

STUDY ONE: Framing The Independent Woman

*frame: to form, adapt, adjust, contrive, devise, invent, compose, express, plan
arrange, conceive, imagine, direct, cause, incriminate¹*

If the social status of women and their marital condition has been in constant flux across the centuries, what is contemporary discourse about the independent woman? Further, at what point of the wave do we find her? Is her position in the ascendancy or decline?

In this chapter, I use framing analysis to illustrate her cultural positioning by newspaper text, corresponding to my second objective of examining the mechanisms by which cultural constructions shape the socio-psychological experience of independent women. I begin with discussion of the function of framing in Section 6.1 and that of mass print media in transmitting ideological dominant values. Section 6.1.1 reviews evidence of independent women's representation in mass media, finding little systematic analysis that I hope this study will redress to some extent. In Section 6.2, I explain that the methods and results will be organised around the framing model developed for psychology by Giles and Shaw (2009). In Section 6.2.1, I describe the rationale for selecting my data sources and keywords for data capture and quantify my database before describing reasons for attrition, in Section 6.2.2. Discussion of the model's adaptation in Sections 6.2.3, 6.2.4 and 6.2.5 precedes description of the coding process from which the frames of independent women were identified. Results are presented in 6.3, beginning with those from the quantitative analysis that provides a basis for interpretation. Comparisons are made in Section 6.3.1 between the profile of independent women in the newspapers and their profile in the categories of independence drawn from census data. Section 6.3.2 details the frames for the widowed (Section 6.3.2.1), single (Section 6.3.2.2) and divorced (Section 6.3.2.3) woman that were identified in the data through a narrative woven from the extracts,

¹ From the New Elizabethan reference dictionary, 3rd edition (undated), Sydney, George Newnes (Aust) Pty Ltd.

with some linking to illustrative items through their identifying numbers. Some extracts are also included but, in the main, the discussion is generalized. I return to the model elements of identified characters (Section 6.3.3) narrative form (Section 6.3.4) and linguistic analysis (Section 6.3.5) before discussing the generalisability of the frames in Section 6.3.6. The chapter concludes with discussion (Section 6.4) about the findings and their implications.

6.1 Background

As discussed in Chapter 2, ideologies are sociocognitive frameworks of social construction that organise shared attitudes, values, knowledge, and models that are the basis of discourse (van Dijk, 1995a). A fundamental source of ideology transmission is the mass media, reproducing through text and other symbolic content discourse that shapes and reflects public debate about, and understanding of, any issue (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010). While ideology may be apparent in news selection, it becomes more evident through the language used by the framework in which an item is presented. Language in print media reflects stylistic and ideological editorial positions, an institutional practice drawing on shared understanding to both construct and respond to discourses (Fowler, 2003).

Framing in communication interprets our world, providing meaning, particularly of the unfamiliar, by drawing on culturally-understood schema for ready assimilation or contesting by an audience, depending on individuals' knowledge of a topic and their related values (Chong & Druckman, 2007). It is the process of using elements of perceived reality to reduce complexity and shape a persuasive narrative, facilitated by their salience for the audience, to prime the intended effect of the communication (Entman, 2007; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Where there is little diversity in media framing, there is concomitant homogeneity of audience frames of any issue (Huang, 2009). Changes in media frames are known to effect changes in public discourse as individual audience members reorientate their thinking in response to either more information or information presented differently (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Strong, elite frames are likely to be linked to partisanship and ideology; they are chosen to engage the broadest range of audience (Budarick & King, 2008) and to do so emotionally, blocking out alternative

understandings, rather than by cognitive persuasion (Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004; Kitis & Milapides, 1997).

6.1.1 Representations Of Independent Women. According to Gamson and Modigliani (1989), general audience (mass) media offer the most useful source of public discourse, given their interrelated practice of creating meaning and reflecting community understanding of events and issues, and providing a site for contestation of meaning between competing players (Gamson, 1988).

Although many authors assert public discourse positions independent women negatively, sometimes with one or more demonstrative examples (e.g., Amador & Kiersky, 1998; C. Anderson, et al., 1994; Barnett & Hyde, 2001; R. Bell & Yans, 2008; Byrne, 2008; Chandler, 1991; DePaulo, 2007; Koeing, Zimmerman, Haddock, & Banning, 2010; La Barre, 1972; Penman & Stolk, 1983), I found few reports of systematic analysis of their public representation.

Two reviews of women's representation across most mass media (e.g., women's magazines, advertising, television, newspapers, sociology textbooks) (Busby, 1975; Tuchman, 1978/2000) were from the 1970s, a time when feminists were highlighting mechanisms of women's oppression to advocate change. Both papers referred to analysis of women's magazines 1940-1970 that found women in fictional content depicted as (i) single, looking for a husband; (ii) housewife/mother; (iii) spinster; or (iv) widowed/divorced, soon to marry. Tuchman's (1978/2000) elaboration of these characterisations noted that the spinster's failure to marry carried greater significance than the story line: the only positive outcome was for a woman who relinquished her successful career to marry. Some magazines with an audience of women in the paid workforce were more sympathetic to women's realities by the mid-1970s, with editorial content optimistic about the possibility of combining paid and domestic work.

Little work had been done on women's representation in newspapers other than identification of a "blackout" on reporting issues of interest to, and about, early feminism and the treatment of women working in news media (Busby, 1975). Tuchman (1978/2000) reported analysis of women's pages in newspapers, which found content that could be grouped into categories of food, fashion and society. The

identities featured were mainly wives of famous men or anomalous female heads of state. “Like the television industry, appealing to a common denominator encourages newspapers to engage in the symbolic annihilation of women by ignoring women at work and trivializing women through banishment to hearth and home” (Tuchman, 2000, p. 167)

Television was most often the medium for analysis. Female characters were found to appear much less frequently, were younger, and were much more stereotypically limited than male representations, other than for daytime soap operas where women were afforded greater and more sympathetic representation (Busby, 1975). In general, women were much more likely to be portrayed in relation to romantic/family attachment (Tuchman, 2000): the approval evident of married women did not extend to those in paid employment or single women, the latter more likely to be victims of violence.

Later work found little change in women’s representation on prime-time television (Davis, 1990) with women in the 1980s appearing half as often as men, and their characters written for decoration rather than function. Marital and parental status that reinforced family values was more salient for female characters although another study found this was more prominent in story lines developed by less eminent producers as they sought network approval (Vest, 1992).

A review of US television series between 1966 and 1990 found a genre shift in those with female leads from relationship-focussed comedy (e.g., *I love Lucy*) to vocationally-driven drama (e.g., *Cagney & Lacey*) (Atkin, 1991). Women-focussed programming was suggested to reflect network competition for a female audience against sports broadcasting but there was no theorising as to the changed focus although it may have corresponded with women’s broader participation in the 1980s’ paid workforce.

A twenty-first century summary of sex-role research in the mass media concluded that women’s depiction continues to be under-representative, that they continue to represent stereotypic interests, are inevitably thin and regularly scantily dressed, and are more likely to be depicted in relationship roles (Collins, 2011).

As can be seen, analysis of mass media in relation to women has been of their depiction in general rather than of their in/ter/dependence. Exceptions, such as those that interrogate the media's portrayal of female politicians (Drabsch, 2007; Fitzherbert, 2005; Ustinoff, 2005), also look at broad issues of gendered discourse, comment in passing on the added denigration of political women who are neither wives nor mothers (Fitzherbert, 2005). This study was undertaken because there was so little systematic analysis of public discourse about independent women, certainly nothing against which private and academic discourse could be compared. I hope that it will provide a useful reference for subsequent researchers in the field.

6.2 Method

The size and lack of a general audience makes new media a difficult terrain to map. While I did find interesting relevant blogs, articles, opinion pieces and so on, I chose to remain with conventional mass media because of its general reach and its institutional communicative practices from which subject positions may be inferred through their framing. Of mass media, newspapers can most usefully be analysed for identifying cultural frames of an issue because (i) their content generally is of short items carrying one thought available for summary and structure analysis, (ii) they reach the widest audience for a single news medium, and (iii) are thought to be highly influential in forming public opinion (Giles & Shaw, 2009; Van Gorp, Vettehen, & Beentjes, 2009).

It is not uncommon for general newspapers to use similar if not identical frames when reporting a phenomenon, particularly if there is little competition in the market place (Budarick & King, 2008; Huang, 2009; Van Gorp, 2007), which may then assume a normative function (Chong & Druckman, 2007). It was the simplicity of this discursive practice that persuaded me that framing, rather than more conventional discourse, analysis was more appropriate for this study.

Psychology's interest in the impact of mass media has largely been on putative causative effects on pathological behaviours such as links between television viewing and desensitisation to violence; that is, a focus on individual rather than social interaction of audience and mass media (Giles & Shaw, 2009). To facilitate psychological analysis of media framing, Giles and Shaw (2009) developed a model

with eight non-sequential components that I adapted for this study. The components are initial data collection; screening; identifying story; identifying character; reader identification; narrative form; analysis of language categories; and generalisation.

The reason for adapting the model is that framing analysis is generally applied to the focus of news items, which is also the focus of the research. In this instance, the phenomenon being researched is public discourse about the independent woman, drawn from all relevant items captured by the keywords. In many instances, inclusion of reference to the independent woman may be incidental to an item's subject and it was the context of the reference, and the descriptive "sketch" of the woman that provided the frame. This means that some components of the model have less applicability and this will be noted when relevant.

6.2.1 Data collection. As noted in Chapter 3, I decided to sample from the most recent year (2009) prior to beginning the analysis to ensure currency, and from the year a decade earlier (1999) to note any change in framing over that period. The data were gathered from the three newspapers that are distributed statewide in Western Australia which, in 2009, had an approximate 1,298,500 adult population (ABS, 2010b). These are *The West Australian* (circulation 203,972 – weekdays, 342,787 - Saturday²; there is no Sunday edition), which is locally edited and a publicly listed company independent of an identifiable owner although the governing Board's Chair owns a national free-to-air television channel, amongst other media interests. The other two papers are *The Australian*, including its weekend edition (national circulation 135,000 - weekdays, 305,000 weekends), that has national coverage albeit with some content dedicated to state audiences, and the locally-distributed *The Sunday Times* (circulation 321,500), both of which are Rupert Murdoch's News Limited publications. Both *The West Australian* and *The Australian* are labelled "conservative" by Wikipedia. *The Sunday Times* is described as a populist tabloid rather than a newspaper of record. Such ideological homogeneity in Western

² These circulation figures were taken from Wikipedia on 12 May 2010. Those for *The West Australian* were reported by the Audit Bureau of Circulation for June 2009; the same source was quoted for *The Sunday Times* circulation in December 2008. Circulation figures for *The Australian* were unsourced but were not disputed by the newspaper so are presumed to be current when the page was updated on 8 May 2010.

Australia's general print media was expected to offer consistent public representation of the independent woman.

Access to *The West Australian* and *The Australian* archives was freely available through the Factiva web-based search engine. *The Sunday Times* on-line archives were accessible to subscribers through newstext. I chose to use the keywords *single woman/women*, *unmarried woman/women*, *divorced woman/women*, *separated woman/women*, from official ABS marital status categorisation, because I thought they would most likely be used in editorial content that drew from institutionalised social organisation familiar to a general audience. These were supplemented by the keywords *de facto* and *bachelor girl* to capture items where characters had informal interdependent status or where a commonly used colloquial descriptor for independent women, chosen for its prevalence in other readings, might be used. Data captured by *de facto* were included in an original analysis that found their frames were embedded in discourse about the equivalence of formal and informal marriage. Given this, I decided to delete this category from a second analysis because it had little relevance for women's domestic independence. No relevant items were captured by *bachelor girl*, which offers some support for my deciding to use official independence categories rather than the more colloquial. I decided against using *single parent/s* or *single mother/s* because I was not interested in discourse about parenting or families, although I expected this might be captured by independence keywords, and while it might be assumed the majority of references would be to women, the captured data may also have included fathers and non-gendered classification.

With the exclusion of *de facto* data, the keywords brought a total 880 items of which 811 were relevant, 459 from 1999 and 352 from 2009 (459/352) (Figure 6.1). For representational ease, they were collapsed into *widow* (86.9/90.3%), *single* (11.9/8.6%), and *divorced* (including *separated*) (1.1/1.1%).

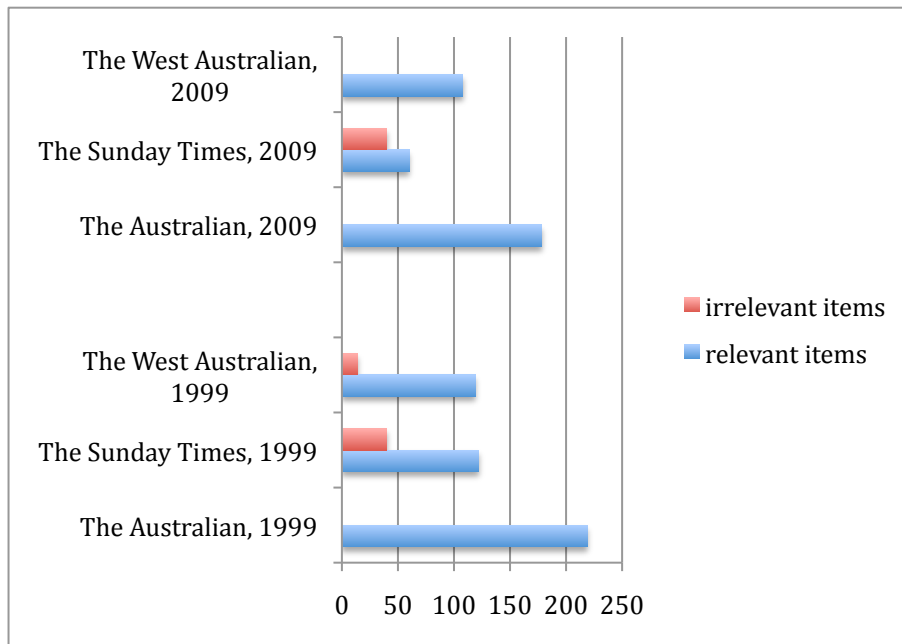


Figure 6.1. Keyword capture (n items)

6.2.2. Screening. The first step was to screen the entire capture for relevance before beginning analysis. Apart from 14 items (14.9%) in *The West Australian* captured by *bachelor girl* that were about a music band of that name, the attrition came from *The Sunday Times*. It was mainly attributable to (i) duplication of items (17%), captured through slightly changed headings in different editions of the paper, (ii) the inclusion of *widow* in titles (43.6%) such as of the opera *The merry widow* or the Scottish Widows insurance company, (iii) unrelated to the topic, for example, taxation policy that would harvest income equivalent to that from “every **single** woman, man and child” in Australia, and (iv) a cluster of typographical errors where misspelled “wi(n)dow” had escaped sub-editing (3.2%). As reported in Chapter 3, the resulting relevant database was entered as a Word document to NVivo8 for coding, after each item was identified by sequential numbering in its newspaper of origin file. To assist readability, item identifiers were abbreviated to the initials of the newspapers’ names - *A* (*The Australian*), *ST* (*The Sunday Times*), and *WA* (*The West Australian*) – and sequence number; e.g., *WA135* means the 135th extract from *The West Australian*.

It is known that newspaper audiences often interpret content by using existing character knowledge, or interpretative repertoires; that is, stereotypes³ or commonly understood positions such as “duplicious politician” or “frail old woman deserving protection” to facilitate understanding (Giles & Shaw, 2009). These, of course, are the very same characters drawn on during a story’s construction, precisely to prime the desired audience reception.

This process of characterisation, to a large extent, drove coding as individual instances were identified from items in the database. These were electronically filed in “child” nodes in NVivo, within the primary pre-determined nodes of independence category and publication year. As the child nodes developed, distinct frames became apparent in the first analysis, which was of data from 1999. Where it became apparent that some early coding was in fact a sub-set of a more dominant nodes, the smaller file was merged with the larger and the process continued until I had a set of distinct frames. I coded the 2009 data to the child nodes generated by the earlier analysis to validate comparison of the two years. Only one new node was generated by the 2009 data.

6.2.3 Identifying story. In Giles and Shaw’s (2009) formulation, an identifying story is the “news peg” that generates an item. As noted above, because this analysis of media framing of independent women includes their referencing in tangentially related items, rather than examining text where the focus is a category of independence, identifying stories will be noted in the broadest terms and may be closer to metaphor, stereotype, or common sense than to any event.

6.2.4 Reader identification. This element of the model asks “who is the audience invited to identify with?” (Giles & Shaw, 2009, p. 386). That is, whose perspective in an item is dominant. Again, because this study is a macroanalysis, the question can be answered only in a very general way and will be broadly summarised after discussion of the frames found for each category of independence.

³ Heard on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s Radio National program *Future tense* 20 October 2011: presenter Antony Funnell ‘I’m a journalist. We deal in inappropriate stereotypes’

6.3 Results

The quantitative base of the study will be reported before discussion turns to the frames themselves. Quantifying the incidence of independence identity in the newspapers in itself has discursive value in illustrating patterns of power relations and subjectification, for example in the startling disparity between the profile of independent women in the media and in their population.

6.3.1 Newspaper and population profiles. Comparison of the mix of independence status in the three newspapers with that in the population found a wide disparity for *widow*, *single* and *divorced* (Figure 6.2).

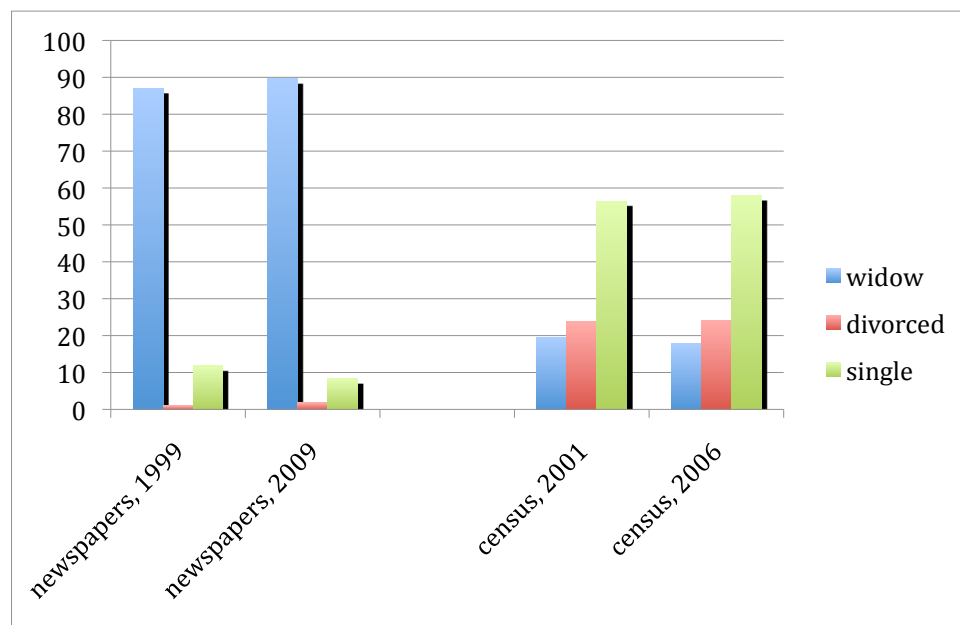


Figure 6.2. Comparison of independent women's profile (%)

The most obvious contradiction was between the incidence of widows identified in news reports and those in the population of independent women. Where *single* comprised 56.6/57.9% of the population of independent women in 2001/2006, *divorced* 23.8/24.1% and *widow* 19.6/17.9%, in the newspapers the incidence was 11.9/8.6%, 1.1/1.1%, and 86.9/90.3%, respectively. The next, related contradiction was the increase in identification of widows in the newspapers while their incidence in the population of independent women decreased against that of the single and divorced which had increased slightly.

There are several possible explanations for the disparity between media and census representation of categories of independent women. There may have been decreasing reference to marital status overall except when the relational link was integral to the story. For example, sports or business reporting rarely mentions marital status. Decades of slowly increasing participation in public life may have reduced the relevance of romantic attachment to a story's narrative so that the status reference common in human interest reporting may have skewed the incidence by editorial convention. Reporting women's involvement in criminal activity does not necessarily include their in/ter/dependence status except, as we will see below, where the protagonist is the wife or widow of a crime figure or has children or grandchildren. Following from this, another explanation for the predominance of widows captured in this data set is that it was her husband's importance, his untimely death, or her changed circumstances without his resources that made the widow newsworthy over other categories of independent women. From this perspective, to be romantically uncommitted reduces the social value of the single or divorced woman so that her status or her life goes unrecorded.

6.3.2 Frames. Frames may be themed as, for example, an archetype, a generic model recognised by the audience at an unconscious level that often provokes an emotional response (Faber & Mayer, 2009); a mythical figure such as Gaia, sometimes used in climate change debate; a value, perhaps motherhood as a feminine aspiration; or narrative, for example, the woman made complete by marriage (Van Gorp, 2007). The political women (referred to in Section 6.2) were framed in public discourse as (i) the steel sheila, (ii) the housewife, (iii) the mother, (iv) the feminist, or (v) the covergirl (Drabsch, 2007)⁴. Because many of the references to independent categories were incidental to an item's story, I chose to label the frames by attribute. As indicated above, I analysed the data by year and by independence category to look for signs of transition and will report my results accordingly.

6.3.2.1 Widow. Analysis of the data sets for both 1999 and 2009 found nine frames for widows: relict, vulnerable, worthy of protection, loyal, proxy, independent, caricature and metaphor.

⁴ From Baird J (2004). *Media tarts: How the Australian press frames female politicians*. Melbourne, Scribe Publications.

6.3.2.1.1 Relict: Although the death of their husband had ended their marriage, reference to widows in the captured media output kept the relationship very much alive. For example, nearly a fifth (19.55%) of the 1999 data set was obituaries, tributes to, or descriptions of funerals of dead men, most of which concluded in formulaic fashion by noting their survivors, for example, “He is survived by his widow, Lady Amy, a son and a daughter” (*WA122*). In only 15.38% of these cases were examples of the couples’ shared lives recorded, in 19.23% the widow was unnamed. There was also mention of others widowed through fatal assaults on their husbands (e.g., *WA300*) in which the focus of the item was the event.

In another 16.45% of the 1999 data set, the woman was newsworthy only in relation to her husband, for example, “The widow of murdered Indian national Rupen Katyal, who was executed on the first day of the emergency, is among the 155 people now being held captive on the tarmac at Kandaha” (*A312*). In a story about the South African elections that were expected to pass the Presidency from Nelson Mandela to Thabo Mbeki, international humanitarian activist, Grace Machel, was identified only in her capacity as the widow of one African leader then the wife of another (*A418*).

By 2009, there had been a significant reduction in the number of obituaries and the increased proportion of items captured by *widow/s* was for other reasons, including growing attention paid to the widows themselves, albeit because of their husband’s status. While there were still instances of brief reference to the widow of a man who was the focus of the item (e.g., *A620*, 633, 669, 723; *WA290*, 367), or whose mention was because of her husband’s standing, such as the demise of a woman whose husband died in the 11 September 2001 attack on New York (*A851*), it was much more likely that the widow herself was the subject of the story. For example, two prominent widows were profiled, the latter in her obituary, as matriarchs of media (Elisabeth Murdoch, widowed in 1952; *A887*) and business/political (Mary Chaney, widowed in 2001; *WA340*) families. An item might also relate to the woman’s experience of widowhood, such as that of the wife of East Timor’s Alfredo Reinado (*A605*) or of an Australian soldier killed in Afghanistan (*A647*), or to the immediate aftermath of her husband’s death, such as the generosity shown in allowing a mistress

to attend his funeral (*A778; ST207*), or to the stresses of settling his estate when its execution was contested (*A764, 815, 831; ST162*).

One unnamed widow had sought to bind a book of eulogies to her husband with tanned skin from his back (*A756*). Others were less staunch, such as Earnest Hemingway's widow who published his memoir against his wishes after his death (*A695*), the widow who affectionately maligned her husband's ability to pick winning race horses during his life when his final bet won £20,000 after his death (*A792*), and the vengeance wrought by the widowed Catherine de Medici on her husband's mistress (*ST206*).

6.3.2.1.2 *Vulnerable*: That they were widows added vulnerability to stories about their lives following the loss of their husband's protection. This might be through sub-headings such as 'Widow tells of her fear' (*WA335*) or in the text, for example, "One night in July last year, Mrs Richards, a widow, was doing some ironing in her kitchen when she was confronted by three youths" (*WA166*). Perception of disadvantage to widows through changes to public policy (*A516*), or being denied part or all of this support (*A329, 396; ST60*), brought editorial comment in their defence. For example, a war widow had lost the pension when she entered a second marriage shortly after the end of World War II (*WA182*). The item, sympathetically headed "War widow left to battle for pension", was interesting for the contesting arguments as to whether her remarriage ended claims on the state to substitute for the lack of her dead husband's financial support or whether its failure to assuage the disadvantage, grief and trauma of his demise in the service of the state rendered the pension a compensatory entitlement.

The withdrawal of widows' entitlements continued to stir editorial protest in 2009, such as that to free hospital transport (*ST154*), to the aged pension if the family home was included in the eligibility means test (*ST215*), or to the government's stimulus bonus paid to a recently deceased husband (*WA311*). Government concern about the impost of a growing number of widows on the pension system had caused consideration of "short-changing" (*A784, 785, 786*) war widows, a plan that was abandoned when its details were leaked to the media. Prosecution of the journalists involved had caused the introduction of "shield" laws to protect confidentiality of journalists' sources (the subject matter of the items). However, these were thought to

be inadequate, with reference to the threatened disadvantage to war widows used to argue for stronger protection than that offered (A784, 785, 786, 803).

There was general compassion for financial disadvantage brought by widowhood, such as that for a woman being “forced” to find work (WA124), for which they were unprepared because financial management had been their husband’s domain (ST38). The imposition of the “singles supplement” on widows’ and widowers’ travel accommodation was decried: “losing your best friend and lover after decades is tragic. Asking you to share a room with a stranger or pay a penalty as you recover is plain insulting” although the focus of the item was less about inequity than the deleterious impact on “tapping the \$900 million over-50s travel market” (A322). A travel insurance company was exposed as having abandoned a widow whose husband had died during their overseas holiday (ST144).

The right of widows to public support and protection was assumed, illustrated by the use of the evocative phrase “widows/and orphans” to argue the morality of a course of action bringing them benefit (e.g., A533, 553, 566, 632, 710, 729, 739, 752; ST205; WA295). Infamy was signified by injury to widows’ interests, for example, “Bernard Madoff was a cold-hearted control freak who ripped off friends’ widows weeks after their funerals...” (A833). The subjectifying “their” would also qualify this reference for inclusion in the *relic* frame, indicating as it does possession by the deceased men of both their funerals and their wives.

6.3.2.1.3 Worthy of protection: War widows’ status was enhanced by the circumstances of their husband’s death (e.g., A439, 466, 467, 469, 508; ST77, 151; WA222), with similar status afforded widows of civilian law enforcement officers, such as slain policemen. Because of their relationship, these widows’ comment, in some cases, was sought about subsequent investigation and prosecution processes and their outcomes (e.g., A415, 446, 461, 495, 496; WA131, 147, 148, 149, 154, 186, 221, 230, 231). The compassionate acceptance and defence of claims for support for widows in general, and war widows in particular, was because their circumstances were an involuntary contravention of social ideals. Consequently, claims for housing (A324, 362), pensions (A337), educational support for their children (A494) and unspecified welfare support to cover a range of needs (e.g., A503, 507) did not attract

criticism. Conversely, there was editorial support for the severe penalties imposed on those who abused the entitlements available to widows, such as imprisonment of a 68-year old woman for falsely claiming the widow's pension to support a gambling addiction (A444).

Support for war widows seemed sacrosanct, drawing on narratives of women and children rendered bereft – the widowhood of every government (Cohen, 1992) - and the bravery shown by soldiers fighting, and sacrificing themselves, for their country. For example,

Australia's long-term practice of honouring ex-servicemen and women, those who die and those who return, is a vital part of our ANZAC tradition. So is looking after the widows and children of those who do not return, or who are too severely wounded to work again. As the war in Afghanistan intensifies, it is vital that those involved, and their families, are as well supported as possible... like the ANZACS of the Great War and World War II and other campaigns, we owe the Diggers who have served our interests in Iraq and Afghanistan a vast debt of support (A611).

The above 2009 extract was from an item about difficulties faced by contemporary casualties in the armed forces and their families when claiming entitlements. Interest had been generated by the straightened circumstances made public by a recently widowed woman whose inadequate income and eviction from Defence Forces accommodation attracted much comment adverse to the government (e.g., A612, 613, 615; ST174, 175, 176).

There was also a special feature on Legacy and its services to widows of killed servicemen and their dependent children (e.g., A645, 648, 649), that needed on-going public donations to maintain the \$15 million expended by the organisation each year on welfare support (A646). The failure of a proposed statue of a war widow and her children, submitted by Legacy, to comply with Council size regulations (WA356) brought a supportively reported response of shock and bafflement from the organisation about opposition to erecting the tribute that also drew on an equity discourse by reporting comment that it 'would be the city's "first female" statue' (WA357).

6.3.2.1.4 Loyal: A major frame was that of widows' loyalty to their now deceased husband, for example, the heading "Widow gives her dead husband a voice" about

an emotionally distressed woman voting in the Timorese elections that her husband had fought for (A361). The widows were reported to be fighting for justice or reparation for their husband's death (e.g., A320, 335, 339, 421, 443, 446, 462; ST55, 128; WA131, 190, 211, 223, 232), protecting and promoting his memory (e.g., A338, 346, 359, 404, 481, 492, 510, 517; ST142, 143; WA179), or fulfilling his wishes posthumously (A389). Of note was a protest about police "violently wrestling spirit sticks representing the spirits of dead Aboriginal warriors" from their widows and throwing the spirit sticks into a vehicle for removal (A483).

This frame remained prominent in 2009 with reports of widows continuing to seek justice or reparation for their husbands' politically motivated or industrially related deaths internationally (e.g., A519, 634, 716, 880, 890) and locally (e.g., A528, 668, 733 781; ST189; WA236, 251, 257, 313, 320), including by joining class actions (e.g., A523; WA256, 330). Further, they were supported by reports of their seeking structural change to prevent future fatalities (A590; ST203; WA368). Others worked to protect and promote their husband's reputation (e.g., A518, 554, 574, 604, 633, 644, 657, 658, 726, 736, 757, 791, 805, 860; ST213; WA288, 351, 359) through initiatives as varied as posthumous publication of his work (A542) and continued advocacy of a pilot's integrity 30 years after the Erebus crash in Antarctica (A545).

6.3.2.1.5 Proxy: A similar frame was that of a widow stepping into her husband's shoes after his death to continue his work (A434, 490, 498), for example, "Elena Bonner, widow of Nobel Peace Prize winner and Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that in dealing with Russia as a democratic state, 'the United States is taking a desired state of affairs as real'" (A334); or to assume his authority although this was not always thought appropriate. For example, while it was suggested Sonya Gandhi "should go for an election as a dutiful widow. She still has a clean image" (A449), "leading figures had staged a revolt, questioning Mrs Gandhi's credentials to become prime minister if the party won the forthcoming election" (A428). To further demonstrate the inappropriateness of her aspirations the latter item continued "Mrs Gandhi, the widow of assassinated premier Rajiv Gandhi, handed an *emotional* letter to an emergency session of the party called to discuss the rebellion and *flounced out*, leaving some members in tears [emphasis added].

Other instances of proxy attribution were those reporting advocacy or other public roles by a widow of a prominent man because she had been his wife (e.g., A326, 330, 355, 374, 487, 493, 514; WA187) and her acting in his name to achieve redress for his death, perhaps by industrial risk exposure (ST55) or, in one case, his burial misadventure (ST151).

As in 1999, there were items in which widows assumed or were ascribed proxy status in 2009 (e.g., A589, 696, 796, 811, 823; ST214, 220; WA246, 280, 291, 334, 338, 374). These included the widow of a footballer authorising her husband's image to be entered in a charity exhibition (WA312) as well as the more conventional proxy leadership such as that shown by the widow of a Wik elder to protect the native title rights he had earlier achieved (A630). More ominous attribution of deputy status was reported when widows of Australian soldiers killed in Afghanistan were threatened, because of their marital relationship, by a Muslim fundamentalist (A577).

6.3.2.1.6 Autonomous: There were examples that privileged a widow's independence. These included pursuit of a post-marriage career unrelated to that pursued by her husband (ST122) or her own authority in the same field. For example, from a cluster of items about the appointment, as one of two deputy prime ministers to a newly elected Fijian government, "an experienced public servant and senior chief in her own right, Adi Kuini is the widow of the prime minister deposed by the coup, Dr Timoci Bavadra" (A424). A synopsis of a theatrical work (*The king and I*) described the scenario of "the arrival into the then little-known city of Bangkok of the widow, who has been hired as a teacher, and her son" (A313) implying both that her status had caused her to seek paid employment and that she had taken advantage of this to travel.

The validity of a cinematic plot about two women seeking to provide a new romantic relationship to their widowed friend, even though she was reluctant (ST53), was reflected in items where widows refused family or friends' matchmaking because they were reluctant or ambivalent about remarriage, instead accepting independence brought by their changed circumstances (WA20, 194).

As noted above, while the relational link to a previously prominent man rationalised reporting an item in 2009, the text was more likely to describe the widow's actions; for example, Terri Irwin's approval of plans to develop an ecozone in memory of her "wildlife warrior" husband, Steve (ST195) or Beverley Brock's road safety campaigning after the death of her racing driver *de facto* husband, Peter (ST203). Their widowhood was noted, but not elaborated, in sometimes quite extensive items about women engaged in philanthropy (e.g., A525, 663, 717; WA244, 287), professional achievement (e.g., A554, 675, 884; WA285), skills acquisition (e.g., A580), political activism (e.g., A630, 640, 683), leadership (A690; WA318) or candidacy (WA370), business (e.g., A804; WA271) and estate management (e.g., A815).

There were clusters of items about the activities of some widows. For example, Honey Bacon stood for state parliament as an independent candidate after the death of her husband, Tasmanian Premier, Jim Bacon (A683, 686, 707; WA296) and her comments about the government of the day were afforded newsworthiness (A763). Paddy Pearl, widow of a writer and media identity who died in 1987⁵, sold her historic house and donated the proceeds to medical research (A525, 541; ST244). There were several feature items about Aboriginal women whose widowhood was noted in discussion of their achievements as land rights activist (A630), musical mentor (A776) and artists (A884) although there was allusion to the marital provenance of their talent

... Papunya Tula artist Yinarupa Nangala, was the natural winner of the general painting prize... Yinarupa is not just the sister and daughter of well-known painters, but also the widow of one of the founding desert artists, Yala Yala Gibbs Tjungurrayi, and her own art bears a faint, affecting resemblance to his work/... last year's winner, Doreen Reid Nakamarra, who comes from the same community as Yinarupa, and is also the widow of a great art star from the past (A675).

Other items about women whose widow status was incidental to their activities included the murder of a crusading Chechen activist (A704, 708), the defiance of a trouser-wearing Sudanese woman arrested and threatened with flogging for breaking that country's indecency laws (e.g., A640; WA283), an Afghani widow's determination, at some personal risk, to vote in forthcoming elections in the hope that

⁵ Author of the introductory quote to Chapter 5.

democracy will improve life for her children (A671), and several about the philanthropy of Sally Burton, widow of actor Richard, to Western Australian theatre and her ambassadorship for the National Breast Cancer Foundation (WA287, 306, 308).

The dark side of independence was evidenced through reports of the widowed criminal. An accomplice of Judy Moran (see below) was also a widow (e.g., A737); another “gangland identity” widow was charged with attempted murder using a meat-cleaver (A787). Other associations with crime included the story, in a review of an anthology of Australian history, of Nellie Cameron whose lovers not uncommonly came to a violent end earning her the sobriquet “the black widow” (A585). Both husbands of a second widow in the same book also died violently. This representation of independence could be interpreted as being, variously, an extension of the life shared by the widow with her husband, resistance to accepting the ascribed role of respectable widow, or examples of disinhibited behaviour made possible by lack of spousal control.

6.3.2.1.7 Caricature: The major cluster of items in this frame related to legal proceedings brought by the daughter of a local millionaire against her stepmother, his widow. Another two items related to the equally acrimonious inquest into the millionaire’s death. The reporting gave the action the dimensions of a soap opera, with headings such as “Gina and Rose twist a legal joke – ALP” (A325), “Rambling Rose” (WA183), “Court loses the plot in Porteous-Rinehart fray” (A475) and “Rose and Gina show lacked the two stars” (WA218) indicating the tenor of media interest. While the daughter’s behaviour attracted censure, descriptions of the widow drew on centuries-old stereotype, described in Chapter 4, so that she became a caricature to provide myth-based entertainment for the reading public.

Discourse drew on characters of the gold-digger (A354, 468; WA183, 217, 220), the wicked step-mother (WA212), and possible husband killer (A460; WA208). Her litigation history, and that of her stepdaughter, was canvassed (A183; WA173), including the latter’s lobbying the government for an inquest into her father’s death (ST120, 199), and the derisive response from authorities such as the State Attorney-General (A325). The widow’s defence, that she was merely the obedient wife of a wealthy man (A468; WA205), was scorned by a magistrate who was reported to have

likened her to Manuel from *Fawlty Towers* in that she claimed to know nothing about anything (A460). As with Sonia Gandhi (A360), narratives of the Other were invoked with the widow's birth nationality raised in the context of accusations that she had sought a sham marriage to allow her to remain in Australia (WA220). From the media coverage, the reader could draw on interpretative repertoires of the "inimitable" (A386) widow, the wicked stepmother, as a calculating, dishonest woman who had seduced her husband into marriage with the intent of gaining access to his wealth, possibly through assisting his early demise after which she would enjoy untrammelled luxury having alienated father from daughter.

Widows were ridiculed for seeking (A504) or beginning (A430) another romantic relationship. Characterisations drew on stereotypes of widows' obsessed search for another husband (A504), particularly if they wanted to improve their financial or social standing (A513). A recurring character in a lengthy item about ocean cruising (WA197) was a "rich American widow", labelled "Kissin' Annie", described as keeping an eye out for someone still capable of twitching, redolent of the "lustful experienced widow" of medieval and early modern times (e.g., Foyster, 1999). The converse characterisation was invoked in a review of a stage production in which the character was "dried up" with a "fussy line in housekeeping" before being "awakened to life", that is, sexually engaged, by an attentive son-in-law (WA174). Referencing the centuries-old, farcical scenaria described in theatrical plots of the mid-millennium, there were items that signalled men's attraction to women's inherited wealth, and what widows might be willing to spend (A408; WA141, 193, 196), including for sexual attention (A348), while taking steps to protect their assets prior to entering another romantic relationship (A282, 480).

In 2009, however, no ridicule was attracted by widows seeking another romantic relationship. In an advertising feature for on-line introductions, a clinical psychologist is quoted as saying "repartnering has become more socially acceptable" (A771) due to Australians' increasing longevity, and an example was given of a widow's adult children preparing her profile for posting. The item finished with a testimonial from a remarried widow, who met her second husband on-line, saying "loneliness is a terrible thing, especially when you're not used to being alone. You feel like you're always *on the fringe of other people's lives*. Even when you're just at

home watching TV, it's nice to have someone to comment to" [emphasis added]. In an item headed "Ready to fall in love again", Beverley Brock was quoted, possibly in response to a question because the focus of the story was her move to a rural property, as saying she would like another romantic relationship although "at this point in time, there's nobody. I am very happy and content in my own space, but if that happened, that would be the icing on the cake" (ST171).

There was some affectionate mocking (e.g., "when Her Wyllie-ness faced the doorman..." (WA317) of two prominent widows whose social misadventures attracted attention: a fall at a party serious enough for hospitalisation of the widow of a previous Prime Minister, (A829, 845) and exclusion from a nightclub, because she did not have the correct ink stamp on her arm, by the widow of the developer who had built it (WA317, above). However, the items also displayed some sympathy for the women, and recorded instances of their fund-raising philanthropy.

Sympathy was not evidence in a cluster of items around "gangland widow" or "gangland matriarch" Judy Moran, charged with murdering her brother-in-law (e.g., A737; ST196; WA289, 299) and whose behaviour, like Rose (above) in 1999, was not uncommonly reported as entertainment (A699). Such was her attraction for sections of the news media that she was profiled at the time of her arrest, in such terms as: Lewis's wife Judy, the weeping matriarch and professional widow of the nation's most shot-at family, was pondering her future in a prison cell after being charged as an accessory after the fact to the murder the previous day of Lewis's brother Des (A744).

Other caricatures were that of the older widow wearing black (A497), or her predilection for hoarding junk that obstructed one pioneer woman's escape from a burning house (A336).

6.3.2.1.8 Metaphor: The fundamental fact of a widow being the relict of a departed husband was adopted in the term "widow-maker" to describe a potentially lethal item such as a poorly designed machine (A340), a difficult ski-run (A366), a 17% alcohol strength beer (ST136), occupational equipment (ST177, 231) including the "widows nets" installed on sailing ships to catch crew falling from tall masts (A724), and the

“widow’s walk” that was the sixteenth hole on a steep incline on a golf course (ST227).

Widow also acted as metaphor for sport that becomes an obsessive male focus for the season or series. For example, “Tis season for widows of USA to be merry” headed an item about a new National Football League (NFL) season that noted “the NFL has for years been the great American widow-maker” (A352). This item is interesting for its competing metaphors of the liberated and the bereft widow to illustrate the same phenomenon.

The metaphor continued in a report of a speech by the wife of a retiring Australian footballer about the impact of his profession on family life (A471), and a woman who described herself as a “fishing widow” (ST167). Such is the acceptance of this phenomenon that one item, noting an entire team’s unmarried status, urged lonely women who “fanc(ied) becoming a football widow” to visit the club to “nab” a player (WA195). Politics was another domain where wives might expect to be “widowed” (A423, 491) and the wife of a vigneron was described as accustomed to being a “vintage widow” (WA233).

There was metaphoric reference to the memorabilia sanctifying a memorial of the Hillsborough football disaster being laid on the ground “with the sincere intensity of a widow tending a grave” (A790). A seminar audience was invited to imagine the SBS television channel, in a context of its compensatory innovative responses to inadequate public funding, as a widow with small children in a Dickensian workhouse.

She barely feeds her family on a bowl of gruel a day and is grateful for it. One day she sells a posy of dried flowers for a penny and buys her children half a loaf of yesterday's bread. That afternoon the workhouse overseer sees the children with stale breadcrumbs around their mouths. He peers over his round belly and says: ‘I don't imagine you'll be needing your gruel this evening’ (A830).

“Widow-dress” poetically described the blackened landscape “stitched by bushfire last summer” (A457), and the “widow’s hat” was worn by a character in an advertisement for anti-dandruff treatment after killing an afflicted man so that she

could wear black again without it being speckled with his detritus (A371). The propensity of the “black widow” to eat her mate was refuted as reflecting the lives of many women in violent domestic relationships (WA54), and compassion was better defined by the self-sacrifice of the “widow’s mite”, wrote a reader, protesting earlier commentary, than linking its philanthropic variability to the impact of the economy and its surpluses on individuals’ ability to donate (A488). Concern about the cost to Brazil’s pension system by growing numbers of “Viagra widows” was attributed to that country’s men’s propensity for marrying much younger women (A670).

When used as a metaphor, either *widow* or *widows and orphans* signified being worthy of protection, generally in relation to financial support (e.g., A343). For example, defrauded businessmen plaintiffs were described as big players or tax avoiders rather than self-depicted vulnerable widows and orphans (A436, 440) and a book review discussed the portrayal of a large communications company’s shareholders as widows with children to claim good-neighbour status when in fact five large corporations owned 50% of the stock (A459). A letter to the editor, humorously defending the sensibilities of sub-editors, asked “Is it not a well known fact that all sub-editors care deeply about widows and orphans?” (A411).

6.3.2.2 Single. The media capture of 85 items containing keywords *single woman/women* or *unmarried woman/women* found more complexity than that associated with the other categories of independent woman. Of interest, while the items captured by the keywords *unmarried woman/women* brought content that implied disadvantage, there was also some respect for these women’s achievements. This complexity made it difficult to easily differentiate between the frames in some items for reporting purposes. This was particularly so for items about the television program *Sex and the City* that debuted in 1999, generating comment about the motives, modelling and representativeness of the behaviour depicted in the show, often using several frames in the same item, (e.g., A91; ST11, 12) that either accepted or contested the stereotypes about sexually active, predatory single women. In some items, the keywords *single woman/women* had brought comparatively neutral comment such as that of the Japanese Prime Minister when he explained that most men choose a single woman to marry but that he had chosen “from among all womankind” when romancing the married woman now his wife (A642). Bernard Salt

discussed the vanishing use of honorifics such as “Miss” or “Mrs”, overtaken by the all-purpose “Ms” (A711) and a biography of Caroline Chisholm described her, amongst other things, as an advocate for the poor British singlewomen encouraged to migrate to Australia in the nineteenth century (A535). In all, there were nine frames: victim, deficient, pitiable, Other, systemic disadvantage, predatory, promiscuity, independence, three of which were not present in 2009, when single women enjoyed more positive press. While it again was the dominant discourse in the later data set, disadvantage included its greater contestation.

6.3.2.2.1 Victim: In 1999, a story headed “Balaclava rapist targets lone, elderly women” (A299) began by reporting police concerns that a “serial rapist” of elderly women could turn murderer before describing how one prospective victim, woken by a pillow being held over her face, repelled the attacker by pinching and twisting “...the flesh in the man’s armpits forcing him to let go and then kick(ing) him in the stomach, propelling him into a wardrobe. He ran off...”. An attached map showed “a trail of intimidation”. Notable for the disconnect between frame and case, rather than focusing on the woman’s effective self-protection, the story was framed around the victim potential of all older single women, supported by police opinion that the number of attacks had been under-reported and would continue. The assailant’s *modus operandi* was described as was his identity-concealing clothing, the nocturnal timing of the assaults when potential victims were asleep and least able to defend themselves, and the likelihood that they may have invited him into their homes as a tradesman or in a similar capacity, so unwittingly advertising their vulnerability.

Young single women were specifically mentioned as needing protection from a philandering former member of a police special responses unit when his appeal against a conviction for attacking a woman pregnant with his child, to terminate the pregnancy, was denied (WA95). Yet single women were significantly less likely to be murdered than those in romantic relationships (WA54). In 2009, victimhood was the theme underlying notions of a “man drought”, a term resurrected by demographer and media commentator Bernard Salt to describe statistically reduced marriage opportunities for women aged 30 years and older (e.g., ST157).

6.3.2.2.2 Deficient: Notions of deficiency underpinned a profile in the 1999 data set of single women that assumed home maintenance incompetence requiring them to

“hire a hubby” for this purpose (ST31). A higher percentage, compared to the general population, was reported to be diagnosed with schizophrenia (WA76). A report headed “Background: those at risk” compared their long-term unemployment rates unfavourably to those of women with working husbands (WA109). The vulnerability of single women to unemployment was mirrored in a trend in 1999 of jobless single women characters in Hollywood output (A278) who were saved from a life of struggle by marriage to a wealthy man. Where single women were depicted as successful, they were in high-power positions, presumably not needing a man’s resources for survival. By 2009, however, a critic commented that a role in a theatrical production was that of “a traditional ‘bad mother’”, a single woman in an abusive relationship (A551), the quotation marks indicating the stereotypic rather than assumable representativeness of the role, although this had by no means vanished as evidenced in another item that expressed anxiety about the high degree of instability faced by the children of *de facto* and unmarried parents (A629).

6.3.2.2.3 Pitiable: Her Ally McBeal character described as “a neurotic, mini-skirted, post-feminist single woman”, Calista Flockhart’s symptoms of possible anorexia nervosa were reported, these were sunken eyes, hollow cheeks and increasing emaciation resulting in a skeletal body (ST39). Conflating role with reality, the actor was reported as “admit(ting) she frets constantly about being unmarried and childless”, and following a diet immune to sensible advice “like her emotionally fragile TV alter ego”.

Common phrases such as being “left on the shelf” or “dying old and alone” were associated with the irrational fears of the single woman (WA16). This item reported the interviewee’s opinion that serial relationship sabotage was prevalent, driven by “undeservability and fear” that results in a preference for “whingeing” about a lack of suitable romantic partners rather than having “to work really hard” to keep one. She recommended single people embrace “a broad and balanced life, making the most of extra leisure time singledom gives” without acknowledging there being no relieving division of labour in single households; she also recommended not identifying every negative emotion (boredom for example) with the “stultifying, paralysing spectre of loneliness”, words shocking in their despair. Interestingly, as with the assumption that independent women have increased leisure time, there was also uncritical

acceptance that romantic relationships were fragile with inherent dissatisfactions making them vulnerable to temptation, from single women's sexuality or independence, requiring constant monitoring and maintenance for their survival.

The situation had not changed much in 2009 when a journalist's personal history about her romantic relationships, written just prior to marrying, tapped memories of "miserable" nights of speed-dating, of opportunities for romance being "grim".

I know some men like to joke about single women in their 30s. They think their level of desperation and the ease with which they can win their affections is somehow funny. Personally I don't see any humour in an emotionally wrought woman coming to terms with the fact she may not meet her life partner in time to start a family. I don't see the humour in a woman settling for less to achieve that end (ST157) [emphasis added].

6.3.2.2.4 Other: The Other is fundamental to the creation of Self (Hall, 2001); that is, the Self is bounded by what the Other is not (Benson, 2003). In the public sphere that is, to a very large degree, a product of media construction (Brinkmann, 2010), deviations from the heterosexual couple are the Other. For example, the lifestyle piece headed "The single life" (WA16, also above) profiled a local celebrity psychologist, labelled "counsel for the defence of the single person", but whose own interdependent status was reported. The psychologist's focus was singles "who have been uniformly marginalised, stereotyped and even feared thanks to the arrogant hegemony of coupledness". In the psychologist's experience, uncoupled people living in "a couple orientated society" were made to feel freakish, stereotyped as "inordinately fussy, or undesirable, or difficult" with perhaps suspect sexual orientation. Her women clients reported being excluded from couples' society, possibly because they are perceived by coupled women as potential competition for male partners or envied for their independence by female partners, so threatening existing romantic relationships. With double the number of women to men in the psychologist's courses on living the single life, she was committed to making them all feel better about their situation because "lonely men and desperate women" often settle for less than optimal relationships just to relieve their condition. The article concluded with the coupled world being urged to avoid judging or labelling single friends, or making assumptions about their lives, and to contact them "on a weeknight, just to say hello". From its beginning, the article was predicated on negative societal attitudes about, and the susceptibility to those attitudes of, single

people. It confirmed the privileged norm of heterosexual interdependence by reference both to the tasks necessary for unmarried people to counter social exclusion and the conscious consideration couples, representing mainstream society, should extend towards them. Despite affirming validity of the single life, there was uncritical assumption that it was transitory, with help needed to either overcome personal emotional barriers to finding the right romantic partner or to relinquish independence for romance. In 2009, there was no frame of otherness for the single woman.

6.3.2.2.5 Systemically disadvantaged: This frame is about single women's compromised access to goods and services. In 1999, there was a cluster of articles about access to assisted contraception that was denied to all except formally married women. Issues of equitable access were reported, including presentation of survey results showing minority community support for access to be available to *de facto* couples (32%) and single women (23%) in positive terms that suggested editorial support for the position (WA88). Despite similar minority support, a government committee recommending guidelines for embryo research rejected access to contraception services by single women while removing relationship duration requirements for *de facto* couples (WA86), a decision supported by church groups, albeit leavened by regret about perceived discrimination, but protested angrily by women's groups (WA85). Another report qualified the exclusion to clarify that contraceptive services would be available to unmarried women "who are likely to become infertile as a result of disease or medical procedure" so that, should they enter a romantic relationship, their stored embryos would offer the possibility of maternity; however, planned single parenthood through assisted conception remained unavailable to them (WA129).

There were indications that inconsistencies between Australian states in single women's access to assisted conception services were perceived to be discriminatory in comments such as "... in Victoria, legislation effectively prevents single women... from taking part in IVF programs. This has *forced* several women to travel to NSW for the chance of conceiving. The situation is *little better* in other states" (A36 [emphasis added]). The use of the emphasised words in this item indicates that both

the daily newspapers recognised legislative disadvantage to single women in relation to access to assisted conception and supported no exclusionary qualifications to eligibility for such services.

In an analysis of income changes brought by the introduction of the proposed goods and services tax (GST) (A186), illustrative cases included a low-income single woman who would benefit by \$0.77 a week, a middle-income single woman gaining nearly \$40 a week, a single-income family's extra \$33.55 a week and \$88.89 to a high-income family. There was comment that people in the same situation as the low-income single woman "will slip through the net and (perhaps) suffer a decline in living standards". A high-income single woman could expect \$37.25 but a retired single woman did not believe estimates of a \$41.04 improvement in her weekly income, anticipating it would be subsumed into new service charges. A single mother of a teenager and a six-year old child, reflecting on her \$12.31 weekly windfall, said "it makes you want to go out and find a partner... it's not fair at all, considering I'm doing two people's jobs here and not always doing a great job of it either because it's very demanding and financially is where it hurts". The range of single people's situations and opinions about the GST, particularly that of women, was sympathetically extensive compared to that of the three families in the piece who covered low-, middle-, and high-incomes, respectively.

There were also items about advocacy of women's involvement in church decision-making, noting that single women, among others, "have something to contribute", implying current exclusion of that contribution (A41) and the lack of facilities for young single women seeking refuge from family dysfunction or assault (WA83).

Celebrations surrounding the unexpected mid-life pregnancy of the English Prime Minister's wife, Cherie Blair, in 1999, were contrasted with reactions to other unintended pregnancies.

The Blairs live in a country that routinely vilifies single mothers and blames them for a multitude of social ills, ranging from teenage delinquency to a blown-out welfare budget. Columnists, policy-makers and do-gooders continually ask, 'How do so many unmarried women become mothers when reliable contraceptives are so readily available?' Ask the Blairs. By their own admission, this pregnancy is unplanned and a 'total shock' (A25) [emphasis added].

The article continued “the women who pay most profoundly for accidental pregnancy are those without permanent partners” with British single mothers lowest on European employment and income scales.

In 2009, uncritical comment about single women’s growing investment in real estate (ST159, 170; WA378) was tempered by reports that they were still being asked whether financial aspects of the project would be handled by male relatives (ST159) and the reversion of British banks to denying single women mortgage finance as a risk management strategy (WA348). Growing recognition of single women’s financial acumen was further tempered by concern about their self-funded retirement support, estimated to be much less than that of men because of gendered labour market participation characterised by lower average women’s wages (WA273).

Further evidence of systemic disadvantage was offered in a 1999 profile of the actor, Meryl Streep, in which she spoke of the difficulties in wanting to make visible the existence of the disadvantaged in the film *Dancing at Lughnasa* (A215).

I mean, you talk about *invisible lives* – a film about five unmarried women in rural Ireland, during the Depression... Who’d want to see that in Hollywood? Nobody. But the money men saw that I was involved and thought, well, if she wants to do it, maybe somebody will go.

Other items drew on historical comparisons to the lives of contemporary single women to indicate a change for the better. An item celebrating International Women’s Day (IWD) described marriage as the only respectable future for any women at the beginning of white settlement in Australia (A272). Another reflected on the support expressed by the State Governor for Hitler and Mussolini 75 years earlier, protested by a prominent Western Australian feminist who drew attention to the associated loss of women’s status in Germany that included a tax levied on unmarried women to fund a loans scheme to encourage men to marry, on condition their wives certified their own withdrawal from the labour market (WA377).

6.3.2.2.6 *Desperate to marry:* While it was possible to find reference to “desperate” women (WA16, above), this frame was apparent in less direct comment. According to a 1999 review of the Subaru Forester GT, headed “Subaru seduces the single girl”, its

attributes would enable single women to feel like they had achieved a life ambition and entered the world of “rich and safety conscious mums” who want safe transport for their children (WA39). As a bonus “most desirable to single women – it makes the lady behind the wheel suddenly and extremely popular with men. Malefolk flock to this car in awe and admiration like seagulls swoop for fish and chips”.

Professional bachelors were said to “madden” single women by being “extremely elusive, working hard at remaining unencumbered, constantly on the alert, always keeping their options open, and kept *out of harm’s way* by self-appointed minders of the *endangered species*; married women”. Bachelors’ determination to remain that way was indulgently described as unfair “considering how many single women of a certain age are *on the prowl* for husbands”. This same column wondered whether, “for many women, life without a husband is like a shop without a cash-register” and that, although there are available single men, a “coquette manqué” complained bitterly that “they’re too difficult to meet, let alone get to know well enough to *entrap*” (A283) [emphasis added].

There was comment in another review of *Sex and the City* about the many desperate, unmarried older women from whom single men take their uncommitted pick, and about married women’s fears that their husbands are seen as sexual prey (ST11).

This perennial frame continued in 2009 with the man drought metaphor that is based on ideological, uncritical assumption of women’s desire for marriage at any age including late life (ST226), and their increasing, derisory desperation, as they aged, at its elusiveness. From the arts, a film character was summarised as being single and desperate for companionship (A839) and a discussion of Jane Austen’s oeuvre included opinion that she had inspired chick-lit and romantic comedy in the 1990s. This appealed to “a new class of consumers: single women who had delayed marriage and whose *search for a mate had taken on a new urgency*”, a phenomenon suggested to be played out in contemporary literature by Bridget Jones (A742) [emphasis added].

In a 1999 article about single women’s reluctance to enter a potentially financially insecure marriage, with the heading “No pash without cash” connoting sex-work, the increasing number of single women was linked to gold-digging so that what could be

considered a rational marital consideration - to choose a spouse unencumbered by unemployment or profligacy - was framed into essentially the unemotional exchange of sexual availability and domestic services for access to financial security. Women “slipping into their mid-30s, *happy*, hardworking and succeeding” [emphasis added] were counselled to understand their “dreams of a Prince Charming swinging in and carrying you into an ozone-depleted sunset” and “(your) demand for a high-income, asset-rich superboy dying to commit to you” are unrealistic. Instead, they may have to lower their romantic sights if they wanted to have children; the *coup de grâce* was comment that children remember being loved, rather than the size of the parental bank account (A311). The item was written by a single man who was “30, balding, I haven't got a degree nor do I own a house”, whose desire (desperation?) for marriage apparently blinded him to the competitive advantage of happy independence over challenging interdependence.

6.3.2.2.7 *Predatory*: Both this and the following frame of promiscuity were absent from the 2009 data set and were related, to a large extent, to the debut of the television series *Sex and the City*. Contesting the underpinning storyline requiring the characters to act like predators, calculating and objectifying but ultimately dissatisfied with their conquests (ST11), a columnist protested that single women in New York are not fixated on getting and keeping men and an “appalling” outcome of the program may be confirmation of the stereotype that they are (A91). In a discussion of the program’s assumptions, one reviewer spoke about “nice” men being unattractive to women “even in a city full of *desperate single females*” (A114) [emphasis added], the New York of powerful single women (WA65). The other assumptions were that every woman wants a powerful, wealthy man; most men will choose beauty over intelligence; men are self-obsessed; women always worry about what men think of them. Hypothesising that these assumptions contain truths, the reviewer described the program as having wry, honest, funny familiarity based in human fragility such as women’s “fear of abandonment”.

Another review of the program described the book on which it was based as “a sort of humorous travel guide for women hunting for sex but hoping for love in New York’s challenging – and, you might say, challenged – singles world” (A124). Again, there was reference to stereotypic role reversal that saw men objectified and women

playing the field, albeit in the hope of finding a permanent relationship. One of the actors believed the program gave her contemporaries “a voice” while breaking down sexual prudishness, forgetting the sexual liberality of the previous generation. Sadness was detected about this being the first generation in many where women would not resemble their mothers, where they did not have to settle down even though the plot lines were regularly directed at achieving that goal. The script had women bemoaning growing old alone and being told “sweetheart, we’re all alone, even when we’re with men. Slap on some armour and go through life like I do” which indicated a lack of contentment with the depicted lifestyle.

The motivation for a television series that asked why “so many powerful, ambitious women end up sleeping alone” was suggested to be the personal experience of its director, an unmarried woman in her late 30s (*WA65*). The director accused Hollywood of stereotyping professional women as “unchained man eaters”, and instead chose to profile the angst of a 45-year-old casting director who fantasises about marriage, maternity, and success. Ironically, episode one was set in New York, “the epicentre of the *single syndrome* with an estimated five single women per man” [emphasis added], where her subject for the episode, amongst other things, attended a seminar about stealing men from other women.

6.3.2.2.8 *Promiscuous*: In an extensive 1999 report of the association of top luxury brands with Americas Cup yacht racing, there was reference to anyone wearing Team Prada’s smart kit attracting “as much attention from New Zealand’s single women as a visiting GI bearing nylons must have attracted during WWII” (*A18*), bringing all the connotations of sexual availability and avariciousness associated with that analogy (Finch, 1995). Similarly, in a column about the debonair grace of the Australian ambassador to the United States, his former wife was thanked for doing “the rest of the single women of the world a favour” by divorcing him (*A54*), with the clause “and they’re not exactly thin on the ground” implying fierce competition for his favours. This theme was continued in an article about Easter in which “a well-worn joke in single-woman circles (is) that the only difference between chocolate and sex is that chocolate is easier to get” (*A250*).

In a column espousing “pelvic health” (i.e., sexual satisfaction), readers were advised married couples hate singles not because single women want to steal husbands but

because singles have “sizzling sex. Sex that flares and sparkles with all the passion of unrequited love, insecurity and unfamiliarity... (they) reek of champagne sex” unlike married couples who enjoy “hot-cocoa sex” (A57).

As noted, there was much comment about the characters’ sexual expression in *Sex and the City*. One reviewed episode had brought the “C-word” to mainstream television, thought to be anathema, rarely used in daily life except as an insult or in pornography (A91). Its use in this episode facilitated examination of issues to do with power; for example, whether to receive money after a one-night stand was degrading or an equitable exchange of power. It was noted that anal sex had caused a dilemma in a previous episode for the character, Charlotte. The program was described as “titillating, provocative, sexually explicit, cynical. A no-holds-barred look at what single women really think about sex” by another reviewer (ST11), in which “four attractive, sexually voracious, 30-something New York women... talk dirty, swear freely and... analyse every sexual encounter, every flirtation, every carnal moment to within a centimetre of its vicarious life”. Continuing the power theme, the characters’ weekly “trawling (of) bars, boutiques and restaurants... for sexual (and to some extent, emotional) adventure” [emphasis added] was judged the key to female empowerment.

Observations about American, and possibly Australian, trends towards public revelation of what previously had been kept private and responsive advertising (e.g., erectile dysfunction and Viagra) included that “*frustrated single women* like myself can now buy an oatmeal which is ‘like a hug that lasts all day’” [emphasis added] although the author declined breakfast cereal that offers emotional, if not sexual, support (ST37). Another item (A233), posited the traditionalist view of women’s role and function in which freely available premarital sex available from single women caused men to eschew marriage, suggesting this is the obverse of radical feminism in which every gain for women has actually been to male and patriarchal advantage.

A theatre reviewer reported that a key theme in a comedy routine was, because she is single, the assumption that the comedienne was “desperate and dateless”. Amongst other subject matter, the show contained a routine about her hiring a male prostitute, reinforced by stage support in the form of a semi-naked “hunk in jockstrap and angel

wings” (A236). The reviewer situated the performance in rebuttal of stereotypes about single women’s rapacious but ridiculous and thwarted sexuality, reporting that the comedienne steps out of character at one point to directly contest that stereotype, saying “talking about being single doesn’t mean I want to meet anyone. If you come up and talk to me after the show I’ll probably think you’re a psychopath”. The review was headed “Glorious revenge for years of bad sex”.

6.3.2.2.9 Autonomous: Responses by women to comment in 2009 about a man drought were likely to dismiss notions of disadvantage. For example, headed “Don’t marry, be happy”

THERE may be a man drought in Perth, but many single women in their 30s couldn't care less. Contrary to what some may think, these women are in no hurry to get hitched and settle down. Nurse Lorraine Navalta, 33, who has been single for three years, said she was enjoying the single life so much that she had stopped looking for a potential partner. She said women in their 30s looked for different characteristics in a man than younger women. ``Looks have become less important. I look for someone who has a similar plan to me, I want to travel and have fun and do all those little things I haven't done yet," she said. ``In terms of marriage and children, it would be nice, but if it doesn't happen, then that's OK by me” (ST158) [emphasis added].

Other items contested both that there was a sex imbalance among those of marriageable age (e.g., ST156) or that the search for romance was female-specific (e.g., ST223). Women’s increasing reluctance to marry (“If single women can't drag (men) to the altar - or, more accurately, can't be bothered...”) (A561) had seen the launching of a website in the United States of America to promote marriage to 18-30 year olds, suggested to be a response to the imposition of increasing numbers of single men on the public purse through imprisonment, unemployment and other social malfunction. Another item reported reduced happiness in all categories of American, except African American, and European women, linked to economic exposure and consumer demand rather than romantic or other opportunity (WA255). There was also comment that some people come to love their independence, following failed interdependence, to a degree that “they would fight tooth and nail” to avoid the condition and “have to be persuaded back” into another relationship (WA16), the implication being that independence, however pleasurable, should be forsaken for a return to ideologically endorsed coupledness.

There was some attention to independent women's financial strength in 1999. For example, a business consultant was quoted as saying that many young, single Japanese women, described as "educated, computer-literate and cashed-up", were deferring marriage, preferring to live alone, with their consumer behaviour missed by monthly government surveys of spending that sampled only "family" households (A39). A study had found banks continuing to be "extremely sexist" about home loans, for example, excluding coupled women from discussions when their male partners were present. While giving no examples of single women's experience, the report quoted the investigator as saying "more and more women were making decisions about finance – whether as part of a couple or as an independent single women (*sic*)" (ST33). Another item reported single women's willingness to invest in higher-risk products (ST38), while noting that divorced and widowed women have greater problems managing their unforeseen independence and mothers of dependent children opt for low-risk exposure. By and large, the items assumed women's responsibility for their financial futures, with single women perhaps best placed for personal wealth creation although wives might expect comfortable retirement support from shared assets and advantageous management of the taxation benefits available to couples.

That interdependence did not always bring privilege had been described in the 1999 data set in a story about an Australian research scientist in the mid-twentieth century who kept her marriage secret for years because it would have meant her exclusion from the workforce, as was customary at the time, and she delayed maternity rather than end her career before it was unavoidable (A268). An aunt, presumably single, who taught the subject and prevailed upon her niece's parents to allow its study by their daughter, had triggered her interest in science.

By 2009, there were reports of an opportunistic market providing services for the growing numbers of independent women such as structured tours for women travelling alone (ST160). Many of these companies were founded by women and catered for singles and women whose husbands refuse to travel. Some focus on indulgence

“I was stretched out in a spa pavilion in Hoi An, in Central Vietnam, having a simultaneous pedicure and shoulder massage, and I thought

I could handle a lot more of this and so could many wonderful hard-working women I know," O'Meara says. "I designed a single perfect weekend that easily fits into a women's schedule, and something that wouldn't break the budget either, and I put in all the things I wanted a bit of shopping, lots of pampering, time to sleep in, lots of delicious fresh food and a cooking class, luxurious accommodation.

"When I took the first group of Gorgeous girls over I knew I'd got it right. We had a small amount of time between connecting flights and when one girl zipped off and bought two handbags in the space of a minute the whole group whooped and clapped can you imagine men doing that?" (ST172).

A profile of a wealthy, recently divorced woman described her as a "strong, single woman with new goals and great determination", now a director of a business providing a directory of services for women (ST168). In marked contrast to 1999, single women in 2009 had access to assisted conception services (ST188; WA249, 292, 322) with a report of angry response when such access was questioned (ST191). There was speculation about the possible paternity of the baby born to the determinedly-unmarried French Minister of Justice (A879) although this was somewhat compromised by the suggestion that the President's support for his Minister's decision was designed to reverse waning support by his feminist credentials.

International Women's Day in 1999 was "a time to celebrate some uncommon women" (A271) made so by their adherence to an independent life. From fiction, the "ingenious, witty, brave Becky Sharp" and *Little women's* Jo March had provided alternatives to girls growing up in the 50s and 60s who were puzzled by the dullness and misery they saw of married life and the interesting lives of unmarried women in their communities.

... all of the women who had been profound influences upon me had probably been single by choice – and it was this that distinguished them... there were heroines in books, but there were, too, those unmarried women of my youth who had such life and magnetism because they dared to be who they wanted to be, at a time when it often must have been hurtful and difficult... International Women's Day seems to me a perfect day to remember all these extraordinary, ordinary women [emphasis added].

On the other hand, an author of a book subtitled "Single women reinventing single life", approved of the characterisations in *Sex and the City*, and was quoted as saying

“A woman who can afford to travel and buy her own furniture is entirely different from the *dried-out old spinster* you have to remember to bring to the party” (A124) [emphasis added], simultaneously resisting and reinforcing the stereotype.

6.3.2.3 Divorced. Compared to discourse about being unmarried, there was more negativity associated with divorced women, increasing between 1999 and 2009, and made more apparent by there being only 11 items in this category.

6.3.2.3.1 Discard: From the author of a previously discussed column about evasive bachelors (A283)

I used to think it was a self-esteem thing; the utter horror of being a discardee would stick in the craw, wouldn't it? How galling to constantly imagine your rotter of an ex parading around with someone hardly old enough for her breast implants.

Many divorced women were reported to be “*bitter, vengeful* and sometimes *keen to sleep with as many men as possible*, to show their ex they were still ‘attractive’” (WA20) [emphasis added].

6.3.2.3.2 Promiscuous: A 1999 story about Viagra reported an increasing incidence of AIDS among older Americans as the newly divorced enjoyed new sexual liaisons (A212), forgoing the use of condoms because they perceived low risk of infection or pregnancy. A 2009 film depicted a newly divorced woman’s sexual adventures with a much younger neighbour (A591) and “disquiet about a newly-divorced woman who cavorts with toyboys” was reported in 1999 to be a source of concern about Madonna’s aspirations to adopt a Malawian child (ST212).

6.3.2.3.3 Disadvantaged: There was comment in 1999 about the difficulties faced by divorced (or widowed) women when they became solely responsible for their financial futures (ST38). Divorced and separated women had benefited from the development of services for women but were still disadvantaged in 2009 in areas such as superannuation where separated women were most disadvantaged (WA273). Divorced women were also disadvantaged physically, with a study reported in 2009 to have found divorced women looked older than their married or single twin sisters (compared with a widowed twin who looked younger than her sister whose marital status remained unknown) (WA315).

6.3.3.3.4 Affective: A profile of an Olympian included reference to her divorce, described as sad after many married years (*WA47*). This was balanced by it being noted that divorced women are generally happier than divorced men and that there is little agreement by women that their children benefit from unhappy parents staying together (*A233*), with 83% of divorced women having no regrets about leaving their marriage (*A163*). This frame was not found in 2009.

6.3.3.3.5 Autonomous: This was another frame found only in 1999. An author who was Muslim and travelling on her own while researching background to a new book, spoke of difficulties finding accommodation in the Muslim community because, being unable to share premises with non-related men, her only option was to locate a Muslim divorcee (*WA110*).

Submissions to research the role of women in the Roman Catholic church advocated removal of barriers to the potential contribution from divorced women and single mothers (*A247*). The above Olympian had moved from the subsistence farming of her marriage to a career in television sports commentator and authorship and was, at the time of the article, ‘a very gentle, peaceful woman’ (*WA47*).

6.3.3 Identifying characters. In Giles and Shaw’s (2009) model, the characters to be identified are those in a single or cluster of items. For example, in the reports of litigation by the millionaire’s widow and daughter, these might be the millionaire, the widow, the daughter, the Attorney-General, the lawyers, the magistrates, and so on. In this study, analysis was of independence framed across hundreds of items, in many of which the reference to a character’s independence status was in passing rather than the focus. I decided that this element of the model would report the characters within the overall identities of widow, single and divorced women that were identifiable from archetype, myth, stereotype and other sources of ‘knowledge’.

6.3.3.1 Widow. While discourse about widows in 2009 continued, in the main, to situate them subsidiary to their husband and his memory, there was evidence of interest in their activities subsequent to his death through, in many cases, their marital status being noted rather than featured. Compared to 1999, widows’ independence, achievements and romantic aspirations were recorded sympathetically and supportively. Audiences were presented with women who made the best of the

circumstances confronting them, offering insight into public discourse over the decade that, while positioning her as eligible for financial, moral, legal and compensatory support because her independence was involuntary, acknowledged the widow as an autonomous entity.

The virtuous widow: the major characterisation was that of the virtuous widow, the woman whose marriage continues through constancy to her husband's memory. This character underpinned stories of widows' lives subsequent to their husband's death, including their adoption of his interests and public life; and in their personal development while living lives of relational independence. She featured in stories of suicide, grief, eligibility for material public support and the vulnerability of continuing life without her man. She was also evident in comment about her reluctance to remarry, despite efforts by friends and family to persuade her into another romantic attachment.

The black widow: while the black widow spider is so named because of the propensity of the female to induce widowhood by eating her mate, in my formulation it includes the definition 'wicked'. This character was most obviously drawn upon in items reporting the deviance of notorious widows from the virtuous ideal. There were stories about women who killed their male partners, including this accusation leveled at the millionaire's widow by her step-daughter, but 'black widow' might also include the criminal widow who vowed physical vengeance for the death of family members and who was implicated in the murder of her brother-in-law.

The merry widow: described as an amorous or designing widow (E. Brewer, 2002), this character was evident in items about man-hunting widows, and in stories about social activities enjoyed by the widows of wealthy men.

The war widow: there was significant reference to the grief, entitlement, vulnerability and loyalty of the war widow, a character that included widows of other institutional warriors such as policemen.

6.3.3.2 Single. Overall, discourse in 1999 about single women centred on disadvantage, although there were instances where principles of equity were invoked on their behalf. Intimations of single women's practical incompetence also contrasted with their acknowledged financial acuity. While there was some discriminatory comment in 2009, most of the items demonstrated rejection of past stereotype and

their embrace of self-sufficient independence. Lack of a committed father for her child was no deterrent to the twenty-first century single woman seeking maternity either through uncommitted sex or assisted conception, and attracted little opprobrium. Characters featured in the items were drawn from the everyday, easily recognised as self, friend or neighbour. The growing numbers of women single by choice had clearly been recognised by the market and were evident in some ideological adjustment reflected in this medium's output. It was less easy to find labels for the characters in this discourse although there were several that became apparent.

The desperate and dateless: there was considerable mention in the text of the character whose desperation for marriage, and despair at its lack of opportunity, is derided. This woman is generally in her 30s or older and has never married. Not only was this character found in items discussing women's general marital and family aspirations, she also was featured in items that profiled otherwise successful women. The older version of this character occasionally assumed dimensions of the grotesque through their desire to re/enter interdependence.

The spinster: commensurate with her stereotype, the Spinster was found in references to women being "left on the shelf", or facing a lonely old age or death.

The single mother: this was not a prominent character but one treated perhaps surprisingly sympathetically in contexts of equitable access to fertility services and financial support to raise her family as well as in anxiety expressed about her child-rearing success.

The old woman who lives on her own: this character represented many of the older women whose independence was not noted in the context of family relationships. She might be the woman whose safety is of concern, or whose income security was unreliable.

The gold-digger: with her eye on the main chance, the gold-digger was found associating with the rich, or at least the financially secure, in the hope of securing her own financial wellbeing through marriage.

The sexual adventurer: mainly associated with the types depicted in *Sex and the City*, the sexual adventurer, in several instances, was suggested to represent the liberated woman although her liberation seemed limited to sexual disinhibition.

The victim: the victim was found across the lifespan. She was prey to assailants, and susceptible to physical and mental ill-health, unemployment and other systemic disadvantage including social exclusion from mainstream interdependence.

The liberated woman: this character was financially competent, self-determining and unconcernedly independent.

6.3.3.3. Divorced. Discourse captured polarisation of divorce as deficit or potential for growth and development, seemingly dependent on the degree to which individual women accepted their new status. Notions of growth and development found in 1999's depiction of the divorced/separated woman were missing in 2009. Other than sharing in greater service provision to the independent woman, the captured items found a discourse of disapproval about this demographic, evidenced through news selection of its deleterious physical impact on those women whose marriages dissolved rather than ended through the death of a husband, and their sexually-uninhibited behaviour. Despite there being very few items in this category, four characters were identified.

The sexual adventurer: this character marks the end of her marriage by seeking sexual encounters that were not possible for her as a wife.

The cougar: an extension of the sexual adventurer, this divorced woman seeks younger sex partners.

The discarded older woman: whether it is the indignity of being replaced by a younger woman or the difficulties associated with finding herself in financially straitened circumstances, the discarded older woman is a sympathetic character.

The liberated woman: the end of her marriage brings affective and developmental advantage to this character.

6.3.4 Narrative form. The narrative in news pages is restricted to what is selected for inclusion in limited space, and bound by editorial style. This makes the published text an important source of cultural framing as writers draw on common sense and well understood devices such as metaphor to communicate as succinctly as possible.

While the frames for independent women were comparatively consistent across the decade (Figure 6.3), the narrative repertoire expanded to include repositioning of

widows as newsworthy for their own activities, single women as autonomous adults, and divorced women as objects of disapproval.

The expansion was apparent in the tone of an item, such as *A879* in which the focus was not on the morals of the independent politician who had become a single mother, as it might have been in earlier years, but on the likely father and on the motivation of the prime minister in supporting her, i.e., whether this was from personal regard or to keep the vote of a sympathetic constituency. Similarly, support for all independent women to have access to assisted conception was apparent in items that reported survey results in terms of community support although that was the minority response, the incidence of homosexual couples raising children in the United States and the split in the parliamentary committee that recommended enabling legislation, and protest from women’s groups as well as opposing comment from religious groups about maintaining a heterosexual nuclear family model of procreation.

In longer reports and columns, space allowed more narrative complexity and greater subjectivity as with the reports of the legal proceedings that featured the widow and the daughter of a mining identity. This narrative took the form of a farce where the protagonists were the jealous stepdaughter and the grasping, manipulative widow of pantomime and fairy story.

Feature writers and columnists brought personal perspectives to their themes displayed in their use of emotive language and stereotype as entertainment. Examples of this were the man whose romantic disappointments were framed as single women’s greed that excluded his modest assets from their partnering criteria (*A311*), and the woman whose unexplained animosity towards independent women was evident in her ridiculing, through insult, older independent women’s aspirations to interdependence (*A283*).

Frame	Year	
Widow	1999	2009
relict		
vulnerable		
worthy of protection		
loyal		
proxy		
autonomous		

caricature		
metaphor		
Single		
victim		
deficient		
pitiabile		
Other		
systemically disadvantaged		
desperate to marry		
predatory		
promiscuous		
autonomous		
Divorced		
discard		
promiscuous		
disadvantaged		
affective		
autonomous		

Figure 6.3. Independence frames

6.3.5 Linguistic analysis. Giles and Shaw (2009) note that, at a macroanalytical level, no more than simple analysis of the language used to frame a phenomenon should be expected. As noted above, this study found a range of linguistic styles situated in the type of content. There was greater objectivity in general news pages where events, with *for* and *against* comment representing balance, are recorded. In features pages, there was more opportunity for subjectivity, arguing a position that might include opposing views but which leads to a conclusion supporting the item's thesis. More egregious examples of this positioning have been emphasised in the text as well as those that highlight subjective experience in items chosen to illustrate discussion. Despite my expectation that independent women might not receive a wholly positive press, some of the language used in characterising narrative was jarring in its vituperation.

6.3.6 Generalisability. This element of the model considers how stories may be linked to ongoing phenomena, how they might fit into a media template, a notion generally applied to long running stories about events such as, for example, a major environmental pollution event.

The ongoing phenomenon to which the data set linked was marriage and the family. *Widow/s*, in effect, continued the marital relationship through its foregrounding, from their subsidiary place in their husband's biography to his shadow over their subsequent independence. Compared to their coupled sisters, *single woman/women* were disadvantaged in most areas of life, with the exception of financial management. However, their representation had become more positive over the decade. The 1999 preoccupation with their sexuality was centred in assumptions about the inherently unsatisfactory nature of what was cast as pursuit of a husband rather than sexual autonomy. In 2009, their demographic was less likely to attract disapproval or ridicule and there were signs that choosing to remain independent may be a valid option. The poor press afforded *divorced* women seemed related to assumptions that either they had been judged wanting and discarded by their husband or that their subsequent behaviour was a further affront to the family ideal.

There was considerable anxiety about marriage/families in 1999, anxiety that had dissipated to a significant degree in 2009's print media. In 1999, *The Australian* ran a series titled "Chronicles of the future" that discussed:

- whether *de facto* marriage couples actually wanted to be considered married (A33);
- the conversion of relationships from *de facto* to formal marriage, with comment about a concomitant assumption of traditional gender roles;
- the history of the family and its use as a metaphor for belonging (A35);
- family diversity with reference to homosexual households (A36) and
- future trends (A37).

Some of these and other items were substantial, with six of more than 1,000 words, four of these with more than 2,000 words. There were no such items in *The Sunday Times* but *The West Australian* carried four:

- an interview of an author of a book about blending families of just over 1,000 words (WA20);
- a discussion about family diversity and trends of 2,000 words (WA77);
- 1,200 words about healing dysfunctional families (WA26), and
- the impact of stereotyping families headed by single women (WA90).

In 2009, the longest items were

- a 940 word column about adultery that brought together a range of opinion: associated divorce rates are a modern equivalent of past early mortality that caused multiple marriages; the institution of marriage is either weakening or individuals' urge to test its strength is very strong; marriage is strengthened by infidelity; collective refusal to accept the limitations of romantic love as the manifestation of marital union is pathological; and contemporary coupledness may be unsustainable in the long term (*A543*),
- a 891 word discussion about the general trend away from marriage, due to the impact of economic stress, although, for one contributor, the effect was more to do with career-orientated, economically independent women and uneducated or otherwise disadvantaged men who had few resources to attract a spouse. A trend was noted for separating couples to continue living in the same house – Separated But Living together – because the cost of alternative accommodation was prohibitive (*ST192*),
- concern expressed about women's superannuation resources, already less than men's and made more so by variation in their marital status, in a 787-word business item (*WA273*).

6.4 Discussion

At the beginning of this chapter, I asked what is contemporary discourse about independent women, and where this is on its historical wave that has seen their position rise and fall in the religious, political and economic discourse that has shaped society across time.

Earlier work had found limited representation of the positions constructed by women in general, even less for independent women. The characters in the fiction in women's magazines (Tuchman, 1978/2000) seemed designed to provide a working model for successful femininity, exemplifying the opinion of the sixteenth century author that fiction has a unique role in reinforcing dominant social mores (S. Chamberlain, 2002). Women's interests in newspapers were domestic and decorative and their identities linked to newsworthy men (Tuchman, 2000). Television continued to marginalise most women (Busby, 1975), female characters who did not represent marriage and family values were likely to come to a sticky end (Tuchman,

2000). Growing numbers of women in the paid workforce may have been associated with more realistic depiction of women's lives but, in the twenty-first century, they are still likely to be under-represented, and stereotypically thin, provocatively dressed, and relationally orientated (Collins, 2011), subjects for the male gaze and women's emulation.

Examples of the promotion of interdependence are rife in the mass media (DePaulo, 2007) however, while it also found such discourse, this study also found some nuance in representation of women living single. From the identified frames, it is clear that a discourse of independence is common across categories of women without husbands (Figure 6.4), further support for my adoption of in/ter/dependence as primary social categories denoting romantic relationship status. Other than sharing a frame of independence, there is clear demarcation between frames for women who are widowed and those who are not romantically attached.

The frames suggest that the difference is related to the involuntary nature of widow's independence, that they are still wives but now married to their husband's memory. Their caricaturing was of widows who transgressed the moral boundaries of widowhood with behaviours that were not based in continuation of a marital role. Single and divorced women do not demonstrate attachment to a romantic partner and this is reflected in frames of deficiency and immorality although, for single women, there was evidence these frames were softening.

Discourse about single and divorced women had changed between 1999 and 2009 (Figure 6.3) with fewer frames of marginalisation for single women, and a narrower, more negative narrative about the divorced woman, in the twenty-first century.

Frame	Categories of independent women		
	Widow	Single	Divorced
relict			
vulnerable			
worthy of protection			
loyal			
proxy			

autonomous			
caricature			
metaphor			
victim			
deficient			
affective			
Other			
disadvantaged			
desperate to marry			
predatory			
promiscuous			
discard			

Figure 6.4. Framing independent women

The frames for each category of independence drew on well-understood characters that reinforced, through their use as a communicative technology, narratives about each category. Widows were depicted as women whose involuntary loss of their husband left them bereft, but fierce in their defence of his memory and reputation. Their activities, subsequent to the death of their husband, were reported as autonomous initiatives albeit an extension of those for which their husband had been known. This was even the case for those in criminal pursuits although reports of the anti-social behaviour were derisive, as were those of widows whose activities were not consistent with those expected of a loyal wife.

In the narrative from the earlier data set, single women were disadvantaged both systemically and by personal characteristics that precluded marriage, assumed to be the goal of every woman. Choosing to live independently was framed as misguided, even selfish. The 2009 narrative encompassed independent living as a valid life choice although familiar frames of victim, deficiency, and desire for marriage were still evident.

Notions of growth and development found by women following divorce were missing from 2009's frames although the very small number of cases means no definitive statement may be made about the reflection of public discourse in that of the newspapers.

Nonetheless, the consistency and evolution of the framing over the decade may be thought reflective of current ideology, the frames chosen as they are to resonate with the broadest audience (Budarick & King, 2008), which includes the increasing number of independent women. From this analysis, the social position of independent women is on the ascent, possibly due to their increasing numbers, economic value and gradually increasing representation in social decision-making strata.

In the next chapter, discussions with women about their perceptions of living independent in a society that privileges interdependence will be analysed for discourses about independence past and present, and discursive strategies to resist unfavourable social comparisons with their interdependent peers.