

STUDY TWO: Negotiating Identity

Making autonomous choices, living as a single woman, are acts of political and ideological resistance (Byrne, 2003, p. 459).

If there is a shift in public perception of the independent woman and her role in the social hierarchy, is this apparent to her? How does she respond to the positions ascribed to her by social discourse? This chapter gives voice to her reflexive perceptions about the positions available to her at the beginning of the twenty-first century by which I hope to contribute to a feminist psychology of women's independence, the first objective of this project.

Following brief discussion about the function and effects of social identity in Section 7.1, I will consider notions of contradiction between self and social identity construction, and the role of resistance to ascribed social identity in maintaining wellbeing among the marginalised. My method is described in Section 7.2, with a profile of the women who contributed to this study and how they were recruited in Section 7.2.1 and how the discussions were organised in Section 7.2.2. The process of analysis is described in Section 7.2.3, from early intimations of identifiable discourses recognised in the transcribing process, to flexibility in coding nodes as themes grew or were found to be an element of a larger discourse. I will revert to conventional marital status descriptors for much of this chapter, to correspond with the terminology used with participants.

Results of the analysis are presented in Section 7.3, beginning with the three discursive repertoires used by discussants to interpret indices of transition in the social identities of single women (Section 7.3.1). These were deficit/stereotype (Section 7.3.1.1), independence and achievement (Section 7.3.1.2) and circumstance and choice (Section 7.3.1.3). Commonalities among all discussants introduce Section 7.3.2, leading to the repertoires used to make sense of the contradictions between the stereotypic and the actual experience of singleness. Section 7.3.2.1 describes the use of comparisons by discussants, drawing from both their observations and their

experience of single and coupled life, to reposition their identity from that ascribed by public discourse. Closely linked to status comparison is status apartheid (Section 7.3.2.2) where participants talk about their resistance to marginalisation from coupled society including active adoption and defence of a single lifestyle. Issues of independence and freedom (Section 7.3.2.3) related to being single or coupled are canvassed, related to opportunity for achievement (Section 7.3.2.4) afforded by singledom. The results section concludes with the final repertoire (Section 7.3.2.5), that of friendship and its value for both single and coupled women.

This chapter concludes with discussion (Section 7.4) of some issues of the process before reflecting on the role of identity and indicators of transition in the discursive construction of the public identity of independent women. I suggest that a corollary of the search for independent practice by increasing numbers of women living single is reduced salience of the moral values underpinning current power relations, which may presage paradigmatic social change.

7.1 Background

An individual's social identity is grounded in acknowledged membership of a group, attributes of which are the product of culturally shared, normative belief systems (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Joffe & Staerklé, 2007). The essential criteria for group membership and social identity are self- and ascribed categorisation (Tajfel & Turner, 2007). The process of categorisation is discursive (Augostinos & Walker, 1998; Gallois, McKay, & Pittman, 2005; Gough & McFadden, 2001), involving evaluation and comparison (Festinger, 1954), weighted by value and emotional significance attached to the affiliation (Tajfel, 1982b) and its compliance with dominant ideology (Tajfel, 1982a).

Ideology ascribes group membership to individuals within a hierarchy ordered by the dominant group against norms understood by all related groups (Deschamps, 1982) that frame the regulation and guide our understanding of our social worlds (Beattie, 2007). Social status is a function of group comparison, exaggerating intergroup difference and enhancing intragroup similarities (M. Brewer & Brown, 1998), with concomitant stereotyping, prejudice, privilege and group allegiance. A fundamental function of stereotyping is to support the status and privilege of an in-group, in a

macro-social context, by penalising and stigmatising groups that vary from the cultural default (Augostinos & Walker, 1998; Billig, 2002; Fiske, 1998).

Contestation by members of an out-group of their ascribed status generates a strong defensive reaction from its oppositional in-group to maintain and justify dominance (Brinkmann, 2010; Crocker, et al., 1998; McGarty, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 2007). In Western cultures, default in-groups are Christian, from the middle classes and are heterosexual (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). As found in the previous chapter, independent women are marginalised from another default in-group, the culturally idealised norm of adult relational interdependence.

Characteristically, members of an out-group are defined, labelled, by that membership, with no explicating nuance (Mehan, 2001), unlike the individualisation afforded members of an in-group (Deschamps, 1982). That is, members of an out-group, a social classification, are perceived as unidimensional types to assist organisation and simplification of the social world, whereas individuals in an in-group draw on their many narrative sources to construct a rich, complex, personal identity (Loseke, 2007). Those so stigmatised are generally very aware of their ascribed place in contexts where this is relevant (Baumeister, 1998), with a commensurate impact on their behaviour and self-concept.

To be ascribed, or to claim, membership of a group is to be socially situated, positioned, by patterns of belief that discursively construct repertoires of behaviours and possibilities (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). To be positioned negatively can bring costs to intellectual functioning, agency, health and wellbeing; conversely, a privileged position enjoys high human, social and cultural capital (Schooler, 2007).

Generally negative framing of the independent woman in the general press of 1999, and to a lesser extent in 2009, indicates that her social identity and position, with attendant systemic disadvantage, should be problematic for her wellbeing. Yet, always-single women's high physical and mental health status is acknowledged (Flood, 2005; Michael, et al., 2001; Verbrugge, 1979) although this advantage is lost statistically for independent women *per se* when data from all non-coupled cohorts are aggregated (Murphy, et al., 1997; Verbrugge, 1979). Infrequently noted, the

wellbeing disadvantage for previously married women, including widows, is comparatively short-lived (Anson, 1989; Feldman, et al., 2000; Gray, et al., 2010; Mastekaasa, 1994), as might be expected as stress symptoms recede and circumstances change (Brehm, et al., 2002; Jeter, 2000; Mastekaasa, 1994; Stack & Eshleman, 1998; Thoits, 1992).

7.2 Rationale

At the end of Chapter 2, I asked what it is that protects independent women from the adverse affects of their marginalisation. According to theories of its construction, the Self is grounded in personal experience of reflexive consciousness, interaction within one's social environment, and executive functions of choice and control that enable effective social agency (Baumeister, 1998). These frame the private (individual personality), the public (connections and role relations) and the collective (shared prototypical properties) selves (M. Brewer & Yuki, 2007). This means that the positions a subject constructs for herself are not necessarily those ascribed by others, creating contradiction between private and public identity.

This contradiction was evident in two studies related to single women's identity construction. The first was the development of a model for researching identity construction that clearly delineated self- and social identity (Byrne, 2003). The elements of self-identity were its construction through interaction with other people, self-knowledge, care and practices of the self, a capacity to talk about their self-identity, and using that knowledge to either seek change or reinforce their position. "...Self-identity for single women is not a matter of being defined in relationship to others (as wife, as mother, as daughter) but rather is defined by oneself in chosen relationship with others" (Byrne, 2003, p. 459). Social identity was embedded in dominant ideologies, primary identifications (e.g., gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation), secondary identifications (e.g., nationality, occupation), social value, and social stigma. "Social identities for single women revolved around stereotypes of fussy, selfish, choosy, particular, spinsters, women who were dried up, 'staid, old, not living', single women who hated men, old maids, wallflowers, women who were left on the shelf and who had 'something wrong with them'" (Byrne, 2003, p. 451).

The four interpretative repertoires found in the other study of women's discursive construction of their single lives (Reynolds, 2008; Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003) could be thought of as self and social identities although the authors do not discuss these in terms of private and public constructions, rather as a set of ideological dilemmas from which to construct an identity of singleness. The first of these repertoires was singleness as personal deficit, a construction of single women as having a missing component, a man, and so being less than fully developed. This was described as the "canonical view" (Reynolds, 2008, p. 53), a cultural narrative of singleness. The second repertoire, closely connected to the first, was of social exclusion, strongly represented in discussion about how single women are seen by others for whom a committed relationship is the adult norm. The third repertoire drew on narratives of independence and choice, privileged over a limiting coupledness, which could be thought related to the fourth repertoire, that of self-development and achievement that, it was suggested, indicated "a positive feminist politics of singleness" (Reynolds, 2008, p. 60). Considering the two studies together, it is arguable that the first two of these repertoires reflect social, or public, discourse about single women with the final two drawing on reflexive discourse embedded in personal experience that, while perhaps idealising the single life (Reynolds, 2008), resists public negativity associated with their marital status.

The two studies above described mechanisms for the construction of, and possibilities for, single women's identity with implications for resisting dominant public discourse that marginalises them from normative coupledness. This study will amplify those implications focussing on the discursive strategies used to resolve the dilemma brought by oppositional public and private discourses about unmarried women's social identity, and the power relations in which those discourses are based.

7.3 Method

This component of my project, the discourse analysis of reported experiences and perceptions of in/ter/dependence, was designed to maximise the presence of women's voices so that their self-identity could be compared with its public construction. Participants were aware of the background to the study and its purpose when they accepted my invitation to participate (Appendix C), and were sent the discussion schedule (Appendix D) prior to our meeting to give them time to consider their input

from memory and experience. While this may be thought to influence outcomes, it actually is a useful method for gathering richer data than that possible when no notice has been given of subject matter to be discussed; I was not seeking to trick participants into self-revelation through surprise questions but to learn from them. It also brings a clearer understanding of identity construction when considered narratives are forthcoming that hold the arguments, inconsistencies, contradictions and knowledge that situate the subject positions possible for individuals. Because the terminology in the discussion materials referred to 'single' and 'coupled' women, I will revert to that mode when reporting my method and results, resuming in/ter/dependence in the discussion of the results.

7.3.1 Participants. Because my interest was in attitudes towards, and experience of, single women in general, there was no attempt to attract participants from any particular section of the community. An advertisement for participation (Appendix E) was posted in the waiting rooms of health and consumer services, circulated through book clubs and professional organisations, and community organisations selected for their general membership (e.g., Zonta International) from a directory of women's services. The advertisement invited women to talk about their experiences and perceptions of being single and the impact of a single status on social, work or domestic life. There were no exclusionary criteria, although an expectation that participants would be women aged 18 years and older, with coupled women also invited to contribute their experiences, attitudes towards, and perceptions of the social construction of single women. There were 19 responses to the invitation with a further six participants recruited through snowballing. Because I originally intended to match equal numbers of single and coupled women, single discussants were asked to invite a coupled friend to participate, to maximise similarities in class and interests. Many discussants said they had few coupled friends to ask, others agreed but no subsequent recruiting eventuated. Ultimately, only five of the 25 participants identified as coupled. Two of these responded to the advertisement, the other three were members of interested colleagues' families.

Following an initial expression of interest, background information (Appendix C) about this component of the project, including the discussion schedule and ethical

issues to do with confidentiality and consent, and their freedom to withdraw at any time, was forwarded to prospective participants.

Participants were from broad age (28 – 76 years, mean age 50.56 years, with a standard deviation of 12.65 years) and occupational (full-time dependent minder – paid workforce – retired) ranges. Paid employment was in administration, the professions, and self-employment on a full- or part-time basis. Three participants were mature-aged university students. While the majority were Australian-born, four participants were migrants from Europe and one was from Singapore. Five were living with dependent children, one with friends, four with a partner, and one was Living Apart Together (LAT)¹. Fourteen were living alone, two of whom had twice divorced, and another two had divorced and been widowed from separate marriages. Ten participants, four of whom were mothers, had never married. Of the ten who were single again, eight had children although only one had dependent children. Three of the five coupled women had children, one was pregnant.

7.3.2 Procedure. Participants completed a brief demographic questionnaire at the beginning of the discussion (Appendix F) that collected details of age, education, ethnicity, occupation, parenting and marital status. The relationship categories were developed to allow responses from a diversity of respondents. Sexual identity was not requested because I expected women who identified as lesbian to complete the form in terms of their relationship status (i.e., living with a partner; living single by choice) rather than in heteronormative terms. I was also more interested in participants' experiences and perceptions of in/ter/dependence than the impact of their sexual orientation on these. Responses to the questionnaire were intended only to report participants' aggregated profile with no identifying detail so that anonymity and confidentiality are protected (S Taylor, 2001). The consent form, repeating assurances that withdrawal from the study was possible at any time, was also completed before the discussion. This form had provision for a mailing address, should the participant be interested in receiving a copy of the results of the study. With only one exception, all participants completed this section. A summary of findings was distributed to participants.

¹ Living Apart Together, couples in a committed romantic relationship who live in separate residences (Milan & Peters, 2003).

The discussions were held at a time and place most convenient to each participant. One occurred in a participant's office, the rest either in my or participants' homes. The non-hierarchical informality of the setting was intended to encourage wide-ranging discussion (Oakley, 1981). After some awkwardness at the beginning of the first two discussions where I went straight to the schedule of discussion points, I included an ice-breaking question thereafter about motivation for participation. Commonly, the single women said that they thought there was little research interest in single women and they wanted to redress the balance, similar motivation to that reported by Clements (1998). Some also said they thought the project was interesting, or they were sympathetic to research, or wanted to know the results. Six said they had been encouraged by somebody else to participate. Three added they were motivated by recognising my name, from past acquaintance or feminist activism, giving them confidence their participation would be respected.

This introduction to the discussion brought comment that might not otherwise have been prompted. Similarly, further rich data came from discussion following the end of the formal discussion points when opportunity was given to raise anything that had not previously been elicited. For example, one participant spoke of an elderly, independent aunt who had suicided as advanced age became difficult to manage. The conversational style of the discussions, within the framework of the discussion schedule, contributed to equalising the researcher/subject power differential that might otherwise inhibit exploration of complex issues (De Vault, 1999; Oakley, 1981). Further, my responses to questions or revelations, rather than just their acknowledgement, fostered trust and enabled deeper probing of an issue. I described my marital and maternal status to all participants who asked.

The discussion points covered three broad areas: (i) personal perceptions of women living single including self-description and reasons for their marital status, which regularly brought comparisons of independence and interdependence; (ii) cultural perspectives perceived through other people's behaviour towards them; and (iii) their own lifestyle, preferred activities and companions, attitude to maternity, ideal life and plans for the future. I chose to end each discussion with consideration of first the disadvantages then the benefits of being single or coupled to respect the integrity of

discussants' lifestyles, and to leave them feeling buoyant about their life choices. Discussions ranged in length between 30 minutes to over three hours.

The discussions were audiotaped and transcribed (see Sections 4.2.6.2; 4.2.7.1) with participants' names changed to alpha/numeric code, rather than use first names or aliases, to satisfy assurances of anonymity. The single and coupled participants were differentiated by identifying codes Axx and Bxx, respectively. The "xx" recorded their position in the discussion sequence. It has been said that the use of letters to identify extracts or illustrative discussion related to texts implies lack of interest in sociological categorisation, and that more, tacit information would be provided if first names or roles were instead used (Billig, 1999b). For example, names reveal the sex of the speaker, roles such as 'therapist' 'client' may indicate a power relationship. Billig (1999) considers that alpha labelling speakers is reasonable when analysis is of commonalities, making sense of everyday lives, whereas the greater differentiation by more descriptive labelling of speakers may illuminate rhetorical analysis. In this instance, my analysis is of speech patterns and commonalities rather than technologies of the speech production. My coding protocol lets the reader know that the speaker is single or coupled, which is relevant context for reading a transcript text. Another relevant variable may be the age cohort of the speaker, which will be recorded after a forward slash immediately after a discussant's identifying code throughout this report.

A copy of the transcript of her conversation was offered to each participant to correct, amend or withdraw. Three participants provided further information or clarification that was inserted at the appropriate place in their transcript. Approval of their transcripts was assumed by lack of amending response from other participants. The transcripts were imported to NVivo8 for analysis.

7.3.3 Analysis. The transcription process itself allowed the beginning of the discourse analysis, making familiar broad patterns of talk and alerting me to discourses commonly used by discussants in their narratives of self.

A powerful narrative became apparent as I transcribed the data, one of discussants' resistance to a devalued social position. This fitted a Foucauldian approach interested in power relations, discursive construction of social subjects and knowledge, and

social change (Fairclough, 1992) that persuaded me that this should be a primary focus of this study, along with perceptions of any transition in the social identity of single women.

Before beginning this work with the transcripts, I created a primary node each for transition and resistance, the two foci of the study, under which child nodes (*the nodes*) would be generated by discursive patterns that were identified in the data. I decided that the two pre-determined primary nodes were necessary: first, to facilitate analysis of participants' perceptions of past and present discursive practices within which independent women negotiate their social identity and which corresponded with the second objective of this project, and the discursive strategies used to resist the identities evident in public narratives about independent women that were so powerful in the transcribed discussions that provide the data for this chapter.

Extracts from the transcripts were filed in nodes of commonality, sometimes to several when they related to different themes and topics. The relatively generic labelling of the nodes (e.g., *intimacy* that allowed coproximity of physical, emotional, familial and social intimacies) also enabled identification of devices such as contradiction and argument, variability not initially obvious from relevant extracts grouped together in a more narrowly defined file. This process enabled identification of new categories of interpretative possibilities, drawing from discourses in individual transcriptions and from the corpus as a whole.

Some initial nodes were later found to be aspects of another, larger pattern that subsequently came apparent so were merged with the dominant one. Similarly, examination of the larger nodes indicated content that had sufficient focus to justify their separate filing but I thought were really different facets (e.g., *deficit* and *stereotype*) of the same repertoire so grouped them together for reporting purposes.

Because I want to use participants' language where possible, some brief extracts are included, with transcript line numbers noted (Lxx), as well as more extensive quotation to illustrate discussion. It is not intended to include an extract from every discussion; rather the extracts used are the most representative of commonalities, with richer nuance, across discussions. To maintain transcription replication, the extracts

are not bound by the margins of discussion indentation. Repeated listening to the audiotapes helped ensure integrity of interpretation that might otherwise have been compromised by working only with text interpretation, and its transcription protocols, of the talk. For example, “laughter” in the text could, in the taped version of a discussion, be interpreted as signifying incredulity, embarrassment, or amusement that contributed to interpretative understanding.

7.4 Results

7.4.1 Transition. The early part of each discussion was about societal and participants’ individual perceptions of the social identity of single women, from their girlhood to their current ages. They drew on three repertoires – deficit/stereotype, independence/achievement, and circumstance/choice – to interpret shifts from their original to current constructions and those detected in public representations.

By far the dominant repertoire, *deficit/stereotype* problematised the single woman, pathologising her through discourses of moral transgression and personal inadequacy. These discourses are those that shape public construction of the single woman and were drawn on by single women themselves to give meaning to the identity before it applied to them.

In contrast, the second and third repertoires were more likely to come from personal experience and contested the problematic nature of single living. They were also more likely to relate to single women’s shifting status in contemporary social change.

7.4.1.1 Deficit/stereotype. The problematisation of single women was explained by A04 as their disrupting an otherwise ordered social world.

100 I think they view them still, our society quite, [], not as a nuisance but
101 almost as like [] what do we do with them? [], it’s like, you know, I’ve
102 been doing ballroom dance work and of course there’s always more
103 women than men. As so the quandary is, how do you teach these women,
104 you don’t want to teach them to dance with each other because then one
105 has to do the male role whatever, so it’s almost like “why are they single,
106 can’t they sort this out” so I think society, feels quite [], sorry for us (?)
107 They feel that if we had a partner we’d, we’d be like everybody else. And
108 they wouldn’t have to worry about it, you know. (A04/62)

To be coupled is to be like everybody else or, bearing census data in mind, to be acceptable, causing no concern. A04 is candid about her own response to the

quandary caused by single women in her dancing class when conventional learning outcomes are not compatible with skills practice. She recognises that she is part of the macro problem even while she wrestles with a dilemma from the other side at a micro level.

In response to being asked about their early images of women living single, several participants were unable to recall any single women at all. This may reflect higher marriage and lower divorce rates in the decades following the end of World War II that would have reduced both (i) their presence in the community and (ii) the likelihood of families numbering independent women in their friendship circles, rendering them socially invisible for many people.

For some participants, their memories were of women with unattractive personality characteristics, such as two colleagues who were *very neat tidy (.) very efficient in their work (.) but very narrow and quite intolerant (.) (???xxxx???) they were quite intolerant.* (A13/62, L21-23).

10 *I looked at (.) the people I knew who were living single you know*
11 *to answer that question. I could only think of two. And (.) they were*
12 *both bitter, twisted (laugh)*
13 *Oh were they (?) (AS)*
14 *horrible old women (laugh). So that was my only impression. And I*
15 *recall (...) [], thinking of it as some sort of aberration because I*
16 *asked, why, is Miss L on her own. But I never asked why are people*
17 *married.* (A15/53)

In this extract, A15 recognises the socialising function of a couples culture when remembering that she thought of singleness as an aberration from an unquestioned norm. Single women's deviance from the social norm was sufficiently aberrant as to inspire fear still remembered by A17.

85 *I don't know we were fencing*
86 *somewhere and (..) must have been a boundary fence or something and*
87 *a neighbour was helping (..) and the neighbour's sister was there and*
88 *she (.) my mum went (whisper) "she's a spinster". And there was all*
89 *and I was just kind of scared of her because she was this spinster. And*
90 *my mum was going "oh she's" you know "she's never met anyone"*
91 *and kind of I don't know if she'd travelled gone off and done different*
92 *things and. But I was really you know it was kind of like (.) not*
93 *normal and undesirable. And I remember I was quite frightened.* (A17/42)

The trope of "spinster" was regularly invoked to describe personal early construction of single women whose difference was explicable by their exclusion from conjugal

possibility. For example, 'spinster' meant *Then it was (..) [], like a (...) an old woman with a (.) bun at the back of her head and, [], a bit sour a bit staid [], lonely. Somebody that probably a man wouldn't be interested in. So therefore they were on their own (A07/55, L48-51); the sad and lonely, elderly spinster with lots of CATS (A14/46, L44).*

As a signifier of deficiency and stereotype, spinster had greater salience for older discussants, possibly because it was in more regular use in their younger days. Its negative connotations were well understood to expose the discursive stigmatisation of single women.

And it's that word "spinster" which really is such an unattractive word and said with (..) I don't know, sort of derision, you know like a failure. Fortunately I think that word's been (..) almost eliminated from vocab now 'cause I think it's kind of a cruel word (..) to LABEL someone, (A04/62)

The use of spinster as a pejorative that positioned the single woman on society's margins was compared with the admired identity of "bachelor".

67 *Whereas "bachelor" on the other hand is, is you know, said spoken with*
68 *great glee the joys of bachelor and he's fantastic whereas spinster is like*
69 *that tragedy, thing. (A04/62)*

9 *There seems to*
10 *be this really negative stereotypical (.) of the old spinster but the hot*
11 *you know globe-trotting bachelor and yeah so I prefer to think of*
12 *myself as a bachelorette now. (A18/39)*

A18's satiric adoption of "bachelorette" recognises the power of the word spinster to denigrate single women, and contestation of such marginalisation by positioning herself performing a bachelorhood defined as an admired globe-trotting, pleasure-seeking independence.

Cultural references had reinforced knowledge about the undesirability of a single life for women.

32 *Yeah I actually had quite a (.) there was quite a few different*
33 *conflicting images actually because you (.) I had a good think about*
34 *that one. []. You had this sort of the images (.) from (.) literature like*
35 *(.) I read a fair bit of Georgette Heyer when (laugh) I was younger -*
36 *Absolutely – (AS)*
37 *Still do -*
38 *I had the series – (AS)*
39 *Still do.[]. Every now and then especially when I'm not feeling too*
40 *well I go back into them and read them but []. But you know, there*

41 *was always in those sort of books there was always (.) a real STIGMA*
42 *attached to [] sort of, you know 22 you're just about on the shelf sort*
43 *of thing. [], so there was that kind of image (A14/47)*

A14 went on to describe her early personal observations of women who were artists, writers or career women and who lived alone by choice, images conflicting with those from her preferred literature that left her with an impression that independent achievement and romantic attachment were incompatible for women.

There was general agreement that single women were less marginalised now than in previous decades, particularly in relation to access to financial services, possibly because of their increasing numbers and associated visibility across public arena. However, past constructions still echoed in public policy that privileges the family, such as income supplementation through family bonuses, and in stereotypes about single women's sexuality, particularly for women raising children on their own.

A16 spoke about judgemental interactions with public servants when seeking financial support after the birth of her daughter, the father of whom was denying paternity.

323 *there's sort of assumption (.) of all of the above that you (.) you know*
324 *because you're single you must be some floo (..) or because you're*
325 *single and [] you've had a you must be some floozy and you must*
326 *have slept with 75 (.) men that particular week or (laugh) you know*
(A16/29)

Further reference to stereotypes about single mothers' sexual promiscuity was made by A18 as she described experiences with tradesmen during home renovations.

351 *Yeah. I'm getting there I've kind of worked that way but yeah*
352 *tradespeople. I can't face them and (.) I learned even though it hurts*
353 *(..) don't offer them drinks or food because that's it you want them.*
354 *You know (?) (laugh) a coffee equals sex. So. I mean the plasterer*
355 *went into my bedroom he followed me around my house you know.*
356 *And he tapped my bed and he said "oh this looks like a good bed.*
357 *Good for screwing". I mean he (.) by far was I actually called Today*
358 *tonight and [] I was going to do the secret camera thing because he*
359 *was just vile. But in the end I thought 'I don't care. Here's his*
360 *number' set him up, he deserves it you know. But yeah he was the*
361 *worst. And he was only here for (..) a long time when I think about it.*
362 *Because I said I had to be gone by 2.30 so he made sure that he left at*
363 *2.30 (.) and just the whole time and then I'd go out and he'd still*
364 *follow and it was just shocking. (A18/39)*

A third single mother, A15, was struggling for the meaning of her married male therapist's suggestions of less formal interaction than their hitherto professional relationship, and whether this included his wife. Participants whose children had grown, or who were childless, also spoke of expectations of their sexual availability, that their lack of obvious male companionship signified receptivity to any heterosexual contact no matter how transitory or uncommitted. This linked to another regular comment about coupled women's fear of the attraction of the single woman to their husband.

57 *the single*
58 *woman who might pinch your husband that one. I'm not too sure*
59 *really (laugh). It's not something I've thought about a lot ah (long*
60 *pause) I think there is that perception that I talked about a bit earlier*
61 *that [] (.) of single women out to GET a husband you know it's a*
62 *temporary state that you've got to get out of as quickly as possible*
(A20/55)

This extract illustrates the stereotype of single-again women as home wrecker, desperate to remarry at whatever cost. Yet, while desperation for heterosexual engagement might be ascribed to unattached women, a life lived domestically independent of men could attract epithets of sexual as well as social deviance.

194 *Yes then again I*
195 *think to myself you know, probably, people might think you're sort of*
196 *a lesbian or something like that, you know really, that you live alone*
197 *and a woman and things like that. []. I can remember there's one (.)*
198 *actress in America I think you know she's fighting (.) [], to prove to*
199 *everybody you know that she's not a lesbian she's in her 40s and never*
200 *married and things like that and she has to, you know because the press*
201 *take it up and things like that you know that you must be a lesbian if*
202 *you're single and you're 40 and things like that - (A12/76)*

A12 described several incidents when her sexuality had been questioned by men antagonistic to her friendship with their wives, including her relationship with her sister. In this extract, A12 is relating the example of a public figure, who is publicly refuting claims about her sexuality, to A12's own experience where she, too, was labelled Other for noncompliance with normative gender roles. Younger discussants also spoke of singleness being labelled spinsterhood or lesbianism (e.g. A16/28), labelling they understood to be meant as an insult in twenty-first century Australia.

7.4.1.2 Independence/achievement. In this facet of the single woman construct, discussants drew on models they had admired and respected, in some instances

despite the attitudes of those around them. For A04, it was an aunt whose accomplishments were secondary in her family's opinion of her as racy and pitiable because she was a single woman.

24 *I was thinking about that and the only woman that I KNEW as a single*
25 *woman was an auntie (..) [], and she was never married and she was*
26 *the same age as my mum and my aunties and they always spoke of her as, a*
27 *little bit racy and when I finally met her she was actually a very glamorous*
28 *she was blonde and, had her hair drawn back in a chignon and she was,*
29 *dressed beautifully and she used to paint on silk, [], wildflowers and sell*
30 *them in London Court and I thought she was fabulous she was very*
31 *glamorous. [], but she was always spoken of with a little bit of pity or*
32 *“poor” (...) yeah but she was, [] gorgeous (A04/62)*

A10 had several examples of unmarried aunts, including one who was engaged for more than four decades, and saw parallels between her own life and that of one aunt in particular.

46 *But, no and I was [] (..) very fond of my Auntie Florrie and she (.)*
47 *was, somebody that had sort of (.) done accountancy and she's doing*
48 *accounts, she worked for [a publishing company] and ah (pause) I admired*
49 *her, I mean she lived with a married couple, ah but eventually she was*
50 *on her own. So []. I didn't ah, I related a bit to her I think. (A10/75)*

An older (aged 76 years) participant remembered single women in the country town where she grew up as being elegant, propertied, and whose proficiency with a horse, sulky and whip left a lasting positive impression. A model for A11 (aged 41) was an aunt who had a troubled romantic life but whose profession life, teaching music, was admired.

There were memories of other single women who were pursuing careers in the professions and the arts and from whom notions of personality types arose.

81 *I thought the only one I could think of was when I was*
82 *at school, and I can remember she was a (???xxxx???) teacher. And then,*
83 *at (???named???) University there was a, professor of English who was*
84 *single and I thought both of them, they were both very career-oriented.*
85 *[], very close to their family. [], put a lot into their students. Ah, and*
86 *when I look back I recognise now, I, I was thinking it was like, a little*
87 *barrier, but barrier's not the word. And thought, I recognise it in myself*
88 *now, there's some sense of people that have been independent used to do*
89 *things for themselves and taking responsibility for themselves, having a*
90 *certain air or a certain (..) and I still can't get to the word. That's not there*
91 *in those that have always had someone there for them. Even if they feel,*
92 *they did, they're independent within a relationship. It's still a different*
93 *(...) and I can't put my, quite put my finger on it. (A05/54)*

In this extract, A05 is suggesting single women are more likely to have a quality extra to that of their peers enjoying more conventional lifestyles, a sense of responsibility to self that is not contingent on their relationship to others. This does not imply isolation from family but a self-sufficiency evident in their manner that is absent in coupled women. This perception was echoed by one of the coupled discussants.

74 *The single women that I know(?) Strength. You really. Especially in*
75 *my age category, 50+ []. And even younger like the 20 30 year olds*
76 *around my (.) children's age group they seem a lot (.) have a lot of*
77 *inner strength to sort of get out there and do what they want to do, they*
78 *don't (.) seem to (..) be dependent on others for their existence so)*
79 *Has that always been a perception(?) (AS)*
80 *(pause) Probably never really thought about it, you know. Maybe until*
81 *the last 10 years(?) []. (pause) yeah. I've never I [] thought of single*
82 *women as missing out on anything as being (.) any lesser than someone*
83 *who is in a relationship. No. Consider them LUCKY in some aspects*
84 *but there you go (B03/51)*

This extract is of particular interest because it was amended by B03 during her review of her transcript to

70 *I think I am a person who stereotypes a bit too often. I see single*
71 *women as being career driven, perhaps. Out of necessity maybe. As*
72 *being a bit detached from family orientated activities. Shopaholics. I*
73 *don't have any real grounds for these opinions though.*

This amendment is quite a radical contradiction of the original spontaneously expressed admiration for the strength exhibited by single women, and the value of their independence signified by the use of 'lucky' in relation to some aspects of a single life. On reflection, B03 had drawn on stereotypes to amend her earlier response, rendering pursuit of a career by single women less about vocational satisfaction and doing what they want to do than being a substitute for a family life. Her follow-up comments also implied lack of the inner strength and discipline originally thought to characterise single women, the absence of these attributes evident in compulsive consumerism that labelled single women 'shopaholics', a term borrowed from addiction pathology. The amendment is also interesting for the acknowledgement that it is an unfounded stereotype, that is, a public construction, for which B03 has no supporting evidence yet is sufficiently compelling to want included in her contribution to the study.

For younger women, mothers and grandmothers had provided models of living single, albeit not always voluntarily but *in all practicalities she did it* (A16/28, L74-75).

Some participants spoke of continuing to seek role models, with varying degrees of success, as they mature, in a society that marginalises both the older and the independent woman.

42 *So when I got to my 20s I guess at that age, you know how you hit the*
43 *whole cycle with the biological clock so (.) I clearly didn't want to be*
44 *single. []. But at the same time because [] (.)*
45 *I didn't want to just (.) just you know get married for the sake of being*
46 *married and having children and all that so, I had to give that a real*
47 *think. That's when I started looking for positive (.) role models of*
48 *people who are single, and loving it, and I did find a lady, and she's*
49 *from South Australia. And she was, oh probably in her 40s when I met*
50 *her. And she was lovely, she just (.) lives full-on you know she had*
51 *this abundant life she travels she's a missionary and [] always*
52 *wonderful, I'm still in touch with her today. (A11/41)*

The notion of marrying for the sake of it, or to have children, was regularly rejected by the always-single participants, some of whom were considering single parenthood to satisfy their desire for maternity. Conversely, to marry and have children had been a common expectation of once- and currently-interdependent women, *a package deal* (B01/29, L14) with marriage requisite for women who did not want to raise children alone. Once past child-bearing age, the independent woman felt more marginalised.

325 *Yeah. I don't think we get SEEN once we get past a certain age, we*
326 *certainly don't get noticed or seen. []. By, men of any age. Because*
327 *the older men it seems to me are still looking for the young, sexy, you*
328 *know, blonde, or (..) I don't know, we become, valueless in society I think*
329 *which is, a bit of a shame, so to find role models I'm, for me, to find role*
330 *models, you know older women, who're older than me 'cause I'm, parents*
331 *have all gone. Is very difficult, to find a woman who's working, who's*
332 *single, who's got a fulfilling life I mean they're out there but I'm not*
333 *mixing in those sort of circles probably. But it's hard to find them.*
(A04/62)

Here, A04 is conflating the invisibility of older women to men with loss of social value, in tacit understanding of patriarchal social organisation. As a corollary, their invisibility makes seeking an alternative culture where she might find value difficult. For A04, the invisibility of single women in the mid-twentieth century still exists, for older women, in the twenty-first so that, just as there were few templates for young women to look to that were not of family formation, there is a limited range of models to guide older women's independence.

Words commonly used to describe contemporary single living included "independence", "freedom", "self-reliance", "brave", "strength". It was generally

said that there were greater possibilities for women to be single now than in the past and that this was a good thing even if it attracted disparagement.

7.4.1.3 Circumstance/choice.

164 *but now when you ask me about what does singleness mean to me*
165 *now it, it's life circumstance if I look around and I see a single woman we*
166 *never know, what brings it about, it's [], through choice, [], I don't have*
167 *any stereo (.) types in mind, it's [], [] (..) there's more social acceptance*
168 *of it, I think. []. And especially among younger people I think. [],*
169 *and I also think, [], as a positive of it, actually I didn't think before when*
170 *I went through this, the number of older women who I've met who find it*
171 *very difficult when the partner dies because it, they've never been alone.*
(A05/54)

Several different notions, common across the transcripts, arise from this extract. First is a dominant explanatory concept that independent living is due to circumstances that had not favoured romantic attachment. These may have been that individuals *haven't met the right person, to have a life with* (A07/55, L66), or that they chose not to enter an available relationship that offered less than was acceptable for a lifetime commitment, or that they ended one that had become untenable.

Associated with circumstantial singlehood is that of coupled women becoming involuntarily single through widowhood, and finding singleness very difficult because they are unwillingly single. Also highlighted is the notion of different meanings associated with singleness across the lifespan. These might include young cohorts whose ambition includes marriage, essentially wives in waiting; those who delay family formation to establish themselves financially and vocationally before committing to couplehood; the always-single; those who are again-single through marriage breakdown or widowhood; or those enjoying the fruits of a life well-lived in their mature years.

The second dominant concept is that of choice. B04 offered her perceptions of single women.

113 *Oh there's quite a few they're really quite mixed actually. One*
114 *spectrum is like individual outgoing educated articulate women*
115 *who know what they want. And they choose not to get married and*
116 *they choose not to have relationships. I think that's really positive and*
117 *that's great and that's women doing things and they're empowered,*
118 *that's fantastic. But I guess I still have these sort of cultural things of*
119 *like you're going to be a spinster. Why (.) don't you have a partner?*

120 *You know and those two spectrums clash. And then depending on*
121 *how broad minded I can be (.) I'll fall into one or the other on the day.*
122 *Generally it's more like (.) good on you for doing what you want to do.*
123 *You know. You are able to make a choice. Whereas generations*
124 *before people weren't able to make a choice (B04/41)*

Of all the extracts available to illustrate the point, I chose this one from discussion with a coupled woman to indicate the dilemma of “common sense” understandings of the contemporary single woman as independent or deficient. On the one hand, women practising choice to achieve desired outcomes has only recently acquired (perhaps dubious) ideological value. On the other, heterosexual coupledness is fundamental to social organisation. It could be said that B04 is drawing from a narrow range of women in her construction, the always-single, educated, high-achievers more likely to be competitive in the upper-echelons of the labour market, further confounding gender roles as they compete with, rather than complement, male peers who, with their families, have enjoyed previously exclusive privileged status. B04's discursive struggle is reflecting that of the broader community when it positions this demographic in an out-group, despite its demonstrable socially-valued achievements in other arenas.

The third concept, that independence is perceived differently by generations, is linked to two more identified in the data. They are, fourth, the growing number of independent women and, fifth, increasing social acceptance of the condition. Some participants linked these phenomena, suggesting social change (that is, changing subjectification of the single woman) is being forced by the need for society to accommodate the demographic change brought by the growing numbers of single women, which brings a certain validity to their situation.

84 *In my opinion yep*
85 *it's more acceptable to be single (.) than it used to be it used to be (.)*
86 *some sort of anomaly and (.) you're not (.) any more it's becoming*
87 *more of the norm, almost. (A18/39)*

7.4.2 Resistance. When asked about their ideal life and future plans there was little difference in the response trends. Six single and two coupled women said they were living their ideal life, another coupled woman said she was on track to achieving it. A majority of the single women reported a need for a higher income to support both their current and future needs, as did one coupled woman. Nearly half of all

participants wanted more opportunity to travel. Five of the single women would welcome a romantic relationship albeit not necessarily a live-in arrangement.

Only one single participant's ideal would be enjoying a conventional family life ... *I think my ideal life would have been just (..) the way it was but everyone happy* (A03/56; L590-591). The value of negative instances is that they paradoxically support overall findings through being identifiable as aberrations, they may be sufficiently aberrant to induce analytic modification, or they may be explained by additional information that obviates their contradiction (Seale, 1999b). In this instance, A03 was expressing regret for her coupled, family life not achieving its potential as her ideal life, a sentiment that might have been, but was not, echoed by other discussants, rather than determination to recreate a new coupled life. In fact, she foresaw in her future life continued employment, expansion of a social life that was currently in the doldrums due to chronic ill health, and her children settled into their own family formation, with no suggestion of desired romantic attachment.

Six single women had no plans for the future, content to live each day as it comes. The majority of single women, and one coupled participant planned to develop careers or change jobs, continue study, undertake self-development or rediscovery, learn craft skills, or pursue international work or volunteering opportunities. Some were incorporating travel into their futures, including two who had compiled lists of places and activities to be experienced. For many, actively working to accumulate or consolidate resources for retirement was a priority.

Given the commonalities, with the exception of financial security, between the single and coupled participants' current lives and future plans, the question to be asked is how do these single women manage the (albeit diminishing) social censure of their independence to construct identities and positions conducive to wellbeing and achievement.

As might be expected, comparisons and evaluations dominated participants' resistance to ascribed social disadvantage (Festinger, 1954; Tajfel, 1982a), and to its promotion (M. Gergen & Gergen, 2003; Weatherall & Gallois, 2003) as a legitimate, preferable alternative to coupledness. These strategies drew from five repertoires

identified in the data: status comparisons, status apartheid, independence/freedom, achievement, and friendship.

7.4.2.1 *In/ter/dependence comparison.* Comparisons were regularly made between single and coupled status, drawing from both personal experience and from observation, that positioned independent participants more favourably than where they felt they had been assigned by public discourse or where they had expected to be without an intimate romantic relationship.

Regret was expressed by some participants at having nobody to share decision-making and the hard work of child-raising. Two single-again women spoke of the positive demands of coupledom that had forced them to *get motivated* (A06/59, L465) to organise a social life or to *be kept in line* (A18/39, L780) by expectations of domestic routine that had dissipated with marital separation. One coupled and two single participants spoke of potentially damaging introspection affecting women living alone.

Contradicting these sentiments, sometimes in the same discussions, were single participants' satisfaction with sole responsibility for decision-making, and with the enhanced relationships they enjoyed with their children. A regular observation was of a sense of loss of self when part of a couple, and their pleasure or difficulty in recapturing the person they once were when they became single again. So much so, that the likelihood of entering another relationship was discounted by many unless it was with somebody who respected their independence. The coupled women spoke of the constant negotiation required for domestic harmony and their appreciation of the support afforded them by their relationship.

The privileging of coupledom was acknowledged, particularly in relation to public policy such as taxation and income support; workplace relations where single women without children are assumed to be available to enable colleagues in families to take leave during, for example, school holidays; or the entertainment book sold by charities that offer, for example, discounted meals for couples or families.

A16 spoke at length about public policy practice that adopts a substitute husband or father role of surveillance and monitoring in return for income support of the single mother.

418 *And I did a bit of (.) [] (.) just*
419 *I looked into sort of welfare literature around [] women []. That sort of*
420 *model that oh you know you don't have a husband so we'll sort of be*
421 *the state husband for you and you can come and discuss important*
422 *issues you know like. I don't know what that is but that sort of feeling*
423 *you still get a bit of that that I've got to go and consult you know*
424 *(pause) with somebody who has nothing to do with my family and in*
425 *fact you know (.) don't even get an informed person about it you get*
426 *some you know person call centre person or - (A16/28)*

She went on to describe, and brought for my inspection, examples of household bills and other documentation she is asked to provide to Centrelink, the government agency responsible for administering financial support to eligible citizens, for continuation of her pension.

477 *Yeah. But you know you just would be never called to present I don't*
478 *have anything to hide but you know. You know you'd never in a*
479 *coupled family you wouldn't I get called in for a parenting*
480 *(???xxxx???) I don't get called in for my family tax benefit that*
481 *everyone gets that's like everyone's welfare and this is like (.) naughty*
482 *(laugh). Single mothers on welfare you know like where these all*
483 *these -*
484 *Have to be monitored - (AS)*
485 *Checks yeah monitoring all the time for sure. Particularly when it's*
486 *about like maybe about your sex life or something you know like. I*
487 *might want to have somebody stay over here three nights a week. I*
488 *don't expect that I have no intention of you know (.) paying for my*
489 *child or marrying or moving or whatever it might be. It's really*
490 *nobody's business. I might not tell my best friend that I might (.) why*
491 *do I have to tell (.) Joe Bloggs (???xxxx???) you know*

In this extract, A16 is comparing the application of values inherent in the implementation of family support policy, contingent on the presence of a man in a household. Where family support is distributed to all households with dependent children, the payments are made without the surveillance of budget management and parenting competence to which A16 said recipients of single mother support are subject. She demonstrated this further by recounting two instances where reporting a cohabiting lesbian relationship did not affect support payments made to a mother. Surveilling the household headed by a single mother for evidence of male companionship assumes a sexual life that will relieve the state of the support burden

for her family by passing the responsibility to a male lover. It makes clear that the rights and responsibilities governing eligibility for family support are predicated on a patriarchal model of a nuclear family that is the organising principle of related institutional public policy.

At a social level, participants drew from this repertoire around aspects of coupledness that tarnished its privileged status through the personal costs of its maintenance.

112 *And I look at married couples who've been married for a long time and*
113 *who are in my age bracket and I don't see them as being very happy or*
114 *fulfilled ESPECIALLY the women. I don't see them, I see them as being*
115 *(.) dried out, as being uncreative, as LOOKING for things to do to FILL*
116 *their day now that the children are not there or whatever and, I kind of feel*
117 *sad, for them in a sense, because some of them DO find things to do within*
118 *the marriage that keeps them happy but a lot of them don't - (A04/62)*

Here, A04 is comparing her single identity with a coupledness she perceives to be limiting, desiccated, and unfulfilling, notions repeated in other discussions particularly around opportunities missed by coupled women. Other participants spoke of relationships held together for financial reasons, and some coupled women's fear of leaving unsatisfactory, even violent, situations for an unknown, possibly challenging independence.

214 *So even though (.) her living situation was quite untenable, she*
215 *still preferred the SAFETY and security of being (.) I don't think it's*
216 *the relationship per se it's (.) the money. Because it is tough I mean*
217 *(pause) I'm living on \$15,000 a year with a mortgage and kids and (.)*
218 *private school fees and (.) it is tough. And like I look back to the old*
219 *lifestyle (.) I used to have. But it's not worth it that (.) that money*
220 *comes at a far more expensive cost to and (..) like (.) it's not my nature*
221 *to stay if (.) money was important to me I would have stayed you know*
222 *but (.) she can't do it on her own. (A18/39)*

In this extract, A18 is discussing a neighbour who *admits she has to have another relationship before she finishes (.) one* (A18, L 204-205) and whose history included temporarily escaping a physically abusive partner before returning to dependence on his financial support. A18's own circumstances are presented as being strained but able to be managed to ensure home ownership and a private school education for her children. Straitened circumstances are preferable, for A18, to paying the emotional or psychological costs of remaining in a more financially secure situation. As with comment above about the extra quality that enables successful single living, A18's

“nature” means that she chose to “do it alone” rather than opt for the “safety and security” of coupledness.

A20 reported feeling shocked when a woman, asked why she tolerated a violent relationship, responded “oh I don’t want to be you know one of these women that comes to [] (.) [a local bar] and is looking (.) desperately looking for a husband” (A20/55, L 30-32). In this instance, it was the loss of coupled status that was too great a cost of escaping physical abuse and the tacit assumption that all women were seeking coupledness that shocked A20 in their disparity from her construction of single living. Her exaggeration of the woman’s “looking for a husband” by the repetition of “looking” interrupted by the emphasis of “desperately” before the repetition draws from public discourse about single women’s identity that posits marriage as their primary ambition and singleness a temporary condition to be corrected as soon as possible.

The fear of coupled women of living single that prevented them leaving an unhappy marriage was a common comparison to single women’s experience. There was candid admission that they, too, had feared living alone but that, for many, the prospect of continuing in an unsatisfactory relationship had seemed a worse option.

This, for me, references discussants’ comments about needing special qualities for single living, including for initiating a return from coupledness. For A16, it was the imminent birth of her daughter that provided the impetus to leave a fringe lifestyle for her child’s wellbeing.

213 *And in*
214 *particular when I had my child that’s good enough for (.) you know a*
215 *child as well. []. So that’s sort of (.) [] yeah making that empowered*
216 *sort of choice like that was when I was seven months pregnant(?) So I*
217 *waddled on out of there and said you know “this isn’t good enough for*
218 *me” (laugh). So []. There was that []. And then since then I guess*
219 *(.) I just haven’t I’ve just raised the (1) I’m happy to be living single on*
220 *my own I’m very content in fact I think in a lot of ways you start to*
221 *realise (.) you’re more content than you could be (.) with somebody*
222 *else. [] but second of all [] (.) you know I wouldn’t (.) sort of ever*
223 *swear myself to singledom but certainly the standard’s set a lot higher.*
224 *If somebody’s not going to gel with my life or make life easier or more*
225 *inspiring then I’d rather (.) do all of the above. You know. On my*
226 *own. So it’s a combination of two I’m not but as we get a bit older I*
227 *think to people you know (.) you see mums or women living in horrible*

228 *relationships I think (.) 'cause they're scared or they don't want to be*
 229 *that other side of the fence that you know has a dark light thrown on it*
 230 *and [] (.) and you know another [] ah single mum that lives up the*
 231 *road we're constantly rolling our eyes at people we know in the*
 232 *neighbourhood who [] it's just because it's like you know what they*
 233 *put up with (.) really (.) and so we've sort of thought (.) you know*
 234 *rather not be much rather be on our own so it's I guess it's relative to*
 235 *(.) who's around but also a contented sort of place to be (.) in its own*
 236 *right(?) (A16/28)*

The above extract contradicts public constructions of the single mother as irresponsible, in need of the monitoring and surveillance earlier described by A16. In her view, it was in the best interests of her child that she left a potentially damaging domestic environment which she compares with that of coupled neighbours who remain in “horrible relationships”. Where ideologically formulated common sense says that a child should live with both biological parents for optimal well-being, A16 located her unborn child’s developmental opportunities in the stability she could offer as a single parent. Her comparison between single and coupled living reflects common sentiments from other discussants when she says her experience of single living has set a high standard for future romantic cohabitation to meet as does recognition that single living has “a dark light thrown on it” that dissuades some women from leaving unsatisfactory coupledness.

A common theme was contradiction of coupledness idealised by the fulfilment it offers to individuals when they become half of a couple, and the mutual care each affords the other, the latter extending to the care provided to aged parents by children of the marriage. For example, A05 used her own circumstances to demonstrate lack of certainty of availability of family support for aging parents and to question the validity of the expectation.

1066 *Yeah, and that's triggered something when people have said "but you*
 1067 *don't have children, what about when you get older?" and it's like, "well,*
 1068 *I'm in Australia and my mother lived in England. It's no guarantee, is that*
 1069 *why you're having children (?) (laugh) "it's no guarantee". You know.*
 (A05/54)

7.4.2.2 Status apartheid. Closely associated with status comparison was a repertoire of status apartheid. Discussants included, as signifiers of marginalisation, being reminded of their category of difference by regular demands for information about their marital status by government and commercial interests in their protest.

392 *Usually single but of course with paperwork it's tricky that's why I sort*
393 *of ticked most of yours as well because (.) for your tax and everything*
394 *else you have to be (.) strictly legal and say divorced. I don't feel very*
395 *comfortable about that because (.) I was divorced 20 years ago (.) and*
396 *I've got to carry that label around with me for the rest of my life.*
401 *It's like how long are you going to be divorced for before you can say*
402 *"I've actually moved on from that" (A15/53)*

A15 had meticulously ticked several options on the demographic form (Appendix F) as she sought to best define her domestic identity. Classification by a marital status demanded by institutional agencies disturbed A15 for whom it was irrelevant in her day-to-day life, and was disliked by A07.

224 *I don't think it's necessary when I am,*
225 *filling in forms or I am. [], I don't like it when they assume because of*
226 *my age, when I say my name is (A07), that they call me "Mrs (A07)". It*
227 *[] annoys me that they assume that I must be married. [], and I don't*
228 *like it when they [] when I have to put my status and my name and I put*
229 *Ms. And they put Miss because I don't think it's got anything to do with*
230 *anybody now if I'm a Mrs or a Ms. So, or a Miss. So, I get a bit, that's*
231 *one of my little [] - (A07/55)*

In their self-construction, official marital status is of little importance to A07 and A15 and they feel constrained by being required to label themselves in this way.

Discernible in the narratives of exclusion were indications that participants separated themselves from the couples culture, preferring the company of other single people.

140 *the sort of (.) environments I choose to be in (pause) and*
141 *circles of friends I choose to be a part of (pause) are not ones where it's all*
142 *about getting married, having kids, buying a house. So, yeah, you know,*
143 *I've been attracted to people who (.) are like me in that regard. (A08/29)*

An older single woman had removed herself from the ultimate celebration of the family after a lifetime of situational marginalisation.

319 *I used to go to these family Christmases and I just you know I (.) and*
320 *of course they insisted you came (???) you're all married*
321 *people, with your children and it's great to be with the little children*
322 *for a couple of hours and I'm off you know. But you know you have*
323 *to be here and I said "no I don't have to be here". And I don't*
324 *WANT to be here (laugh)*
325 *Exactly (AS)*
326 *Yeah, yeah cause once again that's discrimination. (???) No I*
327 *can't be bothered with this. I'll go off with my single friends, and have*
328 *Christmas (A10/75)*

Resistance to normative assumptions about family-themed Christmas is manifested by A10's defining expectations of her attendance as discrimination because it demanded from her involuntary participation in a situation where she felt marginalised.

Choosing to socialise with people in similar circumstances rather than be marginalised by conversations and attitudes grounded in coupledness was explained by B01.

192 *No I don't think so because when I was single (.) a lot of my friends*
193 *were single(?) And now I'm in a couple a lot of my friends are in a*
194 *couple(?) So I suppose if I felt like I was different (.) than the rest (.)*
195 *then I might feel (.) a bit like that and I know like one of my friends*
196 *who is single I do sometimes feel like (.) maybe sometimes feel that I*
197 *don't invite her to things and stuff because it's a coupley kind of thing*
(B01/29)

That is, it is the characteristics of a group that determines membership, a point elaborated by B01 when she said she seeks engagement with "adults" when she is tired of discussing children with her friends. The use of "adults" to describe dependent-free environments, such as the workplace, where conversation is broader than domesticity, gives an interesting insight to the communicative difficulties and silences reported by single women when in the recreational company of coupled women.

The issue with group membership is not the affiliation *per se* but the value ascribed to it. As the fundamental unit of social structure, coupledness is privileged over single status in the social milieu so that resistance through contesting assumptions may be on many fronts.

1553 *And, now I'll stand up and challenge it. Because I feel 'you haven't*
1554 *thought about that' and it's not because I, I want to take it away because*
1555 *'hey guys. Single people have rights as well as, coupled people. And can*
1556 *you please think about them (?) ' Instead of taking it as it's my right so*
1557 *that's not really a consideration, and I do find that crops up. And so I*
1558 *constantly challenge that which can be tiring. And it's like, what about*
1559 *rights with responsibilities and thoughts towards others? So that goes onto*
1560 *a bigger issue 'cause that's human rights thing we get into that too.*
1561 *Thinking about others I suppose, and not judging them on, their status.*
1562 *Just judge them as a human being that maybe has desires too. Does that*
1563 *make sense (?) (A05/54)*

A05's resistance is open challenge to the rights assumed by the coupled. She grounds her challenge in notions of human rights, a position against which argument could be difficult, where individual integrity is afforded dominance over coupled privilege.

Other strategies to directly resist devaluing segmentation included discursive embrace of singledom, such as that recalled by A10 when confronted by perceived condescension from a newly-wed colleague.

161 *(I) do remember saying something, once, to one of the lasses I used to*
162 *work down at [a university], about 37 years or more. Anyway I went to this*
163 *lass's wedding it was a big social occasion you know, the whole thing*
164 *and ah, it would be about 18 months, two years later. And we were*
165 *just up in Broadway and went and she said "OH. You never married"*
166 *you know how (.) and I thought 'how pretentious' you know and I said*
167 *"oh good lord no. I'd FAR rather have affairs, MUCH more fun. Love*
168 *'em and leave em" she's going "oh", it was that age where that was (.)*
169 *that was an outrageous thing to say (laugh) and I thought 'good I think*
170 *I'll continue doing this" you know (laugh). It's [] that's another thing*
171 *about the married (.) concept to the single (.) concept. You know and*
172 *they thought that perhaps, if you weren't married you didn't have a sex*
173 *life or anything like this well this was, in my mind, that was ridiculous.*
174 *You (.) you're adults, you know. (A10/75)*

Unlike above, the use of "adults" in this extract is a protestation about the childlike status of innocence, lack of sophistication and deficit ascribed to single women in the mid-twentieth century. It is perhaps a tribute to their rejection of being patronised for their status that a young twenty-first century woman (B01, above) understands adulthood to be interested in more than the domestic.

7.4.2.3 Independence/freedom. When invited to talk about the best aspects of being single, the unanimous response was its independence and freedom, contrasting with the lack of freedom cited by B03 as a disadvantage of being in a couple. B05, the only LAT discussant, spoke of appreciating the freedom LAT gave her to enjoy friendships and spontaneous pleasures of a single life and episodic withdrawal from these to nurture a valued romantic relationship. Her narrative held interesting contrapositions such as candid confession of reluctance to attend an international conference because of fears her lover would "go off with someone else" (L301) while she was away, as her husband had done, and subsequent attendance at the conference, made more enjoyable by her lover's absence.

341 *I loved it while I was*
342 *there and I think it was actually freer because I think if I had have (.)*

343 *thought 'oh he's back at the hotel' or 'he's' you know I probably*
344 *wouldn't have (.) done as much as I did and met up with other great*
345 *women and you know gone off and done all sorts of stuff and (.) [] (.)*
346 *and really enjoyed that [] ... you know that professional intellectual*
347 *part of me that really loves*
348 *Well it's a conference (AS)*
349 *Yeah doing all that exactly yeah. And so (.) [] (.) and I like meeting*
350 *new people and then when I was back in in my I stayed in sort of like*
351 *university accommodation type thing and I was surrounded by all these*
352 *[] (.) gorgeous young French-speaking young people and []. You*
353 *know it was [] great. (B05/48)*

B05 concluded this part of her narrative by saying “But it’s complicated, you know []]. Yeah. So having that freedom (...) to do that is is wonderful” (L 364-365). In this extract, and elsewhere in her reflection, B05 is articulating the different range of possibilities available to her single and coupled selves. Her coupled identity attends to the business of nurturing her relationship, giving it primacy over her single, professional activities that include the networking and intellectual pursuits associated with conference attendance.

The struggle to maintain a sense of self while negotiating single and coupled identities was poignantly portrayed by A01.

81 *Well, I'm newly separated. I (...) yeah. I didn't get married until I was 33*
82 *(...) so I was quite independent before then but, obviously, looking for*
83 *someone. [], and then I lost that independence while I was married and*
84 *I've had to regain it since and that's been very difficult*

88 *In what way has it been difficult? (AS)*

89 *I think because you tend to just, you come part of a couple,*
90 *you (sigh)(pause) try and make that marriage work and it's not working, you*
91 *just involve your whole self in trying to make that work and you lose*
92 *yourself, you know trying to please that other person and (..) that not*
93 *happening and (...) I just lost my independence, lost all self-esteem, all*
94 *that sort of stuff (...) rather difficult*
95 *You're on your own now and it's been difficult to rediscover yourself*

96 *(...) (?) (AS)*

97 *I've been working quite hard at it. So, reading all the self-help books,*
98 *go to counselling (...) and stuff like that because it was (...) I knew in*
99 *myself that I was depressed and I'd lost myself and I knew that I probably*
100 *relied on him a lot more than I should have and that if I enter another*
101 *relationship I don't want to do that again, you know, I want to (...) be*
102 *(...) a separate happy person (...) (???xxxx???) someone else but I don't*
103 *have to have him - (A01/42)*

Like many participants, A01 identified a loss of self as a cost of trying to make a marriage work and the difficulty in rebuilding a suppressed identity. Its value to her now is such that her independence would carry greater weight into any new relationship, a common theme noted elsewhere.

For other participants, independence and freedom meant being their own person, not having to meet others' expectations or compromise to reach agreement, vocational independence, cessation of feeling like a social appendage, strength, spontaneity, energy for other activities, freedom to make one's own mistakes, and choice. For some participants, this extended to feeling able to decorate their house to their own taste, even moving furniture around where before this had caused marital dissention. Home became a quiet retreat with the external world a place of opportunity even if taking advantage of opportunities required practise and courage.

Some participants labelled aspects of their singleness, such as the opportunity for achievement or self-development, as possibly selfish in that it was difficult for, or unavailable to, their coupled peers. Conversely, accusations of selfishness were contested in other participants' construction of their independence.

952 *I think if I was with*
953 *somebody I'd be limiting myself this is personal I think women and*
954 *culture ask us to do it a bit and most women probably do probably not*
955 *all though (.) []. Sort of (.) put yourself second to your family man (.)*
956 *you know. And I'd never ever do that I mean I guess sometimes in an*
957 *extended family you have to put somebody before yourself which is*
958 *just being a nice normal social person but (.) I don't constantly have to*
959 *think of my job second to somebody else or my study in relation to (.)*
960 *what's you know and (.) part of that I guess is (.) 'cause you're getting*
961 *used to living on your own and you know sometimes that even gets*
962 *sold as 'oh if you live on your own for too long you get very (.) selfish'*
963 *you know sometimes people say those sorts of things 'you get selfish*
964 *and you just do your' but I think I mean it's great. You don't want to*
965 *be too removed from being able to co-operate with (laugh) other*
966 *humans but [] (..) you know there's a bit of that culture about and*
967 *dynamic of (..) woman/man/marriage that's still I really (.) you know*
968 *not don't like it I just (..) there's such power stuff still there and*
969 *nobody acknowledges it any more. (A16/28)*

Here, attributions of selfishness were reshaped into frustrated role expectations that privilege men's aspirations and desires. Singledom did not exclude co-operation or thoughtfulness but it did not mean sacrificing personal aspirations to support those of

others. A16 is also explicit about institutional power relations in her observations of marriage that determine different weightings of individuals' interests within marriage or a family.

As participants became accustomed to their singledom, intolerance of compromise that came at personal cost became a virtue, a significant challenge to cultural knowledge about women's roles, nature, and psychology.

7.4.2.4 Achievement. Participants spoke about their achievements they associated with living single, and thought unlikely to have been accomplished had they become or remained coupled. Regularly cited were self-reliance and resilience.

1529 *(there is) no obstacle that you could put in front of us that*
1530 *we wouldn't find a way around (laugh). And whether you could say*
1531 *that [] (.) a female in a couples relationship I think society expects the*
1532 *man to be resilient. I don't know if the woman ever gets to realise that*
1533 *(.) she could be that resilient (A15/53)*

761 *You know, they're put down, they're put down, and if they're not put*
762 *down by their fathers or society it's their partners or their husbands. I*
763 *hear it from (.) clients all the time. You know. "Oh he doesn't think I can*
764 *do this" and I'm thinking 'god. When will you try?' and of course they*
765 *don't (A04/62)*

Here, A04 is describing power relations that position women subsidiary to men in discourse that undermines women's independence or self-resilience. Her internal response to clients' acceptance of incompetence ascribed by fathers, society, partners or husbands shows a frustration with the dynamics of coupledness that cause women to comply with others' assessment of their ability. A07 described the power relations in terms of role-playing "part of it could be role play, part of it can be if you've got somebody else there that will take on (.) the role of clearing up and whether it's males or female, you will let them do it. Instead of TRYING to deal with it yourself" (A07/55, L600-603). That is, a consequence of matrimonial role-playing may be assumptions about gendered competencies, or the availability of somebody else absolves an individual from developing agency.

Self-reliance was thought to be character enhancing, bringing satisfaction when exercised, although in many instances it had not initially been welcome. All participants who nominated self-reliance and resilience incorporated these qualities into their construction of singlehood, and their lack as characteristic of coupledness.

Associated with self-reliance and resilience were self-discovery, self-development and self-esteem, again thought incompatible with most participants' experience of coupledness.

1487 *What are the best things about being single. I think I said it, discover more*
1488 *about myself. My ability, and my capabilities. That there's a hell of a lot*
1489 *more to me than I thought there was. That's just a wonderful thing to (...)*
1490 *and I don't know that I would have ever found it in a relationship. Lots of*
1491 *space, and quiet when I want to. You know (?) (A05/54)*

Other participants also spoke of their surprise at locating unexpected strengths that may otherwise have remained dormant after, however reluctantly, becoming single again. For always-single A08, a developmental challenge was coupledness: "a whole aspect of life that I want to experience and explore and haven't had much of an opportunity (.) to do that yet" (A08/29, L161-163). Examples of meeting and overcoming "challenge" were regularly offered to illustrate steps towards self-development, whether these were acquiring skills for home maintenance, financial management, leadership, or learning to join groups, attend the theatre or cinema, or dine alone. For A08, coupledness was a challenge analogous to those of single-again participants who were seeking to expand their potential through unfamiliar experience.

Solitary social activity was difficult for many, and avoided by some, participants. For example, B01 said she would buy tickets to an event she wanted to attend then look for companionship if her husband was unavailable to accompany her. A05 spoke of forcing herself to attend a theatre performance or dine alone, which she was still unable to do after six o'clock in the evening. She said she was too self-conscious to visit a cinema alone although she was less inhibited in pursuing these activities while travelling when "invariably you end up yacking to people. You know, talking to people or meeting people, not always but..." (A05, L 691, 692). A04 enjoyed solitary activities, commenting on her interdependent clients whose social activities seemed limited to their husband's preferences or to the company of other interdependent women. A08 also enjoyed some solitary activities such as the cinema and music gigs although she felt inhibited about taking evening walks alone, for example, because of safety issues, a matter also raised by B01. B04 perhaps indicated a source of the inhibition - perception of public opinion - when she said, of her independent life,

297 *I used to find more when I was single. []. It wasn't like open*
 298 *discrimination, you know, it was (...) basically (...) sort of second*
 299 *hand and you'd say (.) like going to restaurants. Sitting at a table for*
 300 *one. You know. Doesn't (.) make it look like you had two heads. And*
 301 *I felt really self-conscious about that, []. But then I just thought 'oh, I*
 302 *don't care'.*
 303 *I'm hungry. I'm going to have dinner [AS]*
 304 *Yeah. And well you know you can either serve me or you don't and*
 305 *that's why I'll go somewhere else. So, but yeah I used to feel really*
 306 *quite strange about doing that. []*
 307 *So did they actually avoid coming to serve you or [AS]*
 308 *No no no no they wouldn't avoid it it was "you want a table for one*
 309 *that's really weird don't you have any friends". So because I was a*
 310 *shift worker (.) so I used to go out I'd have a day off in the middle of*
 311 *the week for example so I'd go out for lunch by myself or go to the*
 312 *movies by myself you know. People look at you strangely but all your*
 313 *friends working 9 to 5 (.) and on the weekend you're at work and*
 314 *they're out playing. So just get used to it, you know. But now no it's*
 315 *not a problem. [B04/41]*

Some participants consciously sought to restructure their identity following relationship breakdown through adult education.

442 *I did try lots*
 443 *and lots of courses thinking 'somewhere in there I must FIT', you know,*
 444 *but of course you don't, you just (.) it's not about FITTING in it's about*
 445 *finding out who you are*
 446 *Something, something (???xxx???) (AS)*
 447 *Yeah, finding out who you are and, and, learning to be OK with that,*
 448 *you know. Honouring yourself really (A04/62)*

A04's sense of marginalisation following loss of a coupled identity motivated her search for a new social position before understanding that her sense of place was a personal allocation, independent of cultural ascription. For A05, it was a search for strength to enable her to build her new single identity that gave impetus to self-development strategies. Reflecting on a lack of fulfilment she experienced with independence, A05 also came to a realisation that it was personal actualisation that was missing. Further, that this is a condition shared by coupled women whose roles and responsibilities mean that opportunity for self-fulfilment may never present. A13's reflection on the impact of becoming single drew on attitudinal attributes as well as those of growth and strength. That is, a successful single life requires overcoming the potentially destructive trauma of changed marital status, the achievement of which is accompanied by physical developmental and psychological growth.

452 *I feel there's huge growth and*
453 *physical strength (???xxxx???) it's attitude really (laugh) but you can*
454 *either go under or you can think 'well I've got a life to lead'. (A13/62)*

Choosing to “live” rather than “go under” resists public discourse found in Chapter 6 about divorced women being at risk of incurring damaging consequences of leaving a marriage. Instead, using changed marital circumstance as an opportunity for growth, A13 is promoting adoption of self-determined criteria for a satisfying life.

7.4.2.5 Friendship. Friendship was important for both single and coupled participants. While the latter were inclined to nominate their husband as their best friend, there were times when female friends became more important especially if a coupled participant's relationship was the topic of conversation, or if they wanted companionship unavailable from their husband. For single women, friends were the prime source of emotional and social nourishment, in many cases of greater importance than family who might be more inclined to offer unwelcome advice, such as urging them to settle down in coupledness.

189 *there's certainly like some family members who I would pick that, ah,*
190 *or two family members [] (..) who are a little bit critical that I don't*
191 *just kind of settle down. Just you know (..) do what you know (..) do*
192 *the good girl thing and (..) meet some nice man and (...) be sensible*
193 *and serious again. []. So I guess it's a kind of feeling that I'm being a*
194 *bit frivolous or*
195 *(laughter)*
196 *something like that. Not that they've ever said those words but that's*
197 *the impression. I don't I wouldn't think (.) I don't get that feeling from*
198 *any of my friends. []. I think a lot of my friends have probably been*
199 *(.) [] you know very supportive and very (.) you know like and they*
200 *actually quite a lot few single friends (.) who are in and out of*
201 *relationships but quite a number of both male and female (.) friends*
202 *who are (.) who live on their own. (A19/46)*

This extract illustrates resistance to a discursive construction of the single woman as flighty and rebellious, assumed to be the view of family members who want their conventions restored. A19 compares her family's presumed attitude to that of her friends, people like herself who share her position. While some single participants' friends include couples, the most commonly cited are, like A19, independent people, mainly women, who share similar interests and experiences. These friends support each other when needed, and are a source of social companionship. A05 and A08 described the difficulties they had in relinquishing their self-reliance to receive

support, in both instances to do with allowing boundaries to be permeated. Physical support such as asking for help with home maintenance had “not (been) really, part of the deal” (A08/29, L 297) unlike emotional support through talk. Realisation that friendship could extend to asking for help with, for example, gardening or house repair had opened avenues for shared home ownership that she had been deferring until meeting a romantic partner. Reflecting on the possibility that this might not happen, A08 spoke about the time and energy that would be available for other relationships and the likely deleterious impact a relationship would have on the richness of her friendships, a possibility confirmed in B01’s experience.

35 *probably when I was a teenager I probably thought ‘oh you know,*
36 *that people might be lonely. If they were single?’ but then. Like living*
37 *by myself and stuff I was never lonely and I actually (.) [] developed*
38 *stronger friendships (.) because of it because you’re not always sort of*
39 *(.) you know [] (pause) like you’ve got your friends and when you’re*
40 *upset or something your friends are the ones that you talk to (.) if you*
41 *don’t have a partner? So I think that’s (.) it gives you stronger*
42 *friendships to be single? (B01/29)*

Speaking from experience, B01 recalled discovering the strength of friendships when she was single and, echoing A08’s revelation, the value of singleness to their nurturing. Constructions of single women being lonely were refuted as were notions of their emotional isolation. This contrasted with the inhibition reported by B03 in seeking the comfort of friends during her husband’s absence on consultancies after decades of his regular working office hours.

49 *Not*
50 *wanting to be a ‘pest’ when it comes to friends and neighbours when*
51 *I’m feeling a bit lonely, is also a new feeling*

For B03, seeking companionship from friends and neighbours, with whom she regularly shares social events, was considered an imposition, perhaps a breach of the “deal” spoken of by A08 in her earlier construction of friendship that limited the range of support she felt able to request of friends.

While most friendships were of long-standing intimacy, some grew from new interests such as maternity. Others changed over time as circumstances brought physical or lifestyle distance or vanished completely following marriage breakdown which participants either found hurtful or dismissed as being evidence of false

friendship. Some participants spoke of the value of male friends, others spoke of the obstacles brought by gender to friendship with men.

627 *if they meet (.) a woman who wants to be their FRIEND*
628 *then they think that they're going to get to have sex with them anyway*
629 *(laugh). So []. Yeah they're probably (.) make it harder for*
630 *themselves (.) to like (.) make friends(?) (B01/29)*

This extract was from discussion comparing differences between single women and men, with B01 suggesting women were better able to build an independent life, supported by strong and diverse friendships, than their male peers who further disadvantaged themselves by viewing friendship with women through a sexual lens. Friendship offered opportunity for satisfying non-sexual physical intimacy with friends.

1449 *I had a close girlfriend and we would hug each other and*
1450 *we weren't intimate, we weren't in a, lesbian relationship. We're both*
1451 *heterosexual, but we both felt safe enough with each other, where we*
1452 *could have a really warm intimate hug, and that satisfied that it didn't*
1453 *actually have to be, with a partner because there was real warmth and*
1454 *intimacy, with a friend. Where, []. And, both of us would probably have*
1455 *been scared if we'd thought there was any, [], meaning on the other side.*
(A05/54)

Several participants, e.g., A12 above, spoke of attempts by others to devalue their friendships by imputing a sexual component. Clarifying it was not their sexual orientation, they recognised the discursive power of being so labelled was intended to marginalise them and their friends whose singleness was otherwise inexplicable, even unacceptable, to others. In this extract, the intimacy and safety A05 found that enabled physical contact with her friend transcended convention yet would have dissolved had there been any sexual connotations to their contact.

Friendships paralleled family status for some participants, as with A10's preference for sharing Christmas with friends rather than family and A07's inclusion as a member of her oldest, married friend's family. Commonly, single-again women said they would ensure continuation of friendships, having learned their value, if they entered another romantic relationship.

7.5 Discussion

The women who contributed to this study varied in age and educational levels, work experience and relational histories but, embedded as we all are in the same culture,

drew on the available discourses around in/ter/dependence for the above repertoires of commonality in our discussions. The repertoires were named for the size and content of the storage nodes, which held similar or contradictory aspects of a theme. One consequence for me of hearing and transcribing repetitive words was to draw on earlier discussions when using conversational strategies such as paraphrasing in later ones. For example, I noticed feeding back 'terror' when A19 was talking about clients and friends choosing to stay in unsatisfactory relationships for fear of failing to manage living alone. On reflection and after reviewing other discussions, I suspect comment by earlier discussants about "fear" – of being alone, of infidelity, of single women, of social embarrassment, of the consequences of honest communication, of being unable to find help when living alone, of discrimination against their child(ren) – had magnified its definition for me in the later discussion with A19. It may also have come from memory of Levinson's use of "terrified" (Levinson, 1996, p. 184) to describe members of his Homemaking cohort who were motivated by their fear to stay in dysfunctional relationships rather than return to independence.

Of course, the participants were not intended to be a demographically representative sample, a construct alien to qualitative work that does not pretend or seek to generalise interpretative findings to a population. Nor were they intended to represent single or coupled women, these categories being only one of the identities to which a woman can lay claim, along with, for example, therapist, teacher, grandmother, advocate or public servant. An individual's management of these categories depends on the degree to which they overlap, bringing simplicity or complexity to subjective identity structure (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). The similarities of the social aspirations, achievements and values of the independent and interdependent participants described above indicate that in/ter/dependence was a major distinction in otherwise simple social categorisation, weighted by ideological values privileging interdependence that was recognised and resisted by the independent women.

As found by Byrne (2003), the repertoires identified in the discussions found self and social identities corresponding with private and public discourse. Personal experience brought narratives of achievement, freedom, and enjoyment of functional social independence, doubt as to whether interdependence optimises adult development, and frank admission that successful independence may require hard work. Public

discourse provided repertoires of deficit and stereotype that framed the spinster as a marginalised, socially inadequate subject familiar to all participants and from whom the independent women distanced themselves, citing circumstance and choice rather than personal attributes to explain women's independence.

Where an in-group highlights a distinction between themselves and an otherwise very similar out-group, it is to protect a valued identity (Schmid et al., 2010). In this case, perceived threat to interdependence can be ameliorated through intergroup familiarity that confirms commonalities rather than emphasises differences. The growth in the independent woman demographic brings with it their greater social visibility that reduces a perception of them as Other to interdependent family, friends and colleagues even if it might not increase assimilation practices. It certainly has validated their position as a consumer group, giving significance to their relational identity for the commercial sector. While I did not specifically analyse their discourse for age differences, an impression from the aural and transcribed data is that there was less concern about a single identity among the younger discussants. This may have been linked to only lately becoming interdependent so drawing on their own recent, familiar experience of singleness, having older role models, or having a sense that, unlike earlier generations, they were part of a significant demographic that may normalise independence. Further evidence of a generational shift may be found in the dichotomous meanings of spinster and bachelor being protested by A04 (62) but subverted by A18 (39) labelling herself with bachelorette so repositioning her single status to be analogous with an enviable unattached and self-indulgent masculinity.

Transition in discursive practice was exemplified by the contradiction made apparent by B04 (41) when she said she had a spectrum of attitudes about single women, ranging from positive to negative depending on how broadminded she was feeling, noting the choice to live independent was a recent privilege. It was revealing that her spectrum's end points were the deficient spinster without a partner and the empowered, educated, articulate career woman, personifying for me constructions of the independent woman in the competing discourses of patriarchy and neoliberalism. This contradiction was also visible in B03's (51) later amendment of her view of single women as strong, lucky individuals to family-substitutive "shopaholics".

Critical psychologists perceive resistance as fundamental to explicating social power structures and their associated costs (Osterkamp, 1999). I argue that it is their resistance to public positioning by institutional texts and practice that affords independent women protective effects for wellbeing. This does not mean that independent women consciously work to resist their negative positioning by social discourse or even necessarily recognise discriminatory power structures. Instead, their reflexive practice, comparing and contrasting their experience with what it is represented to be, reinforces their self-identity and enables the lived resistance of autonomy referred to in the quote that heads this chapter. That is, by refusing to accept an emotionally debilitating marginalisation, they subvert a malign influence of institutional power structures on their lives. Adverse findings of impaired wellbeing discussed earlier may have more to do with the degree to which women accept the dominant ideological dogma that interdependence is necessary for wellbeing and social acceptability than with their relational status.

A case in point is that of solitary enjoyment of social activities, which many participants found difficult. Social regulation is predicated on the unconscious monitoring of individual's adherence to norms of interrelationship, evidenced by pair or group activities. Both A05 and B04 spoke of the self-consciousness that affected their enjoyment of solitary activities, indicating a dilemma between public discourse about social norms that marginalise the solitary, which they, as members of this society understood, and their private discourse about the possibilities of independent living.

Resistance to in/ter/dependence power weightings may also have been generated by most independent discussants having come from, or carrying the responsibilities (in the form of child-rearing) of, a state of interdependence so having an actual basis for a comparison that found costs and benefits for both social categories. The special or extra quality suggested by some discussants to enable successful independent living may be less an inherent inner strength than an ability to contest the power relationships structuring and reproducing the institution of marriage-modelled interdependence. Ironically, this may be a product of the neoliberalism that privileges the individual over the collective, mandating a self-sufficiency now extended to women in the interests of national economic growth.

Foucault's imagining of a lesbian culture outside the mainstream (Foucault, 1994) met its obverse in intended insults directed to independent women that ascribe a homosexual orientation to their independence. Jeffreys (1985) commented that "when lesbians are stigmatised and reviled, so, also are all women who lived independently of men" (in Reynolds, 2008, pp. 149-150). It goes to the heart of gendered, patriarchal power relations where women's sexuality, if not controlled by fathers, husbands or the state, is to be traduced. Such a malevolent contestation of women's successful independence indicates the threat it is perceived to be to patriarchal interdependence that is predicated on masculine privilege.

For participants in this study, their hurt at being so labelled had little to do with lesbianism, with which they had no issue other than it not being a facet of their identity, but responded to the intent behind what was meant as insult and a mechanism of power relations designed to control. That is, the perceived threat posed by the individual women to patriarchal social order, which they were subverting by enjoying independence, was that the lives they embodied demonstrated the possibility of an attractive independence to their interdependent peers. To reframe it, therefore, in terms that marginalised women's independence as being outside the norms of their social milieu was to exert the power relations defending institutionalised heterosexual attachment against those that resisted mandatory interdependence.

This was also evident in reference to heterosexual practice. Older women spoke of an assumption in earlier years that, because they were not in a committed relationship, they were sexually innocent, missing a component of life that is necessary for complete femininity. Younger independent women who were mothers described contemporary public discourse that positioned them as sexually promiscuous, subject to institutional suspicion about their eligibility for income support and to attitudinal insult in social interactions. Celibacy received little comment (other than its assumption for independent women in earlier years) either as concomitant with relational independence or as an intended insult. It is interesting to speculate whether this might be thought too unlikely or shameful in a social milieu saturated with sexuality (McRobbie, 2009), or too confronting an indicator of resistance to normative interdependence (Bernau, 2007).

The proposition that successful independence is characterised by a special quality may also be an instance of an in-group's self-enhancement (M. Brewer & Brown, 1998). Not so much a contradiction as a contraposition, accusations of homosexuality designed to protect heterosexual interdependence are deflected by the independent claiming more (a special quality) rather than less (increased marginalisation) than their interdependent peers. Finding difference between groups that otherwise are very similar is a typical defence mechanism (Augostinos & Walker, 1998; M. Brewer & Brown, 1998; Castro & Batel, 2008; Fiske, 1998) to preserve or construct a positive social identity.

Conflict between dominant ideologies of patriarchal gender relations and capitalist neoliberalism are exemplified by the experience of independent mothers who, while now allowed custody of their children, are subject to moral surveillance by the state in the guise of means testing. While other categories of disadvantaged citizens must also satisfy means testing criteria to receive welfare support, women raising children alone are also subject to enquiry about their personal lives where romantic attachment risks financial penalties prejudicing their child(ren)'s wellbeing. The subjectification of sole mothers is sufficiently powerful for several in this study to refer to the stereotype to demonstrate their difference from all the rest; to resist, in other words, their social relational identity by their construction of a personal identity that contradicts that of the stereotype.

I had made the decision in Study One to not use *single parent/s* or *single mother/s* as keywords to capture media items because I was interested in discourse about women's relational independence rather than their maternal status. While the independent women with dependent children in this study identified as "single mothers", and were very aware of their devalued position, they gave examples of being positioned as Other on the basis of their relational independence. This was particularly in relation to their sexuality where it seemed being sole carer for dependent children was defined, in institutional and public discourse, as synonymous with sexual promiscuity.

Sometimes, but not predominantly, their examples of marginalisation were linked to how they felt their parental performance was judged by others. In response, they discursively repositioned themselves through favourable comparison with stereotypes of single mothers and the unhappily interdependent so resolving the dilemma brought by the incompatibility of public and private discourses about their identity.

The conflation by A04 of older women becoming invisible to men with loss of social value is an example of marginalisation that may find resistance in a Foucauldian alternative culture outside patriarchy. The struggle by older independent women, and younger women anticipating continued independence, to find ways of living and identities with which they are comfortable may result in withdrawal from some of the dominant moral values and ideals that lose resonance for those marginalised (Brinkmann, 2010).

While independent women may have no collective sense of being a force for change (Clements, 1998), the knowledge gained and challenged by the size of such a disaffected out-group is likely to create an adapted moral order in which a complexity of identities might thrive. The growing number of independent women, as a demographic, has a significant proportion who are less inclined to seek a romantic relationship although not averse to interdependence should it become an attractive option. This means that the values underpinning patriarchal social organisation have less salience for these women, which then has consequences for the power relations that sustain it.

In this chapter I have reported the interpretative repertoires a group of women drew from to talk about positions of past and contemporary independent women, and those of resistance to negative positioning evident in autobiographical narrative. The repertoires closely linked to those of Byrne (2003) and Reynolds (2008; Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003) in their differentiation between self and public constructions of independent women's identities and similarity of the discursive themes. Independent participants' narratives spoke about the struggle to create an independent identity that resulted in greater agency and self-sufficiency than they associate with interdependence. I argue that it is the practice of resistance that affords protection to

those whose social position is devalued by the public discourse identified by participants, characterised by stereotype and deficiency.

Later, I will reflect on the function of the public discourse in terms of its re/structuring dominant institutions and any impact apparent from resistance to enabling power relations. While media framing indicates their public positioning may be changing, albeit slowly, participants' discourse situates independent women very differently to cohorts in previous generations. As found by Byrne (2003), participants were resisting self-identification by relational status, instead arguing that independence is one of a range of valid identity options. Whether the growing numbers of independent women is driving validation of their status remains to be seen.

In the next chapter, I will sample psychology's approach to women's independence through analysis of relevant content in introductory human development textbooks. It might be thought that psychology, with its *raison d'être* the examination and explanation of human behaviour, would bridge the gap between public and personal identities, motivations, understandings, and knowledge. As will be seen, views differ as to whether the discipline elucidates or inhibits our understanding of the human condition.