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WOMEN'S USE OF POSSESSIONS TO COPE WITH ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements of the degree

of

Master of Management Studies in Marketing

at

The University of Waikato

by

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The University of Waikato

2012

ABSTRACT

Domestic violence is a widespread social issue in New Zealand and throughout the world and is detrimental to both society and the individual. Public services, such as law enforcement and health care are frequently and directly impacted due to the prevalence of domestic violence, specifically in terms of financial costs. The literature has shown that women who experience abusive relationships are often battered, isolated and left with a shattered sense of self. Consequently, understanding how women respond to and cope with abusive relationships is important. This study therefore examines women's use of possessions to cope with an abusive relationship.

A hermeneutic phenomenological framework guided this study. Six New Zealand Caucasian women were interviewed through the use of the Me Box method. The women's lived experiences were analysed and illustrated through interpretive collages in order to understand how these women used possessions to cope with their abusive relationships.

The findings indicate that women use possessions in a variety of ways to cope with their abusive relationships. Five themes were evident in this study: nothing given back, secret possessions, my space, finding me, and the salience of possessions. Although the first theme relates to how the women were victimised by their possessions and their respective partner, the latter four describe how the women used possessions to cope with the abuse. The women used attachment to significant possessions to gain control, escape abuse and reconstruct their identity. The attachments to these possessions were unique to the women and their abusive relationships. These significant possessions enabled the women to strip themselves of their victim identity and recreate their sense of self.

This investigation contributes to the literature in three ways. First, the findings of this study support the defining of the term *possessions* in relation to psychological appropriation rather than the tangibility of an object. Second, this thesis seeks to understand how women in abusive relationships are empowered rather than abused through their attachment to their significant possessions. Finally, the Me Box method used to investigate these women's lived experiences supports the use of art-based research methods when examining sensitive and deeply personal topics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank the six women who volunteered to participate in this study. Thank you for sharing your deeply personal experiences and opening your minds, hearts and souls. You are incredibly strong women and it was a pleasure to meet all of you. From the bottom of my heart I thank you. I could not have completed this thesis without you.

Thank you to my parents. Thank you for your support, your proof-readings, your endless emails and phone calls. You have influenced my drive, sense of morals and inner strength. Thank you for being proud of me, even though your daughter has been a 'professional student' for six years. Mum and Dad, I promise I will now get a job.

Thank you to my cheer squad who supported me throughout this last year. Thank you Rob for your support, patience and understanding. You were my counsellor and my thesaurus and you sat with me at the labs right until the last minute. Thank you to James who sent me care packages of energy drinks and rescue remedy from Wellington and Skyped me when I needed. To Lou and Sarah, thanks for your constant words of encouragement and providing me with a social outlet when I began to drown in pieces of paper.

Finally, thank you to my supervisors, Lorraine Friend and Mary FitzPatrick. Thank you for your guidance, your knowledge and your patience. Thank you for believing in my research topic and encouraging me to pursue my passion.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The topic of domestic violence is examined extensively in scholarly research; often discussed in marital and family violence literature (Anderson, 1997; Cantos, Neidig, & O'Leary, 1994; Carlson, 1990); gender research (Browne & Williams, 1993; Locke & Richman, 1999; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000); social psychology literature (Campbell, Sullivan, & Davidson II, 1995; Walker, 1999); and public health care journals (Cann, Withnell, Shakespeare, Doll, & Thomas, 2001; Flitcraft, 1992). A brief survey of the domestic violence literature reveals a saturation of studies across multiple disciplines. However, there are very few studies within marketing and consumer research (e.g. Kacen, 2011; Sirles, Lipchik, & Kowalski, 1993; Stephens, Hill, & Gentry, 2005) where the majority domestic violence studies surround the effectiveness of advertising campaigns (e.g. Cismaru & Lavack, 2010; Donovan, Francas, Paterson, & Zappelli, 2000).

Abusive relationships can be classed as a stressful situation that people, who are affected by the abuse, need to cope with. Both the coping mechanisms women use in response to an abusive relationship (Herbert, Silver, & Ellard, 1991), and the role possessions have within those relationships (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 1997; Hill, 1991) have been largely discussed in the family and marital literature. Within consumer research literature, however, the concept is relatively unexamined (Stephens et al., 2005).

Understanding how women cope with an abusive relationship is important as the impacts of those abusive relationships have both individual and societal consequences. The mental and physical health of the abused woman is often depleted as a direct result of the perpetrator's abusive actions (Sleutel, 1998; Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2002). The impact of the individual's mental and physical health concerns can be felt at a national level, particularly in regards to financial cost (Coker, Watkins, Smith, & Brandt, 2003).

Pre-millennium literature often view abused women as victims (Ferraro, 1997); however this thesis identifies them as survivors by examining how women cope with an abusive relationship rather than how they are victimised by their partner. The purpose of this thesis is to help the reader understand *if and how women use possessions to cope with an abusive*

relationship using an art-based research method, the Me Box (Gibbons, 2010). This method enabled the lived experiences of the women to be examined sensitively.

A phenomenological approach was used to examine this topic. Using the Me Box method, six New Zealand women who had left their abusive partner revealed how they used possessions to cope with their abusive relationship. The research discloses that the women use possessions in a variety of ways to re-gain and re-establish their self-identity and contribute to their overall well-being.

This thesis begins with an assessment of the current literature from various disciplines in respect to domestic violence. Consumer research and theories with a particular focus on the topic of coping with domestic violence and how individuals use possessions to cope with stressors is examined. A description of the art-based method this thesis used then follows. Finally, detailed discussions of the findings and the contributions this thesis makes conclude this thesis report.

Author's Experience

I am a domestic violence survivor. I am not ashamed of my past and I do not regret things that have happened in my life as those experiences have shaped the way I think and live and are very much a part of who I am. I believe that my experience of an abusive relationship enabled me to better understand the women's stories and helped clarify and interpret situations that a non-abused woman may have overlooked. I followed a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective that argues that a researcher's life experience cannot be separated from data interpretation (van Manen, 1997). I was aware that each woman's experience is unique and was conscious to set aside my own abusive relationship experience; however, I believe that my prior knowledge facilitated a deeper understanding and interpretation (Creswell, 1998; Schram, 2006).

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This thesis examines women's use of possessions to cope with abusive relationships. Although this thesis is positioned predominately within the consumer research paradigm, the topic has been previously unexamined in this literature. This literature review draws on multiple disciplines to gain a fuller understanding of women's use of possessions to cope with abusive relationships. Firstly, the defining of domestic violence as well as the importance of studying abusive relationships is outlined. Previous consumer research literature investigating possessions in regards to extended self and self-identity is examined. The implications of these theories on the impact of possessions and individual well-being are discussed. Current research addressing the role of possessions within domestic violence is then identified, specifically how possessions can victimise women within the abusive relationship. Strategies women employ to cope with abusive relationships is also discussed in order to understand current theories surrounding coping in these situations. Finally, the implications of current literature are discussed in terms of this thesis.

Defining Abusive Relationships

Defining the term abusive relationships is imperative because a wide variety of definitions exist within the domestic violence literature (see Johnson, 1995, 2000a). Although it is acknowledged that there are many definitions of what constitutes an abusive relationship; this thesis uses Johnson's (2000a) *intimate terrorism* definition as it most accurately describes the type of abusive relationships this work addresses. Intimate terrorism can be characterised "by a wish to exert general control over one's partner" (Johnson & Ferraro, 2004, p.949) and includes physical and/or emotional abuse. Within Johnson's (2000a) definition of intimate terrorism, the type of relationship, for example dating, cohabitation, and marital, is not distinguished. Therefore, this thesis does not make this distinction and includes dating, cohabitation, and marital relationships when defining the term domestic violence. Stets and Straus (1989) acknowledge the importance of including a wide variety of relationship statuses within domestic violence research as the reporting and recognition of violence within dating and cohabitation relationships has increased since the 1970s.

The concept of abusive relationships is an important topic to research because of its widespread impact throughout society and has both individual and societal costs. In New Zealand “family violence affects a third of all women during their lifetime” (Woulfe, 2009, p.12). Globally, up to 71% of ever-partnered women have experienced physical or sexual violence by their intimate partner in their lifetime (Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2006). Additionally, the health implications of abusive relationships can be seen at both the individual and societal level (Gerlock, 1999; Pico-Alfonso et al., 2006; Roberts, Lawrence, Williams, & Raphael, 1998). Women are often physically and mentally injured as a direct result of an abusive partner; consequently costing New Zealand between \$1.2 and \$5.8 billion per annum (Snively, 1996). These statistics support the significance of understanding and researching abusive relationships.

The Extended Self, Self-Identity and the Role of Possessions

Before understanding the role of possessions within domestic violence, the role of possessions within the consumer research literature must firstly be discussed; specifically in terms of the extended self and self-identity. Belk’s 1988 paper *Possessions and the Extended Self* synthesised literature and suggested that personal possessions can forge and reflect a person’s self-identity. This paper influenced an increase in the interest of researching possessions and self-identity (Ahuvia, 2005). Since then, many researchers have examined the relationship between possessions and the creation, communication and maintenance of self-identity (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998b; Tian & Belk, 2005) as well as possessions influence on consumer well-being (Ahuvia, 2005; Kleine III, Kleine, & Kernan, 1992). These constructs all suggest that consumption is not primarily needs-based but also preserves, validate and communicates our self-identity (Wattanasuwan, 2005) through defining ourselves in relation to objects, people and places over time (Ahuvia, 2005).

EXTENDED SELF

Possessions and the Extended Self. Belk (1988) examined the relationship between possessions and self-identity. Belk (1988) ascertains that individuals deem possessions as part of their ‘self’. Essentially we are what we own (Feirstein, 1986) and due to the fragility of our sense of self, possessions aid in the stabilisation and support of our self-identity (Belk, 1988; Sedikides, Cisek, & Hart, 2011). It is important to note that these possessions are not restricted to external objects but can also include places, persons, experiences, group possessions, and possessions such as body parts. For a possession to be included into one’s

extended self, the individual needs a feeling of attachment to that particular possession (Belk, 1988).

Attachment to special possessions, places and experiences are psychologically appropriated (Belk, 1988; Furby, 1978). For attachment to form possessions do not need to be rare or expensive (Ball & Tasaki, 1992) appropriation goes beyond the object itself and is dependent on the emotional significance of that individual object as well as a sense the object is “mine” (Kleine & Baker, 2004). A higher degree of attachment is more likely to occur when the possession is connected with personal attributes or significant people or events (Furby, 1978). Similarly, Ball and Tasaki (1992, p.159) suggest that “objects that are socially visible; reflective of the individual’s roles, relationships, accomplishments, and experiences...are clearly more likely to reflect self”. Therefore, attachment to these special possessions helps the individual emulate their life accomplishments and cement core aspects of their self-identity (Rubinstein & Parmelee, 1992).

POSSESSIONS AND THE CREATION, COMMUNICATION AND MAINTENANCE OF SELF-IDENTITY

Consumption is fundamental to the creation, communication and maintenance of an individual’s self-identity because consumption provides meanings and values attributed by the consumer’s personal and social world (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998a). The process of self-identity creation is a *symbolic project* (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1990) where the individual constructs images of who and what they want to be through the consumption of personal and socially appointed symbolic possessions (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998a). These symbolic possessions are interpreted by both the individual and society through their attached meaning and allows for the external communication of one’s self-identity.

Possessions can aid in the subjective communication of the ‘self’. Kleine, Kleine III, and Allen (1995) research of the use of different attachment types in expressing different facets of self-identity suggest men will typically seek possessions that express their autonomy and women usually desire possessions that reflect affiliation (Kleine et al., 1995). Possessions can help communicate a person’s life story, or portray an individual’s personality, for example an engagement ring, or an item of clothing that reflects ‘me’ (Kleine et al., 1995). It should be noted however, a possession can hold a variety of symbolic meanings due to differing individual, societal or cultural perceptions. Thus, people can use the same possession to create, communicate or maintain their sense of selves but may not attribute the same symbolic meaning to that possession. One individual may buy an expensive sports car to

emulate their success however; an onlooker may perceive that individual to be arrogant. Therefore an individual's self can be misinterpreted by others. However, due to the subjectivity of possession meanings, consumers can also use possessions in a variety of ways that are unique to their circumstances to create, communicate and maintain their self-identity (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998a).

The constant communication and reinforcement of possession symbols can result in the continual maintenance of self-identity. A study conducted by (Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993) researching the relationship between people and products suggested that individuals use possessions to attain esteem-enhancing feedback required to maintain the self. An individual will involve themselves with possessions that most strongly reflect both to themselves and to society their desired image; enhancing the maintenance of their self-identity. Because of the ability of possessions to consistently provide important symbolic meanings, possessions can influence consumer well-being by maintaining self-identity in times of change.

POSSESSIONS AND INDIVIDUAL WELL-BEING

The high degree of attachment to possessions and their inclusion into a person's extended-self suggests that possessions can influence an individual's well-being. Numerous studies have investigated the influence of possessions on consumer well-being (Braun & Wicklund, 1989; Chang & Arkin, 2002; Cottle, 1981; Goffman, 1961b) in regards to coping with uncertainties and correcting self-doubt, providing a connection with their past; and as a means of escape - all contributing to their overall well-being.

In times of uncertainty consumers may turn to possessions in order to re-establish their self-identity. Self-identity may be jeopardised when consumers experience feelings of self-doubt. Self-doubt occurs when individuals have uncertainties about their competence or self-worth. Braun and Wicklund (1989) showed that beginner tennis players were more likely to wear branded gear than experienced tennis players as a way of compensating for their inexperience in tennis and lower self-confidence. Similarly, Chang and Arkin (2002) assert that in times of uncertainty consumers may seek materialistic possessions that symbolise aspects of their self that are under threat. Some consumers actively pursue external symbols of competency to rectify internal feelings of incompetency. Thus, some individuals may seek security through the acquisition of possessions as a way of coping with their feelings of self-doubt. Although these studies establish a relationship between coping with self-doubt and materialism; Chang

and Arkin (2002) caution that coping via materialism may not occur in cultures that have low materialistic beliefs.

Possessions not only provide consumers with links to personal attributes but also can be used to connect consumers to memories and feelings of their past (Price, Arnould, & Curasi, 2000; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Possessions can become *personal museums of the past* based on the meaning and history of the possession (Price et al., 2000). Possessions such as trophies, gifts and family photographs can become evidence of past experiences and can be used to validate feelings of competence (Belk, 1982; Kastenbaum & Costa Jr, 1977; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Consumers may override functional explanations of the possession and instead use them to remind themselves of occasions, relationships, and other people; for example, an heirloom armchair extends beyond the function of the chair itself and can connect an individual to their family heritage (Price et al., 2000). Csikszentmihalyi and Halton (1981) suggest that older people are more likely to connect possessions to past memories than younger people simply because they have accumulated more experiences and therefore own more memory-evoking possessions. However, memory-evoking possessions are not limited to the older generations. Furby and Wilke (1982) suggest that infants attach themselves to security blankets as a means to cope with the separation from their mother. For the child, the blanket becomes a symbol of their mother and a source of maternal security.

Places as well as material possessions can be linked to physical and psychological well-being (Giuliani, 2003; Knez, 2005). Places are able to be incorporated into a person's extended self even though some are public. Individuals attach themselves to places through links to memories and emotional significance, such as a town where they grew up, or through the feeling the place is "mine" or "part of me". Places can provide individuals with security, privacy, control, serenity (Altman & Low, 1992b), can reduce stress, enhance positive moods, and provide a means of escape (Rollero & Piccoli, 2010).

POSSESSIONS AND VIOLATION OF SELF-IDENTITY

Individuals often feel personally violated if their special possessions are taken away from them or destroyed involuntarily. Belk (1988) explains this feeling of violation or lessening of self occurs when possessions that consumers view as part of their self are lost unwillingly. Thus, a violation of the self and can occur after involuntary loss, theft or casualty. Involuntary loss of goods can occur through financial hardship (Cottle, 1981), periods of divorce (Belk, 1988), or entering into an institution (Goffman, 1961a). Individuals can find

these experiences quite traumatic as they feel not only a loss of possessions but a loss of self. Goffman's (1961a) study of possessions in institutions found that people who enter into institutions such as retirement homes, prisons and boarding schools are stripped of possessions which make them unique in order to create a standardised or shared group identity. The effect of losing special possession can catalyse a period of mourning. Belk (1988) asserts that individuals who experience the loss of special possessions, through theft or casualty, can also experience a sense of mourning similar to that experienced after the death of a loved one. Moreover, individuals have referred to feelings of vulnerability and loss of control when describing a burglary incident, others have compared it to being raped or polluted (Belk, 1988). McLeod's (1984) study of the impact of natural disasters found similar results where participants could not talk about the event or losing "everything" without crying. These studies highlight not only the loss of self that consumers experience following the involuntary loss of special possessions but also indicate how integrated possessions and an individual's self-identity are.

Domestic Violence, Victimization of Women and the Role of Possessions

The victimisation of abused women is not limited to within the abusive relationship itself but extends to the literature that discusses domestic violence (Koenig, Stephenson, Ahmed, Jejeebhoy, & Campbell, 2006). Within this literature the woman is often blamed for her situation, as the question is often asked "why does she not leave?" (e.g. Herbert et al., 1991; Rhodes & McKenzie, 1999). Additionally, within the literature discussions surround the control and ownership a man has over the woman (Johnson, 1995) as well as the role possessions have in controlling the woman, further emphasising the victim stigmatisation. A turn-point in the domestic violence literature can be seen in the 1990s where women were no longer labelled as the victim; rather they are seen as a survivor (Ferraro, 1997). The domestic violence literature that sees the woman as a survivor discuss the coping strategies she uses in order to cope with the abuse.

VICTIMISATION THROUGH CONTROL TACTICS

Within an abusive relationship the partner can victimise the woman by exerting control over her (Gallagher, Allen, & Jones, 2008; Martin & Younger-Lewis, 1997; Serran & Firestone, 2004). A man will, amongst other things, threatens and use violence and psychological ploys as a means to manipulate his partner into doing what he wants (Brandl, 2000). In 1984, more than 200 battered women designed the Power and Control Wheel (see Figure 1) which illustrates the main abusive behaviours women experience when in an abusive relationship;

exemplifying the cyclical nature of abusive behaviours (Pence & Paymar, 1993). The behaviours outlined in the Power and Control Wheel are common abusive behaviours, such as intimidation and emotional abuse. These however, are not the only tactics batterers use, and not all abusive relationships include all aspects of the Power and Control Wheel. The control may be broad, and control techniques, such as those featured in the Power and Control Wheel, help establish and maintain general control and ownership over the partner (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000b).



Figure 1. The Power and Control Wheel. From *Education groups for men who batter: The Duluth model* (p.3) , by E. Pence and M. Paymar, 1993, Springer Publishing Company.

VICTIMISATION THROUGH A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP

The 'ownership' of a woman is discussed in a variety of domestic violence studies (Johnson, 1995; Koenig et al., 2006; Stephens et al., 2005). These studies discuss how the woman is commonly depicted within the literature as a victim of patriarchal traditions and how she has become a 'possession' of her male partner. Johnson (1995, p.284) acknowledges that some domestic violence is a "product of patriarchal traditions of men's rights to control 'their' woman...[and] involves the systematic use of not only violence, but economic subordination,

threats, isolation, and other control tactics”. Although Koenig et al. (2006) suggest that some cultures foster beliefs that normalise and tolerate men’s sense of entitlement and ownership of women, the individuals desire to control a woman is the underlying motivation of ownership.

The desire for a man to own and regard a woman as his possession has been examined in reference to the concept of the extended self (Kacen, 2011; Stephens et al., 2005). According to Stephens et al (2005, p.40), “control is a central component of the possessions we view as extensions of ourselves; the more we feel that we control, or are controlled by, an object or living being, the stronger our perception that it is a part of us”. Kacen (2011) explains that the perpetrator will covertly absorb the woman’s self into his own, thus extending his own ‘self’. If the woman becomes too absorbed into the man’s extended self it is often difficult for the woman to leave as she does not possess an identity of her own, or the man’s identity may be threatened if she attempts to leave.

VICTIMISATION THROUGH POSSESSIONS

A common abusive tactic used by the violent partner is to destroy the woman’s beloved possessions in order to threaten the woman both physically and emotionally. Stephens et al. (2005) highlights how and why men use possessions to threaten and harm their partner. A man may destroy and take away from the woman significant possessions as an act of terrorism thereby extinguishing or depleting her self-identity. An abusive partner will typically target possessions that symbolise a part of the woman’s extended self that is not associated with him, for example photographs of or gifts from her family, or her passport and car keys. In doing so, the partner “is getting rid of proof of her agency and showing her that there is no part of her or her life he cannot control” (Stephens et al., 2005, p.49). These acts of violence toward the woman’s special possessions are a deliberate attempt by the man to diminish the woman’s sense of self.

WOMEN AS SURVIVORS: COPING WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Ferraro (1997) notes a shift in the literature around the 1990s where women were no longer defined as the victim, but were seen as survivors. Research focused on how women coped with domestic violence. Coping mechanisms within domestic violence is important to understand because it provides insights into how women respond to the unique circumstances of an abusive relationship. Coping with stressful situation requires a person to “engage in complex cognitive manoeuvres that change the meaning of the stressful situation” (Herbert et al., 1991, p.313). An abusive relationship requires a woman to engage in complex cognitive

and behavioural manoeuvres to cope with the situation and make it less stressful. Herbert et al. (1991), who researched women's coping strategies while they remained in their abusive relationships, identifies coping mechanisms such as, viewing the relationship more positively, delving into fantasies, taking up hobbies, or the consumption of substances such as alcohol.

The coping strategies women adopt to cope with abusive relationships has been examined within the domestic violence literature. Studies such as Herbert et al. (1991), and Stephens et al. (2005) found that women use a variety of circumstantial methods to cope with their abusive relationship. These coping strategies were either cognitive or behavioural. Herbert et al. (1991, p.321) found that women who were still in their abusive relationship “cognitively structure[d] their situation in such a way as to view their relationship in a more positive light”. However, despite the women's ability to view their relationship positively, verbal abuse made this optimism somewhat more difficult to uphold. Women found it difficult to view the relationship positively in emotionally abusive relationships because it was not only more frequent than the physical abuse but the emotional abuse severely damaged their self-esteem and psychological stability. Other cognitive coping mechanisms used by women in abusive relationships can be accepting the blame for or ignoring the abuse (Rodriguez, 2011); cognitively restoring the relationship by accepting gifts given by the abusive partner (Stephens et al., 2005); and escaping through fantasy (Rodriguez, 2011; Stephens et al., 2005). Women may also engage in a variety of behavioural based coping strategies, such as seeking social support (Riger, Raja, & Camacho, 2002; Rodriguez, 2011); participating in work, school or hobbies (Riger et al., 2002); or escaping through substance abuse (Kilpatrick, 1990; Riger et al., 2002). Through employing these cognitive and behavioural coping strategies women are able to increase their sense of self-efficacy and self-respect (Riger et al., 2002); increase feelings of commitment to their abusive partner (Herbert et al., 1991; Rusbult & Martz, 1995); maintain a positive illusionary state of their relationship (Herbert et al., 1991; Kilpatrick, 1990); and provide physical resources (Riger et al., 2002).

Every abusive relationship forges a set of unique situational circumstances that effects the way women cope with the abuse (Waldrop & Resick, 2004). Although people may have favoured methods of coping with stressful situations, their reaction can vary according to their circumstances (De Ridder, 1997; Holahan, Moos, & Schaefer, 1996; Waldrop & Resick, 2004). Although a woman may have a favoured coping strategy to deal with everyday stressors, such as talking with friends; however, within her abusive relationship she may not find her preferred strategy suitable, for example, her partner may have isolated her from her

friends. The woman therefore may be required to adjust her coping strategies to fit her abusive relationship. Dutton (1996) affirmed that a man's behaviour as well as the woman's available resources influences her abusive relationship experience. Waldrop and Resick (2004) and Dutton (1996) findings assert that the resources available to the woman and the amount of social support the woman has influence the coping strategies the woman employs. Women who have had greater financial independence and social contacts outside of the home received more empathetic responses from their friends and are more likely to leave their abusive partner (Mitchell & Hodson, 1983).

While research suggests that women cope with their abusive relationships through a series of behavioural and cognitive actions that are unique to her circumstances, we have not yet examined how women use possessions to cope with abusive relationships. As consumer research theory advances that possessions are used by individuals to create, communicate and maintain self-identity and restore and embed their self-identity during times of uncertainty, this thesis investigates how women use of possessions to cope with abusive relationships.

The literature suggests that women cope with their abusive relationship through a series of behavioural and cognitive actions that are unique to their circumstances. However, the literature has yet to examine women's use of possessions to cope with an abusive relationship, particularly from a consumer behaviour standpoint. Consumer research theorists suggest that consumption is not primarily needs-based but is also used by consumers to create, communicate and maintain self-identity through the symbolic images possessions emulate. Additionally, it is understood that possessions are used by individuals to restore and embed their self-identity during times of uncertainty. Therefore, this thesis investigates women's use of possessions to cope with abusive relationships in regards to the extended self and self-identity literature.

CHAPTER THREE

Method

This chapter examines the methodological framework and method used to for the investigation of how women use possessions to cope with their abusive relationships. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used to position this research as well as guide the data collection and interpretation of the women's lived experiences. An art-based research method, the Me Box facilitated the interviews and an understanding of how the individual woman used possessions to cope with her abusive relationship was gained. Finally, the women's interpreted lived experiences were visually represented as individual collages.

Methodology

Phenomenology seeks to understand the essential meaning of a phenomenon through reflecting on and recognising the meaning of an individual's lived experience (Schram, 2006; van Manen, 1997). Thus, seeking the experience of an individual can provide rich insights into the essence of a phenomenon and can be used to understand people and everyday life (van Manen, 1997). The lived experiences of individuals are sought by the researcher asking open-ended and broad questions about the phenomenon, such as, tell me about the experience. By asking these types of questions the meanings of the subjective experiences of the individual emerge and deep insights into the phenomena are gained. Because each woman's abusive relationship experience is unique and the coping strategies they employ to cope with the abuse varies depending on their circumstances (Waldrop & Resick, 2004); the lived experiences of each woman was sought in order to understand the role of possessions in coping with abusive relationships.

Following a hermeneutic phenomenological research approach each woman's lived experience was examined. Hermeneutic phenomenology is guided by core assumptions of how meaning is interpreted from data. Meaning is derived from both the individual's understanding of their personal history and through a wider context of historically established social meanings (Thompson, 1997). Additionally, Wilson and Hutchinson (1991) suggest hermeneutic interpretation is an iterative and evolutionary process where the understanding and interpretation of text are entwined. Thompson (1997) asserts that the interpretation process emulates a *fusion of horizons* between the text collected and the interpreters

analytical orientation. Thus, the researcher's background knowledge, assumptions, and prejudices all contribute to the interpretation of the lived experiences and the concept of *bracketing* is therefore discounted. The researcher takes an active role in interpreting the essence of the individual's encounter (Butler-Kisber, 2010), and a co-creation of meaning occurs. The core assumptions of hermeneutic phenomenology support this research study's purpose to create understanding and meaning of women's use of possessions to cope with an abusive relationship.

ART-BASED RESEARCH

An art-based method was used in this thesis to facilitate the in-depth interviews to sensitively and respectfully elicit inaccessible and deeply personal information (Pink, 2007). Art-based research methods have been used in a variety of studies to gather data and empower participants (Clover, 2011). Art-based research is used to reflect emotions or concepts that are not able to be as easily communicated through words alone (Clover, 2011; Gibbons, 2010). Although some researchers argue that the emphasis of arts-based research is on the end product, and that researchers focus on the artistic compilation and frivolousness of the artwork rather on the scientific meanings that could contribute to the literature (see for example Eisner, 2008); art-based research can offer an insightful addition to scientific research methods (Clover, 2011; O' Donoghue, 2009). Art-based research possesses advantages traditional methods lack, such as the ability of the participant to communicate their emotions more effectively "because [art-based research] deals with what is felt and experienced rather than what is known objectively" (E. Martin & Booth, 2006, foreword). Therefore, Gibbons (2010) Me Box method encouraged the empowerment of the participants and stood to help facilitate both the gathering of data and the understanding of the meaning of the participant's lived experiences.

Method

In order to understand women's use of possessions to cope with an abusive relationship, interviews in conjunction with the construction of the Me Box (Gibbons, 2010) was used. The purpose of Gibbons Me Box method is discussed in terms of Gibbons study of hidden chronic illness. A discussion of the application of the Me Box method in regards to this thesis then follows.

ME BOX: THE RESEARCH

The Me Box method was created by Gibbons (2010) to examine the embodied experiences of people living with chronic illnesses through the use of visual metaphors. "A Me Box is

usually created by gathering together important items which represent different aspects of the person, which can include hobbies, memories, important milestones [and] family history” (Gibbons, 2010, p.34). The concept of the Me Box was adapted by Gibbons (2010) in order to examine the lived experiences of hidden chronic illnesses. Her method enabled participants to visually represent emotions and experiences that were normally hidden from external viewers, including their family and friends. “Through selecting and collecting objects that reflected their illness participants took their private experiences and created images which expanded access to their knowingness of chronic illness” (Gibbons, 2010, p.21). Pink (2007) argues that the combination of visual and verbal narratives facilitate a richer understanding of individual experiences. Thus, the creation and explanation of tangible metaphors helped some participants better explain their experiences of hidden chronic illness.

ME BOX: THE APPLICATION

The purpose and content of the Me Box was adapted for this research and focuses on the experiences of the women’s abusive relationship, specifically the role of possessions. The women were asked to create a Me Box that reflected their experiences of their abusive relationships and how they coped with the abusive relationships from objects both provided by me (Session Two) and by themselves (Session Two).

Participants, Sampling and Session Location

Six New Zealand Caucasian middle to upper class women, aged between 22 and 45 years old, who suffered from emotional and or physical abuse from their partners for a period of seven months to eight years volunteered to participate in this study (see Table 1). Purposeful sampling was administered to ensure the participants were; women who had been in a heterosexual abusive relationship, were in the relationship for at least six months, had suffered from emotional and/or physical abuse, were New Zealand citizens or residents, lived in the North Island of New Zealand, and had left their abusive partner. This selection criterion was imposed for a number of reasons. Firstly, Johnson and Ferraro’s (2004) definition of intimate terrorism was followed and women who have experienced physical and/or emotional abuse from their partner were sought. Additionally, the relationship status of the women was not defined in order to include maximum variation (Patton, 2001) between the participants. Selection criteria were kept relatively broad in order to reflect domestic violence statistics. The New Zealand Ministry of Social Development (2007) recognises that the reporting of male violence to female partners occurs more predominately than female violence to male partners or in homosexual relationships. Therefore, although domestic

violence can include both female violence to male partners and same-sex relationships; this research chose to include only male violence to female partners. Additionally, although the participants of this thesis are all Caucasian women belonging to middle to upper socioeconomic New Zealand society, this research did not seek to include specific demographics because domestic violence can occur across all social strata in New Zealand society (Leivore & Mayhew, 2007). Finally, the World Health Organisation (2001) recognises that although a woman may leave a relationship the abuse may continue. By not including women who were still in the abusive relationship the risk to the researcher and the participant was further reduced.

TABLE 1: Study Participants

Participant Name	Age	Relationship Length	Type of Abuse
Tallulah	26	A year and a half	Emotional and Occasionally Physical
Honour	22	Eight months	Emotional and Physical
Tina	23	Two and a half years	Emotional
Raewyn	45	Eight years	Emotional and Physical
Debbz	39	Eight years	Emotional and Physical
Rebecca	23	Three years	Emotional and Physical

The participants were invited to participate in this study through the use of snowballing techniques. In response to group emails (see Appendix 1) to the Hauraki Family Violence Intervention Network, Hamilton Abuse Intervention Project, and Woman’s Refuge, and personal connections, six women volunteered to participate. The women who were interested in taking part in this research got in touch with myself, I gave the woman a digital copy of the information booklet (see Appendix 2) and we arranged a time and place for Session One.

The sessions were held at a variety of locations throughout the North Island of New Zealand. Initially the sessions were to be held at publically available but private locations, for example a local hall or library; however due to convenience, the meetings occurred at the University of Waikato’s Library, participant’s homes and my parents’ home.

The Sessions:

The Me Box method applied in this thesis involved a four-step process - three sessions and a researcher-based collage interpretation (see Figure 2). In the last two sessions the women created a personal box of objects to represent and describe their experiences. Guided by the assumptions of hermeneutic phenomenology each woman's lived experience was interpreted and visually represented by a collage designed by myself and a holistic understanding of how women use possessions to cope with an abusive relationship was determined. Each session lasted between 60-150 minutes in length. Following the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition, the one-on-one interviews were unstructured and were relatively conversational. By allowing flexibility in the structure of the interview the woman was able to discuss aspects of her life and her abusive relationship at a pace she felt comfortable with. This also allowed the interview to be open to new directions afforded by the unique experience of the woman. It should be noted here that each woman completed the entire process before the next woman was interviewed. This was so I could analyse each woman individually as she progressed through the sessions.

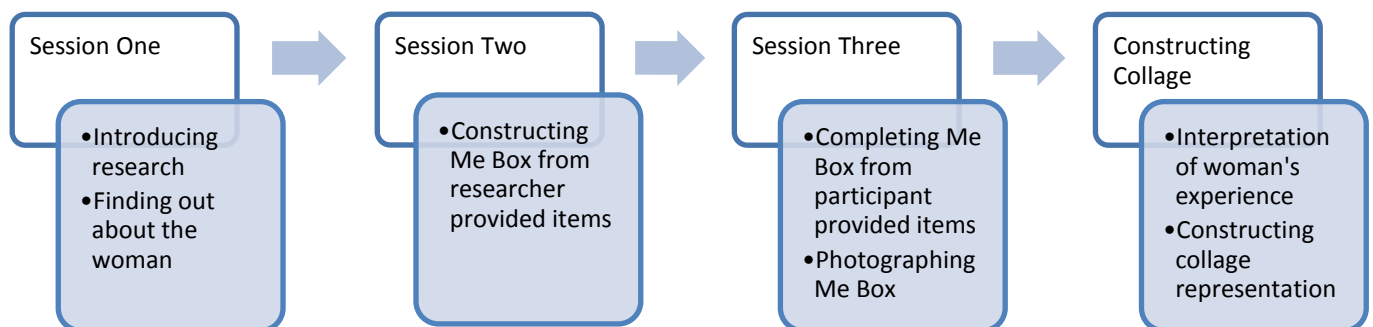


FIGURE 2: Me Box Method Process

Session One

Session One was used to explain the research, to enable to participant and myself to learn about each other, and for mutual respect and trust to be gained. The session typically started with an explanation of the research and allowed the woman to ask any questions she had about the process, about myself, and about why I had chosen the topic. I then asked the woman firstly to “tell me about yourself” and if the interview had not touched on her abusive relationship “tell me about your abusive relationship”. By asking open ended and broad questions I was able to probe into many aspects of her life and provided both an understanding the unique circumstances of her abusive relationship and a good base for the following sessions. As well as providing important information, session one built trust and

respect and allowed the participant to feel comfortable when talking with me. Walker (2009) states that building trust in an interview is integral for the quality of the data as it allows the participant to feel that they should not screen their answers and experiences. Investigating a deeply personal topic required a high degree of trust between the woman and I and it was important for the woman to feel comfortable discussing her experience. Session One ended with another explanation of the research process, specifically what a Me Box essentially is and what Session Two would entail. I also gave the woman an opportunity to ask any more questions she might have and if there was anything else she wanted to add.

Session Two

Session Two took place one to two weeks after Session One with the exception of one participant where Session Two took place 1 ½ months after Session One. The one to two week gap allowed time for verbatim transcription and brief analysis of Session One. The brief analysis was important as it opened up avenues to be explored more deeply during the subsequent interviews and could contextualise further points made by the woman.

Session Two was the woman's first physical introduction to the Me Box method. Before the woman arrived I set up gift boxes and objects in the room; however, in the case of two participants, where the interview took place in their own home, setting up prior to the session was unfeasible. I then explained the Me Box method once again to make sure the woman was comfortable and understood the process. It should be noted here that while the woman selected her Me Box and objects I was not present in the room. Without the presence of me, the woman may have felt less pressure and more comfortable revisiting her deeply emotional and personal experience.

Selecting a Me Box

The woman was invited to choose their Me Box from a variety of gift boxes. She was also given the option of lining her box with a variety of tissue paper that had been laid out next to the boxes. Gibbons (2010, p.38) explains that lining the Me Box is "a very tactile way [for the participants] to connect with the box" and helped the participant create ownership of and connection with their Me Box.





Selecting the Objects







The objects in this session were provided by me and were a collection of household items as well as ones purchased from discount stores (see Table 2). The objects were a variety of shapes, colours, and textures but were all hand sized or smaller. I chose not to include large








bulky items as I wanted the women to be able to store the objects in their Me Box and take each item with them. If the women decided they needed a larger item Session Two accommodated this.





The woman was invited to look through and place any of the provided objects in their Me Box that were reflective of their abusive relationship, the role possessions had in their relationship, how they coped with their abusive relationship, and anything that ‘jumped out’ at them. The objects became metaphors for the woman’s embodied physical and emotional lived experience. By leaving the interpretation of the objects relatively open, the woman was able to include objects in her Me Box that truly reflected her experience. I had my own ideas of what the objects I had chosen may represent; however, the Me Box process allows participants to attribute their own meanings to the objects provided.

TABLE 2: Objects Provided by the Researcher

Object Chosen by Researcher	Meaning behind the Object
<p>A. Handbag</p> 	<p>Handbag’s are often reflective of a woman’s life and is somewhere she will store important things (Harris, 1997)</p>
<p>B. Kitchen Sponge</p> 	<p>Chosen to represent cleaning. Cleaning can often be therapeutic for people and is a way of metaphorically ‘cleaning their life’ (Belk, Seo, & Li, 2007). The sponge also has an interesting texture that may provide a link to its absorbent qualities.</p>
<p>C. Animal Toy</p> 	<p>The animal toy represents a pet that may have been special to a woman and may have provided her with companionship, stability, friendship, and love during her relationship. Pets are also deeply loyal and will often choose an ‘owner’.</p>
<p>D. Pegs</p> 	<p>Pegs were chosen firstly because of their link to the laundry and doing chores, with a similar reasoning to the Kitchen Sponge, where doing things around the house may give a woman a sense of purpose and importance. Secondly, the pegs also may reflect ‘holding things together’ or ‘holding on to</p>

	things’.
<p>E. Notebook</p> 	<p>The notebook was chosen to represent a diary that was used as an outlet for her thoughts and feelings. Domestic violence is something that is not typically spoken about and some women find it hard to talk about. A diary could have been a way to talk about and deal with that happened during and after the relationship.</p>
<p>F. Rubix Cube</p> 	<p>The rubix cube was chosen to represent the woman’s mind or her intelligence. She may have escaped through books, felt gratification or achievement when completing intellectual milestones. Additionally, a rubix cube can be rearranged to represent confusion or something difficult to solve.</p>
<p>G. Lipstick</p> 	<p>The lipstick represents make-up in general. Make-up is often used to cover up imperfections and has been linked to femininity and giving women self-confidence (Lennon & Rudd, 1994)</p>
<p>H. Shower Cap</p> 	<p>The shower cap was chosen to reflect water and the cleansing of water. Some people may find water therapeutic, either in the shower or swimming.</p>
<p>I. Rocks</p> 	<p>A variety of rocks were chosen to reflect nature, the outdoors or the garden. A woman may classify gardening or nature walks as a hobby or getting outside of the house.</p>
<p>J. Photo frame</p> 	<p>The photo frame represents family. Family are sometimes a lifeline for an abused woman, they may give her support or hope.</p>

<p>K. Medal</p> 	<p>The medal represents achievements in a woman's life. This may be an achievement that is separate from her relationship and may give her some sense of enjoyment and pride.</p>
<p>L. Coins</p> 	<p>Coins were chosen to represent money and financials. A woman may take ownership of contributing to the relationship financially (Riger et al., 2002) or she could find an outlet in retail therapy (Kacen, 1998).</p>
<p>M. Lock and Key</p> 	<p>The lock and key reflects something secret or something sacred. It is something that the woman is able to hide or keep from her partner.</p>
<p>N. Paint Brush</p> 	<p>A paint brush was chosen to signify a creative outlet. She may enjoy creating something beautiful and artistic or could be an expression of herself or how she is feeling.</p>
<p>O. Cupcake Papers</p> 	<p>Muffin cups denotes the kitchen and cooking which is typically seen as the 'woman's place'. Some women are very house-proud and cooking may be her way of taking care of her family (Ford & Harding, 2010).</p>
<p>P. Wool</p> 	<p>Wool was chosen because of its texture and the way wool can be manipulated – it can be neatly spun or tangled. This may elicit a feeling that the women may feel is important to talk about.</p>
<p>Q. Pink and blue heart-shaped buttons</p> 	<p>These were chosen to represent the love (heart shaped) for the women's children (pink and blue colours). Children are sometimes a strong motivator for women to leave their abusive relationship (Zink, Elder, & Jacobson, 2003).</p>

<p>R. Car toy</p> 	<p>The car toy denotes transportation and being able to drive to places that the women may want to go. It symbolises the freedom that comes with being able to drive.</p>
<p>S. Diamond jewel</p> 	<p>The jewel was chosen to reflect something precious the woman may feel protective or have a sense of pride about.</p>
<p>T. Gift box</p> 	<p>The gift box is representative of the gifts abused partners give to their victims in the 'cycle of abuse' in order to 'make up' for their behaviour (Walker, 1983)</p>
<p>U. Gift ribbon</p> 	<p>The ribbon was chosen for two different meanings. Firstly, a ribbon is often tied in a bow; to me a bow represents femininity and beauty. Secondly, a ribbon is used in 'ribbon cutting' ceremonies to mark the opening of a building. I thought that this 'opening' of something new could reflect the opening of a new chapter in the woman's life – leaving her partner, or a significant day she remembers.</p>

Once the woman had chosen her objects and was comfortable with her Me Box, she came to the door and told me she was finished. I then asked her how she found the process and to tell me about the box and tissue paper and the process of choosing both. The woman was then asked to tell me about the objects she had chosen. By leaving the question open the woman was able to start with the objects she felt most comfortable talking about first. When the opportunity arose, I probed the woman on specific incidences where she coped with her abusive relationship and the role possessions had in her abusive relationship both in general and specifically how they helped her cope. When I felt the interview had drawn to a natural conclusion, often signalled with long pauses and no new information added, I asked the woman if there was anything else she wanted to add. The process of Session Three was then

explained where I invited the woman to, before the next session, add to her box any items that were ‘missing’. A time and place was then discussed for Session Three.

Session Three

Session Three occurred between one and two weeks after Session Two. The time between the interviews needed to be long enough to allow the woman to emotionally process the last session, as the session often brought up emotional experiences, and to think about what was ‘missing’ from her Me Box. The timing also allowed for the transcription and a brief analysis of Session Two to occur.

Session Three began by asking the woman how she found the previous few weeks and if they had any questions before we began talking about her added Me Box objects. I then asked if she could talk about her new objects. I probed for specific experiences which allowed for richer information to be gathered. The woman was then asked if there was anything she wanted to include in her box but could not find an object to represent it. The session typically ended by myself asking if there was anything else she wanted to add and then the photographing of the Me Box and objects.

Photographing

The photographing of the women’s Me Boxes and objects had two main purposes: to visually capture and represent the findings of the Me Box process; and to provide images for the researcher interpreted collage of the individual woman’s lived experience. For the first three participants the photographing of the Me Box and the objects was done after both Session Two and Session Three. However, as the interviewing process progressed I found that it was more feasible to photograph at the end of Session Three. This was because I thought that the photographing of the objects and Me Box created an appropriate conclusion to the research process.

I photographed the woman’s Me Box and objects both as a group and individually. This was because the group photo (Me Box and the objects) provides an overall picture of the woman’s experience and the individual shots allowed greater detail to be seen and were able to be used in the collage interpretations. The woman’s objects and Me Box were photographed using my Sony Cybershot digital camera on a white backdrop (I took a white sheet to Session Two and Three). The white backdrop was used for every participant and provided a common link between both the woman’s objects and between the women themselves. White was chosen as it is a plain colour and allowed the objects that are being photographed to be seen clearly.

Additionally, white was chosen as it is a colour that is commonly used in domestic violence campaigns in New Zealand; therefore providing a significant link to the thesis topic.

When photographing objects the angle at which the shot is taken should be considered to ensure that the intended connotation is being communicated to the viewer (Giannetti, 1982; Kraft, 1987). For example, photographs taken from a high-angle automatically assign the viewer as dominant over the photographed object and photographs taken at eye-level denote equality. Finally, low-angle shots place the viewer in a submissive position. Gibbons (2010) allowed her participants to photograph their own objects if they chose to; however, the women in this study were not given the choice with the intention of ensuring all angles were taken of the objects and Me Box, so that the appropriate connotation could be assigned in the collage representation. It should be noted that the group shots (Me Box and all of the Me Box objects) were taken from a high-angle to ensure that everything fitted into the frame rather than to portray viewer dominance over the photographed content.

Analysis

The analysis and interpretation of the data I collected occurred in three stages - after each session the individual woman completed, after each woman completed all three sessions, and as an entire group once the data collection was complete. The analysis followed the hermeneutic phenomenological framework outlined by Thompson (1997) where the entire text is examined in order to make sense of the data as a whole. The text is then looked at more closely and meaning is drawn from different aspects of the consumption experience. Finally, patterns across all interviews are gathered. These steps are completed in an iterative process where the text is constantly revisited as the researcher gains further knowledge from subsequent interviews, allowing new insights and meanings to be gained from previous interviews. In context to this thesis, the analysis of the women's experiences needed to be done in an evolutionary process where both individual and collective meaning was sought. Thus, Thompson (Thompson, 1997) framework supported the design and purpose of this thesis and was used to guide the interpretation and analysis of the women's lived experiences.

Stage One: Analysis of Each Woman

At the conclusion of each session the audio recordings of the session was transcribed verbatim, this was to ensure accuracy and also gave me a chance to gain a feel for the woman's session. Session One's transcript was analysed in accordance to Thompson (1997) framework where the overall text was examined to help grasp a sense of who the woman is and gain a background of her abusive relationship. Session Two was examined as a whole; in

relation to the objects she chose for her Me Box; as well as examining the meaning of possessions to her in her abusive relationship and the coping mechanisms she employed during that relationship. While analysing the transcript I asked myself questions such as how did she use possessions in her relationship to cope with different aspects of her relationship? What were these possessions to her? What were these possessions to her partner? When did she use these possessions? How did she use these possessions? What was her relationship like? Session Three was analysed similar to that of Session Two and the photographed objects and Me Box taken in Session Three were inserted into the transcripts.

The Me Box objects the woman chose were interpreted and meaning was developed through the use of metaphors. A metaphor can be classed as an object being represented or compared to something other than the object itself; viewing the objects “as if” rather than “as is” (Manning, 1979). Meaning is developed by viewing the experience, not as a metaphor, but through understandings and observations of the world (Coulter, 2006; Spiggle, 1994). Therefore, the metaphorical object the woman chose is interpreted not as the object itself but as the “as if” representation she has appointed it through the experiences of her world, specifically her abusive relationship. Thus the object begins to take on new meanings. Interpreting the meanings of the objects was integral to this research process and the woman’s transcripts were continuously read closely to ensure the correct metaphorical meaning was given to the objects. These metaphorical meanings were then presented in a collage using the photographs of the objects.

Stage Two: Constructing the Collage

After the analysis of the woman’s Me Box sessions, I constructed a collage representation of her lived experience of using possessions to cope with an abusive relationship. These collage representations were based on my understanding of her relationship and the way that she used possessions to cope with the abuse. I first gained a sense of her overall use of possessions to cope with her abusive relationship and then how each Me Box object contributed to her coping strategies. Therefore, not all Me Box objects she chose were included in the collage as they were not central to understanding her coping experience.

The collage was constructed using Photoshop CS3, a digital imaging software program. The photographs of the Me Box objects were loaded onto Photoshop in order to create the collage. Each object I included in the collage was carefully thought about to ensure the woman’s experience was represented more accurately. The position of the object for example, the

foreground was decided depending on the meaning attributed by the woman. The colour and texture of some of the objects were digitally altered or effects were added to them in order to give them more meaning. Other objects were digitally altered to protect participant's privacy. The individual objects as well as the collage as a whole visually communicate the woman's lived experience of her abusive relationship. A quote from her transcripts was also added to enable the reader to understand the image, as Gibbons (2010) explains, the combination of visual and written forms broadens the type of data and meaning that is communicated. These collages were then sent to the woman along with an abstract explaining the image to ensure that the interpretation was reflective of her lived experience.

Stage Three: Analysis as a Collective

After all six women had completed their Me Box sessions and the last collage representation was created, an overall thematic analysis was completed using all six women's experiences. Thompson (1997) framework for hermeneutic interpretation was once again used as a guide. A part-to-whole intertextual analysis was undertaken where patterns and themes emerged from comparing and contrasting the different women's experiences. Themes and sub-themes took form and were scrutinised until a final set of themes was decided upon. These key themes are essential to understanding women's use of possessions in coping with abusive relationships.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Participant Well-Being

From the outset I wanted to ensure the physical and psychological wellbeing of the women who participated in this thesis study. Being aware that the research could elicit emotional and deeply personal and potentially negative experiences ensured that procedures were put in place if the participants felt vulnerable at any stage of the research process. Additionally, I was also aware that I needed to be compassionate and at times I may have needed to pause the session to make sure the women felt secure and safe. I ensured I did not press for information from the participants and, through following an unstructured interview design, allowed the participants to divulge as much information at a pace they felt comfortable with. When designing the research process the World Health Organisation's *'Putting women first: Ethical and safety recommendations for research on domestic violence against women'* (2001) was strictly followed and frequently referred to throughout the research process.

Participant Consent

Initial participant consent to take part in the research project was implied when the participant showed up to Session One. At the beginning of this session, and all subsequent sessions, consent was sought for the audio-taping of the interview, the photography of the Me Box objects, the use of the data in the researcher's thesis as well as the compilation of the individual and blended collage, and any resulting publications. At the end of the Session Three I also informed the participant that although the interviewing process was over the participant may still contact me within the next seven days if they wanted to remove any of the information she had given.

Participant Identity Protection

Following the World Health Organisation (2001) guidelines on participant identity protection, any names or places in the transcripts were changed to code names, chosen by the participants. Participant information and contact details were stored separately from transcripts and any thesis material. Digital interview recordings were stored in my password protected laptop computer. Additionally, these audio recordings were deleted immediately following transcription. Each participant was reminded at the beginning of each session that her interview data was treated confidentially and that she had the option of not being directly quoted. Additionally, the researcher regularly reminded the participant that she was able to opt out of the sessions or research process up until seven days following each session. The researcher explained verbally to the participant the process of opting out, written details of the process was given in the participant information booklet. Finally, through the information booklet and during the beginning of each session, the researcher ensured that the participant knew exactly what the research process involved. By explaining the research process fully and clearly, the participants understood what they were consenting to.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Women's Me Boxes

In creating their Me Boxes, six Caucasian women take us on an emotional and eye opening journey as they describe intimate and personal details of how they used possessions to cope with their abusive relationship. The incredible stories, Me Boxes and collages capture each woman's lived experience and are reflective of their individual strength, feelings and thoughts. This chapter presents Stage One and Stage Two of the analysis process. Each woman's lived experience is represented using her Me Box images, quotes from her sessions, and through a visual collage interpretation. These are their experiences.

Tallulah

Tallulah is a 26 year old New Zealand resident who has experienced two abusive relationships. Although she spoke about both relationships at stages during the interviews, she chose to speak mostly about her most recent relationship with Wayne. Originally from Europe, Tallulah has spent the last four years in New Zealand, coming here after studying a biology degree in Europe and travelling to various countries around the world. Her passion lies in animals, particularly primates, and "*good food and good wine*". She also enjoys trips around New Zealand to places she has not visited before and is an amateur hiker.

As previously mentioned Tallulah has experienced two abusive relationships; however chose to predominantly speak about her second abusive relationship (with Wayne). Therefore; the discussion surrounding Tallulah is focuses on her relationship with Wayne. Tallulah was with Wayne for a year and a half and had been separated for 8 months when the interviews took place. They spent the majority of their relationship living together. The relationship "*wasn't very physically abusive, only on a couple of occasions but it was more mental and verbal abuse. It was very severe*". Tallulah explained that she was "*completely barred*" from activities such as drinking and dancing with her friends, going on road trips, and doing the things she wanted to do.

TALLULAH'S ME BOX AND OBJECTS

Tallulah's Me Box

Figure 3 and 4 are pictures of Tallulah's Me Box. Tallulah chose a blue ribboned box with a bright green inside and lined it with silver tissue paper. She also chose to decorate her box with two dark blue pegs; however, Tallulah stated "*I don't know what [the pegs] would represent. I don't have a reason for you*".



FIGURE 3: Tallulah's Me Box

FIGURE 4: Tallulah's Me Box

Tallulah's Objects

This section describes the objects which Tallulah chose to include in her Me Box. Figure 5 is a photograph of Tallulah's completed Me Box.

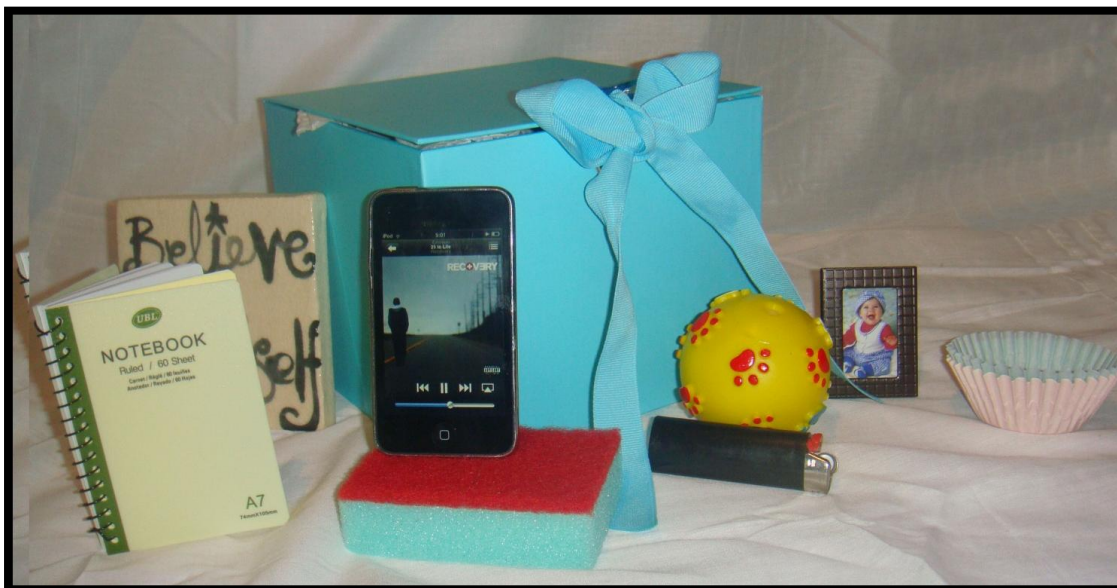


FIGURE 5: Tallulah's Completed Me Box

Photo frame



FIGURE 6: Photo frame

Without hesitation the first item Tallulah picked from the objects provided was the photo frame; however, she chose to replace it in the second session with a photo frame in her room (see Figure 6) that holds a photo of her nephew. During her abusive relationship Tallulah drew on her family to help her cope emotionally with her abusive relationship. Her family live in Europe and America but photographs of them were hung around her room and displayed throughout the house she lived in with Wayne. Tallulah explains,

“I have got a few photos out in my room which are always the same ones even when I move house or when I went to the UK for a while and went away. They are the same photos I put up and they are of the same people. My family and my friends back home who are probably most important to me...Even though I don’t get to see them I like to see them...If I walk past or get to see them up on the wall [they] remind me of them and the good times”.

To Tallulah, during her relationship the photographs

“remind[ed] me that there was something else to my life, outside of Wayne and the house because I didn’t really go out and didn’t really see anyone else outside the home. I guess it just reminded me that there was still a part of my life out there and not to give up on that”.

When she looked at the photographs either intentionally or if they caught her eye, she would

“think about how lucky I am to have those people in my life even though they are on the other side of the world. I still have a good relationship with all my family and I still keep in touch, especially with my parents...My dad - I pretty much tell him everything like he is probably one of the first people that I would go to if I am having a problem with life or need some advice, whether its related to a relationship or whatever. Pretty much he is my first port of call...Every time I call him he is always available...I find him really helpful...He tells me things that are hard to hear but I will accept the things coming from him and he knows that. And my mum um I didn't really talk to her much during either of those relationships because um she's pretty determined and quite um she believes you should put yourself first all of the time and I guess sometimes the advice I got from her was quite cold”.

After talking with her father or being reminded of what he would say by looking at the photographs Tallulah would

“generally feel a lot better. I tend to feel stronger when I have talked to him because...he tells me that he's proud of me a lot and helps me feel a lot more positive about myself. Generally he makes me believe that I can do it...I feel a lot more positive”.

When Tallulah was preparing to leave Wayne her Dad was a big support to her and she talked to him about her decision.

“It was pretty much at the stage when I wanted to leave, well I thought that I wanted to leave but I wasn't sure um particularly with the big steps that were involved with leaving the country and packing up all of our stuff and selling and splitting up all of our stuff. I think because he has been through two divorces...I know that he wishes he had done things differently or behaved in a certain way um and I value that advice quite a lot because he's actually been there and done it and he has been through so much worse. I feel like if he can get through it then I can and he can help me do that...He always says to me most importantly like whatever happens don't lose respect for yourself like whatever you do don't do anything that you wouldn't want done to you in return because you can't respect yourself after doing that...No matter

what happens if you lose your self respect you can't get that back. And that was a big thing like for me when I was with Wayne and going through that whole thing. And I kept it in mind most of the time”.

However, the photos were not always a positive reminder of her family; Tallulah explains that

“when I was sad it made it worse. I would just miss [my family] more, the photos would just make me miss my family more and um I guess question my moving here away from them. But overall it had a good impact. It reminded me that I was somebody before I got into that relationship and even though I had changed they would still love me for who I was”.

Finally, the meanings of the photographs were something only Tallulah could connect with.

“I don't think [Wayne] really would have got some of the meanings behind the photos. He knew that my family were quite important and his family he wasn't close to his family at all so he didn't really think too much of [the photographs]”.

Believe in yourself tile

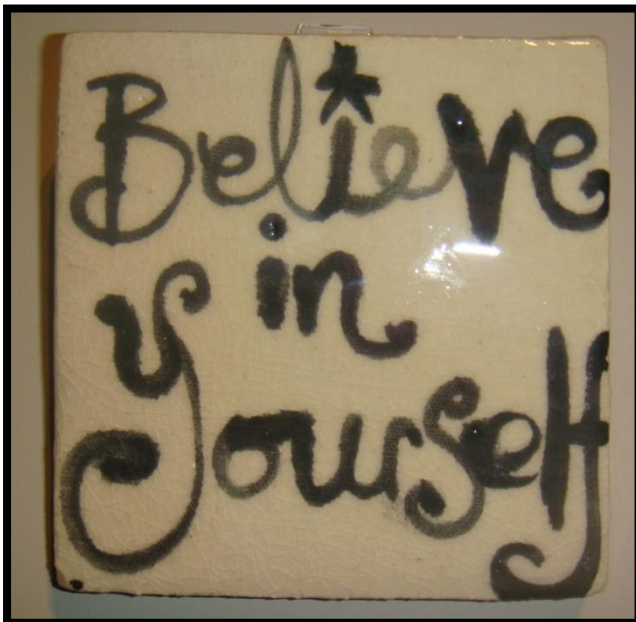


FIGURE 7: 'Believe in Yourself' tile

“I have a tile up on my wall which is probably one of my prized possessions in terms of stuff that I have in my room. It's a tile that says 'Believe in Yourself'. I bought it after my relationship with my first abusive partner ended. I found it in a shop a week

after we had broken up...My mum said it to me when I was talking about the break up and how I was trying to move forward. She said above everything else just believe in yourself. It's like one of her things that when I am a bit down and I have spoken to her she will text me after and say 'Believe in Yourself'. It's cool to have that up there to remind me when she doesn't say it... [The tile] is a big thing to remind me that in the Wayne relationship that I was better than that. Even though there wasn't anything really I could do about it, one day I would be able to get the better that I deserved...The ability to be myself and not have someone to make the person I was with happy and not to have to bend to their rules and their ways and their wants all the time. I could go and have the lifestyle that I wanted without being reprimanded for it".

The placement of the tile (see Figure 7) in Tallulah's home with Wayne was very important to her.

"I actually didn't have it up in the bedroom when Wayne and I lived together. I actually had it up in the hallway just kind of leading to the bedroom by the front door. It was so that when I left every day I saw it when I opened the door. I put it up so that I would see it when I walked past".

Similarly to the photographs of her family, the meaning behind Believe in Yourself tile was a "secret". Tallulah explains,

"I wouldn't even know if [Wayne] even noticed it. Like we never had a conversation about it um we didn't discuss where I was going to put it, I just put it up. So whether he saw it or realised the significance I don't know...It's like a little secret that I have with myself. Like a little 'you can do it'. Whatever's going on you can do it and um whoever else is around or like if I can't get in touch with my Dad or whatever, that message is still there".

The meaning of the tile remained a secret because

"that was just always my choice [not to tell people]. From when I bought it, I told my mum when I bought it obviously because it was her whole thing and I have it up and she obviously thinks it's quite a good thing for me but other than that I haven't explained the meaning behind it to anybody".

Notebook

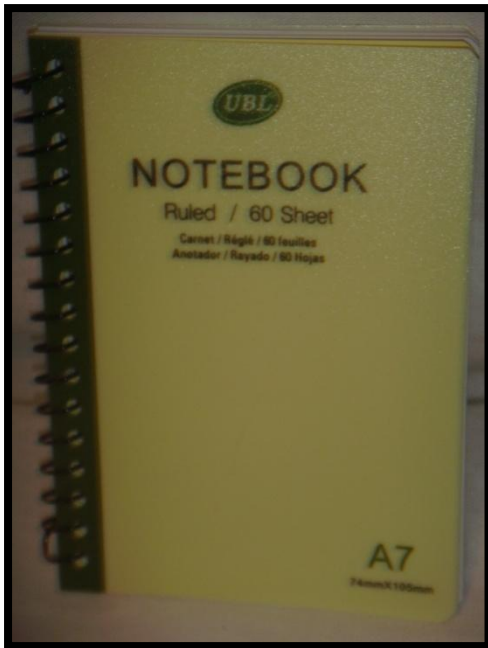


FIGURE 8: Notebook

Tallulah chose the notebook (see Figure 8) because,

“The notebook but not for the notebook. I am thinking of my laptop, like just the communication aspect and I guess my phone kind of comes into that as well. Being able to contact people outside [of the relationship] well the people back home more. Being able to contact them on the internet or give them a call it was quite a big escape in the relationship. It was quite a big escape in the relationship with Wayne because when he wasn’t there in the evenings I would spend a bit of time, not a huge amount of time but maybe an hour every evening on the internet staying in touch with my friends and my family back home...I would email the girls from school and there were a couple of friends I would email and Facebook message. One friend from back home who I have known quite some time...he is a best friend of mine...even though we didn’t talk very regularly he is kind of always positive and helpful”.

Speaking to certain friends was a secret Tallulah kept from Wayne.

“Wayne didn’t like me being in contact with him. I think that was a bit of a rebellious thing for me that he was out and knowing I could stay in contact if I wanted to...Wayne actually found out after we had broken up but I was still living at the house and he got really angry. He logged into my Facebook and read all of my messages. When he was home in the evenings because he didn’t always use to work

nights during our relationship he use to get annoyed at me for spending quite a bit of time on the laptop on the evenings staying in contact with people back home.

Tallulah also explains how devastated she was when Wayne broke her laptop,

“he actually broke my laptop once...He wanted me to give my laptop to him and I wouldn’t and so he kind of snatched it off me and threw it on the ground and the screen broke. And that was a real big deal to me because I guess that was like my life line, my contact outside of the four walls...Which was probably why he did it because he was annoyed that I did have contact outside of the four walls”.

Tallulah describes how she felt after Wayne had broken her laptop,

“I was really, really angry. I cried quite a lot and I shouted quite a lot. I was just annoyed that he would go that far, that he has to be that much in control that he would break something that he knows is not just precious to me but also valuable because I didn’t have the money to replace it. He knew that without it I wouldn’t be able to contact my family or my friends...What right did he have to make the decision that I couldn’t use it?”

Lighter

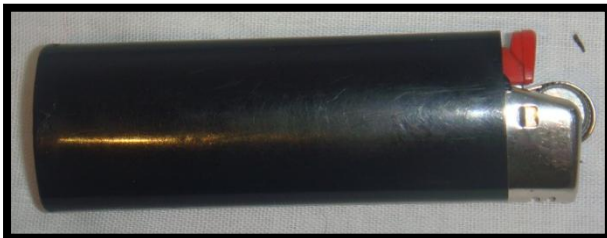


FIGURE 9: Lighter

To Tallulah the lighter (see Figure 9) represented her heavy use of marijuana during her relationship.

“I think I needed to add marijuana to the box because it was a massive um way of dealing with my situation with Wayne...I never really smoked it before Wayne and it’s something that I got into with him. At first it was just a recreational thing at weekends...I started because Wayne did it and it was something that he wanted me to give it a try...It wasn’t something that I jumped to the idea of doing but after him asking a few times I gave it a try. And yeah it was just something that we would do in

the weekends. If we were having a night in watching a movie we would have a smoke before hand. That's how it started...I look back on my time with Wayne and our best times were when we were both high. Even when stuff between us was bad we still had fun when we had a smoke...we would still have a laugh.

Smoking marijuana and the reasons behind smoking changed as Tallulah's relationship with Wayne progressed. At the beginning smoking "was very much him oriented. He wanted to do it and I would join him, whereas to the end of our relationship it was me driven. I would smoke it even if he wasn't around". As the relationship "deteriorated I pretty much ended up smoking every day". Tallulah explains the shift in her motivation behind smoking,

"when I started I would smoke it occasionally because it was fun and at the end I was smoking it because it stopped me from thinking about or addressing stuff that was going on....It was more of an escape. Like I would do it to get away from the stresses or the upset rather than doing it to enjoy myself. And as a result it became a daily thing because every day the stress was there. Every day I needed to get away from it".

For Tallulah, marijuana provided an escape from her relationship with Wayne.

"I felt trapped and completely at the whim of somebody else. There was nothing I could do for what I wanted in my life. Everything was up to him and I hated that but I didn't have the strength to do anything about that. At the time I didn't think I could walk away...I didn't really see any way out of [my relationship]. [When I smoked] I was mostly trying to escape. [Getting high] is like getting home and having a glass of wine to let the stresses of the day go away...this is how I de-stress...When I smoke it makes me take time. It makes me stop and do nothing...[Smoking] is definitely a coping mechanism...I think when I smoked I didn't care anymore. Like it didn't bother me that he was shouting at me or bother me kind of the emotional blackmail he was putting me under. If I had a smoke it didn't affect me as much. It was the only way I could get away from it. There was no way to resolve the situation, that had become quite clear, so it was really the only way that I could distance myself from it...I just didn't care anymore...I was so much more relaxed. I didn't care when I had a smoke...I wouldn't care to bring anything up that was upsetting me. I would just leave it because it just wasn't worth it".

Tallulah's smoking habits would change depending on her partner's presence or absence.

“When he was around I would smoke more because generally that was when I was more stressed out...Pretty much by the end of our relationship I was smoking constantly in the weekends...In the waking hours I would be high about 70% of the time....I wasn’t allowed to go out and do anything or see anybody so when I was at home and on my own or if I was home and it was just me and Wayne then about 70% of that time I would have been smoking or high.

Tallulah was smoking so regularly that getting high was *“like a second normality”*.

Animal Toy



FIGURE 10: Animal Toy

The animal toy (see Figure 10) was chosen by Tallulah because it reminded her of her cat Monster. Monster is

“an awesome cat...I love him to pieces...I got Monster when he was a kitten and I have had him ever since. Wayne and I had him at our house because most of the time I had Monster I was with Wayne. When I was in England Wayne looked after Monster until I came back...He’s my buddy. I think he is quite sensitive to my moods and when I am feeling down...he would normally go out at night...but [when I’m sad] he doesn’t even go out and play he stays in with me the whole night cuddled up to me...I find it quite comforting to have him around”

Within her relationship with Wayne

“he was very much my cat, like particularly in the beginning he was my cat and Wayne didn’t really have anything to do with him. Once we moved in together

[Wayne] didn't really have a lot to do with him. Sometimes Wayne would like not get annoyed but sometimes make sarcastic comments when Monster was in the bed with us...because [Wayne] didn't want [Monster] there.

Monster was also a source of comfort to Tallulah when Wayne and her would have an argument.

"If Wayne and I had an argument or whatever and I was off in another room then Monster would be with me. If I needed to get space or whatever then Monster would be with me...I found him comforting like just having him around. I love him heaps so its nice to know he wants to come hang out with me and that he likes me too...He spends so much of his time with me and I enjoy it a lot like I find it quite relaxing".

When Tallulah moved back to the UK temporarily Monster stayed with Wayne. Monster then became a "bargaining chip" of Wayne's to remain in contact with Tallulah.

"I went travelling and asked Wayne to look after him for me at which point [Monster] became a bargaining chip for him. Which wasn't a particularly enjoyable experience...He would threaten to take [Monster] to a rescue centre...because he knew how much that would upset me...He always used [Monster] as an excuse to hurt me or call me and ask for money because Monster needed food...It got really extreme like 'oh if you don't reply to my text or don't get back in touch with me then I am going to get rid of Monster' and 'I wont let you have him back' and stuff like that...There was a time where he was trying to persuade me that Monster was better off with him and that he should keep Monster because it wouldn't be fair on him to move houses and they were buddies now. But that was never an option...I wasn't something that I was prepared to negotiate on".

iPod

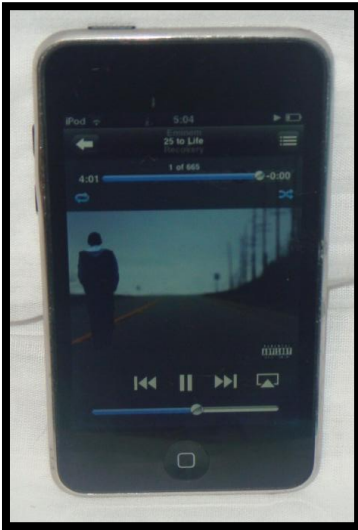


FIGURE 11: iPod

Tallulah chose an iPod (see Figure 11) to place in her Me Box that represented a song she would listen to during her relationship.

“There was just one song when Wayne and I were coming to the end...It was a song by Eminem, so quite an angry song generally. It was called 25 to life and it was about, he was talking about how he devotes his life to hip hop and he never gets anything back and just a waste of time basically. But the whole song he makes out he is talking about an ex partner and that fact she never appreciates him and all the things that he does...about being completely ignored in a relationship and whatever I do it’s not good enough and at the end it’s about the music industry rather than the partner.”

Before Tallulah had decided she wanted to leave Wayne the song had no significant meaning to her. *“It was a song that I knew and that [Wayne and I] had been listening to before it had any significance to my relationship. Before that it was just a good song and I thought it was clever”*. However, the meaning of the song changed *“when I realised I knew, I really, really knew that this was never going to work. And that he didn’t deserve me. That was probably the point in which it had more significance.* The lyrics of the song are what attached Tallulah to it and she could resonate with the feelings and experiences that Eminem was rapping about.

[Eminem] talks about not being able to go out and do what he wants and not being able to go out and spend time with the girls because of jealousy and all kinds of stuff like that. The final like bit when you realise that it’s about the music industry, it says ‘Fuck you hip hop I’m leaving you’. I used to sing ‘Fuck you Wayne, I’m leaving you’

(pauses) like when he wasn't around, like when I was in the car with him I wouldn't but when I was on my own and yea I would say Wayne instead of hip hop...I listened to it a lot when me and Wayne were coming towards the end of our relationship".

For Tallulah the song provided an outlet for her negative feelings she had towards Wayne and their relationship.

"I listened to it a lot, like when he pissed me off or upset me I would listen to it because it would kind of give me a bit of strength singing along to the words knowing that that's how I felt. Particularly if we were in the car together and it was on, I would sing every word.

When Tallulah would sing along to the song in the car with Wayne

"it was kind of like I let it slide and I put up with it because I don't have a choice but I know this is how it is and this is my chance to say it to you without actually saying it to you".

Singing the words to Wayne would make her feel *"Pretty awesome...like a big finger. Fuck you...I had some sort of outlet for the way that I was feeling...I wasn't ready to leave but I knew it wasn't going to work. I knew I needed to leave.* Towards the end of Tallulah and Wayne's relationship Tallulah *"I was probably listening to that song definitely every day".*

Kitchen Sponge

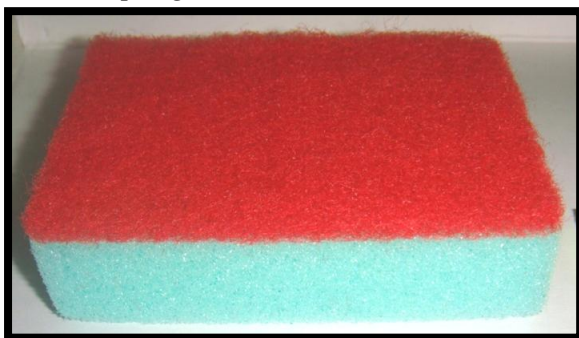


FIGURE 12: Kitchen Sponge

The kitchen sponge (see Figure 12) was chosen by Tallulah to reflect the household chores she would complete during her abusive relationship.

"I was looking at your sponge actually because that was kind of another big point of contention in the relationship was the cleaning. The time spent, I guess generally

doing things around the house [that] perhaps should have been a joint effort in the relationship but never were...[T]hose kinds of things I did in my relationship with Wayne without really complaining because...he didn't get a lot of sleep and I wanted to help him out by getting rid of those parts of the relationship so that he could relax and sleep and spend his spare time with me. So at first I did that sort of stuff automatically without minding but when it got to the stage where it was expected and I also didn't get any of the time that I was freeing up because of it, it became a big issue...It made me feel like he was taking me for granted a lot of the time because he was quite happy when I was doing his cooking and his washing and his cleaning but when it actually came to giving something back to me...there was no reward for all the hard work I had put into the relationship. There was nothing given back.

Tallulah wanted to free up time for Wayne so that they could spend more time together. *I just enjoyed our time together so generally I would be happier and enjoying myself more if we were getting time together regularly. Yeah [we were] just happier to be around each other, unless we were arguing.*

Cupcake Papers



FIGURE 13: Cupcake Papers

The cupcake papers (see Figure 13) represented cooking to Tallulah,

“Cooking was quite a big point of contention in our relationship...I cooked a lot of the time and you know I was the one who had put all the effort in...At one point I realised that he hadn't cooked in 6 months...It annoyed me because I used to cook for him...I would change my recipes to match what he did or didn't like...but then at the same time I didn't eat any meals I didn't like. I got to choose what we were eating all of the time...It was ultimately my decision”.

Wayne was never involved in the cooking or baking process.

“I used to do it quite a lot in the weekends like if we were home not out and about which was generally the only time he was at home. So generally I would get home, he and I would spend some time together and then he would go into work. I would generally bake when he was gone, in the evenings when I had time to myself or in the weekends when he was around but doing his own thing. Generally I wouldn’t cook or bake much if he was around”.

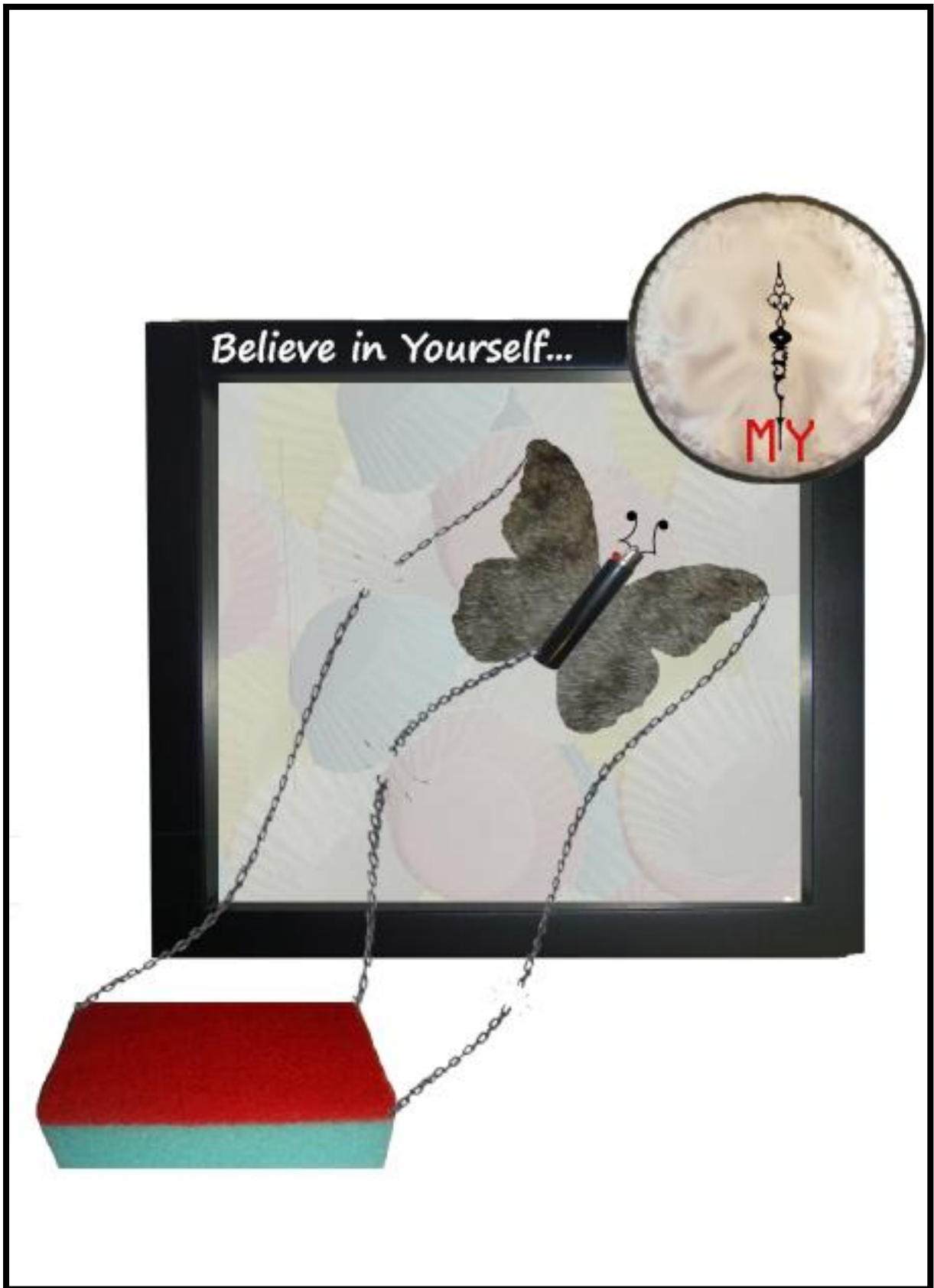
The kitchen is somewhere Tallulah could retreat to

“I find [cooking] therapeutic like just pottering off into the kitchen on my own...I guess it’s the most creative I get like I don’t paint or do anything artistic apart from cooking. So I guess that’s my outlet. I spend quite a lot of time on my dinners in the evenings like I find it quite relaxing. Instead of coming home and sitting down and watching TV or something like that I would rather put that time into making something nice for dinner...I am always busy but it’s the only thing I am prepared to take my time with.

During her abusive relationship with Wayne she would cook for her workmates as they would appreciate the time and effort she had put in to bake for them.

“When I was with Wayne I used to bake a lot for people at work like just like muffins and cakes and cookies and stuff like that and take them into work for morning tea [for] the guys in the factory and that and the people in the office. I used to spend probably a weekend every couple of weeks, which [Wayne] didn’t like actually. He didn’t like that I was baking for somebody else and not him...A couple of times where I baked up a couple of big batches of muffins that he liked but he didn’t eat them so I was like well if yours not going to eat them then I am not going to spend my time making them for you. I will make them for someone who actually is going to appreciate them. There were never any left when I took them to work. So I guess that’s when it started, the point where I started baking for them and not him. It was the fact that I didn’t want to spend my time baking for him and not have it appreciated...I guess I thought well if you were a bit nicer to me and you appreciated them more then I would bake for you more often”.

TALLULAH'S COLLAGE
FIGURE 14:



Tallulah's collage (see Figure 14) representation is reflective of the most important possessions she used to cope with her abusive relationship with Wayne. The possessions that were the most central to her coping strategy were cooking, the photographs and contact she had with her family, her cat Monster, marijuana, the Eminem song 25 to life and cooking. The use of these possessions gave Tallulah emotional support, an outlet from her relationship, and enabled her to reach 'My Time'.

The cupcake papers, representative of cooking and baking, are inside the black frame but are in the background. Tallulah described cooking as a "*point of contention in our relationship*". Although it annoyed Tallulah that she did the majority of the cooking in the relationship, she recognised that it was "*therapeutic*". Cooking gave her space and time to be herself and do something that she loved. She enjoys "*good food and good wine*" and cooking for herself and friends but not necessarily for her partner. Because Wayne disliked cooking and was unlikely to enter her domain, Tallulah controlled the kitchen, making the decisions about what to eat and how to prepare it.

Her family and the contact she had with them were the most important possession Tallulah used to cope with her abusive relationship. Her family is denoted by the dominant black photo frame in the middle of the collage. Her family have shaped and framed who she is as a person and the contact she had with them enabled her to *believe in herself*. They reminded her of her life outside of Wayne and that she deserved better than what she was getting. Not only did the relationship with her father give her unconditional love but also the moral support she needed to leave Wayne. Additionally, Wayne was often not around or involved when Tallulah turned to her family for support and he did not realise the significance of her photographs or 'Believe in Yourself' tile. It was her secret.

The metaphorical images inside the frame helped Tallulah cope with her abusive relationship. The butterfly figure within the frame has been created using the objects Tallulah chose for her Me Box (lighter) as well as other photographed objects that have replaced the ones from Tallulah's Me Box (cat fur and music notes). The possessions that the butterfly represents helped Tallulah cope with the abuse from Wayne.

The butterfly wings were created from the fur of her cat Monster. Her cat Monster was her cat. Monster is attentive and sensitive to her moods and gave her company when she had an argument with Wayne. Monster is Tallulah's "*buddy*" and is "*comforting*" when she is feeling down. Monster gave Tallulah the attention and affection she did not get with Wayne.

Wayne would not spend his spare time with Tallulah; however, “it’s nice to know [Monster] wants to come and hang out with me”.

The thorax of the butterfly is constructed using the image of Tallulah’s lighter. Marijuana was a central “*coping mechanism*” for Tallulah during her relationship. Getting high allowed Tallulah to “*escape*” and enter into a “*head space*” where “*it stopped me from thinking about or addressing stuff that was going on*”. When she had smoked marijuana “*it didn’t bother me that he was shouting at me or...the emotional blackmail he was putting me under*”.

The feelers of the butterfly are created from two music notes. The music notes are reflective of the Eminem song 25 to Life. When Tallulah would listen to this song it reminded her of the relationship she had with Wayne. “*I listened to it a lot, like when he pissed me off or upset me I would listen to it because it would...give me a bit of strength, singing a long to the words knowing that that’s how I felt*”. When Wayne was around and the song came on Tallulah would sing along and it gave her a “*chance to say it to you without actually saying it to you...Like a big finger, fuck you*”. The final line of the song is ‘Fuck you hip hop, I’m leaving you’ and Tallulah would sing ‘Fuck you Wayne I’m leaving you’. It gave her an outlet for the way she was feeling and gave her a sense of empowerment.

The butterfly image was created because Tallulah liked the butterflies on the front of the Participant Information Booklet. She said that the butterflies were both pretty and a symbol of freedom and escape. The possessions Tallulah used to cope with her abusive relationship gave her an outlet and an escape from the “*four walls*” Wayne had confined her to.

The butterfly is flying toward the clock, My Time. ‘My Time’ was spent in the kitchen, on her laptop talking to her friends and family, or when she was high, regardless she was either physically or emotionally distanced from Wayne and the relationship. This was ultimately when she had the most freedom and escape from her partner and the relationship. This time enabled her to de-stress, regain strength, remind herself of who she is and that she deserved better than she was getting from Wayne. The combination of possessions she used was significant in helping her cope with her abusive relationship.

Honour

Honour is a 22 year old New Zealand Caucasian woman. She is a University student who loves the beach and “*just hanging out with friends*”. She experienced an abusive relationship in her first year of University while she was flatting. Her partner did not live with her but stayed the majority of the time. They were together for a period of eight months, and what started as “*friendly banter*” soon became emotional abuse and the relationship quickly turned physically abusive. She finally got the courage to leave him when one day Honour “*confided in a friend and showed her a bruise...she said you have to leave him and to her I owe her my life literally. If he hadn’t taken it I probably would have taken it myself*”. “*I was completely at the whim of him, my life was now his*”. “*He owned me, he owned our relationship, he owned my thoughts and my soul and my room and my space. He owned every part of me*”.

Honour also spoke of the shame surrounding her experience and the lack of understanding people, including her friends, have about abusive relationships. “*[S]ometimes people think that you are weak or like that you deserve it in some way...People just don’t understand, they don’t understand and that makes you shameful, the shame*”. For a long time Honour did not speak of her experience because she was fearful of the stigmatisation she may receive.

HONOUR’S ME BOX AND OBJECTS

Honour’s Me Box

Honour chose a black box as her Me Box (see Figure 15) to reflect the shame she felt about her abusive relationship. The yellow paper on the inside was chosen because Honour felt the Me Box was something positive and would be filled with objects that represented the positive actions she took during her relationship.



FIGURE 15: Honour’s Me Box

Honour's Objects

Figure 16 displays Honour's completed Me Box.



FIGURE 16: Honour's completed Me Box

Shower Cap



FIGURE: 17: Shower Cap

"I chose the shower cap straight away. To me the shower cap represents the shower".
During Honour's abusive relationship the shower was an escape for her.

"It was time to get away. In my relationship I just couldn't I just didn't have any time to be by myself. He was just always there...so my shower was my excuse to get away, to be by myself, to have the space to think to just not think. Just let the water wash over me. To get away from him. I hated him. I hated being by him. I hated being near

him and when I was near him I just hated myself. I felt sick. I was disgusted and I just wanted to be by myself, to not be near him, to not have to think or feel anything about him. Just let the water wash it all away. I could just shut myself away. The bathroom had a lock so I knew he couldn't get in, I knew I was safe. I knew he couldn't barge in and I was just able to have time to myself. Time away from him. It felt good. So I would just sit on the ground of the shower...most of the time I would just sit in silence and just let myself be.

The shower meant so much more to Honour than basic hygiene. Honour's connection with water allowed her to transpose the feelings she gets from the ocean to the shower.

"You feel light and free and I suppose cleansed. You feel all the lines on your face, all those worry line, they just melt, get wiped away, get washed away. You feel so much more relaxed. I suppose that was kind of like the shower. I would sit and let the water wash over me and it was almost like the worries just washed down the drain. The day's stresses would just leave...[The relationship] was hell and that was my only break. It wasn't like I went somewhere better but it wasn't the hell I was living with".

The meaning of the shower changed depending on the time of the day or the temperament of her relationship. Honour would shower in the morning, at night and after a fight with her partner. Honour explains,

"Every day I would shower in the morning to get myself up and ready for the day...start a fresh for the new day...Then the evening [shower] was probably, I don't know like I don't want to seem self-pitying or anything but I felt so down. I felt so sad and I felt so stressed. I felt so crowded by him. He was always around and always in my face, So the evening shower was just to have a break from him...I suppose when we fought it was kind of the same deal, it was just to get away. I didn't want to get hit or pushed or thrown anymore so I just wanted to lock myself away. I was safe. He couldn't get me and the water would feel nice...my body would be sore and my heart would be sore and it was nice to just have the water over me...To escape...It wasn't like I could go out and take a walk or go and drive to a friends or anything because...I just wasn't allowed to go so it was never an option...The bathroom was just a safe haven...it had a lock and I could just shut myself away for a while. The safety of the shower was enhanced because "I had to ask him everything, if I could do anything. Everything but the shower". Honour was able to use the shower multiple

times a day without having to seek permission from her abusive partner, allowing her to escape the relationship and his abuse whenever she needed. *The shower was my saviour*".

Painting



FIGURE 18: Honour's Painting

After Honour got home from Session Two she *"felt like painting"*. Honour painted a picture (see Figure Eighteen) that reflected the 'stigmatisation' she feared she had been labelled with following her abusive relationship.

"I painted a lady in the water, arms by her sides and calm water and calm sky. To me it kind of represents a few things. One it represents...the water and how it, how it makes you feel calm and feel relaxed and just washes the stresses away. But...because you can't see her face and because of her body language she looks a little helpless. There are no surroundings so it looks like she is alone. And I suppose that's kind of how I felt during and for a while after [my abusive relationship] ...It just looks like she has been abandoned and is looking out to sea for answers...I think that it either looks like she is completely calm and finally free and alone, or that she is alone but not free [because] she has no choice to be by herself. (Pauses) Which I guess I feel sometimes. When I left him I knew that I was finally free of him...I felt relaxed and I felt like I was floating on water. I felt light and free but then at the same time I also felt alone...Helpless but yet so powerful.

Honour felt like she was unable to talk to anyone about her experience both while she was in the abusive relationship and after Honour had left him. However, Honour found company in the radio and her soft toys which helped her feel less lonely.

“I used to stress that after I would come home from class he would be in my room or something waiting for me...I was scared to enter my room for a long time...I would leave my radio on when I left so when I came back it wasn't so empty and so scary. It had more noise, it wasn't silent. I also have a couple of soft toys...on my bed as well...It's something to keep me company and not let me be alone...I guess when I am feeling really sad or upset then it's always nice to hug something...sometimes you don't want the company of someone, you don't want to be alone but you don't want to have to talk to someone or explain to someone how you are feeling...You don't want to be alone but you want to be alone”.

Notebook

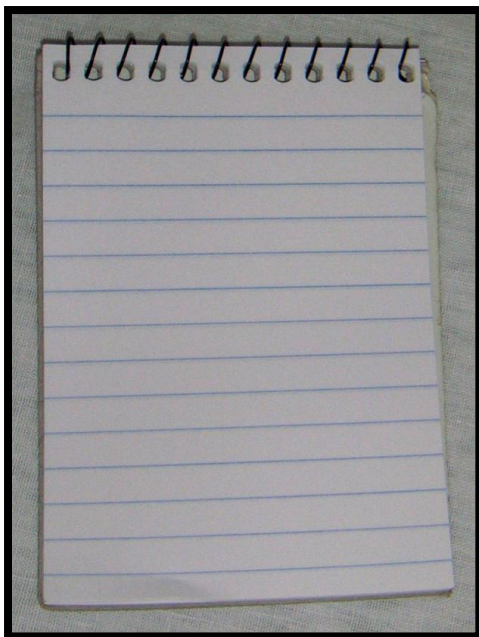


FIGURE 19: Notebook

.Honour chose the notebook (see Figure 19) for her Me Box to represent her university classes. Her university classes provided her with a physical place of safety as well as a sense of achievement.

I didn't have to have an excuse to get out of the house [and go to class] ...I would go to every class because I didn't want to be near him...He never left me alone and so I would go to class to get away and he couldn't tell me not to...I loved that he couldn't

stop me...He controlled everything else I could and couldn't do but I suppose uni was bigger than him...Uni was untouchable".

Although Honour's partner "couldn't stop me" from attending classes, Honour recalls a day where remembers her partner

"accusing me that I was making up that I had classes when I didn't, even though I had always had the same routine for the semester...He started to get a little riled up so I tried to calm him down by quickly logging on to my timetable and saying 'no I do have class. I don't go anywhere. I don't know anyone. I have been in class.' I thought, 'who am I going to hang out with? You have cut me off from everyone. I am a loner and you have done this to me and yet you still accuse me of having friends and doing something you haven't approved?' He looked and he dropped the subject. He didn't apologise but he dropped it.

The classes also provided Honour with a sense of achievement gained through getting good grades.

"I also enjoyed my homework. I really got into my assignments as well. Even though he was there watching me do my homework I still got to ignore him...I got to use my brain and I got...a reward as well for my hard work with good grades...I liked getting that A. I felt less useless. I felt like I was something, that I was somebody, worth something...I had something and someone out there that thought I as good at something...I think learning was the bonus but not being near him was the best".

Photo frame



FIGURE 20: Photo frame

A different photo frame (see Figure 20) than the one depicted was chosen in Session Two. In this session the photo frame was representative of a photo frame her friends made her but her partner had made her throw out. The ownership of this photo frame gave her a sense of control in a relationship where she had very little control over the majority of her life. However, in Session Three Honour chose to replace that photo frame with a mirrored one (see Figure Twenty). The mirror is reflective of the way Honour felt about her appearance and the way she used her clothing to ‘blend in’ and cope with her abuse.

Honour explains the significance of the photo frame her partner asked her to throw out.

“He didn’t like me still being in contact with a couple of friends from back home. They made me a photo frame just before I left [to go to university] and he didn’t like it because it reminded me of them and it was a gift. So he told me to get rid of it...I didn’t get rid of it I just hid it. I had this cupboard...that I never used simply because it was too high. So I put it in there...It was still there and he didn’t know. I couldn’t see it but I knew it was there...I thought ‘No fuck you. This means something to me. You are not going to make me throw this away’ ...It was something that my friends had made me and I wasn’t allowed to talk to them so at least I could keep something that meant something to me...I was so sick of him controlling everything I did...I was completely at the whim of him. My life was now his. So it was nice that I could at least do something because I wanted to do it...It was the line and he had crossed it.

Honour used the photo frame not only as a symbol for control during her relationship but also as a symbol for reclaiming her room when she had left her abusive partner.

“I remember the day that I knew he was never coming back...I got that frame out. That was the first thing I did...I put it on my dresser for me to see. I could see it from my bed and I could see it when I got ready in the morning...It felt so good...I don't think it was about my friends but I think it was about doing what I wanted in my room. I didn't want to be controlled anymore and I wasn't. My life was mine again...It was like a little 'fuck you' because I knew how he didn't like it and I had kept it for all that time...I thought 'you never knew and you will never know this is in my room'...I remember locking myself in my room and just being by myself. I was too scared to go outside of my room and I just stayed there all day and all night and I loved it. I can do what I want and I finally had my room back. He had taken over so much of my life and my room and I finally had those back.

Honour also chose the frame to place in her Me Box because it was made of mirror and reflected the way she coped with her abusive relationship through her appearance.

“Clothes and my hair and my makeup helped me get through...I would wake up in the morning, have my shower...and get myself ready for the day...It gave me a routine and it gave me (pauses) some sort of order in my life that was so hectic and unpredictable”.

The way Honour looked also gave her a sense of control and a way to go unnoticed.

“I have always taken pride in how I look...but when I was with him I didn't. I would tie my hair up every day and I was wearing a lot of greys and blacks and I would always put bare minimum makeup on. I suppose in a way it would...make me go unnoticed. I wouldn't stand out because I was beautiful but then I wouldn't stand out because I looked like a hobo (laughs). I think it just helped me in some weird way. It reflected how I felt about myself but it was also how I wanted to see me. I just didn't want to get noticed. I just wanted to be plain”.

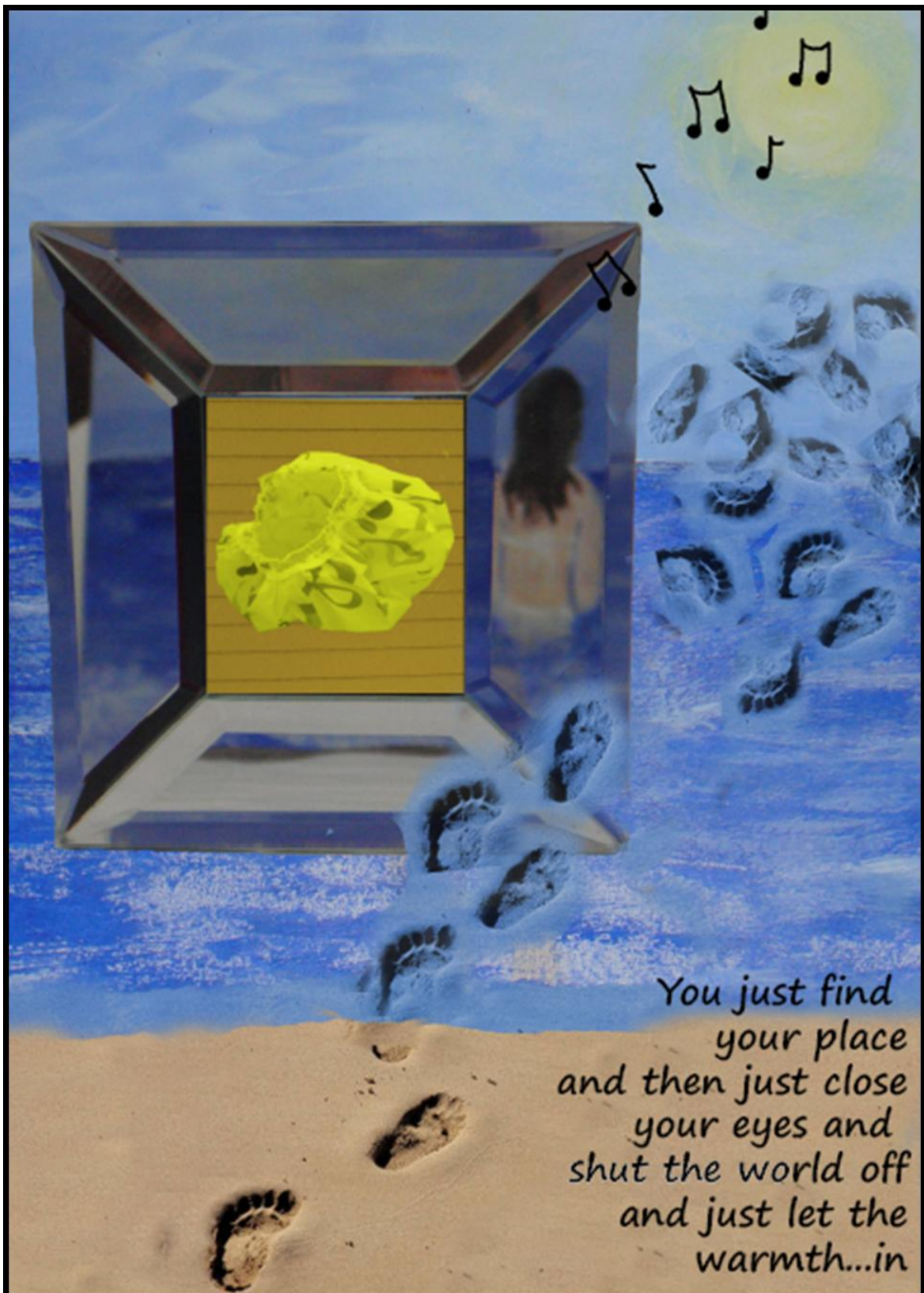
The Unrepresented

After leaving her abusive partner, Honour

“did all the things he had banned me from doing. I went out to town and hung out and drank with my flatmates. I talked to other guys...I joined the gym...I dyed my hair...So there were things like that that...helped me cope...You get that rebellious streak...It felt like my life was mine again and I could do whatever I wanted. I didn't have to answer to no one and I really liked that. I felt like me again....[I] was walking away from it all and gaining some freedom back...taking care of myself again. My body was mine again...He owned every part of me and I was finally getting that back. The gym was I suppose a way to get my body back...He couldn't stop me.

Additionally, by doing “all the things he had banned me from doing” Honour was able to “just keep myself busy...it stopped me from dealing with it...I think I needed time to be with myself or be myself. I just needed that time”.

HONOUR'S COLLAGE
FIGURE 21



Honours collage representation (see Figure 21) represents her use of possessions to seek refuge from her abusive relationship, to gain back a sense of control in her life, and to escape social stigmatisation. Honour used the shower and university to physically escape her abusive partner; a photo frame and activities such as going to the gym to gain back a sense of control; and her appearance to avoid social stigmatisation.

The background of the collage representation is Honour's painting of the woman in the ocean. It was placed in the background because it provides a central element that fuses each object to the overall collage. Honour painted the woman to represent her feelings of freedom but also the way she also felt alone after she left her abusive partner. The woman on the painting has been superimposed on the mirrored frame to look like a reflection. This emphasises Honours conscious efforts to "*blend in*" using clothing and cosmetics so she was able to go unnoticed in public.

The frame itself has been placed in the middle on the left hand side of the collage. Inside the frame are the shower cap and the notebook. The frame, shower cap and notebook are reflective of the ways Honour gained control and an escape in her relationship. She hid the photo frame, went to university classes and sought refuge in her shower. These three things were central to Honour coping with her relationship. Her partner either did not know about or did not go with her when she used these possessions and she could access them daily. The shower cap and the notebook have been tinted with yellow as Honour spoke of the yellow inside of her Me Box representing the positive actions she took during her abusive relationship.

The footprints that go from left to right and change from a straight line to random directions represent Honour "*being able to walk wherever I wanted*" when she left her partner. This was a major turning point in Honour's narrative where she expressed the feeling of freedom and elation in gaining control of her life again. Honour's partner "*owned me*" and "*My life was now his*"; however, when talking about the gym and being able to dye her hair and socialise with friends "*My life was mine again*".

Finally, at the top right hand page are music notes. These music notes symbolise the comfort Honour sought in her radio and stuffed animals. Both the radio and stuffed animals were able to give her comfort when she needed but not to have to seek the advice of a friend because Honour feared judgement. Additionally, because she felt alone in her experience the radio and stuffed animals enabled Honour to feel "*alone but not alone*".

The quote from Honour on the bottom right-hand-side describes the connection she has with the beach which was transferred to the feelings she had about her showers. That she was able to 'shut the world off' and escape for a few moments a day in the shower. This quote transcends beyond the shower and extends to all the actions she took. Through the use of her possessions Honour was able to either shut the world off (through clothing choices and seeking comfort in her radio and stuffed animals) and at other times she was able to shut her partner off (university classes and the shower). Being able to do so helped Honour cope with the abusive relationship she was in.

Tina

Tina is a 23 year old recent Legal Executive graduate, who is passionate about art, particularly painting and drawing, and has a new found hobby of kickboxing. Tina also enjoys a variety of music and has been surrounded by music growing up as her parents are keen musicians. Tina was living with her abusive partner and they were together for two and a half years. Her partner was not physically abusive but severely emotionally abusive. Her relationship *“was just a big black hole of emotion sucking and I was trying to pour happiness into it to try to cheer him up but it got to the point where I had none left for me...That was just another one of his personality traits. He was always negative”*.

TINA’S ME BOX AND OBJECTS

Tina’s Me Box

Tina’s Me Box (see Figure 22) is reflective of her love of bright colours. *“I just like yellow...I have always liked yellow I guess because it’s such a happy colour and I like things to be harmonious and blue goes with yellow”*.



FIGURE 22: Tina’s Me Box

Tina’s Objects

Figure 23 is a photo of Tina’s completed Me Box. The objects Tina chose reflect both negative and positive aspects of her abusive relationship. The following section describes and explains the objects she chose for her personal box.



FIGURE 23: Tina's completed Me Box

Rock



FIGURE 24: Rock

"I chose the rock because for the last year of our relationship...I just felt useless and ugly and fat and he would just make me feel like that all of the time. I would just feel like I was a burden on him and his life and his pay cheque."

The rock (see Figure 24) symbolised the effects of Tina's partner's emotionally abusive behaviours.

“Rocks don’t do anything and they are in the way. He just made me feel like a lumpen object...He would manage to make me feel like such a piece of crap and such a burden...I couldn’t do anything right and I was always in the way. Not contributing to life as a human being”.

Ring



FIGURE 25: Ring

During the first session, Tina placed the ring (see Figure 25) off her finger in her Me Box. The ring was a gift from her partner for their six month anniversary. Tina describes the day her partner gave her the ring and what it symbolised.

“It was a weekday...I had booked a motel in town and he didn’t know about it, it was a surprise. I told him to meet me in town and we would get some food and we went and got some pizza. He was shitty of course. He was like ‘oh I have got the bike and its cold and went’ and he was grumpy about shit. I just said ‘follow me’. I used to excuse his behaviour a lot. So we went to the motel and once he realised that’s why I wanted to meet him in town he was happy (laughs)...So he told me he had picked up my best mate from school one day and taken her shopping for that ring....He put effort into it and went and got my best mate from school and took her...So when he wanted he could put the effort in”.

At different stages of their relationship the ring came to symbolise different feelings for Tina.

“To start off with it was a symbol of no matter how shit I feel at the time or no matter how he made me feel, he still loved me...I guess the worse it got the more it was a symbol of, it was something that I used to look back on the good times because it would remind me of when there was fine between us there was no tension and no bad words spoken... And then as we got further I think it became more of a symbol of

ownership and it made it clear that I was his. I belonged to him...[Now] I guess it's just a bit of jewellery. I just wear it along with my other ones.

As well as the ring, Tina's partner would buy flowers on anniversaries or birthdays. These gifts made Tina feel *“special and valued and loved....He had been thinking about me, it was nice and happy and floaty (laughs).*

Cupcake Papers and Pegs



FIGURE 26: Cupcake Papers and Pegs

The pegs and cupcake papers (see Figure 26) were representative of all the cooking and cleaning Tina did in the relationship.

“It became very apparent that [cleaning and cooking] was a one sided effort...Definitely all of the menial house jobs...They all automatically became my jobs somehow. He used to annoy me because if he finished work before me I would get home and he would have just sat down in front of the TV and not have done anything. So I would get home and have to shut the curtains, get dinner ready and he would just be sat on his arse in front of the TV.

Tina's partner also controlled a lot of what they ate,

“he used to moan about everything. It was too hot, it was vegetarian, I had put beans in it...he would just have a cry about it...He made me feel terrible at [cooking] and that there was no point in doing something when no one appreciates it”.

Food was also something that caused Tina some anxiety in the relationship because she had noticed she put on some weight. Tina became “*really conscious*” of the fat content of her food but felt pressure from her partner to eat foods he wanted to in portion sizes he had.

“I used to beat myself up a bit about eating things that I knew I shouldn’t...He used to give me shit about starving myself...The worst was when he would randomly come home with Burger King or something and I would be like ‘I don’t want this but you are going to make me feel bad if I don’t eat it’”.

Gaining weight added to her already low self-esteem and self-worth and affected the way she dressed.

“At the time I was totally unhappy with the way I looked...I was not happy with my appearance...I used to buy more conservative things...I used to wear jeans all of the time...It wasn’t where it was to the point where it was obvious to anybody else looking at me but it was definitely making a conscious decision about wearing more”.

Coin



FIGURE 27: Coin

The coin (see Figure 27) reflected Tina’s money. Tina’s partner would “*pack a sad*” if she spent her money on clothes and shoes; he thought Tina was

“wasting my money, MY money. I was always of the opinion that he couldn’t tell me what to do with my money. As far as I was concerned I had worked for it...[but] it was very clear cut...it was his money and it was my money and he was able to spend his money however he wanted and I wasn’t allowed to spend my money”.

Tina would go shopping with her friend during Tina’s abusive relationship

“I bought a lot of clothes...maybe it wasn’t a lot but it might have seemed like a lot because I would have to hide it from him...I would hide shit in the wardrobe for ages after I bought it...It was always my way of rebelling...buying clothes and hiding them...For some reason I had more backbone when it came to buying clothes than leaving him (laughs)...Maybe it was just because he couldn’t control it. It was something beyond his control...It was not something he could take away from me. I have purchased it. It was mine. It wasn’t like a CD or DVD because that is something that he could claim...it would become communal property...[My clothes] was something that was strictly mine”.

Although Tina describes how she was able to spend money on clothes because it was not something her abusive partner could take away from her, her partner would still have a problem with her purchases. However, to Tina the trouble was worth it.

“I could buy a dress, wear it, get into trouble, and then the first time I would wear it around him and he would completely forget about it quite quickly. So the trouble was such a small part of the enjoyment I got out of owning it and wearing it multiple times.

To Tina, the enjoyment and self-confidence she got from buying clothes was worth the “constant little remarks and the attacks”.

Red Dress



FIGURE 28: Red dress

“I have got this red dress at home that I bought for no particular reason other than that I wanted to buy it...I wanted a pretty party dress so I bought a really expensive one where I could have just got one off the sale rack... It cost me \$140 and I had to put it on my credit card. I hid it for ages, ages and ages...Apart from the over-riding feeling of guilt at the time, it was so exciting. It felt wonderful to do something for me that was wholly for me, that was a completely selfish act...I was high on the thrill at the time...It felt like a sense of freedom [to go] out and just splurge...“I was so excited about the dress itself...It made me feel really nice and attractive:.

Tina kept her red dress (see Figure 28) a secret from her partner.

“I hid it and I kept it wrapped back up in the Stax tissue paper and wrapped it back up every time I brought it out. I used to get it out of the wardrobe when he wasn't home. I would just walk around the house in it... I would put [the dress] on, put some

music on – music that he didn't like...It was me time. It was time where I didn't have to watch out what I said or think about what I was doing or think about whether he was happy. I could just concentrate on myself in those moments...It was escapism.

Colour of clothes was important to Tina in expressing how she was feeling as well as “an expression of me”. Tina chose her red dress because red “screams look at me”. Tina was conscious of the way she dressed as well as her partner’s comments on how she looked, so instead Tina expressed herself through the colour of her clothing.

“At the time I didn't get criticized for [my clothes] because of the colour choice...colour I would never get into trouble as such for so I could put my twist on things by picking that colour...I was always happier if I could wear bright colours because it was something that was completely my choice...[I]t was my chance to do what I wanted and splash out and think of me. ME ME ME!... Most of the time colour was my little way of shouting out to the world ‘I'm still here!’”

Lipstick

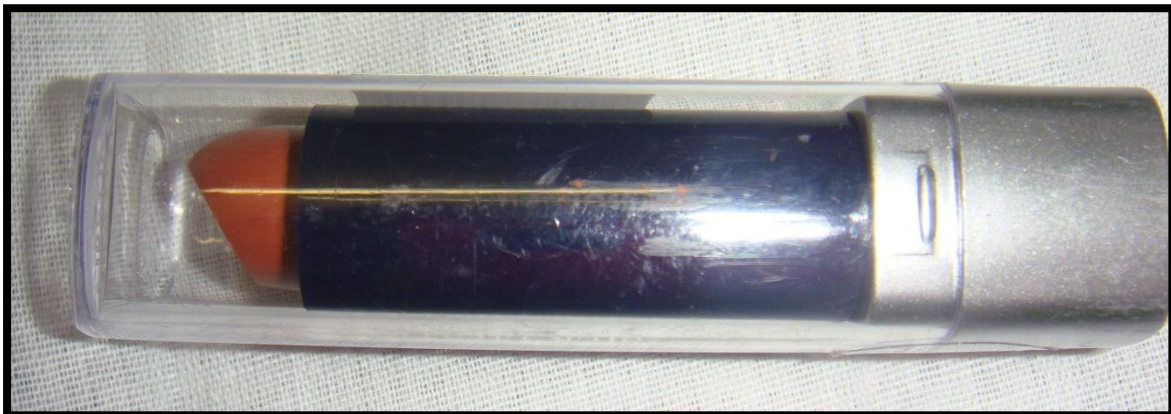


FIGURE 29: Lipstick

Tina chose to include lipstick (see Figure 29) in her Me Box to represent not being able to wear makeup.

“Makeup. I wasn't allowed to wear that. Um I think that was a control thing from his point of view really. Again, if I was wearing makeup I was going out to have sex with all the boys”. Like her red dress, “I used to put [make up] on when he was at work”.

Because her partner did not know, Tina explained that *“it was kind of like a freedom thing, and the rebellion thing”*, She would dress up and put make up on around the house, to attend work, or to run errands.

“I would spend time on myself and put effort into my appearance...and do my menial, whatever I was doing, go to the supermarket and doing his little errands...but then there were a few times...I was like ”today I am going to wear makeup because I want to”.

Tina would wake up on those mornings and think *“Today I am going to wear my makeup and then I am going to go to the supermarket...and it’s going to be amazing”*.

Although not consciously, wearing makeup gave Tina back some self-confidence.

“I never used to do it to cheer myself up because I don’t think it ever crossed my mind when I wasn’t happy but if I was already happy and looked in the mirror and thought ‘hey I look alright today’...I am going to put some makeup on...It was just another little, little step in the confidence ladder. It didn’t last very long but it was the little things that probably made me stay in that relationship a little longer than I should have...[Makeup] made me realise I was more than just a cook and a cleaner and a change the channel”.

However, after leaving her abusive relationship the colour of clothes and the days she wears makeup

“are not so extraordinary...Now I am more likely to buy something because I like the shape of it rather than the colour. Colour plays a lesser part. I am still attracted to the bright colours...[but] it’s no longer a question of standing out because of the colour. But at the time style was something I had to be careful with if I didn’t want to get told off for it. In regards to makeup, Tina explains, “I have never really been a makeup wearer...but I do know that should I want to wear makeup tomorrow no one is going to stop me or have a cry about it”.

Lock and Key



FIGURE 30: Lock and Key

For Tina, the lock and key (see Figure 30) reminded her of secrets she kept from her partner.

“I used to have a lot of secrets from him in the end. I mean along with the stuff that I hid in the wardrobe. I could never be sure how he was going to react to anything I used to say to him. So I just never used to tell him things”.

Although it was easier for Tina to hide things, such as where she was going or the friends she was texting, from her partner so she could avoid being reprimanded, Tina still felt like

“I was walking on eggshells all of the time. I never knew if what I was going to say would send him into a rage...so I felt stressed out all of the time because I don't like keeping secrets from people...[but] it was easier, not worth the grief.

Paint Brush



FIGURE 31: Paint brush

The paintbrush (see Figure 31) was chosen to reflect her love of art and the craft projects she did when working at an Afterschool Care establishment during her abusive relationship. While Tina was with her abusive partner she did not paint for herself, instead she was

“expressing myself at work and being able to be arty and creative at work...I didn’t do art for myself that year but I could cut loose at work and paint the shit out of things (laughs). I think it was just something again that took it away from my personal life and could express it outside of my little self-made world involving him. It was something that he was never part of, that he had no control over or input into. He used to see the product of it because I would bring it home. It was just something else that...I could do by myself, for myself, well for work but I got a lot of enjoyment out of it.

Tina would bring home her creations she had made at work and display them around the house. Her partner would criticise Tina for putting them around the house,

“he thought they were all stupid...he would just make little comments. But I would just think ‘It’s for work’ and it wouldn’t sink in because it wasn’t a personal jive...it was nothing to do with him so I didn’t let it affect me”.

Displaying her creations around the house gave Tina enjoyment.

“They were bright and cheerful things and I had put time and effort into them and I enjoyed doing them and I enjoyed the finished product...they just used to make me a little bit happier, something positive. A positive thing in the house...I wouldn’t actively go and find them but they were always there and they would always be a positive push in the right direction for me when I did notice them...There was nothing bad about them, there was no negativity that had gone into any of my little creations”.

The Unrepresented

Tina discussed two aspects of her life that were important but not represented by her Me Box objects; they were tertiary study and the rebuilding of her self when she left her partner.

Tertiary Study

Tertiary study was vital to Tina coping with her relationship; *“tech kept me sane”*. Tina did not like the work as she thought it was *“phenomenally boring but it was out of the house, it was doing something, it was socialising with other people, it was being part of the world”*. Being able to have contact with people outside of her relationship was important to Tina’s

wellbeing. Tina was able to make friends whom she talked to about her situation at home and “get another fresh opinion on it”. The friends she made at tech helped her recognise that her relationship was not healthy. Tech also helped Tina gain self-worth as it

“reminded me that I wasn’t a waste of space and that I was good at something...It was something positive about me when there aren’t many, when I thought there weren’t many positive things about myself...I liked the fact that at the end of it I could pat myself on the back and be like ‘yeah that’s right you’re not completely useless’”.

Physically attending tech “gave me something to get up for in the morning...[and] was a completely different environment than at home”. Tech was also something “that [my partner] had no control over or had no input into. So [tech] was completely my thing and I chose who I spoke to, what I wore and where I sat”.

Finding Me

After leaving her abusive partner, Tina experienced

“that first euphoric state of freedom and rediscovering myself...Finding me. It was great because I could reinvent myself. I started everything new, completely new job, completely new house, completely new friends...there were no preconceived notions of who I should be or how I should act and so I got to create a new me. A me that wasn’t tied down...It was all part of the doing everything the opposite of how I had done. It was the whole string of behaviour where I lost a shit load of weight, walked around practically naked, got a cat, cut and dyed my hair, and slept with all the boys (laughs)...New man, new shoes, new haircut... I just did completely the opposite to what I had done [while in my relationship]...It was a complete change...I had dragged myself up from thinking I was fat and ugly and then guys would wave at me out of their cars when I was walking up the road ...It helped me get away from the whole thing”.

TINA'S COLLAGE

Figure 32



Tina's collage representation (see Figure 32) reflects how she coped with her abusive relationship through self-expression, secrets and escapism. Tina used the colour of her clothes and art-projects as a creative outlet and also to provide her with a little bit of happiness. Tina also kept secrets from her partner, such as the clothes that she bought. These clothes helped Tina feel attractive and "*scream out to the world I'm still here!*" Tina escaped her relationship by attending tech classes which helped her build self-confidence and feel "*less useless*". Finally, all of these aspects of her life helped Tina cope by breaking away an attachment to her partner; she had ownership of these activities which "*he had no input into*".

The focal point of Tina's collage representation is the lock and key. The lock is reflective of the secrets that Tina kept from her partner. Those secrets, such as buying clothes, wearing makeup, and talking with friends, gave Tina a lot of happiness when her relationship was so negative. Those secrets, once unlocked and accessed by Tina, enabled her to break away from feeling "*ugly and fat*", like she was "*owned*", or that she was just a "*cook and cleaner*". This is shown by the pebble, ring, and peg falling away from the open lock.

The lock is being opened by the key, which is made from the coin Tina chose to put in her Me Box. This money was *her* money and enabled her to purchase the clothes she got enjoyment out of and that she was able to express herself through. Her clothing, particularly her red dress, was vital in helping her cope with her relationship. This red dress is shown in the background with the black ribbon wrapped around the left-hand-side of the lock. The ribbon is wrapped around the left hand side of the lock because it was a positive aspect of her life that helped unlock the negative aspects (peg, ring and pebble) in her life. Her "*pretty party dress*" was a "*secret little indulgence*" of hers that made her feel attractive gave her a sense of freedom.

The red dress is also a representation of the clothes and shoes Tina bought while in her relationship that she hid from her partner. Moreover, the red dress is a symbol of the happiness she got out of wearing bright clothing. Bright clothing was safe from her partner's criticism and was a way Tina was able to express her personality and "*stand out*". This point is further emphasised by the quote "*It was my choice to do what I wanted and splash out and think of me. Me Me Me!*" The quote is being painted by the paint brush as art was another aspect of her life she was able to gain happiness through and where her partner had no control or input into.

Raewyn

Raewyn is a 45 year old New Zealander, a mother of a 17 year old boy, and who as a wealth of practical skills. Raewyn lives in the same town she grew up in and spent the majority of her career working for her father, starting out in the workshop and ended up in the office. She quit her job at her fathers company after 24 years of service. She left with very little financial stability. Everything Raewyn has today she has earned herself. Raewyn has very little contact with her family but is a proud mother of her teenage son. They have a relatively close relationship as she has been a single mother most of his life and “*only have each other*”. Raewyn was in an emotionally and physically abusive relationship with her son’s father for eight years. Raewyn left him “*a good 16, 17 years ago*”.

RAEWYN’S ME BOX AND OBJECTS

Raewyn’s Me Box

Raewyn was the only participant who chose to express her experience with two boxes. The red box (see Figure 33) that contains the ribbon is representative of her childhood. The empty gold box (see Figure 34) is reflective of her abusive relationship.



FIGURE 33: Red Me Box



FIGURE 34: Gold Me Box

Raewyn's Objects

Ribbon



FIGURE 35: Ribbon

Raewyn chose the gold ribbon (see Figure 35) as it reminded her of her childhood ribbon

“The one thing I did pick was a ribbon because that relates to my childhood. I used to suck my thumb with a ribbon. I stopped when I was thirteen [but] I have actually still got [the ribbon]. It’s still in my handbag. So yeah that was, still got that little part of my life from 100 years ago”.

Raewyn is unsure of where her ribbon originated from but

“back in those days you would sit and cut the buttons off old shirts so you could keep the buttons....our parents would keep a lot of zips and ribbons because they would sew a lot of our clothes. I am pretty sure that’s where the ribbon came from.”

Although Raewyn no longer sucks her thumb, the ribbon has been with her in her life in her handbag; she has never gotten rid of it. The ribbon stays with her and provides her with

“security...It’s just the fact that it’s there. I don’t go and look at it or touch it. You open your handbag and sometimes the zip might be open and the little compartment that it is in ‘Oh yeah it’s still there’. Yeah it’s just a little comfort zone. You know people have good luck charms but that was just a part of my childhood and I kept it. I don’t know why.

During Raewyn’s abusive relationship *“I didn’t touch it once. I never touched it.* Raewyn did not offer any insight into this.

Empty Box



FIGURE 36: Empty Box

Raewyn explains the reasoning behind the empty box (see Figure 36);

“During the relationship, when I look back now (picks up box) it was empty. It was just a huge hole...It was quite soul destroying. Men look upon women as possessions, well possessions don’t have a mind of their own. Until a man has complete control, then they become possessions. Once he has taken away pretty much their self-worth, then they become nothing”.

Raewyn used the empty box to powerfully illustrate the “big empty hole where...the best part of my life” should have been. Since she left her abusive partner 17 years ago, Raewyn has accomplished many things, such as her relationship with her son and hobbies she has picked up. These will be discussed in the following section.

The Unrepresented

Raewyn’s Son Josh

A large portion of Raewyn’s interviews are spent talking about her son, Josh. Raewyn describes how she was

“scared of having a baby...I was just so scared. How can I bring up a child? I was so scared of screwing up, more emotionally with him because I did not want him to feel hurt...My biggest fear was that if I loved him too much then I would lose him...But I knew if he was strong within himself that he could do anything. Nothing would be an issue”.

Raewyn is very proud of the young man Josh has become. He has life skills beyond his years and has both his dive and gun licences. Her son is also very perceptive of people, especially of Raewyn and knows when she is upset. Although they have heated arguments they have a deep love for each other. Raewyn describes that the *“best years where when it was just the two of us...[Josh] knows that we are all that we have of each other”*.

Raewyn discusses leaving her abusive partner and reveals that Josh was the reason why she left.

“[O]ne day you wake up and smell the roses and what really made me get out of that relationship was the fact that I couldn’t let him do to me what he could do to Josh. And that was the pushing factor, I couldn’t let him hurt Josh. I couldn’t end up with a child that was going to be a mess later on. I couldn’t do it”.

Although Raewyn acknowledged the need to let her son learn life lessons on his own, she is very protective of him. *“I just couldn’t put him through what I went through growing up”*. Additionally, Raewyn recognises that some of her strength comes from needing to be a good role model and support for her son because they only have each other. *“People say that when you have kids you become part of their life. No. You are in it together”*.

Life Skills

Raewyn feels as though she is unable to rely on the people around her, particularly her family. The skills Raewyn has gained over her life are varied and have proved to be important when dealing with problems that have arisen. She explains that

“there are some people who have had a nice life. But the one thing I find sad about it is that they have never lived either...that’s the difference between having someone you can rely on and having someone that was never there. You just do things”.

Everything that Raewyn has today she has earned herself. *“My biggest thing was that I didn’t want to appear to be a charity case...You had to do it yourself”*. Raewyn has never accepted hand-outs or help from anyone and she takes great pride in that because *“it’s good achieving something for yourself”*.

Although Raewyn felt as though there is a *“hole where the best years of my life should have been”*, she feels as though she is making up for lost time now. Raewyn *“didn’t start living until about 32”* when she learnt to fly a plane.

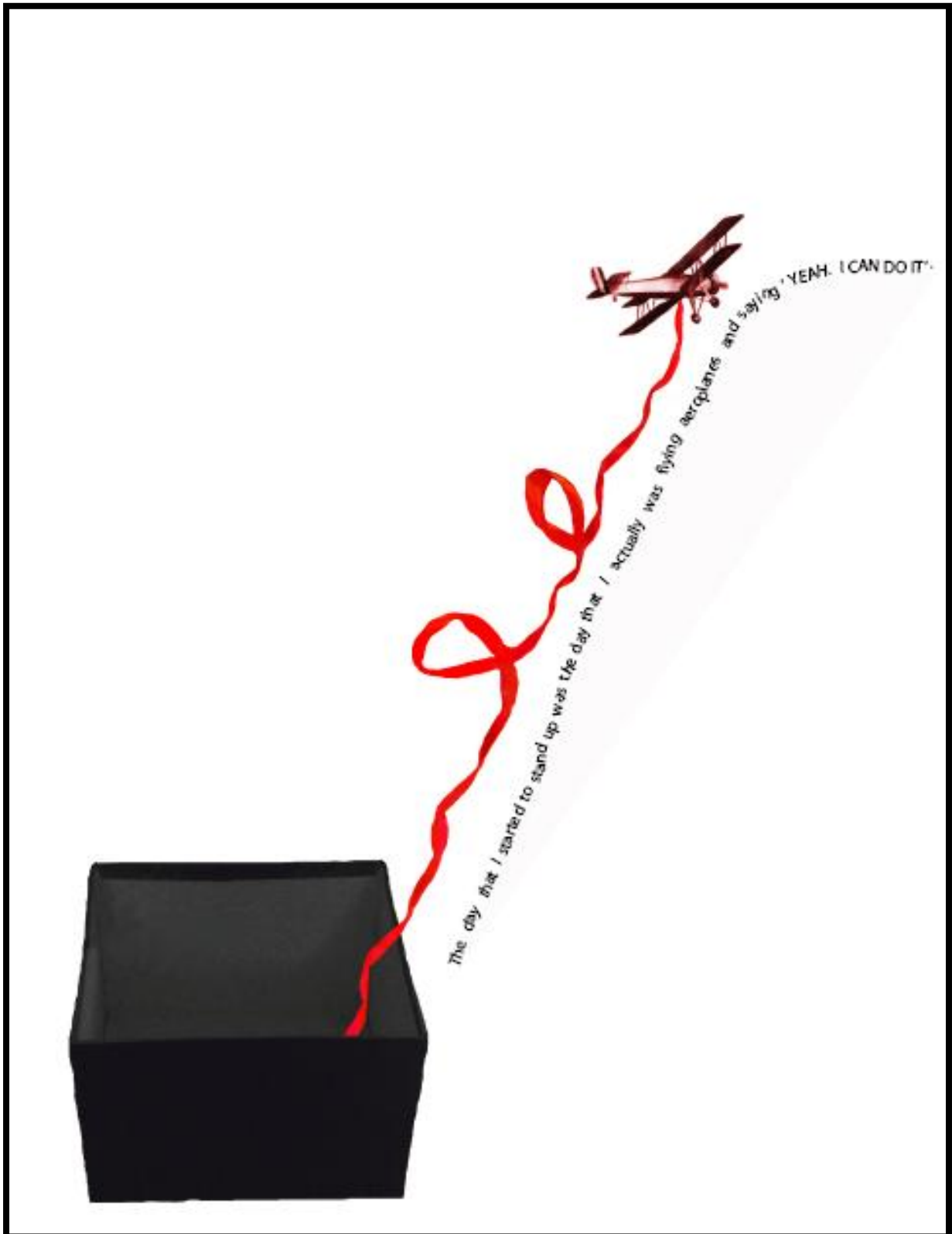
“The day that I started to stand up was the day that I actually started flying aeroplanes and saying ‘yeah I can do it’. It wasn’t the day that I left Josh’s father. I was finally doing something for myself and that’s when things started to get better”.

She was “*blown away*” by the feeling she got the first time she boarded a plane and obtaining her pilots licence has been a great accomplishment.

Since gaining her pilots licence, Raewyn has also earned her gun licence. Shooting is one of Raewyn’s hobbies and is something she does with both Josh and her current partner. Although it took her “*six months to gain the confidence*” in being comfortable holding a gun, Raewyn goes to the shooting range every weekend and travels around the world for shooting. She has met a lot of friends through the shooting club and is a sport she thoroughly enjoys.

Raewyn believes “*I look at the things that I have been through and take out the good stuff and get rid of the bad stuff and move on*”.

FIGURE 37:



Raewyn's collage (see Figure 37) is representative of her life after her abusive relationship and how she filled the empty hole left by her abusive partner. She has accomplished many things since leaving her partner. Raewyn has worked hard to get where she is today and is making up for those lost years.

Raewyn's collage representation begins with the black box in the bottom left-hand-side of the picture. This black box is her gold Me Box that has been digitally altered to be coloured black. Black was chosen so it was able to communicate the dramatic effect needed to explain the "*big hole*" where the best years of her life were supposed to be.

Emerging from the black box is a bright red ribbon. This ribbon, although not the ribbon included in her Me Box, is used to reflect the red ribbon from her childhood. Although she never looked at or touched the ribbon during her relationship, Raewyn was comforted to know that her childhood security blanket was there with her. The ribbon has two loops in it. This is reflective of herself and her son. They are in their life journey together, always there for each other.

The ribbon joins Raewyn on the journey of her life, which is why it is depicted flying out of the box attached to an aeroplane. The aeroplane, like the accomplishments Raewyn has made since her relationship, is propelling her forward. The quote that follows the line of flight, "*The day that I started to stand up was the day that I actually was flying aeroplanes and saying 'Yeah I can do it'*". This day was the first day of the rest of her life.

Debbz

Debbz is a mother of four, Nicole (21), Richard (19), Jamie (17) and Jake (13). Being a mother is *“probably the most important thing about me...they are the best thing in my life...my kids are everything”*. Debbz is very proud of her children, their accomplishments and the people they have become. Because her children have been the centre of her universe for the majority of her life she *“doesn’t actually know how to function when my children aren’t around”* and has very few hobbies. When Debbz does take time for herself she will read or draw a bath. She also enjoys her job, where she works for a family violence organisation. Debbz’s dream is to work herself out of a job but thinks that this is unrealistic. Despite this, the difference she makes is invaluable.

At almost 40 years of age, Debbz left her abusive partner twelve years ago. She was with her partner, Jim, for almost eight years where he manipulated her into *“this little submissive woman who did what he wanted, when he wanted, or otherwise I got the shit beaten out of me...”*. Debbz’s violent partner imposed severe restrictions on her which had a significant impact on her soul. She explains

“Everything was gone. My morals, my ethics, my drive was gone...my language skills had become so limited. I wasn’t allowed out of the house, I was allowed one hour for grocery shopping every fortnight...My soul was broken...I couldn’t dream for my future, I couldn’t plan for my children’s future...Everything that made me the strong person I was before had been chipped away...I was a broken shell of who I was and you cant get out until you have to get out because you don’t believe you can put more than one foot in front of the other let alone get out. He stripped me of everything that I was and he took it away from me...I remember looking into the mirror one day and thinking ‘there is nothing here that I identify as being me before he took everything’...All those things that make you who you are...those little sparks of pride of who you are in different parts of you were gone. And all I knew was servitude and how to look after him and his needs”.

DEBBZ’S ME BOX AND OBJECTS

Debbz’s Me Box

Debbz chose an electric pink box with deep blue tissue paper (see Figure 38). Although she admitted that she *“hates pink”*, Debbz was drawn to the vibrant and bright colours. When discussing the process of lining her personal box, Debbz revealed that she was going to place

some tissue paper over top of the items “*but that didn’t feel right. I didn’t want to cover it up, I wanted to be able to see what was in there*”.



FIGURE 38: Debbz’s Me Box

Debbz’s Objects

Figure 39 is a picture of Debbz’s completed Me Box. The following section describes each object she chose to include.

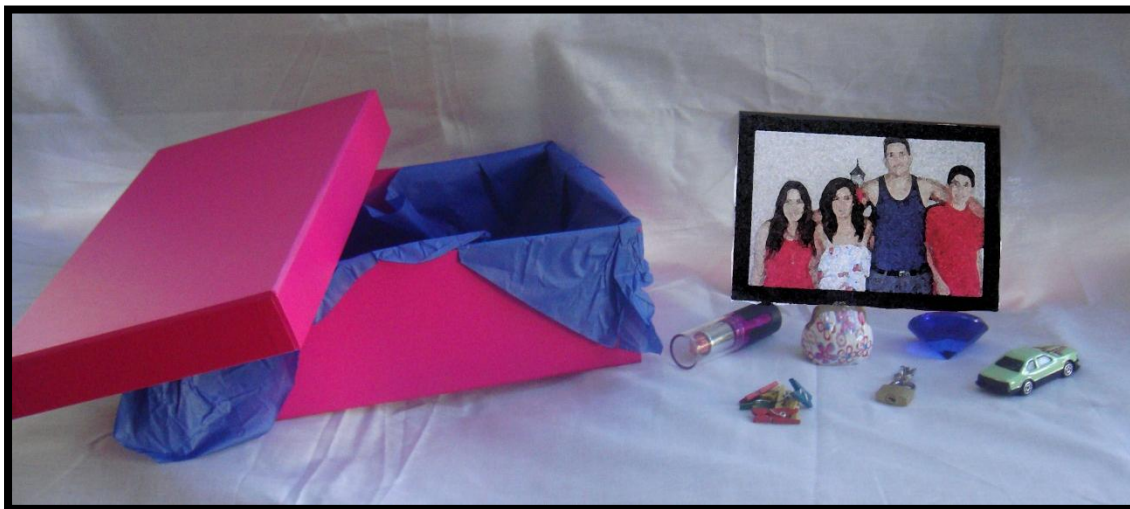


FIGURE 39: Debbz’s Completed Me Box

Handbag



FIGURE 40: Handbag

Debbz uses the handbag (see Figure 40) to describe what her life was like during her relationship with Jim.

“To me it symbolises that everything was shut up. Everything was all in one little compartment and I could never go outside...My life become so small...I wasn’t allowed wearing singlets or shorts...I was never allowed to wear makeup...It just became very limited...Life was very small and very compact and there just wasn’t any stepping outside of that...There was just no room to move in anything...this little bag symbolises that, being closed into a small space...When it opened it was like doves flying out”.

Lock and Key



FIGURE 41: Lock and Key

The lock and key (see Figure 41) was a metaphor for the control Debbz partner had over her life. *“I was very much locked into my life...Everything. What I wore, how I washed, how I shopped...Everything I did in my life and every part of my life...there was a lock attached to it”*. Jim’s control over Debbz and every aspect of her life and the impact this had on her as a woman and a mother is weaved throughout her narratives. *“It was eggshells all the time...I didn’t have the time I wanted to have with them doing the things I wanted to do”*. She was unable to be the mother or the woman she wanted to be. Debbz’s partner dictated the vast majority of her life, *“Every part of what you take for granted as being yourself he had a finger on”*.

Lipstick



FIGURE 42: Lipstick

Debbz chose to include lipstick (see Figure 42) in her Me Box to describe her partner taking makeup away from her,

“I met Jim when I was 21 years old. I was an attractive young woman and I always took pride in how I looked and you know. I always wore makeup even if I was going to the shops. That was something that he liked at the start but took away from me very, very quickly... I think he must have [known what makeup meant to me] because he worked so hard to take it away...He knew I felt better about myself [when I wore makeup] and he knew I had a real issue about my face”.

Debbz explains the process of her partner taking her makeup away from her,

“Like just little things like ‘Don’t worry about putting makeup on today, you look beautiful as it is’. And to start with it always came with a compliment but then slowly progressed....It went from ‘You look beautiful, you don’t need makeup’ to ‘You are a whore if you put your makeup on, you are trying to find someone else’...[Makeup]”

was something he willingly took away from me...So it was almost eight years that I didn't wear makeup and that was something I missed.

Wearing makeup gives Debbz self-confidence. *"To me it makes a big difference and that changes how I feel about myself. When she has makeup on,*

"I have a much bigger self-esteem. I feel like I can walk down the street and I feel like I look OK and maybe I hold myself a little bit higher...I feel like I can stand tall...it's yeah I just feel more in control I guess. Its very much a confidence thing...As soon as my face is covered I just feel better about myself...I have pretty low self-esteem so once my makeup is on I automatically feel better about myself...its very much a mask thing more than anything".

During her abusive relationship Debbz describes what the ability to wear makeup would have done to her self-esteem, *"Makeup was the symbol of my spark and what I did consider attractive of myself was gone...so I felt really ugly and really daggy...It would have been an easy way to gain a tiny bit of self-esteem back".* But because makeup was a trigger for abuse Debbz *"leant to just let it go. It was not worth fighting about at the end of the day".*

When Debbz left her abusive partner *"[makeup] was one of those things that I learnt to let go but picked up very quickly once the relationship was over. And my self-esteem started growing again and I started to wear makeup all the time".*

Debbz remembers the first time she wore makeup after leaving Jim,

"[m]y brother said come on we are going to go on a road trip to [the city]. You have to get out and do something for yourself. It was the first time in 10 years that I hadn't been with the children or you know didn't have Jim in my life. So Dad had the kids and I put some makeup on. I went and bought some makeup and some new clothes and went up to [the city]...I still felt really odd about buying makeup and I had forgotten what I used and what colour my skin was...The first time I put it on I felt like a million bucks. I just felt amazing because I had my hair done and I had my makeup done and I thought you know I was still a beautiful person and I could get on with my life. It was a real turning point. It was wonderful".

Even now, twelve years out of her abusive relationship the process of buying and applying makeup is still important and special to Debbz.

“So its something that I do all the time now is put my makeup on. Sometimes it looks like crap but that’s OK...I still like putting makeup on. It sounds so stupid. It’s something that most people just get up and do or don’t think twice about. [Makeup] has been a real big thing in my life...I don’t think its quite so much of a novelty now...It’s standard practice for me to wear makeup now but it’s a novelty to be able to go and buy it. And I know when my husband says that I look beautiful without it that he means it...its not a control thing its just part of my normal life now”

Pegs



FIGURE 43: Pegs

Debbz chose the pegs (see Figure 43) to reflect early mornings spent hanging out the washing.

“Yea the pegs. Oh I hated that. I used to have to do the washing...I was basically not allowed to lie in or sleep in, excuse me, he was always up about half past six and as soon as he was up, I had to be. I had to have my feet on the floor...I put the washing on at night and I would have to get up in the morning and do the washing before the kids went to school...The washing wasn’t so bad in the summer but in the winter I would have to go out in the freezing cold and hang the washing out. You know even though I knew it was going to freeze before it managed to dry. I used to have to do it every morning. And I still remember how my fingers were engorged in red you know. It was, I just hated it.

Having to hang out the washing early in the morning still effects Debbz today,

“Even now in the morning I will go outside and smell the frost and just shudder. I want to crawl back into bed. It was just one of those things I hated and it was just

something that is a strong memory of. And I still don't like hanging the washing out...I will wash it, I will bring it in, I will fold it, I will do anything but my husband folds it. I hate it. I hate it. And we have a dryer for the winter.

Being able to sleep in is something Debbz now treasures.

"Now it wouldn't be odd to ring me at 12 o'clock and I am reading a book snuggled up in bed...I just love my bed. It's a real place of security for me. I like to stay in bed. Particularly in winter. I am not so bad in summer...but I am more than happy if its cold and yucky to stay in bed. Mmm. I love my bed...It's a place where I could be with all my children where we could just snuggle down and do whatever...Bed is a sanctuary for me now. It's a place where I rejuvenate and it's the bed that my husband and I share and its wonderful compared to the bed that Jim and I shared".

Despite the bed being a place of security for Debbz now, in her abusive relationship,

"It tended to be a pretty yucky place...but it was never a place for rest for me, never. And even when I was sick. I remember when I was sick once and I look back and I don't know how I didn't die of bronchopneumonia or something because I was so ill. But I still had to be up at half past six. If he got up earlier I had to be up earlier and then I was never allowed to go to bed before him. Like some nights he would sit up all night and I would have to sit up at the table all night as well. And I was exhausted. I knew the kids would be awake in an hour and I was going to have to get them to school. I would have to go about my normal day without sleeping and he would just go to bed and go to sleep".

Car



FIGURE 44: Car

Debbz discussed two cars during her sessions. The first car was a four-wheel drive bought by her abusive partner; the second car was one she bought after leaving her abusive partner. Debbz shares the significance of both of these cars.

“[Jim and I] had one car for a long time and then he bought me one. We went to stay with his family and he behaved very badly up there and he hit me in front of his family and he felt really guilty so he went and bought me a car...I was used to the cycle of violence by then. I was used to the shit and then something nice happening you know. But a car was pretty amazing you know....I was so excited....It was really flash, it was new and I was pretty impressed by that. I felt amazing driving it and I just thought it was wonderful I thought, well I didn't think but I hoped that it would stay that way and that it would be mine...we drove it home and it was probably a week after that that I lost control of it...[H]e still had absolute control over the car keys, the petrol money, the everything to do with it. So you know the worse thing was if it was raining and I had to go and get the kids to school. That was just the worse when he would take the keys and say 'no you can walk'...You know there is two cars parked in the driveway with petrol in the tanks and I was still having to walk. And that just sucked. It really sucked...So the four-wheel drive became a big fat burden more than anything else. It was just another form of control rather than it being something positive in our lives”.

The other car Debbz spoke of was the one she bought when she left Jim. Debbz

“remembers that day so clearly. I bought it off a friend of mine for like a hundred bucks or something. It was a heap of shit but we just drove around and around and around in it. It was great. We just went everywhere. I went to visit my Dad, we went to visit my brother and we went into town, went to the beach. It was great. [The car] was a mess. It was terrible. It didn't have a warrant or a rego and every time you went around the corner one of the doors flew open...[But] it would have been a Merc you know. It was just amazing. What it symbolised was incredible. By the time I got it we were living one street away from school so I didn't really need it to get the kids to school but you know. If it had it would have just been amazing to be able to take the kids to do it. But no it was good, it just represented so much more to me. It was a real sense of freedom because I had the keys”.

Jewel



FIGURE 45: Jewel

Debbz's explains the symbolism behind the Jewel (see Figure 45);

“It looks quite different but its quite symbolic...It’s just about the crystal...I am a deeply, deeply spiritual person. There were times that I had to pull into the core of my soul just to get me through...And I literally used to say ‘am I going to get through this?’ ...I either get a rush upwards or a sinking feeling... and I would have a flash of light, like a twinkle or a sparkle. It was just like a diamond catching the light. It would always flash up to my head and I knew that was a sign that I would get out of it. That I really, really would get out of it. And I just had to let life take its course no matter how, but at the end I would always knew that’s what I would get out of it....I would always get this real whooshing sensation and a sparkle of light and I would think that I would get out of it....it was a positive sign. It was just light...That sparkle represented the end to it all, a new life, a new everything”.

Photograph of Children



FIGURE 46: Photograph of Children

“I have added one thing to my box...and it’s a picture of my children. And the reason that I have put them in there is because without them I know I would have taken my own life...At the end of the day the only thing that changed the direction of my life was my children. So they had to be in there.”

In Debbz’s abusive relationship her children were

“the greatest blessing because it got me through...they meant the world to me...They are the core of who I am...My kids are everything...I did everything I could to make their lives as normal as possible when really it wasn’t...”I still did their homework with them all the time, you know that stuff because they were like my one out”. “They were the only normality in my life...They became the only thing that was normal and well good in my life really”.

Debbz was very protective of her children during her relationship.

“He never laid a hand on my children...I like to think that maybe he identified that there was still a spark in me. That you know, I think he knew that if he touched my kids I would have killed him. You know, I mean I wouldn’t have killed him but you know what I mean that was the line. If he had of crossed that I don’t know what I would have been capable of doing if he had hurt my kids”.

Although Debbz credits her kids for giving her strength during and after her abusive relationship and has a strong attachment to them; Debbz was unable to be the mother she wanted while in her relationship with Jim.

“I had always been emotionally available to my children as a mum but not always physically available as I wanted to be”. “I was never allowed to pick Jamie up when she cried or if she was fed and dry then I had to leave her or I was spoiling her...Even though I was screaming out for it, I was never allowed to develop that attachment with her”.

Because the quality time Debbz got with her children was severely restricted by her abusive partner *“We learnt to cherish the times that we had together no matter how small they were”.* *“I just used to drag out bath times as much as I could”* and *“I could still tuck the kids into bed at night and I used to make the most of those moments”.*

The Unrepresented

Debbz recalls other aspects of her relationship during her sessions which were not represented in her Me Box. These are the destruction of her possessions, her trips to the supermarket, having a bath, and rebuilding her sense of self. These are discussed in the following section.

The Smashing and Burning of Debbz’s Treasured Possessions

Debbz’s partner would smash or burn her treasured possessions as a way to control and abuse her. Debbz describes how she felt after her partner smashed her teddy bear canisters and her jewellery box. Debbz explains how *“horrible”* it is to lose possessions that you love.

“One of the things that always happened was that if I got a hiding, I had these canisters with hand painted teddy bears on them. They were just cheap from The Warehouse. Cheap little things. But there were three of them, one big one, a little one and a middle one. And I loved them. And every time I got a hiding he would smash them. You know by the time I got up in the morning he would have given me the money to go and replace them or he would have gone and bought them. I probably would have gone through; I can’t tell you how many sets of those canisters I went through...But he would make this big mess and I would have to clean it up”.

Debbz describes what the teddy bear canisters meant to her,

“I had a sense of loss because I absolutely loved them. They were just so beautiful. It was just something, like I said they were only cheap from The Warehouse, but they were something that I imagined been in a huse in the olden days. They were hand painted and they were just beautiful. They had great value even though they didn’t have much value at all...I loved the way they looked. They just looked really cool in my kitchen because we lived in a state house and when I moved in with him he sold everything I owned...[A]nd we didn’t have a chair that matched or you know knives or forks that matched or anything. And so they were something that I always thought were very beautiful and they matched. And I thought they were probably the most beautiful things that I owned you know...Everything else was pretty crap really.

Because Debbz loved her teddy bear canisters so much, every time Jim smashed them

“it was horrible. It was like every time it was like a little part of me died every time he broke them. He would do it on purpose. He would just pick them up and smash them or he would just smash them and leave them there for me to clean them up later. He just enjoyed it. Everything he knew meant something to me he got rid of eventually, if not consistently and then it would be replaced and wrecked again. He just liked to take things away from me that gave me any sense of pleasure other than him”.

Debbz’s partner also smashed the jewellery box her father gave to her as a gift. She vividly remembers the day she came home to discover it was broken.

“My Dad bought me this beautiful hand carved...jewellery box. It played the most amazing bit of music and I have never been able to find it again since...I treasured it, I absolutely treasured it”. “It was something I found very beautiful and I loved the sound of it. It was a positive tie between my Dad and I when things were so good”. “And I often kept it hidden from him because I didn’t want him to know how much I loved it. And then one day we had this massive argument and he packed all mine and the kids’ stuff in rubbish bags and he had smashed my um jewellery box. And I will always remember picking the pieces up and just crying and crying because it was just so precious to me and stuffing the bits in the bags and walking down the street with these friken rubbish bags with the kids and hearing the music box playing. Out of the bag with my smashed jewellery box with the music box still playing...I will never forget that”. I have not quite got over the loss of my jewellery box. I have got over the loss of just about everything else but not the jewellery box”. “I loved that so much but

he just wrecked everything. He wrecked my clothes, he would you know he would cut my clothes up, he would smash everything in that house". "I had beautiful lingerie when I first met him and he burnt it all. Everything. Burnt everything." "He would just whatever he could, anything he could, as long as it was mine. If it belonged to the family it was not so bad but my stuff just went."

Supermarket

"The supermarket shopping represented so much more than supermarket shopping". "The only time I ever had to myself was an hour a fortnight where I would go and do the grocery shopping. And that was timed. But it was my only freedom ever". "I would always drag it out for as long as I possibly could...I would always make sure it was as close to my hour before I got home". Debbz describes what the supermarket meant to her, "It was everything, absolutely everything. I had no control over...[my life] except for a the supermarket, even though I couldn't leave that supermarket it was like liberating because it was my time and it was my thing".

"It wasn't even the supermarket, it was the freedom that was connected to that. It was the only place I was ever allowed to go on my own without him...the only time I had any freedom from him was the supermarket. I had an exact list and you know that sort of thing like of what I was allowed to buy and what I wasn't um it was just a place without him. And it was wonderful."

"Oh it was wonderful. I could talk to...[my children] and touch them and particularly with Jamie...that time with her it was just magic for me. It was like I could touch her and hold her". "No one would have ever known what was going through my mind as I was traipsing through the supermarket you know. I was mum and I was free and I was me...It was amazing".

The Bath

"I loved having a bath. The bath was the only place in the house that had a lock on it. So it was, he probably could have kicked the lock in if he wanted. But I used to go and I would bath every single day...But he painted all the bathroom windows white because he thought that I would be in the bathroom trying to make contact with people or something like that. So he painted all the windows and jimmed them so I

couldn't open them...I saw it as my safe place. It was always the place that I could go to. And yeah for some reason he never tried to kick that door in".

"He just left me there...I don't have a memory of him being threatened by it...He knocked every other door in but not that one". "I could just be in there and lie in the bath". "It was my place of safety. It was a place I could go and just cry. I mean I never had bubbles, I never had, I only had sunlight soap to wash myself with. I never had anything that made it any more special than just the fact it was a bath. And it was a room where he left me alone".

When Debbz was going through therapy for her abusive relationship the bath was still a significant space for her.

"When I was going through therapy for three years, I would come straight home from therapy and get straight in the bath. It got to the point where Bart would run the bath for me when he knew I was on my way home...I would just have to go into the bath. I could cry in there or just process and do what I needed to do. It was my small and honestly it still holds huge value".

"It's still a very therapeutic place for me to be in water...Its my time. I would read a magazine or a book or something but it was mine". "Yeah but that is something that has still stayed with me, for whatever reason. I think originally it was a sanctuary thing but now it's more than that".

Starting to Create Me Again

"Each time I did something it filled in a little bit more and I started to create me again and it was wonderful". Debbz describes two experiences that helped her regain her sense of self and her self-esteem - a train ride and studying for her degree,

"I remember getting on the train one day after we had been in this house for about two weeks. I said to the kids, 'let's just catch the train into...[the city] you know. And we did. Oh my God it was just so much more than a train trip for me you know. It was the freedom. I used the word liberation and that's what it really was".

"It felt amazing. It feels amazing now, I have goosebumps now. Yea no it was wonderful. It was like a little bit of me grew back each time I had one of these experiences...It was just a sense of empowerment and wonderment and being able to do the things that people wouldn't think twice about doing. Yeah. That train trip

symbolised everything”. “It was all those little things, lots of little things that happened and to get to the point where I was completely free from him again”.

Debbz also enrolled in tertiary study which helped her deal with leaving her abusive partner.

“I got home one day and there was this big pile of books and boxes with my work in it and I just thought it gave me something to work towards, to get my mind of it. Because no matter how horrible your relationship is in domestic violence there is still love there. And you need a grieving period to get over what you have lost. So um yeah that really helped me through my grief period”.

Debbz describes how she felt

“when my books arrived I was so excited. It was like I guess it was the first real opening of the door to the rest of my life. This is what I am going to build my life on for the rest of my life. That was wonderful”..

DEBBZ'S COLLAGE
FIGURE 46



Debbz's collage representation of her experience (see Figure 46) focuses on the possessions that gave her strength during and after her abusive relationship. These are tertiary study, the car, makeup, the bath, her children and the "*sparkle of light*" that kept her going.

The books themselves are stacked up to reflect the studying Debbz did after her separation with Jim. They are stacked on top of each other because her degree is what she was "*going to build her life on for the rest of my life*". As well as providing a future for her and her children, tertiary study also gave Debbz an opportunity to keep her mind occupied while going through the separation with Jim.

On top of the book is a picture of her children. They are the biggest object by size in the collage. This is because her children are the most important thing to her and "*at the end of the day the only thing that changed the direction of my life was my children*". Her children were the one "*sense of normality*" Debbz had in her life. "*Without them I know I would have taken my own life*". They gave her the strength to keep going and to leave her abusive partner.

On each book spine an image is placed that represent possessions that she used to help her cope with the abuse. On the top book is a car. During her relationship the car her partner bought her was a "*big fat burden*" on Debbz because it was just another possession Jim could use to exert his control over her. Once she left the relationship the car she bought meant much more to her than just a car. It was the "*real sense of freedom because I had the keys*". Each time Debbz experienced a small sense of freedom, such as her car and the train ride, a "*little part of me grew back*".

Makeup was another aspect of her life that her partner took away from her but she quickly regained once she left Jim. In the collage makeup is represented by the lipstick on the middle book spine. Makeup was also something that helped her rebuild her life. Debbz is self-conscious of her skin so when she put makeup on for the first time since she left Jim "*my self-esteem started growing again*". When Debbz put makeup on for the first time in eight years "*I felt like a million bucks*". "*I thought you know I was still a beautiful person and I could get on with my life. It was a real turning point*".

Finally on the bottom book a bath is depicted. Because the bathroom had a lock, the bath was the only place in the house she was able to be without her partner. Within her relationship the bathroom was a "*place of safety*". The bath also helped Debbz deal with the effects of her

eight year abusive relationship. Debbz would submerge herself in the bath straight after going to therapy where *“I could cry in there or just process and do what I needed to do”*.

The blue jewel at the bottom right of the page sends a beam of light over the books and the photo of Debbz’s children. This beam of light is representative of the “whooshing sensation” Debbz got when she would reach her bottom. *“It would always flash up to my head and I knew that was a sign that I would get out of it. That I really, really would get out of it”*. In her collage the jewel lights up the path to *“Her new life. Her new everything”*.

Rebecca

Rebecca and her partner are recent parents a little boy with. Rebecca is a 23 year old New Zealand Caucasian. As a Christian, Rebecca enjoys attending Church with her sisters; however because of circumstances she attends sporadically. Rebecca spoke mostly about the love she has for her new son in Session One and her excitement for this new stage in her life. Her son was born prematurely so Rebecca was at the hospital every moment possible to be with him and she takes immense pride in her skills as a mother.

Rebecca was in her abusive relationship intermittently for around three years. Her partner was both emotionally and physically abusive toward Rebecca. They met at a tertiary institution where they both boarded and after graduating they moved to the same city. Although they stayed together a lot, they were residing separately for the majority of their relationship.

REBECCA'S ME BOX AND COLLAGE

Rebecca's Me Box

Figure 47 shows Rebecca's bright orange Me Box with a blue tissue liner.



FIGURE 47: Rebecca's Me Box

Rebecca's Objects

Figure 48 is a picture of Rebecca's completed Me Box.



FIGURE 48: Rebecca's Completed Me Box

Notepad

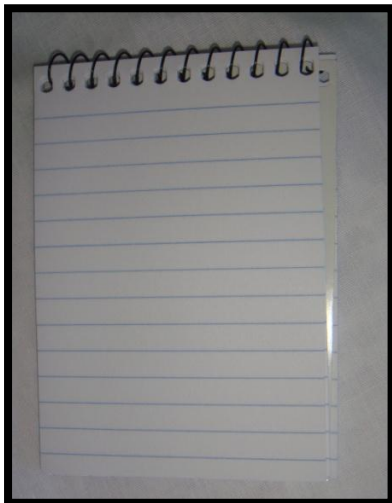


FIGURE 49: Notebook

The notebook (see Figure 49) was chosen by Rebecca to reflect her love of writing. Writing has always been a big part of Rebecca's life, *"I have always love writing"*. At a young age Rebecca kept diaries and journals because she is quite a shy person and found it hard to express her feelings verbally.

"Writing has always helped me deal with stuff. Because I have never really been good at talking about what I have been going through and that but I can write about it. And

I don't have to think about it and whatever I am feeling I can just write what I want".
"I would get really upset and just shut down and so for the way for me to release it was just for me to write about it".

The hiding of her journals began when she was young and often her diaries would have locks on them. She had a collection of diaries when she was younger and *"always want new ones to write in with pretty little covers on them"*.

Rebecca wrote frequently when she was with her abusive partner. When questioned what she wrote about, Rebecca revealed *"What he did to me, how I was feeling, what I wanted from life, what my dreams were, what he said his dreams were and all the promises he would make but would never happen"*. Rebecca wanted to *"get married, have kids"*, and wished her partner would *"stop being an arsehole"*. Although it was hurtful and *"really hard to write about and it used to make me cry and feel upset. But um it was always just kind of the reasoning myself like he won't do it again and he was sorry and all of that"*. Because he diaries were *"for me...not for him"* Rebecca would keep her diary hidden *"probably under the mattress or under the bed or in a cupboard somewhere where he would never go and look"*. However, occasionally she would leave it out open for her partner to find. Rebecca explains, *"occasionally I would leave it out purposefully to show him what I had written or if he asked to see something."* *"I wanted him to read it to see how much he had hurt me and that it might make him change and make him stop doing that"*. After her partner would read her journals *He would say how sorry he was and he would never do it again and he didn't mean it and all that kind of stuff that he didn't really mean"*.

Rebecca's mother also sent emails to her on a regular basis giving her advice on Rebecca's situation. At the time Rebecca *"didn't read them properly"* *"because the emails were basically telling me to leave him and things. So I kind of just filed them away and ignored them. I thought she was just being annoying and that she didn't know what she was talking about"*. At one stage in her abusive relationship Rebecca felt as though she had lost the support of her family; however her mother still sent her emails. Rebecca admits she was *"so stupid"*, *"I was so stubborn"*. Now her family *"are the most important people in my life...no way would I ever hurt them the same way I did"*.

While at a retreat to deal with the abortions she had during her abusive relationship, Rebecca wrote a letter to her partner and to each of her unborn children. Rebecca explains the process of writing these letters,

“at the end, after we had been through everything we had to write um letters like to our partner or whoever we were angry at, it could have been ourselves for what we did. But yeah whoever we were angry at. So mine was to...[my abusive partner] because he was a big reason why I had gone through with [the abortions]. Um and we had to do a letter to each, well depending on how many abortions you had had was how many letters you did to um your child. Just writing, saying whatever you wanted or what you would say to them if you got to see them or whatever”. “I had actually already written my letters before I went to the retreat. It was just something that I felt that I needed to do so when I got down there I had already done part of it so I used those letters that I had already done. ...Because, to me I felt like I had already done that and I didn’t want to try and write it again because it would have just been kind of confusing to have two when I had already put myself in that place, written what I felt and all that”.

After reading these personal letters to the group, the one to her partner was burnt. When asked about what the burning of the letters meant, Rebecca revealed that *“you do it and you kind of move on, you don’t dwell on it and keep going back over it you just let go”*. Burning the letter provided a

“finality...it’s actually gone and you just have to watch it burn and there is nothing left of it. Whereas rubbish, you throw it away but I guess in a sense it is still there somewhere. It just gets moved from place to place to place so anyone could find it and read it at some point...Whereas burning it no one else can see it or read it”.

Stone



FIGURE 50: Stone

When Rebecca saw the pebbles amongst the provided objects she was reminded by the stone (see Figure 50) she received from a retreat she attended to deal with the abortions she had during her abusive relationship. At the retreat Rebecca was invited to choose from a variety of stones that she would carry around and keep. Rebecca explains that there was no conscious process of choosing the stone she did.

I just reached in and picked one. I think at that point I was still, it was so hard trying to deal with it and trying to see, yeah finding a way to get through it that it didn't really mean too much at the time. It was kind of just like 'oh ok pick a stone'”

The stone acted as a reminder “that we got through it and we did it and we will be ok”. Although she does not look at it, the stone is kept in her handbag. Her handbag was chosen so that she was unlikely to lose it but also “it can stay with me because I take my handbag everywhere”. It has become a reminder to Rebecca that she was finally “healed” from her relationship and the abortions.

Angel



FIGURE 51: Angel

While at the retreat Rebecca also received two angels (see Figure 51), one for each abortion she had.

“At the end [of the retreat] before we went home we all got an angel...That was just a reminder of what we had been through but also we could heal from it and come out on the other side of it. So I keep...[the angels] because I am never going to forget them. They were, would have been two of my children. So um they will always be a big part of me. But yeah. So I keep them hanging on my little jewellery thing”.

When Rebecca fell pregnant the first time there was no question of whether the child would be kept. Her partner immediately said that they would get an abortion, “he said ‘this is what we are going to do, this is the best thing for us...I just kind of let myself believe that that it was the best thing, the easiest thing’”. Her partner made the decision

“we would have an abortion and that was kind of that. Yeah there was really no discussion about it, it was just he decided and that was that”. “There was no other decision to be made. If that’s what he had said we were doing then that’s what we were doing”.

The second child Rebecca made the decision. Rebecca was fearful that her partner would hurt her child.

“I didn’t want that tie to [my partner] that I knew if I had it I would never walk away and he may hurt my child and he just wasn’t there for me. So we went ahead with the abortion, well I did”. “It was hard. It was my baby, another one that I was getting rid of. So it was definitely hard”.

Poem

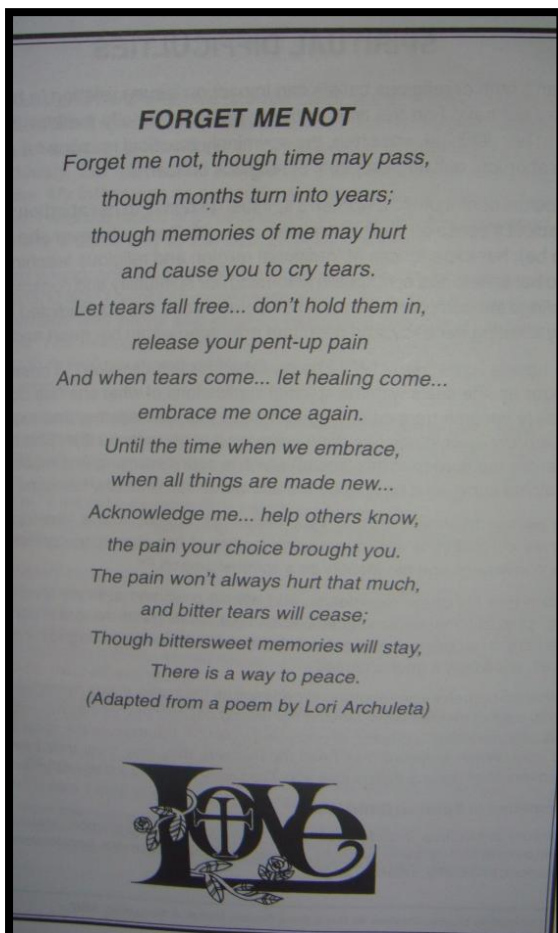


FIGURE 52: Poem

This poem (see Figure 52) is from a booklet that Rebecca's mum gave her when she was still dealing with her abortions.

"Mum had already found this website, Pathways I think it was called, and um they send out little booklets about post abortion stress and like symptoms to look out for and little ways to deal with it and poems and stories and that. And so she had sent me that [booklet] and given me that".

Rebecca "used to look at that quite a bit" because it helped her deal with how she was feeling and her experience. This is her favourite poem from the booklet. Rebecca did not reveal the reasoning behind why she liked this particular poem.

The Unrepresented

Church

Rebecca was brought up in a Christian household and has attended church on an irregular basis throughout her life.

"I went to Church when I was younger and we had been brought up Christian and everything...I had bought a bible and things before I went to...[study]. So I had already trying to get back to that stage and then I kind of met my partner and that kind of just threw it all completely out the window. I wasn't willing to make the sacrifices like walking away from him, stop living with him and not be married and all those kind of things. So it was just kind of a half-hearted attempt and effort. But just to find some peace kind of or just yeah just an outlet and just some time away from him really".

During her abusive relationship Rebecca would attend Church and pray.

"I have always prayed and took part [in Church]. Even when I was with him. Like I have always prayed. I have never stopped, even when I wasn't in Church or anything. Especially like if I was afraid or anything then always I would pray. I am such a sook of the dark and being home by myself".

Church was what made Rebecca realise that she was "living a lie" and ultimately was the catalyst of her and her abusive partner's separation.

“I kind of wanted to stop drinking and wanted to change my life. So I went back to Church but it wasn’t anything to do with him really until we were doing the testimony. I realised that I was living a lie. I was with him when I was telling all these people my story and what I went through yet I was still back with the one who was causing all the pain and hurt and things”.

This ‘testimony’ had the

“theme courage. So it was basically based on each woman’s courage. Whatever the testimony was it was their way out of it. So for me it was a brief overview of what I went through. I didn’t mention the abortions and that because I wasn’t ready to have that judgement or anything...So for me to say that I left him and you know that I felt I had to let go of him”.

The testimony enabled Rebecca to “let him go” and

“gave me the final push to actually tell him it was over for good. And it was me this time telling him, not him being a dick and just walking away for whatever reasons. For the first time it was me truly saying ‘it’s over’”.

Bonfire

Rebecca burnt all of the items she had that reminded her of her abusive partner and their life together. Rebecca describes the night of the bonfire,

“It might have been a staff party for the year. And so we always have it out at Mum and Dad’s and there is always a bonfire. And I don’t know if I had been watching something on TV and saw them burning stuff or what. But ah I had already packed, everything he had given me was already in plastic bags. And like the scans from the babies and stuff. And all the journals I had written about him and stuff. Clothes he had given me, jewellery he had given me. And things were already packed away in bags. And um yeah they went to like the bonfire and I was like ‘I don’t want this’. So I went to Dad and was like ‘Dad can I put this on the bonfire?’ and he was like ‘what is it?. ‘Stuff from my relationship’. ‘Yup’. Chucked it on and that was that. It was all gone...It felt good. It was just gone from my life and yeah I just didn’t have anything that I had to see and be reminded of him. I could just work on moving on and getting over it and not be constantly reminded of him”.

REBECCA'S COLLAGE
FIGURE 53

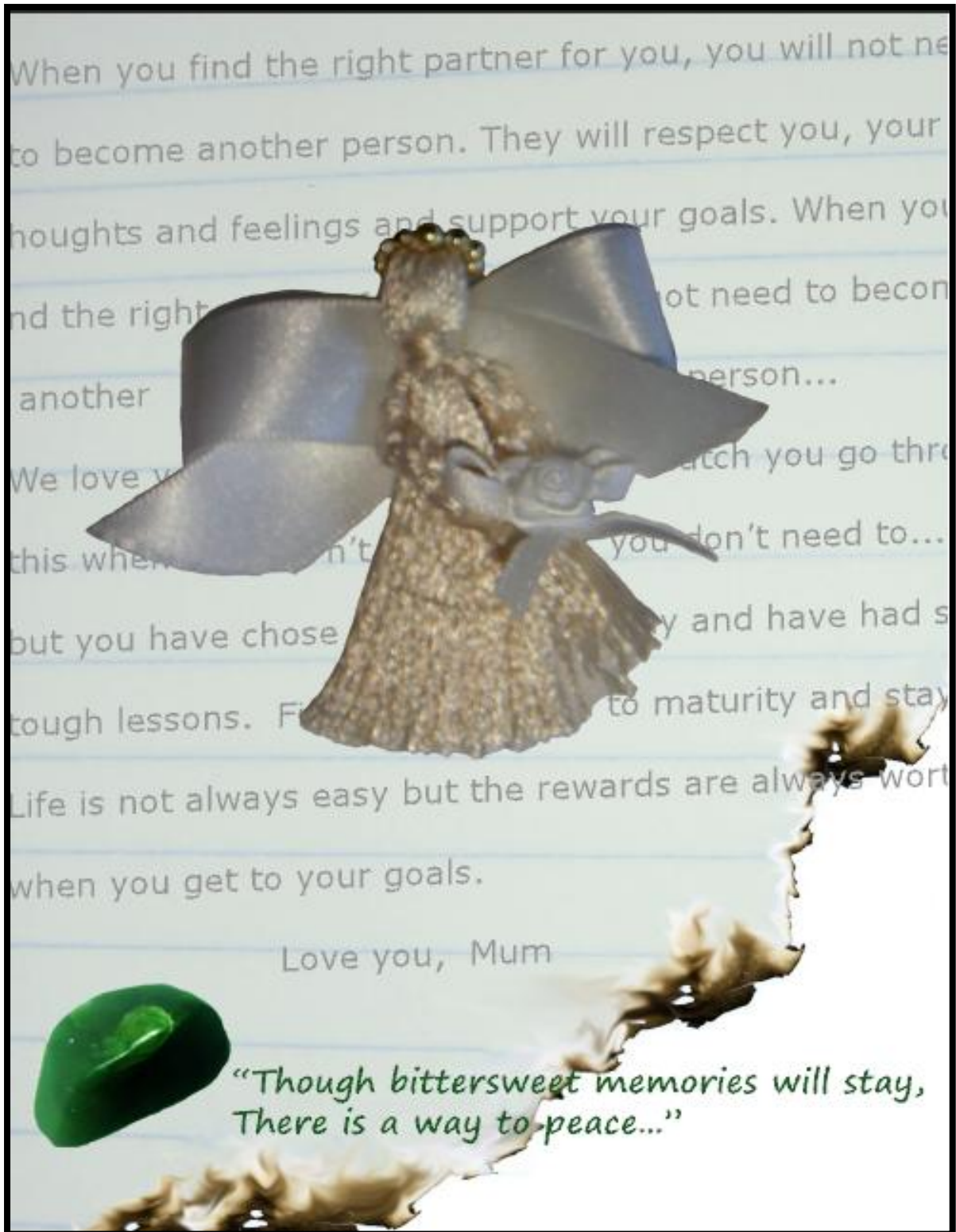


Figure 53 depicts the collage representation of Rebecca's experience. The majority of her collage focuses on the use of possessions to move forward from her abusive relationship. The background is an amalgamation of the notebook she chose for her Me Box and an email from her mum Rebecca read out in her second session. In the email her mum gives her advice on her relationship with her abusive partner. In the collage the email is in the background because Rebecca never read the emails at the time of her relationship. However, through these emails Rebecca was able to maintain a small amount of support and connection to her family. The notebook is also in the background because writing is something Rebecca has done all her life, including in her abusive relationship. "*Writing has always helped me deal with stuff*" in her life that she does not want to say out loud or to another person. Through writing about her experiences Rebecca was able to cope with her abusive relationship and the effects of the two abortions had on her well-being.

The angel and stone are on top of the notebook and email because they represent the retreat and Rebecca dealing with her relationship, specifically her two abortions. The retreat was a place where Rebecca could admit her feelings, accept her past decisions, and realise that she "*could heal from it and come out on the other side of it*". The angel is the focal point of Rebecca's collage as the loss of her two unborn children was one of the hardest aspects of her relationship she had to heal from. Her children will always be a part of who she is but the retreat helped her grow and heal from the abortions.

The burning away of the paper at the bottom right hand side symbolises the bon fire where she burnt the items that reminded her of her partner. This burning symbolised the "*finality*" of her relationship and "*I could just work on moving on and getting over it and not be constantly reminded of him*". The quote from Rebecca's poem, written along the bottom, reiterates that although you can't forget your past you can move forward. The empty space on the bottom right hand side is the new life she is creating for herself now. Like a blank diary waiting to be written in.

In the following chapter, Chapter Five: Women's Use of Possessions to Cope with Abusive Relationships, I present stage three of the analysis process. The women's Me Boxes and their lived experiences of how they used possessions to cope with their abusive relationships were analysed using a hermeneutic phenomenological framework of interpretation (Thompson, 1997). The findings revealed five main themes: nothing given back; my space; secret objects; finding me; and differing importance of possessions. These themes are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Women's Use of Possessions to Cope with Abusive Relationships

Although every woman's abusive relationship experience is different and the women included in this study had different lived experiences; there were common themes among them. These five themes were; nothing given back, my space, secret objects, finding me, and the salience of possessions. This chapter discusses these five themes in relation to relevant academic literature in order to understand women's use of possessions in coping with an abusive relationship.

Before the discussion of the relevant themes, the definition of what the women perceived as possessions is important to understand. Belk (1988) asserts that possessions can extend beyond external objects and can be defined as what we call "ours" or "mine". In this study the women discussed possessions that went beyond material objects and included their family, pets, experiences, places, body parts, and time as something they had control or ownership of and therefore was 'theirs': "*something that was strictly mine*" (Tina).

1. 'Nothing Given Back'

This theme encompasses a number of negative aspects of the women's abusive relationships, explained through the sub-themes of; subservient women, 'ownership' of women, and control of women's possessions. These sub-themes are discussed in relation to their impact on the individual woman's well-being and self-identity.

SUBSERVIENT WOMEN

"Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve..."
(Timothy 11:15 the New Testament).

The objects the women chose for their Me Boxes to represent the negative aspects in their relationship often focused on their servitude to the household and domestic chore items, such as a kitchen sponge, cupcake papers and clothes pegs. These items were representative of their role within the relationship, as Tina explains, "*all of the menial house jobs...They all automatically became my jobs somehow*". The women, specifically Tina, Tallulah, Debbz

and Rebecca, felt they became a “*subservient woman*” (Debbz) who cooked and cleaned for their partner. Although these menial chores are not themselves abusive acts; they became a symbol of the control the partner held and the distortion of reciprocity within the relationship. Tallulah explains, “[H]e was quite happy when I was doing his cooking and his washing and his cleaning but when it actually came to giving something back to me...there was no reward...there was nothing given back” (Tallulah). The abusive partner enforces his belief of superiority through the ownership of *his* woman and by controlling her possessions.

Abusive relationships align with traditional gender roles where the woman becomes submissive to her partner and her role is defined in terms of serving the household (McConnell, 1991). Stereotypical sex roles within an relationship stem from a man’s need to control his woman and from “a patriarchal society in which men hold disproportionate power over valued resources and in which women are subservient to men both within the marriage and in all important facets of society” (Pfouts & Renz, 1981 p.452). These patriarchal traditions exist within an abusive relationship where rigid sex roles are prevalent and the man perceives he has higher status within the family (Yoshihama, 2000).

OWNERSHIP OF WOMEN

The subordination of the women in this study preserved traditional gender roles where the women were regarded as owned possessions of their respective partners. This sense of ownership stems from the male exerting control over the female and absorbing the her into his own extended self (Kacen, 2011). Stephens et al. (2005) suggest that a woman can become an extension of the man’s self because the more he feels he controls his woman the stronger his belief that he owns her. Many of the women within this study confided that their partner had ownership over them. Tina chose to place her ring in her Me Box because as her relationship progressed the ring was no longer a symbol of love but it “*became more of a symbol of ownership and it made it clear that I was his. I belonged to him*”. Similarly, Honour and Debbz also felt that their respective partners had “*complete ownership*” (Honour) of them and their lives. Debbz included a lock and key in her Me Box to represent the idea that her partner Jim held the keys to every aspect of her life.

Stephens et al. (2005, p.63) “suggest that there can be significant physical and psychological effects from being incorporated into another’s extended self” . As seen with the women who participated in this study, being classed as ‘possessions’ of their partners and consequently being engulfed into the men’s extended selves, stripped the women of their own identity.

“Men look upon women as possessions...possessions...don't have a mind of their own. [When] a man has complete control, then they become possessions. Once he has taken away pretty much their self-worth, then they become nothing” (Raewyn).

CONTROL OF WOMEN'S POSSESSIONS

Possessions can become incorporated into a person's extended-self; therefore an unintentional loss or violation of those possessions can result in the loss or violation of self (Belk, 1988; Sayre, 1994; Stephens et al., 2005). Within an abusive relationship context, the man will commonly ban, restrict, damage, or destroy the woman's possessions as a way to restrict, damage or destroy her self-esteem or self-identity (Stephens et al., 2005). The abusive partner will primarily target possessions that are not associated with him and only a symbol of the woman's own sense of self. Debbz explains, *“He just liked to take things away from me that gave me any sense of pleasure other than him”*. Similarly, Honour's partner forced her to throw away a photo frame made for her by friends, isolating her from friends and any her life outside of their relationship. Tina's partner dictated the way she dressed as he had issues with her wearing what he considered 'revealing' clothing. Tina was also not allowed to wear makeup. Banning Tina from certain clothing styles as well as makeup was *“a control thing from his point of view really”*. Jim controlled the way Debbz dressed and how she presented herself; banning her from shorts, singlets, makeup, hair removal, and shampoo. In doing so Jim was taking away *“the symbol of my spark, and what I did consider attractive of myself was gone”*. Being able to have access to beauty products *“would have been an easy way [for Debbz] to gain a tiny bit of self-esteem back”*. The abusive partners stripped the women of their freedom, their self-confidence and their identity.

The destruction of possessions can be a direct attempt to destroy a person's self-esteem and self-identity (Stephens et al., 2005; Wiggins, 1974). Belk (1988) explains that a person can experience a feeling of deep grief and enter into a period of mourning when possessions are lost or destroyed. Debbz describes the effect on her sense of self when her partner smashed her teddy bear canisters: *“It was horrible. It was like every time [he smashed the canisters] it was like a little part of me died every time he broke them. He would do it on purpose...he just enjoyed it”*. Debbz's partner also destroyed the jewellery box her Dad gave her. Debbz was so affected by the destruction of her jewellery box that she has *“not quite got over the loss”* of it.

2. Secret Objects

The women in this study hid significant possessions or the meaning of the possessions from their respective partners. This was to prevent the possessions from being destroyed, taken away, or to avoid triggering their partner's abusive behaviours. In doing so, the women were preserving their self-identity and well-being.

Debbz and Honour kept treasured possessions hidden from their partners to avoid the involuntary loss of those possessions. Debbz's partner smashed or burnt "*anything he could, as long as it was mine*" so she "*often kept [my jewellery box] hidden from him because I didn't want him to know how much I loved it*". The jewellery box provided her with a connection to her father and was a positive link in their relationship. Honour kept a photo frame which connected her with her friends, hidden in a cupboard. Honour's partner asked her to throw it away but instead she hid it because she was "*so sick of him controlling everything I did*". The concealment of these significant possessions was an attempt to maintain a connection to their family or friends. "*It was something that my friends had made me and I wasn't allowed to talk to them so at least I could keep something that meant something to me*" (Honour). Price et al. (2000) assert that possessions can extend beyond their functional use; possessions can immortalise significant relationships; symbolise life stories or experience; or harbour a totemic sense of belonging. Both the photo frame and the jewellery box were gifts from significant others, increasing the possession's significance. It has been asserted that when gifts are given, something of the owner always remains (Gregory, 1982), that the gifts embody deeply felt emotions (Belk, 1988); and that the most successful gifts affirm the identities of both giver and recipient (Sherry, McGrath, & Levy, 1993). These greater functions of the women's possessions helped maintain their sense of self (Belk, 1988), essentially forming the catalyst of their concealment.

Tina and Tallulah hid significant possessions or the meaning of these possessions from their respective partner in order to avoid further abuse from their partner, gain control, or to ensure the preservation of their well-being. Tina bought clothes without her partner knowing, "*I would hide shit in the wardrobe for ages after I bought it*" because Tina would "*get into trouble...because he would notice [my new clothes] and pull me up on it*". For Tina, buying clothes was also her way of "*rebellling*" and gaining control back over an aspect of her life. The colours of the clothes that she bought were a way Tina could express herself. Although Tina had a low self-esteem during her relationship, dressing up in her secret clothes and putting on makeup would boost her confidence and remind her that she was attractive.

Tallulah hid the significant meaning of her 'Believe in Yourself' tile from her partner. The meaning of her tile was "*a little secret that I have with myself. Like a little 'you can do it'*". The tile also reminded Tallulah of her mother and that "*one day I would get the better that I deserved*". These secret significant possessions provided something positive in the women's lives, boosted their self-esteem and contributed to their individual well-being. Brown, Collins, and Schmidt (1988) propose that individuals with low self-esteem seek indirect self-improvement by attaching themselves to material possessions and to people that possess significant value. Similarly, Chang and Arkin (2002) and Chaplin and John (2007) have suggested a relationship between the adjustment of low self-esteem and materialistic consumption. In keeping these special possessions a secret, the women were able to increase their individual well-being.

3. My Space

Through the use of significant possessions the women created a safe 'My Space'. These significant possessions were *mental totems* that only the individual woman had physical or psychological access to. Due to the women's unique connection with their significant possessions their My Spaces were secret spaces where they were able to physically and emotionally cope with their abusive relationships.

Each woman created her My Space differently, through possessions that were unique to themselves and their relationship. Waldrop and Resick (2004) recognise that every abusive relationship forges unique situational circumstances and the coping strategies women employ to cope with their abusive relationship are dependent on these circumstances. The Me Box objects each woman chose and the possessions those objects reflected, acted as a type of mental totem for accessing her unique My Space. For example, Tallulah was able to reconnect with her family through looking at photographs and her 'Believe in Yourself' tile. Debbz felt a sense of "*liberation*" and was able to be the mother she wanted during her mundane trips to the supermarket and Tina became more than a "*cook and cleaner and a change the channel*" when she dressed up in her "*pretty party dress*". These mental totems were accessed exclusively by the individual woman and enabled their My Space to remain secret.

The women's narratives revealed that their My Spaces were unique secret spaces, to which only they could retreat to when they needed physical or emotional distance from their partner. An individual is able to create an exclusive memory with a place or object only when they

have access to it (Hernández, Carmen Hidalgo, Salazar-Laplace, & Hess, 2007). This space remained a “*secret*” from her partner because he did not have ownership of or access to the totem; regardless of whether this totem was tangible or intangible. Tallulah explains:

“I don’t think he really would have got some of the meanings behind the photos...he didn’t really think too much of it...I wouldn’t even know if he even noticed [the tile] ...So whether he even saw it or realised the significance I don’t know” (Tallulah)

The women in this study used their special connection with their possessions not only to transport themselves to their My Space but also to keep their abusive partners out. Their partners did not “*realise the significance*” (Tallulah) of the possessions and were often not involved or not around when the women retreated into their My Space. Hodgetts et al. (2010) suggest that people’s connections to a place or to an object allow them to hold unique feelings toward that place or object because of their personal experiences. As shown above, Tallulah had a close relationship with her family, where as her partner did not have one with his family; therefore, he did not understand the potential significance of the photographs or the ‘Believe in yourself’ tile. Because their partner did not hold that unique connection with the woman’s ‘possessions’ it allowed the woman to gain ownership over her possessions and subsequently her My Space. Because their My spaces were secret, they were physically and emotionally safe from subsequent abuse from their partner. These spaces were safe spaces and helped the women to cope with their abusive relationships.

For these women, their My Space was a vital component in coping with their abusive relationship. Theorists emphasise the significance of such personal space: “[A]busive relationships...generally involve severe restrictions on personal space and freedom of movement” (Ogle, Maier-Katkin, & Bernard, 1995, p.183). Additionally, within a violent relationship the home is a place where a woman can fear physical, psychological, or sexual crimes. Such fears contradict a woman’s expectations and rights to a safe home (Warrington, 2001). Therefore, the women often created safe My Spaces outside the physical boundaries of the home. The women in this study found solace from their partner outside their home, in places such as, tertiary study institutions, the supermarket, and church. The women discussed that although some of these places were “*phenomenally boring*” (Tina), the places meant much more to them than the service the physical place conventionally offered. Rebecca attended Church during her abusive relationship to re-establish her connection with God but also “*just to find some peace...[and] an outlet and just some time away from him*”. Honour

enjoyed attending university classes and learning but “*not being near him was the best*”. For Debbz, “*The supermarket shopping represented so much more than supermarket shopping*” it was “*my time and it was my thing*”. Regardless of whether her space was psychological or physical, inside or outside the home, this was a place where she was able to be herself. Tina explains,

“I would put [my red dress] on, put some music on – music he didn’t like [and dance around the lounge]. It was escapism...It was me time. It was time where I didn’t have to watch out what I said or think about what I was doing...I could just concentrate on myself in those moments” (Tina).

Significant places can provide individuals with a sense of security in times of uncertainty or unrest (Altman & Low, 1992a). Honour and Debbz used their My Space in the shower or bath to physically protect themselves from their abusive partners. The bathroom had a lock so it became a “*safe place*” (Debbz). The bathroom also provided the women with time to process and deal with their abusive relationship. Relph (1976) explains that important spaces can transform into spaces of care during times of volatility. The My Space of the bathroom gave the women time away from their abusive partners as well as a place of physical safety and respite.

To these women, their My Spaces kept them “*sane*” (Honour), “*reminded [them] of who they were before the relationship*” (Tallulah) and helped them regain some self-respect and self-worth. The women used personally significant possessions to access their unique My Space. This My Space was accessible only to them because of mental or physical barriers that prevented their partners from entering it. In this space, the women felt safe from their partners’ abuse and were able to regain some sense of self that had been lost in the relationship. In their My Spaces the women were able to be themselves.

4. Finding Me

Once the women left their abusive partners the women used possessions to cope with the effects of their abusive relationships. The women used possessions to reclaim themselves, re-establish their futures and reaffirm their self-identity.

Women who have left their abusive relationships are often left devoid of their self-identity and self-worth (Sleutel, 1998). The women in this study had their core beings taken away from them by their partners controlling and abusive behaviours.....

When the women first left their abusive partners they described a “*first euphoric state of freedom and rediscovering myself...Finding me*” (Tina). Here the women entered a period of new found freedom where they often involved themselves with activities or possessions their partner had banned. Honour “*did all the things he had banned me from doing*” such as dying her hair, joining the gym, and spending time with friends. Through the process of ‘discovering’ themselves again, the women reconnected with their bodies (Wesely, Allison, & Schneider, 2000). Honour spoke of being able to join the gym when she left her partner; reconnecting with her body through physical exercise:

“I was going to bring a photo of my running shoe because I thought that was like me walking away from it all and gaining some sense of freedom back, being able to walk wherever I wanted and like taking care of myself again. My body was mine again and I could take care myself and go to the gym and get healthy and happy again” (Honour).

The women also reconnected with their body and minds through other physical means. The women used clothing, nights out with their friends, new hobbies, and physical bonding with their family to reclaim their identity. Debbz remembers bonding with her children after her abusive relationship:

“We just had this massive influx of emotional time and physical time as well. And we would bath together... We were just how it should have always been and we would do everything together...it was wonderful”

Similarly, Tina lost weight, dyed her hair, and “*slept with all the boys*”. Tina admits the period directly following the breakup of her abusive relationship “*was great because I could reinvent myself. I started everything new...there were no preconceived notions of who I should be or how I should act so I got to...create a new me*”.

Wuest and Merritt-Gray (2002) describe the stage of *moving on* following an abusive relationship. *Moving on* involves the woman “shedding the identities of victim and survivor, and of moving through the process of figuring [the abusive relationship] out, putting it in its rightful place, launching new relationships, and taking on a new image (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2002, p.60). Debbz *moved on* and wore makeup, bought a car which she had the keys to and rode the train. Debbz describes how she felt during this time,

“There was nothing left of me at all that I identified [as being me]. So each time I did something it filled it in a little more and I started to create me again and it was wonderful...It was just a sense of empowerment and wonderment and being able to do things that people wouldn't think twice about doing” (Debbz).

Hassouneh-Phillips (2001) suggest that once women leave their abusive relationship they seek to gain new insights about who they are and search for new meanings in their life. Raewyn explains that before she left her partner she was unsure if she could cope without him being there. However, once she did leave him Raewyn wondered why she hadn't done it years before. She discusses her feelings surrounding leaving her partner:

“It's not until they leave that you realise you can cope but you also get a lot happier and you start looking at yourself...I finally let him go and once I realised that I was able to move on...it [took] a lot of soul searching” (Raewyn).

Raewyn began to fill in the “*huge hole*” in her life that was left by her abusive relationship. Raewyn obtained her gun and pilots licence and began to realise she was able to live a richer life and that she was able to accomplish things for herself.

“The day that I started to stand up was the day that I actually was flying aeroplanes and saying ‘Yeah I can do it’. It wasn't the day that I left Josh's father. I was finally doing something for myself and that's when things started to get better” (Raewyn).

“[The first day I went to the shooting range] was the day that it finally turned around. Because then you start meeting people, and getting out there and realising shit I can do stuff. And that's what it was all about” (Raewyn).

Debbz also began to look toward the future and enrolled in tertiary study. Not only did this occupy her mind and enable her to better cope with leaving her abusive partner but it also was “*what I am going to build my life*” on; a “*new life*” that did not include her partner.

Rebecca also used possessions to move on from her abusive partner. Rebecca burnt all of the possessions she had that reminded her of her abusive relationship. To Rebecca, the bonfire meant she was able to “*work on moving on and getting over it*” and no longer had “*anything that I had to see and be reminded of him*”. He “*was just gone from my life*”.

Many of the women in this study look on new identities when they left their abusive relationships and in doing so rejected or collected possessions that enforced their ‘new self’.

For example, Rebecca burnt the possessions she owned from her abusive relationship. This ritualistic burning of those possessions helped her move through an important life event – moving on from her abusive partner. As with many of the women in this study, the attachment and detachment of significant possessions helped the women cope with and adjust to the change in their lives (Belk, 1997).

Through the use of possessions the women were able to unlock themselves from their partners extended-self, reclaim their own extended-self and reaffirm their own self-identity. Through re-attaching and creating new attachments to significant possessions the women were able to re-establish their self-identity. By including new possessions, such as makeup and accomplishments, into their extended-self the women were able to communicate a new self. This self was no longer attached to their abusive partner; the women stripped themselves of the victim stereotype and actively became independent and unique women.

5. The Salience of Possessions

The women experienced self-doubt and a loss of control due to their abusive relationship. Consequently, the women varied their degree of attachment to these possessions as a way of psychologically gaining self-confidence and control; restoring their threatened self-identity. The women attached themselves to and disposed of significant possessions over time in order to cope with their abusive relationship.

Studies such as, Chang and Arkin (2002); Ger and Belk (1996); Braun and Wicklund (1989) and Daun (1983) suggest a relationship exists between materialism and consumer coping with uncertainties; particularly self-doubt and a loss of control. Possessions are able to externally communicate symbols of desired personal image because of the perceived meaning of the possession (Thompson et al., 1990). Therefore, when consumers experience feelings of self-doubt they may seek materialistic compensation by acquiring possessions that symbolise aspects of themselves that are under threat (Braun & Wicklund, 1989; Chang & Arkin, 2002). However, Daun (1983) asserts that materialistic beliefs stem from a need for control rather than from the pursuit for meaning. Individuals who experience loss of control may seek materialistic consumption to compensate for the need for control and freedom (Daun, 1983; Ger & Belk, 1996).

The women in this study experienced times of self-doubt and loss of control due to their abusive partner. Both Tina and Debbz lacked confidence in themselves while in their abusive relationships. Tina had little self-confidence in her appearance and was unable to dress the

way she wanted to in fear of sparking her partner's abusive tendencies. Therefore, Tina used the colour of her clothes to express her individuality and let the world know *"I'm still here"*. Debbz explains that before her abusive relationship she was *"an attractive young woman"* and wore makeup every day because she was self-conscious of facial scarring. However, in her relationship *"everything that made me the strong person I was before had been chipped away"* and she was banned by her partner from wearing makeup or putting any effort into her appearance. Makeup was something that Debbz *"leant to just let it go. It was not worth fighting about"*.

When these women left their abusive relationships however, their attachment to their possessions changed. Tina no longer experienced feelings of self-doubt and her clothing choices are no longer heavily influenced by colour. Tina is,

"more likely to buy [clothes] because I like the shape of it rather than the colour and colour plays a lesser part. I am still attracted to the bright colours [but] it's no longer a question of standing out because of the colour".

Tina's partner is no longer able to control the style of the clothing she wears and Tina does not need to use bright colours to express herself and to stand out anymore.

When Debbz left her abusive partner her feelings of self-doubt remained. She was still self-conscious about her facial scarring and returned to wearing makeup as a means to cover up and feel more confident about herself. Being able to wear and buy makeup is even more important now because of her abusive relationship and not wearing it for eight years. Debbz reasons,

"I still like putting makeup on. It sounds so stupid. It's something that most people just get up and do or don't think twice about...It's standard practice for me to wear makeup now but it's a novelty to be able to go and buy it".

Honour had a similar experience with the photo frame she kept hidden from her partner in her wardrobe. At the time Honour felt an immense sense of control because her partner asked her to throw it out but instead she hid the frame from him. When Honour left her partner the first thing she did was put the photo frame up in her room. However, Honour reveals that she does not know where the photo frame is anymore. The perceived control Honour had over her possession, and the lack of control she had over her life in general, could have enhanced the bond she had with her photo frame (Furby, 1978). The photo frame was a major symbol of

control over her room for Honour during and immediately following her abusive relationship. However, as time progressed, the photo frame became less important to Honour and less involved in creating a sense of control.

Ball and Tasaki (1992) suggest that the degree to which a possession is used to facilitate self-identity varies with the progression of the individual's self-identity as well as the relationship between the individual and the possession. This occurs because the individual's self-identity alters or the possession is no longer able to support the self. The individual will therefore voluntarily discard the possession. As seen in the women's lived experiences, the meaning of and their attachment to significant possessions fluctuates over time. The women used and discarded possessions that compensated for their feelings of self-doubt and loss of control. The attachment to these possessions helped the women cope with their abusive relationships in rectifying internal feelings of incompetencies.

The women in this study used possessions in a variety of ways to cope with their abusive relationships. The collage representations further emphasise these women's feelings of relief and escapism when using their significant possessions. Raewyn's collage powerfully illustrates how possessions helped her rise up and leave behind the *black hole* of her abusive relationship. The use of the two contrasting colours, black and red effectively demonstrates the stark contrast between her dark abusive past and her liberating and independent future. The colour red also emphasises her boldness and inner strength. These collage representations and the discussions of these five themes effectively portray the women's use of possessions in helping them cope with their abusive relationships. Specifically, how significant possessions provided a place of respite, an outlet of self-expression and aided in the rebuilding of their sense of selves.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Previous literature has examined how possessions are used to cope with life stressors (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 1997; De Ridder, 1997) as well as the role possessions have in abusing women (Kacen, 2011; Stephens et al., 2005); however, limited discussion exists in regards to the use of possessions to cope with abusive relationships. This research therefore investigated women's use of possessions to cope with abusive relationships through the use of an art-based method, the Me Box (Gibbons, 2010).

The analysis and collage interpretations of this data suggest that women use possessions to cope with abusive relationships. The women used these possessions to re-gain their sense of self and contributed to their overall well-being. This was evident through the five main themes: nothing given back, secret objects, my space, and the salience of possessions. The first theme, nothing given back, supports Stephens et al. (2005) and Kacen (2011) findings that a woman's possessions are used by the abusive partner to threaten, control and victimise her. The themes secret objects, my space, finding me, and the salience of possessions indicate that women use their attachment to possessions to cope with abusive relationships. This attachment to their significant possessions helped restore their self-identity. These women kept significant possessions a secret from their partner in an attempt to prevent the possession from being destroyed or to avoid triggering their partner's abusive behaviours. The theme My Space involved the women using their attachment to possessions to create a physical or psychological safe space. The women used a variety of situational possessions as a *mental totem* for accessing their unique space when they needed physical or psychological refuge from their partner. Here the women were able to be themselves, escape from their partners, and re-establish their self-identity. The theme 'finding me' suggests that these women also used possessions to re-connect with themselves once they had left their abusive partner. These women sought out possessions that helped establish a new identity that was not connected with their abusive partner. Finally, the theme 'salience of possessions' suggests that the women attached and detached themselves from significant possessions throughout and beyond the duration of their abusive relationship. The women did this to validate parts of their selves that were under threat. Once the women no longer felt the need to externally

validate internal feelings of inadequacies of their selves, the women detached from those significant possessions.

This thesis indicates that significant possessions enabled the women to cope with their abusive relationships through attachment to possessions. These significant possessions let them escape their partner, re-established their sense of self, and contributed to their overall well-being.

Contributions

The findings of this thesis make both theoretical and methodological contributions. The findings of this thesis supports Belk (1988) and Furby (1978) characterisation of what a possession essentially is. Possessions can extend beyond physical objects and can include achievements, people, pets, values and concepts such as the human soul. The psychological appropriation of a possession can be attained simply by a sense of ownership.

A majority of domestic violence literature discuss the victimisation of women within an abusive relationship (see Ferraro, 1997). Moreover, consumer research studies have predominantly examined how possessions are used to abuse and victimise women (e.g. Stephens et al., 2005). This thesis indicates that women can actively use significant possessions in creative and proactive ways to cope with their abusive relationship. These women came up with ways that were unique to their circumstances and their relationship that helped empower them and gave them a sense of self. These possessions gave them an identity other than being the victim.

This thesis also contributes to art-based research studies. The use of the Me Box method and the collage interpretations supports Gibbons (2010) research of sensitive and deeply personal topics. The art-based method also indicates that the combination of visual and written forms can help the illustration of emotions that would be difficult to elicit through using words alone (Gibbons, 2010; Pink, 2007).

Implications

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH:

This study has uncovered potential areas for future research. The existing knowledge regarding the use of possessions to cope with abusive relationships is very limited. This thesis has laid groundwork for future research to examine further. This thesis included specifically New Zealand women in heterosexual relationships. Future research could therefore

investigate the effects of culture, sexual orientation, or relationship status in regards to how individuals use possessions to cope with an abusive relationship.

The application of the Me Box method has contributed to the foundation of art-based methods in qualitative inquiry and supports a direction for further research. The Me Box method has helped facilitate interviews regarding deeply personal and sensitive topics (see Gibbons, 2010). The use of the Me Box method has potential to be used in studies examining other sensitive topics as well as help facilitate topics that individuals find difficult to conceptualise.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE:

The findings of this thesis have potential impacts for social agencies who work with abused women. The findings stand to support the healing and re-building of women's self-identities using significant possessions. This thesis indicates that agencies could actively encourage women to bring significant possessions with them when they seek help. The agencies could also use these significant possessions to aid in disconnecting the women from their identity as a victim and reconstruct their sense of selves.

Limitations

Six New Zealand Caucasian heterosexual women, who were from middle to upper socioeconomic groups, participated in this study. It is recognised that the generalizability of this study is limited and the findings are not representative of all women or all abusive relationships.

Due to unforeseen circumstances the time between Session One and Session Two for Debbz was a month and a half. Although it did not create any noticeable complications, it may have been hard for Debbz to reconnect with the process.

Both Rebecca and Raewyn had only two meetings each. In respect to Rebecca, Session One and Session Two were completed in her home. This meant that during Session Two, when Rebecca was constructing her Me Box, she added her own items as well. This meant that Session Three became redundant and would have made Rebecca feel like she was repeating the process unnecessarily. I ensured that I gave her the option of continuing to add to her Me Box over the next week and contacted her 10 days after Session Two to ensure she had not added anything more to her Me Box. In the case of Raewyn, she was apprehensive about coming to speak with me even before Session One. However, she wanted to come back for one more session as she was curious to take part in the Me Box method. Because Raewyn

was emotionally sensitive when talking about her past and at times became overwhelmed, I did not push for Session Three. I felt as though the insights gained in Session One and Session Two were information rich and a third session was unwarranted. Additionally and most importantly, I felt as though a third session could potentially harm Raewyn emotionally, and her psychological state was of the utmost importance.

Reflections of the Author

I cannot begin to describe what the examination of this thesis topic has meant to me. I stated at the beginning of this thesis that I do not regret the actions of my past as they have made me the person I am today. Specifically, I do not regret the relationship I had with my abusive partner. I know that this experience made me a stronger woman and it was also what sparked my interest in this thesis topic. Through understanding the women's experiences I have also been able to better understand my own abusive relationship. Although at times it brought up unpleasant memories, I feel as though my thesis journey has enabled me to heal. I have been able to shed the label of victim and survivor and I have become Bronwyn again. I cannot put into words this feeling, I can only describe it as re-gaining an identity that was once lost as well as gaining a completely new one. For this I am forever grateful.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Group Email

Interested in taking part in a women's study to help other women?

My name is Bronwyn Elphingston-Jolly and I am conducting an art-based research project on the role of possessions in women's coping with abusive relationships. I am beginning my Master's thesis in Marketing at the University of Waikato. I chose this topic because I have a passion for it and also, because this work has the potential to help individual women and other women in New Zealand society.

I am seeking women who live in the North Island of New Zealand. The research project will involve a series of three sessions where you will collect possessions that represent how you cope with being in an abusive relationship. These possessions will then be used to make a collage of your experience, which you will be able to keep. I hope that you will find participating in this research both a beneficial and an empowering experience.

You don't need a background in art or to be very creative - this study will focus on how your collage represents your experiences rather than the artistic quality of what you produce. You will need to be able to talk about your experiences, and be comfortable discussing these experiences with me. Your comfort and confidentiality will be a top priority throughout the research process and a number of steps will be taken to ensure this (e.g., the use of code names to guarantee your anonymity).

If you would like to be part of this study, please, contact me for more information,

If you know of anyone else who would be interested, please pass on my contact details,

Bronwyn Elphingston-Jolly

Email: ble1@students.waikato.ac.nz

Appendix 2: Participant Information Booklet



Women Coping with Abusive Relationships: The Role of Possessions

1. Who are the researchers and how can you contact them?

Bronwyn Elphingston-Jolly is conducting this research study as part of her masters degree in marketing management at the University of Waikato. If you have any questions or problems please contact her on:

Email: ble1@students.waikato.ac.nz

Bronwyn's Supervisors are:

Dr Lorraine Friend

Department of Marketing

Email: lfriend@waikato.ac.nz

Mary FitzPatrick

Department of Marketing

Email: maryfitz@waikato.ac.nz

If you would like to speak to anyone other than the researcher, please do not hesitate to contact Bronwyn's supervisors.

2. What is this project about?

This research project will explore the meaning of possessions to women in coping with an abusive relationship. It will investigate your experiences with possessions and how you coped with your abusive relationship using an art-based method.

The art-based method used is called a 'me box' method. You will be given a box, called your 'me box', which you will add objects to that represent your experience. These objects will be provided by both Bronwyn and yourself.

There will be at least three interviews that will last between one and two hours each. There will be a two to three week period between interviews, or at a time that suits you.

An initial interview may be needed so that you and Bronwyn can get to know each other and you can ask questions about the research project.

The first interview will be conducted at a location that is both convenient and comfortable for you. Bronwyn will bring with her a selection of boxes (your ‘me box’) that you are able to choose from. She will also bring items that you can choose that represent how you coped with being in an abusive relationship. The items you choose are then put in your ‘me box’ and you are able to keep them. Bronwyn will ask you about these objects and what they mean to you. These objects are then photographed by Bronwyn.

Bronwyn will then discuss with you the next interview. She will ask you to collect items that you also would like to add to your ‘me box’ that represent how you coped with being in an abusive relationship.

You will bring these objects to your second interview. As with the first interview, Bronwyn will ask you to talk about the items you have selected to put in your ‘me box’. Bronwyn will also photograph these objects.

In the third interview, both you and Bronwyn will compile a collage from the photographs taken of your ‘me box’ objects in the two previous interviews. This collage will be a representation of your experience and the role of possessions in your way of coping with an abusive relationship.

As well as being able to keep your ‘me box’, Bronwyn will also send you a copy of your collage. Along with your individual collage, Bronwyn will also make a collage from all participants’ experiences.

3. How will the information collected during your interviews be used?

The information collected during your interviews will be used in Bronwyn’s masters thesis. This information will be seen by Bronwyn’s two supervisors as well as external examiners. The information may also be used in conference presentations and academic publications. Any names or identities will be kept confidential (see Section 4 for details).

4. What degree of confidentiality will be provided for you and the other participants?

Your confidentiality will be first priority in this research project. Your identity will be protected by the following measures:

Firstly, you will be given a code name to protect your identity. You may also use a code name for any other person mentioned in your story, as to protect their identity. Additionally, any place names or information that is able to identify you will also be changed or omitted.

Your audio recordings, transcript, photographs and contact information will be kept separately to make sure no one is able to identify you. Your audio recordings will only be accessed by Bronwyn and they will be deleted following their transcription. At request, you will have access to your transcript. You have the right to omit any sections that you do not wish to be used.

You will also have the option of digitally altering or substituting any photographed objects. This is so that when the images are published personal objects can not be traced back to you. You will also have the option of not being directly quoted and your transcript be omitted from publication.

5. What will you gain by participating in this research project?

There will be no remuneration offered for participating in this research project. However, studies show that some women find participating in domestic violence research beneficial. You may find that participating in this research project a potentially empowering and healing experience. You may also find this to be a learning experience and are able to better understand yourself and others' experiences.

6. What if you find the research project upsetting at any time?

You may, at times, find this research project potentially upsetting. If you find yourself in this position you may need to talk to friends, family, or professionals.

Bronwyn will be available to talk to about the research at any time. If you find that you are having difficulty with the subjects being discussed during the interview, you can take a break, stop the interview or pull out of the entire research process. You will not be

pressured to answer any questions and the interview will only cover what you wish to talk about.

NOTES:

7. What if at any stage you wish to opt out of the research project?

You can contact Bronwyn, or any of her supervisors (contact details in Section One of this booklet) if you have any problems regarding this research project. If you find that you wish to discontinue participating in the research you can email Bronwyn and let her know. If you want to discuss anything further Bronwyn is able to phone you or set up another meeting to go through any questions you may have.

You will have a week from the date of the final interview to change any information or pull out of the study. You must contact Bronwyn or one of her supervisors to let her know if you wish to change information or opt out of the study.

