

DISCUSSION

... in human relationships, whether they involve verbal communication ... or amorous, institutional, or economic relationships, power is always present: I mean a relationship in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other. So I am speaking of relations that exist at different levels, in different forms; these power relations are mobile, they can be modified, they are not fixed once and for all
(Foucault, 1994, pp. 291-292).

The three studies comprising this project were designed to examine the discursive construction of women's relational independence. As a corollary, those around interdependence and the nuclear family were also considered in the context of patriarchal social organisation.

In this chapter, I will make myself accountable (Section 9.1) by addressing the objectives that introduced the project in Chapter 1 (Sections 9.1.1, 9.1.2, and 9.1.3), hoping to demonstrate satisfaction of their intent. I will draw from previous chapters to discuss power struggles around women's independence (Section 9.2), emphasising its close relationship to economic circumstances that demand or exclude women's workplace participation so causing flux in their public identities and possibilities. My methodological approach is considered in Section 9.3 and its limitations acknowledged in Section 9.4. In Section 9.5, I conclude with indications of future research directions that might validate relational independence as a free option for the adult woman before reflecting on my project and its process in Section 9.6.

9.1 Accountability

This project was guided by three objectives. These were:

- to contribute to a feminist psychology of singleness through critical discourse analysis;
- to examine the mechanisms by which cultural constructions shape the socio-psychological experience of women living single; and
- to critique the role of psychological theory in legitimising cultural constructions.

I hope to demonstrate below my achievement of these objectives.

9.1.1 Contributing to a feminist psychology of singleness. The project was situated in the tradition of feminist enquiry that gives voice to women's experience and seeks to explicate gendered power relations (M. Gergen, 2008; Hepburn, 2003b; Morrow, 2000; Oakley, 1981; Phoenix, 1990). Critical discourse analysis, encompassing framing and discourse analytic techniques, was applied, taking a Foucauldian approach that is interested in the discourses, and their antecedents, that construct cultural knowledge and truth and the power relations that position subjects in contemporary society (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008; Foucault, 1980; Hall, 2001; Jäger & Maier, 2009).

I chose to include all categories of single women rather than focus on the always-single and found clear demarcation in public discourse between widowed, divorced and always-single women that corresponded to the degree to which their independence complied with normative ideology. Widows were treated most sympathetically, except when they transgressed moralistic ideals of modesty and loyalty to their husband's memory. Neoliberal practices of individuality and those associated with economic growth seemed to be reconciling public opinion with the choice made by increasing numbers of women to maintain financial and relational independence. However, patriarchal interests were evident in the poor press afforded divorced women, possibly because their independence followed rather than preceded an interdependence that had been dissolved by law rather than death. In this way, they were similar to the transgressing widows whose failure to evince continuation of a wifely role risked caricature. Academic discourse reinforced the negativity of public discourse but women themselves offered a much broader, nuanced understanding of in/ter/dependence and the discursive mechanisms by which they were socially positioned. This was particularly so for women raising their child(ren) alone, who gave examples of institutional, social, public and private discourse in their narratives of resistance.

Another contribution was to relabel marital status into the binary in/ter/dependent categories of independent and interdependent. The politics of social classification (Beattie, 2007) define widowed, divorced and single women deviant from the married

norm, as recognised by Lewis (1994) when she proposed using “always-single” to obviate the deficiency implied by “never-married”. As noted elsewhere, I was looking for terminology that was value-neutral because of the connotations, for relationally independent women, of marriage being the default status for adults in social classification. To my surprise, women in monogamous relationships with whom the notion was discussed, and who were unconnected to this project, protested against being positioned interdependent, instead arguing that they were fully independent in their relationship. Such is the power of ideological language, *interdependence* (which I understand to mean mutual dependence by each of a committed couple for domestic, financial, social, and/or emotional support) seemed, to these women, inferior to *independence*, and threatened a valued self-identity. Nonetheless, I would argue that *in/ter/dependence* carries less moralistic value than conventional marital status categories. It also offers less opportunity for discursive positioning that privileges normative coupledness over regularly disparaged singlehood.

9.1.2 Examining cultural constructions of women living single. Examination of cultural construction of women’s independence was through the medium of mass audience newspapers and, I hope, will contribute to psychological understanding of the difference between public perception and private reality. But further to their mass media representation, I also found other mechanisms that re/produce the relations around independent women’s social position.

Fundamental to their identity construction is the categorisation of every Australian woman into a legal marital status, repeated every time she completes an official form for government or commercial purposes. Awareness of the discursive positioning of this practice was exemplified by A15 asking “how long are you going to be divorced for before you can say ‘I’ve actually moved on from that’” and A07’s annoyance with demanded use of honorifics that force her to identify by marital status.

The information gathered by government and commercial enterprises may be used for planning, the provision of goods and services, and marketing segmentation. In some instances, it is requested as a matter of course, an element of a generic questionnaire template with no obvious application, such as market research about

soap powder, for example, or to demonstrate diversity in research participation. Evidence of the strength of the independent women's market has seen growth in the provision of goods and services sensitive to their needs but the dominant market, for both government and commerce is still the family that is privileged with advantages unavailable to the relationally independent. In this way, independent women (and men) are marginalised by their ineligibility for family/couple-related taxation relief and household support, unless they are caring for dependents. They are also excluded from commercial benefits to families and couples, as described in Chapter 2, in some cases penalised through mechanisms such as the single supplement on some services in the hospitality sector.

A consequence of social classification is to create categories of difference (Beattie, 2007) that become identified by certain characteristics used to facilitate understanding in public discourse (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003; Mehan, 2001). In this way, construction of independent women's relational identity is effected through popular music (Bretthauer, et al., 2007; Levande, 2008), literature (e.g., Bauld, 2005), theatre, and mass media (Busby, 1975; Collins, 2011; de Botton, 2004; Tuchman, 2000).

Social categories themselves are socially constructed, embedded in dominant ideologies that re/produce "the natural order" of privilege and disadvantage. The normative function of the natural order is perpetuated in institutional discourse such as that of the sciences, which have confirmed, many times, the advantage brought to individuals by marriage (e.g., Cummins, et al., 2005; Gardner & Oswald, 2004; Murphy, et al., 1997; Verbrugge, 1979). Despite contestation of these findings (e.g., DePaulo & Morris, 2005), science continues to support the primacy of the nuclear family as optimal for adult health and wellbeing, and to pathologise the relationally independent.

9.1.3 Role of psychology. The role of psychological theory, or, more generally, the role of the *psy* industry, in legitimising cultural institutions and their supporting structures has been authoritatively established by others (e.g., Foucault, 1980; Parker, 2002; Prilleltensky, 1994; Rose, 1996; Venn, 1984). The impossibility of sampling across psychology's sub-disciplines made me decide to focus on just developmental psychology because of its relevance for adult social identity and, within these

writings, on contemporary textbooks from which current thinking about women's independence should be available.

Confirming psychology's normative role in validating dominant values and behaviours, I found very little about adult independence in general in comparison to content about interdependence and nuclear family formation. What content there was implied associated pathology with no reference to theory that posited independence as an acceptable life choice. These findings were consistent with previous work (e.g., Baker Miller, 1976; Burman, 2008b; Carr, 2008; Gilligan, 1982; Rosser & Miller, 2003), some dating back decades, that argued the inadequacy of developmental psychology when theorising women's development. Psychology's theorising about independent women, in these textbooks, showed an even greater cultural lag than that in the public discourse of newspapers between experiential and ideological discourse. This conservatism reinforced patriarchy's limitations on women's aspirations through labelling deviance from nuclear family structure and gendered role performance as difference and diversity. This included, in 2009, discussion of married women's participation in the paid workforce located in *diversity of family life* (Sigelman & Rider, 2009), implying departure from the norm.

9.2 Power Struggles

It is the space between the contradictory discourses that locates the power relations (Foucault, 1969) surrounding the independent woman in her embodied resistance to institutionalised heterosexual attachment (Rich, 1980). That is, the gap between discourses systemically disadvantaging and disempowering women living outside marriage and those better reflecting their lived experience. For example, in Chapter 4 we saw patriarchal positioning of independent women, through religious, economic and political discourse, swing between honourable and dishonourable status, with high and low social value, always contested by women themselves in their struggles to validate their own positions.

I hope I have demonstrated that independent women have been/are problematised for their subversion of patriarchal social organisation based around "(nuclear) family values". Further, I have argued that the continued problematisation of independent women across millennia was generated by the need of patriarchy to rid social

consciousness of feminine agency. This was achieved first by religious discourse that gradually reduced the status of the Goddess from omnipresence to mediator between a distant masculine adjudicator and humanity, then by science, embedded in patriarchal culture, that confirmed women's subordination to masculine domination. This transition was reflected in public discourse found in literature, the theatre, art, legislation, medicine, policy and philosophy (e.g., Bennet & Froide, 1999; Bernau, 2007; Bloch, 1991; Foyster, 1999; Harrison, 1995; McCarthy, 2004; Power, 1973; Showalter, 1978; Wiesner, 2000; Yeo, 2008). It continues in contemporary discourse such as that found in the newspapers and academic textbooks where independent women are pathologised to a greater or lesser extent by their distance from formal marriage. This discourse works to create a fear of independence (Lanser, 1999) noted by participants in Study 2, that outweighs any disadvantages of interdependence for individual women.

Contradicting this discourse, and evidencing the struggle between the power relations surrounding adult relational possibilities, is that of resistance. In earlier times, women co-opted religious discourse to resist interdependence imperatives, taking advantage of opportunities to dedicate their lives to deities to become a third gender (Salih, 2001), separate from the demands of conventional femininity. For example, the devotional texts of the Katherine Group paid homage to the saints Katherine, Margaret and Juliana who were all tortured to death rather than betray their god by marrying (Hassel, 2002). As we saw in Chapter 4, women in religious orders could manage large establishments, essentially businesses, of wealth and influence (Leyser, 1995).

In contemporary times, women's independence does not require its practice from the cloisters. However, as at all times, the struggle between patriarchal and liberal discourses about women's potential and aspirations finds ideological pressures privileging interdependence. Whereas marriage was a legal requirement in Classical periods (Pomeroy, 1995), and independent living by women prohibited in parts of England during the Middle Ages (Froide, 2002), today's woman is enjoined by institutional discourse channelled through mass media, science, and popular culture to seek interdependence for personal growth and wellbeing.

Yet increasing numbers of women are choosing independence and, attested to by participants in Study 2, finding it to be different to that of public representation. Perhaps because of their numbers that give them much greater public visibility, the public discourse in newspapers has changed over the past decade to report the activities and interests of single and widowed women (but not those of divorced women) as those of more autonomous adults, complying with Foucault's (1994) reasoning that power relations change through the force of resistance. A major omission in the textbook content about relational independence was discussion about the developmental benefit of resistance to normative adult life pathways mandating relational interdependence. That is, the ability to counter what *ought* to be with an appreciation of what *is*.

9.2.1 Economic relations. The gap between these discourses, it seems to me, is a vortex of economic relations and the degree to which these demand women's participation in any era, within the context of patriarchal interests. Whereas in previous times, women were excluded from financial self-sufficiency when the economy contracted (e.g., Hanawalt, 1992; B. Hill, 1989), contemporary capitalism requires women's participation as producers and consumers (Mohanty, 2003). The close association of women's independence and the economy underpins the ideological dilemma represented by the discourses identified in this project about women's in/ter/dependence. Billig and colleagues (1988) described this well when declaring the common sense interdependence of women and men to be one of the most prevalent unification myths in Western society, opposed by an individuation myth of the neoliberal free market with its different relations of power, value and interests.

Across time, when economic and ideological circumstances have permitted, the numbers of women able to live independently have increased (e.g., Kowaleski, 1999). Further, many women in control of their own resources have directed bequests to enable other women's independence (Barron, 1994; Forth, 2008; Howell, 1998). In contemporary times, good incomes are identified as necessary for wellbeing, irrespective of in/ter/dependence status (e.g., Cummins, et al., 2005)

Today's financially independent woman is an anachronism of modern times (Mitterauer & Sieder, 1982), with all the associated implications for her public and personal identity construction. The lag between this cultural change and its representation (Byrne & Carr, 2005; Tuchman, 1978/2000) means there are few models of successful independence to look to, with possibilities bounded by those of the immediate past. These are compounded by the conflict between patriarchal and neoliberal discourses that produce the different subjectivities expected from ideologies that privilege gendered interdependence (Parent & Moradi, 2010) and individualistic consumer orientated self-management (Walkerdine & Bansel, 2010), respectively.

In the newspapers, a significant component of content about widows related to their entitlements to financial support from public funds, particularly if their husbands had died in the service of the state. Presumably because it had been the responsibility of their husbands, widows and divorced women were thought less capable money managers than single women who were recognised as astute investors and a growing consumer market.

Attention was drawn, in the textbooks, to the financial disadvantage brought by marriage dissolution to women and their children. Most of the participants (excluding all but one interdependent woman) in Study 2 had some financial strain, and expressed concern about supporting a comfortable retirement. However, there was no report of seeking interdependence to ease the strain. Instead, participants spoke of plans to continue their education or seek better paying employment to improve their situation. As in previous times when it held economic value, women's access to independent means invades "the intersection of compulsory heterosexuality and economics" (Rich, 1980, p. 641), weighing alternative discourses, such as *family* and *companionship*, more heavily for interdependent practice. Yet financial independence and a political ideology that tolerates diversity, however reluctantly, means that some women, particularly those who identify as homosexual, choose to create a family, and seek companionship, outside the patriarchal model when their options for interdependence are limited, unacceptable, or just unattractive. It is at this intersection of ideological discourse, between the patriarchal and the neoliberal, that the possibilities for independent women's identities expand.

9.3 Method

The overall approach taken for the project was a critical analysis of public and expert discourse about women's independence from a Foucauldian perspective. The analytic techniques were chosen to be fit for purpose for the individual studies while allowing integration of results that would answer the project's objectives.

Always bearing in mind that there is no one method of, or approach to, discourse analysis, I nonetheless tried to find models to help address issues of plausibility and credibility in the interests of quality control. Willig's dimensions of social constructionist research (Willig, 1999) offered an invaluable framework to elaborate the project overall; Giles and Shaw's (2009) media framing model provided a structured way of presenting the newspaper analysis. The components of both models were not sequential steps, rather they were the scaffold for analysis. In both cases, the models were adapted: Willig's because her model was expanded from application to a single study to all the studies of this project, Giles and Shaw's because I was not analysing data about a phenomenon but one that was both the topic and incidental to a topic across a range of subject matter.

Triangulation of analytic technique strengthened the findings of each study by the comparability of results. Public and expert discourse positioned the independent woman as Other to a married norm. Her independence was the primary symptom of a pathology that, presumably, is curable by formal monogamous union, much as the wandering womb that was the source of women's ills was cured by heterosexual union unthinkable outside marriage in Classical times (Vivante, 2006). Transition was found, more so in public than expert discourse, in greater tolerance of women's independence as a life choice and its recapture following marriage dissolution. Much the same pattern was evident in women's discourse; it was recognition of their position in public discourse that generated resistance through alternative narratives.

9.4 Limitations

Any one of the three studies undertaken to reach these objectives would have been sufficient for a single doctoral thesis. *Ipsa facto*, they individually could have greater breadth and depth, particularly Study 3's very limited critique of theory about adult development, but I believe their analytic techniques have combined to offer faceted

patterns of discourse that construct the independent woman of the twenty-first century.

While the mechanism of newspaper analysis enabled the teasing out of nuance and transition in public discourse about independent women, the findings were shaped by the sampling parameters that identified relevant items by recorded marital status. Another process, for example, interpretative reading of selected print media or sampling across mass media, may have captured a different profile and discourse although, without recorded marital status, assumptions about a subject's independence could not be substantiated. Similarly, differential recourse to stereotypes in categories of mass media (e.g., Davis, 1990; Tuchman, 2000) may have reduced comparative utility.

Assessment of public discourse may also have benefited from greater numbers of interdependent women in Study 2, although the objective of this component was to learn how independent women position themselves in relation to cultural narratives. While those women were from a range of backgrounds, they were self-selected, lacked ethnic and class diversity, and, by and large, brought eloquence to self-reflection. Talking with women less accustomed to considering their lives in relation to social dis/advantage may have introduced other repertoires to this study's discussions. Attraction of homosexual women to the study may also have expanded understanding of the discourse constructing women's independence. Several participants introduced discussion of lesbianism mainly in contexts of its accusatory ascription to their sexuality to explain their independence. However, A16 noted its financial advantage when demonstrating eligibility for family support programs, where marginalisation from heterosexual norms meant homosexual interdependence was unrecognised by patriarchal structures that threatened independent women's financial security if they engaged in heterosexual liaisons that may or may not develop into interdependence.

While limiting a critique of psychology's role in legitimising the social structure reflected from dominant ideology to the index-identified content about relational independence in two developmental psychology textbooks is defensible in this project, it is less than adequate for a generalised statement about the place of

independent women in psychological theory. I would hope that aspects of their lives, identities, behaviours and emotions would receive variable discursive construction, depending on the sub-discipline.

9.5 Future Directions

To properly examine the role of psychology in the social position of independent women, a much more comprehensive review should be undertaken of relevant sub-discipline theories, including (but certainly not limited to) evolutionary, cognitive, positive, cultural and health psychology. This is because of the authority psychology wields in legitimising social regulation which currently, as reported and resisted by them, disadvantages independent women. With its claims of objectivity, psychological theory must first acknowledge then justify the assumptions on which research questions are devised, and findings reported and applied when these endorse normative values against which demographic groups are measured.

Another area of interest that has grown from this project is the fear of relational independence expressed by the interdependent and, more generally, the unacceptability of pursuing social activities alone. An early assumption had been that lack of a companion would be a greater impediment to independent women's enjoyment of social activities and, to some degree, it was. Unexpectedly, however, interdependent women also spoke of missing opportunities such as viewing theatre or cinema productions if their spouse was unwilling to accompany them or friends were unavailable. While current evolutionary theory describes humans as social beings naturally found in groups (e.g., Roughgarden, 2004), such strong antagonism to social independence seems extreme, likely to be embedded in powerful regulatory discourse about the (cultural) sin of solitude (Pamuk, 2007) that, in circular fashion, perhaps underpins and is underpinned by evolutionary theory.

A related subject is contemporary hypersexuality against which the modesty and restraint of other times are thought limiting (Foucault, 1980; McRobbie, 2009). In Chapter 2, I considered the discourse about women's heterosexual objectification in terms of its value to patriarchy when financial imperatives for interdependence are relaxed by women's economic independence, comparative to other times. Where celibacy, across millennia, has been a liberating mechanism for women, it has

devalued currency in present times in the Western world (Attwood, 2006; Levy, 2005). Freud's "love and work" normative criteria for adult competence have played a fundamental role in nominating sexuality as "one of the chief signs of a healthy personality" (Erikson, 1980, p. 102), echoed in contemporary notions of "pelvic health" (457), that is dependent on sexual satisfaction.

Narratives about social and sexual engagement, explicit in public discourse and supported by academic discourse, have implications for the position of independent women. If the narratives are afforded cultural value, marginalisation of those less able to demonstrate compliance is likely. This may be through a resistance to dominant narratives that sets them apart or by adoption of some of the valued behaviours out of context; for example, sexual expression has less social value, as demonstrated by media framing, outside committed interdependence.

Future research into the power relations of sexual expression, including celibacy, sexual identity, and social self-sufficiency would contribute to the work being undertaken by researchers in singles studies whose growing corpus is challenging the truth of established psychological theory and its normative application. Difference and diversity should not be synonymous with deviance. In the context of adult domestic and emotional attachment, they should mean value-free variety in human affairs.

9.6 Reflection

It is fair to say that this project has taken me in totally unexpected conceptual directions to those I had at its beginning. I had not expected to be journeying across millennia to find the root of societal antagonism to the independent woman; nor to find a close relationship between their agency and public interests of politics and economics. I had not expected to find women's sexuality still a fundamental narrative of social control. I had not expected to find such clear positional demarcation between the categories of women's independence in public discourse; nor had I, really, expected to find psychological discourse such as in Chapter 8 that mandated marriage for optimum adult development.

In this section, I reflect on the process that evolved as this project progressed and which gave direction to its narrative. For me, that narrative grew from an

understanding that Western misogyny was constructed from devaluation of the feminine principle, represented by an active expunging of the Goddess from religious practice made necessary to legitimise masculine privilege. Discursive positioning of the independent woman across millennia informed analysis of contemporary discourse, and of transitional trends. Examples are given of my reflexive practice in relation to (i) response to a dominant theme of resistance in independent women's identity construction, (ii) the potential for crossing the line from researcher to confidante in semi-structured conversations, and (iii) data that is homogenous when complexity is sought. My concluding comments are a call for my discipline of psychology to adapt to new knowledge about independent women through reflective practice in theory and research and to incorporate the growing corpus in established practice.

9.6.1 Process. This project, clearly, is a feminist thesis of women's independence that interrogates the ideological bases of discriminatory discursive practices disadvantaging independent women so that those practices might change. To do that, it was necessary to find evidence of past and current ideological construction of independent women's identities.

As noted by Burman and Parker (1993), researchers must recognise that, paradoxically, they are producing discourses as they seek them through analyses of databases and other materials. Indeed, the construction of a database for analysis is the first step away from accessing all possible alternatives of meaning, by virtue of source selection. To have chosen different sources of sampling (i) public discourse than newspapers, (ii) psychological theory than introductory developmental psychology textbooks, or (iii) lived experience than that of participants who self-selected to tell their stories may have found different discourses than those described in previous chapters.

The major discourse for me followed recognition of the construction of independent women as problematic for a society increasingly built around the accumulation of wealth and its protection. That is, replacement of the egalitarianism found in the earliest artefactual records by a social hierarchy based on resource control, validated by devaluing the feminine demonstrable by the gradual replacing of the omnipresent

Goddess with a dominant masculine principle, made clear the function of ideological control in individuals' identity formation. A patriarchal god reflected social organisation in which women were commodified to better serve the interests of family and state. Women who lived on the margins outside a maid-wife-widow model were anathema to patriarchy, which turned to ideology, validated by religion, sometimes legislation, to effect their control.

With the origins of these ideologies now lost to memory, the practices continue so that women in general, and independent women specifically, remain subject to the vicissitudes of patriarchal demand that allow or prevent equitable citizenship. From time to time, over millennia, women's independence has been tolerated for its value to the economy, such as when male populations have been reduced by war or migration, but public discourse has continued their social marginalisation. The exception seems to have been religious vocation when voluntary marginalisation was sanctified so unthreatening and unimpeachable.

As was observed in Chapter 2, latent patriarchal ideology may adapt to economic forces but its essence, the maintenance of masculine privilege, is unaltered. This may be seen in ostensibly contradictory discourses of neoliberal individualism that support public consumerism and those that privilege the private world of the nuclear family. The link here is discourse privileging interdependence and positioning independent women as desperate and dateless, while simultaneously affording high social value to independence. In the power relations around women's in/ter/dependence swirl discourses of social cohesion, women's sexual practice, institutional authority, group membership, gender performance, family, deviance, marginalisation, the natural order, and others, all of which demonstrate struggle for dominance or, at least, equal authority.

Understanding the genealogy of women's independence proved invaluable as I began analysis of its contemporary discourse, although looking for indices of transition over a ten-year period seemed somewhat inadequate after a millennial exploration. However, seeking signs (or their absence) of transition was a fundamental aim of the project and a decade of a human life, represented by the years from which public and expert discourse were sampled, is a significant period of time. The insights gained

from pre/history provided context for contemporary discourse, by recognising patterns from previous centuries current today and observing the circumstances in which women's independence is functionally, if not discursively, tolerated.

It meant that the frames identified in mass readership newspapers, and the discourse found in academic textbooks, could be situated as self-evidently supporting a status quo of interdependent privilege consistent with that which has characterised Western societies from the advent of a masculine organising principle. It also meant that transition to greater tolerance of women's independence, found in attitudinal shift in public discourse and in the private discourse of resistance described in Chapter 7, could be identified. However, using pre/history as my guide, I hesitate to celebrate this as a permanent, rather than a cyclical, trend of social evolution.

I had initially intended to report, in a more general way, the repertoires drawn on to create independent women's identities but found, while working with the transcripts and recordings of discussions, a strong theme of resistance to publicly-ascribed identities. This, coupled with recognition of the authoritative work on single women's identity construction by Reynolds (2008; Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003), was a turning point to consideration of power relations around women's independence consistent with my Foucauldian approach. In retrospect, to have asked participants how they resisted being marginalised would have assumed this was how they felt and left me vulnerable to charges of bias. As it was, the discussions were characterised by evaluation and comparison of in/ter/dependence by which participants contested negative subjectification, offering thoughtful alternatives for a life well lived that provide rich data for analysis of resistance and its strategies.

My role as researcher in the discussions was to encourage participants' reflection around the schedule (Appendix D). The aim was for the meetings to be a discussion with "all the warmth and personality exchange of a conversation with the clarity and guidelines of scientific searching" (Goode & Hatt (1952) in Oakley, 1981, p. 33). While conversational informality was the goal, I was also aware that my contribution should be minimal and, in the main, it was, limited to words or short expressions validating participants' comments. As discussed in Chapter 7, as their number grew, my impressions from commonly expressed views in previous discussions were

occasionally reflected in my responses and were sometimes invited by discussants as they checked to see whether those of other participants matched their perceptions.

On only one occasion did I feel uncomfortable about my contribution to a discussion to the degree that I raised it for discussion with colleagues. My opinion had been asked by a discussant who was worrying about an approach by her married counsellor for less formal contact than their hitherto professional relationship. She asked whether a letter she had received from him, following several telephone calls, that formally rescinded their therapeutic contract because there had been no consultation for three months was normal process. I replied that I was unaware that this was standard practice and that it might breach professional ethical codes. The discussant said she would respond to his approach cautiously. For me, it was a choice between a noncommittal acknowledgment of her dilemma and a genuine response to what sounded like predatory risk. Although my colleagues acknowledged my concerns and expressed support for my response to the discussant, my discomfort about expressing a moral judgement, albeit out of concern for the discussant's wellbeing, remains.

Turning to the academic discourse, despite reviewing literature critiquing psychology's normative social role, I had not expected there to be so little about relational independence in textbooks about human development or that what there was would have an overwhelming slant to pathology. Rather than focus on "the gloomy picture" acknowledged by Sigelman (1999, p. 421), I actively welcomed the instances of positive regard for independence, reported mainly in its eponymous repertoire, to provide some balance to the negativity so to forestall readers' doubts about my impartiality.

9.7 Concluding Comments

As Foucault (1994) saw the possibility of a separate lesbian culture, so have others seen the possibility of a social world for independent women (e.g., DePaulo, 2007; Peterson, 1981; Stein, 1976) unencumbered by discourses of deficiency and disadvantage. To some extent, this is what was reported by participants in Study 2 but, in many cases, to achieve a "state of happiness purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault, 1994, p. 225) they have felt obliged to give primacy to their independent identity over others they value because of social organisation that privileges interdependence. However, independence is not an immutable condition,

nor is it one that women necessarily want to quarantine from general social practice. As was found in Study 2, the similarities between participants were greater than the differences brought by their in/ter/dependence. It is the discourses about independence that demand attention (Hufton, 1984; Reynolds, 2008).

The newspaper analysis found evidence that public discourse about widowed and single women is changing to a more nuanced representation characteristic of in-group membership (Deschamps, 1982; Mehan, 2001). This was also apparent in comment by discussants, particularly of younger women. Unfortunately, analysis of the textbooks found little nuance to legitimise independence as a developmental path for adults instead describing practices of independence as compensatory for (i.e., subordinate to) interdependence.

Given psychology's normative power and claims to scientificity, it is time for greater inclusivity of identity possibilities in its theories of adult development that are so influential in public discourse. I said earlier that future research should contribute to the growing body of knowledge about women's independence to reach a critical mass that would breach the ideological walls defending the patriarchal status quo. This will require reflection on assumptions about research topics and recognition of values underlying methods so that difference and diversity are not synonymous with deviance. Language is both repressive and expressive, with dialogues that provide the means for discourses to be learned and practised (Billig, 1999a). This means that psychological dialogues of scientific discourse can adapt to include those theorising independent women's experience that, to date, represent resistance in the power relations of culturally dominant truth.