflecting on their relationships from discursive approaches such as narrative therapy research (Gaddis, 2002). There are currently no studies that explore with couples who are not engaged in counselling how they shape discursive territories they inhabit, and how these territories shape them. Therefore, space exists in the research and couple relationship education literature for this study.

Chapter 4. Composing a research design and method

This chapter picks up the theoretical perspectives that I introduced in Chapters 1 and 2, and uses them to produce the study's design and method. Along with these perspectives, it draws from co-operative inquiry, focus group, and narrative inquiry methodologies to provide the conceptual framework for the study's design and method. An ethics-centred and collaborative approach is emphasised in the design that recruits five couples in robust relationships and investigates DVD recordings of relationship conversations each has together as a couple. This investigation involves each couple participating in a five-phase process and using reflexive audiencing practices, which were theorised in Chapter 2, to engage with and reflect on the research conversations.

The chapter introduces the ten participants, Geena, Susan, Charlotte, Doug, Amber, Philip, Laura, Andrew, Anne, and MJ and describes ways we work alongside each other as spect-actors and co-researchers through the various phases of the reflexive audiencing process to produce the data for analysis. The methods of analysis the chapter describes draws from reflexive audiencing practices, as well as narrative analysis, discourse analysis, Foucauldian discourse analysis, and conversational analysis. I argue that, together, these methods of analysis provide a receiving context in which I can hold up the participants' commentaries and their analyses, that emerge through the data generation phase of the research, for appreciation, at times echoing and emphasising the wider research story I tell.

Part 1. Conducting the research method

Ethical research practice

As I considered the methodology I would draw together in the construction of this study, ethical practice was of primary interest to me. I resonated with, and drew from, Arthur Frank's (2000) assertion that "methodology must develop from a preoccupation with ethics...." (p. 355): "...one cannot analyze this relationship without *entering* it, which means putting ethics before methodology" (p. 359, emphasis in original). Entering the relationship, on Arthur Frank's terms, means that the researcher goes beyond collecting data, by assenting to enter into

relationships with participants, and “becomes part of that person’s ongoing struggle” (Frank, 2002, p. 115). Kathie Crocket (2001) has taken a relational ethic into her research of counsellor supervision, making a similar claim “... that it is an ethical act to select a research method, rather than a technical act” (p. 91). Producing an “ethics-centred practice” (Crocket, 2001, p. 96) is arterial to this research.

When I looked to the research literature for examples of the kinds of ethics, philosophy, and pragmatics of practice I sought for the design and methodology for my research, there were four key perspectives that particularly resonated with me: they were co-operative inquiry, focus groups, narrative inquiry, and performance ethnography. I briefly introduce each of these four methods, which together provide a conceptual framework for this chapter, before I go on to show their application in the study’s design and method.

Co-operative inquiry

I was drawn to co-operative inquiry (Reason, 1988b) research because of its resonance with my hopes for my study in four particular ways. Firstly, it takes into account, and provides, strategies that attend to power relations in research relationships. I sought to create relationships in which participants could have access to the authority to contribute knowledge and experience on matters pertaining to their lives. Secondly, in co-operative inquiry, members work together as co-researchers in a collaborative process that involves exploring and changing participants’ worlds (Reason, 1988a). I value the ethic that co-operative inquiry is conducted “*with and for people rather than on people*” (Reason, p. 1, emphasis in original). A third area of resonance, between my hopes for my study and co-operative inquiry, is its intention to produce better understanding of participants’ lives and work, and to seek new ways of practice. One way it does this is by investigating the meanings people make, which are drawn from their everyday experiences, and to tell the story of these meanings (Reason & Hawkins, 1988). The research questions I posed in Chapter 1 are interested in the meanings couples make of their relationship conversations when they investigate them using reflexive audience practices. The fourth aspect that I draw from co-operative

inquiry for my research, is its attention to serve social action, education, and personal development (Reason, 1988b).

Focus Groups

Similarly, focus group (Wilkinson, 1998b) methods consider participants to all be researchers who together seek to generate knowledge or understanding about an area of mutual interest.

Whilst I began this study in the position of primary researcher, I then joined with couples, who participated in the study, as a co-researcher in the data generation phase. Stepping from researcher to co-researcher, whose focus is to explore with couples the stories of their relationships, required attention to power relations. Focus groups methods address power relations by making the call for the authority of the researcher to be decentred (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). The balance of power is shifted away from researchers, placing greater emphasis on participants' points of view (Wilkinson, 1999).

I was drawn towards the focus group emphasis on “everyday social interchange” (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 226). In the first phase of the data generation, I sought to create a context in which couples could investigate a couple conversation they had together that resembled, as closely as possible, a conversation they might have as a couple outside of the research context. In this quasi-everyday environment, participants could capture the conversation on DVD which they then go on to audience and reflect on in later phases. Reflexion involves negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the context of their relationships. “[T]he dynamic negotiation of meaning in specific social contexts” (Wilkinson, 1998b, p. 111) is also an intention of focus group interaction.

Three key features of focus groups, articulated by Sue Wilkinson (1998a), are all valid for this study. These concepts are “[p]roviding access to participants’ own language, concepts and concerns” (p. 188); “[e]ncouraging the production of more fully articulated accounts” (p. 190) of lived experience; and “[o]ffering an opportunity to observe the process of collective sense-making” (p. 193). In the context of this study, the focus groups are couples, spect-actors – actors, audience

and critics - in the research. The DVDs, of a conversation they have together as a couple, are the reflecting surface that makes their own language, concepts and concerns visible to them and available for inquiry. The inquiry guides (see Appendix 5, page 380; Appendix 7-10, pages 389-405) that I provided for them to use, to refer to, and to guide them in the reflexive audiencing process, assist them to generate and articulate accounts of their conversations. The guides also offer them, and me as researcher, an opportunity to observe the kind of shared sense-making process Sue Wilkinson's (1998a; 1998b) comments, above, referred to. Focus groups position participants as narrators of their stories. In my study, I sought to position participants as narrators in a narrative inquiry.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry conceptualises the research participant as a narrator of "his or her particular biographical experiences as he or she understands them" (Chase, 2005, p. 661). Thus, as researcher, I listen for and draw attention to "the subject positions, interpretive practices, ambiguities, and complexities" (Chase, 2005, p. 663) within the stories participants narrate. Conceptualising participants as narrators of their own experience contributes to the context I sought to create in my research that places their stories in the limelight, and holds their analyses up for appreciation. In narrative inquiry terms, participants take up positions as authorities on the stories of their lives, and as researcher, I take up the authority to identify and theorise particular aspects of their stories, such as the discursive repertoires they use to constitute and make sense of their narratives.

I link the concepts of storying and performance together to narrate this research story. A performance narrative "transforms any oral or written narrative into a public performance" (Chase, 2005, p. 653). Chapter 2 set the stage for the performance of these narratives later in this thesis. As researcher I, too, am "in the study, a teller involved in the narrated world, [myself] narrated" (Schaafsma, et al., 2007, p. 302). Narrative inquiry is a social process and espouses "a real and a literary form of collaboration" (Schaafsma, et al., p. 303). These features of narrative inquiry that I have outlined above fit well with the theoretical landscapes of reflexivity, social constructionism, poststructuralism, storying, and performance that I introduced in Chapter 1.

Performance ethnography

Performance ethnography is the fourth research perspective that shapes this study's design and method. "[L]essening the gap between a perceived and actualized sense of self and the other" is a task of performance ethnography (Alexander, 2005, p. 411). This study is concerned with negotiating the self-other hyphen and uses performance to achieve this task. For example, I conceptualise participants as spect-actors – actors, audience, and critics – who move between self-other positions as they act in, audience, and critically investigate relationship practice.

Performance ethnography conflates the boundaries of performance and ethnography in order to enact culture and make its *modus operandi* available to observation and negotiation.

Culture operates both within the confines of its own constructions (power, social relations, time, history, and space) and under the forces of externalized pressure that affect the conditions of its operation. *Performance ethnography as a moral discourse* foregrounds this very delicate balance. (Alexander, 2005, p. 416, italics in original)

Processes of transformation implicate the audiences and actors in the enactment and critique of culture. I employ the notion of katharsis (see page 40) to theorise this process of change through which people are transported to new and different places through the process of audiencing a performance. In the new and different places to which the audiencing experience transports people, understanding or identity positions are available that they might not have known otherwise. I wanted to create a research space in which participants could experience transport in terms of their individual and relational subjectivities. Furthermore, I wanted the research process to benefit participants, and paying attention to katharsis would be one way I could consider the benefits of the study for participants.

As people transport into new and different territories of experience, so too do the cultural stories they tell and live. Cultural performance can serve as a "method in which we all define community, maintain community membership, negotiate

identity, and sometimes subvert the rules of social membership and practice” (Alexander, 2005, p. 416). Performance ethnography therefore is an important contributor to the study as it creates space for an investigation of couple practice, the production of relational and individual subjectivities, and the cultural stories couples live and tell.

Pragmatics of the production

Having considered the theoretical and philosophical ground on which to stage performances of couple culture, my focus moved to the pragmatics of such a production. Participants were not familiar with the kind of repertoire I developed for this research, which emphasised involving them in a performance in which they were spect-actors.

One of the tasks was to create a receiving context into which people might step who have not routinely learned or engaged in the kinds of constructionist, poststructural, reflexive inquiry I proposed to study. I wanted to do this in order to capture the performance of couple relationship conversations, and make these available to the performers, to audience. The method I composed made visible the moment-by-moment conversational practices that constitute relationships-in-action. This was important because we needed to rely on more than participants’ memories of the conversation. Michael White (2007) identified one such limitation:

Although life is rich in lived experience, we give meaning to very little of this experienceThe myriad experiences of daily life mostly pass like a blip across the screen of our consciousness and into a historical vacuum ... these out-of-phase experiences can be potentially significantThe identification of such out-of-phase aspects of lived experience can provide a point of entry for the development of alternative storylines of people’s lives. (p. 219)

I sought to capture the couple conversations in ways that could make visible and create space for participants to identify and story the out-of-phase experiences that might be significant for them.

An outline of the method

The remainder of this chapter is taken up with the description of the method employed. I begin with a brief outline of the phases of the data generation stage of the project (see Table 1, page 106).

The participants (actors) were five couples who I introduced at the beginning of the chapter. After a recruitment process of advertising and initial orientation, I met with each couple separately in their own homes. They had a videotaped conversation, as a couple, about a mutually agreed upon topic to do with their relationship (Scene 1). I was nearby to operate the equipment and to be available if needed, but I was not present during this conversation because the focus was on the couple and their relationship. I gave the partners notebooks that they could use to write any reflexions they had of the conversation before we met again for Scene 2.

Throughout the various phases of this reflexive audiencing process, from Scene 2 onwards, I provided inquiry guides for specific purposes for each scene. Thus, in preparation for the subsequent Scene 2 meeting I gave them a Scene 2 inquiry guide (see Appendix 5, page, 380) to consider. I discuss the purposes of inquiry guides on page 136.

Three to five days later the three of us met to view and then reflect on the DVD together. The purpose of this conversation was for the couple to identify aspects that stood out as resonant and of particular interest to them (Scene 2). My role in this conversation was mostly facilitative. I asked questions to clarify particular points or enlarge on the ideas of interest the couples raised.

I then transcribed the DVDs of the Scene 1 and Scene 2 conversations. Informed by the *topics* the participants identified as important in Scene 2, I developed an inquiry guide (see Appendix 9, page 399) to be used by each particular couple in Scene 3. While the Scene 2 inquiry guide was general, and used by each couple, the Scene 3 inquiry guide was developed for each particular couple and asked questions that invited further inquiry about the topics on which they had focussed.

I then met with each couple for a Scene 3 conversation. With the Scene 3 inquiry guide, reflexive letters (see Appendix 6, page 384), and the transcripts of the previous two conversations, the couples selected the topics from the guide that most interested them to investigate further. We then re-viewed and critically investigated the pieces of the DVD that the couple considered relevant to them (Scene 3). In the same way as Scene 2, I again took up a facilitative role. Two of the five couples chose to meet for a second Scene 3 conversation to discuss topics from the inquiry guide they had not had a chance to address in the first.

The final phase involved a review of the overall research process for participants as individuals, as a couple, and for me as a researcher (Scene 4) – again using an inquiry guide (see Appendix 10, page 405). This guide asked questions about what stood out as meaningful and important to the couple, and me, and to our relationships as we reflected on the overall research process. In this conversation, I was more involved than I had been in previous conversations. For example, I shared some of my own experiences of the data generation phases of the research process and the effects of this involvement on me personally and professionally. Together, the four scenes of this five-phase process provide the structure for the performance of reflexive audiencing practices, which I theorised in Chapter 2. I now go on to describe the process I engaged with to conceptualise the method I have outlined.

Phase	Part	Details	Participants
1. Preliminary phase		Initial familiarisation conversation to meet with couples to discuss research and answer questions. If appropriate, give Research Participation Consent Forms and Withdrawal From the Research forms, reply-paid addressed envelopes, pen, and reflexion notebooks.	Couple and me. Half to one hour
2. Scene 1		Taped couple conversation. At the end, I give Scene 2 Conversation Inquiry Guide for the next Scene 2 conversation.	Couple only (I am present in another room of the house) Approximately 30 minutes. Audio and video taped
3. Scene 2	Part (a)	(3-5 five days later) Scene 2 Research conversation View DVD I join the couple as audience but the couple take the lead and speak together about areas of resonance and interest to them as a couple.	Couple and researcher 1-2 hours Audio and video taped
	Part (b)	I send, by post, the Scene 1 and Scene 2 transcripts, Scene 2 reflexive Letter and Scene 3 Conversation Inquiry Guide developed specifically for the couple.	
4. Scene 3	Part (a)	(2-3 weeks later) Scene 3 Research conversation Couple and I re-view specific areas of interest from the DVD and the couple use the Inquiry Guide to investigate these areas further. (Scene 3 was re-enacted a second time by two couples)	Couple and me 1-2 hours Audio and video taped
	Part (b)	I send transcript and reflexive letter for each Scene 3 research conversation. On completion of the last Scene 3 conversation, I send a Scene 4 Inquiry Guide for the next Scene 4 conversation	
5. Scene 4	Part (a)	(2-3 weeks later) Review and evaluation of the research process Together the three of us review and evaluate the overall research process.	Couple and researcher 1 hour Audio and video taped
	Part (b)	I send transcript and reflexive letter	

Table 1: Outline of five-phase research process

Conceptualising a collaborative method of inquiry

Recollections and imagined dialogues

As I considered the method I might employ, I encountered the dilemma of how to introduce couples to the kinds of relationship conversations that this project envisaged. These conversations would be characterised by appreciative curiosity and meaning-making inquiry that would invite participants to consider their conversations from third-person audience positions. For inspiration, I turned to my long history of counselling and group-work in which I had engaged with couples in similar inquiries. The rich stories of many couples who I met and worked alongside in these contexts over twenty years, and had benefitted from engaging in these kinds of relating practices, were memorable to me but were no longer accessible to consult with directly.

As a way of responding to the legacy of these couples, who had originally inspired this research project, and as a way of creating a safe and user-friendly receiving context for potential research participants to step into, my first step was to enlist an imaginary group of couples. I drew from practice notes and remembered conversations I had with these people to imagine what Andrew Tootell (2010) has since called a fictional-composite story. This fictional story draws together common threads, gleaned from process notes and therapist recollections, which weave their way through many individual stories to make one story.

Barbara Myerhoff (1978) took a similar step to keep alive the knowledge and wisdom of one of the participants in her research, Shmuel, by engaging in an imaginary conversation with him, after his death. Like Barbara Myerhoff who drew from the knowledge and experience of real conversations with Shmuel to produce an imagined dialogue, I had conversations with the couples who had inspired this research but were no longer available to consult with in person. Turning to the imaginary made it possible for me to crystallise, and keep alive, historically generated wisdom, knowledge, and experience that would serve prospective research participants and their relationships.

Inspiration to bring forward the knowledge and stories of those who could not speak directly into the research was initially inspired by Shelley O'Brien's (2007) research, which used imagined dialogues to recount and investigate the stories of callers to a trauma telephone counselling service. Her imagined dialogues created space for the voices of virtual research participants to speak about life experiences in ways that would not otherwise have been possible because of ethical constraints involved in researching first-time callers to a telephone trauma service.

Jane Speedy's (2008) dialogues with imaginary friend and consultant, Mr Gingey also involved a process of blurring the imaginary and the real. By adding an imaginative layer to her research text, and consulting Mr Gingey, Jane Speedy (2008) was able to produce a tentative, contingent and in-the-moment account of theory which, she suggested, may have been reified if she had used different writing styles.

This idea of drawing from memory and historically produced experience, for capturing accounts of meaning and knowledge to inform subsequent research stories, involves benefits and hazards. I was mindful that the imagined accounts that I produced were tentative, contingent, and partial. I was clear that my intention was not to provide an assessment of the couples' relationships, or of coupledness. My intention, instead, was to reflect on the therapeutic strategies that assisted the couples to take up constructionist and poststructuralist practices of inquiry that they reported having enriched their relationships and added to the discursive repertoires they had access to.

My imagined dialogue involved me reflecting on stories and tracing some of the steps couples took as they employed constructionist ideas and practices in counselling and group-work contexts. In this imaginary consultation process, I reflected on the ways I introduced these couples to constructionist theory and practice, and I focussed on the positions they had access to, to use and reflect on these ways of doing relationship. This process helped me consider some of the implications research participants might encounter as they engaged in a process of speaking and witnessing their couple conversations in the research context and in

the presence of a research audience. By identifying the steps we took together, I could consider the potential of these same steps for this research context.

My partner, Gary, also made available to me an added avenue for collaborative couple consultation in the design phase of the research. He suggested that we “try out” the steps of the research process, which I soon describe. I readily agreed to be involved in this experience/experiment because I considered this kind of participation to be a practice of accountability. Engaging in the data generation phases of the research with Gary and making my own couple relationship visible and available for reflexive critique provided an opportunity to take similar steps to those the research participants would take. Gary and I videotaped a conversation we had together as a couple and then followed scenes 2, 3 and 4 (see Table 1, page 106). I transcribed the conversations and wrote reflexive letters that we both read and then discussed. Participating in this way turned out to be invaluable for the research, and our relationship underwent rich transformation. We continue to use reflexive audiencing practices to shape conversations we have together as a couple.

The experiment/experience also provided an opportunity for me to consult Gary about how he experienced concepts, such as appreciative curiosity and externalising conversations, which were not very familiar to him. I theorise these concepts in Chapter 5. Taking these steps also provided an opportunity to identify and address aspects of the research process that needed further refinement in order to make them more user-friendly. For example, I came to realise the importance of paying particular attention to preparing participants well to audience the DVDs of their conversations. In particular, I recognised the importance of assisting them to position themselves as third-person audiences, to focus on the relationship, and to take up appreciative curious stances of inquiry. Trying out the process as a couple and experiencing the rich and transformative results fuelled my confidence and enthusiasm to recruit the couples who would participate and to involve them in the phases of the process. I was also able to consider aspects such as the effects of timing between meetings and the pragmatics of managing transcripts and reflexive letters. These, were not aspects that I could address directly through the imagined consultation process I spoke of earlier.

As I plotted the course, in consultation with my virtual counterparts and my actual partner, I did so with the intention that together the actual participants and I could re shape the process in ways that worked best for us. We could then seek and obtain further ethical approval along the way. The point I make is that, collaborative research practice, which centres the stories of research participants whilst I was positioned as the primary researcher and author of the process, was complex and involved ongoing ethical attention, as Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2000) claimed:

Ethical matters need to be narrated over the entire narrative inquiry process. They are not dealt with once and for all, as might seem to happen, when ethical review forms are filled out and university approval is sought for our inquiries. Ethical matters shift and change as we move through an inquiry. They are never far from the heart of our inquiries no matter where we are in the inquiry process. (p. 170)

As it transpired the changes that I made in the data generation phases of the project were minor and did not require a formal ethical review process. For example, instead of using the generic Scene 3 Conversation Inquiry Guide I had prepared for the research interviews (see Appendix 9, page 399), I developed personalised versions for each couple based on the generic format (see Appendix 7 and 8, pages 389-393).

Taking a collaborative orientation

A further concept that is central to relational ethics and inhabits both my counselling and research practice is a collaborative approach to relationships. Collaboration in therapy calls for the interests and preferences of those whose stories are being told to be at the centre of inquiry (Morgan, 2000, p. 3). The ethics and practices of privileging the voices of participants, and the voices of women in particular, emerge from feminist traditions (Reinharz, 1992). For example, in the late 1970s, academic feminists Mary Belenky and colleagues (1986) posited that “the collaborative, egalitarian spirit so often shared by women should be more carefully nurtured in the work lives of all men and women” (p. ix). Sandra

Harding (1991) also called for science that benefits men as well as women “especially those marginalized by racism, imperialism, and class exploitation” (p. 5). I sought to create space for the voices of the women and men who participated in my research to speak and richly story experience in this spirit of egalitarian and collaborative inquiry. I wanted to provide a style of inquiry that would encourage participants to go beyond given-meaning and make meaning.

Engaging participants in meaning-making inquiry fits with intentions of feminist ethnography. Shulamit Reinharz (1992) described these intentions as authenticating the lives and experiences of women – and in my case men - understanding their experiences from their own perspective, and taking into account the social contexts that shape their lives. This context includes privilege that is readily available to men through discourses of patriarchy, and to the discursive practices that can produce silencing and marginalising effects for women, which I was alert to and took into account.

Patti Lather (1992) also drew attention to social context, suggesting that the tendency for most feminist research is to assume “that ways of knowing are inherently culture bound” (p. 91). She called for researchers to take into account the ways their values permeate and shape inquiry. Each of these factors produces research shaped by a feminist orientation and they contribute to collaborative inquiry. They create a context in which important aspects such as those proposed by Shulamit Reinharz (1992) can be taken into account. These aspects are that the diversity of participants is recognised, their voices are privileged, they are involved in the study, and researchers work alongside them. Through this process close relationships can be developed and social change, as well as change for the lives of participants and researchers, can be acknowledged and expressed (Reinharz, 1992).

I locate myself in this collaborative feminist spirit of inquiry in this project by providing a first person account and acknowledging the shaping effects of this study on me personally and professionally. These steps were identified by Shulamit Reinharz (1992) as features of feminist research which repair “the project’s pseudo-objectivity” (p. 258).

Therefore, collaborative practice goes beyond an assumption of goodwill and is achieved through active negotiation of the terms of the relationship by those involved in it (Bird, 2000). In this research project, where and when conversations were held and the topics that were taken up and investigated all involved a collaborative process that centred, as closely as possible, the research participants' interests and preferences.

In positioning myself for collaboration with participants I drew on my narrative therapy background, taking up "investigative, exploratory, archaeological positions...consistently in the role of seeking understanding of the [participants'] experience" (Monk, 1997, p. 25). The investigative role that centres the meanings and understandings of the participants' experience aligns with the kind of research practice with which I sought to engage. Another narrative therapist/researcher spoke of the positioning of research consultant, offering research participants "freedom to express their personal wisdom, perspective, and expertise" (Gaddis, 2004, p. 46). I worked to centre and represent the wisdom, perspectives, and expertise of the research participants. However, as I take up the position as the principal author and primary storyteller there were challenges for me to take into account.

Recruitment: Processes and ethics

Advertising the study

I now turn to the steps of the research method, overviewed in Table 1. Having received ethical approval, from the University of Waikato's Faculty of Education Ethics Committee, to conduct the research, I distributed advertisements calling for research participants (See Appendix 1, page 369). During the planning phases of the research and ethics proposals, I had grappled with the politics of inclusion and exclusion. Selecting the words I used in the advertisement is one example of the inclusion/exclusion dilemma. Val Gillies (2003) made the point that "[t]he phrase 'intimate relationship' is a broad and fluid term, in that it can encompass numerous different associations between friends, sexual partners, family and kin" (p. 2). Using this term may be misleading for potential participants. However,

using the term couple in the advertisement ran the risk of excluding people in polyamorous intimate relationships. Taking into account the local community context in which I was distributing the advertisements, the need for advertising to be succinct and clearly understood, and limitations of the English language to provide inclusive terminology that would serve my purposes, I eventually opted to use the word couple in the written advertisement.

As I wrote the word couple into this advertising, and as I continue to do so in this thesis, I write, wakeful to the knowledge that my use of this term is effective as a general term to articulate the kinds of relationships this study addresses. However, using the term crosses muddled boundaries of inclusion/exclusion, particularly for those whose adult, non-biologically connected, intimate relationships extend beyond two people. I also intentionally omitted the word sexual because couples' relationships could have included asexual relations. This inclusion/exclusion dilemma illustrates my reference to the limitations of the English language, and its effects for people.

In order to reach people, albeit with limitations, I advertised widely through email networks, on notice boards in tertiary institutions, medical centres, community centres, and pre schools. These networks included friends, family members, and colleagues who worked alongside Maori and Pacific communities, those defined as refugees and migrants to New Zealand, and people in same gender relationships. In addition, they reached across people whose lives are shaped by a range of age, socio-economic, and educational contexts. I marketed the research at public gatherings I attended, and I made advertisements available to counselling colleagues who consulted people about their intimate relationships. I also visited and spoke to groups in a community centre and in several pre-schools. From these connections, I received nine requests for further information and mailed information packs to these people.

Information packs

I asked that they read the information and make further contact with me if they wished to proceed to the next step. In leaving contact to those I hoped to recruit, I avoided risks of coercion. I included in the information pack (see Appendix 4,

page 376), information about the pragmatics of the research process and the ethical considerations which I considered important for potential participants to be informed of before committing to the project. I asked that couples read the pack and make contact with me if they wished to proceed to Phase 1, the preliminary phase, which would involve an initial familiarisation conversation (see Table 1, page 106).

The preliminary phase: Initial familiarisation conversation

In effect, of the nine couples who received the information packs, five couples made contact with me by phone. In that phone conversation, I offered interested couples the choice of meeting at a mutually agreeable location, such as the University, my home office, or their home. Each of the five couples who indicated that they wished to proceed to the preliminary phase, elected to meet with me in their home for an initial familiarisation conversation. This meeting was an opportunity for me to meet with both partners together and to further the process of creating a relational space in which power relations could be attended to, along with the development of trust, safety, co-research and collaboration. I provided an opportunity in the preliminary familiarisation conversation to address any questions, and discuss, in person, details of the research process that I outlined in the Information Pack and extrapolated in the Research Consent Participation Form (see Appendix 2, page 370). I did not distribute this latter form at this point but referred to it during the conversation to ensure I informed potential participants as fully as possible before they decided whether, or not, to participate further. These two forms together contained information about the ethics and pragmatics of participating in this research - which I now go on to describe.

Phases and time commitments

The information pack included an outline of the proposed phases of the research and the time commitments that each phase would involve (see Appendix 4, page 376). Data generation would involve several meetings over a period of four or more weeks. I designed this multi-phase research process to benefit the couples' relationships as well as to generate data for the research project. Participation in the research would require that people look into and stretch their relational

experience. It would also involve them in potentially extending their discursive repertoires and, at times, employing new and unfamiliar communication practices. For these reasons, it was important to me that people were as well informed as possible, from the outset, about how they would participate, and for how long.

Voluntary and willing participation

I considered the possibility that one partner might reluctantly agree to participate in the research to appease the other, and I knew that coercive participation in this research could contribute to power relations that may undermine the equitable and collaborative ethos of inquiry I sought to produce. To address this possibility and to foster an ethos of willing and informed consent, I emphasised in the forms and in the familiarisation conversation that participation in the study would be voluntary and I asked that both partners participate willingly. I concur with Johnella Bird's (2004) suggestion that willingness, rather than being assumed, should be negotiated in therapeutic conversations. As a way of negotiating willingness in the research, I asked that willingness be a requirement of participation. In addition, at each research meeting I would have a conversation with the participant couples about their willingness to continue to the next phase of the process.

Withdrawing from the study

The option to withdraw from the study, fully or partially, at any stage during or shortly after the data generation phase of the process, with or without a reason being given, was also a point I included in the forms. Along with this invitation, I offered potential participants the option of contacting my doctoral supervisors if they wished to ask any questions or discuss any aspect of the research, including withdrawal from the study. I was mindful that partners may, for a variety of reasons, have questions. Additionally, those who go on to participate may wish to signal withdrawal from the study and prefer not to discuss these with me directly. For example, they may be concerned about my practices as a researcher or they may be reluctant to let me down by withdrawing. To create a receiving context in which participants had some assurance that they would not let me down by withdrawing, I would reiterate on several occasions that I could successfully complete the project with fewer participants than had agreed to participate. I

would also let them know that I had created space in the research design to recruit more couples into the research if I needed to. It was important to me that couples participate willingly and meet the criteria for participation.

Criteria for participation

The forms also outlined some further criteria for participation. The study sought couples who considered themselves to be in robust relationships. I consider robustness to include partners having faith in a relationship in which they have developed relational practices over time that they can employ to encounter and negotiate difficulties together in constructive ways. This robustness would provide some reassurance for the participants, and for me, that their relationship had a history of attending to and weathering troubling situations if any were to emerge during or after the research conversations. This criterion was particularly important, as I would be engaging with the participants as a researcher and not as a counsellor. I went to the homes of couples who went on to participate, for research conversations, and left them soon after these meetings. Positioned as a researcher, I did not have a mandate to step into counselling conversations with participants if they encountered relationship problems with which they needed assistance. I spoke with couples, in the Phase 1 initial familiarisation conversation, about aspects that distinguished research territory from counselling territory with regard to relationship problems that they might encounter during the research conversations if they went on to participate. At this meeting I also discussed options, such as counselling, for managing concerns that they may not be able to resolve together as a couple.

A further area of accountability to which I was wakeful is the territory between research practitioner and counselling practitioner. As a researcher whose apprenticeships have been in counselling co-research practice, I paid particular attention to this territory. The meeting places between narrative research and narrative therapy are blurred (Speedy, 2008). For example, in research terms, co-research involves participants working alongside researchers in collaborative, co-operative ways (Reason, 1988a). In therapeutic terms, co-research involves therapists and those who consult them working alongside each other to collaboratively address problematic situations (Epston, 2004). Whilst I would

seek to take up a co-research position in the data generation phase of the study my focus would not be to address problematic situations although they may well emerge. I take up the discussion of co-research again in the Analysis section of the chapter.

Whilst the boundaries between counselling and research are blurred, there are also distinctions in the territories that research and counselling occupy. At times, these differences are finely nuanced and yet importantly distinctive. For example, I would work to maintain a reflexive consciousness in the questions I ask so that the emphasis remains on extrapolating the aspects of practice that participants identify as resonant and of interest. This emphasis is also an intention of counselling inquiry, but the participants and I would not be working on the understanding that our task would be to address problems in their relationship nor would we be working on the assumption that this was private. This would be engagement in a process purposefully for the public domain.

So far, I have argued that my counselling experience positioned me well to engage in an inquiry that would work to explore meanings, invite rich descriptions of lived experience, and be attentive to ethical considerations. My counselling apprenticeships also provided ways of negotiating collaborative relationship understandings with the potential participants. However, it was important that I was mindful that this was primarily a research, and not a therapeutic, endeavour. As I would engage with the research transcripts, I would maintain a reflexive eye on the blurred research/therapy interface. For example, as I read the transcripts, I will focus my attention less on what is problematic and more on the range of aspects that are resonant for participants. As I ask questions in the inquiry guides, I will maintain this more general focus. I will direct the questions I ask more towards the meanings couples make of their experiences of their conversations and more away from a focus on the potential for change and development. However, in effect, in the research conversations with couples who went on to participate, changes and developments did occur and were of interest in the story of the research.

With this ethic of safety and care at the forefront, I also asked in the forms and at the preliminary conversation that people not put themselves forward as participants if there had been any history of violence in their relationship. Two potentially hazardous situations inspire this call. Firstly, if there is violence there is a clear therapeutic responsibility and I want to make sure that violence has not been present and that these would be relationships in which I would have the freedom to research. Secondly, fear of violent repercussions may constrain how and what is spoken by partners in the research conversations. Furthermore, topics that produced violent responses in the past may inadvertently emerge in the research conversations and thus place participants under increased risk of violence and harm.

All couples who went on to participate, considered themselves to be in robust intimate relationships, and reported that there was no history of violence in their relationships. Making the two factors conditions of participation in the research were ethical steps I took to engender an environment of safety and care for participants.

Taking care of the stories

As well as paying attention to ethics of care and safety of participants, I informed potential couples that that I would pay care-full attention to storing identifiable information, such as contact details, in a secure location, separate from transcripts and letters that I would edit to remove identifiable information. In effect, in the research conversations I went on to have with those who participated, there were times when it was not possible to maintain this separation of identifiable information and detailed stories of personal experience. For example, when I mailed or emailed letters and transcripts to the participants, identifiable and personal narratives were necessarily included together. In addition, there was a brief period, in the early phases of the research meetings when transcripts and letters contained identifiable information. At that time, I maintained an ethic of care with these written texts so that I protected anonymity and privacy as much as possible. At the earliest opportunity, I edited and separated identifiable information from the data that would be more accessible.

In the initial familiarisation meeting, I advised that I would involve those who went on to participate, where possible, in a collaborative editing process of the transcripts, letters, and conference presentations that would emerge from the research. This step would be a way of checking that potential participants would be satisfied with the content of the information that I might use in the research thesis and in other relevant arenas, such as conference presentations.

Custodians and owners of the stories

I clarified in the Phase 1 initial familiarisation conversation that the personal stories that participants generated in the research conversations would belong to them. I would be the custodian of video and audio tapes and would delete or destroy these once examiners examined the thesis. I advised them that the university requires that I archive all research data - the transcripts, letters, and thesis documents – indefinitely. I also informed them that I would draw from the data for any interviews, conference presentations, journal articles, writing, or seminars that might directly relate to research. It was important to me that I inform potential participants of how I would use and care for their stories.

Anonymity, confidentiality and privacy

I outlined, in the forms and in the Phase 1 initial familiarisation conversation, how I would protect anonymity and privacy. Strategies for anonymity would include removing identifying information from written documents such as reflexive letters and transcripts, and by using pseudonyms, which participants would select. I discussed the limits of confidentiality in the context of the research. For example, as the thesis report is public, information in it will no longer be confidential after I have written the thesis. However, I iterated to the couple that only the participants, my supervisors, and I would have access to the video and audio recordings and only the couple and I would know their full names and contact details unless they agreed to make these available to my supervisors.

Ethical approval and supervision

I outlined the University involvement in the forms, including the Post Graduate Studies Office and the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee's approval to conduct the study. I made doctoral supervisor names and contact details available and issued invitations for participants to contact my supervisors if they had any

questions or concerns they wished to address regarding the study. I also drew attention to the New Zealand Association of Counsellors' Code of Ethics (2002) and discussed relevant aspects from this Code that bound me as a Member.

Introducing me as researcher

The information pack was one site in which I could introduce myself to the potential participants, many of whom I would not have met or spoken with until the initial familiarisation conversation. My attention to the ethics and pragmatics of the project all narrated a story of me as the researcher and created a receiving context into which participants could step.

Laura, a participant, spoke of how the information pack and the subsequent initial familiarisation conversation about the research process contributed to her decision to participate.

Laura	I really appreciated the care and thought and preparation that you put in so that I felt immediately, I had a lot of trust that things would be safe, so it wasn't taking a huge risk. Things were in place that allowed me to do thatI had confidence in the process that you'd gone through. We talked about ethics committees and supervisors and I knew all those things were in place and that you'd spent a lot of time and energy thinking about how to do this and to keep it safe. Had someone else come along and there wasn't that same preparation or intent, I probably wouldn't have [participated].
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The initial familiarisation meeting and the forms also located me in particular biographical contexts. For instance I bring my female, middle aged, heterosexual, married, parental, schooled, (able)bodied, Christian, and privileged discursive positions and practices to this project. These cultural ideas and practices inform the documents I produced, the questions I asked or did not ask, the language I used, and the lens through which I would later make sense of the stories couples told. Introducing myself personally and professionally was a further step in locating myself in this project, and, in Arthur Frank's (2000) terms, entering the

relationship. Laura provided an account of the participant/researcher relational positioning that she valued.

Laura	There's that thought that you were beside us and that you would step with us each step of the way, so there's that huge feeling of not being alone in it – even though there is the two of us [as a couple], because you were standing beside us and walking with us. I think that really helped.
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The introduction to the study and to me personally and professionally was an important step towards the development of the research relationships I went on to engage in alongside research participants. By centring the participants' relationship contexts, whilst acknowledging my own lived experience as a partner in a couple relationship, I created space for two-way research relationships. This "two-way account" (White, 1997, p. 130), which I discuss later in the chapter, acknowledges the contributions research participants make to the work and life of a researcher.

Ethics of informed consent

As I developed the forms and engaged in the initial familiarisation phase of the research process, I encountered a further inclusive/exclusive balancing act. Creating a receiving context, in which I could inform potential participants as fully as possible, required that I provide information that addressed key aspects of the research. However, I believe that the volume of information that I needed to take into account could have had the effect of excluding possible participants.

For example, people who were exhausted by the task of making ends meet financially, who were negotiating long work hours and busy family lives, or who may not have access to the privilege required to comprehend long and complex documentation, faced barriers that may have prevented them taking part. Therefore, the ethical technologies designed to protect participants, but which in effect potentially excluded them, troubled my hopes for inclusiveness. In spite of intentions to the contrary, this research could not escape being complicit in practices of marginalisation and exclusion.

Recording equipment

In the information pack I stated that the research interviews would be video-recorded because I was mindful that for some potential participants the idea of having research conversations recorded, and then audiencing themselves on DVD, may be problematic. I have found in personal and work contexts that some people prefer not to be recorded or to see and hear themselves on video. Additionally, having recorded aspects of their lives made available for a wider audience to view can be discomfoting. I also took a further step of taking the recording equipment I would be using along to the Phase 1 initial familiarisation meeting and showing it to the potential participants.

Participant centred critique

Each of these steps contributed to an ethic of accountability. How I would go on to attend to the participants accounts of their experience would also require particular care and attention. From the outset, my intentions were to centre the voices and the stories of research participants. However, there were many other stories to which I was accountable. For example, I needed to centre the stories that would emerge as I considered the research questions and I needed to take into account academic conventions that call on me produce a research thesis that goes beyond recounting the participants' stories. I have already spoken of the inclusive/exclusive balancing act that I negotiated in various aspects of the research. How I would hold participants stories up for appreciation alongside the other stories was another of these balancing acts and one I took seriously and was wakeful to throughout the research process. Given the power relations inherent in professional relationships such as this participant/researcher relationship, working to include the voices of the participants in ways that represented what they said and meant, and stayed loyal to the spirit in which they said and meant their words, was important. The work of Mary Belenky and her colleagues, which I introduced earlier, guided me. They engaged in *The Education for Women's Development Project* (1986) that explored the experiences and problems of women. Like them, I would be interested in hearing "what was important about life and learning" from the point of view of the participants, and to report the responses and meanings they identified with (Belenky, et al., p. 11). I would draw from these feminist research traditions as I work to privilege the meanings

participants make of their lives and relationships and to produce diverse and unique accounts of their experience.

Therefore, in the recruitment phase of this research, it was also important to the ethos of the study that I take steps to clarify my intentions to centre the meanings and relational practices identified by the couple as meaningful and important to them. This meant that at the data generation phase of the research process my interest would be to investigate and story, alongside participating couples, their critiques of their couple relationships. I told potential couples at the initial familiarisation meeting that they, as a couple, and not me, as a researcher, would make their evaluations of their relationship conversations. I would tell a theoretical story that would sit alongside their stories and weave with theirs but would not speak in opposition to them or presume to know more than they about their relationships. I believed that making this distinction between my analyses and theirs was important because I predicted that people would be more familiar with discourses that authorised professionals or experts to determine the meanings and analyses of the participants' experiences.

After the couple and I had completed our initial familiarisation conversation about what participating in the research would involve, I gave each partner the Research Participation Consent Form (see Appendix 2, page 370) and a stamped, addressed envelope. I asked that they discuss participation together as a couple, and then send the consent forms to me should they wish to proceed to Scene 1 of the research process. At each phase in the process, I wanted to make space available for people to opt out of the research.

All five couples completed the forms at the Phase 1 initial familiarisation meeting and made appointments for the first taped research conversation (Scene 1). All five couples chose to undertake the research conversations in their homes. In the review and evaluation of the research process conversation (Scene 4), Amber mentioned the benefits of holding the research meetings at home.

Amber	I think that's a good part of your research being able to come into somebody's home, because it is more relaxing here and we're in our favourite chairs in our lounge, and that part of it is all familiar, rather than being put into this whole new situation and it then being recorded and then having to have a conversation which could have felt forced. So it has felt a lot more natural in our own home.
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Conducting the research conversations in the couples' homes where they could sit in their favourite chairs and in familiar surroundings, contributed to a receiving context in which the relationship conversations could produce the "negotiation of meaning in local interaction in everyday contexts" (Willig, 2008, p. 95) of the couples' lives. I sought to co-research, alongside couples, the meanings they made of their interactions in their local context.

At the time we arranged to meet for the Scene 1 Taped Couple Conversation, I gave each partner a folder (for storing written documents), a reflexion notebook, a pen, a research withdrawal form (see Appendix 3, page 374), and a stamped, return addressed envelope. This study proposes that research is a constitutive dynamic process. Reflexion notebooks provided a site in which the couples could capture and archive the changing and developing conversations between them as partners, which were relevant to the research, and which occurred between research meetings.

I did not ask for demographic information beyond that volunteered in the research conversations because I was interested in what the couples identified as relevant and meaningful to them in the relationship conversations they had together as a couple. At this point, I bump up against the dilemma of how much information constitutes for you, as the reader, an adequate introduction to the couples. How much or how little do demographics such as age, education, ethnicity, socio economic "status", work contexts, historical, and familial data and so on, shape, limit or enhance your reading of the text? I was mindful of Carla Willig's (2008) warning that "an imposition of social categories at the outset [of a discourse analytic research report] is not helpful" because "provision of 'standard'

demographic information ... is in fact, a way of constructing identities” (p. 102). For this reason, I did not ask participants to provide demographic information. However, they volunteered some demographics during the course of the research.

Whilst I agree with Carla Willig (2008), that providing demographics can have the effect of constructing identities, I contend that this practice is not always problematic. Stephen Gaddis (2002), commented that it would have been helpful for readers to have more descriptive information about participants and suggested that demographic information be gathered in subsequent research. I believe that some knowledge of the contexts that shaped the participants relationships, in my research, and informed the stories they told, could be helpful for readers to make meaning and as a witnessing practice. For example, when one of the couples who participated in this study, Gina and Susan, speak in Chapter 7 about wanting to live as a “normal married couple”, it is helpful for readers to know that they live in a same gender relationship. Geena and Susan’s aspirations to live on the terms of what they describe as a normal married couple involve some legislative limitations, for example, that heterosexual couples do not encounter. For this reason, I introduce the people who went on to participate, below, and provide some demographic information that the participants proffered during the research conversations. Further aspects of the couples’ stories and contexts unfold in the results chapters - Chapters 5 to 8.

Introducing the research participants

At the time of the research, Anne is in her mid sixties and MJ is in his late sixties. They are a couple in a heterosexual relationship who have been together for fifty years and are currently retired from paid work.

Geena and Susan have been in a same gender relationship for more than ten years. Geena works full-time in a self-employed profession and Susan works part-time and studies part-time. From previous relationships, they both have adult children who live away from home.

Laura and Andrew, a couple who are in a heterosexual relationship, have been married for twenty-five years. Both have trained and worked in similar

professions. Recently Laura has moved away from paid work and into full-time study. Andrew continues to work full-time. Laura and Andrew have moved into what they describe as a new stage in their lives since both of their adult children have recently moved out of the family home.

Amber and Philip are in a heterosexual relationship and they have four young children at preschool and primary school. They have been together seventeen years. Amber works part-time from home, alongside caring for the children, and Philip works full-time.

Charlotte and Doug have been married for about thirty years in a heterosexual relationship. Their adult children also live away from home. Charlotte and Doug work in paid employment.

All participants live in the Waikato area of Aotearoa New Zealand. They have resided in Aotearoa for all or most of their lives. Those who moved to New Zealand as children or young adults came from England and Europe. English is the first language for all participants and they all commented that they could comprehend the research documents and conversations. They all spoke of the importance of ongoing interest in, and development of, their couple relationships. Some of these developments were produced in the data generation phase of the research and are discussed in Chapters 5 to 8. I now turn to the performances of the research method.

Part 2. Generating research stories: Reflexive audiencing performances

Scene 1: A couple conversation

Participants and I generated the research stories during Scenes 1 to 4 of the five-phase performance I outlined earlier and illustrated in Table 1 (page 106). I now take up the role of theatrical director and invite you to position yourself to audience the four scenes that demonstrate the reflexive audiencing process in action.

Two research participants, a couple, are the actors. The stage lights described in Chapter 2 (see pages 41-47) are set for this forthcoming reflexive audiencing performance. This Scene 1 performance provides the initial taped material that the participants and I audience and co-research together in the scenes that follow.

The stage setting is the living room of the couple's home. The video camera and audiotape recorder are the only visible signs that this conversation differs from other "typical" relationship conversations they have together as a couple. Less visible traces will inevitably shape this conversation differently from others they might have together: the knowledge that aspects of this conversation will be available to the scrutiny of a wider audience, for instance.

The couple take their places on the stage. There is no script for this scene just a space in which they can have an unrehearsed conversation about a relationship topic of mutual interest to them as a couple. An air of safe familiarity is evident as the couple settle into their favourite armchairs for the conversation. There is also an air of anticipation as they wonder what might unfold and what this performance might mean for their relationship. What images, relating styles and patterns will the conversation produce and capture in the video?

I call "Lights! Camera! Action!" Then I take my place back stage, out of sight, and earshot, and, where the actors can call on me if needed. The performance begins.

Half an hour later I hear one of the partners call loudly, "Cut". The actors have finished their conversation. Scene 1 ends. The curtain falls. The actors prepare for the Scene 2 conversation in a few days time. I give them a Scene 2 inquiry guide (see Appendix 5, page 380) in preparation for the next Scene 2 meeting. They will note any reflexions they have in the days between and record them in their reflexion notebooks that I gave them prior to the Scene 1 conversation.

Scene 2: Audiencing the DVD

Three to five days later - enough time for some distance from the Scene 1 conversation and close enough for it to be reasonably fresh in their minds - the couple and I return to the theatre and seat ourselves as audience.

They are spect-actors and I am both audience and director and sit alongside them to prepare to audience the DVD they produced in Scene 1. I anticipated that these people would have familiar and habitual ways of viewing themselves and their partner on DVD. It was likely that the presence of the camera, of me, and the discursive positions they could take up, would shape their gaze:

Individuals constantly re-situate themselves and construct their self-identities in relation to not only other individuals but also to material objects and cultural discourses. The visual technologies ethnographers use, like the images they produce and view, will be invested with meanings, inspire responses and are likely to become a topic of conversation. (Pink, 2007, pp. 47-48)

Actors can be their own worst critics, and so, mindful of this as researcher, I don my director's hat and strike up a conversation with them. I ask what kinds of audience positions they can take up and what they can look for when they watch themselves enact their conversation. I employ the kind of inquiry shaped by constructionist and poststructuralist perspectives, which I described in Chapters 1 and 2, to investigate the different looking and listening positions that are available for them to take up to audience the DVD. These different positions might include looking and listening to judge, criticise, moralise, interrogate, understand, teach, learn, make meaning and so on. Chapter 5 elaborates the story of the preparatory conversation and discusses how it shapes the audiencing we do together as we prepare to take up respectful, appreciative and curious audience positions.

We then talk about the purpose of this audiencing. I invite the actors to sit back, and as the DVD plays, take note of what they see and hear that stands out, resonates, and strikes a chord with them. This is the kind of audience position I discussed in Chapter 1 that Michael White (1997) invited people he called

outsider witnesses into in therapy and supervision conversations. My role in this piece of the performance is to sit alongside the spect-actors and join them as audience to the DVD of their conversation.

When we are ready for the show to begin, I make the call “Lights! Curtain! Action!” The stage lights described in Chapter 2 illuminate the stage. A large screen lowers and the couple see a still image of themselves on the screen. I don my audience hat as the DVD begins to play on the screen.

As the DVD ends, a spotlight illuminates the three of us sitting alongside each other in the audience. I invite the couple to use their Scene 2 Conversation Inquiry Guide (Appendix 5, page 380), which I gave them at the end of the previous meeting, to generate conversation about what stands out, resonates, strikes a chord with them. From time to time, as they speak, I ask questions that invite clarification or extrapolation of the topics they identify. I provide a more detailed discussion about the inquiry guides in the *Scaffolding the inquiry guides* section, later in the chapter.

At the end of the Scene 2 conversation, I ask the partners to reflect on, and evaluate the Scene 2 conversation. I then describe the next phase in the performance, which is to select a part of the DVD that is of particular interest to them, to re-view that segment, and then have a conversation in which they focus on that particular aspect of their relationship.

I then ask the actors if they wish to proceed to the next phase of the research. If they do want to continue with this phase, we discuss arrangements to meet in two or three weeks for the Scene 3 enactment (see Table 1, page 106). I also remind them of the steps they can take if they change their mind about participating further between this Scene 2 meeting and Scene 3.

I transcribe the Scene 2 conversation (see later section *First analysis – Writing and reading the transcripts* – for a discussion on transcribing) and write a reflexive letter (see also later section *Reflexive letters*). I mail the reflexive letter (see Appendix 6, page 384), the transcripts of Scenes 1 and 2, and an inquiry

guide that I developed from the transcripts (see Appendix 7 and 8, pages 389-393) to the participants prior to meeting for Scene 3. The Scene 3 Inquiry Guides included selected topics of significance that the couple had identified in Scene 2. Under each topic heading, I listed several questions that they might ask each other to extrapolate and investigate the topic further. The inquiry guide provided questions that I shaped to use externalising language, to inquire about meanings, developments in the DVD of the Scene 1 conversation, and to deconstruct discursive practices the couple employed in this conversation. A discussion of the inquiry guides follows this performance. I now turn to the next phase of the performance.

Scene 3: A second taped research conversation with couple and researcher

The actors and I return to the theatre for Scene 3. We take our seats in the audience. We each have a copy of the Scene 3 Inquiry Guide. It has been two weeks since our Scene 2 conversation.

While we await the start of the performance, I begin a conversation that asks about the preceding days since we last sat in these seats and audienceed Scene 2. I am curious about what conversations and developments have occurred in relation to the performance over that time. This conversation creates space for participants and me to recollect and record any developments that have emerged between Scene 2 and 3. It also provides a link between the phases of the performance, and catches me up with how the couple's conversations have progressed in the interval. It is a way of re-orienting the three of us to the performance and it furthers our relational engagement with each other.

When the catch up conversation ends, I ask participants which topic/s in the inquiry guide they have agreed to re-view and investigate together. I am keen to know which piece of the Scene 1 performance they have elected to see replayed on the DVD on the stage.

Before viewing the segment of DVD, as a way of preparing to take up reflexive audienceing positions, I again instigate a preparatory conversation that I outlined

earlier in the chapter and describe in more detail in Chapter 5. In this conversation, for example, I ask how the actors might focus on their relationship as they watch the DVD. One of the actors speaks about taking up a third-person perspective that involves sitting on the couch and placing the relationship at a distance. This preparatory conversation creates a receiving context in which we can audience the second viewing of the selected segment of the DVD, in the spirit of reflexive, relational, appreciative, curiosity I theorised in Chapter 2.

When we are ready to view the DVD, I call “Curtain! Lights! Camera! Action! The couple are at once spect-actors: as the lights dim and the DVD begins to play, together we audience the segment of the performance of their Scene 1 taped conversation.

The DVD ends and the lights shine on the three of us seated in the audience. The spect-actors pick up their Scene 3 Inquiry Guides and engage in a discussion of the aspects of performance that captured their attention. I position myself as I did in Scene 2, and from time to time ask questions that invite clarification or extrapolation of the topics they discuss together as a couple. After an hour or so, the conversation draws to a close and the lights dim.

After the performance, I ask participants if they wish to address any of the other topics in the Scene 3 Inquiry Guide. If they do, we arrange for a further Scene 3 meeting at a later time. Scene 3 involves a re-view of the segment of the DVD of their Scene 1 conversation that pertains to the topic they wish to focus on and develop. When the actors make the call to move on to the final scene in the performance – Scene 4 - we discuss what is involved, I ask about their willingness to continue to the next step, and we make a time to meet again, in two or three weeks, for the Scene 4 Review of the Research Process. Following Scene 3, I again produce a transcript of the conversation we had together after viewing the segment of the Scene 1 DVD, and I write a reflexive letter - Scene 3 (b), which I mail to the couple, along with a Scene 4 Inquiry Guide (See Appendix 10, page 405).

Scene 4: Review of the research process

An ethic of beneficence

Before going on to the Scene 4 performance, I introduce my rationale for its inclusion in the research process. A central intention of this study is for participants, the wider community, and my professional practice to benefit from the research process. Other research scholars have proposed the idea that participants, and others, including researchers, benefit from research. For example, Stephen Gaddis (2004) reported that he, and his research participants, benefited from their involvement in his research that investigated counselling practice. Mary Belenky (1986) and her colleagues, in their feminist study of women's voices in education, wrote that "in our attempt to bring forward the ordinary voice, that voice had educated us" (p. 20). Shulamit Reinharz (1992) also claimed that many feminist researchers are profoundly changed by the learning about themselves that is generated in research. The Scene 4 enactment, that reviews the data generation phase of my research process, provides a forum in which the participants, and I, speak about how our involvement in this part of the research project has shaped our lives. This conversation includes how we have benefited from our participation in the research conversations in rich and generative ways.

Locating myself in the process

The ideas and practices I investigate here link, inextricably, to the events of my life. To not locate myself in the story of this project, or acknowledge the profound effects that engagement in this research has had on my life and work, would be an act of negligence. Referring to therapeutic relationships, Michael White (1997) made a similar claim. He proposed, that as therapists, to fail to acknowledge what he called a two-way account is to "deny ourselves the opportunity to plot significant events of our work into the story-lines of our lives" (White, 1997, p. 130). The creation of space for two-way acknowledgement was a step I took towards an ethic of entering the relationship in ways Arthur Frank (2000; 2002) proposed, and I referred to in Chapter 1. A social constructionist approach to research locates the researcher in their research (Steier, 1991b): research that is produced in conversation and participation with others alongside

the participants: a position I take up in this research. I now return to the performance and to Scene 4.

Scene 4 enactment

Two weeks after the final Scene 3 enactment the couple and I gather in the theatre for the last time. Before the Scene 4 enactment begins, we wander around the stage setting – the lounge room - with its comfortable armchairs and the large screen that has played and re-played the DVD of the Scene 1 conversation. We glance over the transcripts, letters, inquiry guides, and reflexion notebooks that we produced throughout the performance and we reminisce about the weeks since we first met. At this point, we are spect-actors and co-researchers. When the performance is almost ready to begin we take our seats alongside each other in the audience and prepare to reflect on the stage we can see from our seats in the audience, and on the acting and audiencing we have engaged with together over the weeks. I ask the participants to step into the reflexive, respectful, appreciative, and curious audience positions that they have taken up to view earlier scenes.

I then call “Lights! Camera! Action!” The DVD recording of Scene 1 plays on the large screen. As we watch it play, and with Scenes 2 and 3 in mind, we begin to discuss the questions on the Scene 4, Review of the Research Inquiry Guide (see Appendix 10, page 405) that I mailed to them after Scene 3. This guide includes a range of topics to prompt us in our conversation, and its questions, which I have developed, assist us to position ourselves for a reflexive audiencing inquiry. This inquiry includes taking up a stance of respectful, appreciative, curiosity. The participants and I also engage in reflexive deconstructing and externalising conversations, which I discussed in Chapter 2. As our conversation ends and the curtain falls on the stage, we say our farewells and the couple leaves the theatre. I make my way to the stage and gather up the recording equipment, DVDs, letters, transcripts, and reflexion notebooks.

There is one more transcript to produce and one reflexive letter to write. After I mail these to the couple, I prepare for the analysis. As I consider the next step I do so with these words from Arthur Frank (2002) in mind: “the researcher who solicits people’s stories does not simply collect data but assents to enter into a

relationship with the respondent” (p. 16). I take this relational ethic into the next part of the chapter which addresses the writing and reading of transcripts; the development of inquiry guides; and producing reflexive letters.

First analysis - Writing and reading the transcripts

I now take a behind-the-scenes look at the steps I took as director to read and to transcribe the enactments of Scenes 1 to 4. These transcripts along with the DVDs, reflexion notebooks, reflexive letters and inquiry guides, provided the archival documents that the research participants and I used in our co-research and analyses of their couple relationships and of the research process. The spirit of inquiry the texts call for, and the position I took up to read them, were inspired by David Epston’s (1999) practices of co-research. He found that he and those who consulted him in counselling produced knowledge and ways of addressing the problems that brought people to therapy when they took up positions as co-researchers. Together, they investigated the problems and their effects and they generated rich and effective strategies for addressing them. They then documented and archived this privately generated knowledge. They made the archives available for others to consult and benefit. David Epston (1999) wrote:

[D]ocuments record knowledge-in-the-making and reveal it as such. There is no wish at all to use the conceit of “completed knowledges” that promise to have all the answers. By comparison, the archive would wish to provide some of the best and most poignant questions and pertinent lines of inquiry. I am referring to the distinctive “reading” the archives call for as *resonation*. The archives are read for inspiration rather than right answers, prescriptions, etc. (p. 149, emphasis in original)

Each of the modes of documentation generated in my research produced versions of experience that participants and I could read, and re read, to generate meaning, understanding and knowledge. In addition, each reading could yield multiple accounts of meaning, understanding and knowledge. Therefore, each reading created the opportunity for participants and me to generate new knowledge, meaning and understanding. These documents – the DVD, transcripts, reflexive letters and reflexion notebooks - provided the archives that I consulted to write

this thesis. There were also other possible benefits for participants. For example, together the documents provided an account of the research story and a point of reference for participants. These stories were a chronology of the knowledges, meanings and understandings that couples and I had generated over the course of the data generation phase of the research.

I preferred to transcribe the scripts myself because this practice offered me a further audiencing position from which to engage closely and reflexively with the data. As I positioned myself to transcribe the audio/DVDs of the research conversations, my interest was to employ a transcription style that would be accessible and reader-friendly for research participants. A key purpose of this study was to generate the participants' meanings and evaluations of their relationship experience. How participants understood what was resonant and meaningful to them, on their terms and in their lived experience, was a guiding principle I employed as I engaged in the selective process of transcribing audio/DVDs.

I transcribed from audio recordings and then used video recordings to provide some of the non-verbal expressions that were not visible in the audio or written text. Examples of these invisible non-verbal expressions include, smiles, yawns and laughs that were important to include in some aspects of the transcripts and were less important in others. For instance, when humour was the focus of conversation I included bracketed text that depicted smiles, laughs, and voice intonation such as smiling voice or laughing voice. In Amber and Philip's conversations, Amber showed her response to humour by laughing, whereas Philip's response to humour was evident in his facial expressions and in his voice - which I described as a smiling voice. In the transcripts of Amber and Philip's conversations, I paid careful attention to including these distinctions so that the multiple expressions of humour were visible. However, this practice was not so necessary in other participants' transcripts. Rather than be guided by hard and fast conventions, I made arbitrary inclusions and exclusions that the contexts of the conversations shaped. As I took these arbitrary steps, I paid particular attention to areas of conversation that participants identified as meaningful and important to them.

These transcripts were working documents that the participants and I used during and between our conversations together. To make the transcripts readable for the participants I began each speaking segment with the speaker's name, and I used standard prose and punctuation. My aim was to produce a smooth version for the reader, whilst capturing the speaker's conversational style. I edited out fillers, such as um and ah, which I considered irrelevant for the analysis of the text at that point. However, if these fillers showed a participant thinking aloud or negotiating new or difficult conversational territory, I included them to show the work they were doing.

As I negotiated the inclusion/exclusion territory yet again, I took into account the effects of including or excluding fillers, interruptions, yawns, smiles, laughs and so on, for the reader, and for the context of the conversational moment that I was transcribing and reading. I used a highlighter to make visible any words that I deemed potentially identifying of participants. I then invited them to edit each transcript so that it adequately represented what they said and meant, and did not contain any information that might identify them, or others they spoke of, to a reader. When preparing the extracts of transcript for inclusion in this thesis document I engaged in further refining of the text. I show these steps in Appendix 11 (page 407) and Appendix 12 (page 413) and further elaborate them in the analysis section of this chapter, which follows shortly.

Scaffolding the inquiry guides

From the transcripts, I developed the inquiry guides that participants and I used to guide our research conversations. The ethos, theory and ethics that this project has so far described, shaped the questions: the inquiry was not neutral. Social constructionist and poststructural perspectives informed the inquiry and invited appreciative curiosity, deconstruction, meaning-making and an emphasis on the relationships the couples were co-producing as they talked together. These questions also had the effect of inviting couples into a reflexive stance of inquiry. My purpose in these inquiries, was to create a context in which couples had access to and could enact a wider repertoire of relationship practices including those that

appreciative curiosity, deconstruction, meaning-making and an emphasis on the relationship contribute.

Asking these questions directly of participants, and through the inquiry guides, I put in place a scaffolding process. The inquiry guides were the means for couples to ask questions of each other. These questions provided an experiential learning context in which participants could try out and experience particular practices of inquiry. This process created the opportunity to extend the discursive repertoires to which they had access. The notion that learning occurs interpersonally, in relationship, was proposed by Russian philosopher Lev Vygotsky (1999). He termed the space in which this learning occurs as the “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, p. xxxv): a relational space in which disorganized, spontaneous concepts come into contact with systematic, logical, developed reasoning and structures, in a process of progressive development formation.

He proposed that people take up gestures in a behavioural repertoire through the social process of others first introducing the gesture as a socially meaningful act of communication. In the context of this research, the gestures are curious, appreciative questions that I constructed and made available to participants through the inquiry guides. The questions included the use of externalising language that invited participants to respond to them from third-person perspectives. Questions, such as *how's our relationship different*, sought to develop the meanings couples made of their relational context. Lev Vygotsky (1999) described this phase of the process as a gesture from others - me as the researcher - “for others” - the participants (p. xxvii). The gesture then becomes a “gesture-for-oneself” - the participants - when it is used and consciously understood by the person who has taken it up.

By providing the questions that participants can ask of each other, I produced a scaffold for them to experience new and different practices of inquiry. My questions, which I asked directly or included in the inquiry guides, provided a way for participants to negotiate the zone between known and familiar relating styles and the less familiar reflexive audiencing process. The step of calling these documents *guides* was deliberate. My intention was to provide the questions as

guides that participants could use as a reference. I invited them to refer to the guides but with an emphasis on talking about what was of interest and meaning to them. I suggested that they may have questions and ideas that were not on the guide that were of more interest to them. However, the guides shaped the kinds of relational and appreciative conversations I hoped to introduce participants to, and engage them in.

Furthermore, each inquiry guide differed in its context and intention. Guide 2 asked couples to pay attention, during Scene 2, to what resonated about what was said and done in the taped conversation (Scene 1), and to reflect on and evaluate these aspects. Guide 3, used in Scene 3, involved particular topics that participants identified from Scene 2 and my intention in the questions was for couples to explore and develop the story of the topic. Guide 4 involved the couples and me in a reflection of the overall research process and its effects for us personally and for our relationships.

My authority is evident in the production of the questions and in the shaping of a particular kind of inquiry – that which invited participants to step into positions of appreciative curiosity, meaning-making and reflexivity. The couples' authority was evident in their selection of the questions and use of the guides as maps of the territory they were exploring (rather than as prescriptive directions for following a particular pre-determined route). As I reflect back on the research conversations, I note that each couple did use the inquiry guides as prompts, picking out one or two of the questions from time to time, but not following them closely or systematically.

Reflexive letters

As well as generating transcripts and inquiry guides from the video and audio tapes of the research conversations, I wrote and sent reflexive letters to participants. These letters were a development of the therapeutic letters and documents used in narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990) and in narrative research (Gaddis, 2002). David Epston and Michael White (1990) introduced various literary documents into narrative therapy practice, including letters, declarations and certificates, and spoke highly of the benefits of these practices:

We have found literate means to be of very great service in the introduction of new perspectives and to a “range of possible worlds”, to the privileging of vital aspects of lived experience in the “recreation” of unfolding stories, in enlisting persons in the re-authoring of their lives and relationships. (p. 217)

Similarly, Stephen Gaddis (2002) utilised research letters to summarise themes that emerged in his data analysis. Following Stephen Gaddis (2002) I developed letters that would serve as truncated reflexions of the research transcripts that highlighted aspects of conversation that the couples identified as important and meaningful. I included the letters in the archives I spoke of earlier, which provided a forum of acknowledgement, to couples, of aspects of their conversations to which they gave value. Letters provided the couples with a record, or snapshot, of the relationship conversations that we produced in the research. Furthermore, by being accessible to couples between research meetings, the letters may have inspired further reflexions and conversations between the partners.

I draw attention to the shaping effects of these letters for research participants and for me. In the process of constructing the letters, I encountered dilemmas that I had not anticipated in the design phase of the project. As I began to author the letters, I realised that it was inevitable that I would be required to select which aspects I included, and which I excluded, from the DVDs, audio tapes, and transcript texts of the research conversations to which the letters referred. I found that in all instances there were far more areas of interest to participants in the conversations than I could include in the letters, if I were to write them in ways that were reader friendly and served the purposes I had intended for them. This selection process involved me making the arbitrary call to privilege the conversational moments that I considered most captured participants’ interest. In doing so, I shaped the research story. The language I used to construct letters produced a further inevitable shaping effect. The selections I made and the words I wrote in the letters could have been different to those the participants might have selected and used if they had written the letters.

As I wrote and selected, I was mindful of maintaining a decentred and influential posture. Speaking of therapeutic conversations, Michael White (2005) described a decentred posture as “the therapist’s achievement in according priority to the personal stories and to the knowledges and skills of these people”, so that they may maintain “primary authorship status” of accounts of their lives (p. 9). He suggested that a stance of reflexion and inquiry that assists people to understand and live their lives in ways they identify as rich and generative, achieves an influential posture. I took Michael White’s (2005) ideas about influential and decentred practice in therapeutic contexts into my research practice as a way of working to acknowledge the research participants as primary authors of the stories they produced. It was particularly important to hold this knowledge at times when I was influential in making selections from the many stories and then re-telling these stories in the transcripts, letters and this thesis.

At times, I used research supervision as a site in which I negotiated these selection dilemmas. Ethical practices that centred the research participants and took into account what was manageable and meaningful for them guided me. I regularly asked participants to comment about the letters, to take from them what was meaningful and relevant for them as a couple, and to edit them so they most closely represented what the partners said or meant.

Participants reported a range of responses, including the time that they needed to attend to the letters, as well as the benefits of them. Laura and Andrew’s following comments include these two dimensions.

Laura	In terms of getting your letters, they're great, but there's probably times when it's like, "Oh we could think about all these things, we could talk about all these things but oh gosh I haven't got time" ... So I guess there's times when I felt a little bit overwhelmed, but having said that also this [letter] gives us a record of potential further conversations. I really liked the questions you've put out there. That's pretty cool stuff. This felt right and when I read it it's like, "Oh that's a good thing to look at" ...
Andrew	I think the thoroughness that you've put in [the letters] is really important. It just places a huge value on what we've done. It just shows the depth [one is] able to think these things through to.

Part 3. Analysis

Whilst this discussion of analysis completes the method chapter, ideas about analysis were at the forefront of this project throughout each step of the process. Theories and practices of analysis all shaped how I positioned myself theoretically and pragmatically in the design phase of the study; how I constructed the research questions; how I developed the inquiry guides that participants used; and how I engaged in the research interviews. They also shaped how I read and transcribed the texts produced in the study; how I selected the topics for analysis; and how I used the data to develop the results chapters. The methods of analysis that I pay particular attention to in this chapter are reflexive audiencing practices, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, Foucauldian discourse analysis and conversation analysis. I address each of these methods of analysis in this part of the chapter.

Positioning myself for the analysis

As I have mentioned, from the outset of the study my intention was to centralise the voices of the research participants, and to report their stories of local knowledge in ways that resembled as closely as possible their accounts, and the spirit in which the stories had been produced. This intention speaks to ethics of care (Ellis, 2007) and humility (Frank, 2002). Referring to narrative analysis, Arthur Frank (2002) said, "[n]arrative analysis needs all possible humility when asking what it brings to stories" (p. 114). I suggest that ethics of care and humility called for me to stay mindful of the idea that the stories in my care were

the stories of those whose voices I wished to privilege in the research story, and that the expressions in these couple stories depicted real life moments of real people.

Those who have shared their stories with me have done so in the hope that I would represent them as ethically, professionally, respectfully and accurately as possible. I understood this kind of humility and care as a practice of accountability that I was wakeful to as I engaged in this study's analyses, particularly as I was positioned as primary author of the research stories. With these ethics in mind, I looked to a method of analysis that would serve my purposes as I selected segments of participants' stories, and considered them for inclusion in this written report.

Reflexive audiencing as a method of analysis

During the course of the research, I came to realise that the practices of inquiry that I developed to investigate couple relationship conversations alongside couples – reflexive audiencing practices – also provided a framework that I could draw from to guide me in this study's analysis. To tell this story of analysis, I again employ the performance metaphor and describe the three-scene process I used.

Scene 1

In this production of research analysis, like the couples who participated in the research conversations, I took up the position of spect-actor in relation to the research texts. I gathered up the twenty-two transcripts, DVDs and tape recordings, and the twenty reflexive letters that the participants and I produced. These texts were all translations – versions of the research conversations - and provided me with the material to investigate the research questions in similar ways that the Scene 1 DVD provided couples with the means to investigate their relationship conversations.

Scene 2

With these research texts, I positioned myself as audience to engage in multiple readings and re-readings of the written and audio-visual versions of data. Taking

up this audiencing position involved me making a conceptual move from a maze-dweller position – from my part *in* the production of the data - to a maze-viewer position to focus *on* the production of the data. This repositioning created a reflexive/liminal space between the data I read and produced an account of, and me. The same constructionist and poststructuralist perspectives, ethics and practices, which I have espoused in this thesis so far, shaped my reading. I refer to Chapter 2, for example, and the theoretical perspectives I presented as beams of light that shone down on the stage and created the hue through which to look at the performance. I placed these texts on the stage, under the lights, and noticed from the audience position how the beams of social constructionism and poststructuralism highlighted the social and relational constitution of meaning and understanding. Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000) and curiosity were evident in intersecting beams cast across the texts. The various discourses such as gender, communication and coupledness, and the subjectivities these discursive territories produced, were illuminated in the silver ball that hung above the stage. Discourses of gender, power, relationship and communication showed in the positioning theory strobe. The light of deconstruction also shone on my inquiry of the data texts.

The DVDs, audio recordings, transcripts and reflexive letters all included versions of the participants' accounts of their experience, and their analyses of their conversations. What I found in practice, as I began to investigate the texts that the research participants and I generated in the research, was that my task was much more complex than I had previously thought. The participants' analyses, which I had hoped to report on in this written thesis, were only a first step in the process of analysis.

My readings of the transcript texts identified many possible research stories that I could tell. The volume of these possible stories exceeded the space that was available in the thesis. I again encountered what I have so far called the muddled boundaries of inclusion and exclusion territory. I faced the author-itorial responsibility of selecting what could be included in the written thesis story. The position of arbiter and censor of the participants' stories did not sit well with me and was one I had not anticipated taking up when I set out on the research.

I found myself facing a similar dilemma that Kathie Crocket (2001) identified in her doctoral work. Like me, she did not wish her author-ship “to be at the cost of rendering other participants objects of study” (Crocket, 2001, p. 123). However, as she noted the research texts had become her objects of study. I shared her intention to “remain in responsible and ethical relationship with those whose actions had produced the transcript-texts” (Crocket, 2001, p. 123) as I negotiated the “person: text ambivalence” (Crocket, 2001, p. 125) through the process of analysis.

To negotiate these ethical dilemmas, I turned to another theme, one that had guided me in other similar moments in this project – that of resonance. The questions I asked, to assist me in the selections of text I might include in this thesis story, were, firstly, “What stories stand out to me as most resonant for the participants?” Secondly, “How do these stories resonate with the context of the constructionist, poststructuralist research project I espouse here and the research questions it asks? Negotiating the territories of resonance and the politics of authority with which I attended to resonance were an ongoing concern for me through the analysis in this research.

Scene 3

In this third phase, I created a synthesis from selections of theory and practices of analysis across a range of methods. Along with the questions I asked, above, to guide me as I negotiated territories of resonance and authority, these theories and practices of analysis shaped the context in which I could read and ask questions of the research stories I had selected from the research texts. The first of these theories was narrative analysis. In responding from a narrative rationality, I used the text to display the data and to identify the discursive repertoires the couples used in their conversations. I sought to illuminate the work of these practices using constructionist and poststructuralist lenses of inquiry. In part, constructionist inquiry directs attention to social interactions and invites a stance of critique in the taken-for-granted world (Gergen, 1985a). I sought to produce a deconstructive reading of the repertoires participants employed and the modus operandi of these repertoires as they unfolded in the moment-by-moment

constitution of conversation. My analyses or interpretations of the texts, centred on the couples' individual and relational identities and how discursive territories couples drew from in their conversations shaped those territories.

As I began to write the analyses, I faced a further authoritorial call. Rather than merely producing a report of the participants' analyses – of being the link who relayed their accounts into print as I had initially intended to do - I then discovered that I needed to use the participants' stories in creative ways in order to produce a scholarly and readable thesis text. For example, in Chapter 5, I take the step of conflating the voices of five couples so they spoke as one couple – Alex and Chris. I explain my reasons for taking this step in Chapter 5. Furthermore, following supervision conversations that deliberated over the method of analysis for Chapter 5, I took steps to obscure the gender of the participants by allocating them different pseudonyms than those they had chosen, and by editing the data to exclude references to gender. This was a radical step for me to take as a feminist researcher: and one I did not take lightly. However, by using the names Alex and Chris and deemphasising individuality, I created a context in which I could identify and show some of the discourses of communication at work in couple conversational practice. I proceeded with this step of authoritorial licence, satisfied with the knowledge that aspects of couple practice – such as power relations and gender – which were temporarily located in the background would be fore-grounded in other chapters.

In Chapter 8, my method of analysis took a different turn. In Chapter 8, the participants spoke as five couples, but I took the step of personifying humour. I then involved Humour and the research participants, whom the account brought together as a group, in a performance that identified and deconstructed discourses of humour.

Articulating the particular stories I wanted to tell, in these two chapter examples, required an editing process which involved selecting small extracts of text from more detailed dialogue and weaving these pieces together to tell another story than had been told in any one set of couple meetings. To guide my selections I asked myself two questions: "Would my selections be recognisable to the

participants as their words and stories?” In addition, “Would these selections fit with the ethos and spirit of their relationship stories into which the words were offered?” I show an example of this editing process in Appendix 11 (page, 407) and Appendix 12 (page 413). Kathie Crocket’s (2001) ideas about attention to “person: text ambivalence” (p. 125) and “responsible and ethical relationship with those whose actions had produced the transcript-texts” (p. 123) guided me in my selections and re-presentations of the texts I storied in my analyses.

Whilst I sought to centralise what was resonant for participants, and take into account their unique stories and contexts, the two examples from my research I have given above do produce dissonance by decontextualising and recontextualising the couples’ accounts. Conflating the stories and voices of five couples to speak as one couple creates dissonance between the individual couples and their stories. This dissonance is particularly poignant for the reader who was not present when the stories were initially spoken and who does not have access to the context and spirit in which the stories were constituted. Similarly, in the example of personifying Humour and bringing the five couples together as a group, I also conflate the stories and decontextualise them. However, any step I took in the process of re-telling the couples’ stories would inevitably be a translation, a partial version of those stories. Amber’s words have often resonated for me as I have made these selections and translations.

Amber	You’ve been so clear and open about the fact that you’ll be changing names and you’ll be changing really obvious things that would identify us. I felt quite safe and happy with the way you are going to be writing it up.
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At the time when Amber spoke the words, I had very different ideas about how I would write up the thesis than the ideas that eventually shaped the final analyses. I am not sure what detail of the writing up process I might have conveyed to Amber at that time, or whether I have adequately attended to this safety. My efforts have been to go beyond attending to the ethics of anonymity and to take ethics of care, humility, safety, authority and re-presentation into the analyses along with inevitable politics of inclusion-exclusion, resonance-dissonance and

decontextualising-recontextualising. At times when I am negotiating these slippery, muddy, dynamic and complex territories, I remember Carolyn Ellis's (2007) suggestion, in the context of autoethnography, to "hold relational concerns as high as research" and "when possible to research from an ethic of care. That's the best we can do" (p. 25). The following four methods of analysis all pay attention to relational concerns and ethics of care and they each resonated with my study in significant ways. I now go on to describe these methods and their contributions to the accounts I offer in subsequent chapters.

Narrative analysis

Narrative analysis is interested in the shaping effects of relationship stories, practices which are expressions of these stories, and the social contexts in which stories are located. It is also interested in how stories produce person's identities. Questions like the following, proposed by Arthur Frank (2002), drew attention to the ways the participants' individual and couple identity stories shaped and were shaped by the discursive practices they employed. The questions were, therefore, relevant for the research questions I was asking:

How does a story detail *practices* in which the teller *claims an identity*?
How does the identity claimed in the story depend on certain values that go beyond the self, and how does the personal story make a claim for some social values against others? (Frank, 2002, p. 15, emphasis in original)

I would argue that the emphasis of these questions is on the discursive practices and the social construction of the identity stories people tell. In my analysis, I read for both the individual and relational identity stories the couples told, and considered the wider discursive context that produced these stories. For example, in Chapter 7, I provide accounts of the ways gendered discursive practices, which are available in the stories of four participants, produced individual and couple identities. I also show how these participants take up or refuse these identity positions and the effects of these practices for their couple relationships.

Discourse analysis

I also drew from discourse analysis because it asks questions of research texts that resonated with the research questions I was asking. For example, the following questions were proposed by Ian Parker (1999b) and emphasise discursive meaning-making. “What different meanings are at work in the text?” “How are these meanings constructed?” “What are these contradictory systems of meaning doing?” “What are the contradictions and dominant meanings?” (Parker, 1999b, pp. 6-7) These questions, which address the ways systems of meaning inform and shape lives and relationships, guided me as I considered practices of meaning-making in the conversations I was investigating. Chapter 6 pays particular attention to how participants shaped systems of meaning in the research conversations and how these systems of meaning shaped participants.

Foucauldian discourse analysis

I was also drawn to aspects of Foucauldian discourse analysis (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008) because it addresses mechanisms of power and is suited to the investigation of in situ interactions. Foucauldian discourse analysis pays attention to the role of language in the constitution of persons social and individual lived experience (Willig, 2008). Of particular interest to me were questions that asked “about the relationship between discourse and how people think or feel (subjectivity), what they may do (practices) and the material conditions within which such experiences may take place” (Willig, 2008, p. 113). These questions invited me to pay particular attention to the work of discourse in terms of the participants’ thoughts, feelings and practices, as well as the contexts of their lives.

These questions proposed by Michel Foucault (1978), were also important in the context of my study:

[W]hat were the most immediate, the most local power relations at work? How did they make possible these kinds of discourse, and conversely, how were these discourses used to support power relations? How was the action of these power relations modified by their very exercise, entailing a strengthening of some terms and a weakening of others, with effects of resistance and counter-investments, so that there has never existed one

type of stable subjugation, given once and for all? How were these power relations linked to one another according to the logic of a great strategy. (p. 97)

I suggest that these questions address power relations and the work these power relations do to produce, maintain and disturb discursive practices. I found Michel Foucault's (1978) questions helpful as I considered the research questions I developed to investigate stories of relationship, and how couples shape and are shaped by these stories. The questions that I have drawn from discourse analysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis, all sat well with the respectful, appreciative, curious stance of inquiry I sought for my analyses. These questions provided me with a range of areas to focus on as I read the research texts, such as meaning-making, power relations and the effects of discourse on identity development and subjectivity.

Conversation Analysis

The closeness with which conversation analysis looks at the moment-by-moment constitution of dialogue as it unfolds in conversation (Wilkinson, 2005) also influenced my reading of the texts. However, rather than focussing on the structure of the conversation, as conversation analysis tends to do, my focus was on the discursive positions that became available and were spoken into existence in the moment-by-moment unfolding of the research conversations-in-action.

I suggest that the blend of theory and practice I have drawn from – narrative analysis, reflexive audiencing practices, discourse analysis, Foucauldian discourse analysis and conversation analysis - has produced a method of analysis that created a context in which I could negotiate ethics of care, humility, safety, authority and re-presentation into the analyses. I add the inevitable politics of inclusion-exclusion, resonance-dissonance and decontextualising-recontextualising to these practices.

In this context, I was able to achieve my intentions to centre the voices of the research participants and to report some of the stories of local knowledge they produced. As researcher, I was able to tell a story that privileged the research

participants' commentaries and analyses of their relationship conversations. The story I produced addressed questions that asked about the discursive practices, positions, meanings and power relations that participants and I identified at work in the couple-only conversations and the subsequent research conversations that included both the participants and me. This story interwove with the participants' stories and it held the couples' stories up for appreciation, at times echoing and emphasising the stories they told. I worked to position our stories alongside each other, neither claiming to know more than the other, nor standing in oppositional relation to each other.

Reflexion of the chapter

I began this chapter with a composition of the study's design and method. I drew attention to the theories, ethos and ethics of practice that created a receiving context into which participants could step and engage in the research process. The descriptions of the data generation phase of the chapter involved a four-scene performance that the participants and I enacted as we moved between the spaces of stage and audience. Through this process of acting, viewing, re-viewing and review, we took up positions as co-researchers and spect-actors. All of these steps involved complex ethical and philosophical relations of negotiation and practice, of which I provide illustrations of in the chapter. Using the same ethos and ethics of practice, I then employed a three-scene process to show the ways I used the ethics, theory and practices of reflexive audiencing, and drew from narrative analysis, discourse analysis, Foucauldian discourse analysis and conversation analysis, to produce the method of analysis I use in the results chapters that follow.

Chapter 5. Reflexive audiencing practices: A deconstruction

I begin this chapter with a brief reflection to remind readers and to make links with Chapter 2. In that chapter, I took up the position of theatrical director to set the scene for performances of reflexive audiencing as relational practices. The setting in this chapter is the lounge room in the home of research participants - Alex and Chris. The construction of reflexive audiencing practices I developed in Chapter 2 undergoes a process of deconstruction in this chapter. Here I present an enactment of the separate components of reflexive audiencing practices using extracts of participants' texts that I selected from the research conversations. A process of systematic de-construction of key aspects shows the particular ways distinct factors are constitutive of relational practice. The work of this chapter is to show how reflexive audiencing practices produce a conversational space in which Chris and Alex effectively investigate and negotiate their intimate relationship conversations. I weave my commentary into the chapter, alongside Alex and Chris's, to provide a further layer of reflexive analysis.

The selected excerpts of participants' dialogue illustrate the moment-by-moment dialogical processes at work as they unfold between the partners in conversation. For example, in Section 1 I show how prescriptive communication discourses are deconstructed and re constructed by the couple as heterogeneous and diverse communication practices-in-action. Through this process, the couple extend the discursive repertoires to which they have access. Prescriptive discursive practices become strategies they can take up or refuse as they negotiate their way through their conversations.

I show some instances of conversation between couple partners that bring less familiar practices and processes of couple communication discourses into the spotlight. In emphasising the less familiar, I put the more familiar discourses into the background. I do this to illuminate a deconstructive, recursive, constitutive process of intimate relationship communication-in-action. In highlighting the patterns and processes of reflexive audiencing in this chapter, aspects such as

gender and power relations are de-emphasised and decentred. However, in Chapters 7 and 8, relations of gender and power take centre stage and are placed in the spotlight.

The theme of deconstruction continues in the final section of the chapter with a discussion that describes the steps I took to create a receiving context into which participants could step to engage with practices of reflexive audiencing that were not familiar to them prior to the research. I involved participants from the beginning in this process of preparation. However, I have taken the step of placing the discussion of this process towards the end of the chapter because the importance of the preparation process will be more salient once I make visible the theory and practices of reflexive audiencing.

In this chapter, I employ the representational strategy of presenting the group of research participants as if they speak as one couple. I refer to these two people as Alex and Chris. Gender-neutral names encapsulate both the heterosexual and same gender identification of research participants. My purposes in conflating the voices of several participants and presenting them as one couple, who represent a collective story of the group of participants in the analysis that follows, are twofold. Firstly, de-emphasising particular individuals shows discursive practice at work and therefore makes the productivity of discourse more visible. My second purpose is to shine the spotlight on the wider argument I am making. This argument is that looking through the lenses of social constructionist and poststructural perspectives, and emphasising a relational process of conversation, positions partners well to explore relationships-in-action. I propose, for example, that a curious, appreciative stance of inquiry makes important contributions to intimate relationship theory and practice.

The process of producing a collective story has some theoretical resonance with the work of Bronwyn Davies and colleagues (Davies, et al., 2006), which I referred to in Chapter 1. These scholars each wrote self-biographies that they developed into collective biographies to show the production of feminine subjectivity through a poststructuralist lens. In this chapter, I selected excerpts of data that participants had identified as meaningful to them, and combined them

together to write a composite story that shows the ways discourses of communication play out within the couple relationship context. Reflexive audiencing practices, which I described in Chapter 4, made aspects of these discourses that resonated with participants visible to them and to me. Noticing these aspects made it possible for participants to name them and to actively negotiate and shape the discursive conditions of their relationship conversations.

While introducing the chapter, I include a final point to guide readers. On some occasions during the chapter, when the pronoun “you” is used by participants to denote a general philosophical “you” rather than a specific “you” (with whom the speaker is in relationship), I have changed the word “you” to “one”. For example, Alex says, “sometimes if you take yourself and what you said it would surprise you that your tone ...” The edited version reads, “sometimes if one takes oneself and what one said it would surprise one that one’s tone ...”. My purpose in making the change is to show more clearly the repositioning of participants when they view and comment on their conversations from different vantage points. These vantage points are macro, in that they create a view of the conversation that participants can look-in-on. From this macro perspective it is possible for them to see the discursive practices of communication they use, not for the purpose of gauging the extent to which they comply with prescribed models of communication, but to deconstruct these practices with questions that ask what work these practices do and what effects they have for their relationship. Through the process of inquiry I propose, and detail in this chapter, the couple in the research extend their discursive repertoires and therefore add to the possible communication practices they can draw from and employ in their unique and variable relationship contexts.

Section 1: Discourses of communication

Discourse

I now move on to the first step in the process of deconstructing reflexive audiencing practices. I begin with an excerpt I have selected from a Scene 2 conversation (see Table 1, page 106) that Alex, Chris and I are having together after we have watched the DVD of their Scene 1 conversation for the first time. The excerpt refers to discourses of communication and, in particular, how Chris

and Alex employ what they understand as the terms of communication discourse that prescribe the step of “looking at each other’s eyes” as a necessary practice of respectful and attentive listening. Alex provides an account of how the couple were introduced to the discursive practice of “looking at each other’s eyes” in a relationship counselling conversation some time previously.

Alex	We went to counselling and the [counsellor] said, “You’ve got to sit at the table and look at each other’s eyes. It’s so important” ... And I never forgot that. I thought “Bloody right”. And ever since, I’ve been saying to Chris, “Full attention, look at me, look at me”.
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Alex identifies one of the rules of looking that constitutes a discourse of effective communication. In this example, the counsellor offered looking “at each other’s eyes” as a necessary function of effective communication. The conversation with the counsellor introduced Alex to the terms of a discourse of effective communication, which Alex accepted: looking “at each other’s eyes” is a regulatory practice of couple communication. The words, “You’ve got to”, make visible the regulatory feature of the practice of looking. I propose that the counsellor’s purpose was to offer Chris and Alex a way of showing each other that they are listening, as a practice of respect. However, there is potential for this account of looking to produce a rule of communication that is fixed and stable and therefore not open to question or critical investigation by Chris and Alex. Such an account can obscure contextual factors that may create space for the rule of looking that Alex and Chris have adopted, to be destabilised. In addition, obscuring these factors, and employing a unitary practice of looking, may also obscure the different ways of looking that are possible and that can have implications for Chris and Alex’s relationship. For example, in Chapter 2, I drew attention to the potential for a normalizing gaze to “qualify, to classify and to punish” (Foucault, 1977, p. 184).

Research has identified different intentions of eye-contact such as to convey “sexual attraction, friendship, hate, dominance or submission” (Argyle & Dean, 1965, p. 292), and interest, shame, contempt and anger (Tomkins, 2008). As well as these differences in ways of looking there are also the different meanings of

eye-contact that have evolved over time and that may shape Alex and Chris's experience of looking at each other's eyes. Michael Argyle and Janet Dean (1965) noted the cross-cultural differences in which meanings of eye-contact vary between taboo, acceptable and necessary practice. In a review of research on gaze and eye-contact, Chris Kleinke (1986) reported that in some cultures too little gaze can be interpreted as dishonest and disrespectful whilst in other cultures averting the eyes of another is considered respectful. Joan Metze and Patricia Kinloch (1984) wrote that in Maori and Samoan cultural contexts it may be considered "impolite to look directly at others when talking to them" (p. 13).

According to Alex's story, the counsellor had offered Alex and Chris cultural practices of looking and listening in particular ways. These practices are echoed in couple communication literature in books (McKay, Fanning, & Paleg, 2006), on websites (Ferguson, 2010) and through relationship education (Sanford, 2009). These sources subscribe to the notion that eye-contact is a necessary feature of listening practice and that effective listening enhances relationships. These various means construct the practice of looking "at each other's eyes" as a prescription of successful communication. Alex's words, "I thought 'bloody right'", suggest Alex readily took up the invitation to align with the discursive practice of looking "at each other's eyes" offered by the counsellor. By offering an account of the process through which Chris and Alex took up the invitation to look in these ways, defined and offered by discourse, I show the shaping effects of discourse on Alex and Chris's communication practice. However, understanding this practice of looking as a situated discursive practice, and one of many possible accounts of how couples look at each other, may not have been visible to Alex, Chris, or the counsellor.

I now move to a later stage in the conversation when Alex and Chris re-view a segment of the DVD and draw attention to a moment when they notice ways of looking at each other.

Chris	You looked at me and I was looking away. I don't know what that means.
Alex	I noticed that too. (Laughs) [It] means you're not interested in me.
Chris	No. [It doesn't mean that].
Alex	Watching it [on DVD] made me realise that you don't always make eye-contact and it's never bothered me. I don't have a problem with it.
Chris	It's not problematic to me at all.

The words, “Watching it on DVD made me realise”, show that watching the DVD made the realisation “that you don't always make eye-contact” visible to Alex. I suggest that this realisation becomes possible because of the visual and spatial perspective that the DVD offers Alex and Chris. At the time of speaking the conversation, the couple get to see only the other's looking practices, whereas in the DVD image, they get to see both their own and the other partner's looking. Therefore, in this reflexion conversation Alex and Chris take up different positions and have access to a different perspective. Alex and Chris entered this perspective by taking up maze-viewer positions, which I introduced in Chapter 1, and which created a vantage point to look in on the conversation-in-action as audience. They therefore have a different perspective on the looking process that provides a different conversational space in which the relational practice of looking is visible and they can reflexively investigate it.

Chris steps into this conversational space by naming an observation of a moment where the practice of looking was visible on the DVD: “You looked at me and I was looking away. I don't know what that means”. Earlier, Chris offered Alex, and Alex took up without question, the claim that “You've got to ... look at each other's eyes”. However, in watching the DVD, Chris notices in the interaction between them that they do not employ this regulatory practice of looking. The words, “I don't know what that means”, calls into question the meaning of both the regulated practice and of this counter-practice and makes the looking practices they use available for inquiry.

Alex then joins in the conversational space opened up by Chris and validates the observation by saying “I noticed that too”. Alex laughs and then offers an account of the meaning of this looking away: “It means you’re not interested in me”. Through these words, Alex accepts the discursive interpretation that says *if you don’t look at me, you’re not interested in me*. The meaning that Alex makes illustrates normalizing judgment (Foucault, 1977), which I introduced in Chapter 3, that measures and compares “looking away” against discursive principles or rules that define what constitutes interest. However, by laughing, Alex destabilises the claim that looking away means lack of interest. Alex simultaneously subscribes to the discourse and questions it. In so doing, Alex opens up space for other possible meanings of looking away.

Before going on to discuss how Alex destabilises the claim, I draw attention to the context that positions Alex and Chris to question their looking practice. The practices and ethos of reflexive audiencing create this context. In Chris and Alex’s conversation, reflexive audiencing involves three steps that I suggest are significant for the couple’s inquiry. Firstly, they have access to the DVD of the conversation that makes it possible to re-view the practice-in-action. Secondly, they take up positions as third-persons and maze-viewers that make it possible to see the practice as it unfolds. Thirdly, they take up a stance of appreciative curiosity that involves looking for what was resonant and meaningful to them. The process of preparation that I developed and described in Chapter 4, and that I invited them into prior to the Scene 2 conversation, assisted them to engage in this reflexive audiencing inquiry process.

I now return to the interaction between Alex and Chris and to Alex’s laugh that accompanies the words “[It] means you’re not interested in me”. The laugh casts doubt on the seriousness of the words Alex utters and indicates this doubt to Chris. Alex introduces irony, a disparity between what is said and what is meant. In Norman Fairclough’s (1992) terms, “irony depends on interpreters being able to recognize that the meaning of an echoed text is not the text producer’s meaning” (p. 123). In this moment, by laughing Alex conveys that other possible interpretations of the meaning of looking away are available for consideration. By saying “No”, Chris refuses the meaning offered by Alex that also suggests that

other discursive interpretations than the one put forward by Alex may be available. With access to these new discoveries, Alex and Chris are in positions to explore and select from the interpretations they identify as available to them.

I now move to the next step in the conversation where Alex responds to Chris's "No" with an evaluation of the practice of looking away. Alex makes a conclusion that "you don't always make eye-contact and it's never bothered me. I don't have a problem with it". Chris also takes up this view by saying "It's not problematic to me at all". At this moment, they are beginning to investigate a different meaning. This meaning is that eye-contact is not always necessary to portray respectful listening and attention. On these terms, effective communication can involve looking into each other's eyes but it can also involve different looking positions.

Through the dialogue Chris and Alex show how a discourse of effective communication initially produced the practice of looking "at each other's eyes" as a requirement. When Alex takes up the counsellor's reading of the discourse that produces "looking at each other's eyes" as a requirement it seems that this discursive position is the only one available to them. Through their conversation, which unpacks the meaning of looking away, the possibility of different interpretations of the meanings of looking emerges and, in this moment-by-moment dialogue, the regulatory terms of the discourse are disturbed and deregulated. Through this movement it is possible to see how the meanings Alex and Chris make of the discursive practices of looking are "progressively and dynamically achieved" (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 46) in conversation between them.

Deconstruction

The dialogue between Alex and Chris that I have just traced also shows the process of deconstruction at work. Deconstruction is a further practice of reflexive audiencing. A feature of deconstruction is its focus on "the self-contradictions in a text, on the tensions between what the text means to say and what it is none the less constrained to mean" (Kvale, 1992, p. 13). By saying "No" Alex exposes the limitation in the text that looking away does not

necessarily equate to lack of interest. Alex implies that a different reading of the discursive understanding is possible. Alex and Chris consider and evaluate the terms of the discourse and conclude that in this particular instance, in their unique relational context, eye-contact is not a requirement of interest. Through this process of deconstruction and review, in this conversational moment Alex and Chris question the discourse and create the possibility of transforming it.

I emphasise the momentariness of this discursive production. For example, in different contexts, the practice of looking away may indicate a range of meanings for Alex and Chris, including lack of interest. The discursive understanding reached between Alex and Chris does not set up another rule for looking as a couple, but produces an understanding that is open to ongoing critique and development depending on the context in which the dialogue occurs.

Furthermore, I draw attention to the shift in power relation that Alex and Chris produce when they deconstruct and contest the practice of looking away. Michel Foucault suggested (1978) that “[d]iscourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (p. 101), and that “[p]oints of resistance are present everywhere in the power network” (p. 95). In the conversation between Alex and Chris, they both refuse the idea that looking away indicates lack of interest, and agentially take up a counter position. This refusal thwarts the power of discourse and at the same time transforms the discourse. Alex and Chris are de-familiarising the familiar rule of communication that proposes that “looking at each other’s eyes” implies interest and effective listening.

Positioning theory

Through this process of de-familiarising, Alex and Chris reposition themselves in the discourse. They focus their attention on the relational unfolding of the conversation-in-action and in so doing they take up, resist, refuse and subvert positions the discourse calls them into in their conversations. This process illustrates practices of positioning theory that “helps focus attention on dynamic aspects of encounters” (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 43) and also “points to the efforts people make to resist and refuse discursive positions they are called into in

conversations” (Winslade, 2005, p. 351). As the chapter develops, I pick up and discuss the concept of positioning further.

Shaping discourse through dialogue

I now move on to another excerpt of conversation between Chris and Alex that provides a further illustration of the shaping effects of discourse and how a discourse of communication is transformed through dialogue. Alex is speaking about a discursive practice of maintaining focus on what the conversational partner is saying in order to produce effective listening.

Alex	One thing I picked up is that quite often I am thinking about what I’m going to say next while you’re speaking. ...I notice that’s a fault I have....
Chris	(Laughs) That means you’re not listening.

The words “that’s a fault I have” suggest that Alex knows the terms of the discourse of communication that defines effective listening. From this perspective, the discourse positions Alex as one who has failed to comply with those terms. Chris’s response, “That means you’re not listening”, indicates that Chris also knows and accepts the terms this discourse stories. However, by laughing, Chris troubles the “truth” of the claim that Alex was not listening. On Bakhtinian (Bakhtin, 1981) terms, discursive practices of listening are being dialogised by Chris and Alex as the authority of the truth of effective listening practices is destabilised. Alex continues.

Alex	Seeing it made me realise that I was doing it and I do it a lot. I didn’t realise how much I did it.
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I suggest that this is a critical moment and juncture for this conversation. I envisage a range of possible steps that Alex or Chris could take. For example, Alex could defend the practice of thinking about a next response as an acceptable listening practice, although naming it as “a fault I have” suggests to me that self-defence may not be a first step. The discourse could invite Alex into positions of

self-criticism, personal failure and of taking responsibility for contributing to not listening. As I read these words, I am reminded of Bronwyn Davies (1991) critique of dominant humanist discourses. She illuminated the understanding implicit in these discourses through which we are, in part, “spoken and speak ourselves into existence” and that persons have an obligation to speak on their own behalf and accept responsibility for their actions (Davies, p. 42). I wonder if Alex is speaking into existence the obligation offered by these discourses to take responsibility for actions that prevent or inhibit listening. It is possible that Alex takes further responsibility by noticing, reflexively, “that quite often I am thinking what I’m going to say next while you’re speaking” and takes this opportunity to re-visit the practice and reflect on it with Chris. At this point Chris could also respond and join Alex in responsibility, judgment and criticism talk. However, Chris’s response to Alex’s claim is to step into a position of critique by asking a question.

Chris	So when you watched the video, do you remember me saying those things in conversation?
Alex	Yeah.
Chris	So you probably were [listening].

Chris takes up a stance of curiosity to ask the question “do you remember me saying those things in conversation?” Chris also offers a counter claim that implies a different discursive reading is possible to the one Alex is employing. I suggest that curiosity creates space, in this moment, for Alex to consider the possibility of a new interpretation. Chris subverts the original discourse and at the same time produces different terms of the discourse that suggest to Alex, that *whilst you said you shut off, you do remember what we said. Further, because you do remember what we said, you do meet the terms of the discourse of effective communication.* In the conversational process, Chris disturbs the terms of the discourse on Alex’s behalf. Alex continues the conversation.

Alex It made me realise that I have to stop [thinking what I'm going to say next] and start listening, I should be looking at the person who's speaking ... I think it will [make a difference to look at Chris], I quite often misinterpret what [Chris] is saying.

So maybe it will help [to] see facial expressions as well, so it would probably help me to be on the same page ... But I'm quite a deep thinker anyway so maybe part of it was just part of my thinking process. I don't know.

Initially, by saying, "I have to stop thinking what I'm going to say next and start listening, I should be looking at the person who's speaking", Alex continues to submit to the terms of the discourse that positions Alex as one who has listened badly. Alex refuses Chris's invitation to engage with a transformed discourse of effective communication. Alex also names a further term of the discourse, that of "looking at the other person who's speaking".

However, in the second part of the statement Alex begins an analysis of looking and listening and produces a shift. Alex says, "But I'm quite a deep thinker, so maybe part of it was just part of my thinking process". These words suggest that Alex begins to consider a relationship with thinking *and* listening. This statement begins to trouble the idea that thinking precludes listening. Alex's analysis highlights a possible contradiction. Alex suggests that looking at Chris is a beneficial practice because it will assist in interpreting, more accurately, Chris's words. At the same time, Alex also begins to acknowledge and consider the relevance of deep thinking in effective communication.

The words, "I don't know", suggest that Alex has not yet reached a conclusion about what constitutes effective listening practice in this context. What is important in this research discussion is the ways Alex and Chris negotiate discourses of communication. Through the conversational process, Alex and Chris identify and deconstruct terms of the discourses. Through the process of deconstruction, the couple take up, refuse and transform discourses of communication in the context of their relationship-in-action. Thus, these

discourses are uniquely shaped and are subject to ongoing negotiation and review. This dialogue shows Alex and Chris move from fixed positions of good/inadequate listening to multiply positioned listening subjects.

I suggest the video is an important contributor to the process of subjectification that Alex and Chris just illustrated. Alex's words, "Seeing it made me realise that I was doing it", highlight how the DVD provides them with a reflecting surface that makes moments of practice-in-action visible and negotiable. The DVD gives Alex and Chris access to a visual dimension that is not available to them during the initial conversation. Alex's words imply that seeing the practice changes Alex's position in relation to the practice and creates space for them, as a couple, to deconstruct, to evaluate and to shape the practice.

Subjectification: The simultaneous process of mastery and submission

I now move on to consider the previous dialogue and the process of subjectification in terms of the concept of simultaneous mastery and submission that I have drawn from the work of Judith Butler (1997) and Bronwyn Davies (2006). I suggest that the dialogue I have just reviewed in the previous section is useful to illustrate how the concept of simultaneous mastery and submission works to produce Alex and Chris as subjects in the conversational moments of their relationship.

Judith Butler (1997) conceptualised the Foucauldian process of subjectivity as a simultaneous process of mastery and submission. She theorised an account of the process of subjectification. She suggested that people make themselves subjects by showing their familiarity with the terms of the discourse and subjecting themselves to those at the same time as being subjected by the discourses. Bronwyn Davies (2006) then used Judith Butler's analysis to show the process of simultaneous mastery and submission in an educational context. I consider the production of subjectification in Alex and Chris's intimate relational context because doing so highlights the paradoxical conditions in which they produce themselves in discourse, and discourse produces them, as subjects. This process of subjectification offers an added account of the complex and dynamic

conditions in which Alex, Chris and discourse are intricately woven and how they all shape each other, moment-by-moment, in recursive ways. To show this account, I selected excerpts from Chris and Alex's earlier dialogue and repeat them below.

Alex	One thing I picked up is that quite often I am thinking about what I'm going to say next while you're speaking ... I notice that's a fault I have.
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Naming the practice of "thinking about what I'm going to say next while you're speaking", and the effect, "that's a fault I have", could be read by Alex as *I know the terms of the discourse and I am listening inadequately. I have mastered and submitted to the terms of a discourse of effective communication.* A further point involves the terms of discourse that hail Alex to produce the self as a responsible and effective member of society. Through this discursive lens, Alex knows the terms of the discourse *that positions me as having failed as an effective listener, and I have mastered and submitted to taking individual responsibility to become an appropriate and effective listener on those terms.* Chris then responds to Alex.

Chris	(Laughs) That means you're not listening.
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Chris confirms Alex's claim, but by laughing and not taking seriously the terms of the discourse of effective communication, Chris engages in a simultaneous process of knowing the terms of the discourse and therefore exercising mastery of it, whilst refusing to submit fully to the terms of the discourse. Chris then attempts to subvert the discursive terms by implying that one can achieve listening if one remembers the content of the conversation.

Chris	So when you watched the video, do you remember me saying those things in conversation?
Alex	Yeah.
Chris	So you probably were [listening].

By laughing, Chris begins the process of undoing the discursive formation that Alex is employing. By asking the question, “do you remember me saying those things?” Chris provides more of that undoing. Alex’s claim, “That’s a fault I have”, implies that the fault is produced by, and belongs to, Alex alone.

Alex	It made me realise that I have to stop [thinking what I’m going to say next] and start listening. I should be looking at the person who’s speaking.
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Alex continues to master and submit to the terms of the discourse of effective communication by claiming the terms required to attain mastery of the discourse. These terms are “to stop [thinking what I’m going to say next] ... start listening ... looking at the person who’s speaking”. Discourse continues to position Alex as listening badly and personally responsible for failure to adhere to the terms of the discourse.

I suggest that Alex and Chris engage in a dynamic process of relational responsibility-taking as they negotiate the terms of discourse. Chris and Alex’s dialogue highlights what Bronwyn Davies (2006) emphasised about relational responsibility:

Our responsibility lies inside social relations and inside a responsibility to and for *oneself in relation to the other* – not oneself as a known entity, but oneself in process, unfolding or folding up, being done or undone, in relation to the other, again and again. (p. 436, emphasis in original)

In this dialogue between Alex and Chris, I show the kind of relational folding and unfolding to which Bronwyn Davies referred. The discursive practices of listening begin to be troubled and renegotiated in the dialogue. In the following words, Alex begins to engage in an analysis of the discursive practices of eye-contact and thinking-whilst-listening, in the context of Chris and Alex’s relationship.

Alex	I think it will [make a difference to look at Chris], I quite often misinterpret what [Chris] is saying ... So maybe it will help [to] see facial expressions as well, so it would probably help me to be on the same page ... But I'm quite a deep thinker anyway so maybe part of it was just part of my thinking process. I don't know.
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I note three important points. Firstly, aspects of discourse that both align and compete emerge from what Alex initially suggested as terms of the discourse of effective communication. The words, “I have to stop thinking what I’m going to say next and start listening”, suggest a binary position in which thinking precludes listening. However, in Alex’s last statement, which takes account of thinking, listening and limited eye-contact, I draw attention to a shift from an analysis based on the terms and conditions of the discourse, to an analysis that takes into account their skills to become critical and discerning, and to verbalise their experience in the context of their relationship. This analysis is that *seeing facial expressions can assist listening but is not always necessary for effective listening*.

Secondly, there is movement in the power relation as Chris and Alex shape an analysis of good/inadequate listening based on the terms of the discourse into an analysis of the ways they can negotiate looking and thinking in their unique relational context. These terms evolve as Alex and Chris re-interpret their actions and negotiate different meaning within the landscapes of hopes, dreams and intentions they have for their relationship. Through this process, Alex and Chris define the terms of discourse beyond the terms to which they initially had access. Alex and Chris are involved as “speaking subjects” (Davies, 1991, p. 50). This means, that through the reflexive process of considering their conversational practice-in-action, and disrupting the terms of that practice-in-action, they agentically and authoritatively speak themselves and discourse into existence in new ways.

Thirdly, Alex and Chris show that one cannot be a particular, static kind of listener on one’s own. They dynamically negotiate and renegotiate listening in the context of social relations. Discourse always shapes listening, and as

relational partners, they can shape listening discourse. What might constitute good listening in one context may vary in different situations. As Chris and Alex look at and review discursive practices of communication in the context of their relationship, they shape relations of knowledge/power. The terms of discourse that they produce in this conversation, extend the discursive repertoires and the knowledge available to them about the listening practices to which they have access. Through this process, prescriptive terms of discourse are accessible alongside uniquely-shaped terms of discourse. This work that Chris and Alex are doing in this conversation has resonance with the kind of responsibility-taking Bronwyn Davies (2006) spoke of in the context of educational institutions:

We must take responsibility for examining ... discursive practices that are taken for granted ... and ask: what conditions of possibility are they creating and maintaining ...? In what ways do those conditions of possibility afford ... a viable life? And in what ways may they be said to fall short of adequate care? (pp. 436-437)

I take a moment to consider Bronwyn Davies (2006) words, firstly, in the wider context of this study, and then secondly, to show how the meaning of these words is also relevant in the context of Chris and Alex's relationship.

I have developed reflexive audiencing as a conceptual framework for couples in this research to identify and to examine taken-as-given conversational practices, and to consider the conditions of possibility these practices create and maintain in terms of what couples consider viable for their relationships. I have done this because I believe that this process of reflexion and review creates space for couples to understand and act on their relationships-in-action in ways that take into account the inimitable contexts in which couples live and relate with each other. I propose that, in this space, couples can extend and shape the discursive repertoires they use in unique and dynamic ways.

In the example of Alex and Chris's relationship, they employed reflexive audiencing practices to take up responsibility for examining the discursive practice of "thinking what I'm going to say next while you're speaking". By

noticing and examining the practice it was no longer possible for it to be taken-for-granted – its conditions of possibility were available for inquiry. Through the examination process, the couple re-created the conditions in which they could master and submit to what they deemed to be effective relationship-talk-in-action that they shaped uniquely through talk-in-action.

Section 2: Components of reflexive audiencing practices

A stance of inquiry - Reflexive eye/I, curiosity, relational “we”

I now move to examine the conditions of possibility that stances of inquiry and questions create and maintain in the context of Chris and Alex’s relationship. I show how questions shape, and are shaped by, Chris and Alex in the moment-by-moment process of inquiry-in-action.

Chris speaks the following words during the final Scene 4 research conversation (see Table 1, page 106) in which Alex, Chris and I engage in a reflexion of the overall research process. Chris introduces the topic of asking questions and begins a discussion on the shaping effects of questions.

Chris	I think what we have to do, is watch how we are [talking] and not actually get hooked up in the “why did you say that?” [But rather ask] “What are we doing?”
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Chris is suggesting steps the couple might take into account in future conversations. These developments are emerging through a process of reflexive audiencing that they produce as they view an interaction between them, evaluate that interaction, and identify further steps they might take to enrich the interaction.

There are several further important points Chris’s words highlight. Firstly, Chris’s suggestion of a move from an emphasis on what “you” said, to an emphasis on “how we are talking”, creates the opportunity to step into relational inquiry. This relationality conceptualises relationships as dynamic and influential - they change from moment to moment, shaped and reshaped by relational partners and discourse, in a dynamic and complex force-field (Condit, 2006).

Relational inquiry involves paying attention to the discursive production of the interaction between Alex and Chris: the “how we are talking”.

Secondly, as Alex and Chris speak these words they actively produce discursive practices of inquiry in language. Chris’s words shape a new conversational strategy that they, as a couple, can draw from and employ at times in conversation. This strategy is to pay attention to “how we are [talking]”, to de emphasise questions such as “why did you say that?”, and to ask instead, “what are we doing?” Chris and Alex constitute relational identity in this dialogic interaction and through the discursive practices in which they engage.

Thirdly, Chris implies that the two questions have different implications for how they view and respond to the conversation between them. I use these questions to explore how they might produce different implications for Alex and Chris’s relationship. To show these implications I distinguish between the two stances of reflexivity – judgement eye/I and reflexive eye/I (Davies, et al., 2004) that I discussed in Chapter 2. A judgement eye/I involves a “gaze that judges”, a “moral gaze”, a “surveilling, governing eye” that is “potentially always switched on, gazing at and containing my actions” (Davies, et al., 2004, p. 376). In this context of intimate relationships, I extend this concept to include a gaze that also observes the actions of the conversational partner, that I term, a judgement eye/you gaze. Chris’s question - “why did you say that?” - emphasizes the “you”. When asked from a judgement eye/you position, the gaze focuses on Alex and seeks explanation and possibly justification for what Alex has said. The eye/you gaze may imply that *I already have an idea why you said that*. Alternatively, Alex as the person receiving the question may respond to a judgement eye/I position as the subject of the gaze and attempt to produce an answer acceptable to Chris. For example, in a Scene 2 conversation Alex reflected on questions asked by Chris:

Alex	It’s the hard questions, that’s when I start to feel uncomfortable, because you’re asking a really personal opinion. What if what I say is not what you want to hear? ... it feels like a test, like an exam.
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Here, Alex describes an effect of questions that ask, “Why did you say that?” These questions invite Alex to explain what was said, and they carry the risk that Chris may evaluate these explanations as inadequate. By suggesting an emphasis on “what are we doing?” Chris argues for a different kind of inquiry in this context. The words - “I think what we have to do” - and the question - “what are we doing?” - emphasise the “we” and invite a reflexive eye/I or reflexive eye/we stance of inquiry. This stance “ideally gazes without judgment ...finds the unexpected, the surprising - the contradictions, the 'good' and the 'bad' in all its detail ...to say with fascination, 'oh so that's how it is!'" (Davies, et al., 2004, p. 376) The question - “What are we doing?” - invites an exploration of the relational practice under investigation.

The fourth point of interest is that in focusing on the relational “we” - in the question “what are we doing?” - Chris implies a gaze that seeks to find the fascinating, “the unexpected, the surprising - the contradictions, the 'good' and the 'bad' in all its detail” (Davies, et al., 2004, p. 376). Such a question invites a stance of curiosity. An orientation of curiosity treats “the others or othernesses around us, not as an already known ‘problem’ to be solved, but as still radically unknown to us, and unknowable by us” (Shotter, 2005, p. 122).

Participants in this research used inquiry guides that I developed to guide their audiencing conversations and to ask each other questions from a stance of curiosity (see Appendices 5-9, pages 380 to 399). In a preparatory conversation, which I describe in the next section of this chapter, I invited Alex and Chris to think about possible stances of inquiry they might consider taking up to watch the DVD and to reflect on their conversation-in-action. I also invited them to consider asking questions of each other from a stance of curiosity. My intention, in the preparatory conversation and in the inquiry guides, was to create a context in which Alex and Chris could take up a reflexive eye/we gaze. In the following extract of text, Alex defines some of the elements and intentions of these questions of curiosity they asked of each other in the research conversations.

Alex	[The questions] are not judgmental or leading, so they keep things very safe. It's that curiousness, it's not wanting [a particular, preconceived] answer, it's trying to gain understanding.
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Alex refers to the safety of questions asked from an orientation of curiosity. This kind of inquiry, which has as its intention the development of discovery and understanding, contributes to this ethic of safety for Alex. I note that this safety is a different experience to the discomfort that Alex spoke of earlier that was evident in the words “it’s the hard questions, that’s when I start to feel uncomfortable”. This difference highlights the implications and effects of different stances of inquiry in different relational contexts that I now go on to discuss.

Earlier, Chris argued against Alex asking questions such as “why did you say that?” It is possible for Chris to read these questions as confrontational and produced from a judgement eye/you gaze. It is not clear from the dialogue what Alex’s intentions were at the time of asking “why” questions, but Chris reads these questions as ones that Alex knows the answer to. This reading is understandable when considered in the context of discursive practices of examination. Chris’s words refer to this context - “It feels like a test, like an exam” – and the gaze that produces a power relation in which Alex has access to a knowledge/power position that is not available to Chris.

According to Jim Dillon (1987), it is common for questioners and respondents to presume that the questioner already knows the answers to questions they ask. Furthermore, the question in this situation is for the benefit of the inquirer - the inquirer has the question and the answer - and the respondent gives the answer to the inquirer (Dillon, 1997). If Chris contemplates questions that it seems Alex already has preconceived answers to, the question may invite Chris into positions of justification and defence. The potential for “why” questions to offer people positions of being tested or examined is one reason why some counselling communication skill literature warns against using particular linguistic structures of questions such as “why” questions. For example, counsellors are encouraged to avoid questions beginning with the word why in their therapy conversations

because these questions invite defensiveness (Evans, Hearn, Uhlemann, & Ivey, 1989). I remember being discouraged from asking why questions in my counsellor education in the early 1990s, because of the potential for these questions to be interrogative and de-centring of the person positioned as the client.

Michael White (2007) also noted the prejudice, which has emerged in therapeutic contexts, against the use of “why” questions. He suggested that therapists have been careful to avoid engaging in practices of moral interrogation and for these reasons “why” questions have received bad press. These questions can contribute to demeaning and diminishing effects for persons subjected to this style of inquiry. However, Michael White (2007) called for the resurrection of the “why” question when it is associated with:

[H]elping people to give voice to and further develop important conceptions of living, including their intentional understanding about life, (for example, understanding their purposes, aspirations, goals, quests, and commitments), their understandings about what they value in life, their knowledge about life and life skills, and their prized learnings and realizations. (p. 49)

Evident in Michael White’s (2007) words, are the emphases on making meaning, the development of understanding and a spirit of appreciative curiosity. In the following example, I demonstrate these emphases by first creating a receiving context to ask a “why” question”: First, I ask, *You have suggested that a hope you have for your relationship is that you can both share special moments together. What are some of these special moments you hope to share?* In this context a “why” question is less likely to suggest that the “why” question that follows - *Why are these important for your relationship?* - implies moral interrogation or that I have preconceived ideas of a single, right answer. These features of meaning-making, developing understanding and a spirit of curiosity, were pre-requisites in the questions I asked in the inquiry guides and that Alex speaks of appreciating.

Participants gave “why” questions divergent ratings. Exploration of the different meanings and effects of “why” questions drew attention to the importance of

creating a receiving context for these questions to be usefully employed. For example, earlier Chris claimed that asking “why did you say that?” was unhelpful. However, in the dialogue that follows, Alex exemplifies how “why” questions contribute to rich understandings and relational development.

Alex	Someone stops you and says “Why?” You think, “Why did I say that?” I think it’s neat to do that. You suddenly realise “Why did I say that? Where have I picked this up from?” ...The questions [like] why we use humour in different types of conversations,
Chris	Mmm, it did make us think didn’t it? We came up with all sorts of different reasons.
Alex	They’re questions that prompt and guide us. I think they were good questions [that you gave us in the inquiry guides, Wendy], and from there one leads on to other things. It just makes one realise all the things that are sitting behind the conversation ... and the different ways of looking at it. Yeah, it just opens up all the possibilities really...
Chris	It’s like putting a question out there and saying “What about such and such?” and both of us looking at that and talking about it ... For instance, even the questions today, like “How’s our relationship different?” We wouldn’t normally use that as a basis for conversation ... but it’s very important.

The spirit of fascination associated with the reflexive eye/I gaze is evident in the dialogue between Alex and Chris. I suggest that this spirit of inquiry makes important contributions to the production of safety referred to earlier, which Alex noted in the words, “[The questions] are not judgmental or leading, so they keep things very safe”. The linguistic structure of “why” questions may have been similar for Alex and Chris in these examples I have traced so far, but the effects on the conversation have varied between uncomfortable and safe. Alex’s words, “It’s that curiousness, it’s not wanting a [particular preconceived] answer, it’s trying to gain understanding”, suggest a distinction between “why” questions that call for justification and defensiveness and “why” questions that are asked from a

stance of curiosity. On the terms of this most recent dialogue between Chris and Alex, it is unlikely that they would ask “why” questions that had an implicit preconceived answer. They would ask questions with the intention that the questions benefit both the person asking the question and the person responding to the question. Therefore, it is not the linguistic structure of “why” questions, per se, which shape how people are positioned, it is also the particular context in which the questions are asked along with the spirit of inquiry in which the questions are produced and responded to. In reflexive audiencing, the preparatory conversations I involved Chris and Alex in and the inquiry guides I developed for them to use provided scaffolding for Chris and Alex to be introduced to, and to employ, a spirit of curiosity.

So far, in this section, Alex has identified two stances of inquiry. One stance emerges from a “judgement eye/I” or “eye/you” orientation when *I ask a question because I want to hear a particular answer. Then, having heard that particular answer, I evaluate it on the terms that I deem appropriate in that situation.* The “why” in this context is different from the “why” in the second, “reflexive eye/I” and “eye/we” stance. From this stance, *I ask this question with the intention of developing understanding of this situation and for considering the possibilities these developments might contribute to our relationship and lived experience.*

Alex and Chris’s dialogue refers to the ways questions assist them to step into new and unfamiliar territory. This territory is evident in Chris’s words.

Chris	For instance, even the questions today [in the inquiry guides] like “How’s our relationship different?” We wouldn’t normally use that as a basis for conversation but it’s very important.
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Stepping into this territory provides the opportunity for meaningful discovery and understanding. For example, “It just makes you realise all the things that are sitting behind the conversation and the different ways of looking at it”, shows the generative and exploratory possibilities of questions asked from a stance of curiosity.

Reflexivity

So far, in this section of the chapter I have shown Alex and Chris negotiate practices of inquiry. The extracts of text I selected also show the work of reflexivity in action. Bronwyn Davies and her colleagues (2004) suggested that reflexivity involves “turning one’s reflexive gaze on discourse ...to see the work it does in constituting the world” (p. 361). Alex and Chris’s conversation drew attention to the work of questions; identified different meanings of “why” questions; the effects of “why” questions; and the possibilities “why” questions offer, at times, in their relationship conversations. As Chris and Alex deconstruct these questions, they take up positions to see simultaneously the object of their gaze and the means by which they constitute the gaze. For example, the comment, “It’s like putting a question out there and saying ‘What about such and such?’ and both of us looking at that and talking about it”, identifies the discursive practice of asking questions as an object of the couple’s gaze. Secondly, Alex and Chris identify the work that questions do in constituting their couple relationship: “They’re questions that prompt and guide us”, “you realise all the things that are sitting behind the conversation ...the different ways of looking at it ... it just opens up all the possibilities really”. Thirdly, these former steps show how Alex and Chris see simultaneously the inquiry process and the means by which they constitute the process. I suggest that in their process of inquiry Alex and Chris show the complex work of reflexivity-in-action:

[A] critical consciousness of the discourses that hold us in place, that is, a capacity to distance ourselves from them at the same time as we are constituted by them, a capacity to see the work they do and to question their effects at the same time as we live those effects. (Davies, et al., 2004, p. 380)

Later in the chapter, I show how the use of audio-visual technology assists Alex and Chris to distance spatially by taking up audiencing positions from which to see the work of discursive practices in their conversations. I now continue with the discussion on questions and how questions shape conversation and how conversational partners shape questions.

Stepping into questions of curiosity

Participants took up and used questions in ways that were new and different from those they normally asked each other in their relationship conversations. I suggest that these questions were new and different because the couples had not previously positioned themselves as third-person audiences to their conversations or taken up stances of inquiry that asked questions of their relationship practices from these positions. This stance and these questions are visible in the following dialogue in which Chris and Alex reflect on a moment in the DVD.

Alex	This is where humour reminded us of something. Did we go back to humour after that?
Chris	[Refers to the transcript] No, we didn't. What do you think that means?

I had introduced, through the inquiry guides, questions that sought to generate exploration and meaning such as “What do you think that means?” In the above dialogue, Alex and Chris adopt a stance of inquiry and ask questions, similar to those I introduced them to, without referring to the inquiry guide.

This shows the work of Lev Vygotsky's (1999) theory of development that proposes that people take up gestures from others as gestures for themselves when they use and understand the gestures they take up. In this example, Chris is taking the step of asking Alex “What do you think that means?” without referring to the inquiry guide.

Below, Alex describes the effects of the introduction to questions shaped by curiosity and the usefulness of these questions for their relationship conversations.

Alex I think your prompts [Wendy] and the questions that you wrote for us to have a look into were really good ... Just delving deeply into our conversations and seeing, [how] we used humour and how often we used it and how many types of humour Chris could label (laughs) It's made me more aware of how we talk, the way we speak, to each other.

Alex's words speak of enhanced awareness of "how we talk, the way we speak to each other". This development fits with the intention Chris voiced at the start of this section:

Chris I think what we have to do, is watch how we are [talking] and not actually get hooked up in the "why did you say that?" [But rather ask] "What are we doing?"

In this section, the extracts of Alex and Chris's transcript texts show them engaging in an analysis of what they are doing – of the practices they are using, and the effects of these practices – as audiences to their taped couple conversation.

Fostering an appreciative stance of inquiry

I have drawn attention to the contributions a stance of curiosity makes possible for Alex and Chris as they review their taped relationship conversation. I now extend the notion of curiosity to propose a stance of appreciative curiosity. Below, Alex distinguishes between a critical and an appreciative gaze on their conversation.

Alex Initially, the one thing I did actually find really helpful was the way that you [Wendy] explained [to Chris and me] ... that "you'll be looking at yourself in an interesting, observing way rather than a critical way" ... which isn't really the way I was taught when I was younger, to view things.

The “interesting, observing way” that Alex speaks of is shaped by an orientation of curiosity that I have brought to this research inquiry from my apprenticeships in narrative therapy (White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990). This orientation to curiosity includes an interest in looking for, and developing, aspects of lived experience that people give value to and that fit with preferred stories of their lives and relationships. As I have developed this research inquiry, practices of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000) have also added to the idea of appreciative curiosity.

I suggest that Chris asks the following question of Alex from such an appreciative stance.

Chris	When you watched the video, do you remember me saying those things in conversation?
Alex	Yeah.

Alex earlier claimed that thinking whilst Chris was talking, and not maintaining eye-contact, implied inadequate listening. The question Chris asks - “When you watched the video, do you remember me saying those things?” - suggests that Chris noticed listening practices that were not visible to Alex. Chris invites Alex into considering the possibility that remembering what Chris said may suggest that, whilst Alex was looking away and thinking what to say, listening was still possible. This example shows an appreciative intention by Chris.

Employing an appreciative perspective, Chris’s question seeks to discover and strengthen the potential for the couple to more richly know and experience their listening practices. Chris anticipates that Alex engaged in listening.

As I have shown in this last example, an appreciative stance of inquiry can work to strengthen affirmative capabilities that emerge from deficit accounts of experience. The following text shows how an appreciative approach can also pay particular attention to appreciative practices. After watching the DVD of their couple conversation, Alex noticed an occasion when Chris acknowledged appreciation.

Alex	It was quite interesting, Chris said something really positive. Something about appreciating what I do well, and it just made me feel really good. [It was] definitely a memorable moment for me to make me think, “That’s really cool, maybe we need to focus a bit more on speaking our appreciation”.
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Alex did not notice these words of appreciation in the original conversation they had together, but audienced them in the DVD. Alex’s proposal, “maybe we need to focus a bit more on speaking our appreciation”, suggests that “speaking our appreciation” emerges as a practice that they now have access to, and may utilise in future conversations. I suggest that Alex was able to see this appreciative practice because of the position of appreciative curiosity into which Alex stepped.

As I consider the developments Alex and Chris are producing through their conversation, I think it is important to consider how the ideas I propose are different from the communication skills training methods discussed in Chapter 3. These extracts from Chris and Alex’s conversations highlight these differences in three areas. The first involves what the couple focus attention on, the second involves structure, and the third involves analysis. I now show these distinctions.

As Chapter 3 shows, communication skills training exercises for couples tend to introduce couples to particular skills and practices determined by the discursive repertoires of coupledness, and considered effective communication practices by those discursive repertoires. Secondly, these models also tend to be conceptualised as fixed and stable methods and generalised for use by a variety of couples across a variety of contexts. Thirdly, how well couples communicate is measured in relation to how effective the couple is in mastering the skills identified by the particular repertoire they take up.

In this chapter, the emphasis is on Alex and Chris’s critique of the practices of communication they use. To make this critique they take up vantage positions from which to look at their relationship talk-in-action and to consider how that practice sits alongside the hopes and intentions they have for their relationship.

The skills and practices defined by different discursive repertoires of effective communication may or may not fit with the particular hopes and intentions they have for their relationship. Alex and Chris, therefore, determine the effectiveness of the practices of relationship talk they use. Furthermore, through the reflexive audiencing processes, Alex and Chris may transform these discursive practices in ways that fit more closely with their preferred hopes and intentions. Therefore, they produce relationship-talk-in-action that is determined by them. Alex and Chris can shape and reshape the discourses in different contexts and for different purposes.

A communitarian perspective on negotiating style

I suggest that the audio-visual aspect of reflexive audiencing practices also makes it possible to see the constitution of relationship as conversation unfolds. For this reason I add a communitarian perspective (Shotter, 1989) as a component of reflexive audiencing practices and show this in the context of Chris and Alex's relationship conversation. A communitarian perspective focuses on "the practical social processes going on 'between' people ...within the general communicative commotion of everyday life at large" (Shotter, 1989, p. 137).

The preceding analysis has focused on the ways Chris and Alex take up particular stances of inquiry that position them to engage in a critical reflexion of their couple conversation. These stances emphasise a reflexive eye/I gaze, using appreciative curiosity and relational "we". I now return to the relational "we" stance, or what John Shotter described as a "communitarian perspective" (1989, p. 137), to begin an analysis that shows the moment-by-moment constitution of Alex and Chris's relationship-in-action as they engage in this reflexive conversation.

In the text that follows, Chris alludes to the kind of constitutive, dynamic, communitarian perspective that John Shotter (1989) described. Chris speaks these words in a preparatory conversation prior to watching the DVD of their couple conversation for the first time.

Chris	[I want to pay attention to] our negotiating style, ‘cause sometimes we do really well and sometimes we do really badly. It would be interesting to see how we do watching [ourselves]; ... our language and our attitude and that sort of thing. The way one speaks, is it respectful, is it helpful to conversation or does it put up walls and cause the conversation to steer down a negative path?
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Chris speaks of an interest in paying attention to how the relational “negotiating style” they engage with will be evident in the conversation they are about to watch. There are four points I make in response to Chris’s comments.

Firstly, the use of relational language such as “our” and “we” highlights a focus on looking at the relational process being produced between Alex and Chris. This focus invites them into positions of “looking alongside” (Kindon, 2003, p. 142) each other in conversation as audience to the “negotiating style” they seek to investigate. I suggest that this looking alongside position, that focuses on the “negotiating style”, assists Alex and Chris to take up a reflexive eye/we gaze on the conversation they are audiencing, as third-persons, looking at the “negotiating style” from a vantage point.

Secondly, from the alongside position, the “negotiating style” is positioned as the object of Alex and Chris’s gaze, and is thus, externalised: that is, it is conceptualised as an object in relationship to Alex and Chris that is available to be investigated by them as a couple. Following John Shotter (1989), the “negotiating style” is an example of “practical social processes going on ‘between’” (p. 137) Chris and Alex. As Alex and Chris take up positions alongside each other and the “negotiating style” becomes a discursive practice that is available for investigation, they produce a particular conversational space in which they take up maze viewer, or what they termed “third-person” positions. I return to the concept of third-person positions and the process of externalising later in this section of the chapter.

Thirdly, the words, “Sometimes we do really well and sometimes we do really badly”, indicate movement in the conversation that occurs in the space between

“doing really well” and “doing really badly”. The metaphor of “steering down pathways” implies that Alex and Chris engage in the dynamic process of negotiating routes that are available to them in the territory of doing really well and doing really badly.

The following example shows how Alex and Chris begin to engage in this process of negotiating talk-in-action. They have selected a conversational moment from the DVD to explore the practical social process of paying attention to “our “negotiating style”. Alex uses the frame-by-frame function on the remote control to review the process step-by-step.

Alex	<i>[Pause]</i> We have found familiar ground about there. <i>[Play]</i> ... <i>[Pause]</i> And, as soon as you got there, it changed. See how we changed, how we're sitting? We're not on the same page at that point. <i>[Play]</i> ... <i>[Pause]</i> And then, suddenly, we hit a united point. And, suddenly, we were in there together and I kind of thought, “Now what changed that?” You look at the body language and stuff and suddenly we're together.
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Alex's comments track the moment-by-moment movement from “familiar ground”, to “not on the same page”, to “a united point”, in this brief dialogical exchange between them. I note the way Alex employs the relational strategy of focussing on the conversational process that goes on between them as a couple. This relational focus is evident in the use of the words “we” and “we're”. Alex also illustrates a reflexive eye/we stance produced by the question, “What changed that?” This question, in the context of this conversation, creates space for a reflexive eye/I gaze – or in this relational context, an eye/we gaze. Alex and Chris are poised to look with fascination for the unexpected, the surprising, the contradictions and meanings the question invites.

There are further notable factors that contribute to this segment of inquiry between Alex and Chris. Firstly, Alex identifies two positions that they have stepped into: “in there together” and “not on the same page”. Exploring “what changed that?” from a reflexive eye/we position may provide a receiving context

for the development of new and rich knowledge and understanding of the goings-on in the spaces between “in there together” and “not on the same page”.

Secondly, I propose that the opportunity to view and re-view this exploration is possible because of the audio-visual technology. A feature of audio-visual and written texts of conversations is the opportunity they provide for multiple viewings of the moment-by-moment interactions that shape intimate relationship conversations-in-action. This technology assists Alex and Chris to make visible the “negotiating style” that has captured their interest, and locate it as the site of inquiry. By making the conversational process a topic of inquiry, Alex and Chris take up positions at a vantage point, alongside each other, as co-researchers in the investigation.

For this couple, the frame-by-frame process of reflexion-in-action contributes to the development of enhanced understanding, as the following evaluation by Chris suggests.

Chris	I think looking at it more closely has helped me to focus in on particular parts and then get more understanding around them.
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The development of understanding, noticed by Chris, is an illustration of the ways the couple produce identities in the moment-by-moment dialogue between them. Next, Alex uses the metaphor of magnification to account for how the process of focusing in on particular interactions produces this enhanced understanding. (I remind readers of my authoritorial changing of the generalised “you” to one).

Alex	One is increasing the magnification of what one is looking at ... What one could see more of is seeing the cues, hearing the cues, more than the issue at stake ... One is trying to find the “Ah, I didn’t see that. Ah, I didn’t hear that before ... How familiar could I become with that cue?”
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Alex's words - "Ah, I didn't see that. Ah, I didn't hear that before. How familiar could I become with that cue?" - exemplify the fascination involved in the reflexive eye/I gaze.

This brief extract shows Chris and Alex in the process of audiencing an historical conversational moment-in-action. The interaction is available for investigation in the present moment. From this vantage point, Chris produces knowledge about the discursive practices that focussing on this particular moment makes possible. In this present moment, Chris is both mastering and submitting to the discursive practice of reflexivity-in-action. In this same moment Chris is also simultaneously showing and producing understanding that is evident in the words "I think looking at it more closely has helped me to focus in ... and get more understanding". Furthermore, this understanding positions Chris agentically to take up, refuse, or subvert the practice of "looking more closely". As the social interaction between Alex and Chris produces understanding, the couple also constitute their individual and relational identities.

Below, Chris moves from an analysis of particular interactions to a critique of the conversation under investigation.

Chris	The conversation was slower than I thought it would be. At the end of it I thought "This conversation seemed all over the place". But watching it again, one can follow it. I thought it was a fine pace.
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In this analysis, Chris and Alex centre the conversation they produce as a relational construct that they, as a couple, engage in. Movement is evident as Chris moves from an evaluation of the conversation as "slower" to a conclusion of "a fine pace". The process of re-viewing the interaction on DVD made this movement possible – a point I now develop further.

In the next sentence, Chris engages in a further shift, identifying and evaluating the response time that the slower pace makes possible.

Chris	Looking at it I [thought] I could speed it up a bit. But, it's actually OK and it also tells me that it's OK to have time to think about the answers.
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Chris's words, "looking at it, I thought I could speed it up a bit but it's actually OK", imply a development as Chris considers speeding up the conversation, and then considers the importance of taking time to think during the conversation. Chris's account shows a process of noticing the pace, making an analysis of the process that involves thinking "I could speed it up a bit" and then thinking "it's actually OK", and then evaluating the process – "it's OK to have time to think about the answers".

At this point, I draw attention to the recursive to-and-fro movement between the phases of engaging in the original couple conversation, the viewing of the DVD of that original conversation, and then the subsequent reflexion process. I show this recursive movement in the following analysis. Before watching the DVD, Chris's impression was that the pace of the conversation was faster than it seemed when watching it. The comparison Chris makes shows a recursive loop between the original conversation and the DVD version. Chris's memory of the original conversation is present as they re-view the segment of conversation on DVD. The impression Chris had after the original conversation changed through the process of re-viewing the DVD version of the conversation. Then whilst watching the DVD a further change occurred from thinking the conversation was "all over the place" to "a fine pace". Therefore, in the step between beginning to watch the DVD and the end of the DVD, Chris's ideas about the conversation changed again. Then in the step between looking at the DVD and thinking "I could speed that up a bit", and subsequently reflecting on the DVD, Chris identified that in the slower pace, time was available to "think about the answers", which made the pace, in the context of this conversation, "OK". What began as a fast pace changed through the process of speaking, reviewing what was spoken, then seeing and hearing what was spoken, and then reviewing what was seen and heard. A point I make is that the process of re-view and review provides Alex and Chris with added perspectives on the conversation and creates opportunities for change to occur.

The following extract shows Chris going on to describe a further significant progressive development.

Chris	One the big things I've realised, is that when you ask a question, I think what the answer is and then I'll think about why it is that way.
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Chris identifies a new development, a two-step thinking process that emerges in response to Alex asking a question of Chris. These steps are, to “think what the answer is” then think “why it is that way”. The process of audiencing - watching the DVD and then engaging in subsequent reflexive conversations with Alex - has made these developments visible to Chris.

In the moment these words are spoken it seems that Chris considers what the effects of this two step process might have on the relationship, and decides there is an even further development that could enhance the conversational process between them as a couple. Chris takes a further constitutive step by recognising that thinking about the answers may not go far enough in the conversation with Alex:

Chris	[Instead of thinking what the answer is, then thinking about why it is that way], I need to go out there with an answer, then say, “Well I think this, and the reason I think that is” and by that time I would probably have sorted it in my mind.
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Chris decides that instead of engaging in the thinking process alone and silently, to articulate the thinking process aloud. This out-loud process would involve Alex relationally, and assist Chris in sorting the thinking. Chris employs hindsight to produce a preferred future step.

Alex then responds by confirming that the thinking-out-loud process would be a preferable step.

Alex	I think that would really help me. ‘Cause I was sitting there [when you were thinking] and I was getting really uncomfortable. It’s about being tense and waiting. Feedback’s really important for me and [hearing that thinking spoken out loud] would really help so much.
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What began as an inquiry into the pace and direction of the conversation – “I thought ‘This conversation seemed all over the place’. But, watching it again, one can follow it. I thought it was a fine pace” - leads to the exposé of the ways Chris uses the response time made available in the slower pace of the conversation to think about “what the answer is ... and why”. Alex and Chris then employ a relational process of evaluation and review that leads to developments in which Alex can speak about the experience and suggest helpful possibilities for future conversations. Through this process, Alex and Chris create space to shape their relationship in preferred ways.

The excerpts, and the account I offer, illustrate how Alex and Chris exemplify reflexivity as they demonstrate critical consciousness of the discursive process of the “negotiating style” under investigation. Alex and Chris also demonstrate that whilst they critically investigate the discursive practice of the “negotiating style” they use, the discourse simultaneously constitutes them. Additionally, they demonstrate how they can see the work of the “negotiating style”, and question the effects, at the same time as they live those effects.

Third-person perspective

So far, this chapter has explored different aspects of the “negotiating style” Chris and Alex paid attention to as they watched the DVD of their couple conversation, reflected on that conversation, and through the process ongoingly developed practices for the “negotiating style”. The use of audio-visual technology has assisted them in taking steps towards reflexivity that positioned them to see and question the practice as they simultaneously engaged in and developed the practice. For example, in the last section, I showed how Alex and Chris used the pause/play functions on the remote control to produce a step-by-step analysis of

the negotiating style they employed. I also drew attention to the vantage point Alex and Chris took up when they sat alongside each other and directed their gaze towards that negotiating style.

I again use the metaphor of the maze I introduced in Chapter 2 to theorise this process of positioning that offers Alex and Chris a perspective of vantage on their conversation-in-action. Rom Harré and Luk van Langenhove (1999) suggested that “[p]ositioning theory offers a possibility to shift from the perspective of maze traders, those who are within the labyrinth, to a perspective of maze viewers, those who can see the labyrinth from above” (pp. 12-13). I use the labyrinthine metaphor to theorise Alex and Chris’s dialogue about the DVD conversation. During the DVD conversation they are participants, positioned as maze dwellers. In their reflexion about the DVD conversation they take up positions of audience and the perspective of maze viewer that audiencing positioning offers them.

In a further reflexive loop Chris and Alex then engage in a conversation about the experience of this maze viewer position. Chris begins to provide a theoretical account of the practice of observing the self in the process of reflexion.

Chris	It’s interesting to see oneself and to see how we interact ... being an observer is very different. Really fascinating. It seems different to watch it ... It’s a different perspective.
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Chris goes on to theorise the different positions this observer perspective offers.

Chris	We were having a conversation about having watched ourselves, so there was a different position ... It wasn’t a here and now. A conversation is often here and now, it’s very present. I guess that reflective is a good word ... What it allowed me to do, is to put myself in that position again, but to be able to feel and notice things different, because I’m not in the here and now, I’m in a different place.
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I now use an earlier example offered by Chris to illustrate the different perspectives that are possible when one moves between the here-and-now of conversation into the observer position from which to audience the there-and-then of the conversation.

Chris	The conversation was slower than I thought it would be. At the end of it I thought “This conversation seemed all over the place”. But watching it again, one can follow it. I thought it was a fine pace.
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Chris suggests that in the here-and-now of the conversation the pace appeared “slower” and, “all over the place”. Yet from an observer or audience position, the pace was “fine” and “one can follow it”. These different positions offer different accounts of experience. Alex gives an account of what produces this difference.

Alex	Watching it one is a lot more aware of the whole picture than being in it and just one-step-at-a-time.
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The maze viewer perspective offers Alex and Chris a different vista. This example shows how context shapes experience. A problematic account of the conversation transformed into a preferred account, not by employing problem-solving skills for example, but by stepping into a maze viewer position. The same interaction, when viewed from one vantage point, was quite different when viewed from another perspective.

Alex now provides another example of how stepping into a maze viewer position produced a different, and preferred account of experience.

Alex	In that conversation, when we recorded it, I went away from there thinking, “I didn’t say very much. There wasn’t actually a lot of two-way conversation in there”. But, when I watched the DVD, there was far more two-way conversation than I remembered there actually being. It didn’t look like it was one-sided. I thought that was positive.
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As Alex’s view of the conversation changes from “one-sided”, to “far more two-way” and “positive”, the developing story of the relationship is also shaped differently. Alex exemplifies how the audiencing process contributes to transformed and enhanced relational experience.

For Alex and Chris, the practice of stepping into the observer, or third-person position, adds to the discursive repertoires they have access to and produces their relationship as a dialogic practice-in-action.

So far, I have shown how taking up a third-person observer position involves a visual and physical repositioning. I now highlight the linguistic repositioning involved in this process. In the words that follow, Alex is looking at a still image of them, as a couple, on the TV screen. The DVD is paused and Alex and Chris are poised and ready to begin watching.

Alex	We’re looking for a point where that [person] in the red shirt connects.
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Alex employs the third-person grammatical form. This linguistic strategy contributes to the receiving context into which Alex takes up a vantage point as third-person maze viewer.

In the following statement, Alex shows a further example of the third-person vantage point employed in the enactment of the reflexive audiencing process.

Alex	They look pretty united there those two.
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From this perspective “both the tale and the telling” (Park-Fuller, 2003, p. 300) are captured in the enactment and are available to Alex and Chris for investigation.

Externalising conversations

From the third-person vantage, and positioned alongside each other, examples from Alex and Chris show, in this next section, how externalising practice provides Alex and Chris with a strategy for investigating selected aspects of their conversation. Earlier examples illustrated how Alex and Chris externalised the “negotiating style” by taking up third-person perspectives in relation to it. In this way, the “negotiating style” was conceptualised as an object in relation to them. This relational aspect was visible as the shaping effects of viewing and re-viewing the “negotiating style” became apparent. The following reflexion from Chris theorises the work of externalising that they employed in a conversation about humour.

Chris	We’ve used [humour] as something outside, to look at ... rather than internalising it ... We’ve both sort of looked at it as some thing, rather than ourselves.
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Chris uses externalising language as the linguistic strategy to speak of humour as “it” and to position it as “some thing” – an object in relation to them as a couple. Chris and Alex create a perspective of distance between them, as humour becomes the subject of discussion.

Chris goes on to show how understanding and clarity of thought become available to both of them through engagement with the externalising process.

Chris	I've really enjoyed it because it's made me think more clearly about how [humour] affects me and I think it's done the same for Alex. And made me understand perhaps more of where Alex is coming from and maybe hopefully Alex has understood how I feel in a non threatening way.
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Chris describes how the process of externalising humour contributes to the development of understanding. Johnella Bird (2000) described this positioning as “constructing the relational”: a process that “requires us to be in the conversation while at the same time distant enough to enable consideration of our participation in the conversation” (p. 272). The development of understanding to which Chris draws attention, indicates a changing relationship with humour, and with Alex. This relationship with humour is evident in Chris’s statement: “It’s made me think more clearly about how humour affects me”.

In the following words, Alex articulates how to take up a position in relation to the object of discussion, a problem that was externalised.

Alex	One of the learning outcomes that came from [the research conversations] was, not to be critical of the other person, or not to be critical of oneself, but to put the problem out there and be critical of the problem.
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The steps of putting “the problem out there and being critical of the problem” involve conversational partners making a shift in focus from the persons in the conversation to the problem under investigation. Chris goes on to show how the metaphor of a spotlight provides a useful tool that shifts the emphasis onto problems and away from Alex and Chris.

Chris	The last session was really quite profound when we talked about shining the spotlight not on us but on the problem being the problem really. And, it was just really clear with that picture of the spotlight. So, it's quite a nice little tool to have when we're looking at an issue that's quite personal to us.
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I suggest that as Chris and Alex place the spotlight on the problem they produce a triangular relationship whereby the partners are positioned alongside each other and the topic is subjected to scrutiny. The triangle can be conceptualised as an invisible yet tangible permeable membrane - the reflexive liminal space Jane Speedy (2008) spoke of, in which partners, the problem and the relationships they co-produce, are available to be investigated and shaped.

The practice of externalizing has important implications for Alex and Chris's relationship. When they position themselves as audiences to the tale and the telling of their conversations, their couple relationship-in-action is available to them to view and review. Therefore, as well as seeing the other person in conversation, as would usually be the case, they also get to see "us", the "collective we" (Shotter, 2005, p. 103) that sits between "us". The relationship is relationally externalised and becomes a site for exploration.

These practices, of taking up third-person perspectives and using externalising to investigate aspects of conversation, produced benefits for Alex and Chris. Below, Alex identifies the benefits of employing these practices.

Alex	I think one of the benefits is ... being able to become the third-person, almost, in the room and say, “ah, we’re not actually even here, there’s some frustration here ... maybe some hurt”. I don’t think that we’ve ever really done that. We haven’t sat on the same couch and put the issue there, we’ve been on either sides and finger-pointed; “but you said” and “I felt”. I think [the third-person perspective is] a helpful tool, because it diffuses situations that are heating up, full of emotion. I tend to like the image of sitting here together and both looking the same way. For me that’s been helpful.
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In this account, Alex identifies four discursive positions that are available to them to take up or refuse in their conversation. The first is an oppositional position that is evident in the words, “we’ve been on either sides and finger pointed”. This practice of finger pointing from opposing sides, invites centring the gaze on the other relational partner. The second, internalising position, produced by the use of language such as “you said” and “I felt”, implies that concepts and practices belong to, or are located within, individual subjects. A third position to which Alex draws attention is the third-person-alongside. This position is conceptualised in the metaphor of being “on the same couch” and “sitting here together and both looking the same way. The fourth position is externalising, achieved when they take up third-person-alongside positions and “put the issue there” at a distance.

Alex argues for taking up a third-person-alongside position and using externalising as a practice to address hurt and frustration. Alex’s words, “we haven’t sat on the same couch and put the issue there”, shows how the relational, externalising, alongside process of conversation takes Alex and Chris beyond what was previously readily available to them as a couple. The process also produces enriched relational development for Alex and Chris. In particular, the process “diffuses situations that are heating up”. Furthermore, Chris’s words, “... hopefully Alex has understood how I feel in a non threatening way”, suggests this externalising process contributes to a context of safety into which Alex and Chris can speak.

Visual/audio technology

A further significant component in this deconstruction of reflexive audiencing practices is the use of audio-visual technology. Video re-produced a version of the couple conversation-in-action and makes it available to Alex and Chris to view, re-view and review-in-action. DVD is the prosthetic device (Shotter, 1993) that, along with taking up a communitarian perspective, third-person-alongside positions and using externalising practice, assists to create the reflexive/liminal space available to Alex and Chris. It provides the means by which they can engage in a complex process of repositioning. They achieve visual and aural repositioning as they see and hear their interactions from third-person perspectives. This visual and aural repositioning produces the possibility of relational repositioning as they move from seeing each other in conversation, to sitting alongside each other and viewing their relational interaction as audience.

Below, Chris refers to the contributions visual and aural senses made to the reflexion process.

Chris	It gave us a little tiny window of what we look like, sounded like, how we responded, all those little nuances that one doesn't see in oneself ...
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Alex also speaks of appreciating the opportunity to see, for the first time, novel aspects of the conversation not noticed from the position of maze-dweller:

Alex	Well we're seeing it. We're seeing it live. Because I've never thought about [this] till just now.
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Katherine Carroll (2008) and her colleagues engaged in video-reflexive ethnography alongside clinicians who viewed video tapes of their work in a hospital intensive care unit. These researchers proposed that “[v]ision brings the lifeworld closer by revealing or ‘presencing’ it in a new way” (Carroll, et al., 2008, p. 388). In seeing the conversation “live”, Chris sees practices from outside the conversation that were not visible from inside the conversation. Chris’s lifeworld

is present in a new way. This development is evident in Alex's words "I've never thought about this till just now".

Chris	I think it was more really just only physically seeing what I already knew ... It was just seeing [dominance] in the flesh ... I actually physically saw it, and even though one is told a hundred times, it's not till one actually sees it that one believes it.
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Chris is referring to acting in dominating ways in the taped couple conversation, and then seeing this practice from a third-person perspective on the DVD. What Chris witnessed on the DVD had been a feature of their relationship for many years. Having been "told a hundred times" meant that Chris had some knowledge of the behaviour, however, "seeing it in the flesh" makes it visible in new and different ways. The DVD provides Chris with a visual, third-person perspective of self-in-relationship – a visual view that is normally only available to others who witness Chris.

I have shown how Alex and Chris employed each of the components this chapter has discussed, which together produce reflexive audiencing practices. In addition, I have illustrated how these practices have contributed to enhanced individual and relational developments. Below, during a Scene 4 research conversation, Alex offers a moving summary of the effects, both personally and relationally, of engaging in the reflexive audiencing process.

Alex	[The research process] was actually quite confidence-building. Because by watching myself I realised that I don't look as bad as I think I do and I don't communicate as badly as I think I did ..., and I actually do contribute quite well ... My thought processes are actually OK and my intelligence level's actually OK. Whereas one never gets that reflection normally ... Yeah, so I guess it's helped me to get to know myself.
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This account shows how the reflexive audiencing process, that includes the visual and aural aspects made available by DVD, contributes to a context in which Alex

experiences individual and relational identity development-in-action. This identity development involves change in perception of self, in terms of communication, contributions, thought processes and intellect.

I suggest that the process Alex's description refers to, illustrates the points Ruth Holliday (2000) made - that having access to a visual dimension of experience and engaging in reflexion of what is seen, involves persons in a process of meaning-making and identity development. Ruth Holliday (2000) said:

The visual dimension ... allows a glimpse of the configuration of cultural products as they are mapped out on bodies, homes and other adjacent milieux. In addition, the dialogue enables a reflexive process of explanations for these configurations and importantly alludes to the meanings which products come to have, not just at the point of consumption, but as they subsequently become woven into narratives of self. (p. 509)

For Alex, the identity changes occur through the process of seeing and hearing self, and relationship, on DVD and then, through subsequent reflexive conversations, making meaning of what was seen and heard, and weaving these meanings into new and different narratives of self and relationship that Alex speaks of.

So far, Sections 1 and 2 of this chapter have produced a deconstruction of the components of reflexive audiencing practices and have illustrated the work of this process in the context of Chris and Alex's relationship. I have shown in these sections how reflexive audiencing practices involve relational partners taking up third-person positions from which to engage in an inquiry process. A feature of this inquiry process is the curious and appreciative ethos that partners engage with to investigate conversational processes and practices that are relationally externalised. Audio-visual technology provided means for Alex and Chris to view, re-view and review their conversations. It assisted them to take up vantage points from which to audience their interactions from maze-viewer positions.

Alex and Chris employed a stance of appreciative curiosity to investigate extracts of their Scene 1 couple conversation. Using this practice of inquiry, they deconstructed and transformed prescriptive discourses of communication in the process of their reflexions of the conversation. Through this process they, as a couple, shaped and defined terms of discourse that defined their relationship.

I involved Alex and Chris in a process of preparation – which the next section of the chapter describes – to take up third-person perspectives on their Scene 1 conversation and to engage in intentional critical analyses of that conversation. This reflexivity involves skills that make possible a simultaneous process of distancing from discourses whilst continuing to constitute discourse as discourse constitutes. I now go on to describe the process of preparation that produced the scaffold on which they could step to engage with the ideas and practices of reflexive audiencing.

Section 3: Preparation for reflexive audiencing practices

When Alex and Chris started out as participants in this research, the practices and positions of reflexive audiencing were new and unfamiliar to them. Below, Alex speaks to the novelty of using audio-visual technology to investigate their intimate relationship conversations-in-action.

Alex	Initially it was different because we never sat and had a conversation and had it filmed before, ever ... It's not something you normally do in life is it?
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Earlier in the chapter, I showed Alex and Chris also report that externalising conversations, questions informed by appreciative inquiry and curiosity, and taking up third-person positions from which to investigate their couple relationship-in-action, were also novel and unfamiliar practices.

In the following commentary, Chris identifies the challenge of stepping into a third-person position in confrontational situations.

Chris	Stepping from being in the middle of confrontation or being able to say “let’s just step out [and become] somebody watching this conversation, what would they be saying?” it’s quite hard to do. I don’t think we’ve ever really done that, certainly haven’t taken the third-person position before. The tools or the skills to be able to do that have got to be quite developed really, to make that work.
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In spite of the difficulty that Chris mentions, they did use the skills necessary to engage in reflexive audiencing practices and experience their benefits, as this thesis story shows. However, Chris’s words, which identify the novelty and difficulty of repositioning, highlight the importance of a careful process of preparation. The preparation process contributes to a scaffold that offers Alex and Chris an introduction to added discursive repertoires that may involve novel and different practices than those to which they currently have access. In the preparation process, they consider the possibilities of these repertoires for their relationship context.

Whilst it is not possible to know the extent to which the process of preparation contributed to Alex and Chris taking up and using these added discursive practices, I believe that it was a crucial step. For example, Alex mentions the benefits of the questions I produced in the inquiry guides.

Alex	I think your prompts and the questions that you wrote for us to have a look into were really good.
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Chris also refers to the importance of questions and speaks about how these questions contribute to the development of understanding.

Chris	I think that the modelling of you asking questions is something that we've added to get further understanding. So it's kind of that modelling that's an important part I think.
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Chris's claim, that these questions are "something that we've added", suggest that the couple have extended their conversational repertoire. The idea of scaffolding learning (Vygotsky, 1999), which I discussed in Chapter 4, and earlier in this chapter, is useful here to show how questions initially introduced by me, provided a scaffold for Alex and Chris to take the questions up as their own.

Taking up a looking stance

In addition to "modelling" the questions, I involved participants in a further step in the preparatory process. I facilitated a conversation that asked couples to consider and explore distinctions between different audiencing styles. For example, I was interested in the potential effects of listening from different positions which I referred to earlier in the chapter – such as reflexive eye/I, judgement eye/I, appreciative curiosity and relational we. I then asked that the couples identify which styles would assist them to determine the preferred positions they wished to take up in the research conversations.

Alex	I'd like to be respectful; of me and you [Chris]. I don't think I'll judge but I want to be careful that I don't.
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Alex goes further to consider how to step into respect and care-not-to-judge.

Alex	It's about placing myself in a place of acceptance maybe.
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Alex's words indicate the kind of active, intentional and agentic stance I invited the couple to take up as they audienced their conversations. I instigated these preparatory conversations prior to each viewing of the DVD.

Audiencing through the eyes of a respected, valued third party

I also consulted them about how significant others might audience their couple conversation. I asked participants, if they were to view the conversation through the eyes of someone whose opinion and response they would respect and value, how would that person respond. Invoking the memory of a person known to Alex and Chris, who values and appreciates their intentions and hopes for their relationship, is akin to enlisting what David Epston (1998) referred to as virtual communities of concern. Virtual communities of concern in this research context are people who are not in attendance during the conversation but become partners in the dialogue through imagined dialogues that acknowledge and contribute to bringing forth preferred knowledges and meaningful aspects of lived experience for the couples wishing to better understand and develop their relationships. My intentions of creating a kind of community of concern were threefold. Firstly, I sought to create space for a communitarian perspective. If, as John Shotter (1989) argued, identities are constituted in relations with others, and that “different ways of talking work to ‘propose’ different forms of social relationship” (p. 149), then invoking the presence of a valued and respected other is likely to shape what Alex and Chris see and appreciate in their conversation. Secondly, by considering what valued others might say about them, Alex and Chris can identify the preferred kinds of listening and feedback that would be respectful and valuing of them and their relationship. Thirdly, metaphorically standing in the shoes of another person can also assist the couple to gain the kind of perspective on their lived experience that the reflexive audiencing process calls for – the taking up of a third-person perspective from a point of vantage. When I ask how a valued respected friend might respond if they were an audience to Chris and Alex’s conversation, Chris names insight, wisdom and experience.

Chris	They’d be insightful. They’d be wise. Experienced.
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Alex also shared a story of a special friend, who had passed away some years earlier, who would listen and speak about what they saw and heard in ways that Alex knew would be acknowledging and valuing.

Looking relationally

A further and final step I took in the process of preparation for Chris and Alex to audience their conversation, was to consult them about what they were interested in looking for in the DVD. There were two key reasons why I asked about possible areas of interest. Firstly, I wished to centre the participants and their voices in the research. The research questions invited participant-centred accounts of what they audienced and were interested in. Secondly, participant responses would provide some indication of the audiencing stance that they sought to take up. For example, if a participant spoke of an interest in looking for evidence to find the flaw in their partner's argument, then I would be able to take the opportunity to engage them in conversation about the potential implications and effects of this line of inquiry. For instance, this line of inquiry might go against the ethic of fairness and equity that Alex speaks of in the next transcript excerpt.

Chris	Watching it, my concern is that ... my perception of myself will be different [to my intentions] ... That maybe I'm not being fair or not being even ...
Alex	Sometimes if one taped oneself and what one said, it would surprise one that one's tone doesn't convey one's thinking
Chris	How one's body language comes across, how one sounds or looks, I don't think often represents the true nature of what's actually sitting inside one at the time.

I was struck by the interest Chris and Alex expressed in looking for moments of contradictory or dichotomous expressions in their conversation such as “my perception ... will be different to my intentions”, and “when your tone doesn't convey your thinking”. These moments show the process of talk-in-action and can represent turning points, in conversations, that have implications for the direction the conversations take. For example, Chris predicts that inconsistency between self-perception and intentions might go against an ethic of fairness and even-handedness in the relationship.

Seeing and hearing the self

I sought to prepare participants to consider and take up looking positions that would most serve their purposes. For example, the gaze people take up shapes what they see. Alex and Chris's initial emphasis, after watching the DVD for the first time, is their visual appearance.

Alex	As with most film stuff, one looks at oneself a lot, how one looks ... I think for me, [I noticed] how fat I was.
Chris	I couldn't sit still ... I didn't know I was such a fidgety person and couldn't sit still ... I guess I was seeing it as a fault.

This response suggests that Alex and Chris view the DVD in this moment with a judgment eye/I gaze. This particular looking position is a common one that people initially take up when viewing themselves on DVD. Jackie Shaw and Clive Robertson (1997) made the point that it is commonplace for people to experience embarrassment, for example, when they initially view themselves on video. These authors developed what they called a practice of Participatory Video, which they used for group education and development. They recommended making space for discussion about the self-viewing experience. I took the step of making space in the research process for participants to speak about their responses to how they evaluated either their own or their partner's visual/aural presentations. I suggest that the emphasis on bodily appearance is a response to what Michel Foucault (2007) described as the technology of discipline, the mechanism in which people regulate their conduct and oversee and shape their bodies and conduct to produce themselves as ethical persons. This process of regulation involves people exercising "normalizing judgment" (Foucault, 1977, p. 177) as they measure and compare themselves against discursive principles or rules which define what constitutes a 'normal' person. Through this process they are produced as "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1977), whose mastery depends on their submission to the principles and rules of the discourse that produces normality. I am not sure whether it would be helpful or not to consider ways of avoiding the practice of participants finding fault when viewing the DVDs. I engaged them in an inquiry that sought to explore the meanings of these visual and aural responses, and the effects of them, on the relationship. This process of exploration was an

opportunity to hold practices of normalizing judgment up for critique and evaluation and review. The step also created space for the inquiry process to move beyond the focus on the individual person/s in the DVD and to include a focus on the relationship they constituted in the conversation. This emphasis on the relational interaction was less familiar to Alex and Chris than the emphasis on the individual.

Moving between discursive repertoires

Mindful that I was introducing Alex and Chris to discursive practices that were novel and unfamiliar to them, I considered ways that they might manage the muddled and shifting boundaries between known and familiar discourses and positionings and those that were novel and unfamiliar. One step I took was to ask them to consider what they would notice that would alert them to turning points in the conversation when they recognised they had moved more away from appreciative inquiry and stepped towards judgmental, critical positions, for example. I invited them to consider what steps they might take to respond to these conversational moments that might assist them to move towards practices of inquiry that would best suit their intentions and hopes at that time.

Alex	[One would hope] that going forward, while one can't avoid those situations, ... that one can actually catch oneself somewhere with some trigger point that one recognises. [Such as] when one starts using language or attacking people's integrity.
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Alex suggests ways of managing these moments when the conversation has turned away from the direction they intended for it.

Alex	If one was able to somehow have the tool to step aside and use the third-person to look in on what's actually happening here ... [To say] "OK, let's take a step back, sit on the same couch with this thing, same playing field, same page".
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Using the "third-person" becomes a strategy they can utilise to reposition themselves in their conversations, and maintain or take up a preferred

conversational trajectory. Alex coined the term “third-person” in the research conversations. This term provided a more “experience near” (White, 2007, p. 40) description for Alex of what I have described as the maze-viewer, or audience, position.

These comments suggest three important points. Firstly, through a process of preparation Alex and Chris are able to consider stepping into practices of inquiry that were previously unfamiliar to them. In the extracts of conversations through this chapter, I have shown how the couple utilised these practices and engaged in reflexive analysis of them. Secondly, Alex suggests that “a tool” might assist them to use the third-person “to look in on what’s actually happening here”. In the data generation conversations, I was influential in introducing Chris and Alex to the tools of reflexive audiencing practices. Earlier, I drew attention to Alex’s comments about the effects for them of me introducing them to the notion of taking up positions of appreciative curiosity. I repeat these words from Alex because they also acknowledge how I was influential in preparing them to take up a stance of appreciative curiosity.

Alex	Initially, the one thing I did actually find really helpful was the way that you [Wendy] explained ...that [we’ll] be looking at [ourselves] in an interesting, observing way rather than a critical way ... which isn’t really the way I was taught when I was younger to view things.
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These examples show the shaping effects of the research relationship as a thread that weaves into the development of Alex and Chris’s couple story. Thirdly, these examples highlight how a careful process of preparation contributes to a receiving context in which couples can incorporate and investigate new ways of relating. I argue that engaging in preparatory conversations with participants before the initial viewing of the DVD and then prior to each reflexive audiencing conversation was a crucial aspect of the process. The stance of inquiry that emphasises appreciative curiosity was not familiar conversational practice for Alex, evidenced in the words “isn’t really the way I was taught to view things”.

However, it became another “tool” that the couple had access to, and that they employed in the research conversations.

Reflexion of the chapter

This chapter has investigated reflexive audiencing as practice, and its work in the conversations between Alex and Chris. It has explored how Chris and Alex shaped stories of relationship and how to do relationship when they took up reflexive audiencing positions. The chapter has deconstructed components of reflexive audiencing practices, at work, in the moment-by-moment interactions of Alex and Chris’s relationship conversations. It has shown how each of these components separately, and collectively, enlarged and transformed the discursive repertoires available to Alex and Chris as a couple. In addition, the chapter showed the developments and benefits of reflexive audiencing for Alex and Chris’s relationship conversations. The couple constructed their relationship as a situated, dialogical practice produced in and by discourse and constituted in the moment-by-moment dialogue-in-action they co-searched and co-produced in the data generation phase of the research.

Chapter 6. Originating meaning in meaningful ways

Meaning and understanding are socially constructed by persons in conversation, in language with one another. (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992, p. 29)

Meanings emerge from our togetherness. (Gergen, 2001, p. 168)

This chapter focuses primarily on the production of meaning in the research conversations of one couple, Laura and Andrew. I show how the reflexive audiencing process offers Laura and Andrew positions from which they can see their relationship unfold, moment-by-moment in a conversation they have together. Through this reflexive process, they identify meanings that they have previously taken up and produced and reproduced over time, without question. They investigate these meanings, evaluate them, and make new meanings.

To assist them in this process of inquiry, Laura and Andrew use inquiry guides, which I developed for them, to ask each other questions that were new and unfamiliar to them prior to participating in the research. The guides, and these questions, assist Laura and Andrew to scaffold (Vygotsky, 1999) their learning as they get to ask each other questions which are different from those they might normally ask. The questions emphasise meaning-making and trouble the authority of known and familiar meanings. Through this process of inquiry the couple move recursively between the territories of what Michael White (2007) called the “known and familiar”, and “what is possible for them to know” (p. 263). Laura and Andrew make different meanings, which contribute to the development of rich understandings, and they widen the conceptual repertoires that they draw from and use. I conceptualise meaning-making and understanding as a simultaneous process. I propose that as people identify, review, reproduce and originate meaning they identify, review, reproduce or originate understanding. Whilst I talk about meaning-making and understanding in the same breath, I also envisage them as separate. I suggest that as Laura and Andrew make meaning they story that meaning from maze-dweller positions. When they speak of how they understand these meanings, they speak from maze-viewer positions thus

adding a reflexive layer to the story. A further layer is possible when they consider, reflexively, the meaning-making process they use. I highlight these layers as they emerge in the conversation that follows.

The theoretical tools I use to show the simultaneous process of meaning-making and the development of understanding in Laura and Andrew's relationship conversation primarily draw from positioning theory (Davies, 1991; Harre, 2004) that recognises the discursive constitution of the self and relationship. Using positioning theory as a conceptual framework, I show how Laura and Andrew refuse, resist, accept and subvert discursive practices as they identify them and negotiate them through the reflexive audiencing process. Positioning theory draws attention to the performance of relational subjectivity as Laura and Andrew engage in their couple practice in ways that originate meanings that fit with some preferences they have for their relationship. I argue that it is through the visibility that reflexive audiencing provides, and the conceptual repertoire it offers, that they can do this.

I show how Laura and Andrew get hailed (Parker, 1992) differently, by discourse, and by each other, when they ask questions that inquire about the meanings they make of discursive practices of independence and dependence. The couple experience what other hailing becomes available when the familiar discursive meanings they make become troubled.

Meaning-making and understanding make a difference

Whilst this chapter primarily focuses on the process of meaning-making and the development of understanding in Laura and Andrew's relationship, other participants also identified and commented on the importance of meaning-making and understanding for their relationship contexts. Before going on to address Laura and Andrew's conversation in more detail, I offer two examples from other participants. These examples highlight the importance of meaning-making and understanding to these couples, and thereby create a receiving context for a more detailed investigation of Laura and Andrew's conversation. The first example comes from Geena and Susan's research conversations. The following extract of text from their Scene 4 conversation (see Table 1, page 106) reflects on the overall

research process. Susan and Geena speak of the ways they have developed awareness through the research process and how this development has made a difference to them.

Geena	I think, overall, this whole exercise has improved our relationship, hasn't it?
Susan	Mmm, it's opened up lines of communication that probably normally wouldn't have had the opportunity to be addressed. 'Cause we didn't know. It brought the awareness. Just simply bringing in the awareness helps to resolve things.

This extract of dialogue makes two important points. Firstly, that the reflexive audiencing process assisted Geena and Susan to step from unknown into known “lines of communication”, and that having access to these “lines of communication” made a difference to them. The second point is that the development of awareness helped “to resolve things”. Together these two points illustrate hopes I had for the research that were that couples would extend their discursive repertoires and use these repertoires to shape their relationships in ways that fit with their preferences. Additionally, what Susan calls “awareness”, and what I call understanding, contributes to relational change and problem resolution. John Shotter (1989) argued that attention to meanings is an aspect of social relations that has been ignored:

[N]ot only have we ignored the *resources* made available to us by our social context, but we have also ignored the standpoint, available only within a discourse, from which people's meanings (not their movements) are perceived and understood as such. (p. 143, emphasis in original)

By not ignoring Susan and Geena's social context, by focussing on it and taking up standpoints that inquired about their meanings, they extended their conversational resources. Therefore, I propose that practices of meaning-making and understanding can be conceptualised as intentional practices that can contribute to relationship development and problem resolution.

The second example I illustrated in Chapter 5, showed instances in which Alex and Chris produced and negotiated meaning. For example, the account I offered showed the transformation of meaning as they investigated practices of looking at each other's eyes (see pages 153-158). The meaning they made of looking at each other's eyes moved from a prescriptive practice determined by an authoritative communication discourse, to a constitutive, context-situated practice-in-action shaped by them as a couple. Through this process, they also developed enhanced understanding of the discursive repertoires they had access to, and employed, in their conversations. Their transcripts of conversation illustrated the ways that the reflexive audiencing process provided a scaffold that made it possible for them "to incrementally and progressively distance from the known and familiar and more toward what it might be possible for them to know and to do" (White, 2007, p. 263).

Meaning-making and understanding in practice: Laura and Andrew

I now go on to show the work of meaning-making and understanding being produced in more detail in a series of extracts that I selected from different phases of Laura and Andrew's research conversations. The first excerpt of dialogue is from the taped Scene 1 conversation (see Table 1, page 106) that Laura and Andrew had together as a couple.

It is a few days since the Scene 1 conversation and Laura, Andrew, and I, sit alongside each other in the lounge room of their home. We are poised to audience the DVD of their Scene 1 conversation as part of the Scene 2 phase of the research process. At this point, I have facilitated a preparatory conversation with Laura and Andrew. They have considered how they might step into a stance of curious, appreciative, third-person inquiry from which to audience the DVD. We each have a copy of the Scene 2 Conversation Inquiry Guide (See Appendix 5, page 380). Having prepared ourselves, we begin to watch the DVD of their Scene 1 couple conversation. We watched the entire DVD, but for the purpose of this chapter, I select a relevant excerpt that I present below. The topic Laura and Andrew refer to in this extract is familiar to them. It has been a recurring and cyclic theme of conversation during their twenty-five year marriage.

The DVD excerpt begins

Andrew The biggest issue we've got is supporting each other ... I acknowledge that there's probably days that I should have taken off work to look after you, and I haven't. I'm not very good at that sort of thing and that's because I'm just independent ... I do feel the weight of carrying you and looking after you ...

Laura I pick up those thoughts from you and that's how it leads me to feeling not loved and not valued.

Andrew And that comes from the frustration that you don't value my time like I value my own time ... Sometimes you might be a little bit needy ... So that's a bit of a history cycle, sort of a power game trap, that we've got into at times ...

Laura So maybe we could talk about how can you support me and how can I support you in meeting each other's needs? ... But, meeting our own needs at the same time.

The DVD excerpt ends

Conceptualising independence/neediness and support

Before going on to show Laura and Andrew's response to the excerpt, I first draw attention to four contextual and conceptual aspects that I note in the extract of dialogue. I do this to highlight some of the wider discursive stories that I believe inform this conversation, such as gendered understandings of independence, need-meeting and support. I hold these tentatively in mind as I consider some of the next steps that the couple might take in terms of inquiry, the possible effects of these steps, and the kinds of questions an emphasis on meaning-making inquiry might ask.

Firstly, Andrew begins the dialogue by nominating "supporting each other" as the topic of the conversation. I note its significance that is evident in his words, "the biggest issue we've got". In my reading of the dialogue, "supporting each other" stands out as a practice that they both seek for their relationship but at this point is out of their reach to achieve satisfactorily.

Secondly, in Laura and Andrew's conversation I see traces of discourses that provide a context for the story Laura and Andrew tell about independence. Ian Parker (1992) proposed that "discourse makes available a space for a particular type of self to step in. It addresses us in a particular way" and "we cannot avoid the perceptions of ourselves and others that discourses invite" (p. 9). Andrew's words, "I'm just independent", suggest to me that he takes up the discursive space as an independent self. In this construction, neediness and the "weight of carrying ... and looking after" Laura contrast with independence. This account produces Laura as needy, and calls into question Andrew's ability to care for her in ways he feels he should. I draw attention to the binary that these identity descriptions produce, of Andrew as independent and Laura as needy, because of the potential for these constructions to shape Laura and Andrew's relationship.

The discursive construction of independence and neediness, which Laura and Andrew draw attention to, has resonance with the independence/dependence binary that Lous Heshusius (2002) identified. She suggested that "the two constructs ... need each other to exist" and that "there is nothing wrong with fostering independence", unless "such fostering means, as it almost always does, that (1) dependence is negative, to be overcome as quickly as possible, and (2) that an obvious way to see human life is in terms of independence/dependence divide" (pp. 107-108). From Laura and Andrew's account, it seems that one way they understand their relationship is in terms of the independence/dependence divide and that this territory informs and shapes how they support each other. For these reasons, I draw attention to the binary and the potential problematic of it for their relationship.

Thirdly, I note the gendered power relations to which this independence/neediness construction contributes. I am thinking, for example, of the cultural story of relationship that typically considers independence to be the domain of men. For decades the discursive terms available to men have included practical, individualistic, breadwinner activities outside the home (Coontz, 2005). Women have been offered roles that involved taking emotional care and responsibility for intimate and family relationships (Coontz).

The notion that men cope with stress by withdrawing into their caves and become increasingly distant from their partners is a common one (Gray, 1992). This practice of withdrawing emotionally and physically is one expression of independence. Also common is the idea that women partners assume that this withdrawal means their partner does not care about them (Gray, 1992). On these terms it is understandable that Andrew, as a man, seeks independence and Laura understands this as an expression of her not being loved or valued. It is also understandable that Andrew and Laura take these gendered positions for granted and therefore have not previously subjected them to critique.

In Laura and Andrew's extract of dialogue, I read independence as positioned on the valued side of the binary, and dependence as positioned on the other, devalued, side. Women's dependence on men is understood to be associated with non-egalitarian relations at a societal and individual level (Baxter & Kane, 1995). On these terms, discourse offers Laura the devalued side of the binary and Andrew the valued side, producing a non-egalitarian relation. I suggest that this gendered power relation is an important consideration in the context of Laura and Andrew's conversations and for the kinds of selves the discourse makes space into which they can step.

Fourthly, in the extract of the DVD, Andrew apportions responsibility for not "supporting each other" to both Laura and himself. Laura's neediness and not valuing his time, and his not being good at supporting her, are constructed as deficit descriptions that are internalised as essential qualities that belong to Laura and Andrew respectively. Laura also draws from this discursive repertoire that constructs the problem in essentialist terms. This construction positions her as "feeling not loved and not valued". Stacey Sinclair and Gerald Monk (2004) warned that "[w]hen conflict is conceived as arising from within individual or couple deficits, it invites a universal, totalising, essentialist description of the problem(s)" (p. 338). A concern I hold is that when problems are constructed on these terms, it is possible for other constructions and strategies for action to be obscured. For example, Andrew's claim, "I'm just independent", and Laura's "feeling not loved and not valued", may be construed as the kinds of universal, totalising and essentialist descriptions proposed by Stacey Sinclair and Gerald

Monk. As I hear these accounts, I am concerned that they may close down space for Andrew to experience himself outside of independence and for Laura to feel other than “not loved and not valued”. Andrew’s concern, that he is not good at providing the kind of care that he feels he should, suggests that for him independence is contrasted as both problematic and something he values. For Laura, independence is constructed as problematic when it offers her positions of “feeling not loved and not valued”.

This last point raises the question about the next steps Laura and Andrew might take in the conversation. There are five further points in the extract of dialogue that capture my attention for the ways in which they may affect these next steps. Firstly, I read the discursive repertoire that they employ in this interaction as constructed on needs-based terms. In this example, the couple present a snapshot of life that involves need-meeting. The construction of relationship is about supporting each other to meet needs, including the need for independence. This approach is indicative in Laura’s suggestion that they “talk about ... meeting each other’s needs ... but meeting our own needs at the same time”. The needs-based approach emerges from liberal-humanist traditions. On these terms needs are understood as inherent features of the human condition (see, for example, Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of needs). John Gray (1992) wrote that “[m]en and women each have six unique love needs that are all equally important” (p. 133). This needs-based construction suggests that easier and more fulfilling relationships are attainable when needs are attended to, and satisfied. Responsibility for fulfilling needs on these terms lies with individuals, and failure to do so may suggest individual or relationship deficit.

This needs-based discursive repertoire may have assisted Laura and Andrew to meet their own, and each other’s, needs in rich and fulfilling ways over the years. Continuing with this approach in this conversation may be productive for them. However, I am concerned that Laura and Andrew’s efforts in “supporting each other” may be constrained by the use of a discursive repertoire that has them constructed in deficit terms. For example, I wonder how Laura might support Andrew’s need for independence when it leaves her “feeling not loved and not valued”. I also wonder how Andrew might support Laura when he constructs her

pejoratively as “needy”. Mindful of the “history cycle, power game trap”, of which Andrew speaks, I am interested in strategies that may open other possible doors for them than those that take them into the “history cycle, power game trap”.

Secondly, given the history of finding themselves in the “power game trap” cycle, continuing to employ these essentialist and needs-based constructions in this context may produce polarised positions. This polarisation may lead them into this “trap” if their individual needs were to prevail over each other’s needs. For example, in this situation, Laura might argue against the position call of needy and Andrew might argue for more independence. From these positions there is potential for the intentions of support, which Laura and Andrew hope for, to be thwarted. In this instance the “history cycle ... power game trap” may be reproduced.

Thirdly, if Andrew and Laura were to use a discursive repertoire that offered them polarising positions, and emphasise the primacy of individual needs and responsibility, they may be positioned in an individualistic space rather than the relational space that their hopes for “meeting each other’s needs” invites. I wonder whether a conversational repertoire, informed by a relational framework, may enlarge the discursive repertoire from which Laura and Andrew draw to approach this “issue” of “supporting each other”. Given the cyclic and repetitive history of this conversation, adding to their repertoire may offer them an added route to the familiar and repetitive “history cycle ... power game trap”, that Andrew mentions. A relational construction conceptualises independence and support as discursive practices Laura and Andrew engage with relationally. My hope is that reflexive audiencing practices will offer space for a relational stance by inviting Laura and Andrew into maze viewer positions from which they can investigate their conversation alongside each other as third-persons.

A fourth point that I suggest can shape the next steps Laura and Andrew may take is the meanings they make of independence, neediness and supporting each other. For example, I wonder what discursive constructions of independence shape Laura and Andrew, and I wonder what constructions they shape. Are their constructions similar or different, and how are they understood by them both? I

also wonder how Andrew has come to understand “looking after” Laura as a challenge to independence. Additionally, I wonder how Laura has come to understand independence as anathema to love and value. How might these constructions shape the needs they speak of, and the support they seek? These questions inform those I write up in the Scene 3 Conversation Inquiry Guide (See Appendix 8, page 393) which Laura and Andrew use when they go on to explore this topic at a later stage in the data generation process, as shown later in this chapter.

The fifth and final point that I note as I consider what next steps Laura and Andrew might take, is evident in Laura’s words - “Maybe we could talk about how can you support me, and how can I support you, in meeting each other’s needs, but meeting our own needs at the same time?” I read these words as nominating the possibility for change and suggesting a strategy for things to be otherwise than they are. As Laura offers a possible solution, which seeks to discuss ways of supporting themselves and each other, the couple are poised either to draw on a familiar pattern of conversation or to employ a different strategy. My hope is that if they could be more connected in terms of a discursive repertoire that produces meanings then finding ways of meeting their own and each other’s needs may stand more of a chance of success.

Making meaning of independence

I now move on to the next piece of the Scene 2 conversation and Laura and Andrew’s response to what they saw, and heard, on the DVD. At this point, after audiencing the DVD for the first time, I ask Laura and Andrew to identify aspects of their conversation they have just viewed that stood out for them as particularly resonant or meaningful. Laura raises “independence” as an interesting and big theme.

Laura	[Independence], that's a really interesting one ... I think that's a big theme actually ... Andrew [you] spoke about independence. [You] used the words, "carrying your weight" ..., and "needy". And I think that's a definite topic for discussion.
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Laura emphasises, here in Scene 2, that independence is “a big theme” and a “definite topic for discussion”. Earlier, in Scene 2, Andrew mentioned that “supporting each other” was the biggest issue the couple has. The importance of independence to Andrew and Laura guided my decision to include it as a topic for further investigation in the next Scene 3 phase of the research process (see Table 1, page 106). Before going on to Scene 3, I discuss the steps I took to develop the Scene 3 Conversation Inquiry Guide (see Appendix 8, page 393) that Laura and Andrew will draw from in that research conversation.

From the audio-visual recordings of the Scene 2 conversation, which I watched and listened to, I selected seven topics that Laura and Andrew identified as resonant and of interest to them after they had viewed the Scene 1 DVD (See Appendix 8, page 393). My hope in developing the inquiry guide was to create a scaffold so that new and different discursive repertoires might enlarge the known and familiar ones to which Laura and Andrew had access. For example, I constructed questions that invite inquiry that is reflexive and deconstructive. The questions create openings for exploration of the discursive practices that the couple employ, and they use language that invites appreciative curiosity and externalizing conversations. I wished to pay attention to questions that would facilitate meaning-making, and externalising is an example of “a speech genre which furnishes a scaffolding for constructing meaning” (Pare & Lysack, 2004, p. 6).

I shaped the questions to facilitate a “social constructionist stance” that emphasises “the meanings generated by people as they collectively generate descriptions and explanations in language” (Gergen & Gergen, 1991, p. 78). On these terms, Laura and Andrew produce their relationship-in-action in conversation with each other. Therefore, the questions I ask in the inquiry guide

involve the couple in reflexive inquiry about how their relationship is constituted. Reflexive inquiry highlights the relational production of meaning and emphasises “the expansion of the languages of understanding” (Gergen & Gergen, 1991, p. 79). It was the construction of meaning and the expansion of understanding that I had in mind when I developed the questions in the inquiry guide. Therefore, the inquiry guide serves to provide a scaffold that offers Laura and Andrew access to new and different practices of inquiry, and, thus, seeks to add meaning-making and understanding to the available discursive repertoires they have access to. I mailed the Scene 3 Conversation Inquiry Guide to Laura and Andrew several days before the Scene 3 conversation. I asked that they familiarise themselves with the topics and questions and decide which topic/s they would choose to re-view and discuss during the Scene 3 conversation. I now move on to that conversation.

It is two weeks since we last met and we are seated in the lounge room of Laura and Andrew’s home. I have again facilitated the preparatory conversation that asked them to take up positions as reflexive audiences in their Scene 3 inquiry. We discussed how they might position themselves alongside each other and take up third-person perspectives. I propose that third-person perspectives help make visible the tale and the telling in the segment of DVD Laura and Andrew are about to investigate further.

Laura and Andrew have selected two topics to discuss in this Scene 3 phase. One is entitled, “Need for independence” and the other, “Needing sometimes, carrying weight, looking after you, being here for you”. I employed language that Laura and Andrew used in the DVD for the topic headings in the inquiry guide. My intention in taking this step of using “experience-near” (White, 2007, p. 40) language, was to help create ways that these new and unfamiliar ideas I was introducing to them would fit as closely as possible with their familiar experience. Laura and Andrew considered these two topics to be related, and they opted to speak about them as one subject.

Having selected the topic of inquiry, engaged in the preparatory conversation, and re-viewed the segment of DVD, Laura and Andrew now use the inquiry guide to begin the Scene 3 reflexion conversation about independence. The following is

an extract of dialogue from that conversation. It shows how Laura and Andrew use the inquiry guide to investigate independence/neediness and supporting each other. Furthermore, it shows how, through this inquiry process, they make new meaning and develop understanding.

Laura	You see me as needy, and a challenge to independence ... But for me it's a put down and an undervaluing, so we've got this absolute dichotomy there ... For me, independence is the ability to be self-soothing, self-caring, being able to look after self without others. What about you Andrew, how do you define independence or the need for independence?
Andrew	Being able to do the things that I want to do without having to worry about you.
Laura	So we're coming from really different places about independence eh?
Andrew	Yeah, that's true, I hadn't really thought of that before.
Laura	If we hadn't had this conversation I don't know if we'd know that.
Andrew	We [usually] have the conversations and we talk about independence, and around it, [but we haven't asked], "What do I see as my need for independence and what do you see as your need for independence?"
Laura	And they're so different, because for me to be self-soothing, you can be around.
Andrew	I'm the same. I can go down to the shed for a few hours and not feel like I have to worry about you or that I'm not going to be there [for you].
Laura	OK, that's cool, that's amazing, it really is. It's scary when I don't know what you think or how you think about something - particularly independence. That you'd want to go off and do stuff and leave me at home. But, actually getting to the bottom of that takes away that fear so quickly. It's about understanding.

A reflexive audiencing approach to meaning-making

There are five aspects that I draw attention to in this extract of dialogue. The first, relates to my earlier commentary about the ways the gendered discourse of independence can produce Laura as needy and dependent on Andrew. Laura's words, "You see me as needy, and a challenge to independence ... But for me it's a put down and an undervaluing", suggest to me that she does not like being positioned as "needy" and refuses the positioning offered her by Andrew. Laura recognises the positioning, and, I suggest, that the reflexive audiencing process gives an opportunity for her to speak and for Andrew to hear it differently. Through this process, the gendered discourse of independence, which determines who can speak and what they can say, is troubled. By speaking against the construction of "needy", Laura takes up the authority to question the discourse and thus destabilises the close interconnection between independence and gender that construct her identity in deficit terms.

Secondly, as Laura and Andrew each speak about the meanings they make of independence, a single, monocular, patriarchal account of Andrew as independent and Laura as needy is changed. The couple produce a "double description" through a combined "binocular vision" (Bateson, 1979, p. 131; White, 1986/87, p. 11) of independence. I concur with Michael White's argument that "binocular vision is of itself a major source of change in relationship". Gregory Bateson (1979) provided a theory of learning that goes some way to account for how learning and understanding occurs through a dialogic process. He suggested that learning the contexts of life involves "two parties ... each giving a monocular view of what goes on and, together, giving a binocular view in depth. This double view *is* the relationship" (Bateson, 1979, p. 133, emphasis in original). Practices such as dependence are produced and negotiated in interactions between persons, and binocular vision makes possible understanding of behaviour through relationship. The reflexive audiencing process creates space for Laura and Andrew to notice independence, and the inquiry guide invites them to question available understandings of it and to speak a binocular story of independence into existence.

Thirdly, I draw attention to the question Laura selected from the inquiry guide that asked *How would you define the need for independence?* I am not sure what drew Laura's attention to that particular question, but in using it, and asking Andrew the same question, the couple begin to deconstruct independence. This deconstructive process of inquiry takes Laura and Andrew into different territory about independence than they have previously ventured. By considering the question herself, and then asking it of Andrew, Laura uses an unfamiliar conversational repertoire to investigate this familiar and recurrent topic. I suggest that the deconstructive inquiry, which emphasises meaning, contributes to awareness and creates space for different position taking. This point was made by Stacey Sinclair and Gerald Monk (2004). They drew attention to the benefits of having access to discursive practices that shape relationships and to engaging in reflexive analysis of them:

[W]hen individuals are unaware of the particular discursive influences affecting them, they have a much more limited, narrow, and constrained range of discursive responses available to them. In other words, deconstructive analysis of very particular discourse usages opens up choice and frees up the position taking that is possible. (Sinclair & Monk, 2004, p. 344)

The questions I provide in the inquiry guide invite Laura and Andrew into a deconstructive analysis of the ways they use discourses of independence. The excerpt shows them drawing from an extended repertoire and provides a glimpse of them repositioning themselves, in relation to independence, as they speak. They are originating relationship-in-action.

The step of employing an extended repertoire of inquiry leads into the fourth aspect that I note in the extract of dialogue. Laura's words, "You see me as needy", begins as internalizing inquiry to summarise Andrew's construction of her. She then refers to the inquiry guide and selects the question "How would you define the need for independence?" The key word that constructs "the need for independence" as an externalized entity is the word "the". Laura takes up the invitation the question offers, and responds, "For me independence is ..." She

employs externalizing inquiry to speak of “independence” as a separate entity with which she also has a relationship.

There are three sub-points that I draw attention to here. The first point is the work of externalization that is visible. Externalising inquiry “situates persons as being in relation to experience – a position from which a person can adopt a reflexive stance and exercise enhanced choices for action” (Pare & Lysack, 2004, p. 7). This extract of dialogue shows Laura and Andrew situated in relation to independence and as they speak they begin to consider different understandings of independence. The second sub-point is the way Laura uses language to move across and between conceptual repertoires that locate independence in both essentialist and externalised terms. This simultaneous mo(ve)ment (Davies, et al., 2006) between embodied moments and the movement toward dynamic subjectivity is visible in her words “It’s scary when I don’t know what you think or how you think about something - particularly independence ... But, actually getting to the bottom of that takes away that fear so quickly”. As Laura and Andrew speak, they re-shape their understandings of independence and begin to create meanings and understandings that are new to them. The third sub-point refers to the assumption implicit in the question - “How would you define the need for independence?” This question assumes that there are multiple possible meanings for independence in different contexts. A discursive approach understands meaning to be “progressively and dynamically achieved” in discourse (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 46). From this theoretical perspective, people can simultaneously inhabit a variety of discourses. Furthermore, different people can produce multiple meanings of the discursive contexts that shape the conversations they have together. In offering the question - *How would you define the need for independence?* - I sought to invite Laura to take up an agentic position in relation to the topic of independence so that she might actively mediate and negotiate the meanings she makes individually and in collaboration with Andrew. When Laura and Andrew consider and share the meanings they make of independence, they take up positions to reflect on and originate the meanings they make and to consider them in terms of their preferences for their relationship. Michael White (2007) referred to the practice of actively shaping lived experience that fits with people’s preferences as intentional state expressions of identity.

Finally, in the extract of conversation, Laura begins to describe the meaning she makes of independence – “For me, independence is the ability to be self-soothing, self-caring, being able to look after self without others”. Andrew is an audience to Laura’s meaning-making-in-action. She then uses the same question to invite Andrew to give an account of independence. She asks “What about you Andrew, how do you define independence, or the need for independence?” Laura and Andrew begin to story different meanings of independence. One meaning involves “the ability to be self-soothing, self-caring, being able to look after self without others” and the other, “[b]eing able to do the things that I want to do without having to worry about you”.

As they engage in this exploration, meaning develops further. Laura says, “For me to be self-soothing, you can be around”. Andrew responds: “I’m the same. I can go down to the shed for a few hours and not feel like I have to worry about you or that I’m not going to be there [for you]”. In this moment, Andrew and Laura produce shared meanings. Both Laura and Andrew are constructing a story of independence as something they are both in relationship with in similar and in different ways. Laura’s words, “OK that’s cool, that’s amazing, it really is”, suggest that the idea that Andrew can engage in independence without worry for Laura, is meaningful for her.

Laura and Andrew originate a new story of the meanings of independence in the moment-by-moment conversation between them. They destabilise the authority of given-meanings of independence and produce new meanings.

This meaning-making process that Andrew and Laura are speaking into existence is an “intersubjective phenomenon, created and experienced by individuals in conversations and action with others and with themselves” (Anderson, 1993, p. 324). I argue, along with Robert Cotter and Sharon Cotter (1999), that meaning-making is:

[A] ‘we’ phenomenon, a relational process within a social context ... we construct our meanings in our relationships ... the resulting collectives of

meaning are organized into stories. These stories give direction to our beliefs, values, and future actions in that social context. (p. 163)

Laura and Andrew produce a collective meaning or shared story of independence in conversation between them as they speak. The discursive construction that positioned Andrew as independent and Laura as needy begins to be destabilised. In the process of destabilising given-meanings it seems that Laura and Andrew get closer to meanings that fit more closely with their experience and possibly their hopes for supporting each other in meeting their own and each other's needs. Laura and Andrew trouble given-meanings about independence and produce meanings that are new to them. These new meanings involve new understanding. This different construction opens up space for different selves into which Laura and Andrew can step. For example, Laura's words, "actually getting to the bottom of that takes away that fear so quickly. It's about understanding", suggest that understanding creates space for something different from the fear with which she is familiar.

Meaning-making, understanding and change

The inquiry process produces the change as I have shown through these extracts of dialogue. David Cooperrider and Diana Whitney (2000) proposed that inquiry and change are not truly separate moments, but are simultaneous. Inquiry is intervention. "Even the most innocent question evokes change" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000, p. 13). The question, *how would you define the need for independence?* that I developed, and Laura took into their inquiry, evoked meaning-making, understanding and change. My account of the dialogue illustrates how "creating and transforming meaning is central to the change process" (Cotter & Cotter, 1999, p. 163) and is therefore a useful discursive repertoire that Laura and Andrew have access to.

A further example of change is also evident in the above dialogue between Laura and Andrew. Laura says, "We're coming from really different places about independence eh?" Andrew responds, "Yeah that's true, I hadn't really thought of that before". These different conceptualisations of independence are now available to both Laura and Andrew. Furthermore, this is new knowledge for

Andrew. In the next two extracts of transcript, Laura and Andrew engage in a reflexive account that shows the ways this meaning-making conversation contributes to the change.

Laura	If we hadn't had this conversation I don't know if we'd know that.
Andrew	We [usually] have the conversations and we talk about independence, and around it, [but we haven't asked] "What do I see as my need for independence and what do you see as your need for independence?"

Andrew suggests that the questions - "What do you I see as my need for independence and what do you see as your need for independence?" – were new, different from those they usually ask about independence. In the previous and the following extracts Laura and Andrew engage in a "doubled reflexive arc" (Davies, et al., 2004) as they reflect on their reflexions. They evaluate the meaning-making process and discuss how it produced new understanding and change. I describe this step as making meaning of the meaning-making. It adds another level in the development of meaning-making and understanding.

Andrew	The beauty about having this conversation about the conversation is the chance to pull it apart and actually understand. It's a reflective thing about what was this conversation about and what did we mean about it? If we slowed our conversations down all of the time and said "What do you mean by that?" one would get the same result.
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The reflexive audiencing process offers Andrew and Laura spect-actor positions from which they can have the "conversation about the conversation" and "the chance to pull [the conversation] apart and actually understand ... what was this conversation about and what did we mean about it?" These words illustrate the ways the practices of reflexion – having a conversation about the conversation – contribute to the development of meaning and understanding.

Landscapes of action and meaning

Andrew's words speak to two landscapes of conversation that Laura and he engaged in to produce this developing story of various expressions of independence. These are the landscape of action and the landscape of meaning as I shortly go on to show. Michael White (2007) drew from Jerome Bruner's analysis of literary texts to develop the notions of landscape of action and landscape of consciousness in the context of narrative therapy. He used these concepts of story construction – landscapes of action and consciousness - to shape the inquiry process he employed in therapeutic conversations to assist people to re-author "dominant storylines that have been limiting of their lives" (White, 2007, p. 83). He later took the step of substituting the word *identity* for *consciousness* because of confusion that arose, in therapeutic contexts, about use of the term consciousness (White, 2007). The term identity was a relevant choice, in that context, because it "emphasises the irreducible fact that any renegotiation of the stories of people's lives is also a renegotiation of identity" (White, 2007, p. 82). Another term Michael White (1995) used alongside landscape of consciousness was landscape of *meaning* and I use this latter term in the context of this chapter because it is a closer description of the meaning-making conversation that Laura and Andrew's dialogue shows them negotiating.

Andrew's question, "what was this conversation about?" involves the landscape of action. It refers to the detail and content of the story such as the events, the plot and the theme. His question - "what did we mean about it?" - refers to "the consciousness of the protagonists of the story and is significantly composed of their reflections on the events of the landscape of action" (White, 2007, p. 78).

Laura It's that curiousness, it's trying to gain understanding ... I've got new and different understandings about independence. I think what struck me largely in that conversation was in defining what independence is for me, and then for you, which was quite different. We may have different ideas, but hopefully we can share those and have an understanding, or an acceptance, of where each other comes from ... We take one word, independence, and how utterly different places we were coming from ... I guess it just shows how it's so not right to assume anything. Even just one word can be so different ... I now hope for a relationship that can include independence and togetherness. Having a clearer understanding of the meaning of independence for me, and where and how some fears are played out, helps me to stop them getting in the way ... Having this conversation has allowed some of these things to become visible and clear.

Laura's reflexion theorises the work of the question, "What do you mean by that?" She identifies two intentions of the question - to use curiosity and to enhance understanding. I note that Laura employs externalizing language to speak of "curiousness ... understanding ... independence ... togetherness". These constructs - "curiousness ... understanding ... independence ... togetherness" are constituted as practices that Laura and Andrew can investigate and negotiate relationally. Laura shows how she takes up, familiarises a previously unfamiliar communication practice, and uses it to shape understandings of independence.

Earlier, independence meant that Andrew would "want to go off and do stuff and leave me at home". In the commentary above, Laura says, "I now hope for a relationship that can include independence and togetherness". The idea that independence and togetherness can co-exist, becomes a new possibility and a hope for Laura. The couple produce this hope in the conversation-in-action between them. These meanings are relational, they emerge in the "togetherness" of the conversation (Gergen, 2001, p. 108).

Laura's words, "Having a clearer understanding of the meaning of independence ... helps me to stop [fears] getting in the way", suggest possibilities for how Laura might position herself in the future. In this example I hear echoes of Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1980) maxim, "Understanding is like knowing how to go on, and so it is an ability: but 'I understand', like 'I can go on', is an *utterance*, a *signal*" (p. 155e, No.875, italics in original). For Laura, "knowing how to go on", means that she may be differently positioned around fears.

In the following extract, I provide a further example of Laura producing and evaluating meaning-making and understanding in conversation.

Laura	We take one word, independence, and how utterly different places we were coming from. I guess it just shows how it's so not right to assume anything. Even just one word can be so different.
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I take from Laura's words that she appreciates the importance of an inquiry process that asks about meanings because of the potential for given-meanings and assumed-meanings to be identified, for their authority to be destabilised, and for space to be created in which other meanings become possible.

Meaning-making: An intentional process for change

In the extract that follows, Andrew and Laura discuss the possibilities for employing meaning-making inquiry in the future.

Andrew	If we were having another conversation about independence, we would talk [about] where we were coming from and what it meant to us ...
Laura	I can't imagine us really sitting down and talking about independence before, and I think it's that meanings again ... That looking at meanings ... So yes, through working through this, it's given us skills, and knowledge, and practice at visiting some of those conversations.

Laura confirms that engaging in the newly discovered process of meaning-making has provided them with “skills, and knowledge and practice”. Andrew’s words imply that they now have access to a different repertoire of inquiry that they may employ in future conversations. In Ludwig Wittgenstein’s (1980) terms it seems that they now understand new and different ways to go on.

Reflexion of the chapter

This chapter has conceptualised meaning-making as an intentional, situated, constitutive, dialogic practice. It showed, through extracts of transcript text, how one couple, Laura and Andrew, took up third-person positions as spect-actors to investigate *independence* and *support* that they identified as important and meaningful topics of inquiry. They used an inquiry guide shaped by questions that emphasised meaning-making and appreciative curiosity. With this guide they audienced a DVD of a taped conversation they had together. Through the multi-layered process of inquiry that reflexive audienicing practices involve, they identified given-meanings of *independence*, they troubled these meanings, and they originated new meaning, understanding, and change. In a doubled reflexive arc, they engaged in a reflexion of their reflexions and in so doing, they described the work of meaning-making and identified questions and practices of inquiry that they might use in future conversations to reproduce meaning-making inquiry.

The chapter shows how the reflexive audienicing process created space for Laura and Andrew to enlarge the conversational repertoire they had access to and to develop a story of independence and support that included some of the preferences they had for their relationship. This change and understanding was dynamically fashioned in the moment-by-moment dialogic space between them as a couple and shows how couples can originate their relational practice in unique and preferred ways.

Chapter 7. Audiencing gender and power relations

Michel Foucault (1978) produced an analysis of power as a force that is “everywhere”, not as a strength or commodity that one is endowed with but as “a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (p. 93), that is exercised in “the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations” (p. 94). Jane Flax (1990) claimed that:

Gender relations enter into and are constituent elements in every aspect of human experience. In turn, the experience of gender relations for any person and the structure of gender as a social category are shaped by the interactions of gender relations and other social relations such as class and race. (p. 40)

Taking these ideas into therapy Johnella Bird (2000) proposed that “Where there is a relationship there is gender” (p. 246). “Gender relations is present and influential in every conversation” (p. 256).

Together, these accounts conceptualise power and gender as inevitable, mobile, and influential forces always at work in relationships. All of the research participants identified and made mention of gender and power relations. In this chapter, I focus on the stories of two couples, Gina and Susan and Ann and MJ. The chapter investigates how these couples shape stories of gender and power when they take up reflexive audiencing positions to investigate their relationships. It also investigates how stories of gender and power shape couples when they take up these audiencing positions. Reflexive audiencing practices work to create space for research participants to gain what Jane Flax (1990) called “a critical distance on existing gender arrangements” (1990, p. 40). This chapter shows the development of these arrangements at work in the research conversations. It also pays attention to the effects, for couples, of co-searching power and gender relations from reflexive audiencing positions (see research questions, page 6).

Before beginning the analysis, I provide some comment about the structure of the chapter that will assist in the reading of it. In similar ways to the previous two

results chapters, I provide excerpts of text, which include the participants' analyses and then I weave my analysis alongside theirs. I have used brackets to draw attention to relevant non-verbal cues that are important for the reading of the dialogue. For example, rounded brackets - () – make visible gestures such as voice tone and laughter. Square bracketed text - [] – includes meant, but unsaid, words that are understood by participants in the conversation and that I have inserted to assist you, the audience, who were not present at the time.

I make one final point about my intentions as I am poised to reflect on, and write about, the excerpts of participants' texts in this chapter. I make this point because this chapter addresses relations of power and gender and I am wakeful to the potential for my commentary to impose particular ideas and practices and thus shape the power relations. One intention I have is to take care that the story I develop in this chapter does not have the effect of re-storying the participants' accounts in ways that are colonising, reifying, silencing, or subjugating. My hope is to add another layer to the research story, a kind of meta-analysis, which weaves alongside the participants' accounts. My intention is not to define, or redefine, the couples' relationships or identities, or to speak on their behalf but to identify and investigate discursive repertoires that I identify as being produced, reproduced, and transformed in the excerpts of conversations I selected. I remind, the reader, and myself, that the version I produce in this chapter is one of many possible stories that have emerged through these research conversations.

Anne and MJ discuss dominance

I now begin the analysis with a piece of dialogue between Anne and MJ. I draw the text from the Scene 2 phase of the research (see Table 1, page 106). The dialogue takes place prior to watching the Scene 1 DVD for the first time. In the excerpt, Anne, MJ and I are sitting in the living room of their home and they are catching me up on conversations they have had as a couple between research meetings. In the first part of this excerpt, MJ provides what I read as an account of relations of gender and power in their relationship.

MJ	The way I see our life together is I've sort of got the rudder of the boat or the keel. I determine where the boat's going and Anne is that bit of wind that occasionally blows us in another direction which is really, really nice, because we go places I would never have gone ... And the wind determines where one is going. One might have to fight against it. She needs someone to guide her sometimes. She thinks on a more emotional level than me. I'm very practical and think, "This is what we should do" ... Usually we're right. So that's why we work as a unit.
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In his commentary, MJ addresses me. I suggest that he is drawing on a gendered “conceptual repertoire” (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 46) that offers him, and Anne, particular positions. This repertoire may be conceptualised from a feminist perspective, which pays attention to “patriarchal thinking” and “patriarchal gender roles” (hooks, 2004, p. 18). bell hooks (2004) defined patriarchy as “a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak” (p. 18). MJ’s words, from the perspective of this conceptual repertoire, show him taking up the available position of in-control of the rudder of the boat. In this construction, MJ offers Anne the position as the wind. These positions seem to produce MJ with the authority to determine the course the relationship takes. Space is available to Anne to “occasionally” blow the relationship in another direction. However, MJ ultimately retains the authority to “fight against” the wind or use “practical” means to guide her onto the best course.

MJ refers to himself as “very practical” and he takes what I suggest is the authoritative step of defining Anne as a person who thinks “on a more emotional level” than him. These two steps, of taking up the authority to determine the course of the relationship and to account for Anne in terms of emotional contributions, illustrate gender/power relations at work in the moment-by-moment dialogue of Anne and MJ’s conversation.

I begin by sketching one brief genealogical version of gender and power to illustrate the point I am making. The idea that men and women occupy different territories in terms of emotional and practical contributions is widely accessible to couples in the modern world. For example, these ideas are encapsulated in these words from John Gray's (1992) bestselling self help book for couples: "A man's sense of self is defined through his ability to achieve results (p. 16) ... A woman's sense of self is defined through her feelings and the quality of her relationships" (p. 18). Whilst John Gray suggested that these differences make equal contributions to relationships, and MJ's account seems to concur with that view, the long history out of which these ideas emerge has also shown them to produce the kind of inequitable relation that I read in MJ's description.

Stephanie Coontz's (2005) historical account of marriage described how the roles of husbands and wives underwent transformation during the eighteenth century, in parts of Europe. Predominantly, in that context, Men were supervisors of the family's labour force, and the tasks that women and children undertook were important contributions to the survival of the family and community. However, along with the advent of industrialism and other political and economic developments, the notion of men as sole provider began to emerge. The emergence of the idea that men and women occupied different spheres replaced the notion that husbands and wives were joint contributors to the household and economy. From this perspective, men assumed responsibility for providing the financial resources and women were responsible for emotional and moral contributions to the family. These developments brought about a theory of gender difference that defined men and women by different traits. Stephanie Coontz suggested that women were idealised as humanitarian and compassionate and men as rational and active. "When these two spheres were brought together in marriage, they produced a perfect, well-rounded whole" (Coontz, p. 156). I recognise this idea of reciprocity in MJ's words "that's why we work as a unit".

However, this idea of reciprocity can obscure inequitable power relations inherent in the notion of men as financial provider and women as emotional caretaker. Bronwyn Davies (1991) critiqued the humanist position that suggests that individuals use "[c]onscious, rational, linguistic processes" to dominate "irrational,

emotional aspects of self” (p. 43). What MJ describes as Anne and he working “as a unit” also inadvertently offers him the favoured and more valued “practical” position and Anne the less favoured, less valued “emotional” position. These terms of discourse contribute to the construction of an inequitable, gendered, power relation. I read MJ’s words, “Usually we’re right. So that’s why we work as a unit”, to suggest that he evaluates the relationship to be reciprocal and functional. It seems to me that at this point he does not recognise the potentially problematic effects of the power relation for Anne and for the relationship. The following response from Anne shows how she initially agrees with MJ’s account of how their different contributions “work as a unit”.

Anne	I think it probably works ... It’s a family trait on my mother’s side of the family ... It’s like [these maternal relations and I are] silent, we don’t speak what’s in here (pointing at chest) ... Not because I don’t want to, maybe, but just because it’s too deep and I can’t explain it ... I think I take a back seat when MJ’s speaking ... Sometimes I get really frustrated because ... I try to say what I want to participate in the conversation and I can’t because I feel like I’m over-talked, so I just take a back seat. I’ve just come to accept that that’s the way it is.
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I read Anne’s words to mean that she accepts the construction of her identity, made by MJ on her behalf, as one who “thinks more on an emotional level” than he, and offers an account for this emotionality in terms of historical familial discourse. Anne draws from this familial discourse to make meaning of emotional experience and to understand the terms that determine what she can and cannot speak about based on the depth of emotion. Anne seems to refer to this emotionality in deficit terms: “not because I don’t want to, maybe, but just because it’s too deep and I can’t explain it”. I suggest that, by not being able to explain the deep emotions, Anne is also positioned in deficit terms by discourses that hold her accountable for emotional matters – terms Anne may be seen to fail to comply with because she cannot articulate deep emotions.

My account shows how Anne speaks herself into existence on the terms of humanistic and gendered discourses. At the same time, the discourses, and MJ who also subscribes to them, speak her into existence. For example, Bronwyn Davies (1991) noted that the terms of humanistic discourse obligate persons to speak for themselves and accept responsibility for their actions. Also evident here are discourses shaped by essentialist notions of personality that “bids us to think of [people] as having a particular nature” that “determines what people can and can’t do” and which are “to some extent modifiable by environmental influences, such as the kind of childhood experiences [people] have” (Burr, 2003, p. 30). On these terms, which are implicated in Anne’s words, her heartfelt experience is understood as deeply embedded in her personality and shaped, probably genetically, by generations of familial influences. The discursive construction that these emotions are buried deeply in Anne and in her maternal family history position her poorly to speak of heartfelt experience. I draw attention to the complex interplay of discursive positioning that the discourses Anne and MJ have access to have offered them. These discursive stories constitute Anne and MJ’s conversations, and MJ and Anne are constituted by them in ways that they may, or may not, be aware of.

As well as the familial discourse Anne speaks from, which informs what she can and cannot speak of, she also suggests that her efforts to “say what I want, to participate in the conversation” are prevented by being “over-talked” by MJ. Anne responds to MJ’s over-talking by taking “a back seat”. It seems that this example is another illustration of the ways discursive constructions of gender and power offers MJ positions of authority and offers Anne subjugated positions.

Anne’s words, “I try to say what I want, to participate in the conversation, and I can’t because I feel like I’m over-talked so I just take a back seat”, provide an example of “constrained agency” that “simultaneously grants women agency and recognizes that that agency occurs within constraints” (O’Brien Hallstein, 1999, p. 37). In the extract of dialogue I have selected, Anne knows that she can take up the authority to “say what I want, and to participate in the conversation”. However, I suggest that the frustration she mentions is indicative that her efforts to exercise the agency to speak, on these occasions, are constrained by what she

experiences as being “over-talked”. Anne accepts the subordinate position offered her that is to “take a back seat” and “accept that that’s the way it is”. It is possible to understand what is happening here on the terms of a feminist standpoint perspective which is that “women occupy a distinctly subordinate position in patriarchal culture that is structured by power relations, and that this position is qualitatively different to men’s” (O'Brien Hallstein, 1999, p. 35).

I now move to a later stage in the Scene 2 research meeting. Anne and MJ have now watched the DVD of their conversation and begin to reflect on and provide analyses of that conversation. The extract begins with MJ drawing attention to a specific instance when he identified relations of power at work between them.

- | | |
|---------|---|
| MJ(1) | I saw me dominating the conversation so much it worried me because I really thought when we finished that film that we’d had an equal talk. And when I saw it I thought “Damn it, there I go again, Captain Heavy”. |
| Anne(1) | I was reading the transcript... my goodness it was so clear ... he interrupted when you, [Wendy], were asking me a question, and he interrupted ... and he interrupted again. He ended up speaking on my behalf. I couldn’t answer the question ‘cause he did. |
| MJ(2) | It’s called dominance. |
| Anne(2) | <i>(Laughs)</i> It’s something I’ve been aware of for years ... It’s been helpful for me to notice ... I think it’s been something I’ve ignored. It’s been there so often I’ve ignored it ... I’ve actually noticed it but it doesn’t really faze me too much ... But now I know if I notice it happening I can stop it ... or change it ... I think it gives room for the conversation to be two-sided ... so it doesn’t leave me as an interviewer so much. |

It interests me that immediately after the taped conversation MJ thought “we’d had an equal talk” and then whilst viewing the DVD he saw himself “dominating the conversation so much it worried me”. I showed in Chapter 5 how reflexive audiencing practices produce a position of vantage that offered Chris and Alex a

different perspective and a different account of experience from what they viewed and experienced at the time of the conversation. This example from MJ(1) provides a further illustration of the different views that maze dweller and maze viewer make possible. From MJ's position as audience to his conversational practice-in-action, he was able to see himself "dominating the conversation". I think of Bronwyn Davies (1993b) claim that "discourse is the transparent medium through which we see real worlds. Just as we disattend the pane of glass in order to look at the view out of the window, so we generally disattend discourse" (p. 153). The maze viewer position has shown up cracks in the glass and made it possible for MJ to attend to dominance as a discursive practice.

I read from MJ's comments that he began the Scene 2 conversation with the impression that he and Anne had achieved "equal talk" in their conversation. His use of the term "equal talk" suggests MJ has some familiarity with discursive practices of equity. However, his concern that he witnesses his dominance (MJ2) instead, when he watches the DVD, indicate that he was constrained in his efforts to achieve equal talk. It seems that MJ had limited access to the discursive practices to serve his purposes for "equal talk".

I now move on to consider Anne's response to MJ's reflexion.

Anne (1) I was reading the transcript... my goodness it was so clear ... he interrupted when you, [Wendy], were asking me a question, and he interrupted ... and he interrupted again. He ended up speaking on my behalf. I couldn't answer the question 'cause he did.

I read some surprise in Anne's comment, "my goodness it was so clear". Furthermore, she names practices of dominance that include interrupting, answering questions directed at her, and "speaking on my behalf". In this dialogue, so far, Anne and MJ see and name practices of what MJ has called dominance. They have also identified an effect of dominance that is unequal talk. The process of audiencing the taped and written versions of the original Scene 1 conversation have made these practices, and their effects, visible to Anne and to MJ. Anne goes on to speak more to her experience of dominance.

Anne (2) (Laughs) It's something I've been aware of for years ... It's been helpful for me to notice ... I think it's been something I've ignored. It's been there so often I've ignored it ... I've actually noticed it but it doesn't really faze me too much ... But now I know if I notice it happening I can stop it ... or change it ... I think it gives room for the conversation to be two-sided ... so it doesn't leave me as an interviewer so much.

The point I wish to draw attention to here is that Anne is familiar with dominance. It is something she has “been aware of for years” and “something I've ignored”. However, after watching the DVD and reading the transcript it seems that Anne sees these practices again, but somehow sees them differently. Whilst dominance “is something I've been aware of for years”, it seems that reading the transcript helps her to recognise that she has ignored dominance in the past. In this reflexive/liminal space, created through the reflexive audiencing process, Anne begins to imagine some different steps that may also be available to her to act on dominance in the future – to “stop it, or change it”. Anne's words, “I know if I notice it happening I can stop it ... or change it”, convey, I suggest, a particular kind of authority. This authority was described by Bronwyn Davies (1991) as authority that works to break old patterns and mobilise existing discourses in new ways without claiming to dictate or enforce knowledge on others. For example, Anne recognises the effects that ignoring dominance have on the position she takes up in her conversations with MJ. These effects are a one-sided conversation in which discourse offers her a position of interviewer.

I now move to a moment in Anne and MJ's conversation when MJ takes steps to subvert dominance by attempting to employ strategies that create space for more of “an equal talk” and invite Anne into a front seat and two-sided speaking position.

MJ	I'm too dominant, you pick [the topic for us to discuss] if you like.
Anne	No. No ...
MJ	It's over to you what you want to [discuss],
Anne	What did you have written down?
MJ	I'm really quite open, you work on one of the things, you were upset about the humour side.
Anne	I'm not upset about it.... I think it's a good one to look at.
MJ	And you've picked it too so it's not me being dominant as well.

In the dialogue MJ again acknowledges dominance - "I'm too dominant" - and invites Anne to choose the topic for discussion - "you pick if you like". This acknowledgement suggests that MJ is familiar with the terms of gendered discourse, which offer him the authority to choose, and he tries to refuse these terms by inviting Anne to choose.

I draw attention to three points that may constrain MJ's efforts to step back from authority. The first point, made by Bronwyn Davies (1991), is that "access to a new discourse does not undo or out rule the other" (p. 47). Whilst MJ might desire to engage with a discourse of equity, it is not easy to shed the familiar interpretive frameworks that have produced dominance in the past. Secondly, whilst he is familiar with discourses of equity, he may not have access to adequate discursive practices to produce "equal talk". Thirdly, it is also possible that Anne does not recognise MJ's intentions, efforts, and skills, to employ a discourse of equity. Given these factors, MJ's invitation - "I'm too dominant, you choose if you like" - could set Anne up to not like to choose, particularly given the history that Anne identified earlier. She said that in the past she has typically "ignored" practices of dominance and taken a "back seat". It seems unlikely that Anne will take up a position that is possibly unfamiliar to her. It is also possible that Anne reads MJ's invitation as shaped more by the terms of "dominance" than the "equal talk" he intended. Anne, understandably, declines MJ's invitation to choose by saying "No. No."

Then MJ takes a further step in his attempt to refuse dominance by again offering Anne a similarly qualified position to choose the topic of discussion - “it’s over to you, what you want to [discuss]”. I read this latter statement as less of an invitation and more of a directive. MJ seems to be responding from the terms of gendered discourse that grant him the authority to determine that on this occasion Anne can pick the topic for discussion. I am reminded of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s (1980) words “[u]nderstanding is like knowing how to go on, and so it is an ability: but ‘I understand’, like ‘I can go on’” (p. 155e, no. 875). It seems that in this conversational moment MJ does not know how to go on and inadvertently reproduces patriarchal terms and practices in his continued attempts to invite Anne into “equal talk”. MJ takes up this well-intentioned authority without consultation or collaboration with Anne. Therefore, whilst MJ’s intentions are to step into a different discursive repertoire, the receiving context for these intentions to be realised, and for Anne to respond to this different repertoire, has not been set up. Without a different receiving context, the place for Anne to speak from is the same place in which dominance has previously been produced and in which she ignored it or took a back seat.

As I consider this process of change that MJ has instigated, I think of the metaphor Bronwyn Davies (1993b) used of “palimpsest” (p. 11). This is the term used to describe the ways new writings, on parchment, wrote over old writings, but the old writings were still inscribed, and were recognisable along with the new markings. Bronwyn Davies (1993b) made the point that, like these writings, “New discourses do not simply replace the old as on a clean sheet. They generally interrupt one another, though they may exist in parallel, remaining separate, undermining each other perhaps, but in an unexamined way” (p. 11). The deeply ingrained discourse that produces MJ as dominant undermines his attempt to write-over the story of his dominance. Anne and MJ both see the stories of “dominance” and “equal talk” but do not examine them. The story of dominance stands out more visibly than the story of equitable relations.

In this scenario, I note a paradoxical situation for MJ. If he heeds Anne’s invitation and chooses a topic, he simultaneously refuses and takes up dominance. By continuing to invite Anne to choose the topic, he also simultaneously takes up

and refuses dominance. Anne's reply, "What did you have written down?" is, perhaps, a further refusal to make the choice offered by MJ. From the conversation that has transpired so far, this refusal may be read as a step to ignore dominant practices and to "take a back seat", it may be a step to change, or stop dominance, or, it may be exercising a preference to not choose a topic.

MJ continues to offer Anne a limited speaking position: "I'm really quite open, you work on one of the things: you were upset about the humour side". He introduces the humour topic and names Anne as upset. Earlier, I showed how MJ constructed Anne's emotional contributions as problematic and subordinate. By saying "you were upset about the humour side" MJ inadvertently offers Anne a subordinate position. Anne replies: "I'm not upset about it. I think it's a good one to look at". It seems that in this comment Anne uses the gendered categories of emotional and practical to dislocate the topic from the emotional realm, which MJ proposed, and relocate it in pragmatic terms - "it's a good one to look at". MJ seems to read Anne's words as her choosing the topic. His words, "You've picked it, too, so it's not me being dominant", indicate that he believes that he has successfully achieved his intentions to refuse taking up a dominant position. However, the terms of patriarchal discourse he employs to engage in this refusal contribute inadvertently to ongoing practices of dominance. These terms include taking up the authority MJ has access to, along with what Bronwyn Davies (2002) and her colleagues defined as, "repeated, minute accretions of everyday practices" that "can generate sedimentations of lines of force that may also be understood as a state of domination" (p. 291). These lines of force are visible in the authority offered to MJ by discourses both he and Anne subscribe to. Even as he attempts to speak equitable relations into existence, the authoritative voices and practices of discourses, continue to reproduce and to dominate.

Whilst MJ recognises dominance and wants to refuse dominance and achieve "equal talk", these efforts are constrained in a number of ways. Firstly, MJ's utterances are imbued with complex and shifting power relations that are produced in the discursive territories, social practices, and structures that he and Anne are inevitably shaped by. Bronwyn Davies (1993a) suggested that

“[p]ositions of power and powerlessness are achieved through talk, through social practices and through social and architectural structures” (p. 199). Therefore:

Any attempts to disrupt old cultural patterns and to invent new ones must deal simultaneously and in a multi-faceted way with individual psyches, with social structures and patterns and with the discursive practices with which those psyches and those structures are constituted. (Davies, 1993a, p. 198)

Bronwyn Davies outlined the conditions necessary for disrupting cultural patterns at a wider societal level. However, I suggest her claims are also relevant for the local change that MJ set out to instigate. Her words also provide insight into the constraints that undermined MJ’s efforts. MJ’s attempts to refuse discursive practices of dominance, and the positions of power and powerlessness dominance produced for he and Anne, were an individual endeavour and did not take into account the complex, cultural, psyches, structures and practices that Bronwyn Davies drew attention to. Anne and MJ’s experience, which was made visible and negotiable to them, and to me, from reflexive audiencing positions, provided rich illustrations of the ways they shaped gender and power relations and of the ways gender and power relations shaped them and their couple relationship conversations. The gendered discursive practices of dominance and equity, which Anne and MJ negotiated, above, also resonated for Susan and Geena and I now go on to illustrate these practices in the following section of the chapter.

Susan and Geena discuss dominance

The dialogue, which I offer below, and the analyses which weave their way through it, make visible the different discursive repertoires that Susan and Geena use to shape relations of power and gender. The dialogue and analyses also show the work of these discourses in the moment-by-moment conversation that unfolds between the couple. I have drawn this extract from the second, of two, Scene 3 (see Table 1, page 106) conversations Geena, Susan and I had together. Susan and Geena are reflecting on a recent conversation they had together as a couple in the time between the last Scene 3 conversation, a couple of weeks earlier, and this

second Scene 3 conversation. In this first extract, Susan draws attention to discursive practices of dominance.

Susan	It's about being the dominant one in the relationship. People might be thinking that I'm this bloody big ogre, in the relationship, that dominates you and tells you how to live your life ... It's been there in our relationship. I bring my own history with it too because with my previous relationship, it didn't feel very equal either, so I'm really aware of it now. I want to be careful. I don't want it to get to the stage where I'm feeling it's unequal. What do you think?
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Susan speaks these words from a reflexive position. She takes up an audience position to the earlier conversation they had together, and is reflecting on her position and the position call she offers Geena in the relationship. Susan mentions practices that would produce her as “the dominant one”. These include telling Geena how to live her life. This account suggests that she posits “dominance” and “feeling it's unequal” as problematic. I read Susan's words, “I don't want it to get to the stage where “I'm feeling it's unequal” and “I want to be careful”, as an intention to look out for dominance and to act upon it in order to keep “feeling it's unequal” from making an appearance in the relationship. On these terms, “dominance” and “feeling it's unequal” are temporary and inconstant. Implicit in this reading is the idea that there are also other places, outside of “dominance” and “feeling it's unequal”, that Susan knows and experiences.

Alongside this view of dominance, and equal/unequal relations, as multiple and shifting, Susan uses a discursive repertoire that locates power as belonging to her, producing her in a totalising way as “a bloody big ogre” and “the dominant one”. She speaks of using feelings as an internalised measuring strategy to monitor equality and inequality - “it didn't feel very equal” and “...I'm feeling it's unequal”. Furthermore, she draws from a construction of power as a fixed and stable object that she is capable of imposing on Geena by dominating her and telling her how to live her life.

These discursive constructions provide Susan with measures that she can use to assess the relationship as equal or unequal. These terms, together, work to construct a hierarchal and binary relation that produces Susan as the one with access to power, and Geena as the one who is powerless. From this perspective, Susan is conceptualised as the instrument of power and, as such, is the object of a *normalizing gaze* (Foucault, 1977), and *normalizing judgment* (Foucault, 1977) by others - “people might be thinking that I’m this bloody big ogre” - and by Susan herself - “I’m really aware of it now ... I want to be careful”. The technology of power that I refer to here was described by Michel Foucault (1977; 2007) as disciplinary power – a mechanism of social control that is exercised in and by institutions as a way of homogenising bodies of people at the same time as it individualises them. Individuals are required to adopt these standards and rules that these institutions classify as representative of desirable, acceptable, and appropriate ways of life. They also exercise these standards and rules in order to oversee themselves, and others, for the purpose of monitoring and controlling their conduct and performance.

I propose that these ideas and practices will have been woven into Susan’s lived experience over time. This lived experience will have been shaped by the discursive repertoires she has access to. For example, she is exercising “practices of the self” (Foucault, 1985, p. 28) as she has become aware through experiences in her previous relationship of the effects of inequality and goes about taking care not to reproduce these effects in her relationship with Geena. However, Susan does not have access to different discursive repertoires to produce herself on different terms and uses the same discursive repertoires to monitor and manage equality and inequality in her current relationship. These repertoires, to which I have drawn attention, speak to and are spoken by the wider cultural stories of relationship that I soon discuss. In the next piece of Susan and Geena’s dialogue, Geena picks up on inequality in terms of financial contributions and levels of experience.

Geena I think the inequality thing is something that's rife in lesbian relationships. Well it might not be lesbian relationships, it might be reconstituted relationships where you come together in mid life, often one partner is financially more secure than the other or, more experienced in life than the other.

Geena's language linguistically positions inequality as an external entity - "the inequality thing". By doing this, she conceptualises inequality as a relational construct that is produced in lesbian or reconstituted relationships in which partners come together with differing financial conditions and lived experience. In this construction, Geena considers their couple experience in terms of the wider cultural stories that shape "lesbian relationships" and "reconstituted relationships". The "inequality thing" becomes the object of attention.

Susan 'Cause in your relationship you were very much like that. In your previous relationship eh? Where you didn't have much of a voice.

Susan brings the focus of inequality back from the wider cultural context into their more local experience by storying Geena's position in her previous relationship: "... you were very like that ... you didn't have much of a voice". At the same time as drawing Geena's attention to the work of power relations in which Geena "didn't have much of a voice" in her previous relationship, Susan speaks on Geena's behalf. I read Susan's words to mean that she knows something of Geena's previous experience and she understands. I'm not sure of Geena's reading of the statement, but note that Susan's reference to "voice" suggests she has access to the terms of feminist discourses of equity, which pay attention to the "voice" of women in intimate relationships, at the same time as she uses gendered practices by defining Geena's experience for her. In so doing, she takes up a position of authority on Geena's experience and shapes the power relation. The complex threads of gender and power continue to weave into this conversation as Geena responds.

Geena	I came into this relationship where I learnt to have a voice but at the same time [Wendy], Susan feels unequal in it and has actually taken a giant step back in some ways to allow that to happen.
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At this point Geena turns and addresses me. Three things happen here. Firstly, Geena declines Susan's invitation to speak about her previous relationship and by doing so Geena exercises her voice and again shapes the power relation. Secondly, Geena also takes the step of speaking on Susan's behalf by describing Susan's feelings of inequality and telling of the steps Susan has taken in the relationship. This time Geena takes up the authoritative position of speaking for Susan and again the power relation is shaped. Thirdly, Geena describes a relational process that shows the ways they collaboratively mould and develop voice. In this process, Geena took steps - to learn to "have a voice" – that she achieved because Susan took "a giant step back ...to allow that to happen". Both Susan and Geena were complicit in the development of voice and power. Through this dialogue so far, their account tells of negotiating the equity/inequity territory and the power relations. Power, in this dialogic process, is characterised as productive and is exercised in "the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (Foucault, 1978, p. 94) in which Geena and Susan engage. Power is everywhere in this context, not as a strength or commodity that Susan is endowed with, but, also, as Michel Foucault (1978) asserted, as "a complex strategical situation" in a particular social context. (p. 93). Relations of power are "the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums" (Foucault, 1978, p. 94) which occur in "a multiple and mobile field of force relations" (p. 102).

Susan	That's been good for me too. It's just getting into balance.
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Susan's response to Geena acknowledges the beneficial effect that emerged out of the process in which Geena "learnt to have a voice" and Susan has "taken a giant step back ... to allow that to happen". She introduces the notion of "getting into balance" but does not elaborate further on what this balance might entail.

I draw attention to conceptual shifts that take place in this dialogue as Geena and Susan speak relations of power into existence in different ways. Earlier, Susan used a linguistic construction that produced her as the object of dominance - “the dominant one” - and she described the relationship as an object - “my previous relationship” that “didn’t feel very equal”. This construction conceptualised the relationship as - a noun – that is measurable in binary terms as either equal or unequal. In an earlier comment, Geena also produced inequality as an object – “the inequality thing” - in relation to partners and relationships. Geena’s last two comments describe a process - “getting into balance” and taking “a giant step back” - in which they have both contributed to and benefitted from the development of Susan’s voice in the relationship. Inequity, equity, and balance, are relational practices that Geena and Susan negotiate-in-action and as they do they speak them in and out of existence. These different constructions illustrate the complex and dynamic production of power and gender relations in a brief exchange between the couple. In the following account, Geena describes herself as “the dominant one” in her response to Susan.

Geena	I found it really, really hard having no experience of being the dominant one, or the most powerful one to take up that position. And, in taking up that position, my learning in that was my dominant ex. So, I think I have taken on a lot of his qualities, my ex ran all our finances and I didn’t have a clue, except running the housekeeping. And, yet, in this relationship I now have been given the job of running the finances and Susan runs the housekeeping, and I really struggle in that. I feel really inadequate in it.
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In this extract, Geena characterises the “dominant one” and the “most powerful one” as a “position” she takes up in terms of running the finances. Using positioning theory as the analytic tool to consider Geena’s discussion, I suggest that she describes a subject position in a conceptual repertoire she is familiar with, which Susan offered her, and she took up. This repertoire conceptualises the management of domestic finances and housekeeping in gendered terms that produce relatively fixed and stable binary positions: dominant, powerful partner on one hand and submissive, powerless partner on the other hand. This repertoire

produces relatively fixed and stable “unequal” relations of power with one person on the dominant side of the power relation and one on the powerless side. Geena says that she has no experience of the subject position of acting as the dominant one in terms of running the finances, which Susan offered her, and she took up, in this relationship with Susan. However, she is familiar with subjection to dominance. Her words, “take up that position”, suggest that she exercised some level of choice in stepping into the available shoes of the dominant one who runs the finances in this relationship with Susan, but it was a difficult step for her to take.

On the basis of Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré’s (1990) account of positioning theory, Geena is a “choosing subject” (p. 52) who can take up and refuse positions offered her in discourse. I suggest that Geena’s choice was limited by the available subject positions. Susan’s earlier comments suggest that she, too, employs a conceptual repertoire that understands relationships on similar terms to Geena, in which the position of “the dominant one” is, both, familiar to her and problematic.

Woven in to the account Geena and Susan are producing in this dialogue is a conceptual repertoire, that they also draw from, which questions and refuses the binary construction of power. By recognising equality and inequality and by being “very aware of it now” and wanting “to be careful” to refuse inequality, Susan and Geena identify that other possible subject positions and power relations are possible. Their earlier example showed how they refused and subverted the either/or subject positions of powerful and powerless when Geena “learnt to have a voice” and Susan took “a giant step back ... to allow that to happen”. This process produced a power relation in which the idea of “balance” was possible, and available. These steps created space for a conceptual repertoire that destabilised the binary positions of powerful and powerless, and created space for multiple, shifting positions that also included balance and equity.

In this next extract, Geena continues speaking. She picks up on Susan’s earlier reference to balance that seems to imply that “seeking a balance” also fits with Geena’s hopes and intentions for their relationship. She then goes on to speak

about a recent occasion in which she noticed relations of power at work in their friends' couple relationship.

Geena	I guess it's about seeking a balance. We went away with a couple in the weekend and it was really, really, good for us because they were struggling in their relationship and a lot of it was the perceived inequalities.
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I suggest that drawing attention to inequalities in their friends' relationship is significant in two ways. Firstly, up until this point Geena and Susan have used singular terms to describe power as equal and unequal. These terms conceptualise power as relatively fixed and stable. Geena's reference to "perceived inequalities" envisage a view of inequalities as multiple and diverse. This conception seems to reflect the multiple, shifting power relations that I have identified at work in Geena and Susan's dialogue. Secondly, Geena's reference to inequalities in the friends' relationship again locates a story of power relations in a wider context than their local and immediate relationship experience. The practice of moving between local and immediate experience and wider cultural contexts provides a further illustration of a complex, culturally and relationally produced story of couple relationship-in-action.

Susan	And the imbalance of power again.
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In Susan's response to Gina, she makes a link between inequalities and "the imbalance of power" that connects "inequalities" and "balance" together in relations of power. At this point, Geena could take several steps. For example, she could begin to story an account of the friends' relationship. Alternatively, she could consider comparisons between the friends' relationship, and her and Geena's relationship. However, she reiterates Susan's point, renaming the imbalance of power to "the balance of power" and then she considers inequalities in terms of wider cultural stories of couple relationships.

Geena And the balance of power. I don't know whether it's in heterosexual relationships, reconstituted ones or just in lesbian relationships, but a lot of people come together in mid life, they've got different financial holdings at that stage and they're very defensive of those holdings, and while they might have been together for ten years they don't merge [their financial affairs]. Whereas Susan and I have decided we're trying to merge as a normal couple. We've set up our wills just like a normal couple would. It's been a conscious choice for us to say we do love each other, we do want to spend the rest of our lives together and we do want to be normal. Let's be normal and set up our wills like we're just a normal married couple.

Geena refers to partners' different financial holdings as a basis for inequalities. I read from her words that if partners do not merge and share their financial holdings then they do not fit with the conceptual repertoire of "a normal married couple". Reflected in Geena's comments is a construction of a couple who achieves balanced power relations when they merge and share their financial holdings and express their life-long commitment to each other through marriage and by taking formalised steps to express this commitment by setting up wills, for example. An implication of this account is that couples who may be in lesbian, heterosexual, or reconstituted unions and who bring different financial resources to the relationship, and do not merge their resources, are positioned as not normal. I draw attention to this repertoire because I suggest that it has implications for Geena and Susan's relationship and the gender and power relations that the wider cultural conceptual repertoires produce. A first implication is that Geena employs "normalizing judgement" (Foucault, 1977) in making comparisons between her and Susan's relationship, and the repertoire that she understands as "normal" and a site in which balanced power relations are located. Below, Susan's words draw attention to expectations that accompany these norms.

Susan I think more that we have society's expectations of what a normal married couple functions like. And that's our only guide because we don't have any other models in our relationship as lesbians in the middle of our lives. What the hell do you do? How are we supposed to behave in it? There're roles that are taken up and they're ever changing in lesbian relationships because there isn't a clear model to go by.

For Geena and Susan, as women in the middle of their lives who identify as lesbian, these norms seem to tell a fixed and stable story of how couples should conduct their lives and manage resources. This story is at odds with Geena and Susan's experience with access to roles that are "ever-changing". "[S]ociety's expectations of what a normal married couple functions like" marginalise Susan and Geena.

Susan Whereas in [heterosexual] couples there is reasonably clear defined roles. When male and female get together in a marriage, society expects one to pick up the nurturing and the parenting and the other to pick up the producing an income and be accountable.

Susan describes a gendered account of a "normal" relationship. This is a heterosexual marriage in that socially prescribed roles of parenting, nurturing, income and financial provision are clearly delineated and allocated to men and women. I draw attention to the similarities of this construction with Anne and MJ's earlier story, and with the account, I produced, of the historical and cultural genealogy of this prevailing, gendered, social construction of coupledness. The "normal" terms of relationship they have described are not available to them, as two women who identify as lesbian, who have been in previous relationships, and who have come together in midlife with different financial resources and lived experience.

Steps they have taken to meet the terms prescribed by "normal" couple discourse include merging and setting up their wills "just like a normal couple would", and

to “say we do love each other, we do want to spend the rest of our lives together, and we do want to be normal”. These “normal couple relationships”, which Geena and Susan aspire to but are constrained from fully achieving, involve what Michel Foucault (1972) described as a technology of modern power. This technology, “employs various schemes and continuums of normality/abnormality, tables of performance, scales for the rating of every human expression imaginable, and formulae for the ranking of persons in relation to each other” (White, 2002, p. 43).

However, Michel Foucault (1978) also proposed that “[p]oints of resistance are present everywhere in the power network” (p. 95). Susan illustrates a point of resistance in the following excerpt that describes how she and Geena refuse the terms offered them in the “normal” married couple discourse and produce their relationship on different terms.

Susan	One of the things I really love about being with you is that we can make up our own rules and when we are focussed on doing that together, we tend to do pretty well at it.
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Susan’s reference to making up “our own rules” and doing “pretty well at it” shows how she and Geena subvert and transform the discourse. They can use the terms of discourse that serve their purposes and refuse those that do not. Making up their own rules is an example of what Bronwyn Davies (1998) suggested is possible when people use discourse that is most appropriate to their purposes at a given time on a particular occasion. Susan and Geena use some aspects of the discourse of “normal” married couple that serve their purposes and along with “making up our own rules”, they originate their relationship and subvert the discourse of “normal” married couple.

In the next series of extracts, I show how Susan and Geena discuss negotiating heterosexist discursive practices that they encounter in their social environment. When they engage in social relationships with people who identify as heterosexual, I show how Geena and Susan make meaning of these discursive practices and how they must reposition themselves in relation to them. I say

“must” because these discourses are prevalent in the social environments that Geena and Susan live and work.

I have selected this first extract of dialogue from Susan and Geena’s Scene 1 conversation. The couple have been discussing two potential topics that they might address in this conversation - holidays and their social life. Geena suggests they begin with the latter.

Geena	We’ll start off with the minority one, being a minority and going out together. And social phobia and all that, you [Susan] mentioned the other day - that you thought you were social phobic. I might be in a big crowd of people and it feels like, I don’t know whether it’s boredom or whether I’ve got nothing in common but I often run out of things to say to people after one gets past the common ground of, “Hello what’s your name?” Maybe I’m just dumb.
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I draw attention to four particular aspects of Geena’s account. Firstly, her words “being a minority and going out together” suggest that in social situations Geena and Susan are offered, and take up, minority positions as a same gender couple in predominantly heterosexual contexts. Secondly, Geena’s comment, “Maybe I’m just dumb”, and her reference to Susan mentioning that she, Susan, thought she was “social phobic”, suggest that on this occasion Geena uses an essentialist conceptual repertoire to make sense of their social experience. This repertoire locates “dumb” and “social phobic” as internalised features of Susan and Geena’s identities. Thirdly, I suggest that Geena evaluates these features of identity in deficit terms. Fourthly, a humanistic discursive repertoire, which requires that one take responsibility for one’s actions, is also evident, as Geena seems to hold herself and Susan accountable for failing to meet these terms of discourses that prescribe effective social interaction. These four aspects illustrate how Geena and Susan shape and produce a particular story of relationship in this particular moment. This story shapes and produces them as particular kinds of individuals and it shapes and produces their relationship in particular ways. Susan’s following question continues this shaping process.

Susan	So it's not about being gay?
Geena	That's made it harder, in mixed [heterosexual and gay] company, because you are scared that somebody that doesn't know you is going to ask "Who's your husband?" Maybe it's because we live in a small town, we work and that's all we do, we don't belong to anything or do anything except work. We're not involved in this community at all.
Susan	So do you think if we mix, but that's a really hard one because then we go mix with people and no one else is gay.

Susan's question, "So it's not about being gay?", invites Geena to consider these social responses from a gender-aware position in which being gay might shape how Geena interacts socially with others. Geena makes sense of her experience in terms of gendered discourse suggesting that in "mixed [heterosexual and gay] company ... you are scared that somebody that doesn't know you is going to ask, "Who's your husband": a question presupposing heterosexuality.

Geena draws attention to an important aspect of discursive positioning that I wish to emphasise. This aspect is that, when Geena and Susan step into "mixed" social situations they are inevitably offered minority positions in these discursive environments. The discourse positions people who identify as heterosexual more favourably. Being positioned as heterosexual, in a society which privileges heterosexual relationships, carries entitlements that can have significant consequences for those who do not identify as heterosexual. For example, one such entitlement sanctions the practice of asking questions of Geena and Susan that can have the effect of exposing them as gay – as minority – and contribute to their ongoing minoritisation. Through this process, heterosexual privilege and inequitable power relations are reproduced. This fear that Geena speaks of is testimony to the powerful consequences of practices of heterosexual privilege and their effects on Susan and Geena's individual and relational identities.

As well as considering the effects of “being gay” in terms of social situations, Geena also considers Susan’s question in terms of humanistic discourse. On these terms, Geena considers herself and Susan accountable for achieving satisfying social experience. Geena’s words “we don’t belong to anything ... we’re not involved in this community at all” suggest that if one just gets more involved one will experience satisfying social relationships. Susan’s response to Geena again draws attention to the impact of being in a same gender relationship. Below she speaks of the effects that she has experienced since she has been in a same gender relationship with Geena.

Susan	I think I’ve lost more confidence in being in a relationship with you in general than I was before I was in a relationship with a woman. I’m not saying you [personally], but as in a woman. And I think that’s around being, feeling more isolated. Like, I used to be outgoing. I was out and about a lot more and had a lot more confidence I think.
Geena	I think it’s more to do with knowing yourself as a woman and other people’s perceptions of you as a woman is pretty set when you think you are heterosexual and there’s no conflict there. But once you decide that you are gay, then it blurs the boundaries of your femininity and you are never quite sure, or for me,

These effects include “feeling more isolated” and loss of confidence. Geena draws attention the ways gendered discourses can define and redefine how one is conceptualised by others, and how one conceptualises one’s self as a woman. As Geena suggests below “where you fit” is fraught with uncertainty and makes significant demands of her.

Susan	You don’t know where you fit.
Geena	You don’t know where you fit and it takes a whole lot more confidence to be out there talking to people being sure of yourself and confident than it did before. No. I think we’re very boring.

I read Geena's words to suggest that heterosexist discursive practices have had a significant impact on her identity and social participation. However, Geena takes up a position of personal responsibility for the loss of confidence and not fitting in that is evident in her words "I think we're very boring". At this point, it seems that Geena considers that the problem is with her and that she is solely accountable. So far, Susan and Geena identify the problem as social isolation and account for the isolation in terms of being gay, boring, social phobic, not having anything in common, and loss of confidence.

In the next Scene 2 phase of the reflexive audiencing process, Geena and Susan pick up this topic again and speak as an audience to the Scene 1 conversation after they have watched it on the DVD.

Geena	To be able to see that visually and to hear it again ... It's quite reassuring.
Susan	It's interesting seeing, it's quite emotive to watch a conversation like that in general whether it was us or someone else having that conversation 'cause we relate to [prejudice] again and we don't tend to talk about it very often, eh Geena? ... It happens a lot but every so often I'm faced with it and so watching the movie that we made about that sort of a conversation is quite freeing in a way, I suppose ... It makes me realise we're living with that so no wonder sometimes, Geena, we feel a little bit suppressed or we feel a little bit anxious or we feel a bit something in just being.

What Susan and Geena initially spoke of as social isolation, which they held themselves responsible for, is now being conceptualised differently as "prejudice". Susan speaks of prejudice as something "we relate to" and "are faced with". This construction conceptualises prejudice as a social practice that they are implicated in and subjected to but that they are not complicit in producing, imposing on themselves, or responsible for.

Susan uses an externalised description of "prejudice" which locates it as an object in relation to her and Geena. This linguistic construction creates space for Geena

to notice and to make sense of the effects of prejudice on their lives. She says “It makes me realise we’re living with that so no wonder sometimes, Geena, we feel a little bit suppressed or we feel a little bit anxious or we feel a bit something in just being”. This statement introduces the possibility that Susan and Geena may not be solely responsible for the fear, isolation and loss of confidence they experience in their social environment. I suggest that this shift creates space for them to consider the ways discourse produces the conditions for prejudice to exist and to impose on them.

The next extract, taken from a Scene 3 conversation, shows the ways Geena and Susan’s experience and account of prejudice are constituted and developed over time, both during and between the research meetings.

Susan	One thing we did find actually after talking about [not fitting in and prejudice] last time, was we became extremely aware of it. Because it came up in conversation [between research meetings], which is interesting, eh? Because probably nothing else had changed apart from the awareness. I thought it was quite helpful. It made a lot of sense to me, it’s like a piece of jigsaw puzzle.
Geena	It sort of helped us to understand why we feel like we do because it’s ever-present and we haven’t sort of realised the presence of it, eh?

Susan and Geena describe how the awareness, which they developed through the process of audiencing, has made it possible notice and speak about “not fitting in and prejudice” in ways that are helpful and meaningful. Susan and Geena both use externalising language to speak of “not fitting in and prejudice” as relationally externalised entities. Externalising practice is evident in Susan’s description of “it’s ever present and we haven’t sort of realised the presence of it eh?”

Also implied in the sentence is a relational construction of “not fitting in and prejudice”. It seems that Geena and Susan emphasise the “we”, suggesting that they are positioned alongside each other and “not fitting in and prejudice” are relationally externalised as “it”. “[I]t” is available to them to investigate and

critique. From this alongside, relationally externalised, position, Susan and Geena are able to notice and evaluate the presence, and effects, of “not fitting in and prejudice”

This segment of dialogue also highlights the argument I posed in Chapter 6 that suggested that change could be produced through meaning-making and the development of understanding. This change is evident in Susan’s words, “... we became extremely aware of it ... which is interesting ... nothing else had changed apart from the awareness”.

In this final excerpt, which I draw from the Phase 4 conversation, Susan and Geena again pick up the topic of the effects of discourses that produce heterosexist practices when they engage in a reflexion of the overall research process.

Susan	We talked about the gay issue around homosexuality and the heterosexual world that we live in and how you sometimes feel a bit marginalised ... And we have had ongoing talks about living in a heterosexual world and it comes up sometimes, but it’s good now we can name what that is when it comes up.
Geena	And we’re actually dealing with that a lot better now? I mean in the weekend you had to deal with it ...
Susan	And we sorted it out. We were a lot more comfortable than we normally would have been about that ...
Geena	It made me realise watching it [on DVD] that ... it’s going to be there for the rest of our lives. Some sort of prejudice against us and we are never going to find full acceptance ... Maybe it’s not entirely us that are boring. It’s society that’s keeping us in this [minority] place ... We can do little things about that.

Susan identifies the “heterosexual world” as discursive territory in which she and Geena are inevitably located. This world has a powerful effect on their lives. It produces them as other than heterosexual, and, through practices of prejudice, positions them in the margins of their social environment. This positioning is

evident in Geena's words – "It's society that's keeping us in this [minority] place". Her claim, "maybe it's not entirely us that's boring" shows a shift from her earlier suggestion, "I think we're very boring". She identifies the powerful shaping effects of this discourse in her words, "it's going to be there for the rest of our lives ... you're never going to find full acceptance". And her words, "we can do little things about that", are an example of "points of resistance" that Michel Foucault (1978) suggested are "present everywhere in the power network" (p. 95). From this constructionist perspective, discourse acts on Geena and Susan and they take up positions to act on discourse, albeit in limited ways.

This interchange between Susan and Geena illustrates Michel Foucault's (1978) notion that "discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it" (p. 101) as they speak of how they are offered marginalised positions by heterosexist discursive practices and the effects of this positioning on their lives. In addition, I show how, from audiencing positions, they attribute these effects to limitations of the discourse that prejudice and isolate them because of their sexual orientation. They then identify that there are steps they can take to negotiate this discursive territory in better ways. In this way, power is also undermined, exposed, rendered fragile and thwarted, as Michel Foucault (1978) suggested.

Geena and Susan may choose to meet the terms of the discourse that they identified earlier, which are to fit socially by becoming more confident and involved. However, the "little things" Geena suggests they can do may also include other possible steps. What I suggest is important, is that the steps they do take they can make with new and different meaning and understanding about the discursive territory and its limitations. Michel Foucault (1978) suggested that power and knowledge are joined together in discourse.

Geena and Susan's interaction shows how they developed knowledge/power of the ways heterosexist discourse produced prejudice that shaped their relationship and their identities. Their experience illustrates a claim made by Ruth Holliday (2000) who used queer methodology to investigate video diaries compiled by research participants:

How queer subjects, for example, construct and display identities is not just about experiences, not just about the products available to us through which we “consume” our identities, but also about how the meanings of such products come to inform and construct our identities and how these identities become mapped out through the products available to us. (p. 509)

Through the process of reflexive audiencing, Susan and Geena have enlarged the meanings by which they understand the discursive territory that produces their identities as individuals and as a couple. They, therefore, have access to added discursive practices that involve new and different ways to shape those identities.

Reflexion of the chapter

This chapter emphasised the work of power and gender in the construction and development of Anne and MJ, and Susan and Geena’s couple relationships. The first dialogue from Anne and MJ identified a range of discourses they shaped and were shaped by. I emphasised the ways that discursive repertoires, such as those informed by humanist, essentialist, feminist and patriarchal ideas and practices, informed the positions Anne and MJ took up to investigate and negotiate practices of dominance. The phases of reflexive audiencing practices created space for the couple to identify dominance and to investigate and negotiate power relations. Through this process, they demonstrated some ways they shaped discourses, and discourses shaped them, in their moment-by-moment conversational interactions.

In the second series of dialogues between Susan and Geena, my analysis emphasised the ways reflexive audiencing processes offered them opportunity to use different discursive repertoires to articulate and make sense of dominance in their relationship. I showed how they shaped different discursive repertoires and how these repertoires shaped them, each constituting the relationship and the relational partner’s identities in different ways. Geena and Susan identified the different implications and possibilities for the individual and relationship identities produced in these discursive repertoires in the extracts of dialogue. I also identified these implications and possibilities as I added my analysis to their stories.

These examples show the benefits for these couples of having access to reflexive audiencing practices that create space for the shaping effects of discourses to be made visible and negotiable. In these examples, reflexive audiencing practices added to the available positions and possible steps these couples had access to. It also showed the ways they contributed to stories of relationship in which they transformed the discourses they inhabited and employed in their relationship conversations, in ways that served their purposes and contexts.

Chapter 8. Humour: A relational production

This chapter focuses on the ways participants shaped and transformed discourses of humour and of the ways humour shaped the participants' relationship stories. For this chapter I welcome you back to the theatre I set in Chapter 2. I personify Humour and place it centre stage as a performer in a theatrical production. Along with the research participants and me, Humour performs the reflexive audiencing process as a spect-actor – actor, audience, and critic. Through this process, Humour and I produce an externalising conversation that illustrates Humour's part, as a situated social practice, in the choreography of the participants' couple relationships.

The audience plays a part

I offer you, as audience to this chapter's performance, two particular tasks. The first task calls on your imagination. Unlike most performances, I provide you with the script. I ask that you use this script to engage in the performance as a live enactment.

Your second task is to connect with the actors and authors who speak into the performance without having access to the characterizations that playwrights usually provide their audiences. Making these characterizations available would risk defining participants by stereotypic identity descriptions that produce them as particular types of people, whom you, as audience, can readily identify with from your own lived experience. This practice involves a normalizing gaze (Foucault, 1977) on the individual persons that centres them as the object of attention. It also produces expectations for them to speak and act in particular ways. I ask that in the constructionist, poststructuralist spirit of this performance, you direct your gaze, instead, to the relational constructions produced in the moment-by-moment interactions that unfold in the performance.

The performance

Throughout the production, I play two parts. I move between the lectern as Narrator and the interview chair as Interviewer. Humour is also present in each of the four Acts.

In Act 1, I introduce and interview Humour. Some of the literary voices that have contributed to Humour's identity development are with us in the audience and speak into the performance.

In Act 2, the ten research participants as actors join Humour and me. They perform scripted excerpts drawn from the transcripts of the videotaped research conversations they enacted together as couples, and those that they subsequently audienceed and critiqued. Humour and I take up audience positions to these vignettes. From the audience, Humour witnesses itself, providing reflexive commentary on its production in the couples' conversations.

In Act 3, two of the research participants, Amber and Philip, take the stage and perform conversations between them that show the complex and subtle ways they produce Humour-in-action, and they investigate its involvement in their conversations.

In the fourth and final act, Amber and Philip provide an overall summary for the chapter as they speak of the ways audienceing Humour has contributed to the development of understanding, meaning and knowledge, for them as a couple.

Act 1: Humour talks theory

I invite you to take your seats for the performance. The stage curtains are closed. In front of them, on the front left of the stage, two low comfortable chairs are placed, half facing each other and half facing the audience. Between the chairs is a coffee table.

Humour takes the stage

Wendy (*Walks to a lectern positioned to the left of the chairs.*)

Members of the audience, would you please welcome to the stage
our guest of honour, HUMOUR!

A figure strides onto the stage. Gender and age are indistinguishable under the long mop of multi-coloured hair and the flowing sequined cloak illuminated by the kaleidoscope of stage lights that I described in Chapter 2. These are the lights of Shotter's (1989; 1993) relational communitarian perspective that understands identities as constituted and mediated by talk. The multi-faceted silver mirror ball hangs from the roof of the stage, radiating the lights of discourse. These lights illuminate the multiple discursive positions Humour makes available to those who use it to take up or refuse. And, the positioning theory strobe focuses attention "on dynamic aspects of encounters" (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 43) between persons in conversation.

Humour (*Stands in front of the audience and bows*)

Audience (*Applauds*)

Wendy (*Beckons to humour to take a seat*)

Humour (*Smiles, places a large carpet bag on the floor beside one of the chairs, and sits down*)

Thank you, thank you. It's a pleasure to be here, but tell me, how come you need me? You're the researcher and this is your baby. Aren't you supposed to talk about me?

Wendy (*Sits on the other chair*)

Well, believe me I did try. The couples you are about to meet tonight in the performance provided plenty of stories about you, as did the many theorists and researchers who have investigated you. The problem was that everything I wrote just ended up boring me. I thought, "Isn't humour supposed to be fun?"

Simon (*Simon Critchley's voice hails from the audience*)

"A theory of humour is not humorous" (2001, pp. 1-2).

Humour (*Laughs*)

Wendy My intention was for this thesis to convey some of the enjoyment I experienced in the research conversations. But as I wrote, I fell

into the trap that Michael Mulkay (1988) identified more than twenty years ago.

Humour Traps can be so much fun. What was the trap?

Michael (*Michael Mulkay (1988) speaks from the audience*)

I'll answer that if I may.

In the serious realm we normally employ a unitary mode of discourse which takes for granted the existence of one real world, and within which ambiguity, inconsistency, contradiction and interpretive diversity are potential problems. In contrast, [you humour, depend] on the active creation and display of interpretive multiplicity. When people engage in humour ... [t]hey temporarily inhabit, not a single, coherent world, but a world in which whatever is said and done necessarily has more than one meaning. (*pp. 3-4*)

Humour So how was that a trap, I don't get it?

Michael "[T]he incompatibility of the humorous and the serious modes can create practical problems for the serious analyst" (*Mulkay, 1988, p. 7*).

Wendy (*Addresses the audience*)

I propose that, constructionists and poststructuralists have shown that the elements Michael referred to as humorous modes of discourse, such as interpretive diversity, contradiction, inconsistency and ambiguity, are just as available in discourse outside of humorous domains. For example, Kenneth Gergen (*1985a*) claimed that from a social constructionist perspective "the rules for 'what counts as what' are inherently ambiguous, continuously evolving, and free to vary with the predilections of those who use them" (*p. 6*).

I think poststructuralism and social constructionism have come a long way in the last twenty years in troubling the so-called reality of a unitary, congruent, knowable-in-common world. I don't think of humorous and serious modes of discourse as incompatible. Nor

do I think of them as distinct modes of discourse. I see them more as co-habitants of constantly changing, largely uncharted discursive territory. I prefer to conceive of discourse more as a constantly changing multi-dimensional spectrum. In this spectrum, Humour has multiple positions, as do serious discourse, gender, power and so on. Sometimes these discourses are clearly visible and sometimes they are hardly distinguishable in the milieu of discourse.

Humour I still don't get the trap you talked about.

Wendy (*Turns to address Humour*)

Well I began writing about you and noticed that my writing ended up sliding into the quicksand of ennui. Maybe in the writing context I had unwittingly positioned myself in Michael Mulkay's (1988) serious mode of discourse territory. I thought by writing you into this performance, you might be able to help me stay on the path of ambiguity, contradiction and inconsistency. I said before that the rigorous pursuit of a unitary, congruent, knowable-in-common world has been challenged. However, I believe that much intimate relationship literature, and the models of doing relationship that are readily available to those we commonly call couples, do err on the side of unitarism – is that a word?

Humour Who cares, I know what you mean.

Wendy And your presence in the research conversations in this study has produced a different picture. So, I think you can tell us something about relationships. And, what could be better than using your fun side to help us to explore relationships?

Humour OK, you want a bit of fun, ambiguity, contradiction, and inconsistency. That reminds me of that Donny and Marie Osmond (1976) song.

(*Stands and begins to sing*)

I'm a little bit country

And I'm a little bit rock 'n' roll

I'm a little bit of Memphis and Nashville

With a little bit of Motown in my soul.

I don't know if it's good or bad
But I know I love it so.

Audience (*Applauds*)

Humour (*Bows and sits down*)

Why did you choose me to research anyway?

Wendy You took me by surprise. I did not expect to be writing about you. Before this study, I thought intimate relationship conversations were a serious matter. Don't get me wrong, Gary and I like to have a laugh and some fun together, but when it came to talking about our relationship, I took that very seriously. Then I met with the research participants and there you were, an integral part of their relationship conversations! I noticed what Jennifer Coates (2007) called "humorous talk" (p. 29), which she said is collaborative and interactive and emerges organically from everyday conversations. And, when most of the couples audienced their conversations they, too, were struck by your presence. Mary Crawford (2003) has taken up a similar position describing you as "a mode of discourse and a strategy for social interaction" (p. 1414). She claimed that "conceptualizing humor as a mode of discourse encourages research on interactional humor" (Crawford, 2003, p. 1420). So here we are. Rather than a focus on the individuals who produce you, you, Humour, become the object of study.

Humour The object of study. I'm not sure I like that idea! I'm more inclined to camouflage myself so when people see me they see me as the person who is using me.

Wendy As you say that I am reminded of the work of Sallyann Roth and David Epston (1998). Their focus was on the relationships people have with problems in therapy. Our focus is on research and couple relationship practice and is, therefore, not limited to problems. However, these authors used the narrative therapy idea that problems are located in person's relationship with problems, and along with the practice of externalising, developed a language practice, which involved a process of objectifying and personifying problems so that people could investigate their relationships with

problems. I have adapted the practice of problem-externalising conversations, which Sallyann Roth and David Epston (1998) proposed, by personifying you and producing this externalising conversation we are having now. In this way you, and, our conversation, are externalised.

Humour Moi? The centre of attention? Cool! But, what is the purpose of this externalising conversation?

Wendy By personifying you and investigating your presence in the couples' relationships in this way, my intention is to set up a generative and appreciative receiving context in which the research participants, you, and I, can think about and negotiate, the kinds of relationships we have with you.

Humour O.K. But, what difference do you think I can make to the theory of relationships?

Wendy Well, the multiplicity inherent in you makes you an ideal topic for taking up a critical position on everyday life. You can expose ambiguity, contradiction and inconsistencies that are often taken for granted, and, as Michael Mulkay (1988) suggested, are considered problematic in relationships.

Humour Hmmm, to eccentricise the conventional so to speak?

Wendy Simon Critchley (2001, p. 65) is a philosophy theorist and is here in the audience. Simon, would you tell us how you proposed that humour does this "eccentricising the conventional"?

Simon "Humour views the world awry, bringing us back to the everyday by estranging us from it" (Critchley, 2001, p. 65).

Humour effects a breakage in the bond connecting the human being to its unreflective, everyday existence. In humour, ... the world is made strange and unfamiliar to the touch ... humour might be said to be one of the conditions for taking up a critical position with respect to what passes for everyday life, producing a change in our situation which is both liberating and elevating, but also *captivating* ... (2001, p. 41, *emphasis in original*)

- Wendy (*Addresses Humour*)
- Simon spoke about you being well positioned to produce change through critical evaluation. The purpose of this study is critical investigation of intimate relationships. From Simon Critchley's account, you provide a lens through which we can critically investigate relationship conversations. In particular, this research focuses on discourse, positioning, agency, power relations, and that serious/humour territory that I mentioned earlier.
- Humour I can also produce change, liberation, elevation and captivation for couple relationships. Isn't that what you are after?
- Wendy As you will see shortly, you did contribute to change in the couples' relationships and they were captivated by your presence and involvement in their conversations. However, this study is not about attempting to describe a philosophy of you, Humour, for couples. It is about investigating the ways you and each couple together produce each other in moment-by-moment conversation-in-action. It is about noticing the effects of this production on the relationship and evaluating these effects so that couples can use you in ways that fit best for their unique relational contexts. In this process, the couples and you are dynamically shaping and originating you. If we think of liberation in terms of mo(ve)ment (Davies, et al., 2006): embodied moments when couples experience you dynamically changing their individual or relational subjectivity then you could be considered liberatory, I suppose. The notion of liberation can also be associated with liberation philosophy and a liberal humanism (White, 2000). In these contexts liberation involves broad-based social movements seeking to address oppression and repression and effecting social change for groups of people on a larger scale (White). This study does not seek this kind of liberation.
- Humour I can see from your example of liberation that the different meanings people make can have an effect on how I am experienced and how the relationship is produced. So when Simon said that I

- produce change that is elevating, does that mean that couples are swept off their feet by me?
- Wendy The idea of elevating gets me thinking about levels of change and of scales that measure and compare levels of change. I propose the idea of change in terms of katharsis (Lear, 1988) and transport: that through the audiencing process couples might be transported to new and different places.
- Humour Transport. That's got many meanings as well. I guess you mean that they might experience me in new and different ways.
- Wendy Yes. I think the work that you and the couples do in the production of their relationships is meaningful for the couples and informs their relationships in rich ways. Our work is to show that in this performance.
- Humour OK, you've convinced me. But I'm not going to give away all my secrets. Simon also once said that being "a nicely impossible object" makes me an "irresistible attraction" (*Critchley, 2001, p. 2*). I like that!
- Wendy I think what Simon was referring to when he described you as a "nicely impossible object" was that developing a philosophy of humour is tricky because what might be understood as humour to some may not be humour to others. Your elusiveness and complexity makes you attractive to philosophers such as Simon. Speaking of attraction, that outfit is quite impressive. It's got the "Joseph and the Technicolor Dream Coat" look about it. That bag looks like it's been around since Mary Poppins hit the big screen. And, your hair! Is that a wig, or the real thing?
- Humour I can tell you're a researcher. Asking all these probing questions. Luckily, I find manners far too restrictive, otherwise I could be offended, you know. Anyway, yes it's a wig. I have a few more in my bag here, too. It was so hard to know what to wear today.
- Wendy What was hard?
- Humour Everywhere I go, people have different ideas about me, and different expectations of me. And, sometimes I want to be more, or less, visible depending on the audience.

- Wendy So would you say that you are chameleonic?
- Humour I am colourful but I wouldn't say I'm flowery.
- Wendy Nooo, I'm not talking about a camellia. I'm talking about a chameleon. According to the English version of the Encarta dictionary, a chameleon is something or someone "who rapidly changes personality or appearance". Do your gender, identity, and shape constantly change as they are simultaneously moulded and remoulded by the unique historical, local, multi-cultural discursive environment you inhabit at any one time?
- Humour I have a feeling you have invited me here to find that out.
- Wendy Given your willingness to dress appropriately for each occasion, it sounds like you make yourself available to postmodern, constructionist critique.
- Humour What does that mean?
- Wendy Are you open to viewing and re-viewing the ways in which you discursively shape and are shaped in this performance and in the research participants' relationships?
- Humour I like change, and keeping people guessing is part of my tantalising charm. I'm here to find out what you have discovered about me. So, what are your hunches?
- Wendy Well, it will spoil the show if I say too much, but these are some of the things that the participants and I have noticed about you in the research conversations, things that haven't previously been too much in the public eye, especially in the readily available literature for couples. These points form the tale of this performance. We will substantiate them in the detail of the analysis we produce together.
- People can use and reflect on you simultaneously.
 - When you speak or act, there is a range of position calls that are available to take up or refuse.
 - These position calls produce relations of power.
 - Power relations are visible, and at work, in your modus operandi.

- You are discursively constituted. You shape relational partners in the unique contexts of their lives and relational partners shape you.
- You have real and potential effects on couple relationships.
- You serve unique and productive purposes in relationship such as meaning-making.
- You perform multiple subjectivities.

Humour Ooooh, you make me sound like a real celebrity. If you keep this up I'll have the paparazzi following my every move. Tell me about my fans: those research participants who have uncovered my not-so-well-known, exquisitely proficient strategies.

Wendy Well, the research participants are actors in the show, so you will meet them in the next Act. Every participant in the study spoke about their relationship with you in the research conversations. The extracts from these conversations make up the scripted words of the participants in this performance. Along with selecting the words of the participants, I have also attempted to capture the spirit in which they spoke the words. For example, sometimes they employed you for playful competitiveness, sometimes to position someone as the butt of the joke.

Humour Ouch! I feel like I'm about to be de-frocked.

Wendy Don't worry, what I present in this chapter is just one developing translation of many possible versions of you. This version we are producing as we speak and act has been uniquely crafted through a process of selections.

Firstly, the participants offered selected aspects of their lives into the research conversations. There was vast territory of lived experience that they did not share. I then selected excerpts from the transcripts of these conversations. In a third step, I produced a script from the selected text. Also, whilst I selected text from conversation that participants were drawn to, my own experience is inevitably implicated in what I noticed, appreciated, and was

interested in. Each of these selections creates and recreates different versions of you. As we speak together and participate in this performance, your identity is further shaped. From this perspective, there is no unitary Humour, but plural, dynamic, co-produced Humours. So, hopefully, you can relax and enjoy the show.

Humour A bit like multiple personalities?

Wendy More like multiple identities. This idea will become clearer as the performance unfolds.

Humour One more question. How come you have us all on stage in front of an audience?

Wendy Telling this story of you, and your appearance in ordinary intimate relationship conversations, as a performance was informed by several factors. Firstly, Henk Driessen (1997) drew attention to joking as performative.

Henk *(Henk Driessen stands and speaks from the audience)*

Joking, in the anthropological sense, is a face-to-face discourse, a *performative* genre that includes plays, stories, folk tales, ritual forms, ritual clowning and ordinary conversation. Jokes are acted out on a cultural stage by performers amidst an audience. (Driessen, 1997, p. 224, *emphasis in original*)

Wendy Also, I have developed the reflexive audiencing process as a performance. So performing this chapter seemed fitting. A third area of inspiration came from Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth St. Pierre's (2005) ideas of writing as "creative analytical processes" (p. 962). I decided that instead of just talking about you I would talk with you. Is that creative, or what?

Humour Very postmodern.

Wendy Well thank you. That leads nicely into my last point. In postmodern qualitative research "writing is always partial, local, and situational ... ourselves are always present" (Richardson & St.

Pierre, 2005, p. 962). Employing a performative style for this chapter provided a way in which I could write you and me into the research. This strategy works to blur the boundaries between researcher and researched, a feature of performative psychology (*Gergen, 2001*). Speaking of writing as performance, you will notice in the script that I have included bracketed voice inflection cues such as “laughing voice”, or “smiling voice”, that depict voice tones. These are to assist the actors and script readers to orient themselves to your sometimes-invisible presence.

- Humour Ah, so that’s how you notice me when the text obscures me?
- Wendy Yes. Speakers often use verbal inflection and gestures such as smiling or laughter to make it clear that they are calling on your practices. These practices are not always visible in the written text. I made note of these gestures and voice tones when I watched DVDs of the research conversations and wrote them into the script.
- Humour This is going to be interesting. Seeing and hearing myself from this seat will be quite different from what I see and hear when I’m doing my thing in conversations. I can’t wait to see what I look and sound like.
- Wendy The opportunity to see and hear yourself in this way is one of the particular features of reflexive audiencing practices. The research participants followed a similar process when they saw themselves on DVD. Like the couples, you and I will have a conversation about what we audienced.
- Humour Cool. That makes perfect nonsense. When can we start? I can’t wait to see what the research participants have to say about me.
- Wendy Then let’s sit back and audience Act 2. Curtains. Lights. Action!

The curtains open and the stage lights up.

Act 2: Reflexive audiencing the work of humour

Wendy *(Steps up to the lectern as narrator)*

Take a moment to familiarise yourselves with the stage. The setting is an open plan kitchen, dining and lounge in a modern residential home. In the lounge on your left of the stage there are three two-seater couches forming a U shape in the lounge area. A large television screen on the lounge room wall is visible from all areas of the theatre. A DVD player and a remote control sit on a coffee table in front of the couches. The round dining table to the right of the stage seats eight. To the right behind the dining table is a kitchen area. The actors enter and leave the stage from open French doors at the back left of the stage that appear to lead out into a garden. It is a fine summer evening and the chirping sound of a chorus of birds and cicadas is coming from the garden.

The cast is the five couples whom I introduced you to in earlier chapters, either directly or as Alex and Chris. They are, Anne and MJ; Laura and Andrew; Geena and Susan; Amber and Philip; Charlotte and Doug, and of course, you Humour, and me. During the data generating, the couples did not meet as a group. For this performance, however, I have brought them together, and conflated extracts of their texts to read as a conversation they had as a group.

The auditorium lights gradually dim into darkness. A single spotlight shines in the middle of the stage. The actors file silently onto stage. Four of them move towards the kitchen bench and begin to make drinks. The silhouettes of six other people are visible sitting at the dining table. Wendy sits next to Humour in the chairs on the far left of the stage. The story begins as a conversation unfolds between the couples about Humour. The script is composed directly, and only, from transcript material.

The spotlight moves directly onto the group in the kitchen as Laura, one of the group, speaks.

Scene 1: Humour – important, complex, multiple

- Laura Something that I liked and I noticed [in our relationship], was the humour [Andrew and I] had....
- Philip Ah humour, [Amber and I] use humour ... I love it. ...I think humour's really important, for us anyway; we have to be able to laugh and enjoy life....
- Geena I think humour plays a big part. Well, I know humour plays a huge part in our relationshipIt's so important to me in a relationship....We do use humour a lot....
- Susan I think humour's essential. ...
- Geena Probably humour is the saving grace of our relationship.
- Susan And, it drew Geena and me together - a similar sense of humour. ...
- Geena I loved it.
- Susan To watch [us using humour on DVD] ...
- Geena It made me realise how important it is. ... And how much I relish it and treasure it. ... I guess it made me more aware that it's present.
- Humour *(Whispers audibly to the audience)*
I can see I have a bit of a fan club but I have to say that I can play some pretty mean tricks too, you know.
- Wendy *(Whispers back to humour)*
You'll get a chance to perform many subjectivities for us, including those "mean tricks".
- Humour Subjectivities? Do you mean costume changes?
- Wendy Using a theatrical metaphor, it would be more like character changes: the chameleonic thing I talked about earlier. The meaning of multiple subjectivities will become clearer as the show progresses.

Philip walks into the lounge area and places two drinks on the coffee table. The spotlight follows him and settles on one of the two-seater couches on which he and Amber sit.

Philip Humour's complex and is usually multiple ...There're usually multiple layers: one brings multiple points together. Humour isn't simple. ... Oh, there're so many layers.

Amber *(In a laughing voice)*
 It's like an onion.

Philip *(In a smiling voice)*
 Like an onion, brings tears to your eyes.

The actors all 'freeze' and their still silhouettes are visible in the semi-darkness as the spotlight moves to Humour on the front left side of the stage.

Humour Ha ha, yes, laughter brings tears to my eyes just like peeling an onion. What an exquisite rendition of metaphor and the duplicity of meaning to show my complexity. And, what style they have, using me in their commentary of me. I'm impressed.

Wendy Yes, Amber, and Philip have illustrated my earlier point "that people can use, and reflect on you, simultaneously". This next scene shows some more complexity at work and the multiplicity that Philip referred to earlier.

Scene 2: The butt of humour

The stage lights dim. All eyes turn to the big screen as it lights up. The following vignette starring MJ, Anne, Charlotte, and Doug, begins to play.

The four characters are sitting around a dining table.

MJ We've always joked about Anne being sort of the dreamer in the family, the emotional one.

And we've joked about the Jewish mother, you know, all the jokes about the son. "He's my son". Anne, you tend to want to guide them your way. It's kind of like letting go. Anne isn't very good at that. I find it quite funny because it doesn't affect me that much, but I don't know what it would be like for our son and daughter....

Anne MJ's humour is very much like his father's. His dad used to say [hurtful] things [in jest]. People would take offence, and he would say, "What did I say?" For the last forty, fifty years, MJ's been saying this. It's a standing joke with people who used to work for him, the kids, and me....

Charlotte Doug's got this thing about medical stuff. The kids call him Doctor Doug because he generally talks about stuff he doesn't know very much about in a very authoritative way. It's very funny.

Doug Careful!

Vignette 1: The butt of humour

The spotlight shines on the dining table where Anne, MJ, Charlotte and Doug were seated watching the DVD. They are about to discuss the vignette they have just witnessed.

Anne stands, and followed by the spotlight she walks to the front of the stage. She uses soliloquy to respond to the vignette.

Anne Humour always seemed to be concerning Anne.
Anne is the Jewish mother.
The family joke.
Anne is the dreamer in the family.
The family joke.

Well, am I the butt of family humour?

Or, am I really like that?

Is it real?

The spotlight moves to Charlotte who responds to Anne.

Charlotte I don't know what word I could put for when you're feeling like it's a little patronising; it's a little poking the borax. Some of the borax pointing is on the sarcastic edge of humour.... Actually, you're the butt end of a joke and the joke's not that funny....

Anne *(Sits down)*

It's just dawned on me that it's probably why I do take offence at some kind of humour that I find not funny, because I feel it's a criticism of me in a humorous sort of way....I think it should be OK for me to say, "Sorry MJ, I don't find that funny"....

MJ I think the lesson's all mine. I've suddenly realised what I'm doing to Anne when I'm making her the butt of a joke. It's making her feel childish and insignificant, so I'll have to stop using her as a butt....It comes down to the awareness of hurting one another in a way you're not really realising you're doing it.

The actors again freeze and the spotlight moves back to Humour and Wendy seated in their chairs.

Humour You know there's something different about this reflexive audiencing idea.

Wendy What do you mean?

Humour Well, watching that conversation shows me things about myself that I hadn't even realised before.

Wendy What kinds of things?

Humour Well I knew that I could get between people by positioning them as the butt of a joke. And, I knew that the idea that the joke spoke to some inner flaw or truth about their identity could get them to take responsibility for being the butt of a joke. Anne begins to do that when she says, "Am I really like that? Is it real?" If I failed with

that strategy, I could get the person who told the joke to take the blame by suggesting to them that the joke is not funny, as Charlotte's words "Actually you're the butt end of a joke and the joke's not that funny," suggest. Or, a third option could be to have them think that they don't have a sense of humour.

Mary *(Mary Crawford (2003) speaks from the audience)*

There are some gendered ideas that view "gender as a fundamental, essential part of the individual" (p. 1416). These ideas shape beliefs, such as "women as a group lack a sense of humor" (Crawford, 2003, p. 1416).

Humour These ideas make it easy for me to have individual women believe they don't have a sense of humour. I've just realised how gender shapes me. And, I've seen how gender is negotiated and shaped in conversation between people. Wow! There could have been a time, before feminism, when Anne would probably have just accepted the description of the dreamer in the family or the family joke. And MJ would have said Anne didn't have a sense of humour rather than entertain the idea that the joke might not be funny. He wouldn't have even considered that he might have some responsibility for positioning Anne in ways that were offensive or patronising. My, haven't I changed? Amazing!

Wendy Yes, here they are performing gendered identities by refusing those well-trodden patriarchal paths. And, in so doing, they are shaping the gendered discursive territories they inhabit, and they also shape you, Humour. Also, MJ's words "I've suddenly realised what I'm doing to Anne ... It's making her feel childish and insignificant so I'll have to stop", is an example of relational knowledge production-in-action. Through the interaction, MJ learns of the effects of using Anne as the butt of the joke, and he voices an intention to stop this practice. MJ's identity is produced differently in this conversation, and gender and humour discourses are shaped in the speaking.

Humour I didn't know I could be such a multi-tasker. Aren't I doing well?

Wendy Yes, doing being the operative word.

- Kaethe *(Kaethe Weingarten (2006) stands and speaks from the audience)*
I suggested that hope can be transformed from a noun to a verb, which can generate new thinking about hope.
(Sits down)
- Mary *(Mary Crawford (2003) stands and responds from the audience)*
And I argued that “gender is conceptualized as a verb” (p. 1417).
(Sits down)
- Wendy *(Addresses humour)*
In the vignette and the reflexive conversation that followed, we see you produced as a verb as the actors perform you. We see a discursive production in which you make various positions available to MJ and Anne to take up or refuse. For example, Anne considers the position of saying “Sorry MJ, I don’t find that funny”. MJ is also repositioned as he says that he “realized what I’m doing”, and declares, “I’ll have to stop using her as a butt”. These position calls produced in conversation are thus socially constructed. You are at work as a situated social practice.
- Humour I always considered myself a bit of a mover and a shaker.
- Wendy Speaking of movement, Charlotte says, “Some of the borax pointing is on the sarcastic edge of humour”.
- Humour That makes me edgy.
- Wendy In what way?
- Humour Well, as I told you before, I can play some pretty mean tricks. And, Charlotte just exposed one of them. I can get a whole family to think I’m hilariously funny and at the same time cause hurt and divisiveness. I could probably have got away with that here if they hadn’t seen themselves in action.
- Wendy I also noticed, in the vignette, that Anne invites MJ into the same kind of butt of joke position that she experiences as offensive and not funny?
- Humour Ah, paradox, just another of my many features.
- Wendy Was there anything else that resonated as you watched yourself in that last vignette?

- Humour I was disappointed to see the way Anne and MJ make meaning in the conversation. Anne's words "It's just dawned on me", suggest that she develops new meaning and understanding of the impact of my jokes on her. This meaning invites Anne to consider refusing the butt of joke position by saying "Sorry MJ, I don't find that funny". And, MJ's words "I've suddenly realised", suggest new knowledge or meaning that has become available to him in the conversation.
- Wendy How is that disappointing?
- Humour I've been exposed. They are on to me now, aren't they?
- Mary *(Mary Crawford (2003) stands and speaks from the audience)*
Anne and MJ illustrate what I meant when I said that from the social constructionist position "meaning is co-constructed and contextual" (p. 1418).
(Sits down)
- Wendy And, as we are speaking together, new meaning is being constructed between us. For example, you said earlier, "I've just realised how gender shapes me".
- Humour I see what you mean! All of this new knowledge, just from me watching Charlotte, Doug, Anne, and MJ, watching themselves, and me, on DVD. That's a bit of a tongue-twister. I might have to don my hat with the camellias around the brim. I have just experienced an identity change.
- Wendy Chameleons. That practice of looking back at yourself to see the work you do in relationships is, in research terms, reflexivity. In Barbara Myerhoff's (1982) terms, reflexivity can arouse consciousness and awareness as participants see themselves as heroes in their own dramas.
- Humour *(Muses aloud)*
A hero in my own drama. I like that.
- Wendy Yes, she and her colleague, Jay Ruby (1982), said:

Reflexivity generates heightened awareness and vertigo, the creative intensity of a possibility that loosens us from habit

and custom and turns us back to contemplate ourselves just as we may be beginning to realize that we have no clear idea of what we are doing. (1982, p. 1)

When MJ said “I’ve suddenly realised what I’m doing to Anne ... I’ll have to stop using her as the butt ... it’s making her feel childish and insignificant”, I read this as a practice of contemplating a habit or custom of offering Anne butt of joke positions. This contemplation produces awareness for MJ, of using Anne as the butt of a joke and of its effects. Speaking of reflexivity, in the context of anthropology, Barbara Myerhoff and Jay Ruby (1982) said that “[o]nce we take into account our role in our own productions, we may be led into new possibilities. ...We may achieve greater originality and responsibility than before, a deeper understanding at once of ourselves and our subjects” (p. 2). MJ’s words, “I’ve suddenly realised what I’m doing to Anne ... I’ll have to stop using her as the butt ... it’s making her feel childish and insignificant”, show “new possibilities ... greater responsibility ... and a deeper understanding”, produced in their relational context.

Humour Hmmm, some of those new possibilities, greater understanding, and responsibility are rubbing off on me too. That’s a bit close to home.

Wendy Humour, you noticed gendered discourses earlier and spoke of the ways in which gender shaped you. Gender studies have made a contribution to the expansion of the ways in which you are known (Crawford, 2003). I agree with Mary Crawford’s (2003) claim “that the intersections of gender and humor are theoretically and pragmatically vital” (p. 1414). In this next piece, you might be interested to see MJ and Anne engage in some reflexive dialogue on what I call the gender/humour nexus.

Scene 3: Women lose their sense of humour at forty

The lights dim and the DVD plays the following vignette.

MJ and his bowling partner Joe are in the locker room of the local bowling club after a tournament.

MJ See you Joe. Say “Hi” to Mary.

Joe She’s not talking to me at the moment, mate.

MJ What have you done now?

Joe She made some scones to bring for morning tea and I told her we could use them as bowling balls they were so hard. More like rock cakes than scones. She picked one up and I thought she was going to throw it at me. She didn’t, but she gave me that disapproving look.

MJ Mate, females lose their sense of humour at forty. They just can’t take the truth

Vignette 2: Women lose their sense of humour at forty

The actors, except for Anne and MJ, maintain their “frozen” positions. Anne and MJ, a heterosexual couple in their late 60s who have been together for more than fifty years, stand up from their couches and walk over to the edge of the stage, lit by a spotlight.

MJ *(Addresses the audience)*

I’ve said females lose their sense of humour at the age of forty.
And, all the men joke about this.

Male *(Interjects from the audience)*

Too right, mate.

Several other male audience members whistle, laugh and applaud in agreement.

Humour *(Laughs and mumbles, just audibly)*

Oh, oh, this’ll be fun, not.

Anne *(Addresses the audience)*

He always says I haven't got a sense of humour. But, I have a very good sense of humour. ... But, it's just not into sledging. ... A lot of men's humour is slinging off at each other, like sledging each other. ... And males think that's funny so that's a boy kind of humour ... that men have. And, women aren't into that kind of humour. ... MJ uses that kind of humour on me and it doesn't work. That's why I take it seriously. [I'm] having a go at MJ. ... I call it sledging. It's boy humour.

Women *(A chorus of women in the audience applaud and murmur agreement)*

MJ *(Addresses the audience)*

Anne said that men are sarcastic, and I accept that. I realised that everything the guys say to each other is really quite sarcastic and very heavy stuff.

Male *(Interjects from the audience)*

Steady on mate. It's just having a bit of fun.

MJ But they laugh it off. It's said in this humour. Anne was accused last night by one of the males [we were out for dinner with], that the trouble with women is they cannot cope with the truth; they just don't like the truth. It suddenly occurred to me this morning, I said to Anne "You know you are absolutely right about men being sarcastic, but it is our way of saying the truth to one another. We know it's a sarcastic remark, we know there's a hidden agenda in that remark, and that's how we cope with it. Now if you do that same remark to a woman, it's received in a totally different way. And, women can't cope with it. And so from a male point of view, you can't cope with honesty".

More whistles, laughter, and words of agreement resound from some of the male contingent.

Humour I've really got them going. There's nothing like a bit of heckling to liven up the show.

Anne I see the difference between being brutal in a man's way, to being gentle in a woman's way, brutal as opposed to constructive.

MJ At the end of the day, what we are saying is that men actually verbally say things differently to a woman. Neither was right and neither was wrong. When the guy said women can't stand honesty, what he was saying was really a kind of truth. But, as Anne said, men are too brutal and sarcastic, which is also right. So neither is wrong, nor right. ...I've said to Anne openly, many, many times, and we've argued about it, she's lost her sense of humour. But, she's said, "No, your humour is too vicious for me". And, this morning, to me I've resolved it now.... If I don't use humour differently, I'm being a fool because that's how you hurt people by pressing those buttons. And now I know there's two extra buttons on Anne I just don't press.

(Turns to Anne)

I've realised that I don't want to go through the rest of my life hurting you, so I might have to button off saying things and just tell the men in the locker room, that's all.

Actors all 'freeze' on stage and the spotlight moves to Humour and Wendy.

Wendy *(Addresses Humour)*

I will step back into the narrator role for a moment and do some theorizing. I may speak about you as if you are not here, but I am very aware that you are the focus of this conversation. If you have anything to say, I welcome your contributions.

Humour Be my guest.

Wendy *(Stands at the lectern and addresses the audience)*

Humour "offers us a powerful device to understand culturally shaped ways of thinking and feeling" (Driessen, 1997, p. 222). MJ's claim, that "females lose their sense of humour at the age of forty", speaks to a cultural story grounded in discourses of humour and gender. This story was noted by Mary Crawford (2003), earlier, when she pointed out the commonly held idea that "women as a group lose their sense of humour" (p. 1417). MJ takes up the idea that women, as a collective group, lose their sense of humour, as a prescription of the discursive repertoires to which he has

access. He subscribes to, echoes, and reproduces, this cultural story, and thus illustrates Jennifer Hay's (2000) claim that "gendered patterns of interaction, and humour, are culturally grounded (p. 738).

Mary (Mary Crawford (2003) *stands and speaks*)

Women and men use humor in same-gender and mixed-gender settings as one of the tools of gender construction. Through it, and other means, they constitute themselves as masculine men and feminine women. At the same time, the unique properties of humor make it a valuable tool of gender deconstruction. (p. 1413)

Wendy Yes. Anne and MJ's dialogue provides an illustration of the practice of deconstructing gendered humour whilst simultaneously producing gendered and relational identities. In the text I selected for analysis, Anne uses the discursive practices available to her to produce herself as a woman (alongside other women) who engages in women's humour that she identifies as "gentle" and "constructive". It is evident from her words that she also has access to discourses that she uses to produce herself as someone who can take a stand against humour that goes against gentleness and constructiveness, by refusing the invitation to respond with amusement.

(*Turns and addresses Humour*)

Anne and MJ negotiate and produce you, Humour, in the conversation between them. You operate as "a mode of discourse and a strategy for social interaction" (Crawford, 2003, p. 1413).

(*Turns and addresses the audience*)

Through this discursive process, the available humour and gender discourses simultaneously shape MJ and Anne and they shape the discourses.

Humour (*Mutters audibly to self*)

- I told you things have changed. There's another tactic out in the open.
- Wendy MJ produces himself as a caring partner who recognizes the effects of “men's humour” in his relationship when he says “This morning ... I've resolved it now. If I don't use humour differently, I'm being a fool because that's how you hurt people”. In this conversational moment, he makes the call to refuse familiar discursive practices of what MJ and Anne have named men's humour, and to take up a different discursive position in relation to you, Humour, which is to “use humour differently”. As he considers using “humour differently” a wider discursive repertoire becomes possible for him to call on. This discursive territory, which includes gender and you, Humour, changes as MJ speaks.
- Humour I'm not just a pretty face you know. There's more to me than meets the eye. But, if people know these things I'll just be putty in their hands.
- Wendy *(Sits down in the chair)*
But, think of all the ambiguity, inconsistency, contradiction and interpretive diversity you can have fun with.
- Humour Actually I get quite a kick out of surfing the discursive waves. Never knowing where they will take me and what I will look like at any given moment. And, I can be many things to many people depending on the discourse mates I hang out with and the hoods I hang out in.
- Wendy Hoods?
- Humour Neighbourhoods; contexts in your lingo. That makes me very powerful you know.
- Wendy Good point. We can't have a conversation about you and gender without including power relations.
- Humour I'm not sure I want to go there.
- Wendy Can you humour me for a moment?
- Humour OK but don't spoil my reputation as a wonderful, fun, playmate.
- Wendy Remember we have an understanding about unitarism.

- Humour Go on then, power relations. I don't think you'll find them on my side of the family though.
- Wendy If I draw from Michel Foucault's (1978) ideas about power relations we would find them in your side of the family. He said power is everywhere (p. 93). Power is exercised in discourse, in relations between people (Foucault, 1978). Doug and Charlotte, in their research conversations used the metaphor of a see-saw to describe the ways in which the balance of the see-saw positioned them equitably in conversation and how that balance tipped to position them in a one-up, one-down position in relation to each other.
- Humour A playful metaphor. Sounds like fun.
- Wendy I suggest that the image of a seesaw runs the risk of locating the source of power as an internalised commodity that either Doug or Charlotte has and uses. I prefer a metaphor that makes space for more occupants in the power relation.
- Humour Damn, I thought we were going to play teeter-totter.

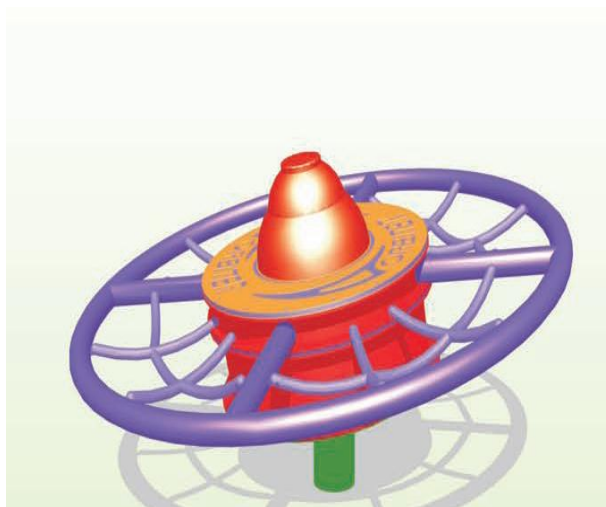


Figure 1 Orbitor



Figure 2 Operating the Orbitor

(An orbitor lowers onto the stage)

- Wendy I have another idea. Hop on. I use the Orbitor metaphor to speculate on some of the ways you may have contributed to shifting power relations. Imagine we are at a playground and you,

Charlotte, and Doug are on this Orbitor. There may be more players too, like gender and other cultural discourses. Let's say the Orbitor is kind of like power. It is multi-directional and produces many possible positions its players may take up. There is space for more players than the seesaw allows.

So, in this example, the players on the Orbitor can include people in relationship, as well as the discourses they mould and that mould them. When a person or persons lean in a particular direction, other players inevitably move also. The strength of the pull from some can influence the opportunities and positions of others. The Orbitor, like power, is moved by the players as they constantly shift and change position and direction.

Humour Pulling the trajectories of power. Hmmmm. I hadn't seen myself as a powerhouse. Quite the opposite; I saw myself as just a big joke that nobody took seriously. But, I can see that I do pull strings. Like, I have Anne, MJ, Charlotte, and Doug offside with each other by positioning one as the butt of the joke, against the other. They have also pulled my strings by recognising my influence and changing their ways of using me, as MJ and Anne showed earlier.

Wendy Yes, that's exactly the kind of power relations I'm talking about. Anne speaks of times when MJ offers her butt-of-joke positions that are experienced by her as patronising and offensive. At these times, the effects of butt-of-joke positioning may shift the Orbitor and offer Anne and MJ different positions in the power relation. As they each take up and refuse these positions, they may then contribute to the Orbitor moving more towards or away from equity and balance. Then, as Anne speaks of MJ's sense of humour being a standing joke, the positions she offers MJ may again shift the power relation.

Another example of a shift for MJ may occur when he suggests that all men joke about females losing their sense of humour at

forty, and can't take what he calls "the truth" from your sarcastic edge. The response from the men in the audience positions them alongside MJ on the power Orbitor. I suggest that at this moment the men are positioned well to move the Orbitor, whilst limited movement is available to the women. This culturally sanctioned position may shift when MJ recognises the effects on the relationship of positioning Anne as the butt of family humour and voices an intention to refuse to position her as the butt of family humour in the future. Can you see how the discourses of power and gender are all on the Orbitor producing people and people are producing the discourses as the Orbitor is positioned and repositioned?

Humour Of course, Anne, MJ, Charlotte and Doug would have to have the final word, but I think you and your research participants have done a pretty good job of showing my camellia, chameleonic abilities. My tactics are out in the open. Why did I agree to this? Can we have a break while I pull my complex, multi-faceted, discursive identity together?

End of Act 2.

Curtains close.

Act 3: Amber, Philip and the functions of Humour

Scene 1: Playful humour

As the curtains open, Amber and Philip are sitting on a two-seater couch. They are alone on stage except for Humour and Wendy whose silhouettes can be seen sitting in their chairs. A dim light creates a cosy glow around Amber and Philip as they watch the following DVD vignette of a recent Scene 1 conversation between them.

Amber	We need to make space in the bedroom.
Philip	Yes, we can get rid of that rocking chair.
Amber	Noooo. I wish my rocking chair was more out and able to be used, instead of holding your clothes up off the floor.
Philip	Yeah, I need something for that.
Amber	<i>(Laughs).</i> You could always put them away or put them in the washing machine...
Philip	I'm a lot better at putting clothes away than what's in your corner of the room...
Amber	<i>(Laughs)...</i>
Philip	Man there's like a stock pile going on ... It's a climb Mount Everest type of experience to get to the top of that ...
Amber	Your pile's higher though <i>(laughs)...</i>
Philip	Yeah, you're competing in height but I have a structure underneath holding it up. You started from scratch. Build the pyramids.

Vignette 3: Even handed humour

The DVD ends, Amber, and Philip, as audience, begin a reflexive conversation about the humour they have just witnessed themselves enacting.

Philip	That was pressing buttons...
Amber	Winding up humour...
Philip	I knew that would press a button straight away.
Amber	<i>(Laughs).</i> Yes, it did...
Philip	It was fun. That was having fun with each other...
Amber	'Cause I knew you'd never get rid of the rocking chair.
Philip	No, I wouldn't get rid of it ... It's treated wood, I can't even burn it.
Humour	<i>(Whispers loudly from the side of the stage)</i> There he goes again, using me in his analysis of me. I do enjoy the way Philip uses metaphors of Mt Everest and the Pyramids to embellish and exaggerate me. I was thinking about the Orbitor

when they were talking and it seems they are pretty well matched in that conversation.

Wendy Would you say you were more on the edge of humour than sarcasm in that moment?

Humour Yes, definitely. I never keep still do I?

Philip It was good-natured humour ... Just to be funny or, elbowing maybe.

Amber *(Laughs)*.

Philip I don't know, maybe we just like having fun.

Humour *(Speaks from the sidelines)*
Hear. Hear.

Amber Sort of poking fun, but, it's not sarcasm,

Philip Sometimes it is, but, in a good intentional way.

Amber Yeah. It's not derogatory ... or putting down or anything.

Philip Humour about life isn't it? Picking out the fun out of life...

Amber I think we know the safe subjects between us ... So it's safe humour as well.

Philip It's safe because we do know it's done out of respect for each other as well.

Humour They have me sussed. That vignette was an example of how I can be really even-handed. It was fun wasn't it?

Wendy There are so many adjectives used to describe you: elbowing, winding up, good natured, good intentioned, sarcasm, and poking fun humour. I would add another description, that of playful competitiveness.

Humour Yes. I can be such a tease.

Michael *(Michael Mulkay (1988) stands and speaks from the audience)*
"To tease is to say or do something that is intended light-heartedly to make fun of somebody else's words or actions" (p. 73).
(Sits down)

Wendy I can see how teasing could have a multitude of different effects on relationships.

Humour Oh yes I can use my teasing strategies in many ways. Philip and Amber's evaluation of the conversation positions me as safe and

respectful. Their commentary paints the picture of the Orbitor on an even keel.

Wendy *(Steps up to the podium)*

Philip and Amber's conversation exhibited what Jennifer Coates (2007) described as humorous talk in that it exhibited spontaneous expressions of verbal play that emerged from their everyday conversation and was maintained by them both (p. 31). Jennifer Coates (2007) suggested that this form of play can only be achieved in an environment of close collaboration and can produce solidarity and intimacy between speakers (p. 29).

Jennifer *(Jennifer Coates (2007) stands and speaks from the audience)*

"Successful collaboration arises from shared understandings and shared perspectives, and is a strong demonstration of in-tune-ness" (p. 46).

Humour In-tune-ness. That's a lyrical description. I can get people dancing to the same tune or different tunes, depending on the circumstances.

Jennifer "Humorous talk often involves speakers constructing text as a joint endeavour, just as jazz musicians co-construct music as they improvise on a theme" (Coates, 2007, p. 32).

(Sits down)

Wendy *(Returns to sit beside Humour)*

Humour, you introduced the metaphor of dance to suggest that speakers use you to co-construct relational dances. So far, Amber and Philip exemplify how they use you to dance to the same tune. In Vignette 1, Anne and MJ, and Charlotte and Doug, provide examples of times when they take up "butt of joke" positions that have them dancing to different tunes. These dances take them out of step with each other.

Relational solidarity and respect were two of your intentions identified by Jennifer Hay (2000) in her study of your occurrence in New Zealand friendship groups. In my study of intimate relationships, you have produced respect and solidarity as Amber and Philip have shown. However, Charlotte, Doug, Anne, and MJ

have identified that it is also possible for offensiveness and dissonance to be an effect.

Humour *(Stands up and performs a brief tap dancing routine)*

My dance repertoire is extensive. And, we have seen so far that each couple creates unique versions of me at different times and in different circumstances for different purposes.

Wendy Yes, a poststructuralist account would suggest that you use these different repertoires to produce your many “subjectivities” (*Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984*). From this perspective you, Humour, are a subject that “is composed of, or exists as, a set of multiple and contradictory positionings or subjectivities” (*Henriques, et al., 1984, p. 204*). You perform these subjectivities in Charlotte and Doug’s, and Anne and MJ’s relationships.

Humour Is that what you meant when you asked if I was cham, chameleonic before?

Wendy Yes. And Amber and Philip, Anne and MJ and Charlotte and Doug have shown us what Judith Butler (1994) called “performativity” (p. 33). As they speak about you, they bring you into being; they produce your subjectivities in particular ways. And, at the same time, you and they produce and reproduce their subjectivities. If we think about you in discourse terms, this example shows how you shape these relationships and how the partners shape you in their conversations.

Humour Wow! All of that from a playful, and I admit, sometimes a little bit mean, bit of fun.

Wendy Philip and Amber do suggest you are a playful bit of fun on this occasion. The conversation between them also offers an interesting example of the simultaneous production and troubling of gender identities. For example, neither Amber nor Philip suggests that the other partner take sole responsibility for tidying the clothes. Instead, the text conveys an understanding that they each take responsibility for tidying their own clothes. This understanding exemplifies refusal by Amber and Philip to prevailing constructions

of masculinity and femininity that may produce Amber, as the wife and stay at home mum, as responsible for tidiness and laundry care. Amber and Philip give a graphic example of the ways in which discourses of masculinity and femininity are available and performed in humorous conversation.

Jennifer *(Jennifer Coates (2007) stands and speaks from the audience)*
In this vignette Amber and Philip show the process of switching “repeatedly between serious and non-serious frames” where they “collaborate with each other to bring about the switches. The unpredictability of this kind of talk is part of what makes it fun for participants – anyone can trigger a switch at any time” (p. 33).

Wendy The dialogue also shows the simultaneous process of evaluating you, Humour, and producing you, which again exemplifies you as contextual, complex and performed in relationship. As you watch Amber and Philip’s next vignette, notice the ways in which the voices have the same tone and expression as the last segment. However, consider how this piece of conversation might be different from the last.

Scene 2: Serious Humour

The spotlight moves across stage to Amber and Philip. The DVD of them talking together appears on the TV screen and the volume becomes audible to the audience.

Amber	Hot air balloons, are we going?
Philip	I’ll go.
Amber	Are you going to take all of the children?
Philip	Except for the youngest one.
Amber	Oh, I was going to say “here’s something to talk about our relationship” (laughs). “You taking all the children” (laughs).
Philip	I’ve done it before. It’s OK.
Amber	Just when I was in hospital.

Vignette 4: Serious humour

The DVD ends, Amber, and Philip turn to each other and Amber begins the reflexion of what she saw and heard.

Amber I thought, “Oh, you’re going to take them all”, thinking, “I know you’re not going to take them all”.

Philip Yeah, you knew I wasn’t going to take all of them ... But you thought you would point it out anyway ... Yeah, that was elbowing humour.

Amber I guess in some ways, some part of humour is maybe trying to get a point across, as well, but getting it across in a light way, so that, maybe – hey, I would really love it if you took all of the kids ‘cause that would be really cool for me. I’d get a little bit of sleep in and time to myself - but to have to say all that makes it sound a bit draggy and dreary.... For me, the purpose was, maybe, the possibility that you actually might do it.

Philip *(Laughs)*
See, that’s funny by itself.

Amber *(Laughs)*
Me saying, “Ooh you’re going to take them all” meant you thought about it for half a second even if it was in a dismissive way. But, had I said nothing you might have thought “Oh yeah, she doesn’t want me to take them all anyway”.

Humour OK, I admit I did have a different agenda that time. I thought it would be too subtle for anyone to pick up.

Wendy What were you up to?

Humour I’m not used to this reflexivity and having to be transparent and accountable. It’s all a bit new to me. I prefer it when you think I’m straightforward and simple. But, I’ll give it a go. I think I made a speaking place available in which Amber could keep the hope for change visible. This hope was that Philip would consider, “for half a second”, taking all of the children out.

Wendy	This is an example of “trying to get a point across ...but getting it across in a light way”. In this moment you are “both playful and serious” (<i>Driessen, 1997, p. 222</i>) Michael Mulkay (<i>1988</i>) suggested that: The boundary between the humorous and the serious domains is as ambiguous and uncertain as the discourse of humour itself. On some occasions, humour is clearly signalled and accepted unproblematically as humorous. On other occasions, it is signalled but deemed by some not to be amusing. In certain circumstances, usually when something unexpected occurs, some participants, but not necessarily all, find humour where it appears not to have been signalled or intended. Furthermore, events which were treated perfectly seriously at the time can often be reformulated as humorous in subsequent accounts. (<i>Mulkay, 1988, p. 55</i>)
Humour	I agree with these claims, but I add that in the example Amber uses, there is not a distinction between humour and seriousness. You were at once humorous and serious. Another example of my “irresistible attraction” of “being a nicely impossible object” (<i>Critchley, 2001, p. 2</i>). Now I can add performer of multiple subjectivities to my curriculum vitae.
Jennifer Hay	(<i>Stands and speaks from the audience</i>) Amber and Philip demonstrate and articulate my claim that “humour is a complex discourse event” (<i>Hay, 2000, p. 737</i>).
Jennifer Coates	(<i>Stands and speaks from the audience</i>) Amber’s suggestion, of trying to get a point across in a light way, exemplifies what I consider to be one of the fortés of humour, which is, that it “allows us to explore, in new ways,

what we know, and even, by using other words, to explore things which are difficult or taboo” (Coates, 2007, p. 32).

Michael Mulkay

(Also stands and speaks from the audience)

Amber and Philip exemplify the ways in which dialogue can “imply that certain aspects of ... speech are not to be taken seriously; but there is nevertheless a serious component. It seems that ... words convey both serious and humorous messages at the same time”, which is an “illustration of the uncertain meaning of the signals for humorous discourse and of the indefinite boundary between [humorous and serious] discursive modes” (Mulkay, 1988, p. 67).

Wendy

I would add that Philip and Amber’s conversation shows the complex and nuanced relationship in which seriousness, humour, gender, purpose, and power, for example, are all situated and negotiated in this relationship.

Wendy

(Steps up to the podium and speaks from the narrator position)

Here we see an example of Amber and Philip using a humorous mode, “not as a self-contained alternative to serious discourse, but as a useful resource for accomplishing serious tasks” (Mulkay, 1988, p. 217), or, “to convey serious meanings whilst appearing merely to jest” (p. 30). It seems to me that they use humour in ways that Jonathan Miller (1988) proposed as a “rehearsal of alternative categories and classifications of the world in which we find ourselves” (p. 11). He described “the jocular as a kind of sabbatical section of the mind in which ‘off duty’ is celebrated” (p. 11). This idea posits humour as a kind of recreation that “is in fact re-creation. It is the rehearsal, the re-establishment of concepts” (Miller, p. 15).

Simon Critchley

(Stands and speaks from the audience)

Jokes have a sense of *thereness*; they illuminate the social world that is held in common with others. If we are to clarify this *thereness*, then it must be in terms of the ‘we’ of a specific community, with a common language and shared cultural assumptions and life-world practices. (2001, pp. 86-87, *emphasis in original*)

Wendy And I would add that jokes go further than illuminate the social world. We have seen how jokes and humour also produce the social world and the social world produces jokes and humour. Mary Crawford (2003) also suggested that humour is co-constructed in a linguistic performance in which people use strategies to signal humour. Conversational partners either take up or refuse these signals.

Humour Anne illustrated this earlier when she noticed MJ’s use of me but decided it was “not funny” and didn’t go along with it.

Wendy How are you feeling at the moment?

Humour Like a complex performer of multiple subjectivities that shapes relationships and relationships shape in social interaction. More like a nicely impossible verb than the object that Simon Critchley (2001) described me as. But, of course that could change depending on the neighbourhood I inhabit.

Wendy I couldn’t have said it better myself.

End of Act 3.

Act 4: Conclusion – A reflexion of the chapter by Amber and Philip

As the curtains open, Amber and Philip are standing centre stage.

Philip It's been fascinating how much humour we use. I knew we used it a lot, but seeing how often that is, and it is a lot, even in our measure ... Sometimes it serves a direct function, sometimes it's just purely to keep interesting and humorous, sometimes it's to be distracting.

Amber I mean we came up with all sorts of different reasons, like, to skip topics or to end part of a conversation or just to put a laugh in there.

All of the actors join Amber and Philip on stage.

Amber and Philip speak to the cast and to the audience.

Philip Humour's complex and ... there's usually multiple layers. Humour is complex: you bring multiple points together. Humour isn't simple ... Oh, there's so many layers.

Amber *(Laughs)*
It's like an onion.

Philip Like an onion: brings tears to your eyes.

Humour and Wendy line up with the actors, join hands and bow.

Final Curtain.

The End.

Chapter 9. Researcher reflexivity: A relational production

In this chapter, I again invite you back to the stage I set in Chapter 2. In a doubled reflexive arc, I use reflexive audiencing practices as the conceptual means by which I engage in an investigation of researcher reflexivity. This story of researcher reflexivity developed concurrently alongside the participants' stories of relationship practice as the research project unfolded.

My interest in practitioner reflexivity has a longer history that has developed over the twenty years of my apprenticeships in counselling and group-work practice. The call from these work contexts, to pay attention to how I practice and to be accountable for the effects of this practice, has shaped my practitioner identity in rich and generative ways. This history, and this identity, inform and shape the research practice I effectuate in this study.

So far, I have shown through this thesis that reflexivity provides a means by which couple relationship practice can be articulated and accounted for. The kind of reflexivity to which I refer involves the simultaneous process of seeing the object of one's gaze and the means by which it is being constituted (Davies, et al., 2004). I have produced and investigated reflexive audiencing practices as a conceptual framework that research participants drew from to audience their couple conversations. As I became more involved in this project, I began to notice the ways reflexive audiencing practices contributed to further developments in my own relationship with practitioner reflexivity.

In emphasising researcher reflexivity in this chapter I de emphasise couple relationship practice. I take this step of centralising researcher reflexivity for several reasons. Firstly, I take up Barbara Kamler and Pat Thomson's (2006) call for research scholars to apply to their own practice the same critical and investigative stance and attention they give to the data generated in the research. This step, of placing my practice under investigation in similar ways to the couples who participated in the research, is one that engenders the kind of egalitarian project I sought to produce and have spoken of in earlier chapters. By taking this step, I trouble the idea that this investigation is a one-way endeavour in

which only the participants' benefit from reflexive audiencing practices. I show that my supervisors and I also benefited from using this reflexivity to investigate our supervision relationship and my research practice.

A second intention for emphasising researcher reflexivity is to show the work of reflexivity in a research supervision context. By showing how reflexivity works in supervision by making visible the moment-by-moment constitution of reflexivity, as it unfolds in extracts of conversational dialogue, I provide an accompaniment to the supervision and reflexivity literatures that theorise reflexivity.

A third purpose, which follows on from the former one, is to show the process of deconstruction at work. In the extracts of conversation that I investigate in the following pages, moments of reflexivity and supervisor/teacher and researcher/student relationship discourses are deconstructed. I investigate how aspects of these intersecting discourses are constituted and reconstituted, and researcher and supervisor identities are produced and reproduced, in extracts from research supervision conversations.

A fourth reason for this emphasis on researcher reflexivity is to provide an example of the inevitable and inextricable involvement of others in this research production. For example, this chapter shows my doctoral supervisors and me in a process of relational power/knowledge production. Through this process of power/knowledge production, we experienced rich identity development that would not have been possible without our collective involvement. This chapter illustrates the whakatauki that I began the Acknowledgements section of the thesis with – Ehara taku toa, he taki tahi, he toa taki tini. An English translation of this proverb is - My success should not be bestowed on me alone, as it was not individual success but success of a collective. As I said in Chapter 1, this thesis is penned by me, but it is produced by the work of collective contributions. This chapter makes visible some of this collective work.

A fifth intention is to illustrate the ways reflexive audiencing practices can be employed to investigate relationships in contexts outside of coupledness. The

research participants spoke of the couple-counselling context as a possible site for reflexive audiencing practices, and this chapter shows its benefits for research and supervision contexts.

Finally, I propose that this move of centring researcher practice also assists me to identify, understand, and articulate aspects of reflexive audiencing that I did not address during the research conversations with participants. For example, I asked theoretical questions about reflexivity in research supervision that were not appropriate to ask in the research conversations or that emerged after my conversations with participants had ended. Additionally, in the research relationship with participants, the power relation offered me different positions to those in the supervision relationship. By investigating researcher reflexivity and the participants' couple relationships, I was well positioned to consider different sides of the power relation.

Whilst I centre this researcher reflexivity story, and tell it as if it were separate to the story of reflexive audiencing practices for couples, the two stories were woven together in the research, each shaping the other in a dynamic, recursive relation. To create a receiving context in which the relationships between these stories can remain present and tangible, this production that you are about to step into uses a particular genre of theatre that I now describe.

Some years ago, I attended a theatrical production – *I ain't nothing but: A glimmer in the dark she said* - that involved two different but related performances. Actors enacted these performances, simultaneously, on two adjoining stages, in adjacent theatres. The same actors acted in both of the performances by moving between the two stages through an adjoining door. The audience divided into two groups. One group audienced one play at the same time as the other group audienced the second play. Then, each group swapped theatres and the plays repeated so that each audience member eventually attended both of the plays. Each play, on its own, told a meaningful and rich story, but after audiencing both plays together, the story was further enlarged and enriched in ways that were not possible from audiencing one play. In similar ways to the performance I have just described, this research shows the simultaneous weaving

and telling of two separate but related stories that I then write consecutively. I ask you, as audience, to use this theatrical metaphor to read these consecutive stories of researcher and couple reflexive audiencing as simultaneous productions.

I use the stage as a site in which to show and tell this story of researcher reflexivity. I do this because performance makes it possible to describe reflexive practice whilst simultaneously showing its ongoing constitution and development as it unfolds in the process of the telling. In earlier chapters, I produced an enactment of reflexive audiencing practices for couples who participated in the research. I now ask that you as audience step into an adjoining theatre for this enactment of researcher reflexive audiencing.

Scene 1: Taking up the call to audience researcher practice

The curtains open.

The setting is a researcher's office. A wooden desk, with a computer, sits on the left hand side of the stage. The computer is on and a transcript text is visible on its screen. The researcher is seated in a black swivel chair working at the computer. A video camera stands on a tripod next to the desk. A television and a DVD player sit on a low table in the right-hand corner and a DVD of a research interview is playing on the TV screen. A large L-shaped couch sits strategically so that those who sit on it, as well as the audience, can see the computer and television. On the coffee table, in front of the couch, lies an array of papers, some in orderly piles, and some less orderly. On the back wall is a bookshelf stacked with books and articles. The researcher stands, walks towards the front of the stage, and addresses the audience.

Wendy Welcome to my office. This performance of researcher reflexivity unfolds here. First, I tell a story. The story begins in 2007, the year I embarked on my research project. Before providing an account of how I understood practitioner reflexivity at that time, I emphasise that this account has a long history. It tells of reflexivity that has been dynamically shaped, and reshaped, over

twenty years of apprenticeships in group-work, counselling practice, counselling supervision, and counsellor education. These contexts, and the research literatures I consulted, contributed to my ideas about researcher reflexivity and my identity as a researcher. For example, this identity was, and continues to be, informed by ideas of dialogical reflexivity that involves “a process of explicitly turning one’s critical gaze back on oneself as well as the professional, historical, and cultural discourses that empower and constrain one’s capacities to think and act in the context of a relationship” (Hawes, 1998, pp. 105-106). The purpose of this reflexive process is to permit “the other to become known through a dialogical process of differentiation” (Hawes, p. 100). On these terms, by externalising my practice and engaging in a dialogical investigation of it, I get to know and shape my practice in rich and generative ways.

When I began this research project, in 2007, I understood researcher reflexivity to be a relational process that involved my research practice and me. This practice included being ethically accountable to the research participants in every phase of the research process. It involved responsibility for meeting the ethical and procedural obligations I had agreed to in my research plan and ethics proposal. It also meant taking responsibility for reflexive engagement and development of my research practice. I believed that the construction of practitioner reflexivity I have outlined here, involved a bi-directional relation between my practice and me for which I was solely accountable.

What I discovered instead was that this relation extended beyond the duality of me and my practice. The significance of this story, and the process through which these discoveries unfolded, prompted me to include this performance as a chapter in the production of this research thesis.

I pick up the story at a memorable and significant moment in 2007 when, in a supervision conversation, one of my doctoral supervisors, Kathie Crocket, invited me to take up an audience position to a piece of writing that I was struggling to refine. Kathie made this invitation in similar ways to those I offered research participants when I asked that they position themselves in relation to their Scene 1, taped couple conversations (see Table 1, page 106). My development of the reflexive audiencing process for the research, positioned me well to take up Kathie's invitation. In similar ways to the participants, I videotaped myself reciting the piece of writing, and then took up an audience position to view the DVD with the intention of critically investigating and refining the writing.

This audience positioning provided me with a range of advantageous perspectives. Firstly, it offered me a different vantage point from which to view my writing. This different third-person, or maze-viewer, position has been theorised in earlier chapters. For example, the position of vantage assisted me to externalise the writing practice and investigate it as a relational construct.

Secondly, by videotaping practice and then taking up a third-person vantage from which to view, re-view and critically analyse my writing, I take up similar spect-actor positions as the research participants. I am involved as actor in the writing and reflexion, and as audience and critic in the performance of that writing and reflexion.

Thirdly, joining the audience for whom I was producing the writing offered me an audience perspective. Paying attention to the audience for whom authors write, and shaping the writing accordingly, is an important writing practice (Harris, Wilson, & Ateljevic, 2007). This audience included Kathie Crocket and

Elmarie Kotzé - my doctoral supervisors - the research participants, examiners, academics, and practitioners who engage in some way with this written thesis.

How the voices of those involved in research are positioned and written about are important considerations for researchers, along with decisions about how these individuals and groups are represented in the writing (Harris, et al., 2007). Stepping into the positions of participant, audience and researcher provided me with different perspectives from which to consider how I positioned and wrote about the voices of those involved in the research, including myself.

The detail of the developments that emerged from researcher reflexive audiencing positioning is another story that I soon tell. First, I step into the future to another memorable and significant moment in a supervision conversation.

Curtains close

End of Scene 1

Scene 2: Enacting researcher reflexivity

Curtains open

The setting for this scene is a meeting room at the University. In the room is a large table and chairs. There are two whiteboards on the wall and in one corner, a television and DVD player sit on a trolley.

Elmarie, Kathie and Wendy sit around the table talking together in a supervision conversation. On the table, in front of each of them, lie pages of writing drafts they are reading and discussing together.

Wendy *(Addresses the audience)*

It is now 2010. Kathie, Elmarie and I are nearing the end of a supervision conversation. My writing has been the focus of this discussion. You are most welcome to listen in.

(Turns back to Elmarie and Kathie)

Elmarie Wendy, you come in here with a reflexivity that I am appreciating. This discussion feels like a real collaborative talking and struggling and learning. How do we create that for people to step into? Because, it's almost the same with the couples [your research participants]. How do we create that? What are the transitions and shifts you went through?

Wendy I am captured by your questions, Elmarie. How we produce reflexivity is of interest to me. I am also interested to trace the steps that contribute to a collaborative talking and struggling and learning environment. As you say, I have involved research participants in this kind of environment, so thinking about your questions may also help me better understand and articulate their experience of reflexive audiencing. I am interested in taking a closer look at our supervision conversation and engaging in a reflexion of what has contributed to this reflexivity, and the collaborative talking and struggling and learning you have identified. I will let you both know how I get on.

Curtains close

Scene 3: A Reflexion of a reflexion

Curtains open

It is now one week after the 2010 supervision conversation. The setting is the same, Scene 2, University meeting room. Kathie and Elmarie sit at the table in front of the television. Kathie uses the remote control and pushes play to watch a DVD of a video diary, recorded by Wendy, that tells of her reflexions after audiencing the previous supervision conversation. Wendy sits in the audience. The video diary begins with Wendy speaking on the DVD.

Wendy Hi Elmarie and Kathie. I have been giving considerable thought to the questions you asked in our last conversation, Elmarie, and decided to record this video diary to catch you both up on the development of these thoughts.

It is amazing how one produces reflexivity during one's sleep! I woke this morning with several new ideas that emerged from our last supervision conversation.

The questions you asked me, Elmarie, inspired the developments.

Elmarie	Wendy, you come in here with a reflexivity that I am appreciating. This discussion feels like a real collaborative talking and struggling and learning. How do we create that for people to step into? Because, it's almost the same with the couples [your research participants]. How do we create that? What are the transitions and shifts you went through?
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My reading of your words, “this conversation feels like a real collaborative talking, and struggling and learning”, locates the collaboration, talking, struggling and learning in the conversation. I had previously associated the work of struggle and learning to be the task of the researcher, yet here I understand your comment to include you, as supervisor, in the struggling and learning. It is a new development for me to consider the struggle and the learning as a multi-directional process. By locating the talking and struggling and learning in the conversation I can see how we constitute that relationally in the moment-by-moment dialogue we produce together.

I also read your question - “How do we create that for people to step into?” - to be reflexive. The practice of reflexivity that I draw

from involves turning a practice back on itself to take a critical view in order to understand how that practice is constituted. Your question invites a collective inquiry into the constitution of reflexivity in supervision, and in research practice.

Two developments emerge for me at this moment. The first is an introduction to the notion of supervision as a site for reflexive practice. Until that point in time, I had understood reflexivity to be limited to self-reflexivity in which I as researcher investigated my relationship with the various aspects of my research practice. I am now conceptualising reflexivity as a multiply sited practice. Secondly, by emphasising the “we” in your question, I am introduced to the notion of reflexivity as a collective practice.

As a way of theorising this development of supervision as a site of reflexive practice, I turned to the supervision literature. Susan Hawes drew from postmodern, feminist traditions to describe clinical supervision as a collaborative, bidirectional process in which dialogic reflexivity is produced (Hawes, 1998). The ideas that she elaborated further shaped my understandings of reflexivity as I read. For example, I was able to understand our supervision experience in terms of theory, and see its links with reflexivity. These developments extended my understanding of the research conversations participants had together as couples. I now understand these conversations as practices of dialogic reflexivity.

Additionally, as I encounter these ideas in this story of researcher reflexivity and write them into this story, I in turn shape the literature. Thus, the multiple sites of reflexivity, which I have identified, extended to include literature as a site in which I also engage relationally with reflexive practice.

This collaborative talking and struggling and learning that you identified, Elmarie, and I am subjecting to reflexive critique, is the

kind of dialogue I sought to invite research participants into. We have seen, through this thesis, how the research participants stepped into and embraced this relational process. I, too, am interested in how we produce reflexivity in supervision and in the conversations that involved the research participants.

To assist me to understand more of what might have made such reflexivity possible, for participants, for me as a researcher, and for the supervision relationship, I investigated an excerpt of the transcript from our last supervision conversation. The extract I chose illustrates what I consider reflexive, collaborative, talking and struggling and learning. I present here an annotated dialogue of that extract. My intentions are to show reflexivity at work, to theorise what contributed to the collaborative talking and struggling and learning, and to show developments that emerge through this reflexive investigation.

The excerpt begins with a statement I will now read to you that speaks to how I am positioned in relation to the piece of writing I presented for discussion at that supervision meeting.

Wendy I'm sitting with this struggle that I can't see how I'm going to make the leap I need to make in my writing in terms of sophistication and authoring.

I feel like there's this big space that is required. I can see how a certain amount of shaping has happened as we've gone through this collegial supervision approach. And I can see there has been development, but there just seems to be a big step that I've got to take and I don't know how to get there.

I draw attention to several important points in this excerpt that contribute to the story of reflexive audiencing practices. Firstly, when I speak of not knowing, I do so with an understanding that I also contribute know-how and experience to the writing. For example, in the words “I can’t see how I’m going to make this leap”, I have identified that a leap is necessary in my writing but I lack knowledge of how to traverse the territory to make the leap needed to progress the writing. My comment, “I can see there has been development”, makes visible knowledge of development.

In positioning myself as a research practitioner with know-how, I employ discourses of supervision and research relationships informed by social constructionism and poststructuralism. From poststructural and constructionist perspectives, conversational partners jointly create knowledge. Harlene Anderson (2002) proposed a collaborative approach to knowledge production. She said, “[K]nowledge is not imparted by another or a knower who bestows on a not-knower. Rather, knowledge is fluid and communal, yet personalized” (p. 1). In the context of our supervision relationship, I understand that we engage collegially and collaboratively with this kind of knowledge production. My earlier reference to a “collegial supervision approach” acknowledges this point and speaks to the different power relation produced between knowledge that is bestowed and knowledge that is generated collectively.

This construction of supervision as collaborative positions me as researcher and you as supervisors in a reciprocal relation as learners and knowledge bearers (Hawes, 1998). When I think about your words, Elmarie - “This discussion feels like a real collaborative talking and struggling and learning. How do we create that for people to step into?” - I suggest that this collaborative approach to knowledge that locates its production in a reciprocal relation is one way we create a collaborative, talking

and struggling and learning context. I sought to produce this same collaborative approach in the research relationships with participants.

A second point emerges from this constructionist poststructuralist approach. I understand that our work in supervision is to identify and critically investigate the discursive practices at work in our conversations as a way of developing the research and supervision practices. This understanding invites a focus on the practice we are investigating and developing. This is a relational orientation as we position ourselves in relation to practice. Research participants also paid attention to this focus on relational practice in their conversations.

Thirdly, my comments, “there just seems to be a big step that I’ve got to take and I don’t know how to get there”, illustrate a limitation of self-reflexivity. The process of self-reflexivity I engaged with before this supervision conversation has contributed to the development of the writing so far, and has assisted me to identify that there is a step to take. However, I have come to a point of not knowing how to proceed from this place. In this instance, I can explore further the unknown or partially known territory in the conversational space this supervision conversation provides. Your question, Elmarie, opens up this space.

Elmarie Do you know what the big step is about?
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I read this question as one asked from poststructuralist and social constructionist perspectives, and from a stance of curious inquiry. I draw attention to these same theoretical orientations as I shape my response. Firstly, I understand the question as a first step in a collaborative process through which we produce knowledge together about the “big step”. In this way, we are co-researching (Epston, 2004) .

Secondly, I understand that when you ask the question from a stance of curiosity we both share Kaethe Weingarten's (2003) account of curiosity which proposes that you are "not presuming to know what [I,] the speaker means but wanting very much eventually to understand" (p. 198).

Furthermore, my comment - "there just seems to be a big step" - and your responding question - "Do you know what the big step is about?" - illustrates to me how we are positioned alongside each other. We centre our attention on the practice we are investigating together: "the big step". In this way, "the big step" is externalised as a construct that I am both struggling with and mastering in this conversational moment. Using an externalising account of the "big step" makes it available to us to develop as we co-research my relationship with the writing. We are struggling and mastering the step together. Rather than produce a definitive answer, the question, "Do you know what the big step is about?" invites me to consider and articulate particular aspects that might begin to inform this step.

Barbara Kamler and Pat Thomson (2006) proposed that it is the doctoral supervisor's job "to help doctoral researchers look for and probe their own blind spots" (p. 67). Your question, Elmarie, "Do you know what the big step is about?" begins the process of helping me identify the blind spots in the writing we are discussing.

Wendy	I don't know, there's some level of sophistication of writing that I don't seem to be able to get a glimmer of.
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In my response to your question, I offer one possibility, "some level of sophistication", as a beginning point for exploration. My statement shows both an absence of this sophistication, "I don't

seem to be able to get a glimmer of”, and a possible presence, “there’s some level of sophistication”. These two aspects are available to story. Your response, Elmarie, picks up these two threads.

Elmarie	If we look at this chapter, what do you see in this chapter that would give you that kind of hope that this is what you want to move into, or, what do you get from this chapter that says, “No, I’m not there yet?”
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As I consider these words, two theoretical concepts come to mind that inform this question and shape how I engage with it. The first is “therapeutic posture” (White, 2005, p. 9) which involves therapists taking up de-centred and influential postures in therapeutic practice. Decentred positioning means that therapists accord “priority to the personal stories and to the knowledges and skills” of those who consult them (White, 2005, p. 9). At the same time, therapists are influential “in the sense of building a scaffold, through questions and reflections”, which make possible more richly described stories of the lives of those who consult them (White, 2005, p. 9).

Elmarie, your question - “What do you see in this chapter that would give you that kind of hope that this is what you want to move into, or, what do you get from this chapter that says, ‘No, I’m not there yet?’” - is influential, in that, you ask it from a stance of curiosity. Your question guides me to look to the chapter as a focus, and it invites me to choose what direction I might take. These factors shape a scaffold for the development of a more richly described story. At the same time, your question is decentred in that it prioritises my writing practice.

The second theoretical perspective that your question illustrates and speaks to is the concept of the reflexive eye/I gaze. Your question invites me to gaze “without judgement ... find the unexpected, the surprising - the contradictions, the 'good' and the 'bad' in all its detail - not with a mind to censor, but to say with fascination 'oh so that's how it is!'" (Davies, et al., 2004, p. 376)

I locate this question in a feminist pedagogy of supervision that “maintains a stance of posing questions rather than providing answers, in the hope of co-creating opportunities for the supervisee to discover his or her own interpretations ...” (Hawes, 1998, p. 97). I asked these same kinds of questions, from a stance of appreciative curiosity, in the inquiry guides I developed, and that research participants asked of each other to generate knowledge and understanding of their relationship practices. Appreciative Inquiry asks questions that mobilise inquiry into positive change and aims to discover potential and strengthen affirmative capability (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000).

My response shows me similarly generating knowledge and understanding of my writing practice.

Wendy	How I articulate myself, I think, is what I'm not happy with. How to bring in the theory voices; and my voice and make it flow like a story; and the development of the theoretical part of it as well; and the development of the practical part, and gelling all of that?
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The interpretations I make begin to emerge as my response shows developing knowledge of how I might produce a more sophisticated writing. For example, I identify that bringing in the voices of theory alongside my voice may produce a narrative that flows, develops and gels.

As I speak, I notice several conceptual matters that capture my attention. Firstly, I recognise the positions I take up in this dialogue, simultaneously, as inquirer and participant, as I weave the multiple strands that comprise this critical investigation. These strands include investigation of my writing that I continue to shape as I reflect on the supervision conversation and write this diary into the thesis. A further strand involves a reflexive critique of the supervision conversation, its construction, and its theoretical location. A third strand is the focus on reflexivity and how reflexivity works to constitute and enhance knowledge and relationships. A fourth strand involves reflexive critique of the ways these reflexive audiencing practices, which we are engaging with in supervision, resonates with and informs the research process, and the conversations participants and I had together.

I am involved in a doubled reflexive arc as I speak - and write this diary's script - about reflexivity and examine myself at work in the process. As I see, simultaneously, these objects of my gaze and the means by which they are constituted, I produce reflexivity. I simultaneously experience and research the work of reflexivity as I step between analyses of the content of our supervision dialogue and analyses of the multiple strands of reflexive processes.

What I present here is reflexivity as a multi-stranded, complex, process that examines relationships-in-action at the same time as it constitutes them. The research participants negotiated this same complex territory as they viewed, re-viewed, and reviewed the content of their couple relationship conversations at the same time as engaging in critique of the means by which they constituted their conversations.

Illustrated here is Frederick Steier's (1991b) claim that social constructionist research applies the principles of constructionism to

the research and researcher. In this conversation, I show how I engage in, and experience first-hand, the same reflexive audiencing practices into which I invited research participants.

I now step from reflexive critique of reflexivity as practice and back into the dialogue of our supervision conversation.

Kathie	So, thinking of the chapter, and your relationship with the data and the literature, what would bring this writing closer to the story you want to use those data and the theory to tell?
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Kathie, whilst your voice has not been audible in this section of dialogue until now, your involvement in this inquiry is evident to me. This involvement is apparent in your question that draws together the threads of theory, researcher voice, and practice that I have identified during the preceding dialogue. This question, informed by appreciative curiosity, centres my writing practice and continues the work of building the scaffold on which I can further develop this practice.

As I engage with this question, and the preceding ones, “the leap I need to make in my writing in terms of sophistication and authoring” is being articulated and refined, as my next comment shows.

Wendy	I think more sophisticated articulation of what I was trying to say.
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I make a claim for “more sophisticated articulation”. There is still some tentativeness evident in the words “I think”, and I am noticing that. I have continued to argue for this sophistication through this conversation so far.

At this point, I step back from the words to consider, again, the power relations, and in particular how these questions of appreciative curiosity work to privilege the knowledge I bring to the relationship. By privileging this knowledge, the questions act on the power relations that discourses produce that position you as teachers and supervisors, and me as student and researcher. Therefore, these questions contribute to the collaborative orientation to supervision that I drew attention to earlier. Kathie, I read your next conversational move as a further expression of this collaboration.

Kathie	Can I just ask Elmarie something? Is that alright, for you to take up an audiencing position for a moment?
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I know that the audiencing position you speak of refers to the same concept of audiencing that I have developed for this study. For example, you are inviting me to temporarily take a particular listening position as an *outsider-witness* (White, 1995) to the conversation. This positioning involves me making a conceptual move from actor in the conversation to audience. The intention of this move is to create a point of vantage for what Michael White described as “reflexive self-consciousness” (White, 1995, p. 178). If I reflect on Michael White’s account in terms of my experience I can see that by taking up this position of reflexive self-consciousness it is possible for me to become more conscious of my identity as I see and hear myself and my participation in the production of my writing practice.

I also experience your request, for me to “take up an audiencing position for a moment”, as a step that attends to the power relations. By seeking my consent, you create space for me to accept or decline the invitation and thus take a step in addressing the power relation. I read this invitation as a further step to create

a context in which the conversation you propose to have with Elmarie is propositional, to test out with Elmarie, as I listen in as audience.

Wendy	Mmmm.
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The “Mmmm” in this instance is affirmative. I accept the invitation and take up the audiencing position. In the research conversations, I invited the participants into the same kind of audiencing position. However, they did not have access to the same kind of theoretical and practical knowledge of audiencing that we three have developed through our work. For this reason, I engaged them in the process of preparation that was not necessary for our purposes. With my consent, Kathie, you continue.

Kathie	Wendy’s used that word sophistication a number of times. And, my sense is that she’s achieved theoretical sophistication, and when she says that, my thought - which I didn’t have at the time of reading [in preparation for this meeting] - is what the next step might be is to now employ that theoretical sophistication she’s got to. I don’t think there’s more work to be done to get more sophisticated theoretically. I think the next step might be linking sophistication, complexity, and simplicity together.
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There are several important points that are of interest to me here. Firstly, Kathie, your use of the word “might”, on two occasions, illustrates the propositional stance you take up and the effects of this stance on the power relation. By suggesting that I might take these steps, you offer me the option of taking up or declining the ideas you propose. Secondly, Kathie, I recall earlier supervision conversations in which we identified and discussed the development of theoretical sophistication. The distinction you

make between theoretical sophistication and the sophistication I am suggesting in this conversation is new to me and strikes a chord. This distinction assists me to deconstruct sophistication and thus change my relationship with it. For example, I could see that continuing to develop theoretical sophistication could lead to more of the writing I had identified as problematic. However, by shifting attention to the relationship between sophistication, complexity and simplicity, a different writing is possible. By you, Kathie, introducing your understanding, I was able to further refine the writing task that your and Elmarie's earlier questions had begun.

Thirdly, I notice a shift in the direction the conversation takes. My writing practice remains the focus, but you now move from asking questions of me, to introduce some ideas that you are developing in the conversation. Your words, "when [Wendy] says that, my thought - which I didn't have at the time of reading ..." suggest to me that this thought emerges in response to my comments about sophistication.

Your words illustrate you generating knowledge in the conversation. Through this second phase of reflexivity – the supervision conversation that followed your reflexive reading of the writing – this thinking emerged. It was not available to you at the time of your first reflexive reading of the chapter.

Fourthly, building on my last point, these same words - "when [Wendy] says that, my thought, which I didn't have at the time of reading ..." - is an example of constituting reflexivity, in relationship, as a situated social practice. By this claim, I mean that in this conversation, we draw from theoretical and philosophical conceptualisations of reflexivity that are produced in particular ways by us in this conversation.

Finally, I see at work a collaborative model of supervision in which we each take up “reciprocal and mutually beneficial positions of learner and knowledge-bearer, in which the supervisor is seen as having as much to learn from the supervisory dialogue as the supervisee” (Hawes, 1998, p. 97).

Wendy	That’s what I’m thinking. I read a sentence or I read a paragraph and I want it to be simpler but when I try to write it more simply I can’t. It’s almost like I want to say, “Wendy, what is it you’re actually trying to say here?” And then say it, and then write it.
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Kathie, your words resonated with me and as a result, I enthusiastically stepped out of the audiencing position and in to the space that you made available for Elmarie to respond. As I consider this step in hindsight, I draw on the knowledge that if you had intended to step in to that space, Elmarie, you would have done so. We have since had further reflexive dialogue about this conversational moment, and you, Elmarie, have confirmed that space was available for you to take this step had you wished to do so.

Whilst my response does not show it, Kathie, your claim that I had achieved an adequate level of theoretical sophistication was news to me. This new knowledge, produced in this conversation, was not available to me through the process of self-reflexivity I engaged with prior to this conversation. This wider supervision context produced and made visible to me knowledge of what I did not know. This example highlights a second limitation of self-reflexivity. This limitation is that there are limits to what we can know.

Elmarie Mmm. So, the sophistication comes across as everyday language that somebody can pick up and read and say “Wow, what an idea.” But it is so sophisticated that it is so refined and simple.

Elmarie, I read your words as a summary that further deconstructs and refines sophistication. Together we have found the words for the kind of sophistication I seek to develop in my writing. I suggest that the conversation so far illustrates the kind of “collaborative talking and struggling and learning” that you referred to earlier. It is through “collaborative talking and struggling and learning” that this development, in the understanding of sophistication, is made possible. The three of us in conversation constitute this understanding relationally.

Elmarie And can I offer another word? The sophistication of uncluttering. Because it’s in the cluttering with lots of tricky words, or stringing words, that I think that the brightness can get lost. I think it is sophisticated work when you talk in your chapter about the moment-by-moment ways in which people do communication. I almost want to ask, Wendy, if you can find a piece in this chapter where you say, “This is the kind of writing I want to do.” Do you have one paragraph where you could say, “This is clear, this is the kind of writing I want to do?”

I note a further change in direction as you, Elmarie, migrate from contributing ideas you have generated about sophistication - “Can I offer another word, the sophistication of uncluttering” - back into inquiry that is informed by appreciative curiosity - “Do you have

one paragraph where you could say ‘This is clear, this is the kind of writing I want to do?’”

In the words, “I think it is sophisticated work when you talk in your chapter about the moment-by-moment ways in which people do communication”, I hear you identify an area of my writing that you read as the kind of uncluttered sophistication I now seek to produce.

However, rather than privilege this knowledge, you invite me to consider the ideas I might have through your question “I almost want to ask, Wendy, if you can find a piece in this chapter where you say, ‘This is the kind of writing I want to do?’” I read this shift of direction as a further example of attending to the power relations I spoke of earlier.

Wendy	That would be hard. As you say that, I immediately can’t.
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This knowledge is not yet available to me. My words, “That would be hard”, show that I am not positioned to take up the authority the question invites me into. In this moment, I can’t see what you see. This extract of conversation provides a further illustration of my claim that the concept of self-reflexivity is limited to what I see as a researcher in a given moment.

Kathie	I have ticks on page nine. ⁸
Elmarie	Yeah I have ticks there.
Kathie	Elmarie said [to you, Wendy], “Can you find a paragraph that works?” and I stepped in and said, “Well I can find a page”. What would you say about that page, Wendy?

It is evident to me, from the “ticks”, that you both see something, perhaps uncluttered sophistication, in my writing, which I cannot yet see. Ticks are practices commonly used by teachers to identify correct answers in written text produced by students. I read your references to the ticks as acknowledgement that I have produced some of the writing I seek, but have not yet recognised. The power relation swings away from an account of your expertise back to mine. Kathie, your question invites me to look at page nine and to identify the kind of writing for which I am arguing. I read page nine aloud to you in the supervision conversation and then I respond.

Wendy	Yeah, well it does sound pretty good.
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As I re-read the text I have written, I too can see some of that uncluttered sophistication. I am on the edge of knowledge about my writing that you know but I am yet to know.

Elmarie	What sounds good?
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⁸ There is an ironic reference, here, that deconstructs the teaching/supervision relation and invokes a history of research students interested in counting the ticks on their work. By drawing attention to the *ticks* Kathie makes visible her authority as the teacher, to make ticks, at the same time as she deconstructs the teaching/supervision power relation by ironicising her authority to make ticks. (K. Crocket, personal communication, March 14, 2011).

In response to your question, Elmarie, which I see as another illustration of appreciative curiosity, I begin to identify some of the elements that contribute to uncluttered sophistication in the excerpt of writing.

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Wendy | I've used a word in here that I haven't been using and that's "we". Now I don't usually speak about the reader as a "we" who's alongside me. So that's something I did differently that I think gave it a different flavour. |
| Elmarie | And are you pleased with it? |
| Wendy | Yeah, I think it sounds more dialogical, and simple. |
| Elmarie | For you, is that the uncluttered sophistication? |
| Wendy | Well it's a small part of it. It looks like we've got a nice mix of my words, theory and participants words, and that's something I'm aiming for as well, that I think contributes. I can see the step-by-step that you've been talking about Elmarie, taking the reader step-by-step. I can see that in there. |
| Kathie | How is the step-by-step produced? |

In this last segment of the supervision inquiry, as I engage with your questions, "What sounds good?" and "How is the step-by-step produced?", I begin to see and name writing practices that I had previously not noticed. Through this process of reflexive practice, we co-produce knowledge. We simultaneously transform the story of my research practice.

- | | |
|-------|---|
| Wendy | That's a good question. I think one technique I've added in to my dialogue to show the reader is [to explain] <i>when they said this, this means this and this is what it shows</i> , so, that's one way. Did you have something in mind when you asked me that question? |
|-------|---|

I suggest your question is a good one, Kathie, because your invitation to consider how I produced the step-by-step writing takes me into new territory of thought. I willingly engage in thought about this question because I believe that exploration of how the “step-by-step is produced” may inform how I might reproduce this practice in further writing. By responding to the questions informed by a stance of curiosity that centres my practice, I bring forward knowledge and ideas I have available to me.

My question of you, Kathie - “Did you have something in mind when you asked me that question?” - is a response to two thoughts I had at the time. The first is that your words, “I’ve got ticks on page nine”, suggest that you have ideas about the writing that I have not yet identified. Secondly, I know I have reached the edges of what I can contribute to your question.

This question, in the context of the dialogue we are investigating, illustrates three defining characteristics of collaborative supervision which Susan Hawes (1998) identified. These include bi-directionality, noncentrality of expertise, and circularity in modelling practices. Me asking this question of you, Kathie, shows the inquiry we engage in together is bi-directional. Our inquiry demonstrates noncentrality of expertise as we offer questions to each other that create space to share and produce expertise as we speak. On Susan Hawes terms, expertise is understood as a relational construct we all contribute to and give value to. These characteristics of bi-directionality, noncentrality of expertise, and circularity in modelling practices “speak to the reciprocity of interpersonal obligations, the absence of rigidly enacted hierarchy in a working relationship, and an outcome or object that is a shared construction of every participant” in the conversation (Hawes, 1993, p. 4 cited in Hawes, 1998, p. 97)

My asking a question of you, Kathie, is an example of circularity in modelling practice. This circularity of modelling practices offers me the position to also ask questions in our collaborative inquiry that centre the development of my research practice. That I can ask this question suggests that I can contribute to a power relation in that I can ask you to contribute knowledge and expertise.

Kathie	Well let me just be transparent. I think ...
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I read your words Kathie, “well let me just be transparent” as a further illustration of paying attention to the power relation. Together, we have engaged in the kind of poststructural constructionist inquiry, I have theorised, to centre and enhance my writing practice. First, we engage in inquiry that identifies the knowledge and expertise I have developed through self-reflexive practice, and then we extend that knowledge and expertise through an inquiry process that takes me to the edges of that knowing and expertise. In a final step, you then stand alongside me and offer further knowledge that further extends the knowing and expertise. Through this process, the development of my research practice unfolds.

Kathie, your contributions along with my own ideas produces a piece of the map for writing that I may now employ to develop the work further. Elmarie, you then contribute knowing and expertise to the conversation.

Elmarie	Kathie just said “How is the step-by-step produced?” and then we got to how it is produced. And maybe those are uncluttering sophisticated steps.
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Your words, Elmarie, “we got to how it is produced”, emphasise the collaborative we, and, provide a further illustration of the talking and struggling and learning that was involved in getting “to

how it is produced”. It was through this “collaborative talking and struggling and learning” process that I was able to go beyond the limits of self-reflexivity. I was able to experience, conceptualise and story the complex and multiple strands of researcher reflexivity as a dynamic, constitutive, situated social practice. Furthermore, in a recursive loop, the story of reflexive audiencing practices and their work in the research conversations has also been refined and shaped. As you, Kathie and Elmarie, and I, audience the diary the reflexions continue...

Video diary ends.

Curtains close.

End of Scene 3.

Scene 4: Reflexions on reflexions: A multi-phase process

Curtains open

Wendy sits at the computer in her office. She turns and addresses the audience.

Wendy The story so far has shown the constitution of reflexivity across several phases. The first phase was the production of the piece of writing to send to Kathie and Elmarie. This writing involved a process of self-reflexivity as I wrote and critically investigated the work. I then sent that extract of writing to Elmarie and Kathie who engaged in a reflexive reading of the writing. In a third phase, we met together for a supervision conversation for which you, as audience, joined us for a segment of in Scene 2. The fourth phase involved the reflexions I illustrated in the Scene 3 video diary enactment. In a fifth phase, I turned to the supervision literature to inform and further shape the discursive practice of supervision I was encountering and conceptualising through my reflexions. Then, in a sixth phase, Elmarie and Kathie offered further reflexions in emails that followed the video diary.

I present here two brief extracts from each of these emails to show the continued developments of reflexive practice and its far reaching effects for research practice and our supervision relationships. The first of these extracts is from an email Elmarie sent to Kathie and me.

From: Elmarie Kotzé

Sent: Tuesday, 15 June 2010 8:22:43 a.m.

To: Wendy Talbot; Kathie Crocket

Wendy, I have been thinking about the intentions of the questions in the example you brought yesterday in the video diary. The reflexion keeps talking in my sleep too.

In this, (our) particular example, I remember thinking, “I have no idea where this is going or even might go...” What was absent from my body, and mind, was the expectation that “I was supposed to know...” (I am part of a supervisory team). I held onto knowledge that we “will get there...” because we have done in the past. I knew that I wanted us to get to a meaningful place so that Wendy can experience mo(ve)ment. I know I was in a position of vulnerability. However, I also know that I felt well positioned by both of you to speak the “being lost/vulnerability/uncertainty” without experiencing judgement. I held knowledge that the “answer” was in the spaces between us, the literature, the text, our histories, our skills, commitment. I held knowledge that I had not seen one of us “giving up” – the conference committee we worked on together last year is an example.

If/when we talk past each other, do we have a system to check in like Kathie demonstrated? Now that I think about this, this is important, since you do it, Kathie, I am invited to do it too.

In this excerpt, I draw out several points that I understand Elmarie to be making. She refers to her experience of the supervision conversation to which her questions about the reflexive “talking and struggling and learning” were a

response. She describes the supervision relationship as one in which “being lost/vulnerability/uncertainty” could be spoken and negotiated. “[T]he literature, the text, our histories, our skills, commitment” shape the knowledge, that this relationship was a place in which the “answers” are available in the “spaces between us”. The relational context in which we produce knowledge is emphasised in these words. The notion of knowledge, as produced in the spaces between people, illuminates the poststructural constructionist approach to knowledge production I have articulated in this research. From these words, I read that we three swim in the same theoretical waters that understand knowledge production on these terms. The histories we share, of a commitment to producing the answers in this relational environment, enhance this knowledge.

I see, in Elmarie’s email, an illustration of addressing power relations at work in our relationship. These power relations are shaped by a stance we each take up to produce a collegial relationship in which know-how and “being lost/vulnerability/uncertainty” can co-exist and be negotiated. We are each positioned in a reciprocal relation as learners and knowledge bearers (Hawes, 1998). In this construction of power, positions are available to us to take up or refuse at each step the conversational process. For example, I suggest that a construction of supervision that offers binary positions to researchers as learners, and supervisors as knowledge bearers, would not create the same space for Elmarie to speak of “being lost/vulnerability/uncertainty”.

Also visible, in Elmarie’s words, is a further important point. Her comment, “I knew I wanted us to get to a meaningful place so that Wendy can experience mo(ve)ment”, illustrates, to me, decentred practice. She centres the development of my writing practice as the focus of the supervision conversation.

I understand Elmarie’s reference to mo(ve)ment, in this context, as drawn from the work of Bronwyn Davies and her colleagues (2006) to “signify the simultaneity of specific embodied *moments* and the *movement* toward the subject as process that can come about through the mode of telling” (p. 92, emphasis in original). Elmarie’s words, “now that I think about this, this is important, since

you do it, Kathie, I am invited to do it too”, also illustrate, to me, this mo(ve)ment that is produced as she thinks and speaks her reflexions.

I draw attention to one further aspect that struck me from Elmarie’s email. She is referring to the moment in the supervision conversation when Kathie asked if I would take up an audience position so she could check something out with Elmarie in my presence. She said, “If/when we talk past each other, do we have a system to check in like Kathie demonstrated? Now that I think about this, this is important, since you do it Kathie; I am invited to do it too”. This statement illustrates, to me, an important transformation that occurs in the present moment of reflexion-in-action - “now that I think about this, this is important, since you do it, Kathie; I am invited to do it too”. This example highlights the constitutive practice of reflexivity. It also shows how the effects of reflexive practice extend beyond my practice and reach into Elmarie’s supervision practice.

These reflexions on reflexions are important in that they have the effect of informing and refining my researcher practice and my understanding of the research and supervision relationships in which I engage. This refinement occurs as I look into and develop understanding of the moment-by-moment process of knowledge production and power relations we produce in supervision. This understanding assists me to articulate reflexive audiencing practices, and their effects, with which research participants engaged. In this way, my researcher identity is also shaped.

I read Kathie’s following response as a reflexion of the same conversational moment Elmarie referred to in the earlier email, and also a description of the steps she took to negotiate uncertainty, and the relational environment that created space for this uncertainty.

From: Kathie Crocket

Sent: Tuesday, 15 June 2010 4:35:03 pm.

To: Elmarie Kotzé; Wendy Talbot

I can remember this moment because it was of this idea that you, Wendy, had to get more sophisticated in your writing. I also had an idea. Although I had a knowing, I was holding it tentatively. I wondered how I could introduce that idea and I remember feeling a little inept and thinking, "If I say this to Elmarie, not only could you Wendy stand away from it as an audience, but Elmarie could contest it". I was saying, as if privately, "I'm not sure, what do you think, Elmarie?".

As I re-read this at the end of the day, I am thinking that this way of working is something that we have 'grown' into together. As I write that, what comes to my mind was the day you came in to supervision, Wendy, with your chapters mapped out on all the large sheets of paper. I remember that as an authority-taking moment - we were negotiating in a making-knowing territory. K

In her words, "Although I had a knowing, I was holding it tentatively", and, "I remember feeling a little inept", I suggest that Kathie also makes transparent the presence of "knowing" and "feeling a little inept". She, too, takes up positions as learner and knowledge-bearer in this relationship. The poststructural constructionist account of knowledge production as constituted in the conversational spaces between people is again emphasised in her words, "we were negotiating in a making-knowing territory".

In these reflexions, we occupy simultaneous positions. We are, at once, integrally involved in the supervision conversations and observers of them. Investigating our supervision conversation enables me to better understand how reflexive audiencing practices offer participants and practitioners third-person perspectives that give access to this occupier/observer territory.

These reflexions that I provide an account of here show a seventh phase of reflexive practice and the developments that we continue to produce. This seventh phase also included Skype conversations Elmarie, Kathie and I had together. An eighth phase will unfold as you, the audience, read and engage with the text.

In practice these phases, which I have identified and listed, were much more complex than I have been able to convey in this thesis. Between the lines, there are many layers and loops of reflexivity that wove through the phases in recursive and multi-directional ways. For example, my reflexions revealed many more developments than space allows me to speak to, and these developments often unfolded over time, and in complex and subtle ways. Conversations that extended to colleagues, family and friends shaped my researcher practice and thus added layers that are too extensive to give more than a brief mention of here. It is important that I draw attention to these layers and loops because their inclusion would tell a much more complex story of researcher reflexivity than this written one. This written account necessarily tells a much more straightforward story of researcher reflexivity than the one produced in the lived experience of the conversations - an inevitable outcome of the process of translating accounts of lived experience into written or oral text.

A reflexion of the chapter

This chapter has continued the theme of performance as the site in which to enact a story of researcher reflexivity. Performance made it possible to tell this story at the same time as showing its constitution as it unfolded, moment-by-moment in research supervision conversations. The chapter has taken the theory and philosophy of reflexive audiencing practices, which I developed for couple relationships, and put them to work in the investigation of researcher reflexivity. In this way, it has shown that contexts beyond couple relationship practice, such as research and supervision, can employ reflexive audiencing practices. Elements that I have drawn together to produce reflexive audiencing practices for couples were also identified in the supervision relationship. These elements included a multi-phase process through which researcher reflexivity was identified, viewed, re-viewed and reviewed from spect-actor positions. Supervision conversations

employed poststructuralist and constructionist practices that I have advocated as beneficial discursive repertoires for investigating couple relationship conversations. Like the research conversations, the supervision conversations paid attention to the production of collaborative and reciprocal relations. My supervisors and I took up positions as learners and knowledge bearers. We took up alongside positions as co-researchers, and we used externalising conversations to centralise my research practice as the focus of our conversations. We identified, investigated, and developed aspects that were known, partially known, or not known, in the reflexive/liminal space between each of us, and my practice. We emphasised a stance of appreciative curiosity in these investigations of practice.

The chapter shows the developments produced through the supervision conversation. For example, my understanding of researcher reflexivity moved from a bi-directional account that involved the dual relationship between my practice, and me, to a multi-layered and multi-directional process that included research participants, supervisors, literature and the wider audience who are involved in some way with this thesis. These developments produced reflexivity as a multi-stranded, complex, dynamic process in which we took up positions to examine my researcher practice and our supervision relationship at the same time as we ongoingly constituted the relationships.

This chapter has made important contributions to this study's argument in several ways. Firstly, it has exemplified an egalitarian approach to research that places my research practice, and me, the researcher, under investigation in similar ways to the research participants and their couple relationships. This practice, of temporarily deemphasising couple relationships and emphasising researcher reflexivity, illustrated a two-way account of beneficence in research. This two-way account acknowledged the benefits for the others who are involved in the research – the participants, the supervisors, and the wider audience – as well as the benefits for me, the researcher. I showed, through this investigation of researcher reflexivity, by using the theory and practices of reflexive audiencing, how aspects of both my researcher practice and the supervision relationship were constituted and reconstituted as situated social practices. Furthermore, the chapter also deconstructed some of the discursive practices that produce

supervisor/teacher and researcher/student relationships and that supervisors, teachers, researchers and students produce in their relationships. For example, through this process we investigated and deconstructed instances of inevitable and mobile relations of power.

This chapter makes an important contribution to understandings of reflexivity because it shows its production-in-action as a relational process. As I consider taking steps from this research into counselling, supervision, group-work and further research, the concept of supervision as a multi-directional, multi-voiced, collaborative relational process appeals. As well as the developments to my practice through the process, the practice of taping and reflexion added further important layers and rich learning. I expect that conceptualising reflexive supervision as a multi-layered, constitutive social process will contribute to my supervision practice as both supervisor and practitioner. Because my study's emphasis was couple relationships and that is what chapter 10 will focus on, this is my last word on this important finding and its implications for practice. I now move on to the tenth and final chapter in which I tell you about the study's contributions to couple relationship practice.

Chapter 10. Reflexion and conclusion

I now offer to you my account of the study's findings and discuss the possibilities of these for practice. As I offer this account, I imagine myself back on the stage. The lighting is the philosophical and theoretical lighting set up in Chapter 2 (see pages 41-47), and my research office described in Chapter 9 (see page 305) makes up the setting in which I stand and speak.

While I stand here on my own, the story I tell is populated by many other voices. Research participants, doctoral supervisors, and authors whose work I have drawn from have all spoken into and shaped this research production.

As well as presenting a multi-vocal story, I am also multiply positioned at the spect-actor (Park-Fuller, 2003) hyphen as I move between actor, audience and critic to present this chapter. As I discuss how the study's findings are particularly meaningful for couples, for my personal and professional practice, and for my professional community, I do so positioned in the same "highly political, personal, imaginative and social" spaces (Speedy, 2008, p. 28) that this study invited research participants into. These reflexive/liminal spaces provide the conditions for reflexive practice that is a feature of this study and an emphasis of this chapter.

The chapter is a reflexion on a process that critically investigated couple relationship talk-in-action. The chapter identifies important contributions that the process offers couples, and it considers what these contributions might mean for my future professional practice.

I came into this study somewhat troubled by the extent to which some discourses of couple relationship produced and re-produced given-meanings and one-size-fits-almost-all stories of coupledness. Couples counselling can offer couples the opportunity for critical reflexion on relationships and for partners to question the limits and the possibilities of these stories. Within the couples field there are a range of areas for couples seeking to develop their relationships that span counselling, couple's education and couples self-help. This study's focus was

directed to the educative space that might also have potential implications for the self-help space or the counselling space. The particular hope for this study was in this between space, where couples might have access to practices that assist them to take up similar critical and reflexive positions to notice relationship practices, to determine preferred practices and to take steps to produce these preferred practices. This study is a response to these hopes and its findings show that each of the couples was able to reflexively investigate their relationship conversations and through the process transform their relationships in meaningful and generative ways. I now describe the means by which the study contributed to these transformations.

Reflexive audiencing practices

The study developed and evaluated a set of practices for couples that I have called reflexive audiencing practices. These practices allow couples to critically reflect on their relationship conversations and they do this through a series of steps. First, familiar, and at times taken-for-granted, practices and processes of relationship conversation are made visible and audible in ways that go beyond what partners usually see and hear when they speak as a couple. Practices that stand out to the couple as meaningful or of interest are held up for appreciation. In this way, familiar practices are defamiliarised – or in Victor Turner’s (1978) terms the familiar is exoticised and the commonplace made marvellous. Second, once the practices and processes are visible people can then critically investigate them. Third, through this investigation they can evaluate these practices on terms that they get to identify and determine. These terms, which also may not be visible at first, are made salient through conversation about what the couples discern as meaningful and important to them in the context of their relationship. What is important in this conversation is that couples get to consider not just the practices that shape their relationships – landscape of action (White, 1995) - but also the meanings of these practices - landscape of meaning or identity (White) - and the effects of these practices and meanings for their relationships. Meanings are an inevitable part of any storying process but they are often taken-as-given and not held up for appreciation by partners in the storying of their lives. Therefore, reflexive audiencing practices involve making given-meanings visible, audible and negotiable. As people consider these relationship practices and processes in

terms of their production and meaning, in the context of their moment-by-moment conversation, they are involved in a process of what Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) called dialogising. Through this process, given-meanings that are culturally produced as authoritative discursive practices are re-considered in terms of how they fit or do not fit with the particular circumstances in which they are lived-out in the couple's relationship. The authority of the practices is destabilised as couples consider other possible meanings and identify steps for future action. By taking the steps of making these relational practices visible, exploring what is important and meaningful, and collaboratively negotiating future practice on terms that are personally meaningful, the couple may originate new and different practices and meanings than they have previously known or that couple literature has made known.

The technologies of reflexive audiencing practices

This set of practices that enable people to take a series of steps to critically reflect on, evaluate and shape their relationship practices is dependent upon a set of technologies. None of these technologies is unique in themselves, but the way in which I put them together in this project produces them as unique.

Videoing relationships-in-action

Perhaps the most obviously significant is the process of videoing conversations. Video offers couples different positions from which to see and hear practices of relationships-in-action. Whilst partners might see each other during a conversation, when they audience the conversation on DVD they get to see, hear and experience their relationships-in-action. Therefore, video offers couples the spatial perspective of distance from which to look in on the conversation as audience. Interestingly, video also provides a hindsight perspective made possible by the temporal distance between the here-and-now of the actual conversation and the there-and-then that couples view on DVD. Not only do they get to see and hear the conversation, or parts of it, again, but also they are differently positioned as they do so because they have already enacted the conversation. Therefore, the conversation is already familiar to them. However, as Michael White (2007) noted, in conversation many potentially significant moments of daily life that may be important and meaningful opportunities for change and development go

unnoticed. Through video, conversations can be re-viewed repeatedly, offering opportunities for different aspects to be noticed, foregrounded and investigated.

Video extends and enlarges sensory perspectives as couples experience the perspectives that closeness offers as well as those that are produced through spatial and temporal distance. Laura's following comments articulate some of the different perspectives, processes and senses that the audiencing process makes available to couples.

Laura	I guess I have learnt so much through this [reflexive audiencing] process. These learnings centre around finding out and understanding more about myself and Andrew. Having the opportunity be an audience and consequent conversations has helped. I wonder if it is because there are more 'senses' at work - observation, hearing/listening, speaking, feeling. At the moment, I kind of see this whole process as a TV screen – with surround sound.... In this case, the process is two-way with message and response. Also, with the inclusion of reflection and iteration. This situation allows for much learning.
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The metaphor of television that Laura uses is useful because it speaks to the unique ways that visual and aural “senses” are “at work” through audio-visual technology. Television involves the production of images, sound or content of a combined audio and video broadcast (Encarta English Dictionary). Tele-vision makes possible positions of distance for relationship reflexion that involves couples in a series of steps. These steps include looking back on discursive practices of conversation to see the ways the practices constitute the relationship; to consider what the practices might mean for partners and for the relationship in the future; and to identify how practice might be shaped in ways that fit with people's preferred hopes and intentions. I extend the tele-vision metaphor to propose that couples engage in a *tele-visual experience*. Tele-visual experience involves the visual and aural dimension of tele-vision as well as the sensory experience evoked by what is seen and heard. The couple get to see and hear and experience their conversation as third-person audience.

At the same time as the perspectives that distance provides, audio-visual technology also makes possible a connection with individual and couple relationships as they unfold, replayed in-action, on the television screen. As Laura's comments, above, suggest she does more than receive these images, sounds and content: she is involved in an embodied "two-way" relation of "message and response" and "reflection and iteration" with the re-played taped conversation and with Andrew. I read in Laura's reference to "surround sound", the implication that what she hears is somehow enlarged when contrasted with other metaphorical descriptions such as mono or stereo sound. Video, therefore, offers couples a multi-sensory tele-visual experience of relationship-in-action in which the partners in the conversation are moved or *transported* (White, 2007) in some way by what they witness. To be transported is to experience some kind of relational transformation: to see the relationship differently through the process of witnessing and reflecting on it. The emphasis on shaping the relationship goes beyond one-size-fits-almost-all approaches that tend to focus on shaping the individuals as communicators in the relationship. From a relational focus, individuals are positioned as audiences to the relationship-in-action in which they are connected as actors and agents in its development.

As I speak of positioning, actors and agency in the same sentence, I am drawing on the work of Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré (1990). On their terms, conversational partners produce each other as subjects by taking up and offering each other particular subject positions made available to them in conversation through the use of discursive practices. These discursive practices offer opportunities for agency as partners get to take up or refuse the position calls they are offered (Davies & Harre). These opportunities may be limited and partners may not always be aware of them. Nonetheless, making the positions visible helps to familiarise them and make them accessible and negotiable.

Philosophical perspectives for looking, listening and talk-in-action

The concepts of positioning and agency contribute to the philosophical perspectives that make up the second of the reflexive audiencing technologies that couples employ to investigate their relational practices as third-person audiences

of relationships. These perspectives also include taking up a stance of appreciative curiosity, of recognising the significance of local knowledge that is meaningful and of value, and exploration of relational practices and cultural stories that shape relationships. For example, these stories might include identification and negotiation of gender and power relations-in-action. I will shortly illustrate how research participants noticed and addressed relations of gender and power.

Preparation for reflexive audiencing

Because the philosophical perspectives at the centre of the study were not so familiar to couples, I introduced reflexive audiencing practices through a process of preparation. My role was to facilitate a conversation with each couple prior to viewing and reflecting on their taped conversation. I asked them to consider different positions from which to look and listen, and the effects of different looking and listening practices on the hopes and intentions the couple had for the conversation they were about to view and reflect on. Preparatory conversations also included drawing attention to practices that might alert the couples to occasions when the conversation turned away from these preferred hopes and intentions. When different conversational directions are made salient, couples can consider the effects that these different directions might have on their conversations. Furthermore, once couples are wakeful to the changing directions and the effects, they can explore ways they might redirect the conversation towards more preferred speaking and listening positions. Doug illustrates this positioning and repositioning in the following extract from a Scene 2 (see Table 1, page 106) reflexion conversation.

Doug	I don't see <i>from my, from that fellow in the red's</i> point of view, I don't see that there's a change at all (emphasis added).
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In this conversational moment it seems that Doug recognises that he is speaking in the first-person, “my”, then, for some reason he makes a move into a third-person perspective as he positions himself in relation with “that fellow” he observes in the visual and aural image on the DVD. My impression is that Doug notices that he has taken up the more familiar first-person speaking position and then, having

noticed, he intentionally moves into the less familiar third-person position because doing so fits with the intentions Charlotte and Doug identified in the preparatory conversation I facilitated with them. This move by Doug illustrates the kind of simultaneous mo(ve)ment between embodied moments and the movement toward dynamic subjectivity that Bronwyn Davies and colleagues (2006) identified, and that practices of reflexion make visible and possible for couples. In the moment there is movement as Doug produces himself otherwise. The example also highlights the importance of creating a receiving context in which new and different practice can be considered. It is difficult to imagine that Doug would have re-positioned himself in the same way had he not been involved in the careful process of preparation.

Through the data generation phase, I found the preparation process to be more and more important to take more and more time and care with. It was a process I refined and elaborated because I noticed early on that couples initially encountered difficulty maintaining a third-person stance and a focus on the relationship. My instigating a conversation about different speaking and listening positions helped to familiarise the couples with ideas, to language them, and to contrast them with other practices. Couples could then, more easily, notice how they were positioned and re-position themselves during the subsequent reflexive conversations. As this discussion shows, these positions are multi-layered and complex. Partners are invited into a process in which they investigate their conversation at the same time as they investigate the conversational practices that they use *in* the conversation. Whilst these practices are complex and multi-layered, with preparation, all of the research participants were able to take up and use the practices and all reported the benefits of the process on them personally and relationally.

As the data generation phase progressed, I came to appreciate the significance of the preparatory conversations for the couples. The conversations are an opportunity for partners to consider ways they interact as couples, alongside other possible ways of interaction. Through preparation conversations and the process of familiarising, articulating and contrasting ways of interacting, familiar ways of speaking and listening which may have previously been as taken-as-given are

unsettled and available to be evaluated and originated. Couples get to select from an extended repertoire of looking and listening positions; they have access to strategies for moving between maze-dweller and maze-viewer positions; they are positioned with some authority in and about their relationships; and they get to negotiate and determine their relationship direction within the discursive landscapes they have access to.

Taking the technologies into counselling, supervision and group-work practice

A significant and interesting aspect that I expect will have important ramifications for my counselling and group-work practice is the practice of repositioning when conversational partners move from actors in their conversations to third-person observers. Generally, when couples consult practitioners for relationship development and change, the practitioner is the audience with the authority to identify and nominate the areas for change and development. The practitioner then gets to initiate an inquiry into the effects of these areas the practitioner has identified.

The repositioning that reflexive audiencing practices produce, through the technologies I propose here, involves the couples in the step of indentifying the meaningful aspects of change and development. What couples might deem meaningful and what practitioners might deem meaningful can be quite different. Therefore, when practitioners and/or couples take up audiencing positions the possibilities for what gets noticed and addressed are extended. Repositioning partners as audiences involves a repositioning of authority and, therefore, a destabilising of power relations.

As I think about future counselling, supervision, research and group-work practice I am drawn to the possibilities that these co-reflexive, co-authoritative audiencing positions may offer in terms of collaborative practice and more equitable power relations in these contexts. At the same time, I remain mindful of the limitations of one-size-fits-almost-all notions and do not wish to re-produce reflexive audiencing practices on these terms. I am also wakeful to the complexity of the kind of co-reflexive and co-authoritative positioning I am suggesting. Despite

care and preparation, reflexive audiencing may be out of reach and some couples may not be well positioned or may not wish to take such steps. I look forward to considering the possibilities and limitations further as I move from this research into practice.

I am also particularly interested in further consideration of the technologies and practices of reflexive audiencing in situations outside of coupledness. For example, I wonder how reflexive audiencing practices might shape how people audience their relationships with themselves as individuals, in family situations, with counterparts such as colleagues and team-members, and in relationships in which power relations are more hierarchical such as teacher/student and employer/employee. I will say more about future practice possibilities soon but first move on to the third of the technologies of reflexive audiencing.

Inquiry guides

Like the preparatory conversations, inquiry guides (see Appendices 5-9, pages 380-399) contribute to the *scaffolding* (Vygotsky, 1999) of the philosophical perspectives and practices of reflexive, appreciative inquiry. In the guides, I ask questions that seek to critically investigate given-meaning and to create space for originating meaning. I ask questions that value local knowledge, context and experience. Questions include inquiry about the ways cultural stories shape relationships and how these stories fit with the couple's preferred hopes and intentions for their relationship. They deconstruct cultural stories, asking how these stories work to shape relationship and how relationships might be otherwise. I include questions that ask about power and gender relations and about possibilities for how people might act on their relationships. These inquiries focus on the relationship-processes-in-action and they focus on talk-in-action, the work these do and the possibilities for new and different relationship-in-action. The study found that after using the inquiry guides couples began to initiate asking similar questions without referring to the guides – a hope that I held when I developed and introduced the guides.

Transcripts and reflexive letters also added to the technologies that made relationship practice visible and negotiable. The transcripts made visible the

moment-by-moment accounts of conversation-in-action in different ways to the visibility provided by the DVD versions. The letters drew from philosophical perspectives that hold relationship practices up for appreciation, and reflexive inquiry that focuses on relationship developments that couples identify as meaningful and important. Together reflexive letters and transcripts contribute to the narrative of the developing relationship story and they add further layers to the reflexion process. Letters and transcripts can be read and re-read, just as DVDs can be viewed and re-viewed, as part of an ongoing process of reflexion, review and relationship development.

As I have said, none of these technologies on their own is unique but together they produce a unique process that make a unique contribution to the ways couples notice, reflect on, investigate and produce relationship practice. Most particular to these contributions is that they go beyond the kind of bounded possibilities that are offered when particular communication strategies are taught and taken up as one-size-fits-almost-all. In Chapter 5 (see pages 153-158), I showed how Alex and Chris went beyond given-meanings of communication strategies such as listening, looking and paying attention to each other and how they originated new and different practices that extended their conversational repertoire. Going beyond bounded possibilities enacts the idea that there are many possible ways that people can know and experience their lives (Gergen & Gergen, 1992; Weedon, 1987). Reflexive audiencing practices offer people opportunities to see what is, to evaluate that, and to produce individually preferred practices or understandings. These practices incorporate developments in narrative therapy that assist people to be agentic in determining what they consider to be preferred ways of living and to be originating life rather than only employing prescriptions of how life should be (White, 2000). These practices make such originating possible through making practices, such as talk-in-action, visible and audible and then making the tale and the telling of these practices available for reflexion and review in the particular context in which they are spoken.

As couples go through this process, they continue to make their relationship up. In this way, they are poststructural subjects-in-process “who are working and worked on to appropriate themselves within a particular culture, in a particular

moment and within particular relations of power” (Davies, et al., 2006, p. 100). The process is recursive and generative. They get to the point where they start noticing and talking about the means by which they got to new and different practices, and evaluating the practices, as Alex describes below.

Alex I think one of the benefits is ... being able to become the third-person almost in the room and say “ah, we’re not actually even here, there’s some frustration here ... maybe some hurt”. I don’t think that we’ve ever really done that. We haven’t sat on the same couch and put the issue there, we’ve been on either sides and finger pointed; “but you said” and “I felt”. I think [the third-person perspective is] a helpful tool, because it diffuses situations that are heating up, full of emotion. I tend to like the image of sitting here together and both looking the same way. For me that’s been helpful.

In a doubled reflexive arc (Davies, et al., 2004) Alex names a new and different practice of “sitting on the couch and putting the issue there [at a distance]” that the couple learned and took up through the reflexive audiencing steps and technologies. This is a reflexion of the reflexion in which Alex identifies third-person positioning as a counter practice to the more familiar, oppositional practice of being positioned “on either sides” and finger-pointing. Alex recognises and articulates different looking and listening positions that the couple now have access to. These positions are being “on either sides” facing each other and sitting beside each other “on the same couch”. The former practice invites a focus on the other person in the relationship and the latter practice creates a receiving context for the relationship to also be visible and investigated. Furthermore, Alex nominates strategies that involve repositioning “the issue” by putting it at a distance from which the couple can investigate it relationally. Alex then evaluates these practices: “I tend to like the image of sitting here both looking the same way. To me that’s been helpful”. Each of these steps has emerged as a result of making relationship-in-action visible and negotiable and together they have produced originated-relationship-in-action.

Making familiar practices visible and negotiable

Making humour-in-action visible and negotiable

Another particularly significant finding – and a surprising one – was the extent of the presence of humour in all of the couple conversations, and couples interest in relationship humour. This interest captured and intrigued me and I came to appreciate humour as an important relational practice.

I had read the couple literature but had not got any understanding of how significant humour is in intimate relationship. The couple literature does not tend to focus on humour and humour literature does not tend to focus on couples. Some couple literature directs people to play, which includes laughter and fun. Play is said to contribute to safety and pleasure, to strengthen the relational bond and to enhance intimacy and love (de Koning & Weiss, 2002; Hendrix, 1988; Pritchard, 1996). Humour in couple relationships is generally portrayed in either negative or positive terms and its use is reported to have significant physiological benefits by averting tension and negative feelings (de Koning & Weiss, 2002; Eckstein, Junkins, & McBrien, 2003). However, none of the couple relationship literature made mention of what, for these five couples, was a central relationship strategy which became visible in the everyday practices of relationship-in-action.

For each couple there were significant moments when there were practices of humour that the couples evaluated as important to them. The story of humour that these practices tell is an important contribution of this study. It is a story that suggests that couples' practices of humour are generative and valued aspects of coupledness, and that each couple originates unique and complex expressions of humour. The main aspects we discovered were that couples came to re-value humour-in-action as a playing out of relationship-in-action that serves to produce and maintain relationships. Amber and Philip identified good-natured, safe, playful humour in their reflexions on a segment of their taped conversation that discussed moving a chair to make more space in their bedroom (see page 292). The momentariness of humour-in-action can be seen as Amber and Philip then move into humour that is simultaneously playful and serious and makes possible a preferred speaking space for some topics (see page 297). Humour also has other

effects such as producing distance and inequitable power relations when it is used as a patriarchal put-down practice or at someone's expense (see pages 278 and 284). It was through the process of making humour-in-action visible that MJ got to notice and evaluate its effects for Anne and for their relationship. Through the process of reflexion, MJ reviewed the ways he used humour and voiced a preference to take different steps in future.

The stories of humour that emerged through the couples conversations resonated with ideas of humour as a social practice that is local and context specific (Critchley, 2001) and as a practice that is performed in everyday conversation. The irony, paradox, complexity and multiplicity of humour invites reflexion, as it positions us to "view the world awry, bringing us back to the everyday by estranging us from it" (Critchley, p. 65). My study goes further to conceptualise humour as a practice that produces, reproduces and maintains relationship and which is produced, reproduced and maintained by those who use it. By making humour visible, couples get to see its production-in-action and to evaluate humour's effects. Couples may then re-evaluate and so initiate steps to originate different practices of humour-in-action as MJ did, or they may decide that the practices fit with their preferences as Amber and Philip concluded:

Amber	I don't think [viewing and evaluating humour has] changed me or the way I speak to you or the comments I make or anything ... but it's made me more aware of how we talk, the way we speak to each other.
Philip	I think we appreciate some parts more really....The more we're aware of it the more we appreciate it, we know that it works, which is kind of good, so it affirms that our communication appears to be working, which is encouraging.

Practices of humour were made visible to Amber and Philip and Anne and MJ through access to the series of steps and technologies that made practices of relationship-in-action visible, negotiable and available to be dialogised, critiqued and shaped.

Making power relations-in-action visible and negotiable

The simultaneous positions of distance and connection that reflexive audiencing steps and technologies produce, and the opportunities these create to make discursive practices “visible and therefore revisable” (Davies, et al., 2004, p. 369) in the ways I have described above, were also particularly significant for couples in addressing power and gender relations. For example, positions of distance and connection with practices of dominance made it possible for Anne and MJ to see and re-evaluate these practices in ways that closeness and connection had not (see pages 236-238). Stories of dominance were dialogised as Anne and MJ were positioned to speak about the meanings and effects of dominance and to evaluate these meanings and effects in terms of their relational context. They were able to speak and evaluate practices of dominance by seeing practice-in-action on DVD and in transcripts, and by taking up relational third-person positions to employ an inquiry process, assisted by inquiry guides, that asks about the meanings and effects of practice. They were both positioned to say *I don’t like that*, to voice hopes for taking different steps in similar situations and thus create possibilities for different practice-in-action. Chris’s comments, below, speak to the contributions that seeing dominance-in-action from a relational third-person position can make.

Chris	I think it was more really just only physically seeing what I already knew. It was just seeing [dominance] in the flesh. I actually physically saw it, and even though you’re [I am] told a hundred times, it’s not till you [I] actually see it you [I] believe it.
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In the closeness and connection Chris couldn’t see and hear familiar practices of dominance but with distance and connection was positioned to see and hear dominance accentuated and authenticated.

Even when relationship practices such as dominance are seen and heard, making the changes may not be so easy to accomplish. In the context of relationship, MJ wanted to create space for Anne to speak-up, and he took steps to make this space available for her to take up an agentic speaking position. However, at the same

time he continued to employ practices that meant there was little space for her voice (pages 239-242). MJ took steps to originate practices of equal talk but it appeared that he did not have sufficient access to the discursive strategies that might assist him to do so. Instead, his efforts inadvertently continued to reproduce patriarchal practices of dominance. Couples may originate practices of relationship as they make the everyday visible, but they may not, or they may struggle to do so. They may not because they decide they don't need to and they also may not because they have reached the edges of what is possible to know within available discursive repertoires.

This latter situation speaks to the experience I described in Chapter 9 (see pages 325-329) when I reached the limits of knowing through the process of self-reflexivity. I then got to enlarge that knowing through a recursive, collaborative communitarian process of inquiry with others. As I think forward to further research and to counselling and group-work practice, I envisage a similar recursive process in which efforts to originate new and different practices and processes can be made visible and negotiable through tele-visual experience and through inquiry guides, transcripts, reflexive letters and dialogue. Adding recursive and iterative layers to the reflexive audiencing process is one way that couples might go beyond the edges of their knowledge in ways similar to those I experienced through the supervision process. If the research process had been set up to include these further layers, and I had had another meeting with MJ and Anne, MJ's efforts to originate different conversations could have been made visible and available for critique and evaluation. For example, I imagine myself asking MJ something like, "As you audience your conversation, what do you see happening to dominance as you take these steps to create space for Anne to speak, and Anne does not take up the invitation in ways that you hope?" Taking into account the conversations I have already had with MJ, I imagine him responding; "By keeping on asking Anne, I keep on using dominance, but by not asking her I'm also using dominance. I'm damned if I do and damned if I don't". An inquiry such as this might then open space to involve both Anne and MJ in an exploration of how and why cultural stories produce dominance and to wonder about possible practices that might fit more closely with their preferences for equal talk.

Closing reflexions

At this point I am poised in the reflexive/liminal space between looking back to identify other possible stories that may have been told in this research, and at the same time looking forward to what these possible stories might mean for future practice. It seems like an appropriate moment to close the curtain on this chapter and this research performance in the knowledge that there are other possible stories and studies in the wings and available to be investigated and developed.

There is one last question my positioning as a researcher calls me to respond to. I've been talking about meaningfulness with the couples, but there's also the question of what's been meaningful to me as a woman, a member of a couple, a mother, a doctoral researcher, a practitioner?

I have touched on the ways these findings and developments for couples are also meaningful and relevant for personal and professional aspects of my life. Another particularly meaningful feature that I did not anticipate, was the extent to which the steps and processes of reflexive audiencing practices transformed my own couple relationship and research practice in such rich and generative ways. I expect that these transformations will reverberate into my counselling and group-work practice and am excited at that prospect.

I now appreciate the generativity and complexity of humour so much more. That is just one of many aspects that have found their way into my personal and professional contexts. As a partner and a parent, I hope that appreciative curiosity of given-meanings, marvelling at the taken-for-granted, and scepticism of one-size-fits-almost-all ideas might take up residence and provide some of the surprise and delight in my family's relationships that research participants experienced. As a woman, a partner and a practitioner, I have become more alert to the nuances and complexity of power relations-in-action and gendered discourses-in-action. I expect that this experience will shape the inquiries I have with others in personal and professional relationships.

Colleagues have expressed an interest in the collaborative, reflexive doctoral research supervision that I wrote about in Chapter 9. I imagine that these ideas

will be of interest to other practitioner/researchers and supervisors and will inform and enrich my practice as I continue to think and write about practitioner reflexivity and supervision.

Engaging in doctoral research has provided me the opportunity to contribute to research and literature for couples that addresses the heartfelt hopes and concerns I brought to this study. It is satisfying to have reached the place where I can report these contributions. I now look forward to continued investigations, developments and transformations that assist in making the ideas more readily available to couples and to my professional communities, through counselling, group-work, research and further literature.

Through research, I have developed ways of unsettling and destabilising the known and familiar by subjecting them to appreciative curiosity and I look forward to this continuing in the future as I investigate and originate relationships-in-action.

Epilogue

Truman Burbank begins to notice the unusual in the usual. To use Victor Turner's (1978) analogy, Truman begins to exoticise the familiar events in his life. For Truman, "The commonplace has become the marvellous" (Turner, 1978, p. ix). What he took for granted now has the power to stir his imagination.

The film ends when Truman discovers his world is a film set and the terms of his life produced for him and determined for him by the writers of the show. His life is a construction – a discursive repertoire, written for him by others. He climbs the stairs of the film set and opens the door. What he sees, through the door, are other versions of the world – other discursive repertoires – other possible ways of living his life. In this moment, Truman determines the terms of his life. He knows the freedom of agency. "It is the freedom to recognise multiple readings such that no discursive practice, or positioning within it by powerful others, can capture and control one's identity" (Davies, 1991, p. 51).

Truman doesn't accept the reality of the world offered him by the writers of the show. It isn't as simple as that.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Advertisement

Would you like to be involved
in research about
couple relationships?

An invitation to research the conversations you have with each other as a couple.

This doctoral study is an opportunity to participate in research that would value
your perspectives on your unique relationship.

If you both consider your relationship to be robust enough to look at your ways of
relating, you would be ideal participants.

I would be very interested to hear from you. Please contact me for further
information.

Confidential email: wendytalbot@hotmail.com

Confidential mobile: 027 604 9605

Home phone: (07) 858 4451 (messages are not confidential)

Wendy Talbot M.Couns.MNZAC

Appendix 2

Research participation consent form

‘Co-searching relationship practices’

Researcher: Wendy Talbot

83 Cook St

Hamilton East

Phone: (07) 858 4451 (messages not confidential)

027 604 9605 (confidential)

Email: wendytalbot@hotmail.com (confidential)

We have read the information sheet sent to us by Wendy and have met with her to discuss the study.

We consent to participate in this study and understand that:

- ❖ Participation is voluntary and there will be no financial costs or rewards.
- ❖ Wendy’s research is approved by the University of Waikato Human Ethics Committee and the Post Graduate Studies Office.
- ❖ Wendy will adhere to the New Zealand Association of Counsellors code of ethics.
- ❖ The success of the research does not depend on our participation. We are free to opt out fully or partially from the study at any time before the research conversations are finished. We do not need to give any reasons for withdrawing unless we wish to do so.
- ❖ We can discuss the option of suspending our participation.
- ❖ We are invited to read and edit transcripts of our conversations with Wendy and any letters or documents created during the research conversations so that we may be satisfied that what is said about us or our lives is accurate and anonymous.
- ❖ We are teaming up with Wendy for the purpose of exploring and speaking about the ideas that are important and meaningful to us in our relationship.

It is not the intention of this research to be evaluating us or our relationship or requiring us to participate in any way that goes against our wishes.

- ❖ We are free to choose what we share about our relationship and may withdraw any part of the conversation at any time up until one week after the final research interview is completed.
- ❖ The research conversations will be taped and transcribed by Wendy and all transcripts, letters and reflections will be available for use in the thesis, unless we withdraw some or all of them. Only selections of the conversations will appear in the thesis.
- ❖ The decision to participate and experiment with some new ideas in our relationship has been freely made by both of us.
- ❖ We both consider our relationship to be robust enough to handle possible unsettling conversations and will if necessary seek additional support.
- ❖ Wendy's role is to be a co-researcher of our relationship with us and not to be our counsellor.
- ❖ Once published the information in the thesis is public, but all steps outlined in the information sheet will be taken to protect the anonymity of our selves and our life stories.
- ❖ Tapes will be destroyed or wiped following the completion of the thesis, or following our full withdrawal from the study. It is a requirement of the University that all written information will be archived indefinitely.
- ❖ All tapes, letters, reflections and transcripts generated in the research will be securely locked away and our real names and contact details will be kept separate from other material.
- ❖ Wendy has a commitment to working collaboratively, respectfully and representing us accurately.
- ❖ Wendy will keep tapes in her possession and we may arrange to view them with her or privately.
- ❖ Wendy will author and own the final thesis.
- ❖ The stories we share and copies of any information generated in the research such as transcripts, letters and reflections are ours. This information is for our personal use and will not be used publicly in any way until the final report is completed.

- ❖ Wendy may discuss the study and quote from it for the purpose of interviews, conference presentations, journal articles, writing, or seminars directly related to the research.
- ❖ If one of us withdraws from the study the research conversations will cease and we will decide what information, if any, may be used for the thesis.
- ❖ In the interests of openness and fairness, we will all be present during conversations. If we do wish to have individual conversations with Wendy we know that the research cannot continue unless the details of the conversation are available to us both.
- ❖ Our couple relationship and our safety must take priority over the research.
- ❖ The time commitments and other aspects of the study will be regularly discussed, reviewed and adapted.
- ❖ At times, Wendy's supervisors will view or read tapes and written information that will contain our first names. It is important that this project is conducted in an ethical and accountable way. Like Wendy, her supervisors will be responsible for maintaining confidentiality, anonymity and respect for our privacy.
- ❖ We may contact Wendy or her supervisors at any time should we wish to withdraw or discuss any questions or concerns about Wendy's approach or the research process.
- ❖ We would not be consenting to participate in this study if there are any times during our relationship when either one of us or our relationship has been subjected to violence or aggression that has or could impact on our ability to speak freely about any aspect of our relationship experience.

Wendy's University supervisors are:

Dr Kathie Crocket (email: kcrocket@waikato.ac.nz) and

Dr Elmarie Kotzé (email: elmariek@waikato.ac.nz)

School of Education

University of Waikato

Private Bag 3105

Hamilton

Phone: (07) 838 4176 or 0800 WAIKATO

We prefer to be contacted in the following way/s (e.g. phone, fax, email). It is fine/not OK to leave a message.

Contact details:

.....

Participants name

Signed.....

Date

Participants name

Signed.....

Date

Researcher's name: Wendy Talbot

Signed.....

Date

Appendix 3

Withdrawal from the research form

Request to suspend or withdraw participation in the research

‘Co-searching relationship practices’

Researcher: Wendy Talbot

Please circle your preferred response, sign and return this form in the reply paid envelope.

I/we wish to
suspend/withdraw partially/withdraw fully from the research being conducted by
Wendy Talbot.

We both know of this decision.

We know that if one of us withdraws fully, the research conversations will cease.

We know we do not need to give any reason to Wendy for this decision and that
the research will not be negatively affected as a result of taking this step.

We would like/do not wish to discuss or write our reasons.

We know we may discuss our reasons directly or in writing with Wendy or her
supervisors if we wish.

We understand that our information will not be used in the thesis unless we
discuss and agree on the details of this.

Please contact us/ do not contact us to discuss this further.

Preferred means of contact

We would like/do not wish to discuss this further with Wendy’s University
supervisors and know we can contact them if we wish.

We understand that Wendy may record statistics in her thesis, for example the number of participants who participated or withdrew from the study without giving any identifying information.

Signed

Date

Signed

Date

Appendix 4

Information Pack

Date

Wendy Talbot

83 Cook St

Hamilton East, Hamilton

Email: wendytalbot@hotmail.com (confidential)

Phone: Home (07) 858 4451 (messages left are not confidential)

Mobile 027 604 9605 (messages are confidential)

Dear

Thank you for your interest in my doctoral couple research. The study is called “Co-searching relationship practices”. Here is some more information. If you read this and are interested in taking the next step, please get back in touch with me and we can arrange to meet and talk in more detail about what’s involved.

I won’t contact you because I do not wish there to be any pressure on you to participate.

How will you be involved?

If you participate in this study, you will have a videotaped conversation as a couple about an aspect of your relationship. You will choose the topic of conversation. There are many possible topics and some examples may include conversations about a particular area that affects your relationship such as financial matters, roles and responsibilities, decision making, hopes and expectations or communication cycles and patterns. You and I will then watch the DVD of the conversation two or three times to talk about the things that were important to you as a couple.

How is this new or different?

This study is interested in discovering how you as a couple experience watching your own private everyday conversations when you ask yourselves questions and talk about ideas that you see as useful and important to you.

About me as a researcher

I live in Hamilton and have been involved in relationship counselling and facilitating a range of couples' courses for more than 17 years. I am a parent and have been in a long-term relationship for almost 30 years.

Next steps

Once you have read this letter and the attached information;

- ❖ please either contact me to meet and talk more about the study, or,
- ❖ take no further action if you don't want to be involved.

Thank you for your time and interest.

With kind regards,

Wendy Talbot

My research supervisors are:

Dr Kathie Crocket (Email: kcrocket@waikato.ac.nz) and
Dr Elmarie Kotzé (Email: elmariek@waikato.ac.nz)
Department of Human Development and Counselling,
University of Waikato,
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton
Phone: (07) 838 4500 or 0800 WAIKATO

Research information and outline

The structure and phases of the study

This table shows the phases and time commitments that are involved should you decide to participate.

Phase	Details	Participants
Preliminary phase	I meet with couple to discuss study and answer questions	Couple and me ½ hour
Scene 1	Couple has a taped relationship conversation together	Couple ½ - 1 hour
Scene 2	(3-5 five days later) Taped research conversation.	Couple and me 1-2 hours
Scene 3	(2-3 weeks later) Taped research conversation	Couple and me 1-2 hours (stage 3 may be repeated if you wish)
Scene 4	(2-3 weeks later) Evaluation of the research process	Couple and me 1-2 hours

After each research meeting, I send a letter that summarises our conversation. If you wish, you can also read the written transcripts of each meeting.

Important points for participants

I have designed this study with the hope that couples can benefit. I have also included steps to protect your anonymity and am happy to discuss this in detail with you.

Which couples is the study for?

- ❖ Because this is research and not counselling, it is important that you both feel confident that you have experience managing the range of responses that can emerge from relationship conversations.
- ❖ In order for this to be safe and helpful for you both, it is necessary that you both want to be involved and don't feel pressured in any way.
- ❖ It is also important that you can both speak about your relationship as freely and safely as possible. Please don't put yourself forward to participate if what you say might put you at risk of punishment or harm during or after the conversations.

How will couples be involved?

- ❖ In this study as a couple you will have a relationship conversation together which is videotaped. The research is designed to make this as constructive and non-threatening for you as possible. We then get together 2 or 3 times to watch the DVD of the conversation and talk about it. We will speak about the things you notice, learn and think about your experience of the taping.
- ❖ Participation is voluntary. You can withdraw from the research at any of the phases. You are welcome to read and edit anything that is written or recorded from our research conversations.

How will privacy be considered?

- ❖ We will take steps so that your names and any information you give does not identify you.

Who monitors the study?

- ❖ The study has the approval of a University of Waikato Ethics committee. I also have two University supervisors monitoring my work and who you are most welcome to contact for any information or concerns. Their contact details are on the attached letter.

Appendix 5

Scene 2 Conversation Inquiry Guide

‘Co-searching relationship practices’

Researcher: Wendy Talbot

In this first research conversation we will together reflect on your couple conversation. We will experiment with you being an audience to your relationship much like you would view a television show or film. The purpose is to get some distance from the conversation. This distance can contribute to gaining a perspective on the conversation that is not always possible when you are in the conversation.

For many people, seeing or hearing themselves or others on tape/DVD can provoke responses such as personal criticism, embarrassment, self-consciousness, judgement, and humour for example. For this reason, it can be helpful to review the tape/DVD of your couple conversation on more than one occasion so that we can notice, look for, ponder and explore different things.

This first research conversation will focus on your immediate responses: what you saw and heard and what stood out or interested you about this, and what this might mean to you and your relationship.

As researcher I will not be evaluating or judging you, or your relationship. My role is to facilitate with you a conversation about what was important or meaningful to you.

- We may watch the tape to the end and then talk. You may like to take some notes.
- Or, we may stop the tape when any one of us wishes to.
- Or, you may like to choose a particular segment for us to look at and discuss.

This may be a new and different way of doing things. I hope that none of us will be silenced by, for example, pressure to know the answers, get it right or thoughts that our responses are inadequate or unimportant. Uncertainties, possibilities,

different perspectives are all of interest for this project. This project is not about finding or having particular answers, but about generating and sharing ideas. I invite you to say or not say anything you wish.

I hope we can work together in our conversations so that we can all feel respected and cared for.

If you think afterwards of anything you wish you had left out or said differently please let me know and I will make sure it is deleted or changed to more accurately represent what you meant. I will also be sending you a copy of the transcript of our taped conversation and a reflective letter to read and comment on if you wish. I do not wish to include anything about you in the research report that is inaccurate or that may identify you in any way.

It is my hope that this research is beneficial for your relationship as well as my practice and the wider community. I am committed to working to make it as collaborative, ethical, enjoyable and productive as possible. I will do this by consulting with you and checking out how things are going. We can work together on this by letting each other know anything that will make this a good or better experience. If you feel unable to let me know directly, my supervisors can help with this.

If you have any questions, thoughts, reactions, or feelings during or between our meetings that you would like to discuss at another time or have included in the research, you may like to write them down in your reflexion notebook. The reflexions could be about your relationship directly or the research process itself. We can discuss any of your reflexions at our meetings and/or in our conversation that reviews our experience of the research. Or, you may prefer to spend some time thinking about the entries by yourself or talk about them with your partner privately.

The following questions are offered as a guide in our conversation. You may wish to select from some of them or you may have other questions you wish to

focus on. I may ask clarifying questions or questions to learn more about your ideas.

Guiding Questions

- ❖ What stood out for you or struck you in what you watched and heard?
- ❖ What effect did this experience have on you, or on your relationship?
- ❖ What effect might this experience have had on your partner or others?
- ❖ What was it like for you to view this experience, for example was it a surprise, shock, reminder, reinforcement or something else?
- ❖ Was this experience something that moves your relationship towards or away from the direction you want it to take?

- ❖ Were there any expressions (words looks or gestures) that you noticed that were examples ways the relationship is cared for, enriched and valued?
- ❖ How is noticing this/these expressions meaningful or important to you?

- ❖ Were there any expressions (words, looks or gestures) that you noticed, that were examples of ways the relationship moves towards or away from the direction you want it to take?
- ❖ How is noticing this/these expressions meaningful or important to you or your relationship?

- ❖ Were there any areas of difference or disagreement between you?
- ❖ How did you respond to these differences or disagreements situations?
- ❖ What effect did this response or difference or disagreement have on you and your relationship?
- ❖ Now that you have re-viewed this difference or disagreement, are there other possible positions or responses you think might have been possible or preferable under the circumstances?
- ❖ How do you think these other possible positions or responses might have been more or less helpful?

- ❖ Were there any examples where you agreed on or shared similar ideas or experiences?
- ❖ What effect did agreement or sharing similar ideas or experiences have on you or your relationship?
- ❖ Would you say that these areas of similarity or agreement help move your relationship towards or away from the direction you want it to take?

- ❖ Would you like to say something about how it has been for you to discuss your relationship in this way?

You may wish to reflect on these questions and experiment with taking up an audience position after other conversations you have in your relationship. If you wish to record your responses in your reflexion notebook we can discuss them in a future research conversation.

Note: This conversation guide is for personal use only and I ask that you not copy, reproduce or distribute it publicly.

Appendix 6

Reflexive letter for Anne and MJ

20 May 2008

Dear Anne and MJ

There are three parts to this information that I enclose here.

The first part is a *transcript* each of our last research conversation. Having these may assist you as you discuss this letter and decide what we talk about in our next research conversation.

The second part is the *Conversation Inquiry Guide*. When we meet next we will re-view the DVD of your original couple conversation and use these questions as a guide. Could you select one or two of the areas in the attached 'Conversation Inquiry Guide' that most interest you to talk about when we meet. As I write this I am thinking of the metaphor you spoke of about sailing the boat. MJ you described you as the rudder and Anne as the wind. You said Anne's experience of 'dreamland' and 'emotional' territory has "taught me so much in that area that I was blind to" (224) and "we go places I would never have gone" (216). You also said "I'm very practical and think 'this is what we should do'" and "usually we're right" (214). I wonder how you will make your selections for the topics? As you decide which of these questions you might like to focus on next time we meet, I'm wondering what kind of conversation you will hope to have together to do that? Whose hand will be on the rudder, what effect will the wind be having? Will it be the rudder, or the wind, or both steering the boat that makes decisions about the selection?

The third part is *this letter* that discusses the different topics in the Conversation Inquiry Guide and includes some further questions to think about and discuss privately together if they are of interest to you? If you wish, we can talk about your responses to the letter before we start our DVD re-view. For example you may have some feedback from the questions I ask, there may be areas where I

have misrepresented what you said or meant, or you may wish to add to, delete or change what has been said or written.

There were several areas that emerged from our last conversation after viewing the DVD of your original conversation. Because you have both said you talk together regularly and have an interest in your relationship, I have included a lot of detail in what I have written here. Please feel free to involve yourself as much or as little in this letter that is useful for you.

Humour

I noticed that humour was a feature in your conversation. MJ, twice you said “I’ve got strong views on that” (448, 452). You also mentioned family jokes about Anne. For example “We’ve always joked about Anne being the sort of dreamer in the family” (224) and “Oh, we’ve joked about the Jewish mother” (267) and “I’d felt it was amusing watching Anne using her hands so much because we always joke about that” (293). I noted that there were numerous times when we all laughed throughout the conversation. And there seemed to be some private jokes you shared in together in your original conversation (70,71; 114-117). Because humour played such a part in your conversation I have included it as a topic in the Conversation Inquiry Guide.

Movement and change

As I have been reflecting on the conversation since we last met, I have been struck by the difference that viewing the DVD had on you both. MJ you said, “I just thought, did we not pick something a bit boring for you? (113)”, “It’s a bit ho hum” (113), “a little bit neutral, easy down the middle stuff” (115), “a bit mundane” (119). Anne you said “Yeah. It was probably a bit soft” (118). Yet watching the DVD Anne you said “I started sort of weeping when I was talking about the burden” (182), “just seeing what I was saying there ... I pressed a button on myself about this responsibility thing”. You also were introduced to excitement; “I feel so excited about the next block of time” (321), “Yeah, it’s exciting” (327). MJ you said, “Well we’re seeing it. We’re seeing it live. Because I’ve never thought about it till just now” (329). And Anne you said, “I was so aware of that but it’s another level now. It’s different now” (196). *What*

did witnessing this on DVD introduce you to that was different? What do you think may have made this change from mundane talk to excitement talk possible? Was there anything about the way you reflected on this conversation that might have contributed to the discoveries you made? If so, what might this/these have been?

Another change you noted Anne was the move from being “just an interviewer” to “taking full part in this conversation” (133). You said “it was funny really. It was quite a boring conversation really...it’s amazing how much under the surface...I just thought perhaps I was interviewing him...rather than... really getting into the conversation, but I think I did towards the end and that’s, I think, what caused me to be upset” (207). *What did you notice as you viewed the conversation that was different for you? What did you see or hear that might have made it possible for you to move from ‘interviewer’ to ‘really getting into the conversation’. What might have been the turning point/s in the conversation from interviewer to getting into the conversation? Which of these positions would you like to take up more or less in your conversations with MJ? What do you imagine might hold you back, or, help you to take up these positions more, or less?*

Heavy going topics

MJ you said, “I just thought we picked something a little bit neutral, easy down the middle stuff” (115). And Anne you said, “No, ‘cause three years ago that would have been a real heavy going topic” (116).

What do you think has contributed to this ‘heavy going topic’ becoming more ‘mundane’ in your relationship? What do you think of this development from the heavy going to the more mundane? How would you evaluate the ways heavy going or mundane topics affect your relationship?

Difference

Responsibility for others/Looking after number one: MJ you said, “we’ve had this difference all these years and it’s only now coming out through what you’ve just said and with experience now” (169). “My family were almost the opposite in as far as I had to look after me” (162). “So I had to go the other way to Anne. I had

to just be insular and just look after number one” (167). *As a couple, how have you managed this ‘responsibility for others’/‘looking after number one’ difference? Are there examples of times when this difference could have been problematic yet you would say that you managed this well? What steps did you take that led to this difference being well managed?*

Pragmatic/dreamy: MJ you said “I felt some of the things we said I was being very pragmatic...and you [Anne] were drifting off into little dreamy things like, that’s our difference again” (210). It seems that this difference can have you work together, “that’s why we work as a unit” (226). It can also contribute to uneven talk. MJ you said “I saw me dominating the conversation so much it worried me a bit because I really thought when we finished that film that we’d had an equal talk. And when I saw it I thought damn it there I go again um, captain heavy with all the mouthing off and it annoyed me a bit...” (228). Continued in next section.

Space for talking, listening, thinking, silence

Anne you said at these times with MJ or the kids, “they talk, I don’t. I listen or I’m doing something with the children” (229). You described this as a ‘back seat position’; You said, sometimes I get really frustrated because...I try to say what I want to participate in the conversation and I can’t because I feel like I’m over-talked...so I just take a back seat...I do get frustrated at times but I’ve just come to accept that that’s the way it is” (259). You said there are also times when you are ‘silent’ because “I don’t want to share it” (245), or “just because it’s too deep and I can’t explain it” (251). You spoke of this silence and ‘not speaking’ as a family trait, and named both men and women in your family who respond in these silent ways (245). You also said that your friends who are Mum’s, have spoken of this ‘not talking’ to Mum when Dad’s around, and you described it as “quite normal” (231).

MJ you raised times when Anne’s voice might be experienced as dominant, “To the family, i.e. both of our kids you come across as more dominant” (263), “you tend to want to guide them your way ...” (263). And, “when Anne wants to make a point she’ll be doing this (hand chopping gesture) “and I’m telling you what we should do” and she’s banging the table” (297). Both you Anne, and MJ have

spoken of ‘worry’, ‘annoyance’ and ‘frustration’ at times when ‘over-talking’ and ‘dominating the conversation’ go against ‘equal talk’. In an earlier example you noticed yourself ‘really getting into the conversation’. And you also said that when your daughter or son are alone with you “we talk” (231). MJ on occasions you have taken yourself away to “leave Anne to talk... in her language instead of me poking in all my views on top of hers” (235). *Is more equalness a hope that both of you have for your relationship conversations? MJ, if you were to watch a conversation where the equalness that you are hoping for was present, what would you be doing that you might prefer? What possible benefits and constraints might there be to achieving more equalness in your conversations?*

Eye-contact: MJ you said “the eyes are so important you know, in a conversation or discussion...you see everything through the eyes” (30). Anne you said, “If I’m not looking at him when he’s talking to me, he stops till I look at him” (33). *Is eye-contact something that is equally or differently important to you both? How might eye-contact help or hinder speaking, listening and meaning-making in your couple conversations? Are there times when eye-contact is more or less important?*

I wish you well with your conversations and look forward to joining you for our next research conversation.

Best wishes to you both,
Wendy

Appendix 7

Scene 3 Conversation Inquiry Guide for Anne and MJ

For this research conversation we will re-view the DVD of your original couple conversation from different angles or perspectives. The questions can be used as a guide to look closely at the conversation. *Would you select one or two of the areas in boxes below that most interest you to talk about?*

If you wish to explore more than one or two areas, we can meet again and talk through other topics that are of interest to you.

We can begin with a catch up on what has been happening between our meetings.

Since we last met

Have you had any thoughts, questions or experiences from the conversation, transcript or letter that you would like to speak about?

How is the research going for you?

Are there any ways that we can adapt our research conversations, or the process to enhance them?

Humour

There can be many kinds of humour and these different kinds of humour can have beneficial and/or problematic effects for people and conversations. These questions may guide you in discussing and evaluating humour in your relationship conversation.

- ❖ Having watched the DVD how would you say you used humour in your conversation?
- ❖ Were different types of humour evident?
- ❖ If so, how would you name these different types of humour?
- ❖ How does humour contribute to your conversation in positive ways?
- ❖ What examples did you notice in the conversation that made these positive effects visible to you as you watched the DVD?
- ❖ Are there examples in the DVD of how humour detracts from the conversation?

- ❖ If so, what effect/s did detracting humour have on each of you as you noticed it in the taped couple conversation?
- ❖ What effect/s did the examples of detracting humour have on your taped couple conversation?

Space for talking, listening, thinking, silence

Talking

In your last conversation you identified ‘interviewer’ talking, ‘over’ talking, ‘dominating’ talking, ‘equal’ talking, ‘taking full part in the conversation’ talking.

- ❖ Now as you watch the DVD again, are there examples of when the different kinds of talking were visible?
- ❖ How were these examples helpful to the conversation and how were they unhelpful?
- ❖ Do you have any ideas about how you can make use of different talking positions in your conversations?

Listening

- ❖ How was listening experienced by you in the conversation?
- ❖ Were there examples that you noticed where listening was occurring?
- ❖ How was this listening visible?
- ❖ What effect did this listening have on the conversation?
- ❖ What effect did this listening have on each of you?
- ❖ Were there examples that you noticed where listening was not occurring in ways that you hoped for?
- ❖ How was this limited listening visible in what you saw or heard?
- ❖ What hopes do you hold for how listening is managed in your relationship conversations?

Thinking

You have identified a range of thinking including thoughts that are always there, thoughts that cannot be spoken because there is no space for them to be spoken into, thoughts that get over-talked and thoughts that can’t be expressed because they can’t be explained.

- ❖ Were any of these different types of thinking noticed by you as you watched the DVD?
- ❖ What effect did this thinking have on the ways you were involved in the conversation?

- ❖ What is it like to identify this thinking and discuss it together?

Silence

You have talked about how silence is experienced in your couple and family conversations and in friends' families.

- ❖ Were there examples of silence in the DVD that you watched?
- ❖ If so, do you consider that this silence was helpful or unhelpful in the conversation?
- ❖ What are your hopes for how this silence might be worked with in your relationship conversations?
- ❖ Is being reminded of this silence helpful or unhelpful?
- ❖ In what ways is it helpful or unhelpful?

Difference

- ❖ As you watched the DVD, were areas of difference at work in the conversation? For example was responsibility for others or looking out for number one noticeable in what was said or not said?
- ❖ What effects might the presence of areas of difference have had on what was said or not said in the conversation?
- ❖ Did these areas of difference that you identified contribute to 'working as a unit' or working at something else in the conversation such as equal talk, captain heavy, taking a back seat?
- ❖ How would you evaluate the effects these areas of difference had on the conversation?
- ❖ What hopes do you have for the ways in which difference plays out in your future relationship conversations?
- ❖ What ideas do you have about ways that you might work to keep difference working for you rather than against you in your relationship conversations?

Heavy going topics

You said that if you had had this conversation three years ago it would have been more of a heavy going topic than mundane, neutral, easy down the middle stuff. Would it be helpful to explore the ways in which heavy going topics are viewed in your relationship and what this means for your relationship?

- ❖ As you reflected on the couple conversation you realised that this same conversation would have been a heavy going topic three years ago. What is

it like for you to notice that the heavy going aspect of the topic has moved into mundaneness, neutral, easy down the middle stuff?

- ❖ Is this meaningful for you to realise this progression?
- ❖ If so, how is it meaningful?
- ❖ If you were to encounter heavy going topics in the future, how would you approach them?
- ❖ What views do you have about the presence of heavy going topics in your conversations?
- ❖ Were there any heavy going topics in your relationship that were apparent but not mentioned in this conversation?
- ❖ If so, having watched this DVD, how might they have been noticeable?
- ❖ If not, how is it meaningful to notice that heavy going topics are not present?

Movement and change

After you reflected on the DVD in our last conversation, you talked about changes in your ideas about the conversation. These changes are discussed in the attached letter. There may be other changes such as ‘changing the subject’ that you noticed. These kinds of questions may be helpful to identify particular moments of change in your conversation and assist you to think about and manage changes in ways that you prefer.

- ❖ Were there moments in the DVD when you noticed that the conversation changed direction?
- ❖ Did these changes of direction benefit or hinder the conversation?
- ❖ In what ways might the change of direction have benefited or hindered the conversation?
- ❖ What actions did you notice that signalled a change of direction?
- ❖ With hindsight, if you wanted to take the conversation in another direction, how might you have done that?
- ❖ What possibilities are made available to you through these live examples of direction change?

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Appendix 8

Scene 3 Conversation Inquiry Guide for Andrew and Laura

‘Co-Searching relationship practices: Reflexive audiencing in practice’

Researcher: Wendy Talbot

The purpose of this conversation is to look at your original relationship conversation from different angles or perspectives.

I have grouped the following sets of questions into seven sections and given them headings.

Before we meet again, *would you select one or maybe two of these areas that particularly interest you both and are relevant to explore together at our next meeting?* You may like to look at the transcript of your couple conversation (7/7) beforehand to assist you to identify and highlight which parts of the conversation we focus on. You may like to also make notes on the transcript if that is helpful. Or, alternatively, you might prefer to watch the whole DVD and stop it at the relevant places.

At the end of the conversation we can decide whether or not you would like to meet again to discuss remaining sections.

We will again take up audience positions. The different sections represent different possible lenses from which you can reflect on your conversation.

We can begin with a catch up on what has been happening between our sessions.

Since we last met

- ❖ Have you had any thoughts, questions or experiences from the conversation, transcript or letter that you would like to speak about?
- ❖ How is the research process going for you?
- ❖ Are there any ways that we can adapt our conversations or the process to enhance them?

Movement

1. Emotions

- ❖ What are some of the particular emotions you experienced in the conversation?
- ❖ What contributed to each of these emotions being evoked?
- ❖ What was particularly meaningful for you about the things that evoked these emotions?
- ❖ What effect did these emotions have on you, for example in your body, mind, voice?
- ❖ What effect did these emotions have on the conversation?
- ❖ What responses were evoked from these emotions for your spouse?
- ❖ What is the history, if any, of these emotions being evoked in similar ways for each of you?
- ❖ In the conversation, at what moments did you notice moving from one emotion into another?
- ❖ How did that change come about, for example what did you or the other person do or say to bring about the change?

2. Realness, cautiousness, tenseness and tentativeness

Laura you asked yourself, “Am I being real or is the cautiousness and tenseness stopping something else?” (#205, 10/7) and said, “I really value being real” (#232, 10/7).

- ❖ Are there any examples when cautiousness and tenseness may have stopped something else from being introduced into the conversation?
- ❖ What effect did cautiousness and tenseness have as you re view the conversation?
- ❖ What do you think of this development?
- ❖ Were there any examples in the conversation when the realness you value was evident?
- ❖ What made this realness possible?
- ❖ How would you describe realness to Andrew?
- ❖ Were there times when you moved more towards the realness you value?
- ❖ If so, what led to this movement?
- ❖ Were there times when you moved more away from the realness you value?
- ❖ If so, what led to this movement?
- ❖ What are the conditions that make realness more possible?
- ❖ What kinds of things pose a challenge to realness?
- ❖ How might realness be problematic?
- ❖ What are some of the hazards of realness?
- ❖ How have you come to value being real?
- ❖ Who or what have been influential in the development of realness in your life?
- ❖ Do these ideas about realness reflect broader expectations, for example from family, society, peers, literature, or about culture?
- ❖ Who benefits or are served by these ideas of realness?
- ❖ Are these ideas or expectations equally, or more or less relevant to men and women?

- ❖ Andrew, is there territory where you stand together or differently with this realness that Laura is describing and seeking?

3. Taking control, directing, guiding the conversation

Andrew you spoke of noticing a shift in the dynamic of the conversation, “there was a shift in the dynamic from the beginning to the end, in that I kind of felt it was quite even at the beginning and then you took more control of the conversation as it got towards the end, almost to a point where you were directing the conversation” (#251, 10/7). You also described this earlier as ‘guiding. (#79, 10/7) Laura you thought it was more about “good listening skills ...rather than control” (#258, 10/7).

Specifically;

- ❖ What were some of the particular moments in the conversation when you noticed the dynamic changing?
- ❖ What might have led to these changes in dynamic?
- ❖ What effect did these changes have on the conversation?
- ❖ What effect did these changes have on each of you?
- ❖ Are there examples where both of you might have taken up directing or guiding positions in the conversation?
- ❖ If there were other directions that the conversation could have taken, what might they have been?
- ❖ What effect might these changes of direction have had on the conversation?

Generally;

- ❖ How would you describe the styles of guiding each of you employ in your conversations?
- ❖ In what ways might these different styles enhance your conversations?
- ❖ In what ways might these different styles undermine your conversations?
- ❖ What is the history of these styles of guiding conversations?
- ❖ Are these styles of guiding conversations connected to more general ideas about men and women?
- ❖ Are these ideas ones you wish to continue to hold or ones you would like to review?
- ❖ If so, why do you wish to hold on to these ideas or why might you wish to review them?

4. Nitty gritty and chitty chatty

Andrew you raised the concepts of ‘nitty gritty’ and ‘chitty chatty’. You said, “we’re not really getting to the nitty gritty of this” (#205, 7/7), but “the chitty chatty which is fine” (#207, 7/7).

Laura, for you, you could recognise the nitty gritty (#402, 10/7). You said that the “nitty gritty’s the things that impacted my feelings” (#404, 10/7).

- ❖ As you reflect on the conversation, if you had been getting more into the nitty gritty, what different course might the conversation have taken?
- ❖ In hindsight, if you had taken the conversation more into the nitty gritty, what might you have said or done to make this movement possible?
- ❖ What effect might getting more into the nitty gritty have had?
- ❖ What might the benefits have been in getting more into the nitty gritty?
- ❖ What might the hazards have been in getting more into the nitty gritty?

Relationship Positions

5. ‘Need for independence’

Andrew when we were discussing neediness, vindictiveness and manipulation, you said, “That’s probably more my need for independence” (#461, 10/7). And, “I’m just independent” (#249, 7/7).

Specifically;

- ❖ Is this ‘need for independence’ something that you both work to satisfy?
- ❖ At what point in the conversation did you notice the need for independence being spoken of or presenting itself?
- ❖ In the conversation, what kinds of things posed a challenge to the need for independence?
- ❖ How did this challenge show itself, for example what words or gestures evoked the challenge?
- ❖ What effect did this challenge have on you?
- ❖ What effect did this challenge have on your relationship?
- ❖ What effect did this challenge have on your spouse?
- ❖ Were there examples where the need for independence was satisfied?
- ❖ How did this satisfaction show itself?
- ❖ What effect did this satisfaction have on you?
- ❖ What effect did this satisfaction have on your relationship?
- ❖ What effect did this satisfaction have on your spouse?

Generally;

- ❖ How would you define the need for independence?
- ❖ Is there a time in your life when you decided to respond to this need for independence or is it something you stepped into perchance?
- ❖ How would you describe the development of the need for independence in your life?
- ❖ What do you value about this need for independence?
- ❖ What emotions are evoked when the need for independence is being satisfied?
- ❖ How might you describe your life when the need for independence is satisfied?
- ❖ Is the need for independence equally, or more or less suited to single life-styles and relationship life-styles?

- ❖ How might you describe your relationship when the need for independence is satisfied?
- ❖ What would you see or know about yourself that suggested the need for independence was being satisfied?
- ❖ What would you see or know about your relationship that suggested independence was being satisfied?
- ❖ What might the limitations be of the need for independence?
- ❖ What challenges the need for independence?
- ❖ What ways do you respond when the need for independence is under threat?
- ❖ What effect does this response have on you?
- ❖ What effect does this response have on your relationship?
- ❖ Are others implicated when the need for independence is under threat?
- ❖ If so, how are others implicated?

5. Need for independence - continued

- ❖ Are there mentors or role models in your life who lived out or aspired to an independent life style?
- ❖ If so, what did/do you particularly value or appreciate about these people?
- ❖ What alternatives are there to independent ways of living?
- ❖ What ideas do you hold about these alternative ways of living?
- ❖ Who in society is encouraged into an independent life style, for example, men, women, children, cultures?
- ❖ Where do you stand around these ideas?
- ❖ What are your thoughts about different ways of living co-existing in relationships?
- ❖ Would you say your ways of living are similar or different?
- ❖ What might this mean for your relationship?

6. Needing sometimes, carrying weight, looking after you, being here for you.

Andrew you said, “It’s all very value laden words and some of it’s quite heavy” (#437, 10/7). And Laura you said “For me it’s a put down and an undervaluing” (#464, 10/7).

- ❖ Who are these words value laden and heavy for?
- ❖ What makes them value laden and heavy?
- ❖ Would it be preferable or not for them to be less value laden and heavy?
- ❖ If so, what words or descriptions might make them less value laden and heavy and more preferable, for example is what you have called neediness a desire or yearning for something?
- ❖ If so, what might it be a desire or yearning for?
- ❖ If not, what might what you have called neediness be a response to?

Specifically;

- ❖ Were there any examples of the presence of this [preferred description] in the conversation?
- ❖ What did this mean for each of you?

- ❖ What effect did this [preferred description] have on each of you, for example what did it get you thinking, feeling, doing?

Generally;

- ❖ How would you describe this concept of [preferred description]?
- ❖ How would you each evaluate [preferred description]?
- ❖ What do you value and appreciate about this?
- ❖ What values does this reflect?
- ❖ What keeps this alive in the relationship?
- ❖ What stifles it?
- ❖ What is the history of this, for example when and how did it develop?
- ❖ What kind of relationship style is this a response to?
- ❖ Can this be problematic?
- ❖ If so, in what ways can this be problematic?

Unspoken but present aspects

7. Unanswered questions and unmet needs

Laura you said “there was still times when, because I was watching it, I realised that there were times when we didn’t both get what we needed. ‘Cause we went on to something else. And I know for me I go “oh I didn’t get listened and I didn’t get heard. You didn’t answer my question, but at the end I just carried over it and yet the feeling that it, I felt by watching it, it’s like I didn’t get, he didn’t answer my question” (#470, 10/7). And Andrew you suggested that ‘Yeah, there were a couple of times there, but you can’t follow every thread” (#474, 10/7).

Given the opportunity to re-view this conversation,

- ❖ You said there were times when you didn’t both get what you needed, what might you have liked to have attended more to?
- ❖ What were the question/s that you would like to have had answered?
- ❖ What are some of the things that might have diverted the conversation at the time?
- ❖ What helped you to notice these unattended to moments?
- ❖ If you were to attend to them now, how might you do that?
- ❖ What, if anything, might be made possible by attending to these aspects now?
- ❖ What if any, are the limitations of attending to these aspects now?
- ❖ What difference does it make to attend to them now?

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Appendix 9

Scene 3 Conversation Inquiry Guide – Generic version

‘Co-Searching Relationship practices’

Researcher: Wendy Talbot

The purpose of this conversation is to look at your original relationship conversation from different angles or perspectives.

I have grouped the following sets of questions into sections and given them headings.

You might like to select one or more areas that interest you and are relevant to experiment with. At the end of the conversation we can decide together whether we continue to meet and discuss these questions further or not.

We will again take up audience positions. The different sections represent different possible lenses from which you can reflect on your conversation.

We can begin with a catch up on what has been happening between our sessions.

Since we last met

Have you had any thoughts, questions or experiences from the conversation, transcript or letter that you would like to speak about?

How is the research process going for you?

Are there any ways that we can adapt our conversations or the process to enhance them?

Language

- ❖ Were there any words, phrases or gestures that you saw or heard that stood out for you or were meaningful in some way?
- ❖ What were they and what was meaningful?
- ❖ Are there examples from your life that have been influential in developing or shaping the meaning you make of these words, phrases or gestures?
- ❖ If so, would you describe some particular examples?

- ❖ How did these words, phrases or gestures position you in the conversation? For example were you encouraged, warmed, connected, understood, labelled, totalized, silenced, cornered by defensiveness, criticism, doubt, fear or blame; moved or surprised by praise or encouragement etc.?
- ❖ How do these responses fit with your hopes and intentions for your conversation and your relationship generally?

Movement

- ❖ Many couples I have talked with, have told me of changes in their relationship that occurred
- ❖ during their conversations. Yet they often did not have any idea how these changes happened. The following kinds of questions have been helpful in identifying the moments of change in their conversations. They have then been able to think about and manage these changes in ways they prefer.
- ❖ Did you see, hear or experience any moments or examples in which the conversation moved forward, or progressed?
- ❖ What words or responses did you notice that seemed to influence or contribute to this movement?
- ❖ What conditions may have made this movement possible?
- ❖ What effect do you think this movement may have on your conversation and your relationship?
- ❖ What is it like for you to recognize and witness this?
- ❖ Did you see, hear or experience any examples in which the conversation might have been sidelined or derailed or movement stalled?
- ❖ What words or responses did you notice that seemed to influence or contribute to this movement?
- ❖ What conditions might have made this sidelining, derailing or stalling possible?
- ❖ What effect might this moment, or moments like it, have on your conversation and your relationship?
- ❖ What is it like to recognize and witness this?
- ❖ If this movement is problematic to you, what possible steps might you take if you were to notice this sidelining or derailing happening in the future?

Relationship injury, difficulty or problem

- ❖ Is there any sign of relationship injury, difficulty or problem, either past or present, in the conversation?

If there is an injury, difficulty or problem;

- ❖ How is this noticeable in what is said or not said?
- ❖ What does it mean to you to experience this relationship injury, difficulty or problem in your conversation?
- ❖ What effect does it have on how you speak or act in the conversation?
- ❖ What effect might it have on the future of your relationship?
- ❖ How is the relationship injury, difficulty or problem maintained or acted upon in your relationship?
- ❖ What ideas or beliefs about relationship injuries, difficulties or problems do you each have that might contribute to it being present in your conversation?
- ❖ If a relationship injury, difficulty or problem is problematic in your relationship, what possibilities can you think of that might help turn this around? For example, can the injury be talked about more or less? If we think about it in terms of a wound, can this wound perhaps be dressed or lanced? What effect might these steps have on each of you and your relationship? Or maybe, can it be mourned? If so, is there a mourning period?

If there is not an injury, difficulty or problem;

- ❖ Is this noticeable in what is said or not said?
- ❖ What does it mean to you or your relationship that there is no relationship injury, difficulty or problem?
- ❖ What effect does it have on how you speak or act in the conversation?
- ❖ What might this mean for the future of your relationship?
- ❖ How do you keep relationship injuries or difficulties from being problematic in your conversations?
- ❖ What ideas or beliefs about relationship problems, injuries or difficulties might keep them from being present in the conversation?

- ❖ What stories or experience do you have of relationship injuries, problems or difficulties
- ❖ from your own life?
- ❖ How have these stories or experiences been influential in shaping your ideas about relationship injuries, problems or difficulties?
- ❖ What ideas or preferences do you know of that might assist you in viewing and negotiating relationship injuries in your relationship?

Conflict and difference

There are many ideas about conflict and difference. Often we take these ideas for granted as the 'normal' ways to manage things. In the conversations I have had about relationships over the years, I have found that couples can have different ideas about what 'acceptable' or 'normal' is. These different ideas can result in battles about who is more 'right' or 'normal'.

Here are some examples of different ideas about conflict. You may have some others.

- Conflict is damaging and painful and must be avoided.
 - If we love each other we shouldn't have conflict.
 - Conflict is necessary for personal and relational growth.
 - The more similar we are the better we will get along.
 - Opposites attract – difference is good.
 - A measure of a good relationship is how well couples get along.
 - Conflict is caused when one person has more power over another and is abusive.
 - Difference is inevitable, understanding our different meanings and points of view is what is important.
 - Conflict is a gender thing. For example, men and women are different and will never understand each other or see things the same way.
 - Conflict or difference doesn't matter or isn't important.
-
- ❖ Are any of these ideas evident in your relationship conversation?
 - ❖ How are they expressed in words, experience or gestures?
 - ❖ What effect is this having on the relationship conversation?

- ❖ How similar or different are your understandings about conflict and difference?
- ❖ Are there particular understandings you relate to more than others?
- ❖ Are there different situations in which you would hold different ideas about conflict?
- ❖ What are some of these situations and how are they different?
- ❖ What life experience or influences have shaped your ideas about conflict?
- ❖ What effect might this have for each of you and your relationship?
- ❖ Are you satisfied with these ideas and ways of managing conflict or are you interested in developing them further?
- ❖ What do you appreciate about the current ways you manage conflict or what developments are you interested in working towards?

Roles

- ❖ Did you notice any roles that were being acted on in your conversation for example, male, female, parent, friend, spouse, colleague, partner?
- ❖ What words, gestures or experience alerted you to these roles?
- ❖ How would you describe the ideas and behaviours that define these roles?
- ❖ What are some of the benefits and hazards of these roles on you and your relationship?
- ❖ How would you describe the kind of person these roles invite or expect you to be?
- ❖ Does this fit more or less with your preferences for your life?
- ❖ If you were to review these roles what aspects of them do you value and what aspects would you develop differently?

Relationship stance or ways of relating

As with conflict and difference, there are many listening and speaking stances or styles of relating. For example listening to find the flaws in someone's argument; listening to better understand; speaking to convince someone of your opinion or position; speaking to clarify.

- ❖ How would you describe the listening and speaking stance/s that you witnessed in your conversation?
- ❖ What words, gestures and experience made the styles visible?

- ❖ What effect did this have on each of you and the direction of the conversation?
- ❖ How does this fit for your hopes for this conversation?
- ❖ What relating stances do you find yourself drawn to or away from?
- ❖ Who or what benefits or loses from these styles?
- ❖ When you find yourself in a conversation with these styles, are they more likely to open up or close down your participation?
- ❖ How do they open up or close down the conversation?

Review of the inquiry

How has it been to discuss your relationship in this way?

What effects are you aware of for yourself and your relationship?

The possibilities for conversations from audience positions are extensive. Many of these questions above could be asked about affection and intimacy, power, values, respect, fidelity, culture, family, finances and so on. You may like to discuss a lens that I have not included here. If so, we can use some of these questions to guide us in exploration. You may like to experiment with some of these ideas and questions in other relationship conversations.

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Appendix 10

Scene 4 Review of the Research Process Inquiry Guide

‘Co-searching relationship practices’

Researcher: Wendy Talbot

In this conversation the three of us will review our experience of the research process. I hope these questions will be useful to guide us in our conversation. You may have some questions of me. If you wish we can interview each other in ways that bring out our experience and evaluation of the process.

- ❖ What are some of the memorable aspects or defining moments in this process for each of us personally?
- ❖ Are there ways in which our knowledge or experience has been added to or enriched?
- ❖ How is our relationship different? What in particular might have contributed to this difference?
- ❖ How have the forms, letters, transcripts and inquiry guides influenced the process?
- ❖ Are there ways that the process of audiencing our relationship might be useful to us in the future, for example in the way we look at, think about or speak about our relationship?
- ❖ Has there been difficult territory that we have encountered?
- ❖ How were these difficulties dealt with, or not dealt with?
- ❖ If we were to repeat this research process, what are some of the things that could be added to, changed or excluded?
- ❖ Are there topics of conversation that might have been risky or difficult to talk about?

- ❖ How might the camera or Wendy's presence in the process have made a difference to the conversations and topics that were raised in ways that were eased or more difficult?
- ❖ What might you say to other couples who are interested in taking up audience positions in their relationship conversations?
- ❖ How similar or different has this process been to how you might usually reflect on your relationship conversations?

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Appendix 11

Original Transcript Text example

Drawn from MJ and Anne's Scene 2 Research Conversation

214. MJ Well the way I see our life together is I've sort of got the rudder of the boat or the keel. I determine where the boat's going and Anne is the one who pops up and says "wouldn't it be nice if we did so and so". Oh yeah let's pop over there a bit or pop over there. She thinks on a more emotional level than me I'm very practical and think "this is what we should do" and I'm usually, sounds like trumpet blowing,
215. Anne No. No.
216. MJ Usually we're right. But Anne is that bit of wind that occasionally blows us in another direction which is really, really nice because we go places I would never have gone.
217. Wendy Mmm.
218. MJ That's the way I see us.
219. Wendy What a lovely metaphor.
220. MJ Yeah.
221. Wendy You can't have a boat without the wind.
222. Anne (Laughs) Yeah.
223. Wendy Especially a sailboat. Yeah.

224. MJ And the wind determines where you are going. You might have to fight against it but you know I just see it like that. So Anne is the, we've always joked about Anne being sort of the dreamer in the family, the emotional one that comes, and she's taught me so much in that area that I was blind to. By the same time she also needs something hard, I almost said the wrong thing then, she needs someone to guide her sometimes because she does go off into dreamland and I'm the practical one that does that I think.
225. Anne Yeah.
226. MJ So that's why we work as a unit.
227. Wendy Mmm. So did you see any of that in what you watched?
228. MJ No I saw me dominating the conversation so much it worried me a bit because I really thought when we finished that film that we'd had an equal talk. And when I saw it I thought damn it there I go again um, captain heavy with all the mouthing off and it annoyed me a bit and I thought "I didn't think I was that bad". Having seen it I have to, you know, it's a bit, even at the end of it I said I'd dominated a lot I think.
229. Anne Yeah, ah, I've often said like when the kids are here they talk, I don't. I listen or I'm doing something with the children
230. Wendy Mmm

231. Anne and it think, I talk to friends and all the Mums say the same things. If Dad's around the kids talk to Dad. Don't talk to Mum. It's really weird but if my daughter and I are on our own we talk. And if my son and I are on our own we talk. But if he's here, and it's like when the grandkids popped around the other day, and they do it all the time, as soon as they see me, "Hello Grandma, where's Granddad?" You know, and it's the first thing they say but it's quite normal.
232. MJ (Response inaudible)
233. Anne No. No, I'm just saying,
234. Wendy So you found that it's common with other people you've spoken of, what about for you two. Is it OK for you?
235. MJ Well I'm very conscious of the fact sometimes when company comes I'll clear off and leave Anne to talk. Like for instance if you come in the door I might go down under the house for half an hour and allow Anne the time to talk to you in her language instead of me poking in all my views on top of hers.
236. Wendy So there's times when you step out of the conversation,
237. MJ Yeah because I need to for her sake. And I'm aware of that,
238. Wendy Mmm.

239. MJ And it kind of annoys me but I can't stop what I am. So that's what I do. I sort of, I'm conscious of doing that sometimes. And I like Anne to have girlfriends round and I just clear out of it.
240. Wendy So if you're thinking about your conversations together, and similar to what you've just witnessed, I imagine that that kind of process is reasonably typical for you?
241. Anne Yeah I'd say so yeah.
242. Wendy What effect does that have on your relationship, on your conversations, is it something that is problematic or is it something that works, or something else?
243. Anne I think it probably works because quite often MJ will say to me "what are you thinking about?" And I'll say "Nothing"
244. MJ Nothing.
245. Anne He says "well you must be thinking something" and I say well I am but I don't want to share it or you know whatever and I've just recently found that it's a family trait on my mother's side of the family, that there is quite a lot of us and it's called the [Family Surname], um what did I call it, oh whatever, but it's like we're silent, we don't speak what's in here (pointing at chest) very often, um and we ah, yeah, we just don't do it.

246. MJ You're listeners,
247. Anne Yeah. It's very, when we do it's quite something.
248. Wendy Mmm.
249. Anne But we don't often, my son's like it, my brother's like it, these three cousins I've found are like it. Um and I've got a couple of uncles who are the same and my grandfather was the same. And it, we just don't open up, I could talk for hours about things, but not probably about what's deep in here.
250. Wendy Mmm.
251. Anne Yeah. It's quite a thing. So if he asks me what I'm thinking about I can't tell him. Not because I don't want to maybe but just because it's too deep and I can't explain it.
252. Wendy Mmm. And yet, I don't know, I might be wrong but as you watched that [DVD] again some of that depth came forward and you were able to explain it,
253. Anne Yeah.
254. Wendy And you were able to speak to what was going on for you.
255. Anne Yeah.
256. Wendy So that does come forward at times.

257. Anne At times yeah but um I think I take a back seat when MJ's speaking.
258. Wendy Yeah. And what's that like for you? Is that,
259. Anne Sometimes I get really frustrated because, especially if it's with the kids and um, like our daughter or son because I try to say what I want to participate in the conversation and I can't because I feel like I'm over-talked, and um, I've told MJ that before and I don't think he's really been able to understand what I mean, but I've, I use a lot of words and he doesn't maybe, I don't know, so I just take a back seat, so I do get frustrated at times but um, I've just come to accept that that's the way it is.

Appendix 12

Edited transcript text example

MJ	The way I see our life together is I've sort of got the rudder of the boat or the keel. I determine where the boat's going and (2, 214) Anne is that bit of wind that occasionally blows us in another direction which is really, really nice, because we go places I would never have gone (2, 216). And the wind determines where you are going. You might have to fight against it. She needs someone to guide her sometimes (2,224). She thinks on a more emotional level than me. I'm very practical and think, "this is what we should do" (2, 214). Usually we're right (2,216). So that's why we work as a unit (2, 226).
Anne	I think it probably works (2, 243). It's a family trait on my mother's side of the family ... It's like we're silent, we don't speak what's in here (pointing at chest) (2,245). Not because I don't want to maybe, but just because it's too deep and I can't explain it (2, 251). I think I take a back seat when MJ's speaking (2, 257). Sometimes I get really frustrated because ... I try to say what I want to participate in the conversation and I can't because I feel like I'm over-talked, so I just take a back seat. I've just come to accept that that's the way it is (2, 259).