Making the best of life: aged women’s (re)constructions of life and learning

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Making the Best of Life: aged women's (re)constructions of life and learning

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from

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by

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Declaration

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being submitted for any degree.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all the sources used, have been acknowledged.

Barbara Pamphilon,
February 24th, 1997
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have come to think of the process of a PhD through the domestic metaphor of knitting a jumper, a sweater for our northern hemisphere friends. In the beginning you need to have someone show you what goes into the making, the yarns possible and the tools needed—for me this came from my teachers and colleagues in the Health Education degree. As you sit down to knit, and continue to knit and knit and knit, you need the company of others to sit alongside and to regularly say “put down that knitting and come out for a break!”—for me family and close friends met that need. The jumper begins to grow but as a novice you are not sure when to cast off, to add stitches or even if you should change yarn for this style of jumper—my two supervisors provided that guidance, suggesting patterns and designs that led to a product that I never dreamed that I could create. And when they asked me to unpick, they did so gently! Finally the jumper nears completion and you are back on your own—to embroider fine detail, to pick up the odd stitch and to finish the jumper as smoothly and beautifully as time permits—a stage that is curiously stressful and gratifying. This particular jumper has taken six years to complete and I must acknowledge those wonderful people who supported and inspired me over that time.

First, there are the nine good women who generously shared their life-stories with me. I fondly remember the many cuppas, the laughter and the quieter times as we shared some of the harder memories of life. They wish to remain anonymous but I thank them for their generous thought-full contributions to my learning.

Four other good women have been central to this project:

In the initial phases, Noeline Kyle encouraged me to begin this research, inspiring me with her enthusiasm about women, history and education. Thank you.

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And using the well-worn cliche—last but not least—I must thank my family. To my parents Lois and Dudley Sharp, and my sisters Margaret and Helen—you have all had faith that I could do it—I'm glad I could prove you right (at last!). Closer to home, my two companions, Zippy and Chino, gave a special quality to the many hours in the study. My three children have grown into young adulthood alongside this project, and indeed they have grounded much of my lived experience of informal learning. They have cheerfully accepted that "Mum's into her PhD again!" and each has supported and encouraged me in their own unique way—you are pretty terrific kids—thank you Michael, Andrew and Kate. Finally, from my partner Peter I have truly learnt the meaning of unconditional support. It is a gift of love that is immeasurable. Thank you.

I have long been an avid reader of acknowledgment pages because they are often the only glimpse I have of the author as a living person. Thankfully as we learn to use and value our own authorial voice, the texts themselves reveal and locate the author. And so I come to conclude my own 'acknowledgments'. My path has been enriched by the wisdom, skills and kindness of many, and it is a joy to be able to recognise this in a public way.

ABSTRACT

The oral histories of nine aged women provide the vehicle for this feminist poststructural exploration of life-long learning in its formal, non-formal, informal and incidental modes. As personal narratives are historically, culturally, socially and personally mediated, it becomes possible to see that the oral histories are at once individual and collective. The women’s accounts illustrate that despite discourses providing competing and often contradictory subject positions, it is possible, indeed necessary, to speak as a rational, coherent self. I illustrate how this group of women (re)constructed what I call ‘enabling fictions’.

The poststructural, multidisciplinary analysis consisted of four levels: the macro, the meso, the micro and the interactional. Through the macro analysis it was possible to locate the narratives in their cultural and historical time and place, revealing collective meanings as they relate to individual experience. The meso analysis drew on the personal level shedding light on individual values, interpretations and positioning. On the micro level, narratives were examined for the subtleties of the telling, exploring emotions and voice in particular. Finally, the interactional analysis recognised that these narratives were a product of the relationship between each of the women and myself.

The poststructural analysis of personal narratives reveals that what events mean to a woman depends on her ways of interpreting her world from the discourses available to her at that given moment. I do not suggest that these women’s accounts illustrate ‘the’ women’s ways of learning, rather I argue that different discourses bring with them different ways of seeing one’s self and of speaking as a learner. As a result learning is seen not as a linear progression, but rather as a constant forming and re-forming situated within a particular discursive field. The nine women were able to utilise the discourses surrounding home and family to claim particular maternal competencies which they found to be transportable into their community activities. This group of women illustrate how it is possible to (re)construct a subjectivity in a way that indeed ‘makes the best of life’.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores how one group of older women speak of themselves as learners across their life span. The nine women who made up the group were born between 1903 and 1925 and have spent most of their lives in Australia. In their life-times they have experienced world war, economic depression and family crisis as well as periods of apparent stability and peace. I was particularly interested in this group of women as they had limited access to formal education. Virginia Woolf writing in 1938 suggested that women such as these are the ‘outsiders’ to the (male) education system and it was her hope that understanding more about the learning of such outsiders may help work towards peace not war. Although I have less grand aims, like Woolf my interest lay in the invisibility of women’s learning outside the formal education system and women born in the first part of this century in general have had few opportunities for such education. However as I have been privileged to know some wonderfully wise old women who have had little ‘education’ I wanted to know what they would tell about a life-time of learning.

In common with much of the research being conducted today in what is called feminist social research, this project emerged from both the personal and professional facets of my life. It is based on what Liz Stanley (1993b, p.207) has called ‘intellectual autobiography’ in which an integration of self in both the process and the text illustrates a new social research paradigm. I share with many feminists the belief that our scholarship is in fact
part of this paradigm shift (Westkott, 1979; Nielsen, 1990). One of the central tenets of such scholarship is the acknowledgment that a synthesis of the personal and the professional can lead to a greater level of understanding than through the artificial bracketing, or holding aside, of the personal. Taking this one step further Marcia Westkott (1983) acknowledged “the interaction between social knowledge and self-knowledge” and relevantly noted that “in a phrase ‘the personal becomes intellectual, and the intellectual, personal’” (p.211, emphasis added).

As a starting point therefore, it is incumbent on me to briefly introduce my own relevant personal and professional values, attitudes, beliefs and experiences as the work that follows can only be understood in that context. Born into the generation of ‘Baby-Boomers’ in Australia (1948), I grew up in an all-girl family where I took on an egalitarian discourse in which education was seen as my right (Middleton, 1993 gives a parallel New Zealand experience). Blissfully ignorant of the contradictions for women within this discourse, it was not until I became ‘just a mother’ that I began to see that my world was not always a place of equal opportunity.

Through my work as a nurse, a support worker for children with disabilities, in a women’s health self-help group and later as a community worker and university student I came to identify as a feminist. At that point, I took a simple definition, close to that of Joanne Hall and Patricia Stephens (1991), to explain my feminism. They have argued that the following principles underpin a feminist approach.

1. A valuing of women and a validation of women’s experiences, ideas and needs;
2. A recognition of the existence of ideological, structural, and interpersonal conditions that oppress women; and
3. A desire to bring about social change of oppressive constraints through criticisms and political action.
(p.17).

Although my feminist awareness emerged from my activism, it has been clarified and enriched by my academic explorations. It has been a powerful learning experience to
recognise the potential and the limits of the diverse feminisms of the 1990s. Ultimately however, in the company of many other feminists, the goal of my feminist scholarship goes beyond the description and analysis of women's experience to the development of work which will enable change that directly benefits women.

It was from my experiences as a part-time community worker that this project emerged. I was employed to train and support community volunteers, the majority of whom were women in their 50s or above. However time and time again I found that the wisdom and knowledge found in these older women surpassed any training I could give them. Yet they engaged in the training in a respectful, sharing and reciprocal manner. I found myself in a rich environment of mutual education. At the same time, as an undergraduate student and later a university tutor in Health Education, I was simultaneously 'learning about learning' through formal education. In this other environment, it became apparent to me that the learning of women such as the older volunteers was not only under-acknowledged, it was invisible. I also became aware that women such as these volunteers were not only invisible as learners, they were generally invisible in our Western society today. My initial impetus thus became two-fold. I wished to understand more about these older women as learners, but I wished to do this in a way that worked against the marginalisation of ageism combined with sexism. It was from this position I began to plan my study.

The politics of the research
To understand the selection of the particular women in this study, it is first necessary to place this selection in its political context—that is, to acknowledge that the selection process was a political act in itself. Aged women have been of considerable research interest, but on examination this interest has been narrow and limited. Further, the very focus areas of gerontological research reflect a subtle ageism that concomitantly underpins much of the theoretical development in these areas. In the first instance, excessive
attention has been given to aged women as deteriorating bodies (Gamer & Mercer, 1989). Here a biophysical emphasis with its biological reductionism makes invisible the social, historical and personal contexts that necessarily interact with a woman's biology. Sociological and psychological studies do little better, with their focus on micro-interactions, individual coping mechanisms and interest in the death and dying process (Arber & Ginn, 1991). This imbalance results in theoretical approaches which in themselves have become prescriptive rather than descriptive, for example in the disengagement theories that suggest that the aged 'should' withdraw gradually from society (for example Cumming & Henry, 1961). The impact of such theoretical approaches is implicitly ageist. A preponderance of research studies maintain and perpetuate the myth that old age is by necessity a time of withdrawal, physical deterioration, passivity and dependence. Further the mere acceptance of aged women as a category homogenises them as a group, making invisible their great diversity and differences.

The selection of the nine women of this study was a response to the ageism/sexism nexus. In every way, this particular group of nine challenges these stereotypes. They are far from a homogenous group, although there are some similarities. English is their first language; none completed school in youth beyond the end of secondary school, all were born before 1925 and all spent the majority of their life in Australia. However, of greatest challenge to the 'old lady' stereotype is their active engagement in community life.

Each of the women was approached on the recommendation of a friend or worker who felt that she was an exemplar of an engaged, active community member in her older years. Again challenging our cultural myth of the passive, disengaged aged woman, I was overwhelmed by the number of women recommended by others as potential participants in this study. I asked colleagues, friends, community nurses and aged care workers just one question: "Do you know of any woman born before 1925 who you believe is successful in her old age and who indicates to you a life-time of active learning?". People
recommended friends, relatives and clients with strong feeling—"You absolutely must talk with...!". This factor was key in selecting this cohort as my interest lay in the women who were externally acknowledged as living their life in a positive way.

Women born before 1925 have been typified as belonging to generations who had little formal education, living out their lives within the domestic sphere. Through the mechanisms of patriarchal logic, they have been typified as 'just mothers' or 'just housewives'. Many younger women have been seduced by this position as well, believing that their mothers, aunts and grandmothers were either victims of, or conformists within, the domestic sphere. Suffice to say, the nine women of this study challenge that generalisation and show evidence of a multi-faceted life that has lead to a productive old age.

To draw on women who were seen by others as contradictions to our cultural stereotypes was only the first step. As my real interest lay in how a woman would construct a life that led to such a positive old age, I sought out women who themselves acknowledged that, in its own way, theirs was a successful life. Not only was it important that others saw this as a successful life, it was crucial that each woman also could see her lifelong learning as leading to the positive place she was in today. My interest lay in how each woman would tell the story of her life, what she would select and what she would deem as not relevant.

I am acutely aware that not all women reach their old age with a positive construction of self. Recent mental health research indicates that social isolation increases mental health problems for one in four women over 70 (Kay et al., 1987). Exposed over the years to limiting, gendered discourses, it is to be expected that many women construct themselves as 'only a...'. However I was interested in the women who could take from their cultural contexts ways of being, and indeed ways of seeing, that mitigated against such a view. In particular, I based my participant selection on the work of family therapists David Epston and Michael White (1990) who argue that personal narratives have the potential to be
either ‘disabling’ or ‘enabling’ constructions. I sought women who had been able to construct enabling stories of their lives; I have come to call this their ‘enabling fiction’.

I also sought to explore the women's life narratives beyond the individual schema. To some degree each narrative is individually constructed, however individual narratives must also reveal the socially shared, cultural embeddedness of each story (Haug, 1987). At any point in time, there are a limited set of frameworks by which to understand a life. However, as material circumstances impact on such frameworks, the women were also selected with an alertness to the different standpoints arising from material, social and family differences within Australian society this century. In this cohort of nine, four of the women were in paid work for most of their adult lives; seven of the women were married, two never married; two of the women spent part of their life on the land; seven had children; two of the women were widowed at an early age, only one had a husband still alive at the time of participation; and three of the women had little material security throughout their lives, four had a moderate level and two lived in a more privileged environment.

These are not just a group of ‘old ladies’—such a category does not exist. They are women who are quietly proud of their achievements: achievements which have come to the attention of others. They are not famous or infamous, but from their life-stories it is possible to see how extraordinary an ordinary life can be. They were selected for their diversity with one major exception—each of these women was able to (re)create an enabling life story in a way that challenges our society’s stereotype of the passive old woman. I was keen to know what such stories could tell about their lifelong learning.

**Towards a postmodern exploration of learning**

In the early stages, I conceptualised this work as part of the compensatory history begun by other feminists, an approach perhaps best summarised by Sheila Rowbotham’s title
“Hidden from History” (1973). Joan Scott (1988) appropriates the term ‘her-story’ to describe such an approach. In this approach women are rewritten into the accounts of what has been labelled ‘man-made’ or ‘male-stream’ history (Purvis, 1989). In other words, ‘his-story’ has ‘her-story’ added. I was well aware that in the area of women as learners outside formal education much needed to be added. For example, in the only bibliography on Australian adult education (Crew, 1968), of the 868 entries only three are found under the heading ‘women’; a heading that is tellingly placed in the section ‘special needs groups’.

As I began this approach, it soon became apparent that mine would be a short thesis. I would be able to reclaim women’s activities in some evening classes, in some vocational training, in community groups and perhaps as learners in the family setting, but this reclamation far from answered my questions about the wise women I had met. I came to realise that what first drew my attention to these women was the paradox of their subjection. As women in a patriarchal culture, one could see these lives as those of ‘victims of oppression’ but my observations told another story. I could see activity and positive identity development. It became apparent that what I was really interested in was their subjectivity; the way in which the women actively sought to shape their own lives and history (Bock, 1991) and in turn then how this impacted on their ability to speak as learners.

The ensuing shift can best be described as a movement towards the postmodern. I recognised that my new project had wider ramifications. By listening to the accounts of the nine women as they told of their life-stories, I would be able to understand the impacts of discourses as they were taken up or rejected by the women, and to see in turn how this enabled or constrained their notions of themselves as women and as learners.

By understanding the nine life-stories as (re)constructions of subjectivity, I would be able to interpret “subjective meaning at a critical juncture between political and social history, daily life and epochal events, macrostructures and microdynamics”. (Barry, 1989, p.561)
In the remainder of this chapter, I will outline the theoretical resources used in my work, and explain how these informed the concepts that were utilised in the project. In an introductory way I will elaborate on what this approach has allowed me to see. Finally, I will outline the thesis chapters, showing how each of these contributed to my expanding understanding of some of the issues of women and learning. Before I begin to link the postmodern with learning, it is important to briefly explain how I am using the terms 'postmodern', 'poststructural', 'discourse' and 'binary logic'.

**Postmodernism and poststructuralism**
If we utilise the 'post' of postmodern to assert that in some way our ideas and conceptualisations have moved on from the modern, we must first denote what it is we are moving on from (Cherryholmes, 1994). The epoch of modernism, typically described as beginning with the Enlightenment, has been marked by its notions of progress, the mastery of science over nature and by an epistemology based on reason and truth (Yeatman, 1994). Emerging from this, modernism holds that there are universal truths; thus, master narratives have developed. Rationality has become the rationale of governing (rather than rule by monarch or church) and the individual has been determined as the basic unit of society (Henriques *et al.*, 1984; Lather, 1991; Middleton, 1993). My project can be described as postmodern in that I am attempting to move beyond these concepts of modernism.

However in some academic circles, the term postmodern has been used to suggest a total rupture with the modern, reflecting an incommensurability similar to what Thomas Kuhn (1970) has named a 'paradigm shift'. Here I am less confident that I can claim such a position. In a persuasive article on the retreat of Marxism and socialist feminism, Jean Anyon (1994) argued that postmodernism has yet to fully move beyond the bounds of modernism. I find one of Anyon's insights particularly relevant. Anyon illustrates how the critique of binary logic as a central strategy of postmodern thinking draws on binary
logic itself. I have struggled with this in my own work as, like Anyon, I have defined ideas into:

- postmodern / modern
- poststructural / structural
- ad hoc theory / totalising theory
- local narrative / metanarrative
- aesthetic, nonscientific / scientific, rationalistic
- decentred subject / centred subject
- many truths / one Truth
- difference / essentialism
- deferral of meaning / fixed meaning
- non binary / binary thinking

(p.120)

I am thus not willing to claim my work is a rupture with modernism but rather I align myself with Jane Flax (1990) who has asserted that we are in a time of ‘transitional thinking’. I am not claiming that my work marks a break with that usually associated with modernism but I am persuaded that the postmodern critical practices developed, especially within poststructuralism, allow new and important understandings to emerge.

Postmodernism is a diffuse term in application. It has been applied to art, architecture, politics, philosophy, linguistics, history, genetics and information technology to name but a few applications (Appignanesi & Garratt, 1995). Although the terms postmodernism and poststructuralism are often used interchangeably (Lather, 1991), I understand poststructural as a subset within postmodernism and one which most accurately reflects my own work. The particular interest of poststructuralism as I understand it is in the way that reality is constructed through a web of relational concepts which constitute a culture, and that have in themselves no fixed physical referents. These concepts arise as conventions, consensus or unexamined assumptions within a culture and act with, or against, social structures and institutions to form a particular discourse. In any one culture the discourses are multiple and always contestatory. For individuals, discourses provide the basis of what it is possible to count as real (Foucault, 1972; Weedon, 1987; Lather, 1991).
My interest in women’s lives led me to utilise a poststructuralist approach. The poststructural theoretical resources, which have been particularly useful in expanding my understanding of this group of women and learning, emerged from feminist extensions of Foucauldian poststructuralism, in particular from the work of Chris Weedon (1987). I have been cognisant of feminist concerns with Foucauldian poststructuralism (as, for example, Bell & Klein, 1996), however I have found that the work of material feminists such as Rosemary Hennessy (1993) tempers poststructuralism and usefully grounds it in the materiality of lived experience. Therefore as I draw on poststructuralism in a particular way, I will illustrate how discourse theory, social constructionism and deconstruction have informed my work.

**Discourse theory**

This project draws on the feminist poststructural approach exemplified by Henriques *et al.*, (1984); Weedon (1987) and Davies (1990, 1991, 1993, 1994), and particularly utilises the understanding that all reality is socially constructed (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Gergen, 1985). In this approach, reality is seen to be constructed by the social and linguistic conventions (discourses) available in a given culture. Language is not a system of signs that stand for objects in the world, but rather language reflects a reality that is constructed through processes of consensus and shared perceptions. The immediate implication of this social construction approach is that meanings must be understood within their specific cultural and historical time and place.

The concept of discourse, which has been accredited particularly to the thinking of Michel Foucault, is well articulated by Chris Weedon (1987).

Discourses, in Foucault’s work, are ways of constituting knowledge, together with social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern. Neither the body nor thoughts and feelings have meaning outside their discursive articulation, but the ways in which discourse constitutes the minds and bodies of individuals is always part of a wider network of power relations, often with institutional bases. (p.108)
Foucault's work has revealed how discourse functions in the creation and maintenance of diverse areas such as insanity (1973), medicine (1975), criminality (1979) and sexuality (1980b, 1986). His work is particularly relevant in that his primary interest is in the working of power, and for those of us whose interest lies in women, this must be a central concern. Along with many other feminists I would note that despite his focus on sexuality, Foucault was relatively insensitive to gender issues (Diamond & Quinby, 1988; Sawicki, 1991). However, as Foucault would have argued, his central interest is to reveal the workings of power and in particular to illuminate the hegemony of meta-narratives, those discourses that become elevated to the level of grand and universal truth. To reject Foucault because of his gender insensitivity is to elevate his own work to a meta-narrative. As a feminist I find Foucault's insight into power useful, however I have used it as a starting point not an end-point.

Unlike the structuralists who see power as a global process, or the humanists who see power as a personal attribute, Foucault directs our attention to the capillary process of power as it positions the subject in a network of discourses. It is important to note that "the subject itself is the effect of a production, caught in the mutually constitutive web of social practices, discourses and subjectivity; its reality is the tissue of social relations". (Henriques et al., 1984, p.117)

Importantly, Foucault and others following his genealogical approach have demonstrated that not all discourses carry equal weight. Foucault was particularly interested in tracing how some discourses work together and have been elevated as 'regimes of truth' (1980). Certain discourses interact with given historical conditions and practice to be taken as truth. This notion of a 'regime of truth' is not the Marxist top-down notion of ideology, imposed by the state or ruling class, but a circular process by which people come to take up positions that are commonsense in that culture and by doing so they contribute to that very notion of commonsense. Such commonsense appears obvious because it is inscribed
in the very language we speak (Belsey, 1980, 1985). Perhaps the most powerful example of a ‘regime of truth’ is that in Western culture, there is for me no other viable way of thinking of myself beyond being a skinbound unit, an ‘individual’, and a gendered/sexed unit of ‘woman’. However within the latter category there are particular ways I can ‘do’ woman, and it is at this point that Foucault’s work is of particular relevance for feminists.

It is only through discourses that we can make claims to knowledge, and according to Foucault (1980a) knowledge can only exist within discourse. Discourses can, and often do, compete with each other to offer distinct, and even contradictory, versions of reality (Weedon, 1987; Davies, 1991). Thus, as individuals strive to make sense of their world, discourses are constitutive of, and are constituted by, actual social practices. In other words, discourses and their concomitant regimes of truth can be seen, heard and enacted in daily life. Hence the relevance to my interest in the life-stories and daily lives of one group of older women.

For women who have lived their lives across the twentieth century, it is probable that certain discourses have been dominant in that time. The discourse of public/private sphere has intersected with discourses of nurturing and family making with the outcome that home and family emerge as woman’s ‘natural’ place this century. However closer examination should allow us to see possible competing and even contradictory discourses within this ‘natural’ sphere. For example, marriage could be seen as a ‘companionate arrangement’, a ‘patriarchal benevolence’ or a ‘procreative partnership’ as all of these discourses have been available during this period. The raising of children could be understood as a ‘mutual’ parental responsibility, a ‘spiritual’ responsibility, a ‘technical task’, and the list could continue. Government policy is part of a discursive field, for example through rulings on compulsory schooling, widows’ pensions and the baby bonus. Each of these work with or against certain discourses. Thus poststructural discourse theory was invaluable to understand the nine life-stories as they reflected the
way that each person actively took up discourses as if they were their own commonsense (Davies, 1993).

**Binary logic**

Oppositional thinking or binary logic is a feature of the power–knowledge–discourse process that Foucault has named. Each of a binary pair is not merely different, this difference is hierarchical. Over the history of Western time, dominant groups have given priority to their own experience and their place in the world by constructing what Edward Sampson names as ‘serviceable others’ (Sampson, 1993, p.4). Whether this be the ‘other’ as native, as homosexual, as Jew or as woman, this division of the world at any given time is a simple, yet powerful determination of them and us. Through the use of deconstruction, following Derrida (1976, 1978), a text can be interrogated for its construction of difference, through the process of binary logic. This will reveal that the construction of the world into binary pairs is a symbiotic act. We cannot understand ‘man’ without a concept of ‘woman’, we cannot understand ‘active’ without knowing ‘passive’. Binary pairs depend on each other for their very existence.

We can see the effect of the capillary process of power when one of a binary pair becomes accepted as naturally superior; and when the symbiotic dependency is made invisible such as in the dichotomy of rational/emotional. As Anna Yeatman (1994) has noted “binary constructions of difference not only specify a border that divides, but that this is simultaneously a border which unites” (p.15). The power of binary logic has pervaded the modern world. Both men and women have internalised Western concepts of rationality and knowledge that falsely dichotomise emotion and thought, objectivity and subjectivity, mind and body, masculinity and femininity (Bordo, 1986). This way of thinking has become a powerful part of what is held to be ‘commonsense’.

The acknowledgment of binary logic has been an important contribution to feminist studies. One of the early Australian feminist histories of women, Anne Summers'
“Damned Whores and God’s Police” (1975) began to make visible the constitutive impact of discourses through the workings of binary logic. Since then, even greater complexity has been revealed as the internal contradictions and competition between discourses have become apparent (for example Matthews, 1984; Reiger, 1985; Gilding, 1991; Johnson, 1993).

In my work, I have been particularly interested in how discourses and binary logic work by repressing meanings (Derrida, 1978). Certain concepts may not be verbalised as they have achieved taken-for-granted status. For example, in all of their texts the women I interviewed spoke of themselves and other women as ‘naturally’ mothers in a way that made invisible any mothering done by men, siblings or neighbourhood friends. Similar silences arose from the categorisation of one concept as ‘naturally’ opposite to the other. Particularly notable was how the women maintained their life-stories as ‘naturally’ private lives, despite significant and ongoing relationships with the public sphere of health professionals, schools, their husbands’ work roles and the like.

For feminists, the interrogation of a text for its discursive patterns and its use of binary logic has been a valuable strategy. This approach allows the mechanism of power to become visible, as discourses prescribe the limits in which we can speak and act. However I share the concern of feminists such as Rosemary Hennessy (1993) and Teresa Ebert (1991) that when working towards a theory of discourse, it must be towards one that is coherent with feminism’s emancipatory aims.

Teresa Ebert (1991), by distinguishing between ludic and resistance postmodernism, has alerted us to a crucial political divide. Ludic postmodernism emphasises the linguistic dimensions whereby language is understood as a formal system of differences, whereas resistance postmodernism directs our attention to the politics of the production of subjectivities, exploring language as social practice. I position myself within a resistance postmodernism that:
insists that social totalities like patriarchy and racism do continue to structure our lives and for this reason critical analyses cannot afford to turn away from them...holding on to normative grounds does not mean embracing master narratives or totalising theories. But it does mean rewriting them. (Hennessy, 1993, p.3, original emphasis)

I find that such work of material feminists grounds discourse theory and mitigates against the nihilistic acceptance of unlimited difference. By acknowledging the material dimensions of women's lives we become aware of how and why social differences are reproduced. Our analysis is socially critical rather than an apolitical act of the mere celebration of difference.

The nine women's lives are materially significant. Whilst I recognise that it is only through discourses that they, and I, can speak of these lives, their material location within patriarchy and within industrial capitalism must be acknowledged. With this statement, I recognise myself as a speaker/writer who affects what gets to count as 'reality'. I focus on the materiality of capitalism and patriarchy not in order to count them as 'real', but in order to make them visible and thus open to deconstruction and critique. I understand this as an action of discourse analysis that emerges from grounded daily lives in a way that acknowledges the material and non-material dimensions of discourse.

I have chosen to use life-stories as a way to explore the discursive and material conditions that can be heard through personal narrative. There are limited ways in which we can speak of our lives. These are the limitations of discourse. Personal narratives illuminate the impact of binary logic in understanding one's life as women tell of what is natural and what is contestable. In my analysis, I have used binary evidence to look at the interdependence of each pair to see sameness and difference simultaneously (Code, 1988).

I have found poststructuralism a rich adjunct to feminist theory, but, as I have begun to elaborate, it brings its own dilemmas. Joan Scott (1991) has encapsulated these dilemmas with the following questions for feminists.
(H)ow to invoke ‘experience’ without implicitly endorsing essentialising concepts; how to describe political mobilisation without appealing to essentialised, ahistorical identities; how to depict human agency while acknowledging its linguistic and cultural determinations; how to incorporate fantasy and the unconscious into studies of social behaviour; how to recognise differences and make processes of differentiation the focus of political analysis without either ending up with unconnected, multiple accounts or with over arching categories like class or ‘the oppressed’; how to acknowledge the partiality of one’s story (indeed of all stories) and still tell it with authority and conviction. (p.60)

These are the tensions I work with in this study. I believe that Scott is right when she determines that such tensions are inevitable outcomes of the personal, the political and the professional interacting.

**Women, learning and education**

When we turn to what has been written about learning in the twentieth century it is possible to see an example of discourse in action. Our late twentieth century understandings of learning arise particularly from the modern humanist discourses of the individual self as the rational, autonomous and independent being. This is typified by work on the self-directed learner (Knowles, 1973, 1975), the self-actualising adult (Maslow, 1962) and the full-functioning self (Rogers, 1961).

Arising from the humanist notion of self are the discourses which construct assumptions about individual responsibility for learning and development and the universal human need for growth in a progress-oriented way. Thus adult learning theory has continued to (re)produce an understanding that learning and development are intrinsically individual phenomena. Here the individual is taken to have the right, indeed the responsibility, to take control of ‘his’ life, to diagnose ‘his’ needs and work towards this. It is not surprising to find that such a notion has gained great currency in the modern democracies of the twentieth century.
Here I use the word ‘his’ in a deliberate sense. Linda Alcoff (1988) has argued that the twentieth century ‘man’ has been constructed as a rational animal with free will, however ‘woman’ has had a more constraining construction.

(M)an’s behaviour is *under determined*, free to construct its own future along the course of its rational choice, woman’s nature has *over determined* her behaviour, the limits of her intellectual endeavours, and the inevitabilities of her emotional journey through life... The place of the free-willed subject who can transcend nature’s mandates is reserved exclusively for men. (p.406, emphasis added)

Along with others (Neuwinger, 1989; Karach & Roach, 1992) I have argued elsewhere that the majority of adult learning theories are not congruent for many women (Pamphilon, 1994) and I believe that a discourse analysis allows us to see why. The discourses that form the basis of most of the theorising in adult learning and education are those that arise from the male lived experience and from patriarchal institutions. In a later chapter, I will illustrate that what is called the self-actualised adult (Maslow, 1962), the full-functioning self (Rogers, 1961), and the self-directed learner (Knowles, 1973, 1975) is in fact the proto-typical white, middle-class male. It is not surprising that women find little resonance with theories in this field. Although some theorists have begun to acknowledge the subjective, interpretative dimension of concepts of adult learning and development (Freire, 1972a, 1972b; Basseches, 1984; Brookfield, 1988; Candy, 1991; Oyama, 1993), in general the application of a poststructuralist notion of discourse has yet to be fully harnessed (Usher, 1993; Lee & Wickert, 1995, are important exceptions).

It was from concerns such as this that my study emerged. However, although my interest began with women’s ways of learning, it is crucial to note that I am not searching for ‘the’ women’s ways of learning. Such a project would firstly locate me within the modernist discourse of the search for the inner being and the truth within, and within the foundationalist view that knowledge claims that are certain and indisputable can be discovered as the foundation for a system of knowledge (as elaborated by Rorty, 1980). Discourse analysis has demonstrated the limitations of such hegemonic thinking. Equally, to search for a single and universal mode of women’s knowing is to dismiss the complex
gender, racial and class dimensions of women’s lived experience (Luttrell, 1989). To ignore this is to contribute to what has been rightly attacked as a middle-class, white feminist hegemony (hooks, 1984; Spelman, 1988; Lerner, 1993).

A small number of feminists have focused on women’s ways of knowing and learning; for example, Carol Gilligan “In a Different Voice” (1982); Mary Belenky and colleagues “Women’s Ways of Knowing” (1986); and Sara Ruddick “Maternal Thinking” (1989). As the titles suggest, these women have turned to women’s lives to ground their thinking. This approach has been critiqued as essentialist as they have been read as a search for the ‘purer’ understandings held by women and the ensuing elevation of women’s culture Grimshaw (1986); Kerber et al. (1986). Indeed my original inspiration, Virginia Woolf, could be counted here within the form of radical feminism known as ‘cultural feminism’ (Jaggar, 1983). I would agree that merely to invert patriarchal thinking and replace it with the matriarchal is to maintain the discourse of biological essentialism. However, I believe that this is not the only way to read work such as that of Gilligan, Belenky and Ruddick, as they themselves assert within their own texts. Jane Roland Martin (1994) has argued that the accusation of ‘essentialism’ has created a ‘chilly climate’ in feminist research and theory, and warns against the trap of ‘false difference’. I read her to say we must resist the essentialist/anti-essentialist dichotomy.

I would argue that ‘women’ are never socially constructed just as women, but always as particular women within particular socio-cultural and historical locations (Spelman, 1988). We cannot generalise from ‘some’ women to ‘all’ women without reverting to essentialist thinking, however we can, and must, examine the lives of as many women in as many locations as possible in order to document and understand the complexities and commonalities of women. It is crucial to resist the politically paralysing fragmentation of a pluralist poststructuralism of simplistic difference. I align myself with the feminist discourse that names ‘woman’ as a real and political category: one that arises from lived
experience and its social construction. I take the liberty of quoting Wendy Luttrell (1989) at length as I share her commitment.

(W)hat [women] do have in common is the organisation of knowledge as a social relation that ultimately is successful in diminishing their power as they experience the world. To understand women's exclusion requires an examination of the similarities and differences in the objective conditions of women's lives, as well as an analysis of how ideologies shape women's perceptions and claims to knowledge. Since women do not all experience the work of being a woman in the same way, it is impossible to identify a single mode of knowing. To understand why certain forms of knowledge appear more amenable to women, we must look more closely at the ethnic-class-, and race-specific nature of women's experiences, as well as the values that are promoted in each context...we feminists, sociologists, and educators must be prepared to untangle both the ideologies and objective conditions in women's lives that render our work, knowledge and power invisible. (p.44, original emphasis)

Although Luttrell uses the term ideology where I would use discourse, I believe she encapsulates my hopes as well. Through an exploration of nine women's lives, I hope to contribute to the cumulative understanding about women and about learning. Having clarified how I have used the concept 'woman' it is now incumbent on me to clarify how I will be using the concept 'learning', and the related term 'education'.

Utilising the insights of poststructuralism, it is possible to see that two discourses have particular currency in the area of learning, one arising from commonsense understandings, the other from institutional settings. In the language of commonsense, we all 'know' that 'you live and learn', at times 'you learn the hard way', or have to 'learn from your mistakes'. This discourse equates learning and experience in the context of daily life. In the second discourse, learning is related to outcomes and more typically arises from institutional settings where we learn 'about' or learn 'to'. It is likely to be associated with educational contexts where the aim is to enable learning through some form of purposeful activity. It is from these two discourses that the traditional delineation of learning into formal or informal arises.

However Griff Foley (1995, p.xiv) has argued that today there are four commonly used categories of adult learning: 'formal learning'—usually conducted in institutional settings by professional educators, with a defined curriculum, typically leading to some
qualification; 'non-formal learning'—when people see a need for some systematic instruction in a sporadic way where no credentialling occurs; 'informal learning'—where people consciously try to learn from experience but without any instruction; and 'incidental learning'—the tacit and often unrecognised learning that occurs whilst performing other activities.

What is apparent from this taxonomy is that learning has been categorised by its degree of formalisation particularly via education, and it is this observation that directs our attention back to discourse. In an industrialising, techno-rational society, it should come as no surprise that learning should be defined by its relationship to education. During the twentieth century, education has moved from mass primary to mass secondary and now, in its various manifestations, could be seen as moving to mass tertiary education. Although informed to a degree by the notion of the democratic right to education, definitions of learning have been driven by a credentialising society. Because of this discursive constitution of learning, the fact that most learning occurs outside formal institutions (Dewey, 1916/1964, Brookfield, 1986) has received minimal attention. Further, the dimensions of informal and incidental learning that are located in social life have been neglected (Marsick & Watkins, 1991; Foley, 1991, 1993, 1995).

A Foucauldian notion of power holds that discourses gain currency from a coalition of factors. I believe that the emerging capitalist and nation states were well served by discourses which linked formal education and learning. Both liberal and vocational education serve to position workers differentially in a capitalist democracy. This process has also determined what is to count as learning. Therefore over this century learning has come to be understood as the measurable outcome-driven product of education. As a

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1 When a reference contains two dates I use this non-traditional format to draw attention to the era in which the text was first written. The first year refers to the original date of publication, the second year the date republished.
result all learning that falls outside this definition is marginalised, in particular that
learning arising from the activities of everyday life.

Although I have acknowledged the discursive construction of the dominant definitions of
learning and the ensuing limitations, I have chosen to continue to utilise the four
commonly held categories of learning: the formal, the non-formal, the informal and the
incidental, because my interest is in how this taxonomy works as a whole. I believe there
is a symbiotic relationship across the four categories. In my work I was interested to hear
how/if these categorisations directly or indirectly informed the life-stories of the women
to whom I spoke.

However, I was also interested to see if the women would speak of themselves as
learners beyond the conventional categories. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) contend that the
human conceptual system is largely metaphorical and is grounded in our interactions with
specific physical and cultural environments. By collecting the life-stories of the nine
women, I had hoped to find alternative metaphors of learning to those that arose from an
interaction with the formal education system. Recalling my initial interest in this group of
women as ‘outsiders’ to that system, I wondered what other discourses, and their
ensuing metaphors, if any, these women would call on to explain their learning.

What became apparent was that the language that arose from formal education did not
allow this group of women to speak of themselves confidently as learners. Each of the
women did attempt to modify the language but it did not always prove to be congruent
with their learnings, particularly those that arose outside formal settings. Instead the
women spoke of their learning in a way that was almost synonymous with development.
In a range of oblique ways, they illustrated for me where and how they had moved
forward and where and how they had developed. Therefore, in this thesis, I have utilised
a sense of learning as development.
Ultimately, I have retained a very simple definition of learning as ‘the central and purposeful activity of human adaptation to everyday life’. Following Thomas (1983), I acknowledge three further factors: that people of all ages can and do learn; that learning is what an individual does voluntarily; and that learning is cumulative. However, to this conceptualisation of learning I would add that learning can only be constructed and understood within the discursive possibilities available within the learner’s cultural and historical context. Underpinning my definition is a belief that learning is the process of responding to the discursive possibilities as we adapt to and attempt to make sense of everyday life.

What to expect—the reading of this thesis
My poststructural methodology and my commitment to socially responsible praxis has led me to write this thesis in a particular way. The first chapters have taken the form of the more traditional thesis approach of argument, illustration, integration of theory and literature and conclusions. However, in Chapters Five to Nine, I have privileged the words of the women to whom I spoke. I do so, not in the naive belief that these women speak for themselves, as I am critically aware of the mediation that my presence has had at every stage. Rather I present their words in recognition that there are many meanings available from the reading of any one text. I have tried to present my conceptual links as rigorously as possible, but I present full extracts to allow other meanings to be possible for the reader.

One of the joys of qualitative data is just that—the quality. As part of my project I retain a commitment to add women’s words to our collective pool of knowledge. By utilising their words I hope to make those words available for other interpretations as well as to provide the reader with enough detail to follow my particular analysis. I share Dale Spender’s (1982) belief that “(w)omen have a responsibility to describe the world from
the position they occupy—for other women; and for men who will not know unless they are informed” (p.17).

Just as I have not presumed that the women’s words speak for themselves, I must acknowledge my particular role in the construction of this text. Like the women of the study, I speak from a discursive location that is culturally and historically specific. As Bronwyn Davies has cited from Foucault:

>(a)nalysis of discourse or discursive practices must include information about who it is that is speaking, the site from which or out of which they speak, and the positions available to them as speakers within any particular context or set of relations. (Foucault, 1972, cited in Davies, 1994, p.47)

I include myself in Foucault’s exhortation for contextualisation and have written myself into the text wherever I have felt it to be essential. It is now beginning to be acknowledged that “in an academic context ‘the personal is theoretical’ - not peripheral or anecdotal”. (Okely, 1992, p.9)

Jane Tompkins (1989) has argued that to self-consciously write one’s self into the text is to correct a mistaken epistemology in which academic convention has drawn a false dichotomy between public/private and denies emotion as part of the acquisition of knowledge. Whilst I would not wish to be a purveyor of what has been called ‘vanity ethnography’ (Maynard, 1993, p.329), I believe careful insertion of the author into her text is compatible with, if not demanded by, a poststructural approach.

My work with the nine life-stories is congruent with Liz Stanley’s (1993a) concept of auto/biography. By linking the two words, Stanley asserted that

‘(a)uto/biography’ disrupts conventional taxonomies of life writing, disputing its divisions of self/other, public/private, and immediacy/memory. Relatedly, ‘the auto/biographical I’ signals the active presence of [researchers] in constructing, rather than discovering, knowledge. (p.41)
Not only does the structure of a thesis reflect the dynamic between the researcher and her informants, through my thesis structure, but I hope to also make apparent the cross-disciplinary nature of my work. Although primarily poststructural, I also draw on feminist theory, narratology, textual analysis, psychology, anthropology and sociology as well as education theory. It is my aim to do so in a trans-disciplinary way.

In the second chapter of the thesis, I explore the way adult learning and development has been conceptualised. I argue that theoretical developments polarise around an individual/social divide and evidence little awareness of the limitations of this dichotomy. Further, I assert that on both sides of that divide—the individual or the social—individuals are presented as generic humans who on analysis are revealed as prototypically male. Thus, I look to feminist theorists to explore the gendered construction of learning. I conclude that a poststructuralist understanding of learning has yet to be fully harnessed in the area of adult learning and development, and that the concept of subjectivity allows us to move beyond the modernist self and the artificial individual/social divide.

In the third chapter, I trace the development of the notion of subjectivity particularly utilising the work of Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. However, I argue that a feminist development of the theory of subjectivity is a necessary adjunct for my project which is explicitly feminist in its politics. From this I suggest that as my interest is in how women speak of learning over a life, the process of speaking of subjectivity becomes paramount.

Although I began with Lacan's concept of desire (1977, 1981), I find that the notion of investments is a more congruent way to understand how and why the women of this study spoke of their subjectivity. In particular, I have valued the work of David Epston and Michael White (1990) as it allowed me to understand the life-stories as enabling fictions. Thus in this chapter I conclude that life-stories are an ideal vehicle for examining
the process of subjectivity. Over any life, discourses modify and change and new discourses emerge. Equally the material conditions of life are fluid. Life-stories present a valuable window into the individual process of subjectivity.

The fourth chapter explicates the methodological underpinnings of my work. I understand life-stories as personal narratives and argue that it is crucial to recognise them as both situated and constructed knowledge. Further, because the life-stories were told to me by aged women, I recognise and explore the issue of memory and gender. My research owes a great debt to the ethical and theoretical rigour of those such as Ann Oakley, Jane Ribbens, Marjorie Devault and Sherna Berger Gluck and their work with women as oral sources. This chapter delineates how my research praxis was enriched by their commitment to empowerment. I conclude the chapter by outlining my approach to the analysis of the personal narratives which I have called a 'multi-level' analysis.

It is then incumbent on me to introduce you to the nine women who so generously shared their life-stories with me: Irene Richards (b. 1903), Louise Depasse (b. 1912), Lucy Beattie (b. 1916), Josephine Blow (b. 1919), Val King (b. 1919), Florence Dugdale (b. 1920), Dagmar Campbell (b. 1922), Emma Merchant (b. 1924) and Margaret Evans (b. 1925). The fifth chapter presents the women by means of a cameo account of their life, accompanied by a photo they chose to include. I examine their life-stories as narrative constructions and argue that in presenting their story each of the women forges a particular sense of self by constructing thematic links across their life. I argue that this is an act of coherency that reveals one way of resolving the contradictions and complexities presented by competing discourses. I suggest that this coherency is particularly forged through the notion of a connected self; and by life themes that are spoken of as life projects. In this chapter, it is important to me to present the women as real people. I avoid writing them out of their own lives.

3 These are pseudonyms chosen by the women themselves.
The second part of the thesis explores what is embedded within the life-stories in relationship to learning, development and women’s lived experience. Chapter Six begins by examining the parts of the personal narratives that focused on the experience of formal education—of being a student. I argue that for the nine women childhood was a time of learning about difference. In their own way each of the women spoke about differences of family, of gender and themselves as learners in a school setting. Through the interaction of school and family the women spoke of a hierarchy of learning, with formal academic learning taken to be at the pinnacle down to the less valued informal learning in the home, and of binary logic that divided the world into concrete/abstract and natural/learned. Childhood was described as being the beginning of learning how to ‘do’ woman, and in particular for most, it was told as the beginning of life projects of care and connection. This chapter also explores how the women spoke of any formal education in adulthood. I argue that formal education settings were overall not the source of a robust sense of one’s self as a ‘real’ learner.

Chapter Seven explores seven of the women’s accounts of wifehood. I argue that the way a woman spoke of herself as a wife related directly to the way she could speak of herself as a learner. When a woman drew on a notion of service and duty, she was less able to speak of her own learning and development than the woman who spoke as a marital partner. Further I found that the notion of marriage as a partnership appeared to provide more flexibility over a lifetime.

In Chapter Eight, I concentrate on the accounts of mothering. All nine of the women, including the never-married women, elevated nurturing, caring and mothering in their accounts. It became apparent that through the notion of mothering the women were able to speak most confidently about their learning. This was their own specialist achievement. In some accounts mothering was constituted as primarily natural, arising from a notion of
maternal instinct. In other accounts the women elevated the modern scientific mothering promulgated in the mid-century. Further all of the women constituted mothering as ‘never-ending’ and in that way forged a lifelong project.

Although Chapters Seven and Eight focus on the ‘private’ experience of wifehood and motherhood, I do assert that the women by necessity moved across both private and public spheres, even though most of the women spoke as essentially private selves. Chapter Nine examines how the women spoke about their extensions beyond the home and family and looks for disruptions to the sense of self that had been constituted. I argue that the notion of caring provided a congruent first step beyond the domestic, but that for some of the women that step led to their exposure to new discourses. Some women invested in new discourses, others did not. I conclude that for some they continued a story of a caring self, but for others they extended to a self-in-development.

Chapter Ten considers how the nine life-stories extend our understanding of women’s learning and development. I consider how the concepts of self-directed learning, of transformative learning, experiential learning, of incidental and of lifelong learning are challenged both by a poststructural approach, and by the ways the nine women spoke of their life and learning.

I conclude by returning full circle to my commitment to maintaining these as stories of real women. Although intellectually it is tenable to understand subjectivity as fragmented, non-unitary and inherently contradictory, it is not possible to live a life this way. We must each forge coherency into our lives and live as if we are sovereign subjects. This is the key to well-being⁴. Each of the nine women have been successful in constituting a

⁴ I choose to use the term ‘well-being’ in preference to ‘health’ due to the overly biomedical emphasis of most current definitions of the latter term. However I am aware that ‘well-being’ has its own limitations (for example the work of Seedhouse (1995)— a challenging exploration of the term as it relates to health promotion).
powerful and enabling fiction in which they take up the discourses which appear to them to have the greatest individual gain. I argue that this is a process that must be added to our ways of understanding learning. It is indeed a process of 'making the best of life'.
Chapter 2

EXAMINING THE FRAMEWORKS OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

My aim in this chapter is to explore how learning and development have been conceptualised over this century, in particular to examine how well those concepts serve to understand women's learning and development. Definitions of learning and development are exemplars of the poststructural argument that certain discourses function as disciplinary power, and as such are implicated in the production and constitution of individuals as subjects in the modern state (Rose, 1989). The emphasis on a particular perspective of adult learning and development is a product of the discursive fields of the time. Adult learning has been viewed in several ways: as a political rebellion in social systems controlled by small elites; as the acquisition of knowledge and skills in societies that value the right of citizens to have equal access to resources; as a way of meeting the expressed needs of learners in a consumerist culture; and as a process of critical reflection in a society where individuals are questioning economic/political systems (Cranston, 1992). Indeed Keith Hoskin (1990) has argued that:

(what we may well need to consider is how 'the educational' may in different epochs, in different ways, function as the hyphen in the power-knowledge relation. We may come to regard hitherto unregarded shifts in 'learning how to learn' as the principle by which we can interpret fundamental shifts both in social organisation and in the construction of the individual human subject. (p.51)

It is crucial to illuminate the contexts that inform definitions of learning and development.
The links between adult learning and adult development are particularly noteworthy in our present era of a rapidly changing society. The need for lifelong learning has become as much a pragmatic as a philosophical reality, as when the time-span of cultural change is less than the lifespan of individuals, the crucial issue becomes learning how to learn.

However, although much scholarly work has contributed to theories of child development, until quite recently adulthood was regarded as the undifferentiated outcome of successful child development. Stages until adulthood were theorised in great detail, however having reached maturity, the adult received comparatively little attention until recent times (Schuller, 1992). In the following analysis I will draw primarily on literature that concentrates on the adult experience. However, in doing so I recognise the discursive construction of adulthood and childhood, acknowledging the fluidity of both constructs.

I will argue that, in general, conceptualisations of learning and development fall clearly within modernist notions of the individual. They reveal a dichotomy between the individual and society which until recently has resulted in theoretical polarisation. This polarisation has particular implications for theorising the experiences of women. Feminists have repeatedly demonstrated that binary logic, in this case into individual/society, is essentially an act of hierarchical thinking in which one of the pair is inherently lesser. Although not always explicitly poststructural or postmodern, there are however directions in recent work which begin to transcend the artificial individual/society divide. There is much potential in understanding learning and development as constructed, and as a contextually situated process of creation and recreation (Gergen, 1985)—an exploration that I extend in the following chapter on subjectivity.
Examining the Frames

In this chapter I begin by examining three major frameworks that have been utilised to understand learning and development. The frameworks are scientific positivism, liberal individualism and social transformation. I argue that each of these theories is essentially modern, and that although they have had varying impacts on understanding women and learning, they are limited by their inability to address reality as discursively constituted. In the second section, I explore the newer theoretical directions in adult learning and development that are compatible with postmodernism. I conclude that to understand learning and development as a process and product of storying (narrativisation) allows us to begin to move beyond the limitations of theorisation that is drawn from the notion of the modern self.

The women of this study showed no evidence that they had read into the field of adult learning, and yet reflected in their accounts were many of the conceptual categories of that academic literature. This demonstrates that certain discourses function as regimes of truth, and insert themselves as 'commonsense' language in the self-descriptions of individuals (Foucault, 1980). Therefore, I begin with a mapping of what I see as the dominant discourses that inform current understandings of adult learning and development: the discourses of scientific positivism, of liberal individualism and of social transformation.

Scientific positivism, learning and development

Prior to the 1960s, scientific positivist and in particular instrumental definitions of learning predominated in Australia and similar Western nations (Foley, 1995). Interest was directed to the individual and his/her development of cognitive and intellectual functioning. Utilising the work of the early biological and reductionist psychologists such as Thorndike (1874–1949), Pavlov (1849–1936), Watson (1878–1958) and Skinner
interest in learning focused on a mechanistic model in which learning was seen as an individual event, outcomes of which could be quantitatively measured. These theorists based their work on overtly observable phenomena, behaviour, and stimulus and response approaches which it was argued could be enhanced by programming or reinforcement (Tennant, 1988). The time at which these approaches were developed (1910 onwards) was a time of rapid expansion of the industrial nations. The imperative was for a well-trained, in contrast to well-educated, workforce.

A hallmark of the early behaviourist approach to learning was the use of animals to determine basic functions which were then generalised to the human being. Pavlov’s dog and Skinner’s rats are all too familiar. Typically, studies of this type revealed that, as with females of most species, women function best as passive nurturers, learning at a different (i.e. inferior) level to that of active males. Such anthropocentric and androcentric research has been rigorously critiqued by feminist scientists (for example Keller, 1985). Biological determinism is not a new experience for women. From Victorian Darwinism to modern day sociobiologism, such theories have contributed to the (re)production of the culturally stereotypical behaviours expected of women.

Positivism isolated facets of the individual learner in a way that enabled testing, monitoring and categorisations to be developed. It was argued that psychometric and IQ testing provided the means to measure an individual’s capacity for learning and development (for example Kline (1991) and Schaie (1996) demonstrate recent applications of this approach). Not only are these tests now recognised for their racial, gender and age bias, they have been found to only measure a limited set of functions (Pogson & Tennant, 1995). The nature of such testing rests on an assumption that if people are tested in a uniform way the results will enable the development of norms for learning and development. However, as is increasingly indicated, the design of the tests arises from the assumptions of the dominant discourses. Thus for women (and others) the
inevitable result has been an inability to meet the standards of the white, middle-class male.

A classic study in this area is the work of the Brovermans (1972). They surveyed mental health professionals to determine what they would identify as characteristics of the well-adjusted human. Overwhelmingly rational, objective and instrumental characteristics were determined as normal and typically male, whilst expressive, subjective and emotional characteristics were determined abnormal and typically female. Thus to test as a normal woman was to test as an abnormal human being. Repeatedly, behaviourist studies set psycho-social guidelines and values that were not applicable to most women (Miller, 1986).

The application of behaviourist approaches to learning have been wide. Within the human resource development and education sectors, behavioural objectives have meshed with the bureaucratic need for measurable outcomes. They complement the mass education project by supporting examination, testing and norming. Most behaviourists do not acknowledge the cultural contingencies of the individual, rather they reduce the individual to a malleable object. They give little credence to the relevance of an individual’s interpretation of a situation and cannot address any propensity to act in an irrational way. This has become particularly evident in the therapeutic use of behaviourism where rigorous programs have been developed to teach people to unlearn ‘bad habits’ such as over- or under-eating, smoking or drinking. The failure of such programs has been consistent (for example Daykin & Naidoo,1995) as people time and time again show they are more complex than Pavlov’s dog.

In the last decade, there have been developments in research on cognitive function that attempt a more holistic understanding. In particular, research on cognitive processes has examined the perceptual, affective and cognitive aspects of the learner, often in order to increase effectiveness of teaching and learning strategies (for example, Entwistle, 1984).
However a mechanistic relationship between the individual and social forces underpins many such approaches. Until more recent explorations such as neuro-linguistic styles (Mills, 1992) and multiple intelligence theory (Gardner, 1993), the person has been primarily constituted as a passive receiver of behaviours, attitudes and values which are maintained by societal rewards and sanctions (Tennant, 1988). The impact of scientific positivism, particularly behaviourism is less influential today in the nineties than in its zenith in the post-war period. However it can still be seen in the language of educators who set behavioural objectives and value the role of regular reinforcement and feedback. Behaviour modification programs in the health field continue to be used to help people ‘un-learn’ negative behaviours. Further, sections of the competency based training movement continue to develop a behaviourist understanding of learning as individuals are trained for highly specialised work places (Chappell et al., 1995, gives an analysis of the competency movement). Multiple intelligence theory, accelerated learning, right brain/left brain theories have understood the learner as more complex than in behaviourism but none of these approaches have utilised the understandings of that learner as discursively constituted.

Liberal individualism, learning and development

In contrast to the reductionist and mechanical views of scientific positivism, liberal individualism has understood the person as a developing self in a more holistic way. Nevertheless this discourse places equal emphasis on the individual as the binary opposite to society. The construction of the individual, with individual rights and the right for self-determination, has become the cornerstone of Western democratic cultures over the last two centuries. It is not surprising therefore that adult learning and development theories have reified the individual experience of self development, a process which has been concomitantly elevated as crucial for the full development of a democratic citizenry (Sampson, 1993).
It was this 'right' of the individual to self development that prompted much of the interest in adult learning at the turn of the century. Universal literacy, although instrumental for the workforce, was equally regarded as a tool for moral learning, whether it be for reading the Bible or reading political manifestos (Jarvis, 1987b). Men were to be educated to be better citizens, whilst women were to be educated to bring up the next generation of full citizens. In 1917, Walter Smith emphasised the link between education, learning, and citizenship.

The individual must not only be personally efficient; he (sic) must be socially efficient...Education must train the individual for membership in the family, the State, the Church, the club and the business world no less than make him an effective thinker. Social efficiency is our present educational shibboleth. (p.13)

The focus on development has shifted across the century, reflecting an interest in notions of the discovery of the inner self and its full development (humanist psychology), the individual's learning process (learning style) and the progress of development (stage theory).

**Humanist psychology**

Although the focus on self development can be seen across the whole of the twentieth century, with the rise of humanist psychology, particularly in the human potential movement from the late 1950s onwards, there was a zenith of what Edward Sampson (1993) has named the self-celebratory project. Such humanist psychology rejects the mechanistic views of learning, espousing the need for holism, albeit only a whole self, and encourages a search for, and development of, the inner, true self. Fritz Perls and his colleagues (1951) for example argued that self-discovery was the central process of life. From their 'gestalt' perspective the individual was exhorted to:
launch yourself on a progressive personal adventure wherein, by your own active efforts, you may do something for yourself - namely, discover it, organise it and put it to constructive use in the living of your life (p.4).

Key to the theoretical development within humanistic adult learning and development has been the work of Abraham Maslow (1962). Maslow’s concept of human development comprises a hierarchical pyramid of five levels of achievement that must be reached in order to attain the goal of becoming a ‘self-actualised’ person. Only when all levels have been achieved is this state possible¹. The goal of the learner is to realise their potential by meeting the higher needs such as confidence, independence, autonomy and of not needing others. Maslow’s theory has drawn much criticism, primarily centred on the many internal inconsistencies that become apparent when non middle-class, non-white people are assessed (Sampson, 1993). Key to these criticisms is the concern that progression is only possible when the lower needs have been met; the implication being that only those who live in physical comfort and safety can develop their higher potentials. Concomitant to this is the implication that those in disadvantaged positions can only develop to inferior levels (Tennant, 1988). This implication does not hold up under cross-cultural scrutiny. Examples abound of love flourishing in non-safe environments, and of people living in poverty pursuing high causes. Maslow’s self in fact represents a highly individualistic, white, affluent and middle-class self.

For women, Maslow’s levels one, two and three (physiological, safety and relationship needs) may mesh well with their socially constructed role of homemaker, wife and mother. However for women to develop beyond this to levels four and five becomes problematic. The desire for strength, achievement, adequacy, mastery and competence; to

¹ Level 1: physiological needs, e.g. hunger, thirst, sex, sleep; Level 2: safety needs, e.g. an orderly environment; Level 3: love and belongingness needs, e.g. warm human relationships; Level 4: self-esteem needs, e.g. achievement, confidence and independence; Level 5: self actualisation, the full use and exploitation of all talents, capacities and potentialities (Maslow, 1962).
be confident in the face of the world; to gain independence and freedom; to gain reputation and prestige, autonomy and separation: all Maslovian terms, remain characteristics that create a double-bind for women. If women do develop these competencies, they are in jeopardy of being labelled pushy, aggressive and the like. Indeed this is apparent in the many publicly ‘successful’ women who preface their statements with ‘I’m not a feminist but...’. For women to claim the autonomous separateness of Maslow’s self-actualised self is inherently to be deviant as a woman—thus women are automatically denied the right to be ever considered as ‘fully-actualised’ human beings (Grimshaw, 1986; Candy, 1991).

Clinical psychologist and educator Carl Rogers, also intent on improving the development of self, had a major impact on humanist adult learning and development theories. For Rogers the goal was to become a ‘fully functioning’ person; thus his original work focused on client-centred therapy (1951) in which he encouraged therapists to help people discover their inner being. Like Maslow, Rogers drew a sharp distinction between people who are emotionally and intellectually self-sufficient and those who are connected to others in a way he describes as pawns rather than persons. Both Maslow and Rogers understand the human’s development as ultimately one which is hierarchical and competitive. Rogers would argue that a conflict between two people’s needs arises because one is not yet ‘fully-developed’ or ‘afraid of growth or independence’. Many women will recognise this rhetoric. It has been suggested that this view of human connection is more congruent with the male psyche (Grimshaw, 1986).

As would be expected of a therapist, Roger's (1983) interest was primarily in the role of the facilitator of learning, a person who he believed should have qualities of realness, genuineness, prizing, acceptance, trust and empathy. These qualities provided a marked contrast to the more authoritarian, directive approach of the teachers of the behaviourist
model. Many women found the supportive environments created by humanist approaches more congruent than ones they had experienced in school, and were able to affirm some of their abilities through this path of inner development. However for women ultimately this inner search does not lead to the discovery of a true, generic self, but a gendered self.

The interest of humanistic psychology in the fully-developed self has been harnessed within the adult learning and development field most markedly through the use of the concept of the ‘self-directed’ learner. This term has become foundational and its application in the field appears almost limitless. Self-direction is associated with ‘learner-centredness’, ‘independent learning’, ‘self-teaching’, ‘autonomy’, ‘freedom’ and ‘need’s meeting’ (Tennant, 1988). The work of Malcolm Knowles (1973, 1975) has been particularly significant, and his concept of the self-directed learner has been integral to most philosophies and practice in the field of adult learning (Mezirow, 1985). Knowles’ own words provide a definition that still stands today. He sees self-directed learning as:

> a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating goals, identifying human and material resources, and evaluating learning outcomes (1975, p.18).

Knowles’ work has been critiqued (for example Mezirow, 1985, 1991), extended (for example, Brookfield, 1984; Jarvis, 1987a) and applied (for example, Tough, 1979; Caffarella & O’Donnell, 1987). However ultimately Knowles assumes a learner who has resources, permission to learn, and time and space in which to do so. He further assumes that the learner’s goals will be unproblematic. For many women, all of these can be far from true.

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1 See Jongeward & Scott (1976, reprinted still in the 1990s) "Women as Winners: a guide to understanding, growth and authenticity" as an exemplar of programs for women based on the humanist approach.
The three humanist individuals—Maslow's 'self-actualised' person, Roger's 'fully functioning' person and Knowles' 'self-directed' learner have much in common. They describe the ideal rational, prototype male, a definition which denies not only the experience of women, but the experience of many non-Western ways of being (Candy, 1991). I would further argue that these definitions represent the epitome of the humanist project with its celebration of competitive individualism. They cannot account for collective or co-operative learning, nor for learning and development towards social action or social change.

The implications of the self-directed learning approach for women have not been totally negative. The concept of self-directed learning does acknowledge that learning can and does occur outside formal institutions, in the non-formal environments wherein many women find their lives located. The subsequent interest in non-formal learning is important but remains limited (Foley, 1993). Some interest in informal learning has been shown in workplace settings (Marsick & Watkins, 1991), in learning through social action (Foley, 1991, 1993; Rossing, 1991), in individual's informal learning as autodidaxy (Candy, 1991) and there has developed some acknowledgment of learning in the social context (Jarvis, 1987a). To consider such areas does indeed broaden the agenda from the individualised generic human.

Equally, the concept of self-directed learning does allow the focus to move from formal education and learning to a wider range of settings. It allows some recognition that women can and do educate themselves through their community and family based activities. Indeed Griff Foley (1993) argued that, for some women, involvement in voluntary groups gives access to similar learning experiences as men have within their paid work, although Foley asserted that such learning is rarely acknowledged or named. Women are, and have been, social activists, community workers, welfare organisers and
major fund-raisers, however, because their lives are fragmented into a range of roles and responsibilities, there are fewer apparent demarcations in their learning environments (Hughes & Kennedy, 1985). This contrasts with men whose learning environments readily divide into public/private or work/home, which allows an ease in naming different forms of learning.

The concept of self-directed learning does acknowledge that significant learning outcomes can occur in self-planned learning; that adults do devote considerable time and energy to learning projects in everyday life; that adults often work with others to plan, to learn and to receive feedback; that adults use a variety of resources; that they create and conduct learning projects in relation to self-defined needs and goals; and that projects are often based in a collaborative facilitative climate (Tough, 1979). However, as Stephen Brookfield has argued, to talk of the adults' propensity for self-directed learning on the basis of research into samples comprised chiefly of middle-class Americans is “a dangerous act of intellectual ethnocentrism” (1984, p.62). In a later paper Brookfield argued that “we need both inter and intra-cultural studies...before we can presume to make any generalisations concerning the innate propensity for adults for this mode of learning [or] any theory we propose will be little more than personal intuition based on culturally specific acquaintance with relatively advantaged adult learners” (1985, p.61).

The mid-century humanist psychologists have had considerable impact on adult learning theory and practice. Their theories arose in the 1960s as a response to the reductionism of behaviourism; at a time when due to stable international politics and in response to totalitarianism, the democratic ideal was paramount. Individualism and inward reflection melded with a concept of egalitarianism that led to a highly self-centred, self celebratory focus in much of the human sciences (Candy, 1991; Sampson, 1993). The assumption of the self-directed humanists was that all people have the freedom to learn and that the
environment in which such learning takes place can be controlled. Self-directed learning was constituted as deliberate and rational. This focus on deliberate, sustained, active learning resonates little with many women's lives, particularly those whose material circumstance is less than ideal. Once again, it is apparent why many women do not see themselves as learners when these are the criteria. However the focus on the process of learning has provided some insights that are less androcentric. This is particularly true in the developments concerning learning style.

*Individual learning style*

Foundational work on learning style by Kolb and Fry (1975) and Kolb (1981, 1984) was a cross-disciplinary approach that drew on cognitive psychology (Piaget, Vygotsky), social psychology (Lewin), psychoanalysis (Jung) and Buddhism (Foley, 1995). Kolb and Fry's (1975) model describes learning as a four stage cycle, in which each stage must be experienced for effective learning to take place. 'Concrete experience' (the affective mode) leads to 'reflective observation' (the perceptual mode) which is then assimilated into 'abstract concepts' or generalisations (the thinking mode), which are then solidified through 'active experimentation' (the behavioural mode), with the cycle then beginning again. They suggest that concrete experience and abstract concept utilisation fall on one continuum whilst reflective observation and active experimentation fall on another. They categorise learners as either accommodators, assimilators, divergers or convergers.

Importantly Kolb and Fry posit that learning style is shaped by the life situations of people. They argue that individuals develop dominant learning styles as a result of their interaction with society, not because of an inherent tendency as the behaviourists would argue.

3 *Accommodator*: strong in action-orientation, utilises concrete experience and active experimentation; *Assimilator*: strong ability to create theoretical models, utilises abstract conceptualisation and reflective observation; *Diverger*: strong in imaginative ability, utilises concrete experience and reflective observation; *Converger*: strong in the practical application of ideas, utilises abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. (adapted from Kolb & Fry, 1975).
Kolb and Fry's initial study examined 127 male practising business managers and 512 male Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology graduate students in management. The framework was therefore developed from an all-male context and experience. Kolb's later 1985 validation study did consist of 638 men and 801 women who were more ethnically diverse and in wider careers, but these were simply added to the grid data, rather than used to re-conceptualise the categories themselves. When it comes to an analysis of this data, the conceptual categories were already in place - categories that had been developed from a very select group of men. It is therefore not surprising that women's responses to Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (LSI) are significant. In a study of 88 women and 36 men, Lainie Melamed and Irene Devine (1988) examined gender as a variable in LSI responses. They found that whilst one continuum (active experimentation-reflective observation) showed no gender difference, on the other continuum 69% of men tested higher on the abstract end of the continuum (abstract conceptualisation) whilst 64% of women were higher on the concrete end (concrete experience).

Women's responses to the instrument indicate that some factors of learning have been rendered invisible or insignificant through this tool. Melamed and Devine (1988) found that women participants were concerned about the lack of a specific context in the inventory questions; for them learning style was relevant to a context and was not always transferable. They found there was no acknowledgment of learning with others, as learning was construed as individualistic. Further, women noted that the inventory did not acknowledge non-logical ways of knowing such as imagination, insight and intuition. It is important to note that in each of these critiques some men noted the same limitations. In conclusion Melamed and Devine argue that "by forcing choices to be made between either/or dichotomies, by viewing learning as an abstraction unrelated to context, by

These findings correlate directly with my own use of the LSI over three years in the first year undergraduate unit.
emphasising the rational without also including the intuitive and the metaphoric, and by assuming that learning is an individual process rather than a collaborative one, women's preferred ways of knowing remain obscure” (pp.77–78).

More recently Bernice McCarthy (1996) has argued for the utilisation of all four processes as part of whole learning and in doing so she acknowledges the cultural constitution of the concepts, however ultimately she returns to a modernist self. “So learning begins with me, my connections to my experience, and it ends when I adapt my ponderings of it, my examining, my use of it in my life—it comes back to me” (p.51). As with most theoretical explorations of experiential learning there is no acknowledgment that the ‘inner me’ and the ‘reflecting me’ are also discursively constituted.

Learning style theories do enable the acknowledgment of learning as a process rather than a product, however neither behaviourist, cognitive functioning or learning style theories acknowledge learning over a life-time. It was this dynamic that interested the stage theorists.

Stage theories

The notion of progress to an end-point of maturity underpins much of the theoretical developments in stage theories. Indeed the line I have drawn between humanist psychology and stage theory is arbitrary as Maslow, Rogers and Knowles also posit ‘stages’ of learning and development. Many recent theories of adult development borrow from both the psychoanalytic and humanist perspectives (for example, Valliant, 1977; Levinson, 1978). The commonality across stage theories is that they presume a generic, unified, coherent and rational self as the ideal goal of development. Further in all stage
theories there is a fine line between description and normative evaluation. This is an important point for women and other marginalised groups.

Central to many theories of development is the work of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). His approach emphasised the importance of early childhood experiences and the functioning of the unconscious. Freud’s theories of development (1905/1953, 1925/1961) are the origin of a psychoanalysis based on the notion of the unconscious which is composed of needs and desires over which we have no conscious control. According to Freud, to become proper men and women we must learn to experience our bodies in certain prescribed ways. These ways are specific to the male and the female. For a boy, the acceptance of the father’s right to the mother signals his separation and maturity (oedipal resolution); for a girl, maturity is the acceptance of her lack of a penis (castration resolution).

Freud’s stages locate almost entirely in childhood with the genital stage of sexual maturity signalling adulthood. His over-reliance on sexuality, his misogyny and his victim-blaming analysis of child sexual abuse have been well described (for example, Masson, 1988). Indeed Janet Surrey (1991c) has suggested that there is no such thing as an ‘oedipal resolution’ for women. She argued that:

(m)aybe the real question with which to begin is this: what are the implications of a theory of healthy male development that posits disconnection from the mother and affirmation of difference between men and women (symbolised by ‘resolving the oedipal situation’) as the foundation of healthy development. (p.39)

Although some feminists have re-worked Freud’s premise to be less misogynist, (for example, the work of Nancy Chodorow (1978) on mothering), Freud’s theories allow little illumination on the experiences of healthy adult development, particularly for women.
In response to Freud’s emphasis on inner psychic development, feminist theorists have turned to inter-subjective relations, such as those between mother and child, and father and child (for example, Chodorow, 1978; Benjamin, 1988). These ‘object-relations’ theorists argue that because girls share the sex of their mother, they grow up in a way that is less separated from others. As a result, object-relation theorists posit that mature masculine personality particularly in a patriarchal society denies relation, connection and femininity, whilst the feminine personality expresses itself in connection with the world. Object-relations theories do posit stages of development that attempt to address societal organisation. However, as with Freudian theory, fundamentally object-relations theories remain within a biological essentialist view of a core sexuality, a sexuality that is essentially heterosexual (Bulbeck, 1993).

Erik Erikson (1963) also attempted to acknowledge development as psycho-social. He suggests that a successful adult must master each of eight stages\(^5\) in order to fully mature. Erikson’s sample was solely male therefore it is not surprising to find that his stages are not necessarily congruent for women. In particular for men ‘identity’ precedes ‘intimacy’ and ‘generativity’ but Carol Gilligan (1982) has argued that for women these tasks have been found to be fused “as the female comes to know herself as she is known, through her relationships with others” (p.12). Women therefore are understood as having ‘problems’ in the later stages of development, and the nature of the social constructedness of stage theories becomes invisible.

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\(^5\) Trust vs distrust (0-1 yr); autonomy vs shame and doubt (1-2 yrs); initiative vs guilt (3-5 yrs); industry vs inferiority (6-11 yrs); identity vs role confusion (12-19 yrs); intimacy vs isolation (20s and 30s); generativity vs stagnation (40s and 50s); and integrity vs despair (60 and over) (Erikson, 1963).
Erikson is not alone in the development of a stage theory that relates to the male life-cycle. Perry (1970), Piaget (1972), Valliant (1977), Levinson (1978), and Kohlberg (1981) all theorised from male lives to determine generic stage theories. Had such theory been applied to men alone it may not have been problematic, however stage theories have become prescriptive for all persons, not just those of a male gender. When certain women were seen to develop differently from men, the problem was located within the woman, not the theory. As Eveline Neuwinger (1989) summarised “[a] problem in theory (different development) became cast as a problem in women’s development” (p.12).

What each of the stage theories have in common is the elevation of the process of separating oneself from the matrix of others; in other words the development of the individuated autonomous self. It has been demonstrated that women rarely meet this criteria, however it should be questioned how much such a state reflects even the lives of men (Miller, 1986). Many women would argue that it is more than a platitude that behind a successful man stands his wife/mother/secretary who maintains and repairs the connections that must not be named.

Lawrence Kohlberg’s stage theory (1981) provided a stimulus for more congruent theory development for women. Although Kohlberg’s primary focus was on moral development, the stages he delineated have been used as the basis for subsequent studies on stages of adult learning (for example Perry, 1970). Kohlberg’s six sequential stages of development of moral reasoning were drawn from a study of 84 boys whose development he followed for 20 years. Kohlberg posited a universal theory from this all-male sample. Not surprisingly women rarely reach the sixth and ultimate stage of full development as Kohlberg found that in general women develop only to the third stage of

6 Kohlberg (1981) defined six stages in which moral orientation was first towards punishment and obedience; second instrumental relativism; third interpersonal concordance; fourth law and order; fifth social contact and legalism and sixth, universal ethical principles.
interpersonal relationships and helping others, a factor Kohlberg related to their limited sphere of the domestic. Kohlberg proposed that abstract logical consistency and rational problem-solving demanded emotional distancing, an ability he believed women rarely develop. In response, Elisabeth Porter (1991) argued that "any conclusion that women are limited to stage three level, is as much due to Kohlberg’s failure to categorise women’s responses correctly as it is due to his sexist ‘moral turpitude’" (p.145). Once again, it can be seen from Kohlberg’s work that to ‘add women and stir’ does little to develop our fullest understanding of human learning and development.

As a response to the perceived inadequacies of Kohlberg’s stages, Carol Gilligan (1982) began with women’s accounts in order to explore moral development through an analysis of women’s moral decision-making. By comparing and contrasting women’s and men’s perceptions, she was able to illuminate two differing approaches to moral development. Whilst stressing that this was not to be seen as mutually exclusive, Gilligan argued that women often develop an ethics of care and connection, whilst men develop an ethics of rights and justice. Her work illustrates that learning and developmental stages will be incomplete and inconclusive if only one gender is acknowledged in the research process. Further her work illuminates the context and constructedness of human development.

As with traditional development theory, Gilligan also utilises the concept of stages. Gilligan delineated a first stage characterised by a concern with self-survival and self-centredness, one which can be challenged by experiences that indicate a need for responsibility beyond the self. In the second stage, Gilligan argued that women become convinced of the moral value of self-sacrificial behaviour through their recognition of the need to care for others. The third stage reflects a need to reconcile the care for one’s self with the care for others, in a way that recognises the “interconnection between self and others with an...awareness of the self as the arbiter of moral judgement and choice”
From her study of women’s life decisions, Gilligan argued that moral problems arise from conflicting responsibilities and that this requires a contextual, narrative mode of thought, rather than formal abstract thought. She contrasts a morality based on rights with one based on responsibility.

Although Gilligan’s work has attracted much debate, (useful summaries of this debate are found in Kerber et al., 1986 and Davis, 1992), it has highlighted the need to acknowledge women’s experiences in order to reveal androcentric theory development. Gilligan’s perspective “implies for both sexes the *intertsubjective basis of morality* or an affirmation of the connection between self and other” (Porter, E., 1991, p.154, original emphasis). However as Lesley Johnson (1993) has reminded us, we must acknowledge the potential for Gilligan’s work to become a normative theory in itself, remembering that it may not be able to account for changing subjectivities over historical time.

The feminist challenge to stage theories has been crucial as it has made visible the need for inclusive rather than exclusive and normative theories. Further feminist critiques have illuminated the need to locate ‘stages’ in their socio-cultural and historical location. Importantly feminist theory has made visible the fact that maturity is a concept that is socially constructed reflecting the interests of the dominant culture. It thus is more revealing of the values of a culture than descriptive of the developmental process itself.

Overall stage theories have been problematic for women and men because of their prescriptive nature. However I would argue that it is their inability to account for differing subjectivities across cultural and historical locations that prove to be their most serious weakness. If we are persuaded that individuals are constituted by, and constitutive of, discourses, then universally applicable stages cannot be tenable. Stages themselves may
be constituted by a discourse but discourses are dynamic and fluid. Any robust theory of learning and development must be able to account for difference in a constructive way. It was from such concerns that feminists began to explore women’s experience of learning and development as different to that of the male.

*Women’s ways of learning and development*

Carol Gilligan’s work heralded the beginning of a woman-centred psychology that attempted to construct new ways of seeing women beyond measuring them against men. Women aimed to find their own yardstick and their own psychological space and identity (Hughes & Kennedy, 1985). Women-centred psychology however has not been without major problems. As Corrine Squires (1989) noted “(w)omen-centred, traditional, and egalitarian feminist psychologies all define their subjects as rational and autonomous, and ultimately ground them in biology” (p.80). Further a woman-centred approach has the potential to deny cultural, social and material differences between women, to idealise femininity and to treat language as an unproblematic expression of women’s experience. However some of the woman-centred psychologies have provided valuable starting points for a better understanding of learning and development.

Woman-centred approaches have either sought to test or expand androcentric theories, or to develop entirely separate theoretical concepts. Some studies suggest that women’s development is predominantly similar to that of men; for example, Sharan Merriam and Carolyn Clark (1991) argued that love and work are central psycho-social forces in women’s lives, in that work develops identity, and love develops the feeling of connection. They believed that a mature state integrates both domains. Similarly, other studies support a common lifespan developmental progression for both men and women but argue for the need to acknowledge women’s fragmented lives (Hughes & Kennedy,
1985) or the effects of cohort and socio-cultural factors (Rossi, 1980). By contrast, the theorists who posit an alternative development for women introduce new language about learning and development. Positive development has variously been understood as a balance of mastery and pleasure (Baruch et al., 1983), a cyclical development linking back to childhood (Hancock, 1989), and the ability to utilise caring and relationships with others as development (Gilligan, 1982; Bateson, 1989, Jordan et al., 1991).

In a similar way to Gilligan, Mary Belenky and her colleagues (1986) sought to understand more about women’s ways of knowing by placing women at the centre of their theory development. They determined five ‘ways of knowing’, which they argue are not absolute or pure categories, but rather extensions to our understanding of the multiple ways that women respond as know-ers.

(S)ilence, a position in which women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority; received knowledge, a perspective from which women conceive of themselves as capable of receiving, even reproducing, knowledge from the all-knowing external authorities but not capable of creating knowledge on their own; subjective knowledge, a perspective from which truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private and subjectively known or intuited; procedural knowledge, a position in which women are invested in learning and applying objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge; and constructed knowledge, a position in which women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge, and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing. (p.15, emphasis added)

The work of Belenky and her colleagues does not acknowledge that women’s ways of knowing are shaped by their historical, cultural and material location; however, it is a radical challenge to traditional methodologies as it puts gender relations and social organisation at the centre of interest. They have illustrated how the examination of women’s accounts of their particular experience generates new conceptualisations of knowledge. As Lorraine Code (1988) argued “(e)xperience in our society is considered second-class compared to knowledge...women are, in general, confined within narrowly
circumscribed private spheres of knowledge and expertise” (p.64, emphasis added). Work such as that of Belenky reveals the potential of theoretical developments that arise from the under-valued sphere of women’s experiences.

Just as it is not enough to add women to male theories, it is crucial to recognise that women themselves must not be seen as homogenous category. Belenky and her colleagues did acknowledge that although they had attempted to sample for some diversity, there was an even greater untapped diversity of women that could further inform our understanding of learning and development. Just as women have resisted being homogenised or marginalised under the category of generic ‘man’ or ‘human’, all groups of women cannot be assumed to fit unproblematically under the generic category of ‘woman’. It is important not to take the work of Belenky, or others such as Gilligan, as a search for a unique women’s way of learning and knowing rather it draws attention to how context and location impact. I believe this work is significant because it disrupts the androcentric nature of prior theorising. It is neither appropriate to ‘add women and stir’ nor to invert the male/female dualism. Most importantly, this work challenges the generic theories of learning and development.

Wendy Luttrell’s (1989) work is very useful in illustrating this point. Luttrell emphasised the need to acknowledge the differences between women. In her work she contrasted American working-class black and white women’s ways of knowing. In doing so, she has challenged analyses that have identified a single or universal mode of knowing even within the category of women. Luttrell argued that women’s perspectives speak to complex gender, racial and class relations of power that shape how those women think about learning and knowing. She found that in differing ways, the women of her study

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7 Formal education: 90 students from six different colleges, and informal education: 45 students from community parent support agencies
spoke of being ‘streetwise’, ‘motherwise’ and ‘housewife wise’. They valued ‘commonsense’ and the way that they were able to take care of others. Luttrell concluded that “their ways of knowing are embedded in community, family, and work relationships and cannot be judged by dominant academic standards” (1989, p.33).

‘Ways of knowing’ appears to be a useful concept in relation to women’s lives. Vrinda Dalmiya and Linda Alcoff (1993) remind us that knowledge can be categorised in two ways: the propositional (knowing that) and the practical (knowing how). Using the example of midwifery, they argued that much of women’s experience, and thus knowing, is discounted. It has not been codified and documented because ‘knowing how’ can only be shown and often only said “in an inherently perspectival language” (p.241). I would suggest that this is why women are often less articulate describing their domestic ‘knowing how’. The available model for demonstrating knowledge is not congruent with the domestic experience.

To consider learning as an individualised and generic process obscures as much as it reveals. In a techno-rational society, the learning processes that are highly valued are those that support productive, public processes. Located as they have been in the private sphere, those learnings generated by women’s experiences in specific cultural and historical contexts have been rendered lesser or even made invisible. It becomes apparent that it is more reflective of an andro- and ethno-centric epistemology, than of women’s inability to meet the standards of what has been posited as a universally applicable theory.

Learning, development and social transformation

Critiques of learning and development theory have not just centred on over-individualisation and limited applicability, they have also focused on their a-politicality.
As is evidenced in the feminist critiques, individualised theories mask most social and cultural factors. Indeed, humanist psychology has been named a victim-blaming approach which keeps individuals inward-looking not outward acting. The idea of analysing one’s own experience to achieve liberation from psychological repression is not only an approach that is a-contextual it is a-historic and one which maintains the status quo (Sampson, 1993 elaborates this argument).

It was within the developing countries that the link between learning, education and social transformation was particularly made visible. Paulo Freire, originally a Brazilian literacy educator; Ivan Illich, a socially critical Mexican priest; and Ettore Gelpi, the head of UNESCO’s Lifelong Education Unit, are examples of the challenges to the Western liberal humanist focus of adult learning and development theories. Although each of these thinkers have some individualist sense of learning, their focus is equally on learning for social change. Freire (1972a & b) adopted the term ‘conscientization’ to describe the process whereby people come to see their place in the world as shaped by social and historical forces. Through understanding that the process can be one of oppression, the goal of learning becomes learning for liberation. No longer is the world seen as one which is fixed or natural, one to which an individual must learn to adapt, but rather it is revealed as a world that reflects competing interests and multiple understandings. Freire named two oppositional forms of education; the ‘banking’ method which assumes the learner is an empty vessel to be filled with culturally appropriate knowledge, and the ‘problem-posing’ method which aims for critical awareness with the potential for emancipatory outcomes. In short, as Coutinho has succinctly summarised, Freire believes that “(e)ducation is either for domestication or for freedom” (Preface to Freire, 1972b, p.9).
Similar critiques have emerged from other non-Western writers. Ivan Illich (1973) argued for a total ‘de-schooling’ of society not only for the developing nations but equally for the developed nations that, he argued, had been disempowered by both the political agenda and processes of schooling in adult and child settings. Ettore Gelpi as one of the most vocal critics of the Western model of education warned that “education could merely lead to a reinforcement of the established order, increased productivity and subordination; but a different option could enable us to become more and more committed to the struggle against those who oppress mankind in work and in leisure, in social and emotional life” (Gelpi, 1979, cited in Griffin, 1987, p.284). This work emerged alongside the Marxist project that inverted the individual/society divide in a way that privileged societal structural oppression.

It is often easier to recognise and acknowledge power dynamics in a culture that is different/other to our own. Work such as Freire’s draws attention to the macro dynamics of class, race and gender. In more complex civil societies, such dynamics are masked through colonising and normalising processes that foster consent. In Western society, rather than having our bodies controlled by direct violence, we consent to a more subtle process that has reduced education and learning to ‘learning for earning’ (Cunningham, 1992). Education for social change can be suppressed or banned, however it is more likely in democracies to be controlled by co-option into the formal education system. Thus a society becomes a training society, not a learning society (Gelpi, 1979).

There has been considerable application of learning and education for social change in Australia. From the mid nineteenth century, Worker’s Education Associations and Mechanics’ Institutes strove to offer ‘useful knowledge’ to help those who wanted to improve their lot (Newman, 1995). ‘Popular Education’ as it is widely known utilises Freire’s notion of conscientization to engender learning leading to social change. This
process can be seen in the consciousness-raising groups of the women’s movement (Loughlin, 1993; Weeks, 1994), the Aboriginal rights movement (Foley & Flowers, 1992) and in the environment movement (Foley, 1991).

With the exception of the socially critical approaches, across the twentieth century conceptualisations of adult learning and development have been firmly located within the project of middle-class, white, modernist progress. The adult learner has been conceptualised as a unified, uncontested self which can be endlessly developed through the intrinsic search for this true self and/or the extrinsic motivators for greater development. This modernist ideal encouraged individuals to think critically and exercise social responsibility as part of the Enlightenment dream of reason and freedom. Education provides the “socialising processes and legitimating codes by which the grand narrative of progress and human development can be passed on to future generations” (Giroux, 1990, p.7). The adult learner has been understood as both a body needing training and a mind needing knowledge and inner development. He stands alone from social, historical, racial and gendered contexts. I use the pronoun ‘he’ quite deliberately for most of all the adult learner is a reflection of the male experience. Psychology-based discourses have lead to definitions of learning which give primacy to human agency over social context (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Usher, 1993) and which I would argue are fundamentally flawed because of this.

**Beyond the individual/society divide**

There have been some approaches to learning and development however that attempt to move beyond the individual/society divide. Indeed, Mathias Finger (1990) has argued that it is essential that our thinking on learning and education especially address this challenge, arguing that:
the subject–person is at the core of the project of modernity and therefore of the inseparably linked idea of conventional education. Second, modernity is in itself an educational project... for, if education fails to bring forth the enlightened and emancipated subject–person, modernity also fails. (p.24)

Two developments are particularly promising in taking us beyond the individual/society divide: understanding learning as hermeneutic; and development as relational and dialectic.

**Learning as hermeneutic**

The most relevant recent developments suggest that learning is best understood as a qualitative transformation of understanding in which learners are active makers of meaning, concentrating attention on the phenomena of learning in everyday material settings (Candy, 1991). In other words, learning is best understood as hermeneutic: an active process of interpretation that is located in a particular time, place and context. Such an awareness of learning as an interpretive process is far from new. Socrates, using a process of dialogical questioning, challenged his learners to recognise that they did not know. The role of the teacher was to create conditions for new interpretation. The starting point of such dialogical philosophy is not in the person themselves, nor in the world in itself, but rather in the relationship between people and their world.

From the 1930s on, John Dewey and Eduard Lindeman emphasised the organic connection between education and reflecting on experience, arguing that experience and education are both active and passive; they are a reconstruction and reorganisation of experience as the individual interacts with her/his environment (Dewey, 1938; Lindeman, 1961). Martin Buber (1970) described relationships as either ‘I–thou’ or ‘I–it’, the former reflecting a dialogical connection, the latter deriving from an object/subject relationship. Similarly Paulo Freire’s process of ‘conscientization’ described a way in which
individuals could be encouraged to achieve "a deepening awareness both of socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality" (1972b, p.51, n.2).

The concept of 'critical reflection' has become widely utilised within adult learning theories (for a variety of examples, Schon, 1983; Boud et al., 1985; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Jarvis, 1987a). An awareness of the political and social dimensions of learning and development has begun to be utilised in a way that moves well beyond the simple reflective observation proposed by David Kolb (1984) in his learning cycle. From this perspective learning has been variously described as critical thinking (Perry, 1970; Brookfield, 1988), dialectical thinking (Daloz, 1986), reflection-in-action (Schon, 1983), emancipatory learning (Hart, 1992) and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 1992). In describing his critical thinkers, Stephen Brookfield (1988) took a middle line between humanist and hermeneutic psychology, finding that learning is informed as much by cultural as by individual processes. He argued that individuals can be called critical thinkers when they "become aware of the diversity of values, behaviours, social structures, and artistic forms in the world" (p. 5) and they "are sceptical of any claims to universal truth or total certainty" (p.6). Although Brookfield did not use the language of postmodernism, it is evident that his definition of a critical thinker is compatible with postmodernist concerns with the hegemony of meta-narratives and universal truths.

Jack Mezirow (1985, 1990, 1991, 1992), however, stands apart as the theorist most directly attempting to acknowledge the interaction of learning, development, culture and the individual (Clark & Wilson, 1991). Mezirow's focus is on what he calls 'transformative learning', a concept he divides into two distinct levels. The first level involves the individual's ability to reflect and to assess assumptions about the content or process of problem-solving, which can result in a change of 'meaning scheme'; whilst the
second level occurs when the learner reflects on the premise or presupposition involved in the definition of that problem, which can result in a 'perspective transformation' (Mezirow 1985, 1991). Mezirow proposes ways in which this second level can occur.

A transformation in perspective can result when one becomes aware of how such perceptual and conceptual filters as social norms, cultural codes, cognitive or learning styles, scope of awareness, neurotic inhibitions or defence mechanisms have distorted the way we think and feel about our experience. (Mezirow 1991, p. 159)

Although still dependent in part on conceptualising learning as an internal psychologising process and the sense of 'a truth', Mezirow has drawn attention to the dimension of learning as construction.

Mezirow initially proposed three categories of learning which provide a valuable start to an understanding of learning that transcends the individual/society divide. Unlike much of the prior theorising, he attempted to situate multiple levels of learning within an integrated system of knowledge (Clark & Wilson, 1991). Initially Mezirow (1985) proposed three forms of learning arising from Jurgen Habermas' (1972) three domains of knowledge: instrumental learning (technical knowledge); dialogic learning (practical knowledge); and self-reflective learning (emancipatory knowledge). Within instrumental learning, Mezirow argued that the focus is on understanding the world of facts, through empirical testing. Although not formalised in everyday life, people are constantly testing hypotheses, and determining cause and effect using a deductive process. Such instrumental learning focuses on 'the how'.

Mezirow’s second category, dialogic learning, involved the abstracting of moral issues, ideals, values and social concepts. He argued that as we try to understand what others mean, whether it be through speech, writing, media or the arts, we enter into an
interpretive relationship that has no established empirical process. This is not to say that there are not interpretive traditions to be drawn on, however there is no one given process as in cause–effect thinking. Rather in dialogic learning we move into the sphere of cultural and sub-cultural meaning schemes in which we are dependent on our cultural resources. Typically within dialogic learning a phenomenon is analysed by drawing on metaphors or meaning schemes that are available to an individual at that point in time. Mezirow argued that the more a person uses a given framework and finds that it does provide a coherent interpretation, the more readily they will tend to draw on this. The meaning schemes and metaphors can then be seen not just to permit us to see aspects of reality, but actually to constitute reality. Although Mezirow does not use poststructuralist language, I would assert that there are clear parallels between Mezirow’s meaning schemes and discourses.

Mezirow’s third category, self-reflective learning, attempts to explain how an individual can move to an awareness of personal assumptions that have become dysfunctional. Here Mezirow draws rather heavily on individualistic psychology. He argues that self reflective learning brings “restrictive psychological assumptions [from childhood] into consciousness and initiates an internal dialogue that differentiates the past and our anxiety symptoms from the reality of our adult present.” (Mezirow 1985, p21). Mezirow further argues that psychoanalytic therapy and adult educators have a central role in fostering such reflective learning.

It is at this point that Mezirow’s understanding of adult learning becomes problematic. Not unlike Maslow, Rogers, Knowles and others, this understanding is seen as an internalising, individualistic process, which is highly rational and cognitive. Further to suggest that it is also dependent on the guidance of ‘knowing’ professionals assumes the existence of true and false realities, as if they exist ‘out there’ to be found. It suggests that people who are not able to see the true reality are less aware. This draws on a concept
similar to the Marxist 'false consciousness'. In his attempt to understand how meaning perspectives change, Mezirow does not fully harness the notion that it is context that is constitutive of meaning and thus is crucial for interpreting experiences (Clark & Wilson, 1991). Further he is unable to account for the non-rational and apparently intuitive dimensions of transformation (Loughlin, 1996).

In later writing, Mezirow (1990) attempted to move beyond this individualistic, internalised process of self-reflection by collapsing the two categories, dialogic and self-reflective, into the one of 'communicative learning'. In doing this, Mezirow stated that he wished to acknowledge group learning such as Freirian learning circles and social movement learning in such arenas as the civil rights and women's movements, and his belief that self reflection was possible within instrumental learning (personal communication, 1995).

Although Mezirow's work links the individual and society through the concept of meaning schemes, it is crucial to acknowledge that meaning schemes (ways of organising discourses) are not simply available cultural frameworks for meaning but that there are always competing frameworks at any given time. Competing discourses offer differential access to power to the individual (Weedon, 1987) thus dialogic, self-reflective and communicative learning cannot be linked to any search for truth, as it must be acknowledged that "truth is at once a material discursive, political and subjective question" (Henriques et al., 1984, p.114). I would argue that it is crucial to acknowledge the dimension of power and therefore to understand learning as a process of subjectivity; a process that for each person is historically, socially and culturally located as well as personally mediated.
Learners must be acknowledged as active constructors of meaning, and, far from being individual acts of human agency, such constructions must use culturally bound concepts and language. It is not possible to analyse or attempt to understand an experience, for example, without drawing on prior understandings or meanings, and it is these prior understandings that arise from the cultural discourses to which we have access. ‘Pre-understanding’ or ‘prejudice’ is both a personal and cultural phenomena (Gadamer, 1976). To understand an experience, a woman must call on pre-understandings that have arisen from her own experience of everyday life. Concomitantly such understandings are not hers personally as they arise from her available language and culture. As Robin Usher (1993) emphasised “(t)he ‘personal’ meaning that my experience has is always conditional upon meanings which are not personal” (p.171).

Experience does not have its own intrinsic meaning to be discovered. It can only be understood as part of a chain of learnings, each dependent on the other for coherency. Learning is best understood as an active process of interpretation, based on our exposure to meanings available to us at any given time. Thus, the adult learner is no longer the lone individual conducting an internal ‘monologue’, but an active interpreter in ‘dialogue’ with others and within the discourses available to her/him at that given time (Sampson, 1993).

Such an understanding of adults as learners dramatically shifts the focus of interest. Both the self-constructing learner and her/his contextual settings become paramount. It becomes important to understand “how learners construe (or interpret) events and ideas, and how they construct (build or assemble) structures of meanings “(Candy, 1991, p.272). Equally it is essential to recognise that individuals can only position themselves within the discourses available to them from their culture. Discourses within any culture are not themselves unified; competing discourses can be seen at any given time. How a person constitutes their subjectivity, which discourses impact most significantly and how
the individual understands themselves within this complexity therefore becomes an important focus for the understanding of adults as learners.

I would further suggest that to conceptualise development as a dialectical process allows a similar poststructural awareness to be harnessed. Psychological processes, such as cognition, personality and intelligence for example, which have been viewed as subject attributes are more usefully conceptualised as historically and culturally relative (Blackman, 1994). Psychological theories of the autonomous, individuated self cannot account for dialectical development, the multiple processes of human development that are socially, culturally and historically enacted between the person and their culture. Nor can most psychological theories encompass relational development, the process of development arising not from within the skinbound individual, but from a web of attachments. It is from these two fronts that more congruent understandings of human development and learning are emerging.

**Relational development**

The Stone Center of Wellesley College, especially Judith Jordan, Alexandra Kaplan, Jean Baker Miller, Irene Stiver and Janet Surrey, have elaborated a theory they first named as 'self-in-relation' but now prefer to name as part of the larger project of relational psychology. The research of the Stone Center has revealed an important dynamic within many nurturing relationships: one that they describe as empowerment through a mutual relational process (Jordan et al., 1991). Surrey (1991b) explained the process of development towards a relational self as one that often emerges from the mother–daughter relationship. She has delineated this as a process of mutual engagement, mutual empathy to mutual empowerment. This process allows a continuous awareness of others' needs and is based on a "cognitive and emotional intersubjectivity" (Surrey, 1991b, p.167). Surrey has argued that although other lines of self-development do occur, for example,
competency and initiative, and they develop in the context of important relationships. Women who experience such relational empowerment can undertake both personal growth and intellectual development in a way Suney found congruent with Belenky's (1986) connected knowing. This work addresses many of the concerns surrounding prior work on women's development.

When Carol Gilligan (1982) attempted to reformulate moral development from a woman's cultural location, it became possible to see a form of development that emphasised a perspective of care and responsibility arising from attachment to others. Sara Ruddick's (1989) concept of 'maternal thinking' was another attempt that drew on the attachment of women to significant others in their lives in order to understand learning and development in a primarily private context. Ruddick argued that responsiveness to growth and change, resilient good humour, attentive love and humility all emerge from women's particular positions as nurturers. She suggested that maternal thinking is concerned with the concrete care and preservation of unique individuals as opposed to abstraction which is a concept arising from male experience in the public sphere. Although Gilligan and Ruddick did encourage a conceptualisation of development with new data from woman-centred approaches, this was not entirely unproblematic. If it is accepted that such developments arise solely from the experience of mothering, then biological essentialism is the next step. If it is 'natural' for women to mother and men to war, we can go little further. However if women's responses as described by Gilligan and Ruddick response are alternatively conceptualised as arising from the material circumstances of women and as a response to deprivation or oppression or connectedness, this allows a more inclusive conceptual framework to emerge.

It is also essential that any unidirectional understandings of women's connectedness and nurturing be carefully examined, as there is no doubt that maternal virtues have the
potential to be elevated in a form of 'maternalism' (Grimshaw, 1986). Women may be trapped in the rhetoric of the good woman giving her all to her family—as a modern version of the Victorian 'angel in the house' from which many Victorian women only escaped through mental illness (Ehrenreich & English, 1979). Further unidirectional analyses have the danger of glossing over the ways in which "resilience has become resignation and acceptance, attention has become chronic anxiety, and care and responsiveness chronic self-denial" (Grimshaw, 1986, p.253). Finally, to elevate maternal nurturing can suggest that women are defined solely through their relation to children, rather than in the context of multiple and differing public and private relationships. A grounded and interactional concept of development as suggested by the more recent relational psychology addresses these concerns.

The work of the Stone Center has direct relevance to understanding women's development as a learning context. Suney (1991c) raised the following issues that become visible through what she called a 'relationship – differentiation' theory. Within this theory, critical relationships would be recognised as real rather than intrapsychic evolutions through the life cycle. Fruitful relationships would be seen as those which could evidence tolerance, consideration and mutual adaption moving in many possible directions. The needs of individuals within situational contexts would move between closeness and distance. Lastly expanding relational networks and new configurations could be recognised, as for example, relationships with fathers, triangular relationships, and women in work groups. Such a theory would not talk about fixed states, developmental crises or unidirectional goals. Instead it would be interested in cognitive and emotional capacities for growth as well as appropriate relational networks (Surrey, 1991c, pp.38–39). Similarly, Mechtilde Hart (1992) has argued that if motherhood is conceptualised as a labour process, a number of dialectical relationships that challenge male epistemology become visible. Mothering intricately combines reason and emotion in
a way that denies a separation of caring for the body (the natural) and the mind (the cultural).

Gilligan, Ruddick, the Stone Center team and Hart use the location of women in our society as the starting point for new theoretical explorations, and in doing so challenge the models of development that elevate the male-as-norm. In order to acknowledge such multiple contexts of an adult’s development, Marilyn Porter (1991) has suggested the term ‘life-course’ over ‘life-cycle’ development as it better locates individual differences in biological, social, historical and geographical time and place. In a similar way dialectical theories of development also continue to encompass the interplay of the individual within society.

**Dialectical development**

Originally dialectical developmental theorists maintained their focus on the individual as their interest located on an individual’s interpretation within their society. For example, Klaus Riegel (1976) compared development to orchestral music, explaining that biological, psychological, social and physical dimensions within an individual are never quite in perfect harmony. Such an approach understood the person as a changing entity within a changing world, and as such replaced the equilibrium models. However it is important to note that dialectical development does not suggest a simple linear interaction in which the environment remains static and the individual adapts. Rather the dialectic is one of infinite complexity in which the environment constantly modifies individuals and individuals in turn modify their environment. Michael Basseches (1984), in critiquing the stage theories and predictable life crises approach to learning and development, argued that historical changes within one’s culture, and one’s own age category changes (for example, youth to young adult), meant that “the constant epistemic task of life is building
better and better understandings” (p.337). It is important to recognise this development of ‘better understandings’ not as an individualised process of constructing a personal cognitive schema, but rather as a complex and dynamic interplay of the individual and society. The notion of dialectic development allows change to be reconceptualised in a way that transcends subject/object and individual/society binary logic as it not only acknowledges, but utilises, the symbiosis and interdependency of these terms.

Therese Peck’s (1986) model of the adult development of women is one example of theory development that utilised the notions of relational psychology and dialectic development in a way that is compatible with post-structural thinking. Peck combined:

a dialectic approach which considers the effects of social/historical factors, with a feminist approach, which emphasises the importance of caring and relationships, to illustrate critical factors affecting a woman’s self-knowledge during the adult years (p.274).

In her work, Peck attempted to account for the social, emotional and political contexts from which a woman can draw for her definition of self. She argued that such contexts may be a severe or limited constraint within which a woman moves as her personal relationships are defined and redefined. Visually the notion of a funnel is used to illustrate growthful self definition, whilst a surrounding cylinder suggests that external definitions maintain the woman in a more constrained state. Like the work of Basseches (1984) this model is only a starting point to begin to understand development and learning as dialectical—situationally located, individual yet relational. Most importantly, unlike many other approaches, both can be applied across gender, race and class.

The move towards considering learning and development as a dialectic process is important. It is limiting to understand the human as a giant machine, a complex computer pawn or a rational agent. Rather I would argue that it is the stories that we learn to tell to
frame our experiences, to understand and explain ourselves and others that mark us as human. It is perhaps more congruent to understand the human-as-storyteller (Sampson, 1993). To explore learning and development as a narrative process (narrativisation) begins to address the limitations of androcentric, ethnocentric and a-historical theories. It illustrates the individual and discursive dimensions of learning and development. Further not only is narrativisation a valuable concept in understanding how people speak of learning and development in everyday life, it is a relevant way to understand theory development. After all, a theory is merely a specialist story in a specific setting, and in the area of learning and development everyday stories and academic stories interact as we all have our lived experience as a way to evaluate both sets of stories.

Peter Heymans (1992) illustrated how our recent developmental stage theories reflect the life structure narratives of Western culture. He argued, for example, that Erikson's (1963) developmental tasks utilise a narrative structure of romance in which the hero faces challenges that can be surpassed whilst Levinson's (1978) theory draws on a tragedy structure in which the protagonist tries to be 'good' in the face of powerful adversarial forces. As Susan Oyama has argued:

"development can be read as an origin myth, a narrative that characterises the present as it names the past; tales of our movement from a past 'there' to a present 'here' tell us what we are by showing how we came to be. (1993, p.478)"

Narrative understandings have emerged particularly from social psychology's understanding of the human experience (in particular Gergen & Gergen, 1984, 1993; Sarbin, 1986; Bruner, 1986, 1990; White & Epston, 1990). The insights have yet to be fully harnessed in the field of adult learning (Warren, 1982; Brady, 1990; Kazemek & Goetter, 1991, provide important exceptions). Within the field of development, the potential of narrativisation has only begun to be utilised. For example, when Carol Gilligan argued that the 'inability' of a girl to separate from her family can equally be
understood as maintaining love as a solution to conflicting loyalties (Gilligan, 1986), I believe that Gilligan was suggesting a re-narrativisation of the view of adolescent development. Insights from family therapy (White & Epston, 1990) and from development as described by other cultures (Lonner & Malpas, 1994) provide examples of re-narrativisation that are increasingly available to us. They provide evidence of the multiple, rather than generic, ways that the human-is-storyteller, as well as making available other discursive understandings of the human experience.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that much of our thinking about adult learning and development arises from the notion of the rational, unitary subject of Western individualism. This subject is the modern man, not woman (Henriques et al., 1984). This belief in the separate, autonomous self is evident in our tools of measurement of learning, development, intelligence and personality. If we are to move to a more inclusive understanding of learning and development, I believe that we must turn to other stories of life experiences beyond the middle-class, white male experiences that have been over-utilised and over-generalised. It is important to acknowledge that narrative accounts are not individual cognitive schemas but rather socially shared, dialectically created and culturally embedded (re)presentations. Stories can only draw from the available discourses and in turn they constitute the discourses. Thus I am arguing that learning and development are best conceptualised within the poststructural understandings of subjectivity.
Chapter 3

SUBJECTIVITIES AND SELF:
PERSPECTIVES AND PROCESSES

As I have argued that learning and development have been primarily conceptualised from the perspective of the rational and unitary self, it becomes crucial to explore more congruent ways of speaking of the self. Just as concepts of learning and development have maintained an individual–society dichotomy, similarly theories of the individual have polarised around a dichotomy of agency and structure. I will examine this problematic then turn to poststructural perspectives, which I believe help to move beyond that divide. I will then explore the constraints and opportunities provided by these theories for my work. In conclusion, I will suggest that the processes of investment, coherency and enabling fictions allow us to understand subjectivity without reverting to a humanistic notion of agency or the determinism inherent in most structuralist approaches or a nihilistic form of poststructuralism.

Perspectives of the self
For centuries the interests of social scientists have polarised around the debated points of free will and determinism with the attendant result of privileging one term at the expense of the other (Henriques et al., 1984; Angelides, 1995). At one pole, the ‘individual’ is elevated as the rational, autonomous, freely acting subject whose actions arise from within the self. This has been called the Cartesian self (Henriques et al., 1984; Angelides, 1995). If we embrace this notion our interest would turn to concepts
of free choice, motivation and will power. However the opposite pole would direct our interest to ‘society’ whereby human actions are seen as outcomes of structural constraints and social forces. In other words, we find a dichotomised sense of individual/society and agency/structure. The dichotomy is particularly apparent when we compare the ‘modern’ self with the ‘ideological’ self.

The modern self
The modern period has been characterised by the elevation of meta-narratives that have been given status as ultimate truth. One of the most pervasive of these meta-narratives is the construction of the self as a stable, rational entity. Although since the Renaissance the self has been manifested in various forms, in the more recent modern period the self has commonly been constructed from a liberal humanist discourse (Sampson, 1993).

The liberal humanist notion of the individual carries certain attributes. It constructs an individual who has identity, which must be continuous, unified, coherent and rational. Indeed it is these characteristics that allow the determination of the sane from the insane. Conscious, rational linguistic processes must be used by this individual to control any irrational aspects of self. This individual is seen to be socialised by the collective, internalising correct values and learning to distinguish the true and real world (Davies, 1990, 1991). The individual is seen to be fully agentic, the source of meaning, of action, and of history. Knowledge is the product of experience, an experience interpreted by the human mind (Belsey, 1980). The modern self is intricately linked with Enlightenment notions of progress.

It is when we analyse applications of such a notion of self that it becomes apparent that far from being a generic, universal notion, the self that is to be found reflects the ideals of the dominant social group. From the 1960s there has developed the critical awareness that specific self-interpretation theories of the modern West are both andro- and ethnocentric (Yeatman, 1994). This was apparent in my preceding discussion of the
limitations of many of the learning and development theories of this century. In other words, in Western cultures we find the true ‘modern’ self to be male, white and middle-class (for example, Kohlberg’s (1981) moral individual, Broverman’s (1972) mentally well person, Miller et al. ’s (1991) typical voter, and Eagly & Kite’s (1987) national stereotype—all cited in Sampson, 1993, p.82).

Psychoanalytic theory, with its attention to the role of the unconscious, has further ruptured the notion of the pre-given rational actor, and feminists have long held the concern that elevation of the rational, freely choosing subject could not adequately address women’s apparent complicity with oppression (Weedon, 1987). Such challenges presented an opportunity to explore a more complex notion of self—one that could move beyond a process of self-discovery that was a-contextual and a-historical.

It has been from Marxists and neo-Marxists that one of the most important challenges to the individual as fully agentic has come. The Marxist project has always been anti-humanist asserting that it is not the individual who creates meaning but that it is the social structures that have enabled certain selves to emerge. This introduced a particular form of the concept of ideology.

The ideological self
Although the term ‘ideology’ has been used in various ways, following Donald and Hall (1986) in this text I use ideology to refer to the notion that we are not:

the conscious and intentional authors of our thoughts. Rather we are ‘spoken’ by the concepts and languages which already exist in our cultural world and which impose their logics on us unconsciously even as we imagine that we enunciate them. (p.x)

For Marxists, the concepts and language that imposed on the twentieth century self were those of capitalism and its class domination. In the extreme interpretation, the valorisation of structure saw the individual as positioned and constructed by this dominant ideology. In structuralist-Marxism, ideology is seen as a monolithic
determining force in which the individual is merely one of many subjected to collective definition. The tendency is not to see human beings living in and through structures, but structures living in and through human beings (Sarup, 1983). This approach rightly drew criticism for its over-deterministic approach. Antonio Gramsci’s (1971) concept of ideology as hegemonic allowed a move beyond this disempowering concept.

Gramsci (1971) has suggested that rather than seeing ideology as a homogeneous monolithic force, ideology can be more productively seen as an articulated ensemble of discourses/frameworks which work together to (re)produce what counts as reality. He utilises the concept of hegemony to account for the process in which a ruling group comes to dominate by establishing cultural commonsense. This is not a top-down imposition but an interactive process by which individuals act on their awareness of taken-for-granted notions that may in fact hold them in their place. It is the invisibility of the ideological, political facets that creates the power of hegemony.

Louis Althusser (1971) drawing on a neo-Marxist sense of ideology provided a useful adjunct to the hegemony of commonsense by explaining how the individual interacts with the society’s ideology through the concept of ‘interpellation’. Althusser suggested that the subject constructs or creates her/himself as a response to the ‘hailing’ of institutions, such as schools or the law. Thus the person learns to recognise a self through subject positions available from this relation with institutions and through social practices: for example ‘I am a student’, ‘I am a citizen’, ‘I am a child’. Althusser (1984) drew attention to the modern conceptions of self in which the individual is ‘always-already’ a subject, in that ideology makes available a limited number of subject position options, even before birth. In total rejection of the humanist notion of self, Althusser argued that this interpellation is imaginary. The subject does not exist until hailed. However as Henriques et al. (1984) noted, we are once again caught on “the horns of the individual-society dualism” (p.97) with society in this case being elevated over the individual.
For my purpose if I use Althusser’s understanding of ideology and interpellation, the women in whom I am interested become unwittingly dupes of their society. As this does not resonate with my observations or my politics, a more compatible sense of the individual is needed. The work of Althusser does introduce the useful concept of subject positions to which I will return, but it is equally important to recognise the implications of Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, particularly the workings of power. It is to Althusser’s contemporaries such as Jacques Lacan and particularly Jacques Derrida, and his own student, Michel Foucault, that I now turn.

The psychoanalytic self
It was the psychoanalytic concepts of self as both conscious and unconscious that particularly began an acknowledgment of the self as a complex interaction between the individual and society. In drawing attention to the dimension of the self that was unconscious, psychoanalysts made visible processes by which the individual interacted with the symbolic order of her/his culture (Lacan, 1977, 1981). For Lacan, subjectivity is at once a conscious/unconscious and a rational/irrational process. Through his development of the concept of ‘desire’, Lacan’s work drew attention to the reasons why certain subject positions are taken up over others.

Subject positions are not a smorgasbord of possibilities of being, but rather they exist ‘in relation’ to ‘other’. Although some subject positions emerge from binary logic and appear essentially hierarchical—for example, teacher/student, parent/child, doctor/patient, man/woman—this is not the simple top-down hierarchy suggested by Marxist theory. Although it is possible to see that what is spoken into existence depends for its very existence on the silent, but omni-present other, the binaries are unstable and negotiable and as such reveal the relevance of the capillary process of power. It was this dimension of subjectivity that interested the poststructural theorists.
The *poststructural self*

The work of poststructural theorists examines the relation between language, subjectivity, social organisation and power and enables a move beyond the agency-structure divide. Such theoretical work holds that subjectivity is discursively constructed and in order to understand this many draw on linguistic theory such as that of Jacques Derrida.

Derrida (1976) provided a crucial turning point for the theorising of the individual. His linguistic approach revealed how the modernist self is the result of an epistemology based on a relation of equivalence between the signifier (the word) and the signified (the object of interest). Modernist theories hold that there is a direct, and universal, one-to-one relationship between the sign and the signified. Derrida showed that far from being universal, there is a constant slipping of meaning between the two. Signification therefore does not reflect a pre-existent reality but rather reveals differential properties. To examine a text for this dynamic has been named ‘deconstruction’ (Derrida, 1978). In other words, Derrida allows us to see that the ‘map’ is not the ‘territory’ and that language is enmeshed with power. This is the power to name.

Such a social constructionist approach reveals that language gains its meaning in use and is thus a social activity (Gergen, 1985). Therefore, if we take it that words do not stand for things and that people create meanings within given contexts, the notion of truth becomes an issue. No longer can we search as the logical positivists do for the true self through an examination of the correspondence of what is said and assume a direct relationship with reality. Rather, we must acknowledge that truth is created collectively within particular contexts, in relation to particular purposes. In poststructuralist terms, ‘truth’ and indeed all knowing is discursively produced. Once this is recognised, we can see that the individual is not an essential entity but, at least in part, is a construct of language. Further the self must be seen as one that is created...
across a range of signifying relations (Hennessy, 1993). Rather than an essential self we now must move to a notion of the de-centred self (Flax, 1990; Angelides, 1995).

This is an important point for women for it has been our essential identity that has been evoked to maintain a limited and limiting cultural role. Woman has been spoken into being as the direct correlate to the biological entity and thus it becomes ‘natural’ and pre-given to locate women in the private reproductive spheres. I will return to this point when I consider the feminist implications of subjectivity as constructed.

Derrida’s work brings to the fore the socially constructed dimensions of language and the realities it creates; how in using language the individual constitutes and reconstitutes culture. Thus, poststructural notions of the self address both individual and collective aspects concurrently by using a dual notion of ‘subjectivity’. The concept of subjectivity arises from French theory, therefore the English language does not adequately do justice to the word. The French word, ‘asujettir’ means both ‘to produce subjectivity’ and ‘to make subject’ (Henriques et al., 1984, p.3). Both of these meanings are incorporated in the poststructuralist use of the term ‘subjectivity’. The individual is conceptualised as subject-ed to social forces whilst at the same time as a sense-making active subject.

Poststructuralist interest turns to discourses in order to understand this dual process. The term ‘discourse’ has been used in multiple ways from the simple sense that it is any regulated systems of statements to complex psycholinguistics (Henriques et al., 1984). As I have begun to explain in Chapter One, I am using the term ‘discourse’ as referring to an inter-related set of statements and understandings that cohere around common meanings, and which are a product of social practices as well as constitutive of such practices (Weedon, 1987; Davies, 1990, 1991, 1993). This notion of discourse enables the performative aspects of discourse(s) to become apparent. It is through discourses
that people can act in and make sense of the world, as well as the way in which the world acts on people. Discourse acts on both the shaping and performance of lives.

Discursive practices occur at a political, cultural and interpersonal level, providing us with frameworks through which it is possible to know. According to Foucault (1980a), it is only through discursive frameworks that it is possible to make claims to know and to be aware of what is sayable. Knowledge can only exist within discourses. This is crucial to the notion of subjectivity as it implies that people can only express themselves and understand themselves using the terms and categories available to them—available from discourses.

Discourses are not parallel to the meta-narratives of modernity with their notion of a unified, coherent, rational core. Rather discourses may be complementary or they may compete with each other, and offer distinct and often contradictory versions of reality (Weedon, 1987; Davies, 1993). This is a crucial concept as individual subjectivity is affected by the multiple and sometimes contradictory discourses available. There is an ongoing struggle over meaning supremacy as discourses act on, and are acted out in, everyday life.

I am particularly interested in the way that Foucault's (1980a) work has indicated that the social sciences in the twentieth century are themselves dominant discourses and with their attendant practices help to shape the various institutions that form our 'society'. Following the lead of Henriques et al. (1984), I would now argue that it is more congruent to replace this term 'society' with that of the 'social', as the former implies an out-there external given which is no longer tenable. Instead, by moving to the 'social', attention turns to processes, particularly those processes by which power is exerted, constituted and negotiated. It is the processes of power that essentially link the individual/society and agency/structure dichotomies in a way that dissolves each couplet (Henriques et al., 1984, pp.106–7).
Foucault asserted that power is not possessed, given, seized or exchanged but exercised (Grosz, 1990). He outlined two important processes of power: the disciplinary and the confessional. To explain disciplinary power, Foucault argued that we must 'produce' truth—'truths' which reflect the 'fact' of being human. In the twentieth century, these truths have been produced particularly by the discourses of the biological and human sciences which work together to provide what Foucault (1980a) has called a 'regime of truth'. These discourses become disciplinary by providing data that determine what it is to be normal. State practices such as measurements of health, educational standards and the like become normalising processes and together with the discursively produced facts they regulate behaviour.

However it is what Foucault called the 'confessional' that he best illustrated the constitutive and constituted nature of power at the individual level. For example, throughout the twentieth century we can see the emergence of the discipline of psychology to explain the individual. Although on one level psychology can be seen as the domain of experts, their practices have also been taken up by individuals as commonsense. It is everyday practice to speak of being 'defensive', of 'rationalising', of 'projecting', or thinking of dreams as 'meaningful' (Sampson, 1993). To be considered as normal, I must understand these dominant concepts and learn to self-monitor and discipline myself within approved parameters. I must learn the bounds of normal from the discourses of my society and I must maintain my non-deviant status by acknowledging/confessing any transgression. The ultimate success of a regime of truth is when confessional and normalising practices merge at the individual level to maintain commonsense.

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1 For example, some feminists, such as Bray (1996), argue that anorexia is an extreme response of self-monitoring in a culture that privileges body image and youth.
Although Foucault's notions of power help to understand the interconnection of discourses and the construction of subjectivity, it is important to note that discourses are not always compatible and coherent. They are not simply dominant or non-dominant. They often can be contradictory. Further it is apparent from the diversity of individual positions within discourses that discourses can be understood and acted from in different ways for different individuals.

I will use an example relevant to the lives of the women with whom I spoke. Two competing discourses were apparent for some of the women in their accounts of their middle years. On one hand, they were surrounded by discourses that understood women as 'hubs of the family'—home centred and family focused. However in the 1960s new humanist discourses emerged that elevated self-development and self-awareness. Inherently these were contradictory as the role of hub of the family was to service others and support their development whilst the self-development discourses spoke of the need to separate and to primarily focus on one's own development. The women were subjected to both sets of discourses; therefore individually each woman had to resolve that contradiction and did so in different ways.

In the accounts, the women illustrated how they wished to be seen as 'good' mothers who were willing and able to be the hub of the family. However, as I will elaborate in the chapter on motherhood, two of the women 'confessed' that they were not sure that their choice to go to work when their children were still at school was the right one. Both women explained that they felt a need for more self-development at that time. As they 'confessed' their failure and spoke as a 'guilty' mother they illustrated the power of the discourses of motherhood of that era.

Discourses are not monolithic and homogenising. They offer understandings and subject positions that are multiple and may be contradictory. As discourses are constantly negotiated and they continually mutate and modify, the meanings available
must therefore be constantly negotiated by each individual. Subjectivity is therefore most productively understood as a dialectic process in which the individual is always part of a wider network of power relations.

**Negotiations of subjectivity**

If meanings are to be constantly negotiated by the individual the question remains: how does this differ from the modern self inwardly reflecting on meanings? The poststructuralist understanding of the dual process that an individual is both constituted by, and constitutes, discourses is the first difference. As Bronwyn Davies (1994) has reminded us "(o)ur (liberal humanist) belief that we are the architects of our own consciousness and our consciences is as much the result of discourses we have been subjected to (constituted by) as anything else" (p.3). None the less poststructural subjectivity as I understand it does not deny the activity of the individual as s/he negotiates meaning. Indeed this is the very focus of my interest in the nine women of this study. It is the very nature of the contradictions rather than consistency of discourses, and of fragmentation rather than unity, that demand that individuals must make some personal sense from the meanings that surround them.

Although the subject in poststructuralism is socially constructed in discursive practices, she none the less exists as a thinking, feeling subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices. She is also a subject able to reflect upon discursive relations which constitute her and the society in which she lives, and able to choose from the options available. (Weedon, 1987, p.125)

As Weedon moves us beyond any sense of discursive effects acting randomly on the individual, in what Bronwyn Davies (1991, p.46) has called a 'flotsam and jetsam' approach, we are reminded that the power of discourses also involves resistance. However I have some discomfort with Weedon’s implication that the individual is “able to choose from the options available” as this appears to circle back to the modern notion of choice and free will.
Linda Alcoff (1988) has presented a resolution to any humanist notion of agentic individuality by positing a dialectical relationship between individual and discourse through the use of the concept of positionality. Drawing on Teresa de Lauretis' work, Alcoff has argued for:

>a subjectivity that gives agency to the individual while at the same time placing her within 'particular discursive configurations' and, moreover, conceives of the process of consciousness as a strategy. Subjectivity may thus become imbued with race, class, and gender without being subjected to an overdetermination that erases agency. (p.425)

The notion of positionality allows an understanding of subjectivity that can account for the conscious and unconscious and that importantly introduces the material dimension. Alcoff asserted that the concept of woman is a relational term, identifiable only within a constantly shifting context. Meaning is interpreted and constructed, not discovered in an essentialist way. The multiple positioning of women within discourses potentially allows them to experience new positions that may illuminate new possibilities; however, this is only possible if a woman 'knows' the other discursive positions. As not all discourses carry equal weight/power, some remain fringe and are less available. Dominant discourses obscure that alternative way of knowing.

In women's life-stories we can expect to hear the culturally dominant meanings of what it is to be a woman, but we must be alert to the possibility of hearing muted, and perhaps less well-articulated alternative understandings. I would not wish to argue that because a woman is multiply positioned she simply moves forward from oppressive positions to a construction of self that is liberatory. Our history tells us otherwise. Genealogical studies\(^2\) constantly reaffirm how regimes of truth and discursive webs subjugate women within patriarchy.

Foucault's notion of the power dimension of discourses must not be over-generalised as all discourses are culturally and historically specific. Subjectivity is a located process

\(^{1}\) For example, Susan Bordo's work on anorexia (1988), Jana Sawicki on reproductive technologies (1991) and Sue Lees on young women’s sexuality (1993).
and it must be acknowledged that subjectivity is equally located in a material way.

Resources are also a mode of power. They operate through the ability to create a
material advantage that can be acquired and possessed, for example, legal rights, skills,
money or property (Cooper, 1994). It is at this point that I wish to expand on the work
of material feminists that utilises this understanding.

**Materialism and subjectivity**

There are two facets to the ‘materialism’ used by materialist feminism. First,
‘materialist’ denotes a commitment to the view that the social and economic conditions
of lives are central to an understanding of a culture and that these conditions are
particular to a certain time of history. Second, ‘materialist’ recognises that most aspects
of human identity are socially constructed (Newton & Rosenfelt, 1985, p.xi). Thus a
materialist feminist approach shares much of poststructuralism’s concern with
difference and subjectivity but it emphasises their material and historical specificity.

The emphasis on material and historical specificity is an important response to feminist
concerns with some aspects of poststructuralism. Criticism has been building from
many quarters regarding the nihilistic, a-political relativism of some poststructural
theorising. Underpinning these concerns is an awareness that poststructuralism has the
potential to deconstruct both the radical and reactionary. Some would argue therefore
that if all reality is constructed we cannot call on any category in the politics of social
change. Jane Flax (1987), for example, has asked why the obliteration of the category
‘woman’ comes when “women have just begun to re-member their selves and claim an
agentic subjectivity?” (p.106). Some poststructuralists have addressed this concern by

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3. Examples of materialist feminists include Norma Alarcon, Evelyn Brooks-Higgenbotham, Teresa Ebert, Teresa
de Lauretis, Donna Haraway, Chandra Mohanty, Toril Moi, Mary Poovey and Chandra Sandoval — cited in
Hennessy (1993) p.xii

4. Jane Kenway’s 1995 paper “Having a Postmodernist Turn” has an amusing but well-targeted summary of this
concern; and “Radically Speaking: feminism reclaimed”, and Dianne Bell & Renate Klein’s (1996) edited
collection contains a number of differing concerns with postmodernism.
differentiating between a postmodernism of reaction (the nihilistic collapse of all meaning) and a postmodernism of resistance (meaning as non-dualistic, pluralistic and dialogic but specific—for example, Lather, 1991). I would identify with the latter—resistance postmodernism. With material feminists, I would argue that it is crucial to acknowledge that lived social relations are conflictually divided by gender, class, race, age, and sexual orientation (Roman & Christian-Smith, 1988). It is these material dimensions that ground theory in politics and confront nihilism.

In Jane Kenway’s (1995) words “material feminists are interested in the mechanics and the politics of signification and subjectivity” (p.9, original emphasis). Materialist feminism reminds us of the link between discourse and hegemony. It accounts for the differential power of various discourses; not all carry equal weight. It therefore becomes important to understand, map and address how discourses can and do create social systems that are not static and monolithic but dynamic, yet still hegemonic. In particular, in the twentieth century Western world, three hegemonic discourses interact—capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism (Hennessey, 1993).

This should not suggest that we are creating a new meta-narrative. Rather it means we recognise that “discourse has material effects: that discourse constitutes and is constituted by wider social power dynamics” (Kenway, 1995, p.11). All knowledge claims are particular and specifically located. They are part of a power struggle over resources as well as meaning. Thus I wish to take forward the notion that subjectivity is both discursively and materially constructed. Each by necessity informs the other but politically I wish to hold them apart, albeit artificially, in order to examine more clearly their action in the process of subjectivity. As the nine women of this study told of their life experience they revealed both the discursive and material facets of their experience. Each informed the other.
Any understanding of experience must be placed in a postmodern (poststructural), not modern, context (Scott, 1992). The concept of individual experience has been the baseline of the project of modernity. It was through experience that the reality and truth of the individual self was reified. Experience was real, hence the valuing of empiricism. In poststructural thinking, experience remains central not because it reflects truth but because it allows an analysis of its discursive nature and the time and politics of its construction. Experience is a linguistic event that cannot be understood outside existing meanings, and since discourse is by definition shared, experience is collective as well as individual. Frigga Haug (1987) has asserted that:

> if a given experience is possible, it is also subject to universalisation. What we perceive as 'personal' ways of adapting to the social are also potentially generalisable modes of appropriation. (p.44)

Experience is part of the material and a discursive process of subjectivity.

Having recognised that subjectivity is a dialectical process that is both material and discursive and therefore specific in its social and historical location, what now remains to be explored is why an individual takes up particular discourses and why certain discourses and certain subject positions within discourses seem preferable to others. Steven Angelides (1995) has coined the phrase 'subject(act)ivity' to describe this necessary individual activity within discourses.

**Subject(act)ivity**

Jean Anyon (1984) has argued that in many lives it is possible to see a simultaneous process of accommodation and resistance in which there is “an active response to social contradictions” (p.26). This early work by Anyon, although beginning from the notion of socialisation, pointed a way to an important part of subjectification—that of the need to respond to the inherent contradictions in the multiple subject positions available at any given time. In her work, Anyon used an example which is almost identical to an account by one of the women of this study, Emma. In both accounts, the woman told of serving tea to her husband and guest, then sitting down to join them smiling and
apparently passive. However as each recalled the event the woman told of determining the men’s conversation as ‘boring’ (Anyon) or in Emma’s case I don’t say I was always right but sometimes [on judgements of human nature] I would think—why can’t you see that! Significantly both women explained that they remained silent at the time.

As Anyon concluded, such

(public/private behaviour is an example of an apparent acquiescence in the role of dutiful, submissive wife, but is in fact an accommodation with a critical edge: it contains an internal resistance, a separate-ness, and an internal non-subordination. (p.31)

Equally this example illustrates that although accommodation and resistance are continuous experiences in daily life, they usually pass unremarked at a conscious level. Indeed Emma used her story to illustrate her interest in people as communicators rather than with any notion of overt resistance to the subservient facet of wifehood. Instead Emma (re)constructed this experience to illustrate her interpersonal observation skills. This allowed her to take up a more positive position than that of ‘only a dutiful wife’. The sub-text was of both accommodation and resistance but not revolt.

Therefore I would argue that it is inadequate to depend on a notion of agency that is solely conscious; rather, it is best understood as a complex involving both the conscious and the unconscious. I believe this is complementary to the Foucauldian concept of the capillary process of power. Indeed as Foucault (1980a) has said “there are no relations of power without resistances... like power resistance is multiple” (p.142). A sense of subject(act)ivity must be able to account for both the contradictory and irrational as well as the logical. The notion of consciously choosing positions cannot do this, for who would choose to be irrational in a techno-rational society, or in a hierarchy choose to be oppressed.

Some theorists have used the Lacanian notion of desire to explain the unconscious facet of subjectivity. Although Lacan himself tended to posit a subject that is not situated historically and is bound by a pre-existing language, more recent theorists have usefully
demonstrated the discursive production of desire (for example, Henriques et al., 1984, pp.218–226). This is an important shift as it links individual desires with the exigencies of norms of social practices; practices that are located in a specific time and place.

Wendy Hollway (1984), Cathy Urwin (1984) and Alison Mackinnon (1993) have drawn on the term 'investment' in order to address the situated nature of subjectivity. In positing this term, they suggest that certain discourses will be taken up because they bring with them some satisfaction, pay-off or reward. Certain subject positions, available in gender-differentiated discourses, confer relative power by suppressing other significations that would be undermining of power (Hollway, 1984). For instance, Mackinnon (1993) found that for some of the early twentieth century academic women she studied there was some 'investment' in staying single (in order to retain a sense of 'intellectual'), although this was contrary to two of the dominant discursive positions of the day, that of woman as nurturer or as maternal citizen. Such a notion of investment begins to allow an understanding of the constant movement within discourses as more than a random, serendipitous effect.

I have found that the concept of coherency is an important adjunct to the notion of investment. It is posited that we constantly strive for coherency in the stories we tell of ourselves, and this is why we may put a gloss on an account or privilege certain aspects in order to maintain such coherency. To understand this further, I have drawn on the work of medical sociologist, Aaron Antonovsky (1979, 1987, 1996) who coined the term 'a sense of coherency' from his work on the individual construction of health. Through his interest in health and well-being, Antonovsky originally studied survivors of the Holocaust, some of whom, despite their experiences of extreme degradation, described themselves as 'well'. From this he posited that there was a subjective continuum between health-ease and dis-ease. Antonovsky used the term a sense of coherency to explain how some individuals were able to move to the positive pole. Although Antonovsky did not use poststructural theory, implicit in his thinking was
belief that some individuals take up, from the available (discursive) possibilities, positions that enable them to forge a sense of coherency to their experiences. He emphasised that—unlike concepts such as internal locus of control, mastery, and empowerment—a sense of coherency is not a culture-bound construct but the ability “to see the world as ‘making sense’ cognitively, emotionally and instrumentally” (1996, p.16). Antonovsky named three facets of a sense of coherency: comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. Each of these, I believe, enriches the notion of investment.

First, comprehensibility refers to the ability to see the world as having some predictable, orderable and explicable sense. For both men and women, this means to be able to recognise the world as gendered. Beyond this core dualism, comprehensibility suggests that for example a woman can recognise a range of other orders in her community and personal life which enables her to hold a sense of coherency, even in extreme deprivation such as Antonovsky’s original respondents’ experiences in the Holocaust. In poststructuralist terms, comprehensibility could be spoken of as the ability to respond to the interaction of discourses, to recognise (although not always in a conscious way) discourses that are compatible with each other and those that create contradictions. For example, it would be recognised by many women that the discourses surrounding ‘responsible adulthood’ are compatible with ‘responsible mothering and wifehood’, but cannot be readily combined with a hedonistic discourse of ‘free love’.

Second, in Antonovsky’s sense of coherency, manageability refers to an individual sense of having the resources to be able to cope and to take on challenges. Again, although at times all positions may not be propitious, some engender a more positive sense than others. Some positions will be avoided because they make us uncomfortable. It may not be possible to avoid discomfort but there will be positions that individually appear more manageable than others; or, linking to the notion of
investment, to be a more manageable investment. This is not always at a conscious level however. Dagmar, one of the women of this study, was able to incorporate notions of leadership into her narrative when the context was community settings; however, she resisted any notion of leadership in her family setting, instead preferring to speak as a nurturer and partner. These social relations specific to certain social contexts appeared more manageable and suggested more return for the investment.

Finally, as part of Antonovsky’s sense of coherency, meaningfulness accounts for an ability to see life as worthy of effort through the belief that problems can be addressed. In other words the individual is able to hold that in some way a particular position is imbued with meaning that they value at that time and that contributes to a sense of their life as worthwhile. This is not to suggest that an individual will ‘gloss over difficulties’, ‘be a Pollyanna’, or ‘look through rose-coloured glasses’. For instance, the meaning involved may be drawn from a religious discourse that suggests that life is a vale of suffering and we gain our rewards in heaven.

Centrally, the sense of coherence is maintained because a meta-meaning can be held. Life is understood as unpredictable, but not randomly chaotic. Like Anyon, Antonovsky conceived of the individual as a social actor but did not draw on any notion of control of, or power over, circumstances. However, both poststructuralist notions of subjectivity and the notion of a sense of coherency retain a notion of a self constantly engaged in sense-making.

The concept of coherent investment is particularly interesting when it is considered over a time-frame such as the life-stories told by the women of this study. Not only do life-stories illuminate how certain subject positions were taken up at a given time, they also allow thematic investments to be seen across time. It is when interest centres on such investments across time that we particularly need to supplement the notion of investment in order to understand the process of subjectivity more thoroughly. It was
the work of poststructural family therapists that provided the link between subjectivity and life-storying.

**Subjectivity as storying**

The work of narrative therapists—especially that of the Australian, Michael White, and the New Zealander, David Epston, (Epston, 1989; White & Epston, 1990) and their international colleagues (for example, Lankton & Lankton, 1989 and Blatt, 1994)—draws heavily on poststructural thinking and is one of the few therapeutic approaches that is challenging the modern concept of the individual. It is not appropriate to elaborate on the detail of the therapeutic approach of White and Epston\(^5\) except to illustrate the aspects that I have utilised in this project. White and Epston use what they call a socio-literary analysis to conceive of subjectivity as an ongoing construction of life as a ‘fiction’, one that they have argued can only be created using the cultural conventions and discourses available (White & Epston, 1990). This understanding of self as a fiction is not unique to therapy. The Marxist concept of ‘false consciousness’ is one extreme of the notion; however I would identify with writers such as Jane Flax (1990) who sees the self as “simultaneously embodied, social, ‘fictional’ and real” (p.16). The re-conceptualisation of agency from a subject-centred agency to an agency of plurality of meanings does not deny the importance of the sense-making activity of subjects (Lather, 1991). Given the bombardment by conflicting messages, each person must story their life in some meaningful way. Each must construct her/his own fiction.

White and Epston understand this individual ‘storying’ of a life as enabling or problematic. In the therapeutic environment it is the problematic that presents. White and Epston have found certain aspects lead to ‘storying’ problems of a negative nature. When a person presents for therapy, White and Epston suggest:

\(^5\) Further details appear in work arising from the Dulwich Centre, Adelaide, especially the Dulwich Centre Newsletter.
(w)e could assume that the person’s experience is problematic to him because he is being situated in stories that others have about him and his relationships, and that these stories are dominant to the extent that they allow insufficient space for the performance of the person’s preferred stories. Or we could assume that the person is actively participating in the performance of stories that she finds unhelpful, unsatisfying, and dead-ended, and that these stories do not significantly encapsulate the person’s lived experience or are very significantly contradicted by important aspects of the person’s lived experience. (1990, p.14)

Just as White and Epston found their work revolved around problematic storying, my project consciously drew on enabling storying. As has been explained in Chapter One, I was interested in the wonderful old women I met through my work. They were more than survivors. They seemed to have a positive resilience. I asked them to ‘story’ their life in order to explain to me what learning had led them to this point. What I received were narratives that attempted to construct what I have come to call an ‘enabling fiction’. This is not to suggest that the life narratives told to me were seamless and internally consistent. As will be illustrated in later chapters, there are contradictions but overall each woman (re)constructed a story that was overwhelmingly positive. As Culpepper Clarke (1994) has stated “(f)inding a past that one can live with, and coming to terms with the past—these necessary acts of the well-adjusted person require that the past not simply be rediscovered but redeemed” (p.19). What each of these women shared with me was an enabling fiction that revealed the way a life can be storied to create a positive form of coherency.

It has been suggested that one way to move beyond the constraining gender dualism is to become aware of the different ways we are made subject and therefore to take up authorship in a way that is disruptive of those discourses (Davies, 1991). This is a political action with which I have sympathy, however authorship is not always a conscious political act. In positing the activity of creating one’s life-story as an enabling fiction, I am suggesting that, particularly in the (re)membering of a life, it is possible to see another positive form of authorship. Although this fiction is demonstrably

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6 White and Epston alternate the use of male/female pronouns.
discursively produced and thus collective in nature, it must be taken on by the individual as her own. It must be told as a personal and unique fiction to be enabling.

Further, the narratives as told in this project evidenced a second characteristic of subjectivity that I began to name as an ecology of discourses, although I would not wish to belabour the biological metaphor of ecology. An ecological approach understands the inter-relatedness of the individual organism and its environment. Such 'systems thinking' challenges the linear notions of causality for the explanations of events in living systems (Bateson, 1972). It highlights the observation that organisms are interdependent. I find it useful as a tool for exploring how the subjectivities (re)constructed by the women of this study were told in a relational way that attempted to maintain connections rather than reduce complexity through isolating particular discourses. When faced with contradictions or competing discourses, I noted repeatedly that most of the women attempted to hold these in tension with each other rather than to strongly align with one or the other. Just as ecology draws on the concept of a niche to explain where an organism structurally locates within an ecosystem (Miller & Armstrong, 1982), I would stress that this incorporation of discourses was only apparent in the woman's preferred niche, usually that of home and family. Frequently, they did not engage with discourses they regarded as being outside their niche, their 'natural' environment. The determination of how extensive this niche was varied from woman to woman and will be elaborated in the Chapter Five ('Cameos'). However, to give one example, Lucy held together understandings arising from home, family and local community, relating them in an interdependent ecology; on the other hand, she discounted most discourses arising from national or international politics and those of public life.

The recognition that subjectivities are constructed from an ecology of discourses allowed me to map and analyse this facet of the process of subjectivity in a way that I found enriched the base concept of investment. Just as a sense of coherency allows us
to examine narratives for their thematic links—in my case, for their enabling fictions—the awareness that narratives draw on an ecology of discourses allows us to examine the text for its construction of a particular niche and its use of interdependent discourses.

In summary, I have found that in order to understand how and why individuals take up certain discourses and certain subject positions it has been useful to enlarge on the concept of investment to incorporate three aspects. First, following poststructural feminists is the idea that investments will be made in subject positions that apparently allow the individual greater power or return for that investment. Second, from the work of poststructural therapists, I take investment also to include the way subject positions can be negotiated to provide coherency and to have the potential to be an enabling fiction. Finally, utilising ecological notions, I would suggest that an investment is more often made in what has been determined by that person as their preferred location in their 'natural' environment.

However we must remind ourselves that just as the subject can be best conceptualised as a self in process (Angelides, 1995), we must not lose sight of the fact that through the verb 'to subject' we also acknowledge that a person both constitutes and is constituted by discourses (Davies, 1991). Thus any sense of coherence, any enabling fiction, any natural environment is never unique but must be drawn from the collective. As has been already argued, for women in a patriarchal society, subjectivity must be understood as above all a gendered complex.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that the construction of subjectivity is a complex that remains problematical within feminism. I have taken a position that the essentialist, humanist self must be rejected for a self that is constantly constructed and
reconstructed. I have retained the category of woman as a political act not as a fixed identity. Further, I have noted that as an individual must move within discursive possibilities over time, an expanded notion of investment and coherency is the most relevant way to conceptualise such a movement. I have called this the process of constructing an enabling fiction.

As understandings of the self/subject have rejected the unitary, rational, self-determining, humanist definitions, postmodern versions of subjectivity have emerged. Poststructuralism emphasises the constructedness of subjectivity, asking how selves are defined and redefined over time and how particular subjects participate in these changes. Feminists have particularly drawn on the work of Foucault and Lacan to explore how subjectivity is constructed through language which offers discourses of identity within which subjects position themselves. Subject positions are not unitary but may be contradictory or shifting as discourses themselves are multiple (Henriques et al., 1984; Davies, 1990).

Interest in the social construction of subjectivity has been at both the macro and the micro level. Foucault’s work is typical of the interest at a macro level, mapping how discourses become dominant and provide normalising mechanisms within a specific time and place. However when the interest is in a topic such as women’s ways of learning, the micro level is the most relevant for a detailed exploration. Is the individual merely mechanically positioned with cultural discourses; or perhaps is the individual simply the sum total of all positions within discourses since birth (Henriques et al., 1984)? Both of these positions give little potential for social change. For those of us interested in social change, the place of the individual and the interaction of the discourses available become key interests. Kathleen Barry (1989) stressed the interpretative task of the researcher into subjectivity.
(By remaining interactively involved with the biographical subject and her interactions and interpretations of meaning, we can identify moments, occasions, and conditions that produce gendered relations without reducing the subject to someone who has been determined by gender power. (p.569, original emphasis)

This awareness of the social construction of subjectivity is crucial in the development of dialectical theories, and provides a potential for enriching our understandings of adult learning and development. Most adult development and learning theories hold that experience is the concrete reality from which an individual draws meaning. However, Chris Weedon (1987) has reminded us that this too is a construction, one that has been elevated as commonsense. It provides an exemplar of how discourse works at a macro level. “The power of experience in the constitution of the individual as a social agent comes from the dominant assumption in our society that experience gives rise to truth” (Weedon, 1987, p.80). The majority of adult development and learning theories rest on this very assumption of the centrality of ‘real experience’. However, if we hold that what events mean to an individual depends on her ways of interpreting her world from the discourses available to her at that given moment, learning can no longer be seen as a progression forward, but rather a constant forming and re-forming that is only understood in its time and place.

Many learning theorists focus on the facet of reflection. This is compatible with learning as construction so long as it does not presume the inward search for self, but rather the process of responding to available subject positions. Adult learning theories further suggest that reflection is, or should be, a conscious, rational process. When we consider the process of the construction of subjectivity, we become aware instead that this is indeed a highly complex issue involving as it does a dialectic process between the woman herself, her material location, the discursive fields that surround her, and the multiple subject positions available.
My interest is in the life learning and the constructions of self of one group of women. Their gendered subjectivity must be central. Nancy Chodorow (1995) has summarised this challenge well.

As feminists, we have fine-tuned theories of discursive, cultural, and political gender that are sensitive to historical, class, racial, or ethnic specificity or positionality and cognisant of the contingent, contradictory, fragmented, or ambiguous character of enactments and constructions of gender. But these cannot, finally, reveal to us how gender is constructed—what culturally situated discursive meanings are for a particular person who experiences or constructs gendered meanings or a gender identity. (p.541)

Life narratives are a valuable window into the socially constructed subjectivities of women. They explode the humanist notions of learning and development and reveal a new complexity of power–knowledge–subject. It is therefore incumbent on me to explicate the principles, processes and practices used in this project to reveal and utilise that complexity.
Chapter 4

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORIES:
PRAXIS REVEALED

As social science itself is discursively constituted and reflects particular world-views and attitudes, it is essential to locate this work within its own particular cultural and historical location. Following Angela Packwood and Pat Sikes (1996) I am locating my own approach as one that acknowledges research as a 'narrative' rather than research as a 'recipe'. Packwood and Sikes (1996) have argued that research as a recipe “is not only an implicit metaphor, it is also an implicit myth. The metaphor is that the process of research is to follow a recipe, and the myth is that this is the truth” (p.2, original emphasis). I did begin this study certain of the fact that I wanted to utilise the life-stories of a group of aged women. Further, as a feminist, I wished to reflect the feminist principle that research should be “by, about and for women” (Gluck & Patai, 1991, p.3). Finally, I was committed to self-reflexive research based on an ethical and accountable process.

The research narrative
In this chapter I will share the narrative process and lay open the decision trails of this project. I do not wish to present my methodological position as one taken at the beginning then held throughout the duration of the project. I will make apparent the developmental stages that emerged as I became aware of the exciting yet daunting challenge of working with oral sources. Following this I will explore the issues of life-story as narrative,
concluding with a detailed account of the strategies used to analyse the personal narratives.

My subheadings for these stages are based on women's domestic labour. Through this strategy I hope to draw attention to the potential for lateral thinking when we move outside traditional formats. It is hoped that these activity-based headings move us intellectually into other territory, and perhaps reveal other ways of seeing that are generated in the silenced, but busy, margins.

**Have a cuppa: tell me about yourself**
I initially conceptualised my project as one of oral history in which I would invite selected women to sit down with me and tell me about their life. I would then add their accounts to the unbalanced history that we had inherited. At that time I understood my work as a response to the epochal events/famous men model in which, as Sheila Rowbotham (1973) noted, women were "hidden from history". This is a radical vision for oral history and it is compatible with much of the recent activity in this field. Since the 1960s there has been a resurgence of interest in oral accounts through work that privileges the experiences of everyday people such as Bertaux's bakers (1983), Thompson's working people (1988) and locally Lowenstein's survivors of the Great Depression (1978) or Watson's farmers (1984). What is elevated in this approach is history ‘straight from the horse’s mouth’ (Murphy, 1986). Such an approach to oral history can be understood as part of a wider egalitarian movement in which the voice of the ordinary person gained its rightful place. The stories of every man/every woman provided a challenge to the elite famous man histories (Minichiello et al., 1995).

Inherently this form of oral history is celebratory. Indeed my own writing at the start of this project reflects this in a telling way, as an earlier seminar paper indicates:
As a daughter of this generation of women, I hope to understand the heritage of women’s knowledge of which I am part. I want to acknowledge that one of the roots of my own feminism must to some degree lie within the learning of my mothers. I share Gluck’s belief that through oral history ‘(w)ith our foremothers we are creating a new kind of women’s literature. To this task we should bring the sensitivity, respect, tremendous joy, and excitement that comes from the awareness that we are not only creating new materials, but that we are also validating the lives of the women who preceded us and are forging direct links with our past’. (Gluck, 1984, p.236). (Pamphilon, University of Wollongong research seminar, 1992).

However I became aware that underlying the celebratory oral history project is an empiricist epistemology. Over the last two decades, many historians (for example, Southgate 1996) and historical sociologists (for example, Gotham & Staples, 1996) have challenged their own dependency on what they have held to be objective data. Oral history, with its interest in the multiple accounts of the everyday experiences of history, has provided one of the most sustained challenges to traditional historiography, however in and of itself it does not automatically ensure a move away from hard facts history. Oral history has been rightly critiqued as, at times, providing more history, rather than new history (Samuel & Thompson, 1990), in which historical truth remains only to be discovered by the dedicated historian. At its heart, this form of oral history is little different to the dominant model of history it decries.

In saying this, I do not wish to suggest I am recanting. In a metaphysical sense, I continue to stand by my research seminar statement as it illustrates the commitment made in the introductory chapter in which I aligned myself with Marcia Westkott’s (1983) belief in feminist research in which “the personal becomes intellectual, and the intellectual, personal” (p.211). However it became apparent that oral history had greater potential than just as a corrective to flawed histories, an application that Victoria Barker (1993) has called a ‘spakfila’ approach. By considering oral sources from a poststructural awareness that all knowledge is a cultural production, I became aware of the link between oral history and memory.
As Frisch (1990) has pointed out:

Memory is living history, the remembered past that exists in the present. In one sense it is a force that can be tapped, unleashed, and mobilized through oral and public history to stand as an alternative to imposed orthodoxy and officially sanctioned versions of historical reality; it is a route to a broadly distributed authority for making sense of the past in the present. But in another way, memory is a deeply cultural artefact, manipulated in a host of direct and indirect ways, especially in an age of mass-mediation, to reproduce culturally appropriate attitudes and behaviours. (p xxiii)

Rather than to search for empirically verifiable truth by looking for the reality content in my transcripts, the challenge became to read the same transcripts for what they may tell of the symbolic categories through which reality is perceived (Samuel & Thompson, 1990).

Concurrent with this growing awareness, I had begun a pilot series of interviews. Initially my interest had been in the effect of major global events on the learning of individual women; for example, the effect of the Great Depression and World War II. However, from the pilot interviews it became clear that women's lives could not be productively subsectioned into arbitrary phases such as World War I or II. Contextual factors of childhood background, family conditions and experience of formal education for example, all informed the oral account. As they told of their experience, the women moved from childhood, to the present and back to the war, for example, in order to explain their accounts. In other words the symbolic categories the women used were not drawn solely from the time of which they spoke. Further the women did not tell their stories in a linear, lifespan way, but at times 'bulged out sideways' to draw in other people, events or stories that impacted on their path. If anything, there was more a sense of inter-related cycles and themes. In order to do justice to this emerging new data and in consultation with a number of the informants, it was agreed that a full life-story would provide a more congruent research method. I believed a full life-story was needed to illuminate the complex interaction between the woman, her perceptions of reality and her multiple cultural locations.

Footnote: 1 Six aged women were interviewed in the pilot stage; one woman (Florence) was selected and agreed to continue in the extended life-story interview process.
Further, although I had begun the project as a radical move to restore women’s stories to our collective resources, I became aware that the accusations levelled against oral history—unreliable, unverifiable, subjective, invalid (O’Farrell, 1982/3, 1987, is an exemplar of this approach)—revealed an even greater radical potential. Oral history deeply challenges the modernist project. It reveals a self mediated by society that is in turn mediated by history. As Jo May (1996) has argued, oral history (and autobiography) “exists in the space between discourses. It is both contingent and universalistic, individual and social” (p.104). Victoria Barker (1993) stated this position cogently:

I conceive the radical potential of oral history to lie in its interrogation of the very notion of the historical that the discipline of history has bequeathed us. It has the potential to interrogate this understanding of history via an interrogation of those bifurcations upon which...history has conventionally depended. If oral history reveals anything, it reveals the dependence of the public upon the private, of the objective upon the subjective, of the factual upon the perspectival. (1993, pp.3–6)

It was no longer enough to collect stories over a cuppa or to vacuum up lives previously swept under the rug. I aligned my work with radical oral history because of its interrogatory radical potential, which still gave voice to versions of reality which are normally neglected or suppressed.

**Beyond the vacuum cleaner**

Having rejected any empiricist search for truth, it was crucial to locate my work within the breadth of radical oral history. As Victor Minichiello and his colleagues (1995) have argued, the terms life-history and oral history have been loosely used, often interchangeably. On one level what I drew from the women was a life-story, however as the women knew that my interest was in women’s experience as ‘hidden from history’, they framed their responses in relationship to their perception of historical eras. As a result, the accounts must be seen as both life-story and life-history. It became apparent that in telling her story a woman not only shares what meaning she had made of her experience but also shows how she has adapted across eras to the culture by challenging
it, conforming to it or thriving within it (Personal Narratives Group, 1989). A life-story has the potential to illustrate the overt and covert mechanisms acting on us all. Women’s life-stories become a rich source for the exploration of the influences on the gendering of self-identity, revealing a dynamic interplay between the constraints of social structure and the power of individual agency (Personal Narratives Group, 1989).

I believe that even one life-story is a rich source from which to examine and extend the feminist tenet that the personal is political. It allows us to recognise that although women’s lives are structured by biological processes as these are varied by social and cultural pressure, a life-story reveals how a woman makes sense of the macro influences on her life (Maynes, 1989).

Further I hoped that the life-stories of the women of this study might provide metaphors about lifelong learning that could furnish symbolic alternatives to the dominant story of learning that we have today in our Western culture. Luisa Passerini (1989) highlighted the symbolic value of life-stories when she wrote that:

if today we find affinities in the individual stories...we too can conclude that such individual mythology may draw its power and raison d’etre from the very fact of not being ‘true’, but rather from acting as a source of inspiration, encouragement and excitement in the face of a different social reality...women’s autobiographies would not primarily aim to describe actual behaviour but would serve a markedly allegorical role. (p.191)

A vacuum cleaner approach, one that merely extracts the relevant data, has the potential to decontextualise such life-stories, to produce them as ‘speaking for themselves’ in an a-historical, a-cultural way. Women, like all marginalised groups, should not be located as a-historical objects. Indeed, as Kathleen Barry (1989) reminded us, we must work in a way which “locates biography in social interaction and interprets subjective meaning at a critical juncture between political and social history, daily life and epochal events, macrostructures and microdynamics” (p.561). Until we acknowledge the position of women as members of a collective sex-class and as individuals who are unique interpreters of their own life-story, we can never meaningfully understand women’s lives.
As a result of my desire to avoid a vacuum cleaner approach, a decision was made to utilise a mutually exploratory rather than a highly structured, expert-driven interview process. However, the challenges of moving beyond the vacuum cleaner approach soon became apparent. New tensions arose, illustrating that as feminist research methodology is consciously reflexive, each decision whilst being a resolution in itself forms part of a forward spiral of praxis, the inter-relationship of theory and practice.

The traditional interview approach that urges 'objective distancing' by the researcher and suggests a 'value-free' approach has been critically analysed by feminists (Oakley, 1981; Ribbens, 1989; Devault, 1990; Anderson & Jack, 1991) and others (Burgess, 1984; Mischler, 1986a; Minichiello et al., 1995; Bourdieu, 1996). Ann Oakley (1981) argued that a non-hierarchical reciprocal relationship between interviewer and respondent was essential if one hoped to elicit women's experiences, opinions and values. She believed that between the researcher and participant "personal involvement is more than a dangerous bias—it is the condition under which people come to know each other and admit others into their lives" (p.58). Fundamentally Oakley, and others following her model (Klein, 1983; Finch 1984), argue for a non-hierarchical, non-manipulative research relationship which they posit has the potential to overcome the separation between the researcher and the researched. This is indeed a challenge to the vacuum cleaner approach, and was the point from which I began.

Starting with the development of principles for interviewing, I determined that the interview process should strive to minimise the inevitable power imbalance between researcher and researched. It should be mutually educative/reciprocal in nature, be interactive in format and be empowering. I believed that my research had the potential to be empowering by elevating and validating the knowledge and wisdom held by one group of aged women. However, throughout the pilot interviews it became apparent that two
particular tensions needed to be addressed. They were the meaning of a ‘good’ interview and the effects of bio-physical ageing.

The differing meanings of a ‘good interview’
As with all processes in social life, the reality of ‘the interview’ is constructed by the individual and thus reflects their material, social and cultural personal histories. In the initial stages, the women interviewed appeared to hold expectations directly opposed to that of my own. As women who lived their 70 plus years in a society permeated by the dominant scientific model, their standards for what comprised a ‘good’ interview should come as no surprise. Their generalised beliefs were that interviews were conducted by experts, who had a set structure, preferably ‘question and answer’, and who controlled the path of the interview in a relatively formal and impersonal manner. For example, despite my lengthy attempt to explain my approach, Dagmar, who had worked in a university, said to me that she pitied the poor examiners who would have to read her words, but she was sure I would edit out most of her story. She concluded that she would be pleased if I got one or two phrases. Although all of the women had completed formal education only at a basic level (on average leaving school by 14 years of age), they held education in high esteem. For those with children, without exception, they had encouraged their children to attain higher education levels and to become ‘experts’ themselves in a given field. To have an apparent expert ask for their views at first appeared comfortable, but as the interview progressed and I attempted to move away from this authoritative role, by moving into a conversational non-directive mode, problems arose.

Evidence of the inherent power of the researcher was seen in negotiations on the use of a tape-recorder. Although coming to the interview with technical equipment seemed to be congruent with the role of ‘expert’, discomfort was also evident. Comments such as I hate those things and I shouldn’t want that recorded were common. I tried to re-balance
the dynamics by offering to delete or stop the tape at any time at their request, but it was apparent that despite their discomfort the women would conform. Because of my need to use a tape for later analysis, this dilemma was not resolved during the interview and although all of the women appeared to ‘forget’ the tape most of the time, this does not answer the dilemma in principle.

After further discussion with some of the women, it was decided that the best solution would be to offer the women a copy of the transcript to edit, amend or add to, thus facilitating their control over the material. By asking each woman to reflect on what we had covered together, and to have an opportunity to change, delete or clarify issues, I hope to concretely demonstrate their co-ownership of both the process and the product of the interviews (Scanlon, 1993 gives other suggestions for reciprocity between researcher and respondents).

During times in the interview, each the women also revealed her anxiety by asking for validation of an answer: is that right? or is that what you want me to say? This is a clear illustration of how, in their anxiety to please, given a traditional style of interview, the women would have framed their answers to best meet what they saw as the researcher’s needs. When we recognise that the concepts of learning have been primarily drawn from the male experience, this self-imposition of attempting to meet the researcher’s needs puts in jeopardy the uncovering of women’s experiences from their own perspective. The possibility of generating new data together becomes limited.

When I tried to stress my need to hear their stories in their own words and to explore their interpretations, a number of participants became quite concerned. As I tried to refuse to judge their responses as right or wrong, an element of confusion was introduced. I was not playing according to the rules of the game. My initial response to the visible uncertainty and insecurity of a participant was to start asking simple and more direct questions which very quickly led me to an object/subject, non-interactive format. For
example, in the first interview with Irene she began to talk about her childhood on a farm, then stopped after an anecdote about holidays, pointedly folding her hands in closure as she did so. The following exchange ensued:

**BP:** *So both your parents were Australian?*

**Irene:** *Yes. My grandfather as a young man came and settled in that area—he wasn’t born there. Most of my father’s brothers lived around the district.*

**BP:** *So you had relatives etcetera?*

**Irene:** *Oh yes, very close. My mother’s parents lived in [the nearby town].*

**BP:** *So you had both sides of the family living fairly close?*

**Irene:** *Oh yes, yes we did.*

**BP:** *What age did you start school?*

**Irene:** *I was seven - because they wanted my sister and I to go together.*

As my respondent visibly relaxed in known territory, my anxiety rose as I experienced the covert power inherent in such an interview process. We were out of balance again. This format usually continued until I was able to utilise language such as “tell me about what that was like?” in order to draw out a more narrative account.

At this point, it was clear that I was faced with a paradox. If I moved away from the overt power differential apparent in the traditional objective interview approach, I slipped into a relationship that disturbed my participants. I was also aware that in the more conversational format I held equal, but more covert, power. Like Janet Finch (1984), I too “emerged from [early] interviews with the feeling that my interviewees [needed] to know how to protect themselves from people like me” (p.80). I occupied a power position whether I tried to relinquish it or not (Bourdieu, 1996, gives a valuable exploration of symbolic violence and the interview relationship). My feminism had led me to construct the interview as an opportunity to provide a sympathetic interaction between two individuals united by the experience of gender oppression. In doing so it became apparent that I had created a universal and false sisterhood which, if unacknowledged, may have become a tool of manipulation (Patai, 1991).
I came to recognise that I was meeting with the women because of my professional (and yes, personal) interest in their life-stories. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the difference between the need for ‘friendship’ in interview relations (as Oakley (1981) argued) and ‘friendliness’ in the relationship (as Cotterill (1992) argued). I could be, indeed wished to be, friendly, but recognised that I could not necessarily and ethically offer an on-going friendship. Essentially because this was a research project, ours had to be acknowledged as a public relationship (Ribbens, 1989). In practice I have remained in touch over the five years with all nine of the women; with four at the level of an exchange of Christmas cards, and with five I have more regular contact.

In light of my concern about the interview relationship I spent more time in the preliminary interview in order to explain to each woman why I wanted her to tell her own story in her own way (in order to explore the issues according to her logic not mine), why I didn’t want to use a structured question and answer format (issues of definition and control) and to then discuss with each woman how different this was to traditional ways of interviewing. I explained how I hoped this might generate new ways of knowing.

What is now apparent to me is my own shift from a notion of interviewing to one of story telling. Although at times I asked the traditional closed questions (Minichiello et al., 1995) such as where were you born, and at what age did you start school, throughout the sessions I endeavoured to encourage story telling. I did this through specific but open questions, for example, tell me how you found your early schooling, or how did you find life on that remote property, what were the challenges? Through paralinguistics and body language, I created a more informal conversational format to encourage the storying, taking care to recognise that the direction of the storying had a direct impact on the product. This did produce rich and detailed description of the reality perceived by the individual women. It allowed each woman to select what was relevant to explain her life learning, rather than to respond to my format (Minichiello et al., 1995). However, most of all, the ensuing product must be acknowledged as an autobiographical story. This is a
statement of methodology not an apologia. Subjectivity is a legitimate concern for historians (Hamilton, 1990; Tonkin, 1992). Indeed how participants construe their own story reveals at an individual level how history is made. Documentary history tells one type of story line, life-stories present another.

The biophysical effects of ageing

Although this appears to be a more straightforward issue, it is important to note how much impact the simple effects of ageing had on the interview process. In particular in the pilot series of interviews, diminished hearing made interactive interviewing most difficult. With some participants who needed questions repeated, the format became more like a machine gun process than a flowing conversation. I found it effective to sit directly in front of the participant to enable lip-reading as those who experience difficulty hearing may have learned this as a compensatory behaviour, sometimes without realising it.

However, on closer analysis, other aspects of the interview process that I had attributed to ageing were more contentious. I was humbled by one particular experience with an 80 year old participant in the pilot series whom I noticed had a marked tremor in her hand. Because of my knowledge of the ageing processes, I assumed that this was indicative of something like Parkinson’s disease. It was therefore sobering to find that the shaking stopped the instant I turned off my recording machine. This everyday experience for me had been a trying and tense trial for the participant.

A particularly important recurrent observation in the interviews was that the aged women often took a long time to respond to questions. Again, with an awareness of the ageing process, one could assume that perhaps the memory has been lost or the re-call difficult. However, it was from Marjorie Devault’s work (1990) on interviewing women that I became aware of another possible dynamic. I was asking these women to recall women’s experiences and meanings in an area that is not well-documented and the little that is documented uses man-made concepts. Is it any surprise that there was a need for long
thinking times as the possible words and concepts were sorted and rejected over and over again, in a search to verbalise most accurately the woman’s understanding? But again, the burden that a ‘good’ participant frequently places on herself is the self-imposed expectation of immediate response. By allowing long silences, by explaining my perception to the participants, by giving permission and encouraging them to struggle for new words and concepts, I hoped that together we could begin to name new concepts. To attribute these interview issues solely to the effect of ageing, reflected to me how insidious our culture’s ageism can be. Whilst I was attempting to recognise and elevate the wisdom of aged women, I had been in jeopardy of discounting an essential part of their processes because of my stereotypical expectations of ageing.

Another complex issue emerged as I engaged in very lengthy interview periods with the nine aged women. Interview times ranged from one and a half to three hours per session with a minimum of eight sessions. It was this length, and the intimate nature of personal storytelling that provided powerful positive as well as negative issues for me as a feminist researcher. On the positive side, the long time spent with each woman allowed us to develop some trust and some mutual respect, and did encourage the discovery of common ground. Many of the issues raised by Kristina Minister (1991) in her excellent guide “A Feminist Framework for Interviewing” were relevant. Women were indeed uncomfortable at first, speaking in what they saw as ‘in public’, but as time passed and we both shared personal anecdotes and life-stories, a more open environment developed. Throughout the interview process, it was important to encourage each woman’s words both verbally and non-verbally, to become what Minister calls “a mid-wife for women’s words” (p.39). The women were not used to having their stories valued and affirmation became crucial.

At times I became aware of what Renate Klein (1983) and others have named as ‘faking’, the situation where women give what they regard as the socially accepted answer. This in fact became a very exciting issue for, as Klein suggested, rather than trying to eliminate this through designing trick questions, it alerted me to points of multiple truths and
multiple realities. As I recognised points during interview that I judged as ‘faking’, it became important to note this (mentally) as a critical point. Rather than reflecting a ‘false consciousness’ which inappropriately suggests there is a true consciousness, this to me reflected a social construction that was functional for that woman, a point to be analysed, not discarded.

This disparity between my interpretation of faking and that of false consciousness led me to understand the danger of an in-depth interview becoming what Marie-Francoise Chanfrault-Duchet (1991, p.89) called ‘savage social therapy’. If I had embraced the notion that the woman was ‘faking’, my interview process may have become one that probed to reveal incongruence and inconsistency. As I rejected any process of forcing disclosure, or imposing consciousness raising, and allowed each woman to tell her story with her own emphasis and timing, I had to consider whether in doing this I was actually withdrawing from full engagement. This is a question that must be considered by all feminist researchers, and one that I believe will provide different answers in different contexts. I believe however, that this question of the degree of engagement and balance must be asked, then made explicit in the research, so that the context can be fully understood (if not agreed with) by those reading the results. It is this context that generates the ‘data’ and meaning can not be understood if the research relationships are not made apparent (Holland & Ramazanoglu, 1994). I encouraged each woman to tell her own story in her words and in the order that she chose. I engaged in conversational probes, but chose not to challenge or confront any woman. I was aware that I was not a therapist and that I must maintain safety for the participant (Sparkes, 1993).

Levels of engagement however were not only maintained by myself. As Pamela Cotterill (1992) also found with her respondents, the aged women set some boundaries which were impossible for me as a younger woman to cross. Because I had chosen an interactive conversational format, conventions of good manners (McRae, 1994) constrained my ability to probe areas such as sexuality, marital relationships and family
conflict. I found myself comfortable as a respectful, curious and inquiring ‘daughter’. When I noted points where my politics diverged from that of the informant, I recognised it was her story I was collecting. With respect, I became fully engaged in that woman’s story. I chose to ask for elaboration, but not to challenge and critique. Therefore the resultant life-stories are a form of autobiography of each of the women. This approach was highly functional for the interview process for all parties, however in its resolution it spiralled on to create another research issue, that of interpretation and analysis.

Ironing out the creases: ironing in the pleats
The life-story interviews were transcribed verbatim. Each interview was then returned to the interviewee who was encouraged to add to, amend, or edit the text. Daphne Patai (1991) challenges us to consider whether the feminist principle of returning the research is in fact empowerment/affirmation or “just another psychological surrogate, a ‘feel good’ measure by which researchers console themselves for a real imbalance in power that they know—despite all the talk of sisterhood—exists” (p. 148). That question must indeed be considered.

In this project, each of the nine women was keen to receive a transcript. Amendments varied from Irene who only corrected factual errors to Josephine who added detailed embellishment, and pages of supplementary information. Margaret, Emma, Dagmar and Florence edited out personal comments on some family members. Louise was the only woman who chose to amend the text in order to change meaning, and indeed edited not only the first draft, but returned the second, and what I had thought to be the final copy, edited.

This ‘ironing out the creases’ allowed the women not only to correct factual mistakes, but to further engage in the process in a dynamic way. This process modelled the dialogic nature of the project, a process beyond the simple collection of oral accounts. Each
woman then engaged with me in a review interview in which she shared her responses to reading over her life. Responses were two-fold. Firstly all of the women were concerned at the grammatical accuracy of their spoken words.

**Emma:** I was a bit sorry that I don't speak more clearly—not clearly, a better usage of words.

**Margaret:** I seemed strangely incoherent in some ways—your tenses seem to be all over [the place].

**Josephine:** I was appalled that my English was so appalling. I loathe the word 'but' and I used it all the time.

This concern was immediately addressed as each of the women requested that tenses be adjusted and their own editing incorporated. Thus it must be noted the resultant quotations used in this text are not the unexpurgated words 'straight from the horse's mouth'. It is also interesting to note that three of the women, Florence, Josephine and Louise, edited grammar in my questions revealing the importance they each placed on excellence of the written word. These changes to my words were not incorporated. The second, and again uniform, response was one of pleasure mixed with some embarrassment at seeing the achievements of their life so concretely documented.

**Lucy:** I just thought it seemed to be as if I was boasting myself up a bit—that was the thing that got me more than anything! And yet it was all true! So I mean there was nothing in there that wasn't true! (strong emphasis).

**Irene:** Well, I felt that I can say—with pardonable pride—that I finished up in very good positions after only going to a little school out in the country up to sixth class—I felt that was quite good.

**Emma:** I think I feel very fortunate to have you want to do this with me - and to be able to talk about it...[My daughters] are thrilled that I've done it.

I bound each woman's set of her own interview transcripts and returned a final copy to each woman. Their responses were overwhelmingly positive and their pleasure was one of the most positive aspects for me of this project. There has been justified concern with the impact of research methods on vulnerable groups and institutional ethics committees rightly scrutinise the potential dangers for respondents. However the benefits for respondents must also be noted. Life-story interviews have been found to offer a positive
catharsis, self-acknowledgment, self-awareness, empowerment and healing (Hutchison et al., 1994 give an analysis of this). The women of this study each acknowledged the powerful affirmation of a life worth living that emerged through our process together. This was the reciprocity I had hoped for.

It should be no surprise that the autobiographical stories of successful aged women should be overwhelmingly positive. Unlike other storying, the narrator knows the ‘end of the story’. Meaning is made to match the ending, to be congruent (Murphy, 1986). This is not to say that this meaning is therefore invalid, but rather it raises the interpretative dilemma faced by oral historians. As Gayle Greene (1991) has said “(m)emory is our means of connecting past and present and constructing a self and versions of experience we can live with” (p.293). Greene compared nostalgia with memory in that “nostalgia is a forgetting, merely regressive, whereas memory may look back in order to move forward” (p.298). This is not unlike the phenomenon described by Alice Day (1985) as the ‘fortunate life’ interpretation. Similarly to Day’s aged respondents the women in this study all regarded theirs’ as ‘a fortunate life’. They evidenced a functional and positive remembering. However as I ‘read between the lines’, I began to address my role—would I in fact be ‘ironing in pleats’ where they shouldn’t go?

The issue of interpretative authority has been particularly problematic for feminist researchers. As Katherine Borland (1991) illustrated in her article “‘That’s not what I said’: Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research”, we are faced with a contradiction. On one hand, as feminists we hold explicit political interpretations of patriarchy and its impact on women which our respondents may not. In valuing their perspectives we may be faced with interpretations that conflict with our own. To resolve this by allowing the respondents to ‘speak for themselves’ is a methodological illusion as even the selection of one excerpt above another elevates that point.
Oral historians, and others, in the last five years have begun to engage seriously in the debate surrounding 'voice'. Reinharz's 1992 survey of feminist approaches to authorial voice found everything from the serious attempt by the researcher to silence her own voice (Seifer's (1976) work with working class women); to raising her voice to correct unjust historical accounts (Patai's (1988) work with Brazilian women); to speaking together (Shostak's (1989) work with the !Kung woman, Nisa). Whether sharing our authority (Frisch, 1990) or using our authority (Hampsten, 1989), it is clear that whatever choice is made, it must be one which is explicit.

In this project, the decision trail will again be laid open, and both the process and decisions made apparent (Holland & Ramazanoglu, 1994). Aware as I was of the subtle dynamics of the interview relationship, I was not able to see validity in silencing my voice and attempting to let the women speak for themselves. I recognised that my voice had already played a major role in the production of the data. I could not pretend to artificially silence my already active voice. On the other hand, I was concerned that by seeing the women's stories solely as texts I could use my authority to write the women out of their own lives.

What happens when a woman shares her life with a researcher is that she tells a story of herself and of the 'real' people in her life. In differing ways for both the researcher and the narrator these 'real' people become symbolic, dramatic characters representing larger constructs (Borland, 1991). It therefore becomes inevitable that interpretation will vary. I thus determined that these life-stories were most productively seen as 'personal narratives'. The women who told their stories became narrators, and both the women and myself became the interpreters.
Life-history as narrative
Jerome Bruner (1986) has argued that narrative is one of only two primary knowledge forms, the other being the paradigmatic form typified by scientific logic. The transmission of personal and cultural ideas have predominantly been storied across cultures and times, and oral narrative traditions can still be found in literate societies (Passerini's work in Turin, 1987, is an example). As the feminist poet Muriel Rukeseyer says "(t)he world is made up of stories, not atoms" (cited in McRae, 1994, p.195). To narrate a life-history is to *tell* a story and to *create* a story, in a way that is coherent to both the narrator and the audience. By appropriating, interpreting and retelling the past from the perspective of the present, the self constructs itself (Kerby, 1991).

For the historian the recollections of others in a life-history offers a representation of a life, a sequencing and an interpretation, all of which are located in a complex of social interaction, time and place (Mishler, 1986a). These recollections must not be decontextualised, or plucked 'like currants from a cake' but must be acknowledged for their ordering, plot, metaphor and meaning (Tonkin, 1990, p.27). Personal narratives draw on diachronic theory rather than synchronic theory and in so doing replace the snapshot with a moving picture (Bertaux, 1981; Gergen & Gergen, 1984).

Personal narratives, as with all ways of knowing, have two important features in that they are both *situated* and *distributed* (Bruner, 1990, p.106). To consider them as situated illuminates their cultural context, time and place, whilst to see them as distributed is to recognise that they are constructed, or built up, from a choice of formats and paradigms. Sidonie Smith (1987) attributed similar facets to autobiography when she said that the self is a "cultural and linguistic 'fiction' constituted through historical ideologies of self-hood [situated] and the processes of story-telling [distributed] (p.45, italicised terms added)."
**Personal narratives as situated knowledge**

As soon as we acknowledge that a personal narrative is culturally situated, a complex of social positions of the individual become relevant. Interest is not in the internal essence of the individual, but in what that individual can reveal about processes that act “from the outside in” and “from the past to the present” (Bruner, 1990, p.116). Personal narratives can reveal what Carolyn Steedman (1986) aptly named the “landscapes” of a life (p.23).

A key feature of personal narrative is that as people are exposed to popular narratives within their culture they learn how to regard themselves and how to position themselves to be understood by others (Gergen & Gergen, 1993). Each life-history narrative will give insight into one person’s perspective of social practice, however when we synthesise this with other accounts it has the potential to reveal a wider network of social relations (Bertaux, 1981).

How and what people choose from their available cultural meanings, and how they position themselves, reveals their choices of alliance with particular positions. Culturally shaped notions are not only a basis for personal meaning, but become a dynamic for cultural cohesion (Bruner, 1990). In this way distortions become important markers of cultural norms and myths. For example, in this study, Irene reiterated that work in a Sydney woollen mill in the war years was no different from that of peace-time except for some patriotic fund-raising. However in 1943, there was massive strike action across the textile industry as women agitated for fair pay, with the Sydney Morning Herald reporting that on the 26th of February every Sydney mill was idle and 8,000 women out on strike (cited in McMurchy et al. 1983, p.122). Irene was not a factory worker but a clerical worker and therefore may not have been on strike personally but her account presented the work of the mill as just busier during the war. It is possible that strikes may not have

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2 For example, Paul Spencer (1992) found that his elderly Masai informant distorted his life-story in order to enhance himself as an exemplar of his culture and in doing so his narrative could be read to reveal the ideal as well as the personal move towards alliance with the notion of the Masai as warrior.
computed with Irene’s sense of herself as an essential worker and patriot and (although not in a conscious way) are deleted from her narration.

Because the nature of personal narrative is both individual and shared, cultural patterns and shared discourses will be evident (Gergen & Gergen, 1993), however, within each personal narrative there will be movement and re-positioning. Although a life-story may be told as a logical progression, this must be recognised as an activity of (re)presentation rather than a reflection of reality. Discourses are constantly modifying and new discourses emerging, therefore over a life-story, movement and re-positioning must be anticipated. At times, personal narratives may present a struggle to resolve incongruencies between one’s own experience and the dominant cultural narratives surrounding this. Louise’s narrative was typical of this dynamic when she explained how she took pains to ensure that her two sons were placed in a boarding school near her mother when she went alone on an overseas trip of nine months. This preface allows Louise to locate herself within the post-war expectations of a devoted wife and mother, before taking up the subsequent narrative position of ‘an adventurer’. In this way Louise resolved the contradictions between the two positions.

To acknowledge personal narratives as situated allows us to see how individual women make sense of particular times and places, and through their narrative positioning we can understand more about the negotiations possible within dominant cultural discourses. This leads on to the awareness that each individual is active in the telling of her personal narrative, in the construction of her life-story.

Personal narratives as constructed knowledges

(T)elling one’s story is a means of becoming, just as much as is having a story to tell...it is in the stories we tell about ourselves and our tribe...that we seek to unite the separate domains of private and public self, sacred and profane, past and present, feelings and thoughts. (McRae, 1994, p.214)
As a life-story is narrated it is a process of reconstructing rather than simply resurrecting the past (Bodnar, 1996). Further the individual is engaged in an active and dynamic process of self-constructing. She is in fact creating herself with the telling, a process of self narration in its double sense (Kehily, 1995). Hence, the account is both of the past and the future. To draw on meanings and significances of the past in a selective way must be seen as much as a prophecy as a summary (Bruner, 1990). This is an important facet of life-storying as an enabling fiction. I had deliberately chosen women who were seen to be successfully ageing thus it is not surprising that their personal narratives created a positive past and predicted a positive future. Lucy is a good example. Lucy explained that since the age of 12 she has always had to work and across her whole narrative, this is a taken-for-granted facet of life. Now in her 70s she told of her voluntary work in a way that continued this theme, as she gets on with the work that has to be done. Indeed when I have dropped in to see her at the charity stall she staffs, Lucy is always focused on the work, rather than the socialising distraction I offer. Her constructing of self is made congruent from past to present and predicts her future.

The notion of personal narrative as a process of creating a life (rather than merely reporting) is not unlike Vickie Shields and Brenda Dervin’s (1993) concept of ‘sense making’. They propose that:

(i) it is constructings, not constructions, that bridge gaps. To ‘verb’ these nouns forces us to remember that sense made is always in process and that it is the active involvement of the actor in the world that creates personal sense. This suggests that agency and structure, individual and society, person and institution are connected in communicating. (p.79, n.4, original emphasis)

Having recognised personal narratives as both situated and constructed, thus an ideal vehicle through which to explore women’s lives, it is important to first acknowledge some of the contemporary debates that inform the use of such narratives. First, there is the issue of memory, both public and private; second, the particular issues surrounding the narratives of aged women and finally, the issue of narrative and audience.
**Personal narratives and memory**

On one level, memory can be seen as the tool/process by which personal narratives are constructed. Frigga Haug’s (1987) ‘memory-work’ approach is perhaps the best known example of research that utilises the belief that subjectively significant events are those that are remembered and re-told. The interest is not on the accuracy or truth of memory, but what memory as a process of selection and presentation reveals about lives as well as the causal sequences of the story and in the unique rendering of the plot (Portelli, 1991). Indeed if we hold that there can only be multiple truths we are not interested in validating/invalidating recalled events but in the hermeneutics of memory (Crawford *et al*., 1992). Our interest in “a life is not ‘how it was’ but how it is re-told, and reinterpreted and so on: a self-conscious act of expression” (Hamilton, 1990, p.130, original emphasis).

At times, personal narratives will appear ‘ready-made’ as they evidence a selection and structure that has been told and re-told and has become a way to ‘re-present’ a period of life (Kehily, 1995). For example, Josephine and Irene, the two women who never married, had well-rehearsed explanations of their single status; for Irene she was *an unclaimed treasure* whereas Josephine explained that she *loved a lot of men but loved their wives as well*. Such shorthand stories appear to enable the women to maintain private boundaries. They do however also reveal the women’s need to account for a ‘difference’.

At times ‘ready-made’ accounts indicated a narrative position that because of its functionality for the individual has become fixed. Val for example marked her symbolic memories with the phrase *I always remember...*. Liz Stanley (1992b) used Virginia Woolf’s notion of such acts as ‘moments of being’ to argue that such crystal-clear collections of memories are “rafts that link our past and present self” (p.117). For example, in this study, Josephine on two separate occasions explained the reason that she took up nursing rather than a scholarship for commercial art. This pragmatic decision, the
result of consensus in a family meeting, is told almost identically in both accounts. This was a turning point in Josephine’s life and the set story reveals a sense of resolution in which she did not fight the decision but over time had worked it through until it contained a coherency for her that then became fixed. This is a very different sense of set stories to the view that ‘pat’ stories are rehearsed and non-reflective and thus of little validity (Plummer, 1995 is an example of this approach).

However more than just an individual act, memory is also an historical and cultural artefact (Murphy, 1986). “Memories link us to place, to time and to nation: they enable us to place value on our individual and our social experiences, and they enable us to inhabit our own country” (Darian-Smith & Hamilton, 1994, p.1). To explain this process the term ‘composure’ has been coined by the Popular Memory Group. As with personal narratives, memory is at once an individual and collective activity (Popular Memory Group, 1982; Thompson, 1994). We compose or construct our memories, using the meaning frameworks available from our culture.

Over time, we may ‘re-member’ our experiences as public meanings change, illustrating that there is a constant negotiation between public and private memory. This is evidenced in what Alistair Thompson (1994) called ‘memory biography’ which explores the layers of memory and meaning around past events as well as the relationship between subjectivity, memory and public versions of that past (p.158). For example, in this study Val told of her enjoyment of her one year as a boarder in a private girl’s school, then added that perhaps she was university material and that her parents may in fact have been oppressive. She then contrasted her situation to that of her grand-daughter who is doing post-graduate study. It is probable that without the influence of feminism on educational options for women, Val would have not re-membered her last years of schooling in such a way. Thus our interest is focused on to memory and its relationship between public meaning and personal positions.
Lucy Taksa (1994) alerts us to another dimension of memory, that of ‘mis-remembering’ (see also the work of Alessandro Portelli, 1991). In her study of the influenza pandemic of 1918–1919, she found informants often confused this pandemic with the bubonic plague. Rather than discount this because it was factually wrong, Taksa engaged with the narratives at a metaphorical level asking what could the conflation tell of the mentalities of ordinary people (p.77). Similarly in this study, Irene recalled that in World War II she did not invite servicemen to her home because there was only her mother, her sister and herself and therefore that wasn’t comfortable. However, Irene’s mother died in 1930. I would suggest that this mis-remembering is indeed symbolic as Irene’s account alludes to the gendered dangers of war. Thus it becomes apparent that memory has a metaphorical level where the memories can be symbolic rather than strictly accurate.

Again, although visible as an individual construction arising from the process of personal narrative, such metaphors must be recognised as culturally specific. As with all language, metaphors reveal certain facets and conceal others. They can describe a reality and create a reality. Whilst often regarded as solely poetic or imaginative, metaphors are in fact core conceptual systems (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). They provide ‘interpretative repertoires’ (Potter & Wetherell, 1995, p.80). For example, on an individual level, one of the women of this study, Josephine, spoke of her life as a constant adaptation, of having to ‘open doors’ (Vilkko, 1994 discusses a range of metaphors used by women to describe their life course).

However, when a metaphor is collectively adopted and sustained over time, it then has the potential to become a collective myth. Although it is possible that metaphors may be almost clichés, even clichés have potential to guide an individual by appearing to make life understandable (Norton, 1989). Thus for example it can be argued that in Australian male narratives, the ‘bushman’ myth has perpetuated a particular form of masculinity (Lake 1993). In women’s narratives, it is more probable that we may hear the ‘woman as nurturer’ metaphor in its various incarnations (Darian-Smith, 1994 gives an example of
The single women of this group are a good illustration. Despite not having the traditional roles of wife and mother, both of these women organised much of their personal narrative through the metaphor of mothering.

Collective myths may become a form of collective memory that can literally be handed down through generations through archetypal forms (Passerini, 1987; Hamilton, 1994). In Australia, the bushman archetype can be seen to continue in currency as evidenced by the penchant of urban males for the rugged, off-road four wheel drive vehicles that in fact rarely leave the sealed surfaces of the city. The woman as nurturer has been evidenced in modified incarnations since the white settlement of Australia as Anne Summers (1975) illustrated with the term ‘God’s police’ and Marilyn Lake (1994) with ‘maternal citizens’. This raises the central facet of personal narratives: the dimension of gender. It demands a separate exploration.

**Personal narratives as gendered**

Feminists have long argued that theory about, and for, women should be grounded in women’s lives, and women’s words have been rightly privileged as worthy of study (Personal Narratives Group, 1989; Gluck et al., 1991). Women’s personal narratives offer the opportunity to examine the dynamic interaction between the constraints of social structure and the power of individual agency as women negotiate a gendered self-identity (Duruz, 1994). Women are a sex-class and their personal narratives reveal this in its complexity (Barry, 1989), thus to collect women’s personal narratives is both a political and intellectual act. Women’s personal narratives reveal the impact of dominant linguistic concepts and form and the impact of this on women’s voice (Devault, 1990). Finally, as my interest is in the personal narratives of aged women, it has been crucial to acknowledge the particularities of this form of gendered narrative.
Language
It has been argued that women must construct their meanings through a language that is man-made and that therefore they are constrained in what it is possible to say or think (Spender, 1980). However, language cannot be separated out from the discursive field in such a simple way. It cannot be denied that the very metaphors that are available to women are primarily located within patriarchal discourses, and that from God’s police to Super-mum, Australian women have been exhorted to particular positions through cultural metaphors. Language must be seen as only one part of the complex.

Not only do the available personal narrative metaphors limit women, but the narrative form provides a similar constraint. The monomyth, a story that places the character as central to a heroic trajectory, is the dominant model of Western personal narratives (Gergen & Gergen, 1993). This archetype rarely accords with female experience which rather than being unidirectional exhibits story lines that are multiple, recursive and intermingled with self and other (Gergen & Gergen, 1993). The lack of resonance with their culture’s dominant narrative form acts as an under-recognised impediment to women as they attempt to create a personal story.

Carolyn Heilbrun (1988) has argued that because women do not have a compatible narrative form through which to constitute a life they “mute both their pain and their accomplishments” (p.22). In a similar vein, Sidonie Smith (1987) concluded that “the male generic contract forces the life and vitality out of the [women’s] autobiography” (p.62). Mary and Kenneth Gergen (1993) go even further and argue that the male narrative form has so little resonance with women’s experience that women are unable to index their lives in a meaningful way with emotional instability the end result (p.215).

Whilst fully acknowledging that women who construct their personal narratives based on male-archetypes may find little resonance in the male monomyth, I would argue that there always has been an optional narrative form available to women. I would describe this as a
relational form in which women narrate their experiences in relation to others, ensuring that the ‘others’ (husband, child) in their lives stay central. It cannot be denied that this narrative form often relegates a woman to the margins of her life, leaving her vulnerably unable to define herself except ‘in relation’. However we must be alert to the possibility that women may adapt this narrative form in a positive way. This seemed indeed to be the case of the women of this study with the exception of Louise who, through the entirety of her narration, attempted to adapt the monomyth. Overall the other women created a more ecological sense of selfhood that challenged the egocentric male monomyth.

However, I would strongly support the underlying concern that women do not have an empowering narrative form readily available. I share the belief that personal narratives allow profound, organising principles of a life to emerge and be maintained and that for many women the dominant archetype is dysfunctional. With Heilbrun (1988) I would argue that “(t)here will be [enabling] narratives of female lives only when women no longer live their lives isolated in the houses and the stories of men” (p.47).

Voice
Just as women can be limited by narrative form, their personal narratives may reveal limitations of voice. Carol Gilligan (1982) first developed the concept of women’s voice in her path-breaking work on women’s moral development: a development she posited led to a ‘different voice’. More recently with her colleagues she has developed a methodology for hearing woman’s voice or its silencing through indepth interviewing (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). This must not be read as a search for the authentic voice of woman however. As women’s narratives have the potential to reveal multiple voices that is where the interest lies (Opie, 1990). These multiple voices reflect the psychological facets of interest to Brown and Gilligan but equally can reveal multiple positions within gendered discourses (Davies, 1994).

\footnote{Hooton (1992) has a similar position on women’s life writing.}
Voice is not just of interest in its speaking but also in its silence or suppression. Although we cannot know whether a silence is a conscious or an unconscious act, awareness of both possibilities must be maintained. In some women’s personal narratives, silences may reflect a self-censorship, a maintenance of what is judged appropriate to be shared. This is what Jean Duruz (1994) has named as ‘doubly private’ in that the narratives locate in the private of the domestic sphere and the private of the negotiation of female subjectivity (p.176). Thus silence within personal narrative acts as a gatekeeper between the private and the public (Kehily, 1995). At other times, silence may suggest a total lack of engagement with an issue; it is not relevant for that woman. Both are a function of repression and thus demand acknowledgment (Samuel & Thompson, 1990). However, in our attention to voice and silence we must not create an artificial dichotomy. We must recognise that women’s voice may also be incoherent, fragmented or simply entangled with other voices (Davis, 1994). Above all, it must be seen as a fluid and dynamic indicator of gendered lives.

Personal narratives of aged women
Finally, it is crucial to acknowledge the particular issues that are relevant to the personal narratives of aged women. Life and the story of that life are internally related; they are “part of the same fabric in that life informs and is formed by stories” (Widdershoven, 1993, p.2). As an aged woman narrates a life she may tell of a seamless, unified self in which little appears contested. This form of ‘sense-making’ must be respected particularly at a time in life where reflection may be a crucial aspect of a functional life review. A narration that allows for the construction of a coherent identity of self is a positive dynamic for a group who may be experiencing dislocation and loss (Hamilton, 1994). As a woman tells of her successful life, we can hear the efforts and contributory factors that allow her to maintain a positive self-image (Ochberg, 1994). Indeed this dynamic forms
the basis for reminiscence therapy that addresses severe depression in the elderly (Coleman, 1986).

However rather than reading a positive construction as merely a gendered gloss, I believe it should be recognised as a gendered adaptation. What a woman elevates or mutes tells us of the storying necessary for her to 'inhabit her own country'. We learn about both the adaptations and the country. A life review narrative has the potential for a woman to assert that she has become a person, not one of the stereotypical aged (Crisp, 1995). As an aged woman draws on and elevates certain facets of the past, to create 'the world we have lost' (Samuel & Thompson, 1990) she is telling us about the contrast to her life today, revealing as much about what it is to be an aged woman in the late twentieth century as what it was to be a young woman in earlier years. For example in this study Florence, Irene and Dagmar spoke with detail and pride about their range of clerical jobs. These are not career narratives in any sense, however they do reflect what those three women saw as a valued place in society in the past, one which is not possible to bring into their identity today as aged women.

Women's personal narratives are located in a particularly illuminating place when our interest is in the interaction of individual subjectivity and cultural location. Women are hampered by the limitations of patriarchal discourses and yet this very dynamic allows us to explore how women move within these constraints. Ultimately the fact that each of these women was able to construct an enabling and coherent personal narrative stands as testimony. Having understood the ramifications of understanding life-stories as personal narratives that are situated, constructed and gendered, it remains to make explicit the analytic strategies used in the project.
Personal narrative analysis

(All autobiographic memory is true. It is up to the interpreter to discover in which sense, where, and for which purpose. (Passerini, 1989, p.197)

Just as personal narratives reveal multiple truths, their analysis demands an approach on multiple levels. The personal narratives collected in this study were analysed on four levels: the macro, the meso, the micro and the interactional. Through the macro analysis it was possible to locate the narratives in their cultural and historical time and place, revealing collective meanings as they relate to individual experience. The meso analysis drew on the personal level shedding light on individual values, interpretations and positioning. On the micro level, narratives were examined for the subtleties of the telling, exploring emotions and voice in particular. Finally, the interactional analysis recognised that these narratives were a product of the relationship between myself and the narrator, and that particular outcomes were generated as the woman’s story, my story and our interview relationship coalesced. This analysis was essentially a socio-symbolic approach (Chanfrault-Duchet, 1991) that drew on multidisciplinary sources of narratology, textual analysis, psychology, anthropology and sociology. Above all, this analysis aimed for a synthesis that would be truly transdisciplinary.

Macro analysis

At this level attention is directed to what a personal narrative can reveal about the culturally specific processes that impact on all women, drawing on their situated nature. Discourses of self, dominant prescriptions, and limited positions for women all work at a macro level. Further, models for the composition of a narrative are culturally typical thus enabling only certain relationships of self to society to be possible. Finally, a macro analysis can reveal the variable impact of historical events on the lives of individuals by illuminating cohort similarities and differences.
As a woman grows up in a specific time and place, she has available to her a limited range of meanings of what it is to be a woman, what Sidonie Smith (1987) has called “historical ideologies of self” (p.45). Much of this will be constructed as ‘natural’ positions for women that are uncritically assumed and acted from (Gergen & Gergen, 1993). To explore what women take for granted, and what they assume to be natural and uncontested, allows us to see the commonalities across women, illuminating the particularities of being a ‘good woman’ of that era.

These dominant discourses can be understood at two levels. There will be a number of collective myths that will, for example, reveal what it was to be a young Australian early this century. These may include concepts based on the White Australia policy and colonial attitudes. For this group of women, there were in the main gendered constructions. Thus we must be alert for historical modifications of the dutiful daughter, the good mother, the serving wife and the passive old woman. The narratives of the nine women confirm Marilyn Lake’s (1994) thesis that from the turn of the century Australian women have been co-opted by the notion of ‘maternal citizens’. However collective myths are not monolithic therefore how women conform, challenge, counter or thrive within these dominant discourses enables further understandings to emerge.

Within narrative patterns there will however be moments of contradiction. These will often be separated in the text and must be acknowledged as illustrative of a more decentred self (Opie, 1990). For example, compare the following two contradictory comments from Florence:

**Florence:** You picked up housewifery skills... It was supposed to be instinctive I think—to enjoy doing that—that was a woman’s role (matter of fact tone).

**Florence:** [My husband and I] shared everything—the money we shared and the work we shared. I don’t think in all my married life I vacuumed more than half a dozen times (strong tone). Everything was fifty-fifty (quiet tone).
Not only does a woman have access to a limited number of discourses, she also has access to a limited range of ways of telling her life as a story. Three narrative models are typically found in Western culture: the epic, the romanesque and the picaresque (Chanfrault-Duchet, 1991). Most of the nine women's personal narratives accord with the epic model, a narrative model of conformity that identifies with the core values of the culture, however Louise, Dagmar, and Josephine used the romanesque model to construct a life where change has been possible through notions of progress and individual challenge. Only occasionally was there a glimpse of the picaresque model in the personal narrative of Louise where she evidenced an ironic or questioning position to the hegemonic values of her culture. These models do overlap, however the adoption of any one of these models reveals a dynamic that enables only certain tellings of a life to be possible.

Using a more psychological approach Agnes Hankiss (1981) has suggested that four models may be evident in telling of the progression of a life from child to adulthood—the dynastic, the antithetical, the compensatory, and the self-absolutory. The antithetical sees a linear development 'against all odds'; the compensatory embellishes childhood thus defining later negatives as external; the self-absolutory links a negative childhood in a linear way to a negative adulthood. In this study only the dynastic model which explained life as a direct and linear continuation of a positive childhood was apparent.

Finally, a macro analysis must recognise that social experiences will take on differing meanings depending on the age of the individual at the time of experiencing (Elder, 1981; Stewart, 1994; Bodnar, 1996). Anne Stewart (1994) in reviewing the literature on generational units and socio-cultural events has found agreement on the following age-related cohort effects. Events happening in childhood may affect fundamental values and expectations, such as family values and assumptive frameworks. For most of the women of this study the Depression impacted on their childhood. In adolescence/early adulthood effects will be seen on opportunities and life choice awareness and identity choices, such
as vocations; in this cohort the impact was of a world war. Social historical events occurring in mature adulthood can be expected to impact on behaviour such as labour force participation; whilst if occurring in later adulthood may cause new choices and revision of identity (Stewart, 1994, p.232). It is crucial to note that many other influences must be factored into such an analysis: socio-economic group, physical location and family types are just a few. However, the impact of socio-historical events on everyday lives form a major part of narrative focus. The commonalities and diversities of effects of these events must be an object of interest.

**Meso analysis**

Whilst macro analysis is primarily interested in personal narrative as situated, meso analysis examines it as constructed. Interest turns to what can be illuminated through an analysis of the individual process of narration, the patterns across tellings, and the positioning that may be seen through the choice of language and constructs (Chanfrault-Duchet, 1991; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Rosenthal, 1993; Davis, 1994). In this study particular attention was paid to style, process, patterns and phrasing found within the personal narratives. However it must be noted that whilst focusing on each woman’s narrative in depth, a cross-analysis awareness must be held in tension and mitigate against an essentialist approach.

**Narrative style**

The style of narration can reveal indicators for consideration (Etter-Lewis, 1991). For example, a unified contiguous style where words and phrases link directly to a central idea may indicate an uncontested construction. This was most evident in the narratives of mothering. A segmented style where answers seem to contain irrelevant data can be indicative of a need for attention to a different construction from the cultural norm expected. Louise typified this with her answer to my question if she had any regrets in her life. She answered by saying that she regretted not having read the newspaper. This
incongruence for me opened up a myriad of further questions to be considered about that life. Finally a narrative style in which the narrator re-enacts a conversation requires consideration of this as a strategy that allows some personal distance to be maintained or alternatively that may emphasise deep personal engagement. This was evident in Josephine’s account when she re-enacted the conversation of the autocratic Army matron who grilled her as a young woman recruit. In doing so she revealed an ambivalence to this senior woman whom she both admired and feared.

Narrative process
If following Rosenthal (1993), the notion of narrative process is divided into narration, description, argumentation or theorising, we become alerted to the narrator’s positioning within the process. A straight narration tells of a single set of events sequenced in a meaningful way. This was usually found in areas that the women saw as an uncontested ‘this then that’, such as “we got married and our first child was born in...” Description will explain and embellish a static structure such as “where we lived”. At a more analytical level argumentation is seen when abstracted elements from outside the story are added, revealing the recognition of other factors drawn in by the narrator. For example Lucy commented that on leaving school she did not consider what jobs she would enjoy or be good at because it was the Depression and everyone at that time was relieved to have any employment; and it was more important to contribute to the family’s financial security. Finally, theorising enables us to see the narrator’s present orientation as she reflects back on past events. Margaret typified this when she recalled her early mothering years.

Margaret: I think we sort of set a fairly high standard for the way the home ran, you know - how the children were dressed!, fed them properly! (strong tone). And it’s a high standard that’s very hard to achieve, so you didn’t get a tremendous amount of satisfaction from it (laughing).

A different application of theorising was evident in Louise’s account when I asked her about the resources available for family planning advice in the post-war period. Louise responded with a history of the development of the pill followed by a history of
contraception in biblical times. In doing so her theorising drew attention away from her own life to the related but more distanced histories. Through this awareness of narrative process, each woman’s account was able to be re-read for process that was uncontested to fully theorised.

Finally it is possible to consider the personal narrative as a process of reminiscence. Wong and Watt (1991) have identified five categories that are useful in the analysis of personal narratives: the integrative in which reality is reconciled with the ideal and a coherence is made between past and present; the instrumental whereby values and wisdom are shared; the escapist typified by recall of the ‘good old days’; the obsessive that focuses on guilt or disappointment; and the simple narrative that only provides simple anecdotes. This taxonomy allowed the personal narratives to be examined for these differing processes of memory.

Narrative patterns
Across any set of narratives, key patterns may be found that reveal the thematic fields constructed by each woman. Through attention to the order of telling, what is selected, and what is left out, personal values within life-stories emerge (Rosenthal, 1993). Not suprisingly, the narrative themes of the nine women revolved around inter-personal relationships, family and community involvement. These are readily available women’s themes and the essential next analytic step is to think beyond these obvious categories to discover/uncover further categories. This was particularly evidenced by the choice of language used by the women. It was often found that women began with a statement such as of course in my day we were...[for example] mothers first. What then followed illuminated exactly what was included for that particular woman in this unproblematic category. This highlights both the ‘taken-for-granted’ nature of some discourses as well as an awareness of the changing, historical constructedness of values.
Narrative patterns were also mapped to note how the length of an episode as told related to the comparative length of that experience in the lifespan (Portelli, 1991). For example, Florence and her husband worked for seven years in a mixed business only to end up bankrupt, losing their war service home. Florence tells of this in a few sentences. Thus alerted we can begin to hypothesise about the reasons behind that particular truncation.

Equally revealing will be the use of binary logic. The deep permeation of such thinking has been well demonstrated by feminists and others as a narrative pattern that both constructs and controls. As a woman positions herself as a particular form of wife, mother or woman, she takes a position of also choosing what not to be. For example, when Lucy was particularly scathing about wives who she saw as clinging vines or leaners, she was placing herself as a wife who pulled her weight and was 'other' to that.

Finally, narrative patterns may illustrate differing relationships through contrasting styles of telling (Bruner, 1990). A vivid impressionistic narration of one event may be contrasted with a removed, distant account of what may on the surface appear to be similar. For example, when Irene spoke of her boss at the woollen mill she painted a detailed picture of their working relationship, however in contrast, when she spoke of the medical specialist for whom she subsequently worked, a respectful distance was maintained by minimal personal description and the reference to him solely as Doctor. Narrative patterns can reveal how certain characters may be demonised, others regularly idealised (Samuel & Thompson, 1990). We learn a lot about Lucy as she disparages women whom she sees as clinging vines and refuses to idealise anyone in her belief that we are all the same under the skin. Such patterns do not indicate fact or fiction but the organising principles that enable a life-story to be coherent.

**Key Phrases**
The last consideration at a meso analytic level is the determination of language, especially of key phrases. These are formal markers which indicate the relationship of self to
society, and may express harmony, indifference, ambiguity or conflict to name but a few (Chanfrault-Duchet, 1991). Hampered by the language of their culture the women at times evidenced what Devault (1990, p. 97) calls ‘linguistic incongruence’ as the language they had available did not adequately reflect their personal experience. Lucy evidenced this when she tried to explain why she didn’t join the armed forces in World War II.

**Lucy:** No [the Armed Forces] wasn’t me (quiet tone). I don’t think my father would have approved either of that sort of thing (laugh). Because you know—it’s a strange thing—the ones who joined the forces seemed to get a bad name—I’m not just saying they were bad—I mean I had cousins in it—and—but you know they had a name for girls—who were - and I suppose—after all who knows when it could happen—they could have died the next day, you know (strong tone).

It appears that Lucy is searching to express something significant which is not well described by the readily available concepts.

Typical phrases noted in this study included ‘it was natural’ and ‘of course’ revealing how hegemonic discourses were reflected in these women’s narratives. A further key phrase of note was the use of ‘we’ when actually relating an experience of ‘I’ with this collective pronoun indicating the woman’s identification within the position of women as a group. Such universalising gestures reflect the preconstructed nature of discursive formation that produces a sense of “always, already there, conveying the sense of what everyone already knows” (Hennessy, 1993, p. 77). Finally the repetition of the phrase ‘you know’ can be seen to be more than a conversational habit (Devault, 1990). Very often it formed a request to me, the audience, for validation of that aspect of the narration, and as a listener I responded with non-verbal encouragement for further elaboration. It also acted as a marker for ideas that the woman took as uncontested by people ‘like us’, in other words it assumed that I shared that understanding.

The meso analysis provided an opportunity to attempt to enter the country that was described by each woman. It particularly revealed how each woman moved as an individual within the cultural landscape, what was significant to her and how she interpreted and acted on the everyday world she saw around her.
Micro analysis
So much is lost when an oral account is transcribed into text. It is crucial that these oral sources are always acknowledged as oral sources (Mishler, 1986b; Portelli, 1991). These are women talking about their lives, their values, their life learnings—it is neither ethically nor intellectually rigorous to reduce their accounts solely to words on a page. We talked together, we shared and in differing ways each of the women and I made connections.
My work at a micro level reflected my commitment to retain and maximise the emotionality and complexity of these sources (Middleton, 1993). Transcripts were notated in three ways: for pauses/hesitations, for emotional expression of the narrator and for my emotional response. Above all, the tapes were regularly re-played to allow each woman’s telling to be re-experienced in its fullest sense.

Pauses and hesitations
Pauses and hesitations are part of everyday speech and as we listen to each other their effect is subsumed as part of our overall understanding. To record them on the narrative transcript allows us to maintain this level of meaning and to return to moments of hesitation to seek patterns across the whole (Devault, 1990; Portelli, 1991). Length of pauses were notated as there is a considerably different effect of a short pause compared to a long pause, particularly as I had supported long pauses during the interview process by my body language and para linguistics. The following extract from Florence provides a good example:

Florence: Where do you come from?
BP: I actually grew up in Latrobe Valley, Victoria.
Florence: (short pause)—So you’re not a Canberran?
BP: I’m getting there. I’ve been here for 15 years so I’m working on it.
Florence: I’ve only been here 12, but I find—(short pause)—I don’t know whether it’s better now than it was—but I find—the—(long pause) class distinction and the—(short pause) educational distinction here is much wider than I was ever used to.
Here Florence’s hesitations suggest an awareness of class stratification and that she would share further details only if she felt a compatibility. After describing some of the class differentials in her retirement village Florence then said *in the ultimate it doesn’t matter.* After a medium pause, I replied *it’s really the quality of your life as you go along the path.* Florence quickly replied *yes, I don’t know what your political affiliations are but I’ve always been working class.* She then described at length a recent interaction with the then Federal Labor Member of Parliament Ros Kelly. Hesitations and pauses thus become a gold mine for further theorising and understanding.

*Emotions*

The next dimension of micro analysis is that of emotions. Emotionality has rightly received attention by feminist researchers as it is congruent with feminist principles of discounting the objective/subjective and rational/emotional dichotomies (Oakley, 1981; Ribbens, 1989; Devault, 1990). The power of the speaking voice can demand that notice be taken of that part of the account (Opie, 1990). As I re-listen to certain tapes, I can visualise for example the woman’s upright body and her firm facial expressions or later uncertain quietness.

Emotions can reflect predictable reactions within personal narratives: Emma’s sadness as she told of nursing her husband to his death; Josephine’s joy as she was at last accepted into the army nursing corps. But equally they can appear incongruent and thus demand attention. For example, Irene giggled in a girlish way at a number of points across her personal narrative and these were to prove to be points that when seen as a whole appear to indicate private territory. In contrast, Lucy when explaining that her husband was against her going to work, said she decided that *if I’m dying you’ll never know.* She followed this with a laugh. I would suggest that the incongruence of the emotion and the substantive content emphasised the depth of the dilemma Lucy faced as a mother who needed to work for the family financial future.
The following extract from Emma’s account of her father’s return from World War II illustrates the significance revealed when emotions are recorded.

**Emma:** I’m very fond of my mother - I always got on with her, but it was the (pause) difficulty of living with Dad and a brother who’d been de-mobbed and was waiting for an operation on his leg. And he was a silent type and Dad a silent type (quiet, brusque tone). They were a pain in the neck. Mum and I used to keep each other sane (quiet tone) not that she was disloyal to my father in any way at all, but I felt sorry for her (firm tone).

This excerpt was followed by a silence. This was the only time in her personal narrative that Emma used a brusque tone which suggests some significance. It suggests this time was problematic. Her quiet tone enhanced a sense of her alliance with her mother, however the subsequent use of the firm tone to describe her mother’s loyalty seems to emphasise this account as one in which loyalty to the privacy of the family is paramount. I would argue that through the recording of emotions it is possible to see that the pain is muted but still revealed. Whether it be sadness, disappointment, confidence or pride, the many emotions expressed were used to reveal the fullness of each life account.

**Researcher reaction**
The last level of micro analysis was the recording of my own reactions. Emotional responses of the researcher are increasingly becoming seen as a legitimate object of social research (Ellis 1991; Ellis & Flaherty, 1992). However researchers must resist becoming “emotional exhibitionists” (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992, p.3); rather this process must be one in which self-reflection allows for a deconstruction of the research process (Packwood & Sikes, 1996). As I had determined from the start that I would use an interview style that encouraged narrative choice by the narrator and therefore that I would not challenge, or interrupt, there were many moments when as a listener I reacted. On reflection these reactions were of three types. Firstly I sometimes reacted with empathy as the story being told accorded with my experience and I felt ‘for’ and ‘with’ the woman. For example, when Val and Margaret told me of their joy working with children with disabilities, I
could not help but recall my own similar feelings. Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack (1991) warn that to be too confident about what a woman is saying is dangerous and I concur, however this was recorded as my first and gut reaction, to be returned to later for deeper reflection.

The opposite reaction also occurred when a woman told of an experience in a way that angered me. This reaction was most frequent when any of the women told me of the great lengths they went to in order to keep their husbands happy; for example, giving up learning the piano because of the noise (Emma), not keeping a part-time job because of tax implications (Louise) or chopping the wood so that he could go to the 'footy' (Lucy). These were crucial moments for reflection as they pointedly showed different landscapes and challenged me to think through the implications of living in that place of the world. However, I must acknowledge that I also believed them to be of deeper psychological portent. I am a daughter of this generation and on one level these are my mothers. As they tell of living within their particular patriarchal world, I am angry and saddened for my mother and mothers, and because in many ways this is the world I have actively rejected through my process of 'growing-up'. Through this work it now becomes apparent to me that I rejected that world without critical analysis and certainly never strove to understand how my mother(s) may have thrived within that world. Just as I hope our daughters will not see us as 'other', this awareness of almost an automatic ideological knee-jerk reaction has alerted me to re-think my own feminism. This has enriched my life and this study.

Finally, there was my reaction of confusion, which was a simpler indicator of a meaning that I could not grasp. At times this alerted me to a gap in my historical knowledge. For instance, when I asked women if they had considered joining the women's armed service branches at the start of World War II all but one told me that this just didn't seem to be on the agenda. It was not until I checked my history that I found that these services were not instigated until 1942.
More simple moments of confusion I usually noted during the interview and asked clarifying questions at the end. Although these were often simply a lack of full explanation, at times they indicated an assumptive path I was taking as a listener that was not matched by the narrative path of the woman. For example in the middle of explaining her lifelong interest in transpersonal psychology, Louise apparently diverged into explaining the historical biography she wrote. It was not until the end of that session that I realised Louise linked both stories to ways of learning about the metaphysical. As I held a different sense of historical biographies, I remained confused until she made that link. Again, a marker is found that indicates two world views interacting. Thus each of these micro analytic points enriched and deepened the analysis.

Interactional analysis

The relationship of researcher and researched has rightly become a central issue in social science today. At an analytic level, it is particularly relevant at two points in this work. First, it must be acknowledged that these narratives are the result of the relationship between each woman and myself. Second, my interpretative role is an active one at every point as I choose what to highlight and what to make visible (Holland & Ramazanoglu, 1994). As Alessandro Portelli concludes the respondent “does not speak in the abstract, but speaks to the historian, with the historian and, in as much as the material is published, through the historian (1991, p.56, original emphasis). The story of a life as told to a particular person is in a very deep sense a joint product of these two people. The ‘self’ can only be revealed in a ‘transaction’ (Bruner, 1990, p.115); one which occurs between the teller and her audience.

The relationship between myself and each woman was unique, and will be explicated in the following chapter. The women chose to tell a story that they believed matched my question and consciously selected how to respond. Alysson Holbrook (1995) notes that the two individuals bring differing background, content and performance factors to the
interview event. Another researcher would have generated other subtleties within the stories if not totally different stories (Bertaux, 1981; Portelli, 1991). In recognition of this dynamic, I follow Portelli’s injunction to make as overt as possible my influence and to record my questions and comments in the transcripts and extracts used and not privilege my role through ‘objective invisibility’ (1991, p.54). Within a postmodern analysis it is crucial to acknowledge who it is that is speaking, the site from which they speak and the positions available to them as speakers within that relationship (Davies, 1994). This is relevant to both the narrator’s position and my own as a researcher.

Throughout the transcriptions I have recorded my own subjective experiences that may have impacted on the generation and analysis of these presentations of self. I am very conscious of the debates surrounding the balance between researcher and researched (see Reinharz, 1992, pp.258–63 for a feminist analysis of this), and believe that we must begin to take risks by self-consciously, but not self-centredly, writing ourselves into the text. To give an example, what would it say if I withheld the information that like two of the women in this study, my mother also had a ‘nervous breakdown’. As I listened to these accounts it could be argued that even through body language, I may well have been encouraging their telling and perhaps I reflected a compassion and acceptance. Certainly in their analysis, I cannot help but use my own pain and learning and my subsequent lifelong interest in this area to shed light on these two accounts. Following feminist principles of laying open process, this dimension was noted on the transcripts and recorded where relevant in this text.

Both the recording of my own emotions in the micro analysis and attention paid to the interactional exchange level were attempts to address and not hold aside my own subjectivity. It was not a navel-gazing exercise but one which strove “to use self-awareness in order to contextualize the specificity of myself and to transcend it” (Okley, 1992, p.2, emphasis added). My reactions indicated the historical subjectivities of self as I have constructed them, thus my discomfort or comprehension allowed competing or
compatible discourses to be acknowledged. This forced me to identify and question my values, stereotypes and truths. It drew attention to the paradoxical, the contradictory and the marginal as well as the compatible (Opie, 1990).

Although no longer talking face to face with each woman, importantly I have remained in dialogue. Ultimately success was noted when I became aware of what Gadamer (1975) has called a ‘fusion of horizons’. As I brought my horizons to these personal narratives, I found that the horizons of the women and myself both shifted to new ground. I understood more of my world and more of the world of each woman. I would agree with Pierre Bourdieu’s (1996) statement that:

the interview can be considered a sort of spiritual exercise, aiming to obtain through forgetfulness of self, a true transformation of the view we take of others in the ordinary circumstances of life. (p.24, original emphasis)

Over the five years that I have immersed myself in the nine personal narratives, there have been a number of times that I have utilised one or more of the women’s insights to reflect on my own personal crisis. Thus the dialogue continues and it is apparent that my own autobiography has been deeply affected by this work (Cotterill & Letherby, 1993, made a similar finding).

Conclusion
In order to maximise their potential, these narratives were analysed at four very different levels, each allowing something different to be seen. It is hoped that the detailed explanation of the strategies used with these narratives will allow the reader to comprehend how understandings in this thesis were generated, whilst at the same time documenting processes that may be of value to others.
The extracts from the personal narratives are edited for presentation in this thesis in a way that aims for clarity of my role as editor whilst maintaining a sense that these are oral accounts. I have noted the speaker’s tone of voice and where relevant, pauses and silences, to allow the reader to consider the (in)congruence of text and tone. The conventional use of square brackets to acknowledge my editing was most often used to remove identifying information such as names. Similarly extraneous detail was edited by the use of ellipsis. When two extracts were used from separate interviews I indicate this by repeating the narrator’s name at the start of the second passage. Finally, in order to draw the reader’s attention to significant words or phrases in the text, I have highlighted these in bold print. It is hoped that this editing assists the reader to hear the voices of both the researcher and the narrator.

Women’s life-stories are valued for their potential to shed light on the interaction of society, the individual and her historical times. As the life-stories are placed beside each other and beside other data such as the popular writings of the time they became fuller as life histories (Bertaux, 1981). The women’s personal narratives and the popular sources of the time most frequently revealed the way that some discourses become taken-for-granted. Much was presented simply as commonsense. The question then arises how do we set such personal narratives in a cultural context in order to reveal the location from which a woman speaks at any given time.

At times, it was possible to see that the woman was reflecting a discourse that was available at the time of the experience. I have used popular texts of the time such as the Australian Women’s Weekly to illuminate this link, and to illustrate how discourses work beyond the simple level of language. In doing this, I am not suggesting that any woman followed the injunctions of magazines of the time, rather that the popular texts and

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4 In a small number of cases, the same extract has been used in two different places of the thesis. I have chosen to do this to avoid sending the reader back to earlier text, and because I have found some extracts to be significant in more than one way.
personal narratives reveal how discourse works at both an individual and a collective level. At other times, I suggest that a woman is speaking in a way that is more congruent with a later discourse, such as late twentieth century feminism. In this way we can see that history produces subjects rather than subjects producing history (Munro, 1996). It is possible to see how discursive practices make particular subjectivities thinkable and speakable.

The methodological developments across this project have indeed been challenging. To hold feminism in a productive tension with poststructuralism and with radical oral history has allowed a deeper analysis of the personal narratives to emerge. Ultimately however these are real women living real lives, and before engaging in what I learnt from their lives, I must introduce them to you as nine women worth knowing.
In this chapter, I will introduce you to the nine women whose personal narratives provided the basis for this study. They generously shared their stories with me and I am aware that in this thesis I have only been able to harvest a small part of what could be drawn from their accounts. As a feminist, it is important to me that I do not write these women out of their own lives. This section results from that desire. I trust that, at the least, this is the section where the women would recognise themselves.

This chapter will to a large degree be about the women as I introduce them through a short cameo and photograph. In introducing each woman's cameo, I also acknowledge the interaction between myself and that woman. This had direct impact on the story that was told and is acknowledged as such. Then follows a traditional chronological life-story in which I utilise the woman's words where possible. Each of the women chose her pseudonym and in all but one case, the choice had resonance with the real name. The one exception is Dagmar Campbell, who, although Anglo-Australian, chose this name to celebrate both grand-mothers' ethnic background. Each cameo is accompanied by a photo which was chosen for inclusion by the woman herself in response to my request for a photo that related to what she felt was a significant part of the story she shared with me. This revealed another dimension of how each woman chose to represent herself—this time consciously to the reader.
As I introduce the women's lives, I do not wish to lose sight of the fact that these are constructed or storied accounts of a life. Each was told as a response to my interest in women's learning across the lifespan; and each was told, indeed had to be told, by drawing on the cultural resources available to that woman. Thus it is also important to introduce these life-stories as narrative constructions. The narratives were a representation of self, a construction of self and a performance of self. Each woman created a framework in which to locate and tell her life-story. She represented both her self and others within this framework. On that level, each woman told a unique personal story.

However, as I have already argued, a personal narrative reveals both an individual and a collective construction. The nine life-stories allow us to examine the narratives for the types of culturally specific resources that people draw on in the course of their account: the devices, category systems, narrative characters and interpretative repertoires to name but a few (Potter & Wetherell, 1995). In these narratives, two particular resources were significant. They were the life themes forged across each account and the narrative characters.

Themes and characters in nine life-stories
Across the life-story, each of the women elevated particular ways of being that were commonsense to her. I have called these ‘life themes’. In order to ascertain the life themes I examined each set of personal narratives for conceptualisations of self that were able to be maintained, albeit modified, across the lifespan. These were often indicated within the text by terms such as ‘of course’ and ‘it was natural’. In other words the functionality of that concept was apparent through its taken-for-granted status.

It must be acknowledged that as with all grounded theory, the determination of analytic categories is not a value-free endeavour (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Traditional notions of reliability (repeatability) and validity (generalisability) cannot be applied to postpositivist and qualitative studies (Hall & Stephens, 1991). Instead a reflexive process was used to
interrogate the data by asking if the themes that emerged were credible given the cultural and historical locations of the women and in light of my own experience of the discursive locations we shared.

Through the development of life themes each woman forged a story line that enabled coherency and congruency in the story of her life. These life themes were central to the construction of a life as a logical, coherent progression. They enabled a life-story to be constructed in a way that allowed contradictions and complexities to be rationalised. In this chapter I will introduce each woman via the life themes that I heard in the text, recognising that they reflect not a coherent, rational life, but what was utilised to create an enabling fiction for that woman.

It should not be surprising that the one life theme that was consistent within each life account and across all of the nine accounts was that of family. It is not appropriate to explore the many debates on the family here, however I would assert that central to most, if not all, understandings of family is an agreement that the private, domestic sphere of family has been identified as the female domain. Throughout the twentieth century women have been primarily defined within this setting. However in this setting, a range of discourses can be seen, at any one time and across time.

Thus as the nine women told a life-story that privileged family as a life theme, each did so in her own particular way. All nine women utilised a notion of commitment to family across the chronology of their lives. This forged coherency. However, each woman presented a particular notion of family that reflected a constitution that was at once unique and collective. Therefore, as I introduce each woman I will highlight the notion of family that provided thematic consistency in her life account.

Although each of the nine women told of themselves as a central character in the personal narrative, the accounts were notable for their dependence on other narrative characters.
Each of the women told her life-story as one intricately linked to certain significant others. Although the significant others selected by the women varied from person to person, what was apparent was that the women could not tell of a life except in relation to others. Theirs was not a heroic trajectory of rising over others but a storying that privileged context and connectedness. In any one life-story, it became possible to see that certain narrative characters were consistently recalled across the different life stages. Predictably most were the characters of family: parents, husband, child. However some discursive categories were thematically consistent, rather than consistent via actual presence; for example, some women recalled ‘people in need’ from childhood, through adulthood to old age, thus these people can be noted collectively as a significant narrative character in that one account.

As each woman created her narrative world and described her narrative characters, I saw that she was revealing her learning environments. For some of the women these were the environments of the immediate locality, for some they extended to global and metaphysical bounds. In describing what was to her the everyday world, each woman was naming her life horizons. I would not wish to argue that the greater the life horizon the greater the learning environment, but more simply say that what was chosen reflected what was significant as a learning environment for that woman.

Therefore, in introducing these women I am drawing on three levels of the narrative accounts. The life chronology, significant events and the photograph locate each woman in particular times and places. The life themes, life horizons and narrative characters begin my reading of these lives as storied accounts. However, as each of the nine women did directly describe herself as a learner, I have included this as her own summarising contribution to my understanding.
The women

*Irene Richards (b.1903)*

Irene and I met in the lounge area of her Aged Persons Unit in the centre of Canberra. She is very proud of the small garden she maintains there. Our interviews were regularly interrupted by friends and neighbours. Irene was pleased *to be of use to me* but relied heavily on me to direct the discussion. Of all of the women, her narrative had the least spontaneity and flow. She had clear boundaries and would use the body language of folding her hands in her lap and pursed lips to close a topic. Her photograph is a passport photo taken at the age of 55. As we looked through her photo album I commented on a picture of her with her fellow workers in the 1930s as they laughingly lounged over the ‘latest model’ car, and one of her taking her nieces shopping in the city, but Irene said with finality *no this is a proper photo. I think this is best. You shall have this one.*

Irene was born in rural New South Wales. She was the eldest child of her family with a younger sister and brother. Her father was a farmer and apiarist. Her mother worked in the home. Irene was not certain about the exact dates of life-events—*because I don’t*
know I think it just flows on rather than being all traumatic. You just get on with it. Irene did not go to school until the age of seven. She attended the local one-teacher primary school until sixth class when she was about thirteen. The following four years were spent at home until her father’s death in 1920.

In 1921, the family moved to Sydney where Irene completed a twelve month business college course. Irene worked in an insurance company for two to three years, however, as her mother’s health began to deteriorate, she preferred to do ‘temping’ in order to be flexible. Her hours after work were spent with the family—of course my mother and my sister and I were like three sisters and we just wanted to be with the family. Her mother died when Irene was in her late twenties.

Irene then took a position as Senior Confidential Stenographer to the manager at a Sydney woollen mill. She remained in this position for over twenty years, which included the war years when this was an essential industry. Irene was very active in the volunteer war effort, working weekends and evenings in a canteen kitchen and in a private hospital.

When Irene was in her mid-forties, her sister died, leaving two daughters aged ten and twelve. Irene became a major support for the family. Well it didn’t bother me that I was sort of on the shelf kind of thing. Well, put it another way, an unclaimed treasure. Well I felt that I didn’t miss having a family because when my sister died her two children were only ten and twelve. So I have always been—they’ve come to me with their sorrows and their joys. I used to barrack for them and so on. But I sort of had a substitute family you see.

After more than twenty years, Irene felt it was time to move on from the mill. Well I felt it was wise to change because women came in with their daughters and they’d say “Oh Miss Richards was here when I came for a job dear”. So I thought it was time I got moving! She took a position as medical secretary to a leading Sydney specialist.
Irene found this job challenging but stressful and after six years, and in her mid-fifties, she took a live-in companion/housekeeper position with an elderly gentleman of 80, moving with him to Canberra. She was with him for four years until his death. In these years she travelled to England with him and spent winters in Queensland. In his will, this man unexpectedly left Irene the use of his house for the rest of her natural life (she calls this her ‘grace and favour’ house), and at the same time made her executor of his will—*it was very nice to get the annuity and the house for home—but I was made Executrix to his will with a solicitor; and that is an honour I think.*

Irene did some temporary medical secretary work in her early sixties, and has since been heavily involved with the Red Cross, the Church Women’s Union and the Embroiderers’ Guild. She was one of the women who created the Bicentennial embroidery for Parliament House. In her mid-seventies, Irene moved into an Aged Persons Unit, and she rents the ‘grace and favour’ house for income. She has become quite frail in her nineties and has had to curtail her activity to the church and the embroidery group.

Irene’s narrative was structured as a taken-for-granted ‘getting on with life’. It featured a linear ‘this then that’ chronology with little interest in description and elaboration. However, this chronology was interspersed with a small number of stories that act as symbolic markers. These stories were repeated over our talks and were almost word for word. They have the quality of a parable and reflect how Irene believes one should live a life, in particular how one should behave to others. The stories included how her father supported her when a teacher belittled her, how a senior stenographer taught her that no job should be below her and how Irene conspired with her boss in order for him to retain face.

The members of her biological family were Irene’s key narrative characters, and although she was a single woman there was a strong theme of herself as a family keeper. Irene spoke first of her mother and sister then, following their deaths, of her nieces and other
extended family. She told of her role as connecting these family members, and thus of an intimate connection for herself. Notable work colleagues form the other narrative characters that Irene foregrounded. These characters were used by Irene to illustrate how duty is a given and that one should be a responsible and reliable worker.

Irene’s life horizons extended from her family to workmates and friends. The learning environments she privileged were therefore those of everyday life and work. Irene believed that she ‘picked up’ most of her learning and was proud of this. *I think I just went from one thing to another. I don’t think as you say, I didn’t think I was learning—you sort of go from one thing to another—and um, that’s all I have to say about that.*

*Louise Depasse (b.1912)*

Louise and I met in her home, situated high in a suburb overlooking Canberra. It features her own symbolic and abstract paintings. Louise made it apparent from the start that she did not want me to probe into personal areas and that she would choose what to tell. She kept very tight control throughout the personal narrative and was very clear about her chosen content. Through my continuing but irregular visits trust developed between
Louise and me and the more personal details of her life began to be shared. Indeed, at a recent visit she was surprised that she had not told me certain details. The photo of Louise was taken on her return from her first overseas trip at the age of 40. Louise explained the photo as symbolic, reflecting her life tensions—the hat bought in a straw market in Florence, the dress home-made at her kitchen table.

Louise was born in Adelaide, and had two younger sisters. Her father did secretarial work and her mother worked in the home. At the age of six, Louise attended a small Anglican primary school, transferring to a private girl's school at the age of ten. Louise completed the Leaving Honours year but did not have the required subjects to matriculate.

Well, when I first left school...my mother wanted me to go to an art school [full-time]...But my father who was practical said, “I think it might be very important for girls to be able to earn their living—I think you’d better learn typewriting and shorthand—I don’t think you’ll like it, but I think you should do it”. So I went along and did it. Louise did not enjoy the secretarial course. The clatter of typewriters. The general attitude toward life there I found bleak.—limited. The practical side.

In her early twenties, Louise attended university as an unmatriculated student studying Logic, Psychology and Economics. But looking back those three subjects have covered the way I’ve thought about things—I’ve tried to look at things logically, the workings of the mind and the practicalities of living. In 1935 when she was 23, Louise married; her husband a lawyer with the Commonwealth Government. She had two sons, one early in the marriage, the second five years later.

During the war, Louise returned for a term and a half to Adelaide to study at university, then did some correspondence study. So I think there was always that bit in me that wanted to stretch my mind. Some of the war years for me were taken up like that and bringing up two boys and coping with life in general.
...There were other things that were very important and I always felt what I needed to do was travel, to get out of Australia to get a perspective, and I didn’t think I would ever be able to do it...Now [early in the 1950s]— through a series of odd circumstances [an aunt gave a bequest] I realised I had an opportunity of going overseas if I could be very careful with my money, and so I had my two boys put to school over in Adelaide so my mother could watch over them—I completely forgot about my Canberra life. But that was a very enriching experience. It was a big adventure. Louise spent ten months away from Australia, travelling around England and Europe.

In her early forties, Louise began a Fine Arts degree at Canberra University College, now the Australian National University. The following year, she transferred to an Honours degree in History which led to her writing a historical biography book. It took me eight years to do it...It was an enormous effort for me... I’ve always been glad I did it. I think, you don’t realise when you’re writing history, it does give you a depth of understanding in life—a perception of—you see things—you see the evolution of things, people, movements, ideas.

Louise was one of the original members of the ACT Women’s Electoral Lobby and was instrumental in the development of the first women’s refuge. Louise has also had a continuing interest in all forms of extrasensory perception, because of incidents in her life from the age of thirteen when she has perceived events happening to those she loves. A lot of my readings in the last 30 years has been in the area of spirituality, now transpersonal psychology... Just trying to get some scientific background or understanding of some of the experiences I’ve had. It’s been a search—I feel like a seeker.

In her seventies Louise separated from her husband and he has since died. She did not speak about this marital change in the interviews. Louise has recently moved into a retirement unit and is now readjusting to this new lifestyle.
Louise’s narrative structure was organised around what she called a search for meaning. Her family of origin and her own family were the genesis of the quest as she sought to understand both family dynamics and the metaphysical. Louise often ‘left home’ intellectually and when possible physically. She explained this as part of her family commitment—*in a way, I think you feel that if you do develop yourself you will help your children and grandchildren. Because you know that you’ve got some wisdom there that you’d like to pass on to them.*

As Louise saw it, her life had horizons placed around it through location and her gendered role. She spoke of constantly working to extend her world through reading, thinking and activity. Louise located herself as a social critic and thinker in a way that was intricately linked with her family role. Her children were central narrative characters, who allowed Louise to speak of an orientation to a better future, whilst her husband appeared only within a construction of duty and loyalty. Other narrative characters were public figures, famous lives and close friends; characters that were used to allow Louise to speak of her intellectual horizons and interests. Louise particularly developed a family theme of the global, maternal citizen.

Louise talked about learning as holistic. *It’s more like an expansion—like a yeast coming up—you don’t consciously put something on top of the other. I am interested in a holistic approach to health and life—it’s very bad to become narrow in your outlook. You miss so much. You know you don’t see it in a balanced way related to the whole.*
Lucy Beattie (b.1916)

Lucy and I met for the first interviews in a run-down government flat in a high-rise block. Lucy was not happy there and was anxiously awaiting the allocation of an Aged Persons Unit. Our last interviews were held in her brand-new unit with its colour scheme especially chosen by Lucy and where she was enthusiastically getting to know her new neighbours and feeling safe and settled. I had known Lucy as a volunteer at a regional community service centre so our interview relationship was quickly established. Lucy was clear about what she wanted to tell me and was happy to elaborate. The photo is of Lucy aged 32 with her only child. Lucy did not have many photos but chose this one from one with her grandchild: photographs with the two most important people in her life.

Lucy was born in inner city Melbourne, as the fifth of nine children. Her father was a council labourer and her mother worked in the home. She attended the local Catholic primary school until the age of 12. She spent the next three years at home helping her mother, especially with the care of the newest baby. I believe it wasn’t a life of leisure—it was anything but! No matter where I went I had my youngest brother on me. If I was playing “skippy” as it was in those days, I had my brother! I couldn’t go anywhere without him. I didn’t know what it was like to be like the other girls and just play in the street.

At the age of 15, as the Depression was deepening, Lucy started work in a cigarette factory. Looking back now there’s lots of things I would have preferred to have done.
Dad said none of his children would work in a factory, but we all worked in factories...When Depression hits it's a bird of a different feather. You just can't expect I suppose to sit back and be taken on as a lady's maid or something like that. Lucy worked in production-line positions for over fifteen years, including the war years when this was an essential industry.

In 1946, Lucy married. Her husband was a sales representative, and her only child, a son, was born a couple of years later. For the whole of her married life, Lucy's mother-in-law, who was not well, lived with her. Everywhere we went the mother-in-law went. So actually we had very little free time on our own to have made a different life...I was very confined—I suppose my husband was too. Lucy and her husband used a War Service Loan to buy a mixed business corner shop. At this time not only did Lucy have the care of her mother-in-law, but had long-term paid care of a two-year-old girl with a kidney disease (Bright's disease) and an elderly male boarder who had had a stroke. Due to this pressure and their inexperience, the business failed.

Soon after this, and at first in secret from her husband, Lucy began cleaning jobs in private homes. House-cleaning for wealthy people - I loved it. It taught me how the other half lived. I learnt what I would throw out of my cupboards - they'd keep and eat. I enjoyed that part of it - I met some lovely people and some peculiar people. After two years, Lucy began a permanent cleaning job in a commercial building. My father and [husband] were dead against wives going out to work and [my husband] said "I don't want you to do it and you won't last", which made me think "if I'm dying you'll never know".

Lucy's husband died unexpectedly of heart failure when Lucy was in her mid-forties and her son 13. After he died it was just night after night sitting—it was work, work, sleep, work. That was what life was like. Fourteen years later, her mother-in-law died and Lucy was able to move to a small house of her own in a new suburb. Lucy was forced to retire
at the age of 65. I was terribly lost—very very lost. I’d worked for 27 years at [the commercial building]. I’d still go back if anything was on. Then gradually you drift apart from that sort of thing. In her early seventies Lucy moved to Canberra to support her son through his marriage break-up.

Today, Lucy is very involved with her only grandson (who has Down’s syndrome) and she is an active volunteer who shares her time with agencies such as the Smith Family where she prepares antique linen for sale and the Community Service where she drives frail aged to appointments.

Like Irene, Lucy told a ‘getting on with life’ narrative. Hard times were dealt with and moved on from with no heroics. Lucy frequently juxtaposed the hard times with a humorous incident in a way that illustrated adaptability. For example, when talking of the war she quietly explained the worry of the times, then quickly moved to an amusing tale of learning how to be an air raid warden and failing at ‘gas-mask’ wearing.

Although Lucy’s life horizons were never beyond her family, neighbourhood and work friends, her narrative was deepened through a simply told connection with her environment. Her narrative was sometimes poetic as she drew on a connectedness with the potential beauty to be experienced in the ‘here and now’. For example, Lucy told of working a twelve-hour day during the war, then travelling home by tram and train for an hour in blackout conditions. I can still remember that I’d get off the train and as you know the [local] station is right on the beach. And the windier it was, the better I’d like it! I seem to have an affinity with the sea. And then you’d go home and open the door and you’d smell the beautiful soup. They were lovely days.

The narrative characters in Lucy’s account were those of immediate family and friends. She spoke as a family maker/worker, not only in her early family years but into her older years. This family making life theme was supplemented by a theme of being a do-er not a
lean-er, an approach she utilised to tell of home and work. Lucy focused on the practicalities of daily life and enriched them with humour and the acknowledgment of simple pleasures.

Lucy summarised her understanding of learning:— *you know, you just learn by experience. It's no good saying to people 'do this' and thinking they'll learn because you've learnt it. Because you don't. You learn by experience and that's the only thing in life, in my opinion.*

*Josephine Blow (b.1919)*

Josephine and I met in her government flat near the heart of Canberra. The lounge room was overflowing with piles of articles, reports, books and memorabilia with only her old recliner and one other chair clear. Before any interview could begin, I had to meet Sweet Thing, an ancient Cavalier spaniel that was her close companion. Josephine was delighted to be interviewed and quickly moved into a detailed monologue, barely noticing that my recorder clicked off after each hour. She took full control of the content and was thrilled with the resultant transcript — editing it only to add more detail and texture. The photo of Josephine was taken in Austria when Josephine was in her thirties. Josephine felt this photo reflected the adventurous nature of her seven-year sojourn overseas.
Josephine was born in England where her Australian parents, a doctor and a nurse, were working. She had one older and one younger brother. Josephine's family returned to Australia when she was three, settling in a small town in New South Wales where at the age of seven, Josephine began school at a school for young ladies. Her father died when Josephine was eight. After a few years in a beachside village, the family finally settled in Sydney, where Josephine attended first the local public school, then a domestic science high school, attaining her Intermediate Certificate. I had won a scholarship to do commercial art for five years. The family sat down and thought about this (this was about 1935/36)—they all wondered what was the best thing for me to do. Mother and my aunts felt that if I went nursing at least I was being taught—I had board and lodgings and I was learning. If I took the art course it would have been for five years (with my fees being paid), but I would have had to be kept. So these were the choices.

Josephine trained as a nurse at a children's hospital, during which time World War II began - This is where I think that suddenly I found that life was real and life was earnest. After completing her training she took a job in a children's orthopaedic hospital in Melbourne. After another temporary job at a country hospital, through the intercession of an army Matron who had known her father, Josephine at last was able to join the army nursing corps, albeit still under the required age of 25. She was posted to an amputation ward. You worked hard and had a wonderful social life too depending where one was posted...I got myself engaged about three times over a couple of years. But I've always managed to get myself unengaged.

Josephine realised her dream to serve overseas when she was posted to New Guinea. But my service up there was not very long because I got Scrub Typhus and was very ill...It had about 98% mortality death rate. It was really quite frightening...I hope it made me be a better nurse. I became much more aware of the problem of being a patient. She returned to Australia where she served at a repatriation hospital and, after a period of private
nursing to save money, Josephine, then in her early thirties left Australia to work in England.

At first, Josephine could not work as her Children’s Hospital Certificate was not recognised; however, based on her wartime experience, she was accepted by a specialist cancer hospital. *That was tremendous because living in London, right in the middle, South Kensington, and being able to go to the theatre and Covent Garden...I was fortunate I was invited by the Dominion Fellowship Trust to all sorts of functions, which normally I wouldn’t have entered...I just lapped it up. I didn’t have any problem. I wasn’t overawed by it. I wasn’t overcome by it.*

Over the next seven years Josephine worked in both England and Scotland as a nurse, doing post-graduate courses in neurology, oncology and paediatrics. When she couldn’t get nursing jobs she joined an employment agency. *I found myself being handed on from family to family throughout the British Isles. I had a wonderful time...I became involved with looking after kids—being the chauffeur, the nanny and things like that. You needn’t be unemployed if you’re willing to do anything. I was very very fortunate I think—it’s been interesting.*

In her late thirties Josephine returned to Australia, primarily because her mother was not well. Over the next three years, Josephine worked in major hospitals and lived with her mother. She did her Midwifery year and a post-graduate administration course, then worked in Canberra where she held a number of senior positions. Josephine’s mother joined her in Canberra and as she had become very frail Josephine needed to adjust her working hours to be able to cope. When Josephine was in her early fifties, her younger brother died and three months later, her mother unexpectedly died. *The effect of her death had a very bad effect on me and I had a sort of a break down...it suddenly hit me that this—what in hell am I doing with myself, and I had to sort of, and I was quite disturbed*
for a while...I went to Sydney and saw a couple of doctor friends...A couple of very nice blokes that I'd known—very good and sensible psychiatrists.

Josephine was able to return to work, however the Matron was not willing to allow her to take any position of responsibility. Following the advice of her doctors she was able to retire early, on a special pension for war veterans. Josephine became very active in community affairs, and is an active lobbyist for returned servicewomen, the aged, and those with disabilities.

Josephine’s narrative form was one of an adventure epic and as a single woman one could expect it would take her ‘far from home’. Indeed this was part of the narrative, however as with all of the other women, family remained the central theme. In the first part of her narrative, Josephine’s mother and father were the central narrative characters. She located herself as a keeper of this particular family’s saga. As she told of adventures across the United Kingdom for seven years it was the notable characters and her relationship with them that featured. In her later life, as she became a community activist, it was again her family values that located this activism as the right and only thing to do.

Across her narrative Josephine developed a life theme of family heritage and tradition. Her family history provided the basis for life decisions and she spoke of keeping true to family tradition. As well, Josephine spoke as a practical worker, whose work took her into new worlds; thus she spoke as an observer of significant people, times and places. Josephine told of a world that was populated by people who expanded her horizons, not due to their status but due to her interest in worlds beyond her own. Her learning environments have varied but always opened out from the people in her life.
For Josephine, learning was linked to experience. *I think living itself is a learning experience. I don't think that in a way that you're fully aware of how much you...* Well I think we all learn all the time—if you're moving around in the community you must be adjusting your life to what's happening, to the forces out there.

Val King (b.1919)

Val and I met in a very cramped bed-sitter that she had whilst waiting for the allocation of an Aged Persons Unit. She was not happy there particularly as a number of nearby tenants were alcohol- and drug-affected. When I visited her for the follow-up sessions, Val was beginning to settle in her new unit where she was a lot happier but still not fully settled. Val was the second woman whom I had known as a volunteer through the community service centre, and so again the interview relationship was easily established. Over the time that we met, Val became interested in the reflective process and began to theorise her life more overtly. She was very open about her close personal relationships. The photo Val chose was taken when she was 28, just before leaving the country property she loved. Her parents, her husband, two sons and their friend are in the photo which, as Val said, was about right as they are the main people in my story.

Val was born in a coastal town in New South Wales; her father was a small businessman and her mother worked in the home. Her only sister was two years older. Val went to a
co-educational private school until her last year of primary school when she transferred to the local public school in order to be eligible for high school. She attended a domestic science high school until the age of sixteen when she had one year at a church-run boarding school for girls. But I wanted to go for another year. My parents wouldn't let me go because my sister had loathed it so much and she'd only had one year. So they couldn't spend money on me for another year's education because she hadn't had it. But I was so disappointed about that.

The next year, the family moved to a New South Wales inland country town. Val wanted to be a nurse and so had her name on the long waiting list for Karitane Infant Welfare training. With the outbreak of war, Val had the chance to become a nurse. Mum and Dad couldn't bear the thought of me doing it. So as I said I defied them by washing old men's bottoms and feeding [them]...my war effort!...Well they had a fit, but then couldn't stop me because I was then old enough to defy them.

At the age of twenty, Val married a man who was a station manager of a property 65 miles from the nearest town. His father lived with them for the next nineteen years. Her first son was born nine months later, her second two and a half years after that. I was a very busy person, helping my husband running, (not owning unfortunately) a sheep station... I feel quite proud how I did cope with it. Because I hadn't been trained for that.

After eight years, the family moved to their own dairy farm on the New South Wales coast. This venture failed and so Val's husband began a successful career as an insurance salesman. They lived for two years at one town, and two years at the next, finally settling in an inland New South Wales city for fifteen years. When Val was in her mid-forties, her husband died suddenly of a stroke—living alone is a completely different life ...It's a completely and utterly different life and if you don't get yourself and brain engaged in what you're doing! it's probably why I've gone so, you know jumped feet first into
everything, you know, all this community service work—was to be really involved so that I didn’t feel I wanted to get back into the things that married people did.

Val began voluntary work with people with intellectual disabilities. When she was in her late forties, Val moved to Canberra to be closer to her sons and in order to have her invalid mother live with her. Her mother died ten years later. Val continued her work with people with intellectual disabilities, however in her early fifties financial pressure forced Val to find paid employment, as a hospital ward clerk for fifteen years. It was a wonderful time though, because we created from—when I first went there, the ward clerks were nothing—and we built them up.

Val has been a counsellor with Lifeline and an active volunteer with the Community Service, the Smith Family and the Salvation Army. She has not been well over the last two years and regretfully has cut back her voluntary work. She had planned to move to a small cottage on her son’s property near Canberra, but now says she will only do this when I am old.

Val’s narrative consisted of a series of settings that were described in order to explain the differing adaptations she has had across her life. In each, Val spoke of reading the life situations, considering the context, then acting to address the needs she saw, both at home and in the community. Her life horizons extended out from her family to anywhere that she felt she could be of use. It was just there! I felt it was perhaps—I’ve always been a person who—don’t quote me on this one.¹ - I felt that I wanted to help other people.

Family members were strong narrative characters, however Val described two separate roles within this: one for her husband, a partner; the other for dependents, her children and her ageing parents and father-in-law. People in need formed the second narrative

¹ NB: permission was granted to use this quotation.
character group in Val’s account. Together, family and those in need provided the basis for a life theme of caring work for others, which was understood as helping others develop to their potential. Val utilised this theme to make sense of her role in the family, paid and unpaid work.

Val’s summary statement about learning revealed her particular sense of connection. *I think I need to know what is going on around me. I’d hate anyone to sort of say “oh, she wouldn’t be interested in that”. I wanted to make my own decisions on that.*

*Florence Dugdale (b.1920)*

Florence lives in a bed-sitter room in a church-based retirement village. We talked in her room sitting near her plant-filled balcony which overlooks the local primary school. Florence had a confident flow to her narrative, however, when she received the transcript, she heavily edited out much of the detail and description on the assumption that I wanted the concrete facts only. Following discussion most was reinstated except for some sensitive comments about family members. Florence’s photo was taken when she was 26. She and her son are dressed up in outfits she had made for outings; in this case a visit to the infant welfare centre. Like Lucy, Florence has few photos but she felt that this one showed how different things were when she was a mother.
Florence was born in the north of England and had one sister who was three years older. When Florence was three, the family migrated to Australia settling in outer Sydney. Her father was a storeman and her mother was a cotton weaver in England and worked in the home in Australia. Florence started school at the age of six, attending first the local primary school where she skipped fourth class, and then the Intermediate high school. Having gained her Intermediate Certificate at the age of 14, Florence did a three-month business college course as that was as long as her parents could afford—*I didn't feel that I was a square peg in a round hole...and that sort of gave me a sense of—more of a sense of worth—that I hadn't had to go to work in a factory or that sort of job, which a lot of girls had to in those days.*

Her first clerical job was in Sydney for five years, then during the war she took a new position with the local council. With some breaks, Florence worked in local government for over thirty years, most of the years as secretary to the town planner.

Florence married in 1945. Her only son was born the next year. After a few years Florence went back to work for the council, however her husband who *found it hard to settle after the war* bought a mixed business corner store and Florence reluctantly worked there. *In the end (we were eight years in that shop) working seven days a week, and we were right down the drain. We'd lost our war service home—we'd had to sell that and put it in to the business—we were further back than when we started.* Florence returned to the council and her husband found a satisfying position as an orderly at the local hospital.

In her early forties when Florence's son was struggling to pass his Leaving Certificate Florence decided to do the course with him in order to see what was required. *I enjoyed that 12 months and I did the exam...Yes. I got an A. And my son did pass...Yes, I was pretty pleased about that and rather sorry that I hadn't been able to do the whole lot.*
Florence retired in her late fifties, planning to do some further study, however within the year her husband was diagnosed with motor neurone disease and diabetes. They moved to Canberra to be near their only son and their two grand children. Florence nursed her husband until his death seven years later. Shortly after this, Florence had a nervous breakdown. *I'd worked all my life, I looked after [my husband] for seven years — then there was nothing. I couldn't seem to cope with that.*

After two years of hospitalisation, Florence regained her confidence and now lives at a retirement hostel. She has become an active organiser of the craft group and works especially with the residents who have dementia or forms of disturbance that she can relate to because of her experience. *I went through that period and it was hell on earth really. I would go through any physical illness... if I had the choice between... I would sooner go through the pain or whatever of physical illness than go through that period again. It's a terrible time. But now I think I'm here and I believe that God wouldn't let me go right down and he was saying to me he had a job for me to do here. It's a job that I can only do because of having gone through that.*

Florence’s narrative combined a ‘this then that’ structure that was embellished by her keen awareness that she is located in a stratified society. There was no sense of a heroic progress upwards, but rather a constant contextual reading of the impact of this society on her options and those of her family.

Florence’s life theme was one of family support—to her husband, her parents and her son. Family was told as the environment in which she developed her relational skills, thus her major narrative characters were those of parents, husband, child and grandchildren. In contrast, the workplace was told as the environment in which to develop her own individual skills and here Florence spoke as one who analysed the situation, adapted and achieved high standards. Florence described her life horizons as primarily those of
family, community and workplace. However, as a hard worker in both, she spoke as someone who was aware of capitalist limitations but believed in the merit of individual hard work.

For Florence, learning was described as done the hard way. *I suppose you'd say I went through the University of Hard Knocks!* Her summary statement was said with a smile in her voice—*I think an attitude that you never stop learning in life [is important]. You never get to the point, or I never get to the point where I feel 'oh well, I'm too old, I've learnt all I can'. I can still, you know. I still feel there's something, perhaps around the corner, to find out or to learn [smile].*

**Dagmar Campbell (b.1922)**

Dagmar and I met in her neat home which is set in an interesting garden she has created. Dagmar has lived here for over twenty years. The interviews took place in a small sitting room, interrupted only by her demanding (almost manic) cat. Although Dagmar and I had not met before these interviews, we had mutual acquaintances that provided an easy starting point. Dagmar had worked in a tertiary institution and had expected a more formal interview, however by the end of the first session she was comfortable enough to engage in a flowing story. The photo she chose was taken at the age of 20 whilst on leave during
the war. She chose this over one in uniform as she believed that the patchwork skirt she wears, made by her mother, shows another less glamorous side of the war.

Dagmar was born in rural Queensland. She had an older sister by 11 years and brother by 9 years—a situation which she described as like having four parents. When Dagmar was 13, the family moved to the outskirts of Brisbane where she did her Junior Certificate at a girls’ grammar school. *I didn’t have all that much confidence until I went to business college where I did particularly well. Well I didn’t enjoy it but I felt because my mother was paying for it that I had to reward her and I worked a bit harder and did well at business college so I started work feeling confident then.* After the one year course at business college, Dagmar went to work in an insurance company, followed by enlistment in the army.

*That was quite an adventure actually—it’s an awful thing to say but I really enjoyed the war. It was a secret unit—we weren’t allowed to live in barracks and weren’t allowed to tell anybody about it—it was the men who were going in behind the lines. So we had the old Netherlands East Indies, with the Dutch, the Americans who were in the Philippines area and our own boys were in New Guinea of course... I think if I’d been put in a different type of unit my life would have been different... If you’d got to another unit, or doing searchlight work or something, you would have sat there for the rest of your life and I think the army gave me a really good push ahead for myself. I knew I could take responsibility and I knew I could supervise people. By the end of the war Dagmar was a lieutenant and had reached the position of Assistant Adjutant, however, as she was planning to marry she decided not to continue in the army.*

Dagmar and her husband married at the end of 1947, moving first to Sydney, then to a remote Queensland town because of his job in the Commonwealth Public Service. In this time she had her two children—a daughter and a son. Whilst in this town, Dagmar became critically ill with nephritis and her children had to be taken away to relatives. *I still*
say to this day that if there had been enough water in the [local] river at that stage I would have put the kids and myself into it. Because you didn’t have enough energy to fight with them and check them...It was a pretty horrific time actually. The family then moved to a larger rural centre for five years where Dagmar became heavily involved in voluntary fund-raising work.

The family moved to Sydney when Dagmar was in her late thirties—that was where I got bored. I went to church and it was totally uninspiring. I decided not to get involved in that. That’s when I decided to go back to work...Being bored was the best thing that I ever did. It got me back into the work-force. Dagmar first worked for the army for a year, then moved on to be office manager for a small company. At this stage her children were in early high school. When Dagmar was in her mid-forties, the family moved to Canberra, where they built their own house and Dagmar began to work at the nearby tertiary institution. Dagmar stayed there for nearly twenty years, loving the range of administrative positions.

When Dagmar was in her late forties, her husband had a serious heart attack, and so for a time Dagmar found part-time work the best option. Her husband died of a second attack. Dagmar continued to work and in the following years had eight overseas trips, some with friends, some alone. At the age of 65, Dagmar retired. Dagmar continues to be a very busy woman. She is a committed volunteer for a children’s charity and a local aged care home, and has an active network of friends.

Dagmar’s narration was confident; however, when re-read, it is curious for its mixing of first and second person pronouns. In a small number of cases (for example, in her account of schooling), the second person pronoun appears to be used as a way to distance herself from the issue, but, in general, I can only explain it as a personal idiosyncrasy. Dagmar did not correct it in editing and I have followed her version as agreed. Dagmar’s narrative was structured as a series of settings deriving from the diverse locations she
experienced. Each was described first in relation to family life, then with regard to the opportunities for personal extension that were offered. Dagmar did little cross-comparison, rather she spoke of each as a separate context that she analysed and to which she adapted.

Work was the central theme for Dagmar. As she spoke of the narrative characters of family, she drew on a sense of working for the family. Dagmar utilised this notion of family worker, in a way that privileged organisation and management. Similarly in accounts of community and paid work, she spoke of herself as one who could take responsibility, helping to work towards the best outcomes. Leadership was the life theme that emerged from her home and community work. Across her life-story, Dagmar’s horizons extended to the community in which she lived and the community of her work. She valued environments that allowed her to be of concrete and practical use.

Dagmar was one of the most confident in describing herself as a learner. [I’m] (p)robably a self-teacher more than anything else; because you learn to adapt to your surrounding and learn from your current surroundings, and current friends, and circumstances and so on.
Emma and I met in her large family home of over thirty years. It is located in a leafy inner suburb of Canberra, set back from the road amongst a well-kept garden with a tennis court. Emma was able to narrate with little need for prompting and although we had never met was willing to share very personal aspects of her life. I was overwhelmed by the trust she placed in me from the first interview and needless-to-say found it easy to reciprocate. Her photo was taken near a Borneo market at the age of 52. Emma was back-packing with her daughter and describes this time as one of a blossoming.

Emma was born in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) where her father worked as a tea plantation manager. Her mother worked in the home. Although she had three brothers (two older, one younger), her early years were more like those of an only child as she was sent to boarding school in England and had holidays with either her grandparents or a childless aunt and uncle. At the age of 13, Emma and the family migrated to Brisbane where she attended an Anglican school. She passed her second attempt at the Senior Certificate and began nurse training. I am sure I would never have been allowed to live away from home unless I’d been going to live in the Nurses Quarters, so really it was a great emancipation.

At the end of her training, when she was 22, Emma married. I was really thrilled to have married into a family that knew the country life and yet it was such a hard life, but that
didn’t worry me at all. I knew I could work hard. Two years later Emma and her husband bought a Queensland sheep station 60 miles from the nearest country centre. I longed for our own married life and this was really the beginning of this great big adventure—to go out there. And although it wasn’t quite the lovely life I’d hoped...once I was out there and pregnant and having babies it was never the same—but we pulled together and it was a very rewarding life.

In the time on the property, Emma had four children: two sons and two daughters. After eight years, Emma’s husband relocated the family in order to do post-graduate studies in England; then the family returned to Sydney, and after a short time moved to Melbourne, as his job was with the Commonwealth Public Service at executive level. I didn’t think of doing anything for myself until [my youngest child] went to school in Melbourne and I was just beginning to think “do something else” and I discovered I was pregnant!...So I was really quite shaken by that. It took me quite a few months to knuckle down to that, get my feelings in order. And yet, of course she’s the greatest joy to me as you could imagine. Everything went so smoothly. I don’t know how I would have coped without three daughters—I can’t imagine.

In her late thirties, Emma and the family moved to Canberra. I’m sure there was a blossoming when I came to Canberra. Emma became involved in Guides as a commissioner, with school fund-raising committees and did a refresher course for nurses and a typing course when her children were teenagers, however her husband did not want her to work. When Emma was in her early fifties she discovered that her husband was involved with another woman. There was one really difficult year...but sadly it wasn’t really the end of it. He got involved then after a few years with someone else.

In response to this, Emma took up bushwalking and part-time geriatric nursing; what she calls her second blossoming. When Emma was in her mid-sixties, her husband moved out, however within a short time he was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Emma and the
family nursed him to his death. The nursing of him here was a real family effort which was wonderful...And so there was a lovely feeling, a lovely feeling, so that when his death came it wasn't so hard.

Today Emma lives alone. Two daughters and a son live nearby and she is busy helping out with her grand-children. One daughter has joined a separatist religious movement and Emma is not able to have the close contact that she'd wish. She is a counsellor with Lifeline, a support worker for the Palliative Care Association and an active bushwalker.

Emma used two distinctive types of narrative structure. From meeting her husband until his first infidelities, he is the main narrative character. His life movements provide the rationale and chronology around which Emma explained contexts and relationships. In childhood and after the marital crisis, Emma's account is noticeably different with her activities and interests being described with her own self as central character. Emma's narrative focused intensely on the people who have been, or are, part of her life. Although she described their context it was her relationships with others that dominated the account.

Emma separated the narrative characters of family into husband and children, focusing on duty to husband and connectedness to children and the whole family unit. Linking these two was the particular theme of family service. Emma's work outside the home allowed her to speak as a support for others' families through voluntary work. Meeting other people's needs was the focus of her life-story and the settings for helping others form the horizons of her life and the environments she privileged.
Emma was very uncertain in her response about herself as a learner. *Today I see myself at last realising what there is—it's so silly to have this inferiority about things that one isn't, has never been, educated to, and that I have other interests which are just as important and much more absorbing to me. And that I have skills to give to other people. It has taken a long time. I think I was learning that (although I didn't quite look at it like that), that I was learning then that I had skills to give to other people.*

*Margaret Evans (b.1925)*

Margaret and I met in the sitting room/library of her inner Canberra home. The house contains an eclectic mixture of furniture and memorabilia of over forty years of living in the same house, contrasting with many large modern paintings done by her artist daughter. Although initially reticent, Margaret's narrative was spontaneous and flowing and evidenced fore-thought regarding content. She was aware of her own narrative as a process of selection and more than all the others recognised it as a story. Margaret's photo was taken at the age of 20, and she described it as showing herself as *the young, single working girl who had lots of friends and few cares.*

Margaret was born in Melbourne, the youngest by six years of a family of seven. Her father was a painting contractor, her mother worked in the home. She began at the local
primary school at the age of six. Margaret then went on to a girls' technical school for two
years where she obtained her Intermediate Technical Certificate.

Margaret's first job was with a press cuttings agency, a position she held for six years.
This job exposed her to a wide range of people and newspapers and she began to become
more politically aware. *My family were very great supporters of capitalism—real props of
the capitalist system (laugh)—I don't know how I managed to turn out to be something a
bit different. But right from those early days I felt no no, there's something wrong here.
It wasn't capitalism or socialism I was concerned about in those days, it was fascism, and
to me socialism was the only way to go.* Margaret joined the Communist Party in her
early twenties. *I wouldn't say I was a political animal by any means—it's not something I
want to do—it didn't—it was something I had to gird myself to do—I didn't enjoy it one
bit. I did things because I felt I should do them.* With the Hungarian uprising, Margaret
lost faith in communism but has continued her activism through peace and anti-nuclear
groups.

In 1947, Margaret married her husband who was a newly qualified geologist. They had
three children, two sons and a daughter. The family moved to Canberra when Margaret
was in her mid-thirties. Whilst her children were young, Margaret was active on school
committees and as a volunteer at a school for children with disabilities, however one of
her abiding interests at this time was the Sydney University extension courses in which
she was involved for 14 years. This first started when her youngest child was in pre-
school. *One of the women when we discussed it at a time when we got together said—
no, nothing about children!—let's do something else; our lives are packed with
children...And someone said “Fancy meeting at the shops and starting to talk about poetry
instead of the measles. It would be very nice”.*

When Margaret was in her early forties, and her last child was in high school she returned
to paid work. She joined the Commonwealth Public Service as a clerical assistant at the
National Library. That was new when I started — within a few weeks perhaps when I started and a very exciting place to be in at that time — everyone was very enthusiastic and sort of pleased and proud that here was something that could develop into one of the great libraries of the world. In her mid-fifties, Margaret began a Library degree. Other people have had nice educations perhaps I’d have a shot... Anyway, I got me [sic] three units and then I thought about it very hard — I thought I’d take some time off. I realised that — no way that I could have a decent life and go to work full-time and have to make up the time when I went out to College; and still do the work that was necessary even for just one unit; and still do what I wanted to do with my family at home... So I never went back.

At the same time, Margaret began to have very serious problems with her sight, and was forced to retire from work. For a period of some months she was legally blind, however her sight was restored with surgery. Margaret has since learnt the piano and is involved with Lifeline, the Wilderness Society, the Conservation Society, the Heritage Association and the Blind Society. Her husband is still alive and she is especially involved with her extended family.

Margaret’s narrative was presented in chronological order, however she constantly circled back to prior events or out to a global context in order to explain her understanding. Her horizons extended from her family and its community to the world community.

The main narrative characters in Margaret’s account were those of her own biological family. These provided the basis for a lifelong sense of family making, which in her older years Margaret described as a haven in a hard nosed world. Although Margaret focused on her own family, she told of this as a contribution to a better world. In this way she linked her daily practice with an on-going political awareness. Margaret’s account is an example of the family life theme in which the personal is political. She privileged the creation of family havens as the way one woman could make part of the world a better place.
Margaret initially described her learning style as *dilettante*, and initially I took her to mean that her learning was trifling/superficial. Following re-reading it is apparent that Margaret used this term in its more literary sense as a lover of learning for its pure pleasure. She went on to say *I don't think I've got that deep feeling for education in me. When I go to learn something, it's more for an interest of mine...everything you do in life you are learning about something and you're making yourself able to fulfil the role that you have at that time. And it doesn't have to be a formal thing—just the matter of the will to find out.*

**Conclusion**

The women of this study presented nine personal narratives that were not pure monomyth in form. Although I would not claim a radical new narrative structure in these accounts, I found that in her own way each woman constructed a narrative that I have come to describe as an 'ecological' telling. I use the term ecological in the same way as I did in the chapter on subjectivity—that is to refer to the environmental science sense of an organism and its niche, in which the whole setting and the inter-relationships must be understood in order to understand the organism. Although the women did present a linear chronology, they regularly interrupted that trajectory to describe, in detail, the people, places and times which constitute the context of events. It was as if they could not continue their story without integrating this setting.

This narrative structure is not unlike the film strategy of 'mise-en-scene', in which a filmmaker presents a frame in a style of realism whereby the viewer sees not just the people in the foreground but the whole setting in its complexity (Sobchack & Sobchack, 1987). Just as a film-maker may use this strategy to provide additional information that is judged central to the narrative, I found a similarity of structuring in the women's narratives. It
became significant to note how and when each woman found the need to provide a
description of her ecological connections or to recreate a ‘mise-en-scene’.

As I re-read the life-stories as narrative structures, I was struck by the way the women
spoke as relational selves. Brown and Gilligan (1992) have posited that to speak in such a
way is a major danger for women because the obligation of service, first to parents then to
a husband, becomes privileged. They argue that women then relinquish their own
development as they strive to be ‘nice’ and accommodating of others. I believe that this is
indeed possible, and this is evident in these nine narratives; however, I would argue that it
is important to resist a dichotomous view of connectedness/non-connectedness. In
suggesting an ecological view I propose that some women are able at times to move
beyond this peril by speaking as a self that is part of an ecology, in contrast to a self as an
individual entity speaking as if it exists in isolation, independent of others. The ecological
narrator speaks from a complex web of mutually conditioned relationships.

None of the women overtly acknowledged this dimension. This is my reading of the
narrative structure. I found that the narrative structures had resonance with Frances
Vaughan’s (1986) concept of transpersonal identity in which she argues that “(t)hinking
of the self as an open living system existing within a larger ecosystem can facilitate the
shift from imagining the self to be a separate, independent entity, to recognising its
complete interdependence and embeddedness in the totality” (p.32). To differing degrees
each of the nine narratives evidenced more of an ecological structure than that of the
monomyth.

An ecological narrative at its heart must be one which draws on equality and reciprocity
rather than dominance relations. It has many parallels with Mechtilde Hart’s (1992)
‘subsistence knowing’, a concept she draws from the productive activity of mothering.
Hart has argued that to place oneself as a part of a complex ecology is an act that
challenges binary thinking because:
(t)his attitude provokes a thinking which does not thrive on the hubris of certainty
and omnipotence whose primary gesture is one of rule and appropriating. Rather,
this kind of thinking endures ambiguity and provisionality and its primary gesture is
therefore acknowledgment and respect for the endless complexities of reality, but
also relentless, ongoing doubtfulness. (p.190)

Just as women's conversational strategies have been described as insecure or hesitant²,
the nine narratives could be read as tentative accounts if compared with a linear story of
progress and achievement. Instead, I would argue that this ecological form should not be
compared to the monomyth but should be read as a response to the differing lived
experience of women, one which privileges environment and connection, and thus is
ecological as well as linear.

In this chapter, I have introduced the women through cameos, photos, narrative
characters and themes, and their own summary of learning. I have elevated the facets of
the narrative that enabled the women to speak as a coherent self. In the following chapters
I will explore how these texts can also be read as the products of more contradictory and
complex subjectivities.

² Tannen(1994) provides one feminist critique of this view.
Chapter 6

SPEAKING AS A STUDENT

The nine women of this study devoted considerable narrative attention to their experiences within a formal education, both in childhood and adulthood. Their experiences as students appear to have given them baseline conceptual categories through which to understand and explain their learning. Formal education was not always valued but it did allow the women to determine what for them was ‘real’ learning and what was ‘just’ the learning of everyday life. As has been argued many times, formal education elevates public, objective, institutional epistemologies over the private, subjective, emotional and personal ‘ways of knowing’ (for example, Belenky et al., 1986; Edwards, 1993). Formal education taught the women what was to be considered as valid knowledge and how to conceive of teaching and learning.

The family/education institution relationship was apparent in both the accounts of being a child student and being an adult student. However the interaction between the two were spoken of differently. It is therefore important to consider the accounts of childhood and adult student experiences separately.

Childhood students: beginning to learn
The nine women of this study all began their personal narratives in childhood. They spoke of their experience of family, of school and of particular locations. However, the telling of childhood in these narratives is far more than an account of the where and when of childhood experience. As I had expressed my interest in how they saw
themselves as learners it should come as no surprise that each of the women especially recalled her years at school. Each evaluated how good or not good she was at school and each believed that their childhood phase of life ended with the last day of school.

But there is another possible reading of that time. Rather than a linear progression through school, marked with success or failure, it is possible to see this as a time in which each woman was learning to recognise and weave together multiple and often contradictory discursive strands. In childhood, we cannot be simply a child. We are also somebody's daughter, another's sister, someone's student, a resident of a certain location. In poststructural terms we are multiply positioned. These accounts of childhood illuminate some of these positions. They allow us to see what was constraining and what was enabling and how in the re-telling of childhood each of the women constructed themes of coherency. As the nine women recalled their schooling, they did so in a way that revealed multiple learnings. Childhood was the beginning of lifelong learning projects, but also the beginning of a restricted canvas of life. Learning in these personal narratives was both learning to be and learning what it was not possible to be.

This chapter will first examine relevant theoretical approaches to the interaction of family, school and society. I will then draw on the narrative accounts of childhood to illustrate that these women's learning revolved around three themes. First, the learning of difference, (gender and social stratification); second, the learning of the differential values placed on learning both at school and at home; and finally, the accounts explored 'what futures were possible for someone like me?'

The nine women were children in the first decades of the twentieth century. This was a time in which the notions of childhood were in transition. Early in the century, families were seen to be responsible for the economic provision and moral guidance of children, whilst children were seen as able to take responsibility for their own behaviour.
Increasingly however, the state intervened in the guidance of children, for example by utilising discourses which laid down the principles for the development of the future citizenry. Children were to attend school rather than work, mothers and babies were to be at home and fathers at work despite any socio-economic differentials (Reiger, 1985).

Concern for a healthy, productive citizenry was evidenced by what Jill Matthews called a 'population ideology (1984, p.74). Religious, eugenic, class, political and feminist groups agitated for social change, and often focused on family. As health and education professionals increasingly monitored childhood, developmental discourses were paramount (Walkerdine, 1985). Childhood was thus construed as a time for guided and monitored development both at home and at school. Each child was to develop to their full potential, albeit a gendered and socially stratified potential. Childhood increasingly became a time in which family and state responsibilities acted as a coalition (Donzelot, 1979). Louis Althusser (1971) has drawn attention to state responsibility for education as a major 'ideological state apparatus' that enabled a covert form of management of individuals. The provision of public schooling is a significant arm of the social policy of the state, and Althusser has argued that within capitalist societies schools exist to provide workers with basic skills of literacy and numeracy, whilst equipping them with suitable attitudes to work and an awareness of where they fit in the existing social order.

Each of the nine personal narratives revealed the validity of Althusser’s interpretation. The women spoke of the instrumental learnings of English and Mathematics as foundational and as crucial in their future roles. They described their streaming into domestic or academic courses and how this complemented or constrained their later roles. They spoke of ‘their’ school in relation to others—secular/non-secular, government/private and rural/urban—and in doing so revealed how they perceived their community to be structured and where they were located within this structure. But to consider these narratives through a neo-Marxist lens is limited, as such an
understanding of the role of the state is overly deterministic, marking both students and teachers as passive participants (Giroux, 1982; Connell et al., 1982). Further, although such a lens allows us to view schools as sites of productive activities, it does not adequately account for reproductive activities, locating these solely within the sphere of family (David, 1980).

The women's personal narratives of childhood challenged the simple division of schools as sites of production, families as reproduction. The women often explained family and school in interaction, and in doing so revealed family, school and community as a complex relationship. They spoke of themselves as active mediators between home and school, constantly living and evaluating the contradictions and compatibilities between the two (Arnot, 1984). Most importantly, the personal narratives revealed that the school/family nexus was a crucial site for the learning of a gendered world. “Far from being separate spheres of reproduction and production, the family and school operate in a dialectical manner to reproduce the ideological and structural conditions of the gender division of labour” (Trotman, 1984, p.134).

In recognising the child as an active mediator, there is a danger that we see this as the action of free choice. The women’s narratives expose the incongruency of such a notion, as each told of limitations and contradictions. The narratives reveal that it is not so much structures that affect these women but the processes within them. In Western societies, we can see the action of normalising disciplines in the maintenance of the regime(s) of truth, which in particular this century, pertained to the disciplines of medicine, education and psychology. Through these disciplines we come to know what it is to be ‘normal’ in development, in intelligence and in physical abilities. This can be seen in the monitoring of the population, by screening, testing and diagnosis, and through the technologies developed within these disciplines. In the twentieth century, schools and families became prime sites in which these normalising processes became visible.
In her personal narrative of childhood, each woman strove to explain how she fitted into her society, in a legitimate (and normal) place. At the same time, each woman spoke of the development of a self that was a unique project. It becomes apparent within the texts that each woman placed an emphasis on certain aspects of lived experience above others; I call this 'elevating' certain notions above others. Thus in the accounts of childhood it is possible to see how each woman began to construct herself as having a positive immediate or long-term future. Accounts of schooling and family life enable us to see the mechanics of power. Rather than in a deterministic way seeing these women as channelled into their rightful place through schooling, we can examine their narratives to understand the dynamics of micropower (Foucault, 1980a). As Valerie Walkerdine (1985) has noted:

"(t)he school defines not only what shall be taught, what knowledge is, but also defines and regulates both what 'a child' is and how learning and teaching are to be considered. (pp.207–8)"

Through the disciplines of medicine and psychology, the family must be seen as a similar site of 'policing' (Donzelot, 1979; Reiger, 1985). The way the individual women made sense of this complex as they defined themselves and their place is the focus of the following analysis.

The childhood narratives revealed the way each person took up discourses available through both school and family and wove them together as if they were simply commonsense. Because the ultimate test of a normalising process is that it is commonsense/taken-for-granted, it is possible to see how each woman resolved contradictions and took up a particular combination of discursive positions in order to begin the development of a coherent self. Each woman began to take up what was to become commonsense for her life, and, as I will show, this began to determine what the horizons of learning were for her.
The women of this study all regularly attended school. Two of them completed only six years of primary school, Lucy in a city Catholic school, Irene in a rural one-teacher school. Five women achieved Intermediate/Junior certificates—Val, Margaret and Josephine through domestic high schools, Florence an academic high school and Dagmar through a private girls school. Val then completed a further year at what she described as a ‘finishing school’, a private boarding school for girls. Two of the women (Emma and Louise) completed Leaving Certificates at private girls schools, with Louise undertaking some subjects at university as an unmatriculated student.

As the women recalled their childhood, it can be seen they were answering three main questions: where did I fit? what learning was important for me? and, what futures were possible for me? Although there is no clear demarcation between these questions, it is useful to consider each separately.

Where did I fit?: Learning about difference
Childhood is a time of expanding horizons. As a baby matures it begins to recognise that there is a separation between the mother and itself, and within the family other differences emerge: parent/child, brother/sister. As the child moves out from the family new differences must be negotiated: teacher/student, adult/child and the list continually expands. A major learning of childhood must be the learning of difference as children become aware of their own possible positions and begin to interact with the symbolic order (Lacan, 1977).

Most of this learning is unremarkable as what the child learns is to fit into the normal categories available to them (Davies, 1993). To be normal is unremarkable. However, when the available categories are problematic in some way, they become remark-able, that is, something worthy of a remark. And indeed when we consider that these personal narratives are those of aged women, this characteristic is even more notable because a particular life-time of living has maintained a certain category as problematic
and remark-able. Through the school/family interface, these women imply that they began to see their place within a socially stratified society.

**Remarking on family differences**

Five of the women, Josephine, Irene, Lucy, Louise and Margaret, found the family/school interaction remark-able, particularly at times when the interaction provided a conflictive situation that demanded some resolution. For each of these women, this led to an awareness that the world was socially stratified; however, each woman responded differently illustrating how individuals move within social structures and are positioned differently by available discourses.

In the following extract Josephine depicts a number of differences. She began with the difference between academic learning and social learning, then illustrated the religious differences in her town, the role differences between her parents and finally, as the daughter of the town's general practitioner, her difference from other children.

**Josephine: What I remember about [primary school] of course is not very much academically (strong tone). The Catholic school playground and the public school playground backed onto each other and all I can remember is the Protestant kids used to stand on the fence and hurl abuse at the Catholic kids and the Catholic kids used to stand on the other siding hurling abuse back at us.**

**BP : Yes, I remember similar things.**

**Josephine: They used to walk home on one side of the street and we walked on the other. One day my father drove down the street and he had a Renault Auto Sports Car (the first one in Australia, I believe) and we thought it was wonderful (proud tone). He slowed down and he had heard all this abuse and he was furious and wouldn’t take us home and made us walk home and not talk to anyone and he would wait at home for us. We weren’t to tell mother anything about what we had been doing - he would be there. He was angry...I can remember him saying “those people whether they be Catholics or not, I am their doctor and I look after them—we must be neutral”. He said “it’s not their fault that they’re Catholics—it’s not your fault that you’re Protestant - you had no choice” (re-enactment)...I remember that very clearly (measured tone).**

Josephine continued throughout her personal narrative to note social stratification but did not directly acknowledge it as such. Rather she chose to understand difference through a notion of ‘characters’ (for example later in the account she told of the
'infamous' doctor or the 'eccentric' lord she worked for). This strategy allowed her to recognise status differences in a way that made the social stratification more negotiable.

In a similar dynamic, Irene recalled her concern when a teacher emphasised her family's difference from others within the classroom. It was Irene's father who also provided an alternative position.

Irene: *I think—this is going back to school days—I don't know why the headmaster asked the question—but he said 'stand up those who can't milk'—we all lived on farms you see. There were two people who stood up—my sister and myself—and he said 'sit down, the Richards' girls never do anything' (re-enactment).*

BP: *Goodness, goodness.*

Irene: *Of course we told father (strong tone). He said that wasn't a very nice thing for him to say—after all he did the milking, or Arthur did. There was no more said about it, but the question was never asked again (quiet laugh).*

Irene told of this event as a disturbing puzzle. We cannot know whether the teacher considered the Richards as not the right sort of farmers or whether perhaps the family had more wealth than was usual for the district. What we can see is that Irene learned that she was different from other children and that difference was family based.

Further, in her recall Irene described the family as the more supportive environment. Irene continued in her personal narrative to maintain a strong public/private distinction elevating the private as the essential foil to the stressors of public workplace. She spoke of striving 'to be fair' and 'do the right thing' at work, and of returning to the family for nurturing and connection.

Lucy and Margaret more explicitly named this learning of family difference with Lucy attending a Catholic school, Margaret a government school.

Lucy: *I don't know, I think the school I went to they either liked you or they didn't like you (quiet tone). And there were teachers who didn't like me, because as I said I came from a large family and we were very poor I suppose. Maybe I didn't have as much as the other kids and couldn't give as much as the other kids. And I think this does influence, or in those days, it did influence a lot of teachers (firm tone).*
Here Lucy recognised that she was more than ‘Lucy’; she was more notably, ‘one of the Beatties’. Lucy used a material analysis to determine that it is not who you are but what you can financially contribute that was noted in her school. As her personal narrative continued, she invested in an interest in people, valuing those who care above those who were materially privileged, although not in a mutually exclusive way. In a similar vein, Margaret recalled her first days at school, albeit as a more affluent middle-class child.

**Margaret:** School itself was a culture shock to me (laugh)...having a family of grown-ups who treated me as an equal and very lovely always and...interested in what I thought about things (warm tone)—to go to school and have people the same age as my sisters treating me as if I was a slug! appalled me!...I’m sure that was culture shock that I had and it lasted a very long time (firm tone).

**Margaret:** I remember one teacher said to me when I’d gone into her class—I was a bit older then—she said “oh you’re an Evans!” as if it was about the nastiest thing that could have happened to her—having an Evans in her class once more (laugh). But I can’t think how they could have been so blinking rude. Rude they were!... I really didn’t know what I’d come upon I think it possibly held back my ability to learn for a while.

Again family difference became apparent through the actions of teachers, and Margaret’s account illustrates the interplay of family and school environments. Margaret particularly recalled her schooling as coinciding with the Depression. In the following extract she locates her life politics as arising from this interaction of personal life and the historical time.

**Margaret:** My family were very great supporters of capitalism—real props of the capitalist system (laugh). I don’t know how I managed to turn out to be something a bit different. But right from those early days I felt no no, there’s something wrong here (strong tone). It wasn’t capitalism or socialism I was concerned about in those days, it was fascism, and to me socialism was the only way to go (quiet tone). I’ve seen a good deal of the Depression—that didn’t affect me too deeply because my family could cope—you know, they were copers (laugh). My mother was very good at managing a budget and my father was a very capable man—even though he wasn’t making any money during the latter part of the Depression, at least he was able to bring us all through, from what he’d had before.

**BP:** So do you think at that stage you might have been observing things?
Margaret: I’m sure I was observing things (strong tone), and at primary school some of the children were very poor and badly dressed, and I think I must have been very aware of how people treated each other from a very early age, because I felt that those little children who were poor were discriminated against—just in as much as their treatment, you know, they were thought less of (energetic tone). I’m not sure there was probably some nasty name given to children like that, I can’t remember that one, but I remember feeling very strongly. I felt that I was a second class citizen with the adults in the school, and those other children who were poor were even lower down the scale—they were worse. It pained me that children went off to school with ragged clothes—really ragged. More holes than sleeve—that sort of thing. I felt very strongly about that (firm tone). There was a girl at primary school who was—a Down’s syndrome girl—but I wouldn’t have known it at that stage—and she was called Mad Muriel and that pained me terribly—this awful treatment of this girl—and she wasn’t very well looked after, and she used to get the most appalling chilblains in winter; and people would dodge her because she was unattractive and I was very concerned about what I realised later were social questions (quiet tone).

Margaret recalled this experience as a symbolic marker of her learning of difference. She utilised her own experience of discrimination to acknowledge discrimination in other forms. Margaret continued to develop this theme of care and connection that she began to understand as both a local and a global issue.

For all the women in this study, family was recalled as the supportive environment whilst school became alienating through its surveillance of difference. However direct comment on family difference was not the only way the women illustrated how they learned their place in the world. Pierre Bourdieu (1971) has drawn attention to the notions of cultural capital and cultural ethos, both of which help to further illuminate these women’s accounts of school/family interaction. Bourdieu has argued that capital can manifest itself in social and cultural forms as well as economic. For some children their families will be located within the dominant cultural group, thus the kinds of knowledge and modes of thought experienced in that family will be congruent with those in the schooling system, what Bourdieu would call a similar cultural ethos. This compatibility allows that child to continue through the system, thus gaining credentialling, or cultural capital, that will then be converted into economic capital through employment at a privileged level. Lucy and Louise provide a telling contrast of material differences which illustrate the impact of differential cultural capital.
For Louise, her years at a private school for girls in Adelaide were told as overwhelmingly positive. She noted how congruent her home and school environments were.

Louise: I can remember [my mother] would try to teach me drawing - this was before I went to kindergarten. I remember she taught me how to draw a swan of all things (laugh). I remember when I went to kindergarten we were asked to draw something and I proudly drew my swan and it was really quite good you see (smiling). It gives you tremendous confidence to do something that you’ve brought to school that you’ve learnt before you got there (energetic tone). It’s funny how I have thought in later years that the things she taught me that helped me to have better confidence when I started school—which was such a strange environment (thoughtful tone).

In her personal narrative of school, Louise recalled how schooling enabled her to develop a love of dramatic arts, fine arts and social sciences, expressive interests that she found transferable into adulthood. In contrast, Lucy explained that education was instrumental for her family as a way to ensure they wouldn’t have to work in factories. In the following account, she draws attention to a sense of mismatch with her school.

Lucy: I didn’t like school. Maybe it was the teachers I didn’t like so much. But, if I’d have been like a lot of the other kids, if I’d had what a lot of the other kids had, I would have been happier I think and would have liked to have gone on (fast pace).

BP: But as it was, feeling a bit out of the system - discriminated against in the system?

Lucy: Yes, that’s right. I did represent our school in the spelling competition. And I mean those things, although I did them, I was nervous—you know I was very nervous about that. And I didn’t like—the singing lessons, you know, we all had to have—because I can’t sing for nuts (laugh).

In Louise’s case both school and family interacted in a complementary way and her cultural capital enabled her to begin to position herself as an intellectual. Her personal narrative continued thematically throughout her life to elevate the intellectual extensions possible. Such congruence enabled Louise to draw on a sense of herself as an ongoing learner in the traditional intellectual sense because what she was learning was congruent with our culture’s construction of valid learning. Louise’s economic capital matched her cultural capital and although the Depression had begun, her family was able to support
her through Leaving Honours. However at this point it is crucial to remember that capital is also gendered. Louise recalled that her father was not willing to continue to support her liberal education as he believed that girls might need more practical skills and insisted on business college training.

Lucy’s family did not have access to the same cultural or economic capital as Louise’s family and she left school to help her mother after the birth of her ninth child.

**Lucy:** I left at 12...I did go back after that Christmas to try for a scholarship but my father was a very independent sort of person. He didn’t think you got there because of your brains. But he had this feeling that if you went in anywhere on a scholarship they’d think you were a charity case and they’d kind of look down on you. So I went back and the first thing they taught in this Intermediate class was poker burning. Now I’m absolutely useless with my hands. I thought I can’t stand doing this for very long. So I carried the nun’s books home one night and I said good-bye and I never went back again. So, that was the end of my school days (matter of fact tone).

In this account, Lucy reveals some of the contradictions for working-class children in the education system. As government increasingly regulated schooling, schools (along with child health services) became sites of direct intervention to ‘improve’ working-class standards (Reiger, 1985). By equating education with charity, Lucy’s account reflects this awareness. Further in her account, Lucy illustrates an understanding of the valued side of the mental/manual dichotomy and later went on to emphasise her superiority in mental arithmetic and spelling. In doing this Lucy stressed her intellectual ability but made it clear that, as a working-class child, realistically school did not provide opportunities for a child like herself. Throughout her personal narrative Lucy did not directly challenge her working-class place and constructed a practical and pragmatic self; however she regularly expanded the account to give a sense of an intellectual self through her ‘need’ to be a reader and to maintain a world beyond the practicalities of everyday life. This in itself can be seen as a challenge, albeit one not directly acknowledged.
The five women who remarked on the learning of social stratification illustrate that it was re-learned over their lives. I would agree with Carolyn Steedman that "(t)raditionally class-consciousness has not been conceived of as a psychological consciousness" (1986, p.13, original emphasis). Like Steedman, I would argue that class consciousness is a learned, and re-learned, position. Although the remaining four women did not recall learning about class in childhood, I would suggest that this is because it was unremarkable and taken for granted, rather than an absent learning. Difference is an omnipresent learning particularly in the area of class consciousness. For the remaining women, social stratification became more notable as a learning later in life: for Emma and Dagmar as a result of living in rural settings, for Val when she wanted to be a nurse and for Florence through her paid work opportunities.

Although this section has explored how the women began to learn about class difference and has drawn on what was remark-able, difference can also be seen in what was told as simply fact. I am referring here to where each woman lived as a child. Although it was not directly theorised by most of the women, locality provided certain early discursive threads. The three women whose childhoods were notable for moves from town to town, and country to city do overtly draw on differences in these environments. For Emma the contrast between the small boarding school family and the impersonal large city school was used to explain why she began to value caring relationships. For Josephine and Dagmar the country towns provided a childhood notable for outdoor adventure whereas in the city, as Josephine said, things became serious academically then. Both women constructed differences between the learning from experience and the learning from education and determined the former as valued but not 'real' learning. For Irene, Val and Florence, who remained in rural settings, outdoor activities and community connectedness were idealised and they began a narrative theme that privileged learning from life. Finally, for Louise, Margaret and Lucy their suburban narratives elevated the extended family networks of their suburb.
Family became the site of connectedness and in differing ways for all of the women it became a site of commitment.

*Remarking on gender differences*

Just as family difference was remarkable in childhood for five of the women, in most of the personal narratives comment on gender difference was significant in its absence. And yet I would argue that this would have been, and would be today, a most significant learning in any childhood. While learning about gender is not commented on, on another level, it can be read between every line. Within the family and school environments, the performative aspect of gender was spoken about differently.

Within the family setting, how they learned to be a girl was not overtly narrated, but rather it was made visible by association. For two of the women there was a direct contrast of boys’ childhoods and their own, however the remaining women revealed gendered identities only through their assumptions about ‘appropriate’ domestic roles and through observations about ‘appropriate’ parental roles in their biological family.

Two of the women, Josephine and Val, spoke of the positive aspects of childhood as being associated with boys. For Val, this was through contrast with her sister.

*Val:* *I turned into [my father’s] son really!* My sister was the house-girl and I used to feed the chooks and do the gardening and dad went fishing—I used to go fishing. Camping and all sorts of things with him (warm tone).

In a similar way, Josephine positioned herself as a girl who had more in common with boys. As can be seen in the following extract she drew on a sense of her own physical competency yet, as is compatible with traditional gender roles, she still needed a male hero to rescue her. Although Josephine emphasised her ability to *play all the boys’ games*, heterosexism underpins the following account.

*Josephine:* There were a lot of boys [in our village]. *They said I could play with them if when I got hurt I didn’t cry.* There was one lovely boy - David I think he was the first love of my life and he objected to the way the boys treated me, thought I should have been treated better (quiet tone). David was
about six years older than I was. He was determined that I would learn to swim and that I would beat the boys (firm tone). So after school we used to go around into one of the other boys and he taught me to swim. The first time I went swimming I was in a boat—this was what brought it on—I was in one of the boats mucking around after school and the boys pulled it out to quite a distance and they said that I had to learn how to swim and with that they chucked me overboard (dramatic pause). They rowed off and left me. David jumped in and every time I went down he pushed me in the middle and helped me and finally we made it to shore. He was determined then that I would learn to swim and that I wouldn’t be frightened and that I was going to beat the lot of them (quiet tone). I didn’t think it was possible, but he said it was. And so it came to pass and no-one was more surprised than these big bully boys. I used to play all the boys’ games. I was very good at cricket (laugh). We had great fun—I used to play rugby. There were no Girl Guides, so I was sort of a honorary Scout and very much involved in all these sort of things (strong tone).

Beginning from these (re)constructions of girl but not passive girl, both of these women continued this theme to some extent into their narratives about adulthood. They included in their notion of feminine a sense of activity in what could be determined as male spheres; for example, later Val told of her hard work on a property as an equal working partnership with her husband, whilst Josephine told of war activity and independent adventures across the United Kingdom.

All of the women told as unproblematic the fact that domestic skills were part of their learning in childhood. It was taken-for-granted, natural and important that they learn housekeeping, cooking, sewing and the like. To varying degrees the women elevated their mothers’ apprenticeship style of teaching as indicative that theirs was a ‘good’ family that took its role of bringing up children seriously. The many skills they learnt however were often described as just picked up. This important point will be elaborated in the chapters focusing on the domestic roles of wife and mother (Chapters 7 and 8), however, at this juncture, the point serves to illustrate the unquestioned adoption of family roles and responsibility as naturally gendered. And I emphasise again, this construction was told in the 1990s when other interpretations, especially feminist, have been made available. However, in these personal narratives domestic skills were categorised as gendered skills from childhood through to old age.
The accounts of four of the women, Lucy, Florence, Emma and Irene, illustrate how the domestic sphere was constructed as central even when the women stepped outside it. For each of them, macro events impacted on their families in such a way that their domestic role, although understood as inevitable, was postponed. Lucy left school to help at home, like all her sisters, however because her brothers could not secure employment since the Depression had deepened, she then took up the position as a family breadwinner, outside the traditional bounds of her family. Similarly, Florence left school for paid work to help the family during the Depression. Irene had left school to be at home on the farm with her mother at the age of 13, however the death of her father when she was 17 interrupted her domestic role. The family relocated to Sydney so that the two daughters could re-train, and gain employment. These three women tell of paid work as a domestic contribution and again, as women's lives often do, they blur the artificially created public/private divide. These tellings illustrate how the women retained a subjectivity focused on their gendered domestic place, by describing work as 'for the family' rather than as for a 'career'.

The only other window into these families as sites of gendered learning comes through the descriptions of parental relationships. All of the women elevated their parents’ gendered roles within the family as a complementary and admirable division of labour. Even the early death of her father merely reinforced, for both Josephine and Irene, that it was man’s business to cope with certain responsibilities and in Josephine’s case this was further reinforced by the admired involvement of a male Legacy worker. Irene’s following account typifies how family experiences and observations were unproblematically gendered.

**Irene:** Well I'd say that we were encouraged to do things (strong tone). We were quite small children. We had to help with the washing up, we had to wipe up, and also make our beds before we went to school (laugh). You were encouraged to do things—like during [World War I] for instance, we sat by the hour and knitted for instance. Then the fetes or bazaar as they called them in those days—we were encouraged to help with those things (strong tone).

**BP:** Was that your mother or both mother and father?
Irene: Both. Father was president of quite a lot of things, and of course, mother supported him (quiet, matter of fact tone).

Although some of these women found the interplay of school and family a stimulus to begin to recognise and name the differences of social stratification, this interplay was not carried into their accounts of the learning of gender. Family roles were told of as natural and uncontested and any learning minimised through its construction as 'natural'. However, as will now be explored, school learning was distinctly recognised as gendered learning.

What learning was important: learning at school
From the personal narratives it is apparent that as these women progressed through the schooling system not only did they learn their ABCs, they also learnt about learning. First they learnt about what was valued as learning and what was not. Second, they learnt that knowledge was to be appropriated by them as individuals and, as individuals, they could, and would, be rated against each other. Some would be smart, some not so smart. Finally they recognised that as girls they were offered specific learning that would prepare them for their future roles.

Of the nine women, two attended private schools, one a church school, three a combination of government and private schools and three passed through the government system. Further although six of the women attended mixed gender primary schools, of the seven who went on to secondary level, all but one went to an all girls school. From this we might surmise that their families 'chose' all girls' environments for their daughters' secondary education; instead I would argue that this is more a reflection of how normalising processes act via education. In the first half of this century separate schooling for girls was part of the maintenance of a gendered society and illustrates the state/family/school dynamic. To understand this further, it is useful to briefly review Australian schooling for girls in the relevant period, 1910–1940.
Throughout the nineteenth century, education for Australian girls had been sporadic and variable. For most working-class girls, paid work or domestic work in their own home precluded their involvement in any significant schooling. Rural girls had little available. The greatest successes were to be found in the private academies in large towns and cities. These schools successfully developed the ‘accomplished lady’ highly compatible with the ‘cultured home’ she was expected to run (Kyle, 1986; Theobald, 1987). The growing middle-class increasingly recognised education as an inherent factor in a meritocratic capitalist nation, both for sons and daughters. Sons were to become leaders of society, daughters their intelligent companions and, as mothers, teachers of the next generation.

Following Federation, State government reviews strongly linked education, national economic growth and technical efficiency. The ensuing ‘New Education’ had a strong utilitarian base where schools were seen as places to train employees capable of working in a more technological workplace (Blackmore, 1987, Barcan, 1988). At a secondary level, the New Education aimed to raise the nation’s technical competency and general efficiency. Prior to this period, there had been the belief that secondary education was for the elite, however the New Education brought with it the philosophy of vocational training with industrial courses for technicians, commercial courses for lower clerical officers, agricultural courses for farmers and academic courses for the professions and domestic courses for girls (Hyams & Bessant, 1972). All States had some form of examination at the end of primary school in order to stream students appropriately into secondary schools that specialised in the academic subjects or the vocational technical subjects.

With the introduction of compulsory schooling from age six to fourteen years, schooling in the early twentieth century (at least at the primary level), had extended to most girls. The subjects introduced through the ‘learning by doing’ approach of the
New Education did extend a girl’s skills, however, the imposition of domestic training made her place also clear. She was trained to be highly compatible with the new ‘scientific home’ she was expected to run or to be a worker in such a home. Whether privileged or working-class, domestic science/arts/economy was seen to be the true vocation for all girls, the future homemakers of the nation. Indeed Noeline Kyle (1986) concluded that in the early decades of the twentieth century the “ideal of domestic training for women was raised to absurd heights” (p.120). Due in part to a desire to train working-class girls for domestic service to address the ‘servant question’, and in part to appropriately educate the wives and mothers of the future, the ‘woman question’, domestic training became the organising factor for girls’ education (Kyle, 1986).

In this Australian context the six of the women who attended all girls schools (with their gendered curricula) can be seen as typical for their time. Indeed Florence, the one girl who took her place on the meritocratic education ladder and was streamed into a co-educational academic school, could not afford to stay at school and left to help support the family through the Depression. Such experiences confront the notion of ‘free choice’.

The women’s accounts reflect what R. W. Connell and colleagues have named ‘hegemonic curriculum’ (1982, pp.120–126) in which certain knowledges are legitimised, others marginalised. First and foremost this hegemonic curriculum was a gendered curriculum. As both sociologists and philosophers of education have noted, schools are part of the preparation of children for the productive roles in that community for the public world of work (Althusser, 1971; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Martin, 1985). For Australian women in the first half of this century this often meant a short period of paid employment, followed by the domestic support role that enabled the male to function effectively in the public sphere, or for working-class women a combination of
both paid and domestic work. Legitimated knowledge thus becomes that which supports this process.

Overwhelmingly their education taught these women that what was to be named as learning was that which was valued through the hegemonic curriculum, and yet simultaneously they had limited access to that learning. Thus, we can see that they were not readily able to position themselves as ‘real’ learners. What the personal narratives suggest is that instead these women utilised the whole fabric of their lives and relationships to construct another sense of learning outside the dominant construction. I suggest they invested in positions that enabled them to develop some coherent sense of themselves as learners, and that this most often was a construction drawn from outside formal education.

Each of the nine women tell of receiving an overtly domestic education at school. For Lucy and Irene this was the basic six years that provided them with literacy and numeracy skills, with an assumption that their destiny was in clerical and domestic work, paid and unpaid. Margaret, Val and Josephine were streamed directly into the domestic high schools having been assessed as not suitable for academic studies. In this way, their futures in homemaking or within the compatible female service jobs were assured. Louise, Emma, Florence and Dagmar were able to attend academic schools, either because their families could purchase this education (Louise, Emma, Dagmar) or because they succeeded at the entry examination (Florence). This last group did not avoid the limitations of a gendered curriculum despite experiencing a liberal rather than a vocational education. I would argue that this education merely prepared them for a socially stratified domestic role in which they were positioned as the accomplished or scientific mother. Their education, like the liberal education of their brothers, was to prepare them for their own profession, homemaker.
This 'hegemonic' domestic education also determined what was not to be classed as real learning. Jane Roland Martin (1985) has noted that the emphasis by schooling on productive processes negates a crucial dimension of any society, its reproductive processes. These include activities that focus on interpersonal relationships, family dynamics and the definition and maintenance of communities, all of which are commonly defined as private activities particularly associated with women. These activities have become the lesser 'other'. Wendy Luttrell (1993) has argued that "(a)s a result, schools promote a narrow view of citizenship, one that privileges the ethic of work and public life over the ethic of care" (p.539). What are privileged are the skills and knowledge of rational, instrumental learning; what are marginalised are the skills and knowledge of empathy, nurturance and care-taking.

Although all of the women told of a domestic education, it was taken up by each in a different way. The outcomes of a vocational domestic education and a liberal domestic education were notably different and need to be considered comparatively.

**Vocational domestic education**

Margaret, Val and Josephine expressed an ambivalence towards their domestic education. For Margaret, although her family couldn't afford a private education, her father arranged for her to travel to a girls' technical school that he had dealt with through his business. Margaret named this as gendered education—first learning to be a lady and then learning that lady's place.

**Margaret:** *Miss G was the headmistress and she was very much the headmistress—very much the lady, very dignified* (strong tone). *Stood very straight as she spoke to you; and I think probably gave us confidence in a way* (questioning tone). *It was almost like reading about girls' schools in English children's stories. She had a very firm grip on discipline, people behaved like ladies, we were meant to be ladies! I'll tell you this terrible thing because it's so interesting* (quiet, laughing tone). *The motto of the school was 'Courtesy and Diligence' which just about placed women where they ought to go—courteous and diligent for the rest of their lives for somebody else* (quiet laugh).
Later Margaret illustrated how a gendered learning environment can provide contradictory complex information about one’s self.

**Margaret:** I think when I went to secondary school and found out I was good at doing things, that was a help. I know it’s no great shakes to be the best cook in a class of small girls but it does give you confidence. I think probably when I came top in cooking on my first day in technical school—an enormous shock to me, I thought they must have made a mistake—I don’t think I realised I was good at doing things (wonderment tone).

**Margaret:** At the end of that time I sort of felt, I’ve been to the wrong place (questioning tone). I would have liked to have gone on to further education—the other angle from there—but over the years of my life I haven’t really regretted it for a minute! because when I had my children, sewing their clothes and doing things about the house; my friends were dashing off to Singers—to learn dressmaking or to the Tech, to do those things that I’d done earlier (strong tone).

A similar ambivalence was paralleled in Val’s account, however as Val had experienced one year at a boarding school, the contrast between liberal and a vocational education was even more marked.

**Val:** I’ve always felt that taking the domestic science course was very good because I became very much a home-body. I wanted to cook and I wanted to learn and there was—we had things like if you were building a home you built on the side of the hill away from the wind, and all those sort of balancing things out—there was quite a lot of that in it (firm tone). There was a fair bit of home decorations, balancing your colours, etc. A lot of it was towards what I was doing in my life and it did. I think that was a very good choice.

**Val:** [At boarding school] I did a lot of investigation reading, learning about various ways of life, various cultures and all that sort of thing round the world, not just in Australia. I did a fantastic amount of reading that way...But I was enjoying thoroughly, this investigation type thing. See I’d had domestic science until then—at the domestic science school—but then I’d gone into more the learning about other countries and that sort of thing and I wanted to follow that up (strong tone).

Both Margaret and Val assessed their domestic education in the light of what unfolded in their married years. Val was to become the home manager on a large property and Margaret was to leave family and friends to move interstate to a new suburb. They acknowledged the utility of their domestic education, but as ‘real’ learners, they were less confident. Both believed that they missed out on something—both struggled to name this. Both women take up a discursive space—what they are is determined by what they are not: that is, not good learners.
Margaret: *I think perhaps [school] made me feel in some ways that other people were more capable of learning than I was* (slow pace)—*which is sort of to say* (silence). *I think I looked up to people who have an education, that's probably what it is. But really I can't complain because I've always been surrounded by people who were interesting and full of life, and doing good things* (firm tone).

In the two accounts we can see the deep impact of a hegemonic curriculum on two women. They have learned some useful skills which did serve them well, but they could not name themselves as confident learners in a world that elevated other forms of learning that they were denied.

Josephine in contrast did not value her domestic learning, seeing it only as the necessary path to nursing. Since Josephine never married, it would be possible to suggest that she did not have an opportunity to value and integrate those domestic skills later in her life, therefore in retrospect did not value them. On examination this does not hold true. Josephine spent two years working as a domestic help in the United Kingdom in between nursing jobs and spoke proudly of the skills she developed in that time. Further nursing in the post-war years incorporated a significant domestic component, and Josephine was also the homemaker for her invalid mother for many years. But more importantly, I believe, unlike Val and Margaret who constructed a story of compliance to the school’s task of creating ‘ladies’ and ‘housewives’, Josephine told of her domestic science years as rebellion.

Although Josephine came from a middle-class family that valued education, Josephine described most of her secondary education as *terribly boring*. Beyond this comment she had little to say about the curriculum except to note her perceived incompetence in sewing, knitting and cooking, that is the manual arts. Tellingly she commented on her one love, Anatomy and Physiology, a more scientific subject. Josephine told of being one of the ‘bad girls’, explaining *that the walls of [my] Domestic High fell down when I left because I supported them for years—I was always being sent out*. As with much of the feminine condition, Josephine found herself faced with a dichotomy—good
girl/bad girl. Her resistance was through the choice of 'bad girl', rebelling against the middle-class imposition of domestication into 'nice girl' (Brown & Gilligan, 1992 give a more recent exploration of this dynamic). This did not begin a thematic link in Josephine's life. She did not continue to tell of the life of a rebel. Rather I would argue that this strategy enabled Josephine to utilise a positive and active construction of herself as a learner despite the constraints of a limiting education system. Further by understanding herself as 'different' because of her family background Josephine was able to positively adapt to the implications of failing the testing regimes of the time—this comparison business.

**Josephine:** Now really schooling was a problem for me when we came to [the city] (slow pace). The big problem was that I'd missed out on such a lot of schooling that there were great chunks and here I was when I should have been going into sixth class and in some subjects I was good and others I was hopeless and didn't know what they were talking about! (strong tone). I ended up in a fourth class with all the little kids (tsk). I can always remember and I used to hate it (quiet tone). If some child was not doing well, one of the teachers would say 'if you're not careful you'll be like Josephine Blow—the eldest girl in the class'. Though I made up three classes in one year, I had this business where I was always being compared to people—this comparison business (strong tone)...This comparison business is soul-destroying actually (troubled tone)...I ran into a situation which was rather unfortunate, my grandfather had been a senior inspector of schools. I was quite unaware of this at the time, [but] most of the school teachers in that school knew him well...There were a couple of them that didn't like him. Years later I discovered I was the bunny. Some of the teachers would say 'just because your grandfather, etcetera—it never occurred to me!' (quiet tone).

As Noeline Kyle (1986) has argued domestic education was to fit women for 'their natural destiny'. These three women's accounts reveal the availability of multiple positions within discourses. For Val, domestic learning became more than commonsense; it was something to be investigated and considered. Her position is compatible with the understanding of mothers as central to the modern, scientific home (Reiger, 1985). Margaret took on her domestic education as instrumentally valuable but, as with Val, found it never quite enough and developed an interest in social justice movements that were extensions of, but still compatible with, family life. Both women complied with, yet extended, the domestic discourses by seeking extensions outside the home. And for Josephine domestic education was to be deflected and denied, first
through rebellion at school and later through naming her life in other terms such as work.

_Liberal domestic education_
In contrast to vocational domestic education which at the very least held some instrumental value for most of the women, liberal domestic education was spoken of in a more ambivalent manner. Louise, Emma, Florence and Dagmar’s experiences of a liberal schooling, and Val’s one year at boarding school, once again illustrate how individuals vary in their responses to being schooled. Emma and Dagmar in their accounts revealed the irrelevance of the curriculum to their lives at the time and in retrospect. At the least, the women who did have a vocational domestic education could recognise it as instrumental learning, but Emma and Dagmar demonstrated a passivity towards, and a sense of inadequacy, from their formal learning.

Emma referred to her schooling as a _struggle_, believing that she was _not university material_ and instead in her account concentrated on the affective and leadership dimensions of her school experience.

**Emma:** So I did go back [after failing Leaving] and do another year, but always, all my energies went into being a prefect, sport, I enjoyed netball, hockey, athletics, the house was everything—_teamwork, school spirit_—a lot of that (matter of fact tone).

Dagmar’s account of secondary schooling is notable in its brevity and apparent irrelevance to her life. As noted in the Cameo chapter (Chapter 5), this is one extract in which Dagmar uses ‘you’ to distance herself from the experience. She spoke as if she neither succeeded nor failed, but endured.

**Dagmar:** [Except for one teacher] all the rest had been at the school for a long time, as had the headmistress; and I guess you held them in awe, but not total respect. You felt ‘oh these old ladies how can they be still teaching. They can’t tell us anything’. So I suppose you didn’t do as well as you could have done.
Dagmar’s account sharply divided childhood and adulthood. Adulthood was when she believed she started to take life seriously, therefore particular life themes were developed in the accounts of adult life experience. In contrast, Emma from early primary school drew out the importance of affective relationships but, like Dagmar, described academic work as something to be endured. Emma’s accounts developed a theme that privileged interpersonal learning, and that minimised the negative impact of school.

In contrast, Florence gained a strong sense of her capabilities through the academic curriculum but as a working-class girl, she could not be kept at school because of financial difficulties. Florence did not focus on what was not to be, rather in her account she elevated the learning that helped everyday living.

Florence: [At school] in those days it was the three Rs—you didn’t get any learning in life—there was no general education like there is today. It was more or less the three Rs—reading, writing and arithmetic—and history and geography.

BP: So not things that you feel?

Florence: Not for living no (quick response).

Similarly, Louise understood her liberal education as directly related to her lifelong learning projects. She recalled the beginning of a life interest in English literature, especially Shakespeare, in fine arts, botany, physiology, history and geography. As a married woman, Louise was able to continue these interests because of her relatively privileged position. More than any of the other women, she illustrates that educational policy rhetoric did at times match reality. She was able to become the ‘educated wife and mother. But side by side with Louise’s account is the experience of Florence, who equally enjoyed academic study but because of her material position was unable to integrate school learning into the ongoing fabric of her life to the same degree.

In both the accounts of liberal and vocational education the hegemonic curriculum was apparent through the narrative attention given to certain ‘important’ subjects and the
relative invisibility of others. For example, only one subject was consistently recalled across all narratives. This was mathematics. Lucy was proud that she was the best in mental arithmetic in her school and linked this to later confidence in adult life.

However, for the other women, especially Emma, Florence and Josephine, maths was - to use Emma’s term—*a terror*. Each of these women related this in part to an interrupted education: Emma and Josephine moved schools and Florence skipped a class.

However, despite the fact that as adults these women were mathematically competent—Florence ran a shop successfully and Emma and Josephine were nurses—their lack of mathematical skills was told as a personal deficit. Josephine’s response is typical of the ways in which most of the women spoke of their experiences of maths.

**Josephine:** *When I finished school I was way behind. I’d been behind for years. I was way ahead with the subjects I liked—history, geography, art, physiology, and those things which I enjoyed. But mathematically speaking I was absolutely hopeless. I was terrified of mental arithmetic questions, because immediately someone asked me how many pints of this or that, etc, a blind comes down in my mind and I can’t think of it (fast pace). I didn’t have that early—I had such a traumatic, or different—so many interruptions in my basic schooling that I, I suppose I suffered to a certain extent with an inferiority complex because my brothers were so good at maths and I wasn’t.*

Josephine’s extract introduces another facet of self-assessment that was common to a number of the women. When they did succeed in a subject, it was because they ‘liked’ the subject rather than because they were talented, smart or clever at the subject. Not one of the women called on a notion of advanced skills or personal superiority in acknowledging subjects in which they succeeded. In doing so, I would suggest that what they were doing was moving away from the individual ownership/appropriation/personal achievement model of education. What they do elevate is the affective dimensions of relationships with teachers to account for success or failure.

*Learning and the teachers*

Early in the century, the development of teacher training colleges was a national trend with the New Education providing the cornerstone of their practice. Unfortunately, the
very conservative State education departments tended to limit the influence of the teachers colleges. Education department practices and policies often had the effect of attempting to make children a standardised product of classroom operation. Coupled with a policy of external examinations, particularly between primary and secondary, teachers were often forced to choose less pedagogically sound teaching approaches such as cramming; however, as teaching became more professionalised, pedagogical practices became a growing point of discussion and debate (Hyams & Bessant, 1972, Barcan, 1988). Although this group of women attended school during a period of evolving pedagogical practices, it was personalities and relationships that the women recalled rather than practices.

Wendy Lutterell (1993) has argued that because in Western cultures schooling is constituted as a formative lifelong influence people feel compelled to account for the decisions made at school. Following Lutterell, I would argue that although not all of the women of this study recalled individual teachers, when they did, the teacher took on a symbolic, formative role in the narrative.

For the six women who did recall particular teachers, negative experiences, especially those concerning fairness and equity predominated. Lucy, Val and Josephine each recalled one teacher whose behaviour remains in their memory as not admirable. Each of the women valued kindness and caring throughout their personal narrative, and I would suggest that these memories provide a symbolic contrast to the relationships the three women value.

**Lucy:** I remember one nun quite well—Sister B.—who made a habit (pause). I consider I was a fair student and I didn’t consider I did anything too wrong—no more than the others. But if anything went wrong I’d be the one that would be called out. She’d tug your ears, pull your nose—and she’d always have the one saying ‘Your mother must have trouble with you—you must be an awful child’. I hated that year. I really hated that year! (strong tone).

**Val:** I always remember there was a Miss B.—we clashed for some unknown reason, I don’t know why—she was the English teacher and she was also in charge of the swimming team. She always seemed to be picking on me (resigned
Anyway I still made the grade...I remember that feeling of being sat on or being got rid of sort of thing. Funny thing, I remember her name, but I don’t remember another single name of any of them (energetic tone).

Josephine: Anyway we were having the entrance to the high school exam and one particular teacher and I didn’t get on well (quiet tone)—I couldn’t please her—and when she handed out the papers to her pets she’d say “Oh, don’t worry, you’ll do well” and when she handed out my exam paper she said to me ‘if you pass I’ll faint’ (sarcastic re-enactment, dramatic pause). I was so upset I didn’t pass.

In contrast both Josephine and Margaret recalled how a supportive relationship with a teacher enhanced their learning.

Josephine: One of the best things that happened to me was spending a year in a ‘removed class’ that was halfway between sixth year primary and first year high school...old Mrs P.—she was an absolute doll ...She was a wonderful teacher. She took me right back to where I started. She was good to me and gave me confidence in myself. I discovered that maths wasn’t anything to be frightened about.

Margaret: When I was in fifth grade in [the local] State School I had a very fine teacher—she really cared about what we learned. She didn’t sort of pick out the clever ones. She tried to get to know us all, not badgering you and even if you said something you were wrong about—she found out why you thought that way and could see that there was some sense in it and you hadn’t just got to this error from complete stupidity.

When a teacher was effective, the women often acknowledged this as the beginning of a lifelong learning interest.

Louise: The mistress in charge at that time—she’d choose the key scene from a play and I still find if I see something on TV, bits from these plays, made into a film—I can read so much more into it. It’s been with me all my life—a wonderful introduction to theatre and literature (energetic tone).

Margaret: In the eighth grade at school there was a teacher Mr B. who was tremendously interested in Australian literature and when he wasn’t teaching us something else, he would read us Banjo Patterson, Henry Lawson—short stories. I took a great interest in Australian literature from that time and it’s lasted me all my life...and he read very well and I think that brought it to life—he was very good...I don’t think there were too many people who were too fascinated with Australian literature, it was a bit put down—it was the lesser.

The nine accounts illustrate how it was the affective connections that were primarily used to account for either the enhancement or constraint of academic learning. If there was a positive connection the women were able to engage in that subject in a way that
engendered confidence and in some cases began a life-time interest in the area. If the relationship was negative these women recall a withdrawal from learning.

The accounts of the women reflected a ‘push/pull’ relationship with the teachers. There is evidence of powerlessness and regulation which did not enable these girls to view themselves positively as students. However, in the narrative accounts, instead of taking on a position of bad child/poor student, these women moved to position themselves as victims and to locate the issue with the teacher. In doing so they resisted taking up a negative position of themselves. Although I do not wish to dismiss the complexity of the teacher/student relationship, in saying this I simply wish to highlight the process by which the women maintained an enabling fiction.

However it was the learning from the home environment that these women drew on most consistently to shape their notion of self. It was from this environment that the enabling discursive threads were most often woven. In differing ways, each of the women distanced herself from, or more correctly was distanced, as a formal learner by her experience of schooling. Formal school learning was a significant part of the personal narratives; however, with the exception of Louise it was primarily constructed as only relevant to childhood. For Louise, it was a dream to do a full degree, one she eventually was able to accomplish in her forties. Each of the women did begin learning projects in childhood and these were located not in school but in the environment of family.

**What learning was important: learning at home**

Learning in the home and family environment was valued by all of the women in two particular ways. For some, home learning was seen as complementary and usually superior to the school agenda, whereas for others home learning was supplementary focusing on the important reproductive process not acknowledged by formal schooling. As has been discussed earlier, domestic skills were taught both at home and at school,
and all of the women noted how they picked up these skills through family life. Home standards were seen to be higher than those at school, and indicative of a ‘good’ family background. Trial and error plus plain commonsense were the strategies that were noted. Mothers’ roles ranged from that of Josephine’s who directly instructed, to Lucy’s and Irene’s who taught by involvement, and who perhaps would not have named what they were doing as teaching. Whether she was directly taught by mother or worked alongside her, each of the nine women privileged the domestic learning in the home above that of school.

However it was not just domestic skills that were learned at home. Louise, Josephine and Florence particularly commented on formal learning in the home. As has been discussed, Louise’s mother’s fine arts skills were shared with her daughter in a way that was directly compatible with school. Florence told of her learning at home as superior to that of the school.

Florence: Well we lived in the bush. There was four of us and Mam (sic) and Dad taught us to play 500 and we read a lot...But my dad was an avid reader. He had a very deep general knowledge and it was all from reading. He would read anything he could lay his hands on. I think my dad could tell you more about the early Australian history than most Australians. I only remember ever having one doll. We always got a book as a main Christmas present. We didn’t get much for Christmas. During those Depression years there was a young fellow out of work and he came round with two bags of second-hand books to make a few shillings and it was like a mobile library - we could exchange. You could exchange for threepence a book. We used to get four books a week. I cut my teeth on the Scarlet Pimpernel etcetera. I used to sit with a dictionary next to me and if I didn’t know the meaning of words I’d look them up. So I got a good English grounding.

Josephine recalled her family ‘teachers’ in a way that suggested a complementary relationship. As was discussed previously, Josephine had positioned herself as ‘rebel’ within her schooling therefore her coalition with family ‘teachers’ against most of those in the school system is logical.

Josephine: Granny K. had the gift of story telling, when [my brother] and I used to stay with her, she used to read to us. She introduced us to the English language and the 19th century composers—literature. She had been a school teacher. She made paraphrasing of Shakespeare words come alive. She told us the meaning of words. My grandmother to start with and Mrs P. and later another
Josephine’s enthusiasm for learning is clear in this account. Despite many perceived negative experiences at school, validating her family teachers alongside the ‘good’ teachers from school allowed Josephine to maintain an enabling sense of herself as a learner. Again both Florence and Josephine noted this as the beginning of a lifelong interest area.

Under various guises, all of the nine women determined the family as the site for the learning of an ethics of care. This comes through not simply as family the ‘haven in a heartless world’, but more as an understanding of particular forms of citizenship. Val and Irene both told of learning to help others, no matter who they were. For Val this was in response to being economically advantaged and resisting any notion of being a snob. In contrast, Irene followed the example of her mother and father in their community support work. In the following extract Margaret illustrates the learning of community care and connection through family.

**Margaret:** *I would also have been aware of all these [social issues] because my mother was a very good worker for charities—she was in the [name] Ladies Benevolent Society (pause)—she would be helping and I used to go to meetings of those things with my mother when I was a very little girl—you know, from the time I was a baby I started going to those sort of meetings. There’d be discussions, my father was a local councillor, so there’d have always been discussion in the house about these things (fast pace) … but my father was very good to people—if people came for his advice, he’d take them and shoulder that need to help people and do what he could. They were both very fine people.*

For Dagmar and Emma, family also provided role models for citizenship that revolved around family care and connection. Dagmar told of how her grandmother, grandfather and parents each in different ways exemplified unselfish love. On the other hand, Emma, although not drawing on the same number of examples, illustrated how her
family-based learning became apparent to her when she reflected on her life themes and learning.

**Emma:** *Today, I see myself at last realising what there is, it’s so silly to have this inferiority about things that one isn’t, has never been educated to and that I have other interests which are just as important and much more absorbing to me* (slow, deliberate tone). *And that I have skills to give other people. It has taken a long time. I think I was learning that, although I didn’t quite look at it like that, that I was learning then that I had skills to give other people* (laugh).

It is significant how much narrative attention was focused on the lifelong learning that began in the family setting of childhood. Family was a major organising life theme for all of these women. It is telling however that this learning was articulated with little sophistication and as Emma illustrated was often not always apparent to the women at that time. I would suggest that family learning is an important construction available to these aged women, but perhaps at the time as they left schooling and moved into adulthood, some of the uncertainty and lack of confidence they tell of may have related to the invisibility of that particular learning. Over time, family became a theme because this group of women became family makers in their own ways themselves. Thus the relevance of childhood family learning may have become more apparent and it was possible to recall a range of investment possibilities.

At the time when this group of nine young women left school, the education rhetoric of those who conceptualised the meritocratic education ladder suggested an unlimited future. Clearly the reality, especially for women, was different. As the nine women explained, in their first step to the adult world of paid work they sought the best of limited options, and they continued to invest in notions of themselves that had emerged through childhood.

**Learning what futures were possible**

As they recalled the end of their schooling, each of the women told of dreams for their future, but they were unanimous that these were fantasies, not because of their limited
ability but because time, place and gender allowed them a limited canvas. Each of the nine women explained that their schooling limited them in such a way that they cannot now truly assess if their dreams could ever have turned into reality. It is important however to note what these dreams were since they are compatible with the life themes by which each woman forged coherency and meaning across her life. In concluding this section I will review each woman's narrative about this stage of young adulthood, drawing on both the dreams and the investments she took on from school and family.

Straight to work: Lucy and Margaret
Lucy had no further formal training after school. She finished school in the Depression and wanted a job so that she could contribute to the family finances. Lucy recalled her first job on the production line in a cigarette factory.

Lucy: I was a little apprehensive about [the job] because I'd never been to anywhere like that. I did try for a few jobs, but they were hard to get. You'd take anything you could get during the Depression years (strong tone)...I managed to get my job because my brother was working there putting the sprinklers in and he spoke to the forelady...[on the first day] I died a thousand deaths (laugh). I was terrified. I think I was the slowest one they'd ever had (laugh). But you soon get into the swing of things...I was a little bit shy at first—but as we moved on and I'd been there a few years there was a great friendship (proud tone).

Across her whole narrative Lucy spoke as a practical worker. She recalled that one of her daily fears throughout the Depression was that she would lose this job and let her family down. As well Lucy maintained a sense of being a people person, using the workplace to continue a theme of interpersonal connectedness. Looking back, Lucy believed that she did have greater potential.

Lucy: If I had my time over again I would have persevered [at school] because I would have liked to have done law or psychology...Logical thinking—I think that must be it.

This dream is compatible with Lucy's notion of herself as a practical, down to earth hard worker—pragmatic and logical. Her limited schooling had not given her any valid indication of her skills and abilities. As a working-class girl attending school in a working-class suburb, she was educated for her place as a worker. Lucy always came
top of the class but was never selected for further encouragement. In addition, coming from a large family, Lucy valued helping her mother domestically then financially through her job. Lucy told of actively learning through her work, but in recalling herself as a young adult she elevated the practical coping skills and friendship connections.

Margaret also told of being relieved to get a job at the end of school. She emphasised how her job opened up new avenues for continued learning and self-education.

**Margaret:** The job I got was very helpful to my education because I worked for a press cuttings agency (quiet tone). I think I must have been there for six years until my first child. Not only did you read newspapers, practically all day long; and take an interest and become very critical of newspapers and their accuracy! (laugh) — but also, they were very interesting people that I worked for. The people they had working for the business were very interesting people (firm tone).

Margaret believed that she was capable of going on in formal schooling but acknowledged that a combination of her domestic science schooling and the norms in her family closed off that option.

**Margaret:** Had I gone to a high school when I was going to have some secondary education—instead of a technical school—possibly I would gone on from there (fast pace). Because I think I developed more at about 13 or 14—I think I got to learning better. I think I wasn’t so held back by anxiety in school. I might have then been able to go on (strong tone) (pause). Possibly would I think. Because I was the last of the family I possibly could have been helped... I suppose I could have gone on from technical school. I remember the headmistress saying to me if you’d like to go on you should — I’ll try and get you a scholarship for ‘Emily Macpherson’, and I didn’t want to go on with technical for some reason. I think perhaps if I’d been in one of those families where education’s a great thing to be desired someone would have said — don’t be absurd! go on! But I was prepared at that stage to do as the others in the family had done—go out and grow up (emphatic tone).

Margaret distinguished school/childhood from work/adulthood in an instrumental way that separated school from the real work of life, that of going out and contributing through a job and this is a theme that she has continued. She did construct herself as a worker but, in a different way from Lucy, she linked this to working for good in the
world. As a woman who gained some material resources across her life this possibility was more readily available to her. Margaret did however have a dream.

Margaret: While I was at school I always thought I'd like to be a doctor. Whether it was a real castle in the air that you could have blown off really easily indeed?—I hadn't had the grounding, I don't know that I had the ability to do it, but it had always interested me!...When someone would say—"well try nursing"—I'd say "no, no, that's not what I want to do", which makes you think that perhaps it was a castle in the air, because if I was keen I would have taken nursing (quiet tone).

Although Margaret personally questioned the validity of her dream because she didn’t take the step into nursing as an alternative, today career counsellors could readily point out the differences between medicine and nursing. Nursing was a service role, an extension of the domestic training Margaret had begun. Her dream was a quantum leap apart from this and at that time a career in medicine had many concrete barriers for women. I would suggest at one level, Margaret knew what she didn’t want—a narrow domestic future as a nurse.

Margaret’s account illustrates the efficacy of the power processes of a capitalist patriarchy. There is no need to explicitly refuse entry to university to women. The rhetoric that all could ascend the educational ladders can be publicly pronounced, but it is only when we look at that ladder we see that some rungs are missing. Margaret’s possibilities were constrained by a domestic education and her family’s ideology that supported the role of women as homemakers.

The nurses: Emma, Val and Josephine
Predictably nursing was a goal for three of the women (Emma, Josephine and Val), and their domestic training was a stepping stone for two. Nursing had a particularly poor status during most of the nineteenth century, however with the changes brought about through the Crimean War and World War I, greater professionalisation of the field occurred. Although still firmly located in the traditional female sphere of care-giving, as the growing scientific discoveries changed medical care, nurses’ roles also developed
(Forsyth, 1995). Not only did nursing give young women an acceptable training that was compatible with their real roles as homemakers, training hospitals ran on quasi army/convent lines so that for many parents nursing was a safe place to send a daughter.

Emma was the only woman who believed that her work choice following school was the perfect one. She had no other dream. Nursing continued her thematic investment of care and connection. World War II precipitated her choice and Emma was able to move into a socially sanctioned place to ‘grow up’.

**Emma:** [The war] certainly meant that I was shanghaied into deciding on what I was going to do and I always thought I’d do nursing. I do remember that my mother thought that her daughter and any girl should have at least a year at home! Now I was never quite clear what that was for (amused tone). I certainly didn’t want it. I was so relieved that there was no question that I would do nursing, that I had to do something. Because, I think if mum had had her own way and there’d been no war, she would have put pressure on me to be at home with her. God knows what we would have done...To just grow up a bit (quiet tone).

**Emma:** I am sure I would never have been allowed to live away from home unless I’d been going to live in the nurses quarters, so really it was a great emancipation.

Emma told of struggling academically throughout school, but excelling in the people skills and leadership arena. Nursing care with its reliance on interpersonal relationships allowed Emma to develop themes of care and connection and as well to begin an investment in practical hands-on work.

**Emma:** I didn’t really do particularly well at school. I found school a struggle (quiet tone)...I didn’t really know how to study. I used to spend time at it—I was quite conscientious! (laugh)...in early married life, [my husband] muttered about “why don’t you do an Arts degree?” I couldn’t understand why anyone could imagine I’d want to do an Arts degree!—but I wish like anything that he had urged me to do something more practical (very quiet tone).

Val had also always wanted to be a nurse and again like Emma, the timing of the war was fortuitous.

**Val:** At this stage I’d gone through the fight with [my parents] that I wanted to do nursing. And oh no! (re-enactment)...but I defied the family, with the war coming and everything, they wanted volunteer nurse aides at the hospital—I went along and nothing stopped me—washing old men’s bottoms (smiling)...Mum
and Dad couldn't bear the thought of me doing it. So as I said I defied them by washing old men's bottoms and feeding them...my war effort! (proud emphasis).

Without the impact of World War II, Val's dream may have never eventuated. Like many privileged young women of her era, she would have moved from her father's home to her husband's home. It was this very privilege that crystallised Val's ambition.

Val: I think I was always very conscious that so many people were snobs. The word snob, I know that covers a lot of horrible things, but there was one thing I think I was determined not to be—was—because my father was supposed to have a fair bit of money and I was determined I wasn't going to be one of the kids—be labelled (slow, thoughtful).

There was no financial need for Val to work, to get her hands dirty - no need except that Val wanted to position herself in a way that distanced herself from the lady of leisure, 'snob' as she saw it. Through her childhood she constructed an active self outside with dad and through patriotic war work she was able to maintain this theme. This short adventure into nursing was a pivotal point in Val's narrative. Val spoke of thriving in this un-paid but full-time position, only leaving it when she married and moved sixty miles out of town.

Josephine was the third woman who became a nurse, but unlike the other two nursing was not her only dream. Just as World War II provided new possibilities for Emma and Val, at first it closed doors for Josephine.

Josephine: I didn't have a chance. No, in those days girls didn't have a chance (wry tone). There were very few options of course...This was the middle of the 1930s and there was a lot of problems—there had been the Depression and it was beginning to lift, but it was still bad. There were lots of things going on overseas—the Japanese had invaded China and there was war there (sigh). We were children of World War I (strong tone). There was Hitler strutting around. We had radio and we were allowed to go to the pictures Saturday afternoon to see the newsreels of these great Nazi marches, muddled in with dole queues and things like this. It was really bad (quiet tone) and everybody knew there was going to be a war...One of the subjects that I was good at school was drawing and painting and I had won a scholarship to do commercial art for five years. The family sat down and thought about this (this was about 1935/36) - they all wondered what was the best thing for me to do. Mother and my aunts felt that if I went nursing at least I was being taught—I had board and lodgings and I was learning (quiet tone). If I took the art course it would have been for five years (with my fees being paid), but I would have had to be kept. So these were the choices.
Josephine had been a rebel at school but was given a chance to take another step on the ladder through the scholarship system. However, her mother, a widow with another younger son still at school, needed more than a scholarship to enable her daughter's continued studies. Her own needlework for trousseaux barely supported her children, and in the Depression choices had to be pragmatic. Josephine drew on a notion of close family connectedness to maintain a positive sense of self through childhood. This commitment led to a valuing of the path that would least disrupt that family rather than the path of individual rewards. Although nursing was a tradition for women in Josephine's family, it did not enthuse her initially as it had done Val and Emma. Again however World War II had its impact, this time in a positive way.

Josephine: Suddenly war was declared and quite a number of the staff nurses became sisters (energetic tone)...We suddenly found ourselves—the senior nurses—students—being left in charge. I spent most of my final year as Acting Sister in charge of Casualty—jobs like that...From being the dogs-bodies, we were given the responsibility. This is where I think that suddenly I found that life was real and life was earnest (proud tone).

The bridge of business college: Irene, Florence, Dagmar and Louise
Part of the educational rhetoric of the time was that secondary schooling provided the necessary vocational skills for paid work. School systems had been redesigned to offer clear pathways to vocational futures. As already discussed, the limitations of domestic education for girls has been criticised as part of the feminist revisionist project, however it is also apparent that there was resistance to this at the time. Noeline Kyle (1986) has noted that the obsession with the domestic ideal overlooked the workplace changes that were going on around the educational system. From the early twentieth century there was an increasing demand for trained clerks and stenographers in the burgeoning business sector. This option for girls was far preferable to the factories and domestic service available to the preceding generation. But the schools were not always seen as adequate entry avenues despite their focus on vocational paths. By paying for private business colleges parents acted with their purses, purchasing a key to the next door for
their daughters. For the four remaining women, business college was to be the bridge between school and work.

Irene’s dream as a young girl was to be a nurse but as a rural girl that was not possible and any other dreams vanished as she was faced with a new life course with the death of her father. Family commitment was central to Irene’s sense of self.

Irene: I felt I would like to be a nurse (firm tone). But of course it meant that if you went in for nursing you had to go away from the district and that was **not encouraged in our family anyway** (small laugh).

Irene: It was a matter of money. Because my father died soon after I left school. In those days if you went into nursing your parents had to supply your uniform and all your study things and everything else. And it meant going away too. I think that it was really a matter of money (slow pace).

Irene: I realised that I **had to get out into the world and make my own living.** When I left school there was nothing thought about that (matter of fact tone).

At the end of primary school, Irene had never expected to have to work for a living.

When the family was then forced to become wage-earners, Irene spoke of beginning to construct a pragmatic self who now worked to continue her family support. Business college and the ensuing clerical work was important in the account only in that it facilitated Irene’s ongoing contribution to her family.

Florence had a dream of being a teacher, however she knew from the start that her family needed her income and explained that her dream faded fast. The opportunity to do a business course was welcomed as Florence told of being relieved that she didn’t have to go into factory work as many girls in her district did. Florence noted with gratitude that her parents scraped together the money to give her this chance.

Florence: If you had to go to work in those Depression years, you got a job and you got what you could and you hung onto it. There was always someone else ready to hop in. You couldn’t just try something. There was no such thing as work experience [so]...I went to [name] Business College. I liked shorthand and typing and I did English there [but] I didn’t do book-keeping...during that time I sat for the NSW phonographic examinations - they were a State-wide thing. I was first in NSW in shorthand, I got ninety nine and a quarter per cent, and third in typing, ninety per cent. At the end of that year I got three prizes—English,
Shorthand and Typing. I would have been considered Dux of the college, but I hadn’t done the book-keeping (quiet pride).

In a similar way to Irene, Florence was able to construct her work options as a commitment to the family, however she also spoke of a sense of competency and achievement at work. Twice Florence thought of beginning teaching in later life but finances and illness precluded this; instead, across her narrative, she told of teaching within both the home and workplace. For example, Florence proudly recounted in detail how in her seventies she was invited to speak to a senior class about living through the Depression. This was a highlight that she understood as her one chance to really teach and she concluded the story by proudly noting how well the students did in the related assignment.

Dagmar also found that business college offered new and positive possibilities, again connected to family. Dagmar’s parents had also made a decision to invest in a course at a private business college for their daughter. For Dagmar business college was connected to the real work of life and she told of it in a very different way to her sense of disconnection with school.

Dagmar: If I’d studied a bit harder [at school] I probably could have gone on (slow pace). But not many girls did. Not many boys did either at that stage. Certainly more boys than girls, because if there was scholarships offered—mostly they were for Uni and for boys. So if there was some money for going on to Uni, the boy in the family got it. So you found it was mainly the boys that went on to Senior—the girls stopped at Junior. So I didn’t have all that much confidence until I went to business college where I did particularly well. Well I didn’t enjoy it but I felt because my mother was paying for it that I had to reward her and I worked a bit harder and did well at business college so I started work feeling confident then (strong tone).

Both Florence and Dagmar had shown competence at school, but school appeared to be a path without congruence with their lives. The chance for a business college education directly related to life. They told of seeing the connection and they excelled. Not only were parents willing to invest in commercial education as a preference over factory or domestic work for their daughters, business colleges had excellent records for placing young women into jobs. Unlike the school system, business colleges developed strong
Dagmar, Irene and Florence all benefited from this link.

Having found her feet in office administration at an insurance company, Dagmar believed that this was a turning point at which she started to look for a career path. It was the impact of a macro event, that of World War II, that opened new possibilities.

**Dagmar:** *I wanted something* (pause) *that was more of a challenge I think. And looking around [the insurance company] there were two women cashiers—they also were not married and they were in their middle 30s—they were the three ‘old’ ones. The rest of us were about 20 to 23 I suppose. I looked around and thought it’s going to be a long time before I’m personal secretary to anybody (laugh). That was one reason why I wanted a way out of it (firm tone). When the war came I thought that would be something totally different (emphatic tone)...I thought it would open something new for me (fast pace).

From this account of early adulthood Dagmar began to speak of herself as someone who could take responsibility in the community, the home and at work. The learnings she elevated were those that allowed a practical contribution in whatever settings were available to her.

Although business college was an effective bridge between school and work for the last three women, for Louise it was a pragmatic choice she did not welcome. Her academic schooling and family learning had enabled the development of an intellectual and creative sense of self but because Louise finished school in the early days of the Depression avenues for further development in this area were limited.

**Louise:** *Well, when I first left school...my mother wanted me to go to an art school [full-time]...But my father who was practical, said, “I think it might be very important for girls to be able to earn their living—I think you’d better learn typewriting and shorthand—I don’t think you’ll like it, but I think you should do it”* (re-enactment).

Louise’s dream was to go on to university and to study medicine, but as an unmatriculated student and without scholarship assistance her higher education was blocked. She did however achieve part of her goal of further study.
Louise: The following year (pause) was the year my sister started at the university [on a scholarship]. So I decided I'd like to go too (quiet tone). But—I couldn't enter any particular course because I hadn't matriculated. So I had to be an unmatriculated student, so—I decided I'd do Logic and Psychology—goodness knows why (slow pace). I think my sister had Logic, or maybe she was doing it at the same time for law; and Psychology I did because someone told me you could understand your dreams if you do Psychology? I've always been a great vivid dreamer (emphatic tone)—lots of technicolour dreams and—that's what led me into it. In those days it was all pretty boring. I was introduced to Freud but not Jung (Jung expanded my ideas much later) and some more boring characters (laugh); then the following year, the Depression being even worse I decided to do Economics (slow, thoughtful tone). But looking back those three subjects have covered the way I've thought about things—I've tried to look at things logically, the workings of the mind and the practicalities of living... Well then I got married (faster pace).

As Louise recalled this period, it is apparent that in retrospect she is able to place this time in the perspective of a whole life. A new relevance of the choice of subjects can be seen for example. Louise told of a passion for a formal education that began in school and although she conformed to her father's expectation, she explained that she managed to maintain some study, and continued to develop her love of the world of ideas that she recalled beginning in childhood. Her passion for formal learning, some family resources, and a sister in the university system were not enough to enable Louise to fully develop her intellectual self. They were the Depression years and Louise apparently recognised her place in the system of relationships.

Louise: I probably married partly because of the Depression because I felt I was a terrible burden to the family and it was best to get me out of the way (quiet tone).

Louise told of options that were severely limited. She was not the first woman to see marriage as the most viable choice, but despite this she maintained a narrative that elevated her own intellectual curiosity which she held in tension with her parenting obligations. She returned to university in her forties when those obligations were diminishing.

As the nine women recalled their schooling experiences, their choice of recollections were very telling as these were the experiences that were now held as congruent when viewed retrospectively across a whole lifespan. They can therefore be read as
organising metaphors as well as revealing incidents. For Lucy and Irene, their schooling story embedded itself as a routine part of childhood. Although they both achieved well academically, their schooling reinforced their family's place in life. Schooling was understood as one of life's givens, a necessity until they could move on and grow up in the outside world. In contrast the rest of the women recalled school as a time of subtle frustration. Whether it was Emma, Dagmar and Josephine with their disrupted educations, or Val and Margaret with their overly emphasised domestic content or Louise and Florence with their love of learning curtailed by material circumstances, all the women subtly revealed a sense of their own untapped potential. The limitations of their schooling with its narrow horizons denied them even the ability to name this problem. Schooling however does appear to have enabled this group of women to determine what was 'real' learning and what was not. By accepting some learning as 'real' learning, other learning was constituted as lesser. This theme continued in the accounts of formal adult education.

Adult students: continuing to learn
Formal adult education was not a significant part of seven of the personal narratives. Except for Louise and Margaret, the accounts of formal adult education seem to have been told as a response to my interest in learning of which formal adult education was clearly a part. Each of the women did want to put 'on the record' that they had continued their education beyond school. In considering the nine accounts of formal adult education, three categories emerge—university education, vocational training and short courses. Each of these categories were spoken about with differing language and illuminate how these nine women understood their formal learning experience and how they integrated it within their personal narratives. Whilst university learning was not relevant to most of the women, the accounts by Louise and Margaret illustrate two very different ways of understanding the 'objective' learning of academia particularly in relation to experiences framed as 'learning from life'. In contrast the accounts of the
learning from short courses was more readily understood as relevant for most of the
women as it clearly could be related to the learning from life.

The degree of narrative attention paid to vocational training was uniformly minimal. As
has been discussed, accounts of such education were primarily integrated into the
accounts of growing up and finding a place in the world. Not one of the women
acknowledged this learning as 'real' learning or as an intellectual achievement. Instead
they drew on notions of practical skill development that provided an entree to the world
of work and adulthood. I would suggest that what is apparent here is the dichotomy
between liberal and vocational learning. I have argued elsewhere that this dynamic can
still be found in current adult education discourses (Pamphilon, 1994). This dichotomy
becomes even more significant when we consider it in relation to women's role in the
workforce. Across the twentieth century women's paid work has been trivialised and
minimised, and therefore it should not be surprising that confident explanations of
learning do not emerge from this group of women's narratives of vocational education.
However, because women born in the first decades of the twentieth century had limited
access to formal education at university and in the workplace and because, over this
century, formal education has moved from the front end or school-based model in
which all education occurs in the first decade(s) of life to a sense of lifelong education,
it could be anticipated that the community-based short courses would have an important
role. This is true for seven of the women. Only two, Louise and Margaret, do not talk
of community-based courses. In the other women's accounts, short courses were told
as recreational and/or instrumental learning, learning 'to do'. However, as I will
demonstrate, these courses were also a continuation of their domesticating education.

Sue Blundell (1992) has argued that from the mid-twentieth century adult education for
women can be seen to be “completing the job of the school, and contributing to the
process of social reproduction by teaching women to be better reproducers, servicers
and repairers of the labour force” (p.212). There is also a class dimension to this
domesticating education. For middle-class women, the discourse of the educated, modern wife and mother suggests a need to continue self-development and self-expression, whereas for working-class women who take up a sense of self as worker, such self-development outside the home may be less relevant (Keddie, 1980; Blundell, 1992). The accounts that described university education and short courses illustrate this point.

**University education**

Louise and Margaret, the two women who did undertake university study, provided contrasting accounts of formal learning. Across their personal narratives both women spoke as thinkers/intellectuals and central to their subjectivity was their role as mother. However both women understood the place of formal learning in their life in a very different way.

Louise held a strong sense of herself as an intellectual across the whole of her personal narrative. She explained that this arose from her family and her schooling. Her schooling finished in the Depression and she was only able to complete three university units as an unmatriculated student. Louise spoke of this as a lack, given her context as the wife of a lawyer.

*Louise:* Now I always felt, particularly in Canberra, there was a high proportion of people with university degrees here, particularly amongst the people that I would meet. *I felt a bit disadvantaged,* because I felt I knew just as much as they did, but didn’t have the confidence in expressing myself. I think in a way I’d learnt a lot from my husband—he was completely different. He was a very well trained lawyer—he helped me with that part of the brain. But of course he was very critical of my—as he thought—lack of logic, at times. Because in those days I’d go more on my feelings. I somehow felt that if I could go back to the university it would help me to get over this lack of confidence in myself.

In this extract Louise elevates rational (male) logic above expressive (female) feelings, at the same time devaluing any interpersonal affective skills or the possibility of these being a valid source of learning. For Louise formal education was the way to address the deficit she had constructed. Across most of her personal narrative Louise elevated
formal learning above all other, but as a married woman with children, Louise found
the educational options for women in the 1930s and 1940s severely limiting. During
World War II, Louise heard that Adelaide University would accept her qualifications.

Louise: So I decided to go back to Adelaide and try (pause). My parents were in
Adelaide and I could base myself there. I suppose I was there for perhaps a term
and a half and then I came back [to Canberra] and did the rest by correspondence.
I didn't complete that—a number of subjects were correspondence. That's when I
did quite a lot of reading in social psychology and sociology. A subject I did was
Hygiene—I can't remember how many subjects I acquired that way—probably—
I think the subjects that I'd done that I'd mentioned earlier—Psychology,
Sociology, then the following year, Economics—I passed them. But they
couldn't count for anything. And again I'd passed some of these other subjects in
sociology—three or four. Then it all became too difficult—doing it all by
 correspondence. So I think there was always that bit in me that wanted
to stretch my mind (slow, querying tone). Some of the war years for me were
taken up like that and bringing up two boys and coping with life in general (quiet
tone).

This is all Louise said about a choice that involved leaving her husband for nearly a year
and relocating with her two children during war time. I find the silence deafening and
yet cannot (with rigour) do more than guess about possible tensions that her passion for
education and her commitment to be a wife and mother entailed. It was not until Louise
talked about her Honours degree in History, completed in her mid-forties, that she
revealed the tensions between the roles of wife, mother and student. For instance, her
ambivalence between her intellectual needs and the needs of her younger son are clear in
the following extract.

Louise: Well I rather wondered in the last few nights when I'm reading [the
transcript] whether there is—I suppose in some ways it became a bit of an
obsession to get [academic] things done, whether it didn't affect my younger son
in some way because he was home more with me than the other one...I didn't
seem to be the right image, I didn't fit in with the images of the other mothers.
Maybe he wanted that. I don't know (quiet, querying tone).

BP: Perhaps we always want what we don't have also, and what other people
have seems better.

Louise: He wanted me home making pies and things (smiling)—well I did that
too (strong tone).

BP: Well I had a friend whose mother was terribly modern when I was a teenager
(explanation of how threatened her daughter was).
Louise: Well you've said something that might be very pertinent. [My son] may have not only felt threatened, not only because I was doing university work and he was just at school—but I was a woman threatening him! (firm tone).

At an earlier point in her personal narrative, Louise explained family learning and academic learning as two distinctly separate areas, however when she recalled her study in her forties, she was able to speak of compatibility between her domestic experiential learning and her academic learning.

Louise: After I'd gone through all this early child rearing bit! and you know, through the war years and so on (pause), there was a lot of background I could call on that fleshed out what I learnt and gave me—a deep understanding—and strangely enough I think—it seems silly to say this—improved—well not my memory, my memory has always been good, but when I could sit down to study, I think I could more easily see what were the important issues and what things were trivial (slow, deliberate emphasis).

Rosalind Edwards (1993) has examined the need for mature-aged mother students to 'straddle' two ways of knowing, the 'local and particular' of the private/family and the 'conceptually ordered' of the public/university (p.163) and this is evident in Louise's account as well. Edwards argued that the women of her research group1 did one of two things to deal with the contradictory hierarchal epistemologies. Either they set boundaries between home and university or they attempted to forge connections between the two. Louise is an example of a woman who forged connections between her private/family way of knowing and that of the university. As Edwards also found with her respondents, when Louise later described her experiences of writing a book drawn from her Honours History thesis, the connection between epistemologies was spoken of as two-way: from family life to university and from university to family life.

Louise: But it has been a plus [doing History and writing the book]—it's more in the sense that having made a synthesis and looked at [the history]—it does teach you to look at life in a deeper way and see how things work out (slow pace). As I was telling you about these strange experiences [ESP] - where this spontaneous knowledge that you've got of how things would work out—nothing to do with the history either. Getting this other background is reinforcement—it helps you in the end (quiet, strong tone).

1 Rosalind Edwards' respondents were 31 mothers undertaking social science degrees—twelve white working-class women, ten white middle-class women and nine women from minority ethnic groups who did not define their status beyond race.
Margaret's account also reflected a response to straddling the two epistemologies of family life and university. Margaret spoke of herself as a thinker/intellectual which she explained as arising from her observations of daily life. Unlike Louise she did not crave further education but rather her account reflects an understanding of education as part of self-development and self-expression. In the following extract, Margaret’s account suggests that ongoing education was indeed an indicator of the ‘well-educated’ wife and mother. Margaret’s first experience of formal education was a fifteen year involvement with Sydney University’s Extension courses. The Extension course was initially suggested by a preschool teacher.

**Margaret:** I think probably what [the pre-school teacher] thought we’d do was take on some of the child psychology ideas ...one of the women when we discussed it at a time when we got together said “no, nothing about children!—let’s do something else; our lives are packed with children”. (energetic tone)

**BP:** And was that a general consensus?

**Margaret:** Yes. And someone said “Fancy meeting at the shops and starting to talk about poetry instead of the measles It would be very nice” (laugh). So that’s how we started. (warm tone)

Here Margaret reveals how under the rubric of being an educated mother, it was possible to move from domestic education into the liberal arts, our little bit of culture each fortnight. Memorable topics for Margaret included literary criticism, satirical novels, Australian country towns, and media, art and music critique. As part of this women’s group, Margaret attended every fortnight in school term for fifteen years, leaving only when her paid work compromised her preparation time. Nell Keddie (1980) has argued that by seeking self-expression through courses outside the home, middle-class women are able to restate their sense of themselves as individuals against the demands made on them from family needs. This goes some way in explaining Margaret’s rewards from the Extension course. However Margaret’s account revealed another dimension that she valued as part of her learning. She recalled the interpersonal dimension of a supportive learning environment from both peers and professionals—*it was a togetherness I think, more than anything*. The way Margaret recalled the
Extension course suggests that she valued the affective as much as the intellectual dimension of learning.

**Margaret:** I’m sure if you spoke to any one of those people, they’d say what a great thing it was in their lives, not just from what we’d discussed, but from being together (silence), you can’t think what lovely people they were! They were so uncritical of each other. I never heard anyone say “that woman ought to pull herself together” (laugh). There was never a harsh comment (quiet, warm tone).

**BP:** Really supportive.

**Margaret:** Supportive, uncritical. You know, totally uncritical. You were as you were, and that was absolutely it. And great fondness (very strong tone).

**Margaret:** [re the tutor] You’d get a lovely big fat answer to what you’d sent down and discussion of what was said at the previous meeting. Others weren’t probably as good at doing that and would just give you a “yes, that’s about it” you know or “I don’t disagree with this” and then get onto the next. Just a very small thing and we’d read that and sort of discuss that. Some of them were great—Wakelin, the artist, used to send us lovely answers—nice conversational sort of replies that we’d get a kick from and he’d be encouraging—“best I’ve ever had!”—and this was lovely for us. Whether he said that to six other groups, it didn’t matter. It did a great thing for us! (warm tone).

One might assume that the Extension course was primarily a recreational experience. However, when Margaret invited me to afternoon tea with another group member, together they recalled how the courses led to activity in the Aboriginal rights lobby (A.P.Elkin was one of their tutors), and in the environment and national park movements. Formal education of this type had the potential to offer radical as well as conservative extensions.

It was however in Margaret’s account of undertaking a degree in librarianship in the 1970s in which it is evident that, for her, family life and university epistemologies clashed. Unlike Louise who spoke of a passion for education, Margaret’s account of returning to study reflects a response to the discourses of self-development.

**Margaret:** 1977 I would have started looking into it—I thought that everyone else was doing their thing and it was very much a period when people were blossoming out and doing something extra.
In the following extracts Margaret reveals the depth of the epistemological clash—a clash that I would argue was even more apparent following her prior experience with collaborative learning.

Margaret: I found [the units] incredibly hard work—I really did. It was agonising (very strong emphasis). And I really didn’t enjoy it. I didn’t enjoy the atmosphere of the [university] (quiet tone). I didn’t enjoy going into lecture rooms and being harangued. There was a certain amount of haranguing went on—I hope it doesn’t happen still. On silly things—not on things we were learning—on silly things!, like “if you don’t have this essay in this box in this room at a certain time on this date, you will fail!” And “you will fail!” was something that was said far too often and I didn’t like it (quiet, indignant tone). I didn’t like being addressed that way because I was a little too grown up for it and I didn’t like it for the other students either.

Margaret: The tutor was the teacher in charge. If you said something it was like putting it in the lion’s mouth quite often (laugh) and for shy people that’s not a comfortable thing. Of course, I was much older than many of the students, of course at the College there were many mature age students; but you might be the only one or two in a group; and I did feel that I knew a lot more than those people which would be just as well because I’d have spent a whole lot of years without getting any information from living at all (laugh). But sometimes they seemed childish—but for all that they had an even opportunity or better of doing well in the unit than I had had because they were used to the system.

At the end of the first semester, Margaret had three credit grades but decided to withdraw. I believe that the Extension course had provided for Margaret a position as learner that was compatible with her sense of caring and her elevation of connection, collaboration and cooperative relations. These had enabled her to develop within and outside the family. The individualistic, competitive nature of university learning did not cohere and it was not compatible with family roles. For Margaret, this proved easy to reject.

Across her personal narrative, Louise explained that schooling and formal education provided the basis for her learning as an intellectual. She valued academic ways of knowing and utilised them as the foundation for further self-directed academic development. In contrast, Margaret explained that her intellectual learning arose from grounded experience and observation of the society around her, as well as from the people with whom she interacted. Louise found the university frameworks for knowledge compatible, Margaret did not. The same environment was recalled by these
two women in contrasting ways, telling us more about the process of constructing subjectivity than of formal education itself.

Short courses: continuing education

Used in its conventional sense, the term continuing education refers to society’s need for ongoing education to meet the changes in the workforce and in the professions (Johnston & Hinton, 1986). It is used to include all adult education, however in this context I am using it, as the women did, to refer to non-award short courses. The personal narratives of the seven women who spoke about short courses illustrate how their continuing education was indeed ‘continuing’ in a way that maintained them in the domestic workforce. Four of the women thrived in the continuing education courses available to them and three found them limiting. However, through the women’s descriptions of the courses chosen and of the benefits they perceived, the process of a domesticating education is clarified.

There is some evidence of a class dimension to the women’s responses to short courses. The working-class women all attended the courses run by their local technical colleges: Florence, Lucy and Irene chose subjects such as lapidary, cooking and gardening. The three women explained these courses as recreational rather than educational. As Irene said you have to do something to fill in time. It appears from Florence, Lucy and Irene’s accounts that, as Blundell (1992) has proposed, these working-class women did not feel the need to use adult education classes as a form of self expression as some middle-class women did.

In contrast, the middle-class women spoke differently about the benefits of short courses. For Emma, for example, the courses were described as a highlight.

Emma: I was delighted to find the Tech and loved those courses I did—dressmaking, various cooking courses. I did several dressmaking courses. I used to sew a lot for the girls.
The available evening courses were highly compatible with Emma’s domestic investment. It appears that they allowed skill development while, at the same time, remaining firmly within the parameters of wife and mother. Josephine, Val and Dagmar did similar short courses through the technical colleges or community groups. Like Emma, they acknowledged the skill development but these women were also able to name the domesticating aspect. They recalled how the limitations of short courses were apparent to them at the time and each told of how they had sought further extensions. For Josephine and Dagmar extensions were found in paid work, and for Val through volunteer work. Dagmar’s following extract is indicative of the ways in which the women perceived the limitations of these courses.

Dagmar: At one stage I was bored in [a country town] and went up to the Salvation Army—they were holding craft classes and I learnt to make baskets which I’ve never done again. The next thing on the program was paper flowers—I was sick that day—so I didn’t learn how to make paper flowers—but [my husband] said jokingly “everybody should learn to make paper flowers”. I could have gone if I’d wanted to, but I drew the line at paper flowers too (laugh).

This is not to say that there was no benefit from their forays into evening courses, technical colleges and the like. To learn more about their jobs, to be more efficient and perhaps to find latent creative talents brought its reward. However, I would suggest that this form of education had the potential to be a self-perpetuating circle. As Helen Gribble (1992) has cogently noted:

(Read through the list of offerings of many adult education programs and you’d never guess that women’s lives involve such [double shift] struggle. On the whole adult education seems designed to quieten them down and give them an outlet so they stay contented with their unjust lot - the educational equivalent of Valium rather than a walk in a brisk wind. (Gribble, 1992, p.231, cited in Knights, 1995, p.225)

Short courses complemented the domestic territory of the women and took them into some new territory particularly that of skill development. However in themselves the short courses appear to have offered little or no new perspective on their lives. Instead the women talk of circling back to family, albeit with extended skills, or they gave up
the courses and moved on. In this way what appears recreational was in fact vocational. Four of the women accepted this, three resisted.

**Conclusion**
From both the accounts of childhood schooling and of adult education, it is apparent that for this group of women, with the exception of Louise, formal education did not allow them to speak with confidence of themselves as students and learners. Rather by constituting a line between ‘real’ learning and other learning, the women have illustrated that for them the experience of formal learning began their awareness that there was a hierarchy of knowledge and of learning.

When recalling their childhood learning, the women accepted that their place was the domestic. Although the education rhetoric encouraged the notion of a fully educated citizenry, the reality for most women was a domestic future. As adults their ways of knowing arising from family and community life did not appear to resonate with the ways of formal education. Although acknowledging that their time as students was a time when they were real learners, even the accounts of learning in this environment were not confident. Rather it appears that for most of the women formal education was a site in which they learned what they were not.

Although each of the women talked about learning from life experience, it appears that their schooling led them to relate learning closely with teaching. This was also apparent in their accounts of learning at home where each of the women particularly accredits her mother as a good teacher. The impact of the construction of learning as correlated to teaching further constrained the women’s abilities to speak confidently about other forms of learning, especially the learning in environments other than that of school.

Each of the women focused on home and family as the site of their most valuable learnings. This was a strategy that allowed them to make sense of their experiences in
formal education. Some enriched their formal learning by transporting personal family learnings across into the formal process, others understood family life as more important than schooling, whilst another group used formal learning to increase their practical skills. However over the nine personal narratives it is apparent that home and family life provided more congruent settings to explain their learnings across life.

Family connectedness was a theme that became apparent from the earliest accounts of childhood. Uniformly the women only recalled the positive and constructive aspects of family relations. Family experiences thus perhaps should be seen as symbolic, as the women recounted a positive childhood that became predictive of a positive adulthood. In differing ways, family provided a lifelong thematic investment as family was the one place that this group of women understood as their own area of expertise and indeed commitment. This investment, as recalled in old age, began in childhood and across a whole life appears to have provided each woman with a specialised sphere of her own—one which, as the following chapters will explore, was both constraining and extending.
Chapter 7

SPEAKING AS A WIFE

As the nine women told their life stories, it became apparent that the family sphere dominated as a setting for their explanations of life and of learning. Seven of the women married and began their own families, however for Josephine and Irene, the never-married, family also remained a central focus of their narratives beyond childhood. For each of the women, the conjugal family was told as the unquestioned, natural structure for daily life. The role of wife and mother was told as the natural progression of the adult woman.

In recalling their understandings of both 'wife' and 'mother', each of the married women revealed their own and particular use of the discourses available to them. Some of the discourses echoed in their accounts are those from the time of the experience; for example in parts of the World War II accounts of both wife and motherhood a feminine form of nationalism is evident (Darian-Smith, 1995 provides an explanation of this discourse in an Australian setting). However as these narratives were told in the 1990s there is also evidence of later discourses: of feminist egalitarianism for example.

As has been discussed in the chapter ‘Subjectivities and Self’ (Chapter 3), the contradictions inherent in any discursive field must be negotiated by the individual in order to understand themselves and their world as rational and coherent. This negotiation emerges as fragments in the personal narratives that the women constructed to account for their experience. In the following chapters I will examine the narratives (of wife, of
mother) that arise from the domestic settings and those that arise from other settings (of worker, of volunteer, for example). I am interested in the discourses the women took up in order to tell of their experience in the most enabling way. Equally, I have looked for what was dismissed, or minimised. I am interested in how each woman spoke her everyday world into existence, particularly in what notions she found worthy of investment. I examine how the particular investments enabled certain ways of speaking about learning and development to be possible.

In order to illuminate how a woman’s personal narrative drew in discourses available at the time of the experience, extracts from marriage manuals, child care books and popular sources such as the Australian Women’s Weekly are utilised to illustrate some of the dominant discourses of the day. Their echoes can be heard in the accounts. However it must be stressed that each of the women spoke as if she was the author of her own life. In the accounts each woman spoke as the creator of a particular notion of wife, of mother or of worker. Each woman articulated what was for her an individual achievement. My interest is to determine the concepts that enabled the women to speak with power and those that constrained them, and how in turn the women were able to name certain learning and not others.

When I examined the domestic facets of the personal narratives the concepts of informal and incidental learning were most relevant. Griff Foley has defined such learning as “learning that is embedded in, and incidental to other activities” (1993, p.22, emphasis added). I highlight the notion of embeddedness as this is pronounced in the accounts of the nine women. By embeddedness, I am referring to relational psychology’s concept that women’s sense of self incorporates an understanding of one’s self as basically connected with others, compared to being fundamentally distinct from others (for example, Chodorow, 1978, 1995; Miller, 1986). Indeed it has been argued that regardless of differences such as culture, class, ethnicity, or religion, a sense of embeddedness is central to the way many women experience and construct their social world (Gilligan,
Within the domestic setting, the women evidenced great difficulty articulating their learning. I would suggest that understanding one's self as a relational self coupled with the embeddedness of the learning within the domestic experience made it doubly difficult for the women to directly account for their own learning. It became apparent that there was not a readily available language to validate, let alone explore, this embedded, incidental learning.

As I have illustrated in the chapter 'Examining the frameworks of learning and development' (Chapter 2), despite the fact that most adult learning is gained through experience and through participation in social life (Brookfield, 1986), informal and incidental learning has been neglected in the adult education field (Foley, 1995). I would argue that it is the nature of the embeddedness of this learning that makes it difficult to explore; not only for the women of this study but for academic theorists as well.

Despite the difficulty in articulating their learning in the domestic setting, it is significant that each of the women spoke of their adult roles in family as central facets of their learning. Feminist theory has struggled with the notion that family is at once both an oppressive institution for women (Barrett & McIntosh, 1982 is an example of this argument) and a place of potential development (for example Ruddick, 1989). As each woman had created an enabling fiction, my interest was in how each woman understood her life to make this possible. I was interested in how it is possible to construct a story of the best possible investment within the domestic spheres. Each woman was able to acknowledge positive personal development which was linked to learning, and although this was done in different ways one particular concept was common to all accounts. This was the notion of caring.
Exploring the concept of caring
It would be wrong to suggest that there is a single definition of caring, and indeed the nine women of this study spoke about, and from, a range of perspectives. In the sixties and seventies a feminist reaction against the patriarchal institution of motherhood led to a concentration on women’s family roles as ones of sexual, emotional and labour service (Rowland & Klein, 1996). However the complexity of women’s relations within the family has been acknowledged through the notion of ‘caring labour’ (see for example Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Ruddick, 1989). Whilst not denying the potential for subservience, women’s family experiences can enable them to understand their work as intimately linked to the protection, nurturance, training and growth of others and indeed themselves. This is not essentially a female role but a central human role (Ruddick, 1989). The experience of ‘caring labour’ can give rise to a ‘rationality of care’ (Ruddick, 1989, p.46).

Joan Tronto (1989) has provided a useful distinction when she noted that as caring involves a commitment, then caring must have an object of that commitment. It is from that object that we distinguish ‘caring about’ from ‘caring for’ (p.173). Tronto argues that ‘caring for’ involves responding to the particular concrete needs of others whereas in ‘caring about’ we respond to the more abstract level of ideas. What Tronto calls ‘traditional scripts’ (p.172) suggest that it is men who care about (the ‘significant’ things—work, money, politics), whilst it is women who care for (the ‘less significant’—families, neighbours, friends). With Tronto, I would argue that such a simple position is no longer tenable as it over-generalises both women’s and men’s perspectives and diversities, and it glosses over the moral dimension of caring. However I would suggest that by beginning to dissect the notion of caring into ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’ the complexity of this discourse becomes apparent.

In the seven married women’s personal narratives, ‘caring for’ was the overarching concept used to forge coherency into the story of becoming and being a wife and mother.
It was equally apparent in the accounts of the two never-married women who utilised the notion of 'caring for' to speak about their activities, both in their extended family and the workplace. However, as I will now demonstrate, other discourses are also evident and each of the nine women spoke of differing roles and boundaries for the good wife and mother. Further it became evident that although all of the women spoke about caring for others as wives and mothers—how they spoke about caring and what other discourses they drew on impacted on how they were able to speak of learning.

This is not to say that the notion of caring for others enabled the women to overtly name and claim learning. Along with Sara Ruddick (1989), I would argue that as most mothering takes place in the private, allegedly 'natural' sphere, a mother's knowledge is judged by herself and others as less legitimate than formal learning. However Ruddick has demonstrated how maternal practice can be conceived as a 'discipline', in that it requires a woman to develop her own conceptual scheme in order to express facts about, and values of, her practice. In examining the narratives of the nine women (and here I am including the single women as nurturers), I was interested in what discourses were drawn on to construct what Ruddick has called 'maternal thinking'. Like Ruddick I am not interested in searching for the essential maternal thinking. I prefer to name my exploration as a search for maternal and domestic thinkings and to interpret from these their concomitant learnings.

As was explored in the Cameo chapter (Chapter 5), each of the nine personal narratives was told in a way that presented a self-in-relation (Surrey, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c). Family members were central to this pattern. However, not all family members were given equal narrative interest and attention. There was a significant difference between the narrativised roles of husbands and those of children in all the accounts. For this reason, I have chosen to examine the domestic narratives in two parts distinguishing between those as wife and those as mother.
Before I do this, I wish to highlight a dynamic that I believe impacts on the construction of these narratives of family, particularly on the interaction between the role of wife and mother. These are personal narratives told by aged women. They were told when all the main characters of a life were on stage and when the chronology of births, deaths and family events was known. Thus the narrative telling is an action that recalls these characters in an ecology of today. To some extent each person has been ‘put in their place’ as that place is determined in the light of a whole life. As discussed in Chapter 3, ‘Subjectivities and Self’, the narration must be recognised as an enabling fiction constructed in the 1990s to reconcile the contradictions and complexities of competing discursive positions as well as to answer my question about their learning. I will first examine the accounts of wifehood, then the accounts of motherhood.

Speaking as Wives
The seven women who had married all spoke of marriage as an inevitable, natural and uncontested step in their lives. I would suggest that following their childhood experiences of a domesticating education, there were few other viable options apparent. How they spoke and what they chose to re-tell, however, illustrated seven differing (re)constructions of the experience of wifehood, albeit all falling within the general parameters of the mid-twentieth century notions of the ‘good wife’.

Jill Matthews (1984) has argued that the early twentieth century discourse of femininity drew on a population ideology in which women were primarily construed as ‘mothers of the race’. She demonstrated how, over the century, femininity was reconstructed through its links to a culture of permissive consumerism. Women were increasingly able to speak as (hetero)sexual subjects shifting the emphasis from their role of mother to that of wife. In an expanding capitalist economy, advertising and marketing showed the modern woman how she could present herself to both catch and hold a husband, and to be more than just a mother.
In the seven accounts of marriage and wifehood, it is possible to see how this changing discourse of wifehood was understood by the individual woman. Although late twentieth century discourses on marriage such as equal rights and shared responsibility are also available to this group of women, they have uniformly not been taken up. Instead the women speak predominantly from understandings of marriage and family roles available in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s; understandings that are still available despite the addition of other discourses later in the century.

In a popular text of the 1930s that was reprinted into the 1960s, Doctors Hannah and Abraham Stone’s “A Marriage Manual; a practical guide to sex and marriage” (1939/1964), the predominant marriage models were described as either “the patriarchal authoritarian system” or “the newer democratic and companionship form” (1964, p.211). Similarly in what has been recognised as the first Australian sociological exploration of families, A.P. Elkin’s (ed.) (1957) “Marriage and the Family in Australia”, Harold Fallding described marital and family form as predominantly of two types: that of ‘rightful patriarchy’ or a ‘partnership’ model (p.62). In ‘rightful patriarchy’, the ‘natural’ sexual division of labour informed the place of men as heads of families with women as their caring and supportive homemaker. The term ‘rightful’ refers to the notion of a consensual rather than imposed division of labour, one which arises from the mutually agreed rights of the breadwinner. The partnership model in contrast drew on the notion of equality, whereby family decisions were made on the basis of competence rather than right. Fallding found that this form had little difference in outcome to the patriarchal model arguing that the belief that authority went with competence came to mean simply that “each partner was thought most competent in the area conventionally and traditionally assigned to that sex” (1957, p.69). Although Fallding rightly draws attention to the commonalities of role division between the two models, the issue of the genesis of role decisions is important to this study. Indeed of the seven married women, the accounts of marriage do follow Fallding’s two models. However it is apparent from these accounts
that to speak from a position within rightful patriarchy has a very different outcome from speaking within a notion of partnership.

Across the seven women, the notion of caring for, and support to, their husbands was universal. However just how they spoke of this caring and support was telling. Predominantly the women spoke of either romantic love, dutiful love or of a partnership although at times three notions did intersect. Drawing on the notions of romantic love and/or the dutiful wife falls within Fallding’s explanation of rightful patriarchy and appears to have provided an investment that I would describe as a fixed-term investment. By this I mean that there appeared to be a limited time during which this construction was provided. In contrast the notion of a partnership, in its various manifestations, provided a construction that was overall more enabling and was constitutive of a more flexible investment across the life-time of the marriage.

Rightful patriarchy relationships and learning
When the women spoke of their marital relationships in a way that was compatible with the notion of rightful patriarchy, they most frequently understood this through concepts of romantic love and/or duty. Such ideas are however far from static. The notion of romantic love in the 1990s often combines with concepts of partnership as part of the discourse of love. However within intimate relationships, especially those of heterosexuals, romantic love is frequently a patriarchal concept involving for a woman physical and emotional service to a man. As Robyn Rowland (1996) has argued, romantic love has been used to convince women of the economic bargain of marriage, making less visible the merging, the loss of separateness and the giving up of individuality. Romantic love has been critiqued as individualistic, objectifying, escapist and driven by capitalist consumerism (Goodison, 1988). Its relationship to other discourses is apparent. Romantic love plays a role in the maintenance of compulsory heterosexuality although a similar romantic
discourse can be found in some homosexual constructions of love. I believe however that it is most significant to consider the construction of romantic love alongside the construction of individualism. In saying this, I am referring in particular to the Western notion of individualism that hegemonically underpins capitalism, democracy, economic rationalism and much of twentieth century thinking (Sampson, 1993). Such individualism has as its goal the self development of autonomous, independent, non-connecting individuals. In contrast, the notion of romance privileges intimate connection. For women for whom notions of self-in-relation and emotional connectedness are important to the way they construct their close relationships, romantic love can appear to offer a more congruent path than the contradictions posed in the individualist discourses. However, to take up the discourse of romantic love as the primary mode of understanding one’s marriage provides an immediate conflict with the notion of self development. The discourse of romantic love offers a female subjectivity that is of service to the (male) other, that reacts to the other. In other words, for wives, the husband’s needs become paramount and evidence of romantic love is shown through the acts of service (love). As a result, when a woman speaks of her own learning and development, to speak of developing her own self becomes, to a degree, a contradiction and an incompatibility.

Further, as Lucy Goodison (1988) has noted, because romantic love is constructed as an intense or peak experience, it is not expected to last. Thus a woman must find a complementary discourse and indeed in at least one account, that of Emma, the discourse of the dutiful wife became a compatible development. This discourse maintained a continuation of the service, caring and supportive notions whereby two people work towards the development of one, the male breadwinner and family head.

The two notions of romantic love and dutiful wife impact on how it is possible to speak of oneself as a learner. First it is not consistent to use any concept of self development or

1 Feminism and Psychology (1992), Special Issue on Heterosexuality, vol 2, no. 3, provides a valuable discussion of the constructions of heterosexuality.
self-directedness as the dutiful wife gains her sense of self and her direction from serving the needs of her husband. I believe that inherent in the very notion of duty is a relationship of reactivity rather than proactivity, in which the wife is positioned by these discourses as a follower. Support and caring within this construction is perhaps best understood by drawing on an architectural metaphor. When one is a buttress, or support, as in the role of dutiful, supportive wife, the direction of activity is focused towards the maintenance of the main body. The relationship is of the main body (husband) and the secondary buttress (wife). However, although the romance/duty constructions of wifehood constrain how far one can speak as a separate self, this is not to say that women will be totally silenced. The daily chores and tasks needed to support another, to ascertain their needs and to respond appropriately are manifold.

Val began her narrative of wifehood by drawing on romantic love to explain the beginning of the relationship, however her use of this concept was particularly time-limited as when she moved out to a rural property after her honeymoon, Val began to explain herself as part of a marital team, and moved to a discourse of marital partnership. The following extract was the only example of a romantic discourse in Val’s account.

**Val:** I’d been to a bachelors ball...[a friend] introduced me to [my future husband] at this ball. I’d never ever touched a drop of alcohol in my life—it was banned; and [he] came along and we had a dance; and he said “let’s have a drink”. I said “can I have something soft?” “Oh, no, let’s have a sherry” he said. I had a sherry with him and I’d said no to everyone all my life (wonderment tone).

**BP:** Isn’t that interesting.

**Val:** Just before the evening was over he said “there’s a dance on in [a nearby town] are you going to that?” I said “I don’t know”...So I went to the next dance with him; and I never went out with anyone else again—that was it(fast, warm tone). It was just one of those things you know—they say love at first sight—well, I’d never thought the word ‘love’—but I just thought I want to be with him (quiet tone).

Emma’s account illustrates how a romantic, dutiful construction of wifehood does allow some enabling constructions. She began her narrative of wifehood drawing on the discourse of romantic love; however when, like Val, she moved to a rural property, Emma began to speak more of herself as a dutiful support. Because of a physical
relocation, Emma and Val began to mobilise different aspects of discourses they had used before. For Val this was wife-as-partner, for Emma it was wife-as-dutyful-support.

Within her account of wifehood, Emma did not speak of self development or self-directedness rather she was only able to articulate the skill development that enabled her to be an efficient domestic support. The romance period was told as one of school boy and school girl lovers painfully separated by war. As Marilyn Lake has concluded of wartime romances, "(m)arriage was seen as the gateway to sexual fulfilment as a union of sweethearts" (1995, p. 72).

Emma: I think there was an enormous desire for [the war] to be finished so that we could get on with our lives (quiet tone). I mean it's really an interesting thought—what would [my future husband] and I have done if there'd been no war, and here we were falling in love at 17 and 18 (energetic tone). Our parents would never have allowed us to get married. He would have certainly had to go to university and he needed to do a lot of growing up. He may not have passed, got on very well in Uni. He needed to mature a lot. So did I, I'm sure. So (pause), we thought it was very hard. I certainly did. It was very hard to be kept apart from him and for a long time I really resented the time wasted. The precious wonderful youthful years that we weren't together. So there was just this feeling, at last it's over and we can get on with our lives and be together (quiet, energetic tone).

Soon after marriage, Emma and her husband moved out to a remote Queensland property, a transition period that Emma constructed as both a romance and adventure at first. Over the narrative of life on the property a contradiction emerged. Emma on one hand told of a time of pulling together but at the same time recognised a gendered dimension, particularly in her exclusion from the major decision-making. She drew on a biological construction of gender to explain this sexual division of labour. Her husband's domestic non-involvement was seen as both natural and yet a lack, a contradiction in the telling that arises perhaps from the impact of more recent feminist discourse.

Emma: The running of the station was so much the men's domain and they didn't realise it but they very much excluded the women. I used to have to ask all the time about things and never realised that [my husband] wasn't including me (very quiet tone). I used to be quite surprised to hear some of the wives discussing things to do with wool selling and marketing in quite an intelligent way which I didn't feel really capable of—I didn't know a lot about it (energetic tone). I just wasn't included in that. I have myself to blame as I allowed myself to be so engulfed with the domestic and children's affairs and I left my husband free (slow emphasis). He was not someone domestically inclined. He never ever cooked. He never came home and bathed the kids or read them stories at night (slow, quiet tone).
SO THERE WAS A DIVISION OF LABOUR?

EMMA: Oh, a terrific division (quiet tone). And I prided myself that I could keep it—leave him free which is—looking back on it a bit of a pity—I wonder if it wasn’t a bit of a pity (quiet tone)... Well it’s to my eternal shame that I have never taught my sons to cook (energetic tone). Because I mean their father at the time would have poo-poohed it. He’d have been quite annoyed! “I’ve got other things for them to learn—to do”. So rather than rock the boat I never even thought of it. And my daughter-in-laws are not too pleased about it (quiet, laughing tone).

Emma today is able to reflect on behaviours and attitudes that mitigated against an equal relationship. Since this experience in the 1950s, feminist discourses have become more widely available. Emma draws on such discourse(s) to reflect on this time and to construct it rather differently from her initial understanding of unconditional dutiful support. Further, as her own children have become wives and husbands, personal observation has reinforced feminist constructions of male/female relationships and Emma is able to speak of her romantic adventure with greater understanding of the complexity of the relationship, by drawing on a more diverse range of experiences and observations.

Ultimately however Emma’s extract illustrates a double-bind. Following the thinking of ‘rightful patriarchy’, Emma prided herself on maintaining the sexual division of labour. This segregated her from other women who had more responsibility and limited her breadth of learning within marriage. In this account, Emma now recognises the constraints of gendered duty. Emma’s account of the time when her husband decided to move the family to England illustrated another way Emma understood wifehood as duty and support.

EMMA: So I was terribly excited about going back to England which I hadn’t been back to since I was 13. I never doubted for a moment that I would cope somehow (tentative tone).

BP: Was it a pretty much joint decision?

EMMA: Definitely a decision made by my husband, definitely—it was what he wanted to do! Yes! (strong tone).

BP: And that was the pattern of relationships in that era (EMMA: Yes, yes) - did it come into your mind to say -
Emma: I don’t want to? No never! (strong tone) I’m his wife and I will do everything with him and for him and help him in any way I possibly can. That’s all I want to do with my life (quiet emphasis).

BP: So as he was thinking it through, it would be more that he would present it to you as “look I’ve decided to do this, for this reason, so let’s prepare for it.”

Emma: Mm, that’s right. Sounds terribly selfless doesn’t it? (quiet tone).

BP: It sounds terribly different from my experience.

Emma: I mean looking back on it I see it was in a way. But it was fulfilling for me, very fulfilling (quiet tone) and (pause) it was also—it solved a problem with [my son’s] schooling—I could see I was not getting on well with [his] schooling. I didn’t know how I was going to cope with another one to teach. And so many of the children were sent away so young to boarding school—that would have been sad (contemplative tone).

In this extract, Emma’s words suggest that she has been able to forge a coherency into the role of the supportive wife by maintaining some sense of romance—I will do everything with him and by constructing it as a personal investment that had its rewards—it was fulfilling. In this way Emma maintained a sense of personal agency and of development through service; service which can be spoken of as fulfilment.

The texts of the day reflect similar ideas on the fulfilment of selfless love. For example, Dr Marie Stopes writing in 1935 argued that:

(t)he chief of the difficulties of marriage can be set right by the recognition that in marriage, more even than any other human relation, it is character that counts; if one cannot be a great novelist without character, nor a great churchman, neither can one be a great lover, an entirely loyal spouse, without an element of nobility in character. (pp. 156–7, original emphasis)

In a more popular text “Sex, Marriage and Birth Control: a guide book to sex health and a satisfactory sex life in marriage” (1943), the Reverend Alfred Tyrer asserted that:

if you have true companionship with the man you love—a companionship grounded in mutual understanding, and devotion, and self-sacrifice—you will find yourself strong in the day of battle, and, what is of more importance still, you will prove a source of strength, and courage, and inspiration to him in his conflict with the world. This is true marriage. (p.215, emphasis added)

The second way that Emma explained her investment in duty was by introducing the needs of her children. In this way, she begins to speak not just as a wife but as a mother as in explaining her choice to follow her husband to England, she included the perceived benefits for her children. By drawing on her duty as a mother as well as a wife, Emma
was able to dispel any notion that she was limited to solely following her husband. I believe that she (re)constructed this time in light of later family experiences in which her relationship to her children’s lives is highly valued as a life-long theme of care and connection. This was the first point in Emma’s account where her husband was not the central narrative character. By speaking of her duty to her husband’s and her children’s needs she began to speak of the learnings that arose from the complex of family members’ needs rather than of the reactive service of one to another. In this way she avoided speaking of herself as merely a follower.

After that time in England, Emma’s account of a dutiful wife changed. Through the use of words such as blossoming and emancipation, Emma indicated that her community experiences both discursive and material presented new possibilities and investments, in a way that was contiguous with her commitment to her family. It is the word blossoming that revealed the most significant changes in identity development. Emma spoke of a first blossoming when she moved to Canberra with her family of five children.

Emma: Straight away I was on school committees and guide committees! (laughing) I didn’t mind! I loved it! I’ll never forget going shopping with [my husband] one Saturday morning a few weeks after we arrived here. We were down at [the suburban shops] and people kept saying hello to me and [my husband] got quite annoyed. He said “how do you know all these people?” (laugh).

To this point, Emma had spoken of herself primarily as a loyal wife supporting her husband’s wishes, but from this point on her narrative began to include some questioning of this. From the extract below, it appears that Emma now reflects that she had reached the limits of her particular primary roles of wife and mother.

Emma: Really I think, thanks to you taking me back, I can see quite a blossoming of myself and a feeling of worth—a feeling of worth other than being a mother and a homemaker.

In recalling this time, Emma appears to be able to articulate a much broader notion of learning by now investing in both homemaking and community-making through voluntary work. Her description of her work in school fund-raising and Girl Guide
management reflects other discourse mobilisation and was told as challenging and fulfilling in both skill development and interpersonal relationship management. However Emma acknowledged the conflict that this presented to her marital relationship of duty. She told of limiting her activities at times because of her husband's subtle disapproval.

In her recall of this period, Emma’s account suggests that she was, at the time, beginning to resist the limitations of wifehood as unconditional support. She was able to name and acknowledge some of her knowledge, even when it was directly contrary to that of her husband. Emma recalled listening to her husband and his friends.

Emma: Mostly the conversation would be about things I didn’t have any information about and so I didn’t mind listening. It was only when they got on to things like judgement of human nature where I knew again and again, I could see [my husband] coming a cropper on his judgements of human nature. I don’t say I was always right, but sometimes I would think ‘why can’t you see that?’ (thoughtful tone).

Although she had begun to speak about her own skills beyond those of caring service and duty, when Emma recalled her husband’s infidelities (over fifteen years from the mid 1970s), she did not totally reject the notion of duty but the 1970’s discourses of self development appear to have offered more enabling investments particularly for her development of a more independent self. Emma spoke of this as her second blossoming. In response to the infidelities, Emma had been on overseas trips with her daughters, begun bushwalking and was working in a paid job. It was the pay packet that Emma spoke of as symbolic of new independence.

Emma: It wasn’t until our relationship changed that I could think of [going on backpacking trips]. I wouldn’t have dreamed of it before. Then suddenly I needed to do my own thing and travel was one of them. Also I was spending my own money (verbal emphasis).

His infidelities, her job and the activities her income funded acted to rupture her notion of dutiful wife, and were the beginning of Emma’s ability to position herself as a more autonomous person. This then opened up the possibility to speak of more self-directed
learning and Emma’s account thereafter reflected on a more individual notion of self development.

Emma: To be quite honest [my backpacking trips] made everybody close to me sit up and take notice! I wanted to do something different. I wanted to do something for myself.

It was Emma’s utilisation of the concept of family as a site for care and connection that illuminated the other way that allowed Emma to speak with a sense of individual agency rather than from the limitations of the reactive position of duty. I believe that by speaking of her family as a whole, of which she is part, Emma invested in a notion of interdependence. This enabled her to explain her service in relation to the family unit and to move beyond any understanding of her role as one of total subservience to another.

Emma: [My husband] was ill with cancer for 18 months and wasn’t living at home for 12 months of that. And, came home for the last three months (very quiet, slow tone). Mind you we saw him constantly during that year. He wasn’t far away—visiting every day (matter of fact tone). So he couldn’t stay away from us. He didn’t make a success of it (smiling tone). So that was (pause). The big test came when I had to turn my back on my marriage and try to make a new life and leave him to it. My decision was not to do that. It was to be here, to be here for the family, and this way I felt, I could have half of him, some of him, and that it was possible to maintain a still loving relationship, and it was (quiet tone).

BP: So you really stretched your boundaries beyond the conventional pattern and it worked?

Emma: Yes, it did work, the chips were really down (very quiet tone). To me that was an enormous resolution, because we were married for forty-two years and you can’t just keep forty-two years away and five children and all that’s gone before (smiling tone). So I feel that along the way, whatever, wherever I learnt it or whatever I made of myself over the years—that was important!—to, to have the knowledge and self-control too—to be able to make that decision (quiet emphasis). So many people said—how ever could you do it? (very quiet tone).

Dr Bernhard Bauer (1926) provides a compatible view to that of Emma’s response to adultery when he described the ideal wife as the ‘patient’ wife:

(c)onscious of her dignity and confident in the strength of her own personality, she will be patient even in this trial, and will console herself by remembering the love which once made her so happy. (p.302)

Emma’s description of this experience drew on similar notions of loyalty and love as propounded by Dr Bauer.
However I believe that Emma was able to move beyond the total selflessness of a faithful wife by also explaining this time from the perspective of a whole family, rather than in relation to herself as a single individual. In the following extract it is possible to see how Emma invested in a particular notion of family. Thus she was able to tell of this time as a challenge to her commitment to her family as a whole, constructing a family that was consensual, integrated and interdependent.

**Emma:** *The nursing of him here was a real family effort which was wonderful. Both [my daughters] took their turns in those last weeks when they discovered I wasn’t really coping awfully well and just said don’t worry we’ll help and they rostered themselves. And [my son] was here, he just came every day. And so there was a lovely feeling, a lovely feeling (warm tone), so that when his death came it wasn’t so hard...And so it was a great healing for all of us. But we’d given to him all we could give to him, and likewise he’d come back to us* (very quiet tone).

Over Emma’s narrative of wifehood, and given her material circumstances, it is possible to see how by positioning herself within certain discourses, only certain learnings were possible to articulate. From the way in which Emma privileged the role of dutiful wife, it was not congruent to speak of personal development or self development. However as her children grew up, Emma could legitimate work outside the home through an extension of the concept of caring which moved from caring for to caring about. Finally in response to infidelity, Emma retained some sense of duty but by combining this with the notion of a whole family unit she was able to express achievement and learning beyond that of simple service.

In contrast with Emma, Louise, who also spoke as a dutiful wife, told of her marital and family raising years as a period of an ongoing struggle to develop her self and to continue her own self-directed learning whilst remaining within the bounds of the duty and responsibility of wifehood. In her utilisation of the concept of the dutiful wife, Emma’s account of learning focused on the skill development of a domestic worker and as an affective support to her husband and family. This led to a central narrative role for the man, the husband, and as a result Emma’s accounts of learning and development,
especially in the early years of the marriage, pivoted around this person's needs. Louise rejected any such investments provided by a service role, instead she privileged her struggle for self development. She spoke of accepting her duty within rightful patriarchy, but as can be seen in the following extract, Louise rejected any notion of dependency.

Louise: *I do think that having a difficult marriage had a lot to do with [my inertia] (pause). I've often been working out, thinking in my mind, you know, what was it, about it, because I have really a good relationship with my husband, but I've made sure that I have for the sake of my family and respect for him (querying tone). I think he wanted me to be dependent on him and this doesn't help* (firm tone).

The popular texts of the day illustrate how Louise's position and Emma's position were both available at that time. The Reverend Tyrer's (1943) view reverberates with Emma's account.

One of the most important matters with which a girl who is going to get married can occupy herself is the consideration of what kind of home she intends (so far as lies in her power) to create for the man she intends to companion through life. It will be his duty to provide the means; it will be her duty to build up the best home she can on such means as are available. (p.229)

In contrast, Bertrand Russell, writing in 1929, and regularly reprinted until 1976, speaks in a way taken up by Louise.

Women's emancipation has in many ways made marriage more difficult. In old days the wife had to adapt herself to the husband, but the husband did not have to adapt himself to the wife. Nowadays many wives, on grounds of woman's right to her own individuality and her own career, are unwilling to adapt themselves to their husbands beyond a point, while men who still hanker after the old tradition of masculine domination see no reason why they should do all the adapting. (pp.93–94)

Louise's personal narrative was the one account that brought into sharpest focus the tensions between the discourses of the dutiful wife and the mid-twentieth century discourse on individual self development (Sampson, 1993 discusses the individualist discourses). Although marriage was constructed as a mutually supportive relationship in accounts such as Emma's and Tyrer's, the gender differences in the enacting of that support were taken as unproblematic. For women, the traditional support role to the husband emphasises a commitment to the development of the man, followed by the development of their children. In contrast, the discourse of individuation and individual
self development revolves around the ability to separately develop one's own full potential. For Louise, the decision became how far and for how long to subsume her needs in relation to the needs of her husband. Louise's account suggests that she saw very few 'pay-offs' in a marriage of duty to the husband's needs. Instead she spoke of finding more liberating and enabling investments through community arts, community work and formal education.

Louise did however reject any radical construction of a self outside family life, by privileging the rewards and challenges within her mothering role. Louise drew on the discourses of caring and connection to explain her mothering role; however, she recalled her desire to be independent as a life-theme that had to be consciously and regularly balanced with her notion of duty, which in her personal narrative was primarily to the care of her children. She placed independence and family responsibility in direct contrast, even rejecting any notion of romance prior to marriage.

Louise: *I probably married partly because of the Depression because I felt I was a terrible burden to the family and it was best to get me out of the way* (quiet tone). *Art was my main thing and I could never see myself making a living in art. But I love children and (pause) in a kind of way was domesticated. But always a pretty independent sort of person* (firm tone).

Louise made few references to her husband and not once in her personal narrative did she use his name. Instead when she spoke about the 'family' it was in relation to her children and her mothering. I would suggest this is because the discourses of mothering on which she drew had greater compatibility with the discourses of independence and individual development. Children do grow up; their dependence can be constructed as temporary. As Louise told of increasingly investing in the notion of personal independence, the discourse of dutiful wife became less viable.

Louise: *I think because, partly because I found some things unfulfilling in my marriage that I fought against being the wife only—I wanted to be more than that. I do think I saw myself as being the mother of my sons...But, I suppose basically, it's the survival instinct* (laugh). *You feel that you've got these things—Well, you don't want to be down-trodden do you, or a door mat, or anything like that?* (firm tone) *You've got to gradually find yourself I think* (thoughtful tone).
BP: So your response to these stimulus was to develop yourself, rather than to give in to the stereotypes of being just a wife and mother. It was never on your agenda to

Louise: No I think it shows a lack of imagination, lack of, considering the options (fast pace), lack of—well, you try to find—it’s like I suppose, a mouse in a cage, you try to find the ways out.

BP: You don’t keep running in the cage.

Louise: It would have to be a cage you can get out of. Perhaps if you can see how to get out through the bars somehow. I suppose this is a desire to develop (pause). But in a way, I think you feel that if you do develop yourself you will help your children and grandchildren. Because you know that you’ve got some wisdom there that you’d like to pass on to them (quiet, thoughtful tone).

It is apparent that in recalling her family life, Louise found little in her marital relationship that was able to be linked to her sense of herself as a learning being, privileging as she did the notion of self development and its learning parameters. However by investing her mothering commitment with a future orientation and a sense of a contribution to generations of the future, Louise was able to speak cogently of her role as a mother. The development of selves, her own and those of her children, became the valued investment.

This does not mean that Louise rejected all discourses of the good wife available at that time. Indeed as the only woman of this group who married prior to World War II, it is probable that her conflation of wifehood with motherhood arose from discourses typical in the 1900s to 1920s (see Matthews, 1984; Lake, 1995). Even in the 1930s and 1940s wifehood was often closely linked to motherhood, and that in turn was linked to a strong society. Marriage manuals of the time often presented family making as a service to the nation, as is evident in the Reverend Tyrer’s (1943) words.

I believe that monogamous marriage to which both parties are faithful through life, is the only possible basis of a permanently stable and happy home, and that such a home is the only foundation of any sound human society. (p.3)

Although never making a direct link herself, I would suggest that Louise’s activism with the Women’s Electoral Lobby (WEL) could in some way be linked to her own experience of marriage. Her personal narrative has a constant theme of social justice and human rights, both of which are told in relation to family.
Louise: *I think I did realise when I was bringing up young children and actually living a married life that there were disadvantages and in the law too, particularly in the marriage area, with the difficulties of divorce and that sort of thing. That was the interest I'd seen in WEL—we worked on the 'no-fault' divorce area, too* (energetic tone).

Second-wave feminism of the 1970s has at times suggested that feminist discourse and activism died out after suffrage was granted. This view has been revised recently (Grimshaw *et al.*, 1994). Louise’s concerns about women’s rights in marriage were reflected in popular writing right across the 1920s to the 1970s. For example, Phyllis Duguid writing to women in Adelaide in 1944 argued that it was a woman’s “right in a democracy to sell your own labour and manage your own life” (p.4). In the same era, the Married Women’s Association (n.d.) distributed a pamphlet that argued that a married woman’s financial and legal position was inequitable, and argued for her access to family income, rights to part of the marital home, disclosure of the husband’s income and desertion support.

Louise did separate from her husband when she was in her early seventies. Prior to this her account suggests that there was too much to be lost by leaving. She told of her concern about women who lost the rights to child custody and the financial and moral outcomes of separation prior to ‘no-fault’ divorce. She implied that this was her own situation. It appears that Louise found greater rewards in the role of mother and community worker. Louise was able to frame any investment in marriage in terms of her own right within that relationship to continue her own development to full potential.

Bertrand Russell in 1929 argued in a similar vein:

(i) *f marriage is to achieve its possibilities, husbands and wives must learn to understand that whatever the law may say, in their private lives they must be free.* (p.96)

Increasingly across the 1960s and 1970s, the ‘right’ for romantic love as well as the right to leave an unsatisfactory marriage have become part of an emerging discourse. The second wave feminism of the 1970s, and the no-fault divorce laws of 1975 now present a sense of marriage beyond duty. New Idea, the popular women’s magazine, by 1970 was
reflecting the right to divorce to gain romantic happiness, however the commitment to conjugal marriage was still evident.

(In a world that has grown huge and impersonal, marriage is our principal source of emotional satisfaction, security, and happiness. (New Idea feature article, December 5, 1970, p.61)

Louise however did not speak of romance or emotional satisfaction in marriage, instead in her personal narrative she spoke of an ongoing struggle to develop in her own direction without fully rejecting the notion of duty.

Louise: I think I know inside myself that if I'd wanted to do anything badly enough (long pause) I suppose I would have found somehow of doing it. You come up against the inertia thing, the whole family set-up (quiet tone).

Across the whole of her personal narrative, Louise spent comparatively little time explaining or exploring her understanding of wifehood. Instead she concentrated on overseas travel, achieving a degree, writing a book, researching transpersonal psychology and social activism. She did acknowledge and elaborate on her maternal responsibility to those fragile strong-willed creatures you've brought into the world but overall Louise silenced her marital experience beyond duty.

Lucy's account is the third one that fell within the rubric of a marriage understood as based on duty. However because Lucy did not have the material privilege of Emma and Louise, her account drew on quite a different understanding of wifehood. Like Louise, Lucy's husband had minimal visibility in the account and again like Louise, Lucy acknowledged her husband's rightful place as head of the family but described her own development as independent of this. Except for two years when her only child was an infant, Lucy was in paid work from the age of fifteen to sixty-five. Across her personal narrative Lucy spoke of herself as a worker—wifehood was no exception to this. Although Lucy appeared to accept patriarchal rights in principle, the financial and personal need to work took precedence in her account.
Lucy: My father and [my husband] were dead against wives going out to work! Then eventually I got a job as a cleaner at the [office building] and [my husband] said “I don’t want you to do it and you won’t last” which made me think “if I’m dying you’ll never know” It was early morning work—that was where I retired from! (strong tone).

Lucy: I suppose the main thing was my home—taking care of the home. It wasn’t that if I didn’t work—the home had to come first! That was until my husband died then after that naturally my work became the first thing because I had to work.

Lucy understood herself as a worker in the marriage. She spoke of herself as a do-er (not a lean-er) who could take responsibility for domestic labour. Indeed Lucy emphasised that she worked the early shift in order to meet her housework commitments; an example of a working-class woman’s adaptability in meeting middle-class standards.

Lucy: Well I think the main thing was that you had to learn how to run a home! and how to manage money! That was very essential because the woman was the one who had to make ends meet. And you had to run the home because it wasn’t—you had to do everything! I mean the men didn’t help in any way. You know they’d come home, they’d sit down, they’d have their cup of tea or whatever and that was it. That was the finish (energetic tone).

However by simultaneously drawing on the notion of ‘caring for’ her husband, Lucy was able to speak of her marital duty in a way that still firmly located her in the world of good wives.

Lucy: Well I can always remember, we often laughed about it, the time we had a whole lot of kindling wood brought to us you know, but it was boxes, crates, and my husband was going down to watch the football at the park and he came out and I’m out in the backyard swinging the axe and he’s all dressed in his overcoat, scarf, hat on and the whole works and as he went out he kissed me and said “be careful you don’t hurt yourself”.

BP: And you kept on—it wasn’t “well I’m not going to do this?”

Lucy: No, no I just kept on, Well I suppose I thought I could—if he’s got asthma—he can’t do it—but it didn’t stop him going out in the cold (laugh).

Lucy: I’ve chopped the wood, and when Dad was doing any work, I was always his labourer sort of thing. For example, if Dad was sawing a piece of wood - it would be “sit on the end of this” and “get me this”. It still continued even after I’d married, I remember Dad coming out to put up a new fence for us and he said to my husband “[name] get the punch will you” and he looked at me stupid and he said “what’s a punch?” He’d never had to do anything like that—his mother was the type of “get Mr L. across the road - we’ll pay him to do it”. So he didn’t even know. I think he knew what a hammer and a nail was, but that was it—anything else he didn’t have a clue. See, whereas I knew all of those things (strong tone).
In Lucy’s account, she explained herself as the strong, competent and caring wife. Her account resonates with the advice of the Doctors Stone in their marriage manual. “being grown up emotionally is the ability to show and to share love and affection, to actually ‘care for’ someone” (1939, p.215). Lucy understood herself as a worker and in her account of her marital relationship, demonstrated how ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’ her husband were linked by caring labour.

In differing ways, Emma, Louise and Lucy’s accounts of wifehood revolved around the notion of rightful patriarchy. Men were head of the household, women the supportive other. Yet in these three accounts it becomes clear that material circumstances impact individually on how a woman interprets rightful patriarchy. The three women’s accounts demonstrate how it is possible to invest in dutiful wifehood in differing but positive ways. This could be the notion of service that Emma invested in, a role that led to learnings about how to support and maintain another; or it could be one in which the woman acknowledged her duty but sought learning and development outside this role as did Louise and Lucy.

**Partner relationships and learning**
The notion of rightful patriarchy arose from marital understandings of the early twentieth century (Fallding, 1957; Gilding, 1991); however in the mid-century, a discourse of marriage as a ‘partnership’ became apparent. The emergent marriage guidance movement stressed personal development, sexual compatibility and communication between couples (Reiger, 1987). For four of the women, Dagmar, Margaret, Val and Florence, the telling of their marital relationship as one of partnership enabled them to speak of at least one sphere that became their own speciality, their apparently chosen responsibility. This is in contrast to Emma, Louise and Lucy who saw their roles as given. By speaking as a partner it was possible to articulate personal competencies, skills and ongoing learning as a particular speciality. Dagmar, Margaret, Florence and Val were able to speak of discrete
and particular areas of learning that arose from the specialist family areas that were negotiated and accepted as their responsibility.

The notion of marriage as partnership remains current today. For example in the last decade the effects of the equal rights movement and liberal feminism are visible. Marital partnerships have been explored via measurements of housework load (Shelton, 1992; Goodnow & Bowes, 1994), communication patterns (Tannen, 1990), parenting division (Backett, 1982), and the like. This 1990s construction of partnership understands a conjugal relationship that is ideally one of the equal balance of all roles and responsibilities.

The four women, Dagmar, Margaret, Florence and Val, who spoke of their marriages as partnerships did not utilise this 1990s construction, rather they understood partnership as two partners with two separate roles, but which were not necessarily required to be equal. This is the point made by Australian sociologist Harold Fallding (1957) in his analysis of partnership marriages in the 1950s. He asserted that:

(what was substituted as the basis for distribution of control between husband and wife was actual competence...so that if an egalitarian arrangement were followed in principle, with plenty of open discussion about everything, agreement would either be reached, or the person less competent to judge would appreciate the greater competence of the other and defer to it. (p.68, original emphasis)

Central to this particular notion of partnership is a sense of mutuality and interaction between the couple. This is what Dagmar, Margaret, Florence and Val stressed in their accounts. Each of the women described the relationship for its egalitarian and mutual support dimensions then immediately moved on to explain their own particular activities within the family.

As a partner it is possible to speak of specialist areas of skill and responsibility in a way that does acknowledge personal achievement. The separate sphere discourses that locate the male as the public, instrumental breadwinner and the female as the private, affective family carer utilise a biological determinism to construct such roles as naturally given
(Yeatman, 1984). However as many now argue this public/private divide is a social construction that does not stand up to scrutiny (Pateman, 1983; Gittins, 1993). Although the binary logic of public/private has inserted itself in many of the discourses informing family life, each person must discriminate where for them the divide between the public/private lies and thus what is to be their territory or that of their partner. This activity allows some points of negotiation as the individual takes up her/his own interpretation of what it is to be a partner in a particular relationship. In the personal narratives that understood wifehood as partnership, five different emphases were apparent. These were partner as co-worker, as co-patriot, as friend, as care-giver and as sexual partner.

**Partner as co-worker**

Not one of the four women who spoke of themselves as co-workers drew on a sense of their marital partnership as one in which all work had to be divided as equally as possible. Indeed sociologist W.P. Coughlan writing in 1957 described marriage forms such as these using the term ‘democratic’ rather than ‘egalitarian’ (p.140). The women spoke of equality as measured by the acknowledgment of separate roles and competencies that were mutually recognised as valid and worthwhile. These roles often fell into traditional gender categories of the instrumental male and the expressive female; however each of the women took care to highlight examples of when their marital relationship challenged the traditional categories.

**Dagmar:** You didn't mind [supporting a sick husband] because you felt you had—
you know, he'd stood by me when I'd been sick so many times (quiet tone)...and he'd done the housework and cooked etc for two years when I had [acute nephritis]! (firm tone).

**Florence:** Well, [my husband] never stopped me! Everything in our house was 50/50. We pooled our money - and he did his share of the housework (strong tone).

**Val:** My father-in-law never ever (pause) sewed a button, ironed a shirt and I'm sure never cooked anything for himself. When I'd been married for a little while I suddenly realised this and I thought "this is not going to happen to my sons! or my husband for that matter" (energetic tone). So when [my husband] came into the kitchen with me particularly, he learnt how to do things—and he wanted to learn (warm tone).
Once again it must be remembered that these accounts are (re)constructions told in the
1990s. Such memories may be informed by ideas from the 1990s’ gender discussions or
may have arisen from the time. However, common to both eras is a biological
essentialism that takes for granted the ‘natural’ differences between men and women.
Transgression into the other’s territory was the exception that proved this rule. There is
some evidence from popular texts of the 1950s that good relationships included such
loving but limited extensions into the other’s gendered territory.

In a parentcraft book: “A husband expects his wife to show an intelligent interest
in his work and his hobbies, and in return he should know something of hers,
lending a hand with some of the household jobs so that she can get out sometimes
into his world”. (Jacobs, 1948, p.11)

In a marriage preparation book: “If the wife has been out at work all day, the
husband can’t expect to come in from the office and put his feet up while his wife
gets the evening meal ready. If she shares in the earning of the income, he must
help out with the management of the home”. (Mace, 1958, p.120)

In each of the partnership accounts, the women spoke about their contribution to the
marriage partnerships as arising from a reciprocal, but not necessarily totally equal,
relationship. They were not so much concerned with equal work load but in respecting
each other as having equal but different needs.

However within the notion of a partnership marriage there were other variations, which
appear through the utilisation of differing discourses. World War II led some of the
women to understand theirs as a patriotic partnership, and to clarify some aspects of
marriage as a sexual partnership. Further notions of partnership as a friendship and as
care giving were also evident.

*Patriotic partnership*

Florence and Dagmar explained their experiences of World War II as a time that clarified
what it was to be a ‘good woman’ and a ‘good Australian’. Both acknowledged this in a
way similar to Kate Darian-Smith’s assertion that the ordeals of war enabled the nation and individuals to ‘come of age’ (1995, pp.124—5).

**Dagmar:** [Brisbane] was a small city. It was barely a city in those days. It grew up tremendously during the war. It helped you sort out people. You were prejudiced. We were terribly loyal—we wouldn’t have anything to do with Americans. We had Australian boyfriends. The women who went with Americans were just awful! That was our quotation (laugh) (energetic tone).

**Florence:** During [World War II] the Yanks were in town. Not that they were any worse than a lot of our own, but, if I might put it this way, the nice girls didn’t sort of go looking for it because you just didn’t go (pause) looking to get into trouble (quiet tone). I mean let’s face it there was no Pill, no permissive society. What’s looked on now as the norm in those days (pause)—you were really on the outer if you did that sort of thing (quiet, strong tone). And our boys didn’t like the Yanks anyway because the general view of them were they were “over-paid, over-sexed and over here!” (smiling) So it was usually the more adventurous girls... and it did put them at a disadvantage to get any sort of husband—a good husband either! (emphatic tone).

In these extracts it is clear that both Dagmar and Florence aligned themselves as patriotic Australians, and distanced themselves from sexual experimentation. They explained their pre-marital relationships in the same patriotic terms reflected in the Australian Women’s Weekly of the time (1939).

Women’s part in the war is to be steadfast...they are the second line of defence. The majority serve best in keeping the family cheerful and happy, in keeping the doors of home bolted and barred against uncertainty, panic and nerves... Men must fight and women work so that peace may come again. (Australian Women’s Weekly editorial, September 16, 1939, p.3)

Both women made it clear that for them, the choice of a marital partner was imbued with patriotism.

Both Florence and Dagmar continued to develop the notion of a patriotic partnership once war ended. They appear to have embraced the re-construction discourse that exhorted Australian men and women to leave the past behind and work together to create a new and better society for all (Grimshaw et al. 1994, gives an outline of this time). Both women spoke of marriage as a partnership for the future, and this focus on the future had the effect of leaving the traumas of war silent and in the past. Family life in Florence’s account was the panacea to the social disruption of war.
Florence: Family life! in those days! was the norm! (strong tone). It’s not now, but it was then. Now, the men by and large had been away, some for six years you see!, and they—not all for that long—but for varying periods of time, and they went away and nobody knew if they’d come back—and if they came back, their one desire was for a normal family life (slow emphasis). I mean a lot of them had gone away thinking it was a great adventure they were going to - they were only kids when they’d gone away—this happened in World War I too. They went away with all this—you know, exciting—but they found that it wasn’t like that at all. They came back wanting to—you know, they wanted a wife and a family (quiet tone). Well my husband within three months was wanting a little nipper—it wasn’t really at the time a sensible thing to do because we didn’t have anything—but you see that was his need, and I suppose mine too. I think that was basically the way life was and the way the average people - the average working people - how they felt and what they needed to do. And of course, you know, the normal outcome was a lot of babies, the baby boomers (matter of fact tone).

Domesticity was a key feature of post-war reconstruction (Evans & Saunders, 1992), and all of the women reflected this in their accounts. Even before war’s end, the Australian Women’s Weekly evidenced such an approach, for example in an advertisement for Masonite board.

Now is the time to save...and plan for a better standard of living in peaceful post war years. Soon we should be within sight of peace. The dreams you’ve had...the plans you’ve made...will be that much closer to reality...build the home you’ve dreamed about, improve and modernise the home you have, and so enjoy the future that lies beyond the war. (May 8, 1943, p.24)

Although not all of the women understood war as a time for patriotic partnerships, all of the personal narratives evidenced a belief that the end of the war was time to get back to what the women believed to be their ‘natural’ life trajectory. It must be remembered that as these women went into the war, none of them knew how long it would last. To look forward, at the age of 18 or 22 or 25 to potentially endless years of war appears to have left its mark. Florence’s extract illustrates welcoming the end of war both as an Australian citizen and as a woman who believed that her family trajectory had been disrupted.

Florence: Five years is a long time. As I say, it’s the difference between when you’re a young person, it’s the difference between being a teenager and perhaps an adult. It’s the difference between being a small child and growing up. And it’s the difference between maybe getting married when you’re say 20 and getting married when you’re 25 or 26.
The material impact of World War II on the early years of Florence and Dagmar's marriages and the concurrent patriotic discourse of national reconstruction appears to have been complementary to the discourse of marriage as partnership. Although Florence and Dagmar did not continue to speak of patriotism in their later married years, they did continue to speak as partners.

**Partner and friend**
Margaret's account of marriage revolved around the idea of a partner as a lifelong friend.

In her personal narrative, Margaret did not focus on the private aspect as much as the public aspect of the partnership. She highlighted her own and her husband's common goal of working for a better world, for example in the Communist Party and later in peace and environment groups.

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Margaret: *[My husband and I] believed that it was a good life to be learning and doing things. We desired that for ourselves. (silence) I think I probably learnt a lot from [my husband] because he's very interested in what goes on around and about him—politically, scientifically and culturally. So we had lots of interest in common and to have a friend that you interact with, with all the things you do—it's very encouraging* (slow, quiet tone).

Margaret summarised her relationship as one of *parallel paths*. The Reverend Tyrer in his marriage manual echoed similar views of an educated marital relationship.

> It is a fine thing when a wife will read things to her husband, and when he will read to her, things that they both enjoy. This 20th century is certainly the most terrifically interesting era any human being has lived in, and both must keep in touch with world affairs at least to some little degree, so that they can discuss them together intelligently and give each other their own angles of vision. (1943, pp.212–3)

This particular interpretation of the marital partnership as mutual education is compatible with the mid-twentieth century middle-class notions of the educated family. From this understanding, there is no tension in speaking of self development—it is the outcome of an educated partnership. Respecting and encouraging each other's need to develop to their full potential was implicit in Margaret's account of marriage. Margaret's material security
enabled her to take up various opportunities to develop within this form of a partnership marriage.

Partner and care-giver
Although initially Florence explained her marital relationship as a patriotic partnership, her husband’s ongoing needs led Florence to speak primarily as a care-giver. She explained that his war-neurosis led him to find it hard to settle after the war. What is apparent in Florence’s account is that although she was a care-giver to her husband for the majority of her married life, she did not constitute this as self-sacrifice because she drew on a notion of reciprocity.

Florence: [My husband] had been under Japanese bombing—he was a bundle of nerves and full of malaria... I had to go back to work to keep the home fires burning.

Florence: My husband decided we’d go into business—a corner shop, you know. I never wanted to, I wasn’t cut out to be a shop keeper...[but] I thought “well, if it means he settles down and he feels he’s got security, well we’d have to do it!” (quiet tone).

Florence: I think he was just a very unselfish giving person and he never expected to be any different. I was doing my share to bring in the money and he did his. He worked all the years at the shop, when he worked three jobs towards the end to try and—but it was useless [in saving the business]...in the later years when I was back at work and we’d gotten rid of the shop, he did a day shift starting at six am and finished at three pm and he would get up at five and make his own breakfast and brought me a cup of tea. When he got home I would get the vegetables if we were having...I’d get them ready and he would set the table and put the vegies on - and when I got home I only had to cook the meat and we had tea. He did the grocery shopping, I made out the list and he went and shopped.

BP: That must have been unusual.

Florence: I don’t think—at the weekend if he was home, I don’t think I vacuumed the floors more than half a dozen times in the whole of my married life—certainly my working life (matter-of-fact tone).

Florence’s account suggests that by acknowledging the caring as mutual although not always equal in time, Florence was able to understand her marriage as a positive partnership of care giving rather than from any constraining notion of dutiful service.
Sexual partners
Except for Louise, who married in the mid-1930s, the women of this study married in the war and immediate post-war period. This was a time in which discourses of masculinity, femininity and nationhood were evolving in a particular way (in particular, Damousi & Lake, 1995). Female sexuality became especially polarised with ‘good girls’ and ‘bad girls’ being clearly marked through government enlistment campaigns, venereal disease campaigns and family and community responses to war. It could therefore be expected that the women of this study would have found it relevant to share with me their understanding of, or decisions about, marriage as a sexual partnership. However only Val spoke directly of her sexual partnership. This may be due to three factors. First, as I have discussed previously, I chose to interact with the women as a respectful, inquiring daughter, therefore it is not surprising that overt discussions of sexuality were not forthcoming. Further, I would argue that it is more typical in Australian culture to discuss sexuality in ‘code’ rather than overtly and indeed this was apparent to some extent in all of the nine personal narratives. Finally, most of the women of this study chose to position themselves as mothers rather than wives, thus sexual partnership becomes less relevant in the storying of life and learning.

As the one woman who spoke of her marriage as a sexual partnership, Val did this by aligning herself with the discourse of the time of the informed ‘modern’ woman. She told of sexuality not as a natural attribute but one that she researched as part of what she described as her usual need to know. This need to know was a consistent theme across Val’s personal narrative; she spoke of her commitment to learn from experts whenever possible. Her preparation for marriage is one such account.

Val: My mother never gave me instructions about being married, or having children, or the process of having them (quiet tone). And I had friends in Sydney where both the sons went to university—they were doctors. So before I was married I wrote to the mother of those boys and asked if they could please get me a book on how to handle—being married, and what you did with a man.

BP: Did she send you anything?

Val: Yes, very good. Two books...
BP: So when you first wrote to get the book, was that, do you think, because you were so far away from people?

Val: I wasn't then.

BP: No, the first one—

Val: What do you call it—I'm forgetting the name—what do you do when you want to go and have sex with a man—what do they call it?

BP: Like having intercourse? So you were interested in the sexual side of marriage.

Val: Yes, well exactly what you did! I mean there were no things on television or—

BP: But you found she came to your mind because she'd been someone?

Val: I talked to her fairly intimately, not that intimately, but with the boys being doctors and they'd taken me through the Sydney Uni and I'd seen quite a lot of things there. But I didn't write to the boys, I wrote to the mother. I don't think I needed a great deal because my husband was very understanding. I'm not certain that he hadn't had sex before (questioning tone), but it was the simplest thing out—there were just no problems whatsoever. But I'm sure the book gave me much more understanding (fast pace).

In this account Val holds in tension two discourses that have informed women’s sexuality during the century. On one hand she refers to a medicalised view of sexuality and on the other hand she balances this with the more traditional women’s business by explaining her choice to write to the mother. This extract suggests a husband who was more experienced or a ‘man of the world’; an apparent acceptance of the double standard of sexual behaviour for men and women. However as a learner in this context, Val was able to speak with confidence and competence. She related to a formal mode of learning, rather than any sense of trial and error.

To be a well informed and well educated sexual partner was the consistent advice of the marriage manuals of the day.

The quality of a marriage depends on two factors—upon anatomy and attitude. For successful living in marriage, it is desirable, therefore, to have some knowledge of both the human body and human emotions (Stone & Stone, 1939/1964, p.222)

Both partners are equally responsible for the proper conduct of the marriage...I am driven to the conclusion, however, that ultimately it is the woman, and her attitude to her own emotional life and, in particular, to what we call her sex life, which as I have said already, is something much greater than mere physical activity, which can make or mar the whole situation. (Griffith, 1935/1958, p.305)
Wartime was the other period in which some of the women spoke more of themselves as sexual subjects. As has been cited already, Irene, the single women 'preferred' not to bring soldiers home to her all-woman household whereas in contrast, Josephine saw the war as a period to **work hard and play hard**. Marilyn Lake (1990) has argued that World War II brought about new understandings of femininity revolving around sexual attractiveness and youthfulness, however, as Deborah Montgomerie (1996) has demonstrated in the New Zealand context, sexualised femininity could also be harnessed to conservative ends.

The earlier extracts from Dagmar and Florence illustrate that the wartime context revealed certain conservative discourses of masculinity and femininity to be highly complementary. Men were the warriors protecting the homeland. Women were the guardians of the home, hearth and family. This can be illustrated by the recruitment posters of the time, for example, an Australian army poster picturing a young mother and baby was headlined with “You love them - fight for them! Join the AIF now” (cited in Darian-Smith, 1995, p. 120). Thus female sexuality was depicted as maternal, and it was this position that this group of women found the most compatible in their accounts of the wartime period and later times. It has also been suggested that the women who lived through the war had a momentary experience of sexual disruption which granted them an ironic view of gender that they did not act on but passed on to their daughters (Higonnet et al., 1987). I cannot comment on whether the women of this study passed on their views in this way, however it is evident in the accounts (such as Dagmar’s and Florence’s) that some of the women did have a sense of the sexual double standards.

Marilyn Lake has suggested that for married women in the post-war years “companion [became] the code for sexual partner” (1995, p. 73). She illustrated that women’s expressed desires to limit the number of children or to reduce housework for example were often explained as a way to increase ‘companionship’ with their husband. Except for
Louise, all of the married women in this cohort described public ways in which they and their husbands were ‘companions’ or ‘friends’.

Margaret: *We had lots of interest in common and to have a friend that you interact with, with all the things you do—it’s very encouraging* (quiet tone).

Val: *We were companions* (strong tone) — *it wasn’t just husband and wife and the kids or anything. Everything we did we wanted to do together and we did it together.*

It is possible indeed that this was a strategy that enabled them to refer to their sexual relationship as part of a relationship of mutuality.

To understand the role of wife through any of the notions of partnership appears to have enabled that woman to forge a role that was for her part of a skilled life project. Whether this was part of the project of carer and/or worker, each of the women was able to speak of individual activity and achievement. The notion of marriage as an active partnership was utilised not just in the accounts of the early marital life within the personal narratives but across the life of the marriage. Unlike the notion of romance, partnership does not seem to be a time limited investment. The concept of partnership allows ongoing negotiation and renegotiation of family roles and responsibilities.

Not only was the notion of partnership evident across most of the women’s personal narratives it remained a part of the popular texts on marriage beyond the 1940s and 1950s. For example, Carl Rogers continued in the 1970s to link marital partnerships with national strength, asserting that marriage is a “rich resource for our country and especially for its future, if we can bring ourselves to accept and trust the seriously meaningful revolution which is taking place in partnerships” (Rogers, 1973, p.220).

The discourse of marriage as partnership appears to have offered a pliable concept that most of the women were able to utilise and adapt across the whole of their marital years. Further by construing the marital relationship as one of many relationships within the
family and one in which they played a specialist role, these women avoided the limitations of the concept of wife as the subservient other.

Conclusion
Throughout the seven narratives on wifehood the issue of support recurs. I would argue that the notion that ‘behind every good man there is a good woman’ is pervasively present. However in the narratives in which there was a sense of reciprocity, the women were better able to speak of developing and maintaining an enabling identity that incorporated wifehood. This can be seen, for example, when Dagmar stressed that she and her husband supported each other’s choices and nursed each other in time of illness; and Florence, although living with a man with war damage, reiterated his commitment to sharing home duties. In these accounts support was needs-based and intermittent and never taken-for-granted. In contrast, in Emma’s account, she embraced a support role that was told as a more ongoing commitment to support her husband while he climbed the career ladder. In Emma’s account, two things mitigated against this becoming disabling. Emma accounted for activities outside the home and it was through this alternative that it was possible to speak of greater development. Further, Emma told of a more enabling sense of reciprocity with, and mutual support from, her relationship with her children. Utilising another understanding of wifehood, Louise managed the contradictions between service to another and self development by enveloping her relationship with her husband in silence, and denying all but a basic economic reciprocity.

When a woman speaks from a position of service or duty to others she draws on a particular discourse. As Emma’s account illustrated, this discourse has been readily available in the twentieth century as one informing the role of a good wife. However, as the accounts of the women who spoke as partners reveal, other discourses are also available that allow a woman to understand her actions beyond subservience. I would suggest that within the notion of partnership with its valuing of mutuality and reciprocity
is a potential positioning not of dependence or independence but of interdependence.

There can be no doubt that every one of the women spoke at some time of service to her husband, but it is important to note that it was also possible to understand wifehood in a more enabling way by drawing on a concept of interdependence.

As I have explored the seven married women's accounts of wifehood, it may appear that I have over-generalised each of the accounts. To some extent this is true as I have drawn out the over-arching theme that each woman used to explain her understanding of wifehood across the lifetime of the marriage. This is an action that does blur some of the sharp edges and minimises the contradictions. However, I would note that marriage was the one section of the personal narratives that was presented with the least inherent contradictions. The women appeared to take a position as a wife and worked to make that consistent across the account. Thus the learnings that they acknowledged also remained relatively consistent as well, whether they be domestic skills, affective skills or achievements that were told as external to the family unit.

A consistent underpinning of the marital narratives was an acceptance of biological determinism. Men were spoken of as essentially different from women, however the application of this determination varied across the personal narratives, and had differing impacts on how the women conceptualised their learning within marriage. One group of wives, Lucy, Louise and Emma, determined their husbands as distinctively different from themselves. Emma spoke of adapting herself to minimise the difference, whereas Lucy and Louise acknowledged the difference and spoke of moving on to develop themselves in a separate but female way. In contrast, the other group of wives, Margaret, Dagmar, Florence and Val understood their husband's differences in a complementary way. For them, their development was understood as part of a process of mutuality and reciprocity that aimed to achieve commonly held goals.
However, as I have already noted, it was not within the marital dyad that any one of the women spoke robustly of their learning. All of them created a notion of family through their commitment to their husband and children. It was through this action and the elevation of their mothering that the women named their greatest investment. Indeed it has been suggested that "(t)he subjective core of female experience in marriage and family...is not developmental tasks but making a virtue out of necessity" (Gravenhorst, 1988, cited in Cheal, 1991, p.72). Each of the women of this study strove to understand themselves as active agents and independent characters. Wifehood presented some opportunity for this. Motherhood provided much more.
Chapter 8

SPEAKING AS A MOTHER

Although there are many indications in the nine personal narratives that the domestic roles of wife and mother were rich sites of learning, the discursive constructions of these roles in the twentieth century appear to have militated against women being able to readily name this learning. However the discourses of motherhood appear to have presented more opportunities to speak of learning than the discourses of wife. All of the seven women who married and had children dedicated considerably more narrative attention to the experience as mothers than to the experience of wifehood. One commonality in these accounts was that all the women, and here I include the single women, drew on a notion of themselves as family-makers or family-keepers. As a result, in the personal narratives, the women accounted for their husbands as family members more than as marital partners.

Over the twentieth century there have been two discourses that have been identified as dominant in the construction of motherhood: one of the ‘natural’ mother, the other of the scientific ‘modern’ mother (in particular Matthews, 1984; Reiger, 1985; Deacon, 1989; Smith, 1990). From the accounts that I examined, I would suggest that these discourses have very different effects on how women can speak of themselves as learners. The natural mother, based on the concept of an inherent maternal instinct, implies that there is
nothing to be learned. However in the accounts of the seven biological\(^1\) mothers some incidental learning was acknowledged particularly through the observation of other natural mothers, especially those women from a similar background such as the family of origin. When learning was able to be acknowledged, it was regarded as something you just ‘picked up’. The modern mother was almost oppositional to the natural mother. In this discourse, women had to be guided by the many professional experts such as doctors, infant welfare nurses and child development psychologists who drew on their scientific knowledge to determine most, if not all, aspects of family life. None of the women of this study adopted either ‘natural’ mothering or ‘modern’ mothering notions \textit{in toto}. Instead their accounts reveal what each woman would name as ‘natural’ therefore ‘unlearned’ and what she would name as ‘specialist’ therefore to be investigated and learned.

The nine narratives also illustrated how the public and private spheres interact. On one level the women spoke in a way that strongly maintained the distinction. The private sector was their responsibility, the public sector their husbands’. The women spoke of creating private support for both their husband and children returning from that public world. In doing so each woman created the private home as her own territory, sanctifying family ties and elevating the affective dimension. The women claimed maternal work as specialised women’s work. The constitution of the ideal of the private/family sphere gave this group of women a role worthy of investment. Equally however, through accounts of their activities, the women showed that they engaged in daily ways with the public sector. As they interacted with health professionals, the school sector and other public professionals, the women had to understand both the public and the private sphere.

Further for some of the women their mothering was understood as linked to global and/or community issues. The private/family sphere was told as ‘women’s sphere’ but boundaries between public and private were not fixed.

\(^{1}\)I use the term biological mother to refer to the seven women who gave birth to a child in order to differentiate them from the remaining two women who spoke at times as a mother but who did not actually give birth to a child.
service. Just as in the narratives of wifehood, all of the women strove to understand themselves as equal members of a family. Although in the accounts of mothering there was much that was construed as natural in a biologically determinist way, all of the women spoke of mothering as a skill they developed, rather than an innate ability.

Mothering was understood as an individual accomplishment by each of the biological mothers. More than in any other parts of the personal narratives it was here the women claimed expertise. Mothering was told as a site of powerful experiential learning, and each of the women articulated skills and learning. There was however little articulation of the changing discourses of motherhood to which these women were exposed in their lifetime. Rather it seems that they took up one particular understanding of motherhood and maintained internal consistency in their storying through that theme. This is not to say contradictions did not occur, but that the chosen theme gave a coherency.

Across the periods of the accounts, according to Michael Gilding (1991) the dominant constructions of motherhood have shifted significantly. Early in twentieth century Australia, the dominant notion of mothering moved from a role of procreation to one of care and vigilance. Later in the century as the nuclear family became the ideal family form, responsibility for the care and vigilance of children became located with the biological mother, not with any wider social network (Gilding, 1991). The seven mothers spoke particularly of their role as one of responsibility, care and vigilance for their child(ren).

Within the notion of care and vigilance the two differing constitutions of mothering can be seen - the natural mother and the scientific mother. When mothering was understood as biologically logical, self-evident and 'natural', an earlier discourse of the maternal instinct reinforced women's natural role as mothers. This concept is still visible in the 1990s with the sociobiologists who continue to refer to maternal instinct as an 'unlearned response' but can provide no evidence to support such a claim (Rossi, 1977; Badinter (1981) provides an historical analysis of the maternal instinct). However increasingly over this
century as techno-rational thinking lead to a mechanistic view of the body, mothering came into the domain of the scientific experts (Reiger, 1985; Gilding, 1991). From the turn of the century in Australia, there was a concerted attempt by professionals and benevolent organisations alike to promote the concept of the art and science of motherhood. In order to raise the standards of mothering and thus of the family and the nation, women were saturated with educational information (Reiger, 1985).

From the 1920s the expanding area of child psychology meant that a mother was now not only responsible for her children’s physical health but for their psychological development as well (Matthews, 1984). Mothers were judged by their ability to recognise and respond to the needs of their children (Urwin, 1985). The emergence of a range of health and education professionals to guide mothers began at this time and the concept of motherhood now included mothercraft, a thing to be learned. Mothers were exhorted to learn about something concurrently argued as instinctual, thus unlearned—a paradoxical situation that left mothers in a particular double bind. As good women, they were to recognise that their maternal instinct best fitted them for their natural and right place as mothers in the home, but that in order to fulfil this role, they were to listen to the experts, to be trained and educated.

It has been argued that a coalition of government policy, professionals and mothers themselves was a social force that shaped early twentieth century society for the needs of an emerging industrial capitalism (for example Lasch, 1977; Donzelot, 1979). This is not to suggest that there was a direct alliance between these groups but rather that their interests coalesced with each other. I share Wendy Selby’s (1994) belief that it is important to explore individual experiences of this so-called ‘maternal alliance’ (Matthews, 1984; Reiger, 1985) between mothers and the emerging family professionals to understand what Selby calls women’s culture and women’s agency (1994, p.81). I also am interested in how women’s accounts make sense of this time at an individual level. Whilst it is recognised that social structures may oppress women, there must be
good reasons why women participate in such situations. It is not only when women overtly rebel or reject social demands that their active engagement in subjectivity can be seen. Making sense of competing discourses demands individual negotiation.

Each of the women spoke of their mothering years as ones of great personal achievement. They spoke of themselves as what I call ‘thought-full’ mothers. They recalled the decisions that had to be made and the options that required negotiation. They did not simply comply with, or reject, the experts. Neither did they merely accept or reject mothering traditions from their own mothers. They spoke of learning on the job, doing it their way, and expressed their pride in this achievement. Much of the narrative emphasis was on the early years of their children’s lives, however each woman also spoke of her mothering as a lifelong role. Therefore it is useful to examine the narratives in two parts: the early years and what I have called ‘never-ending mothering’.

The early years: accounts of child-rearing
Mothering must be acknowledged as both a public and private process. Although the experience of motherhood has been predominantly construed as a private, intimate relationship, increasingly over this century the family has become the site for intervention and preventative diagnosis (Donzelot, 1979). For the seven biological mothers, their interaction with health and education institutions were spoken of as significant. All of the seven accounts focused attention on three aspects: the experience of pregnancy and birth and interaction with the medical profession; the period of their children’s infancy and the medical and nursing professions; and the time of their children’s schooling and the teaching professions.

Pregnancy and childbirth
Although the seven experiences of childbirth span the years 1936 to 1960, the accounts of birth were concentrated in the period of World War II and the immediate post-war years.
All of the married women spoke of wanting a child early in their marriage. The desire for a child was told as the first step in making a real family and for the women it appears to have offered a socially-sanctioned role that could be legitimately taken up as one of their own areas of expertise to be developed.

**Margaret:** Soon after we married the babies started coming along and then life moved on. Most girls left [work] when their first babies came and I never thought of doing anything else. Indeed I was very ready to do it! (quick pace).

The seven women experienced their pregnancies and birthing in a period of unprecedented dominance by the male medical profession (Matthews, 1994). The changes in the management of birthing from a women’s tradition of midwifery to a monopoly by the medical profession has been well documented (Ehrenreich & English, 1973; DeVries, 1985; Oakley, 1990). Australia was no exception to this international trend, and by the interwar years, the numbers of midwife-managed births in Australia had plummeted and the medicalisation of birth was well established (Howe & Swain (1992) discuss this change). Arising from the Cartesian dualism of mind–body separation, medical discourse constructed the body as machine. As technology developed within this paradigm, increasingly medical practitioners saw their roles as highly specialised physical technicians. Midwifery was constructed as primitive and ill-informed. Birthing women were not only seen as passive patients but as “manipulable reproductive machines” (Oakley, 1990, p.65).

The popular texts on marriage and sexuality already quoted in the chapter on wifehood (Chapter 7) exemplify the contradiction that while birth was part of woman’s natural life yet a ‘modern’ woman required the surveillance of a medical practitioner (Reiger (1985, p.110) illustrates this contradiction within medical texts of the time). The Reverend Tyrer’s marriage manual of 1943 is typical.

Every normal woman has the maternal instinct. As a girl she loved her dolls, and, as a woman she wants to be a mother...but this book does not presume to offer a diagnosis [of pregnancy], or to discuss matters that lie properly within the province of medical advisers...it is well to consult your physician and let him, or her...give such instructions. (pp.48–9)
Val was the one woman who had found it necessary to do her own reading on marital relationships; pregnancy was also a part of her life on which she sought guidance from the experts. However, as she told of her experience in pregnancy she spoke not as the active arbitrator of information, but rather more as a compliant patient.

Val: *I think I had a good doctor* (strong tone)—*I think he prepared me enough. Country people see animals in nature. I don’t remember reading a great deal about it. There weren’t many books about it. There was certainly no breathing exercises, etcetera, you just did as you were told.*

Val illustrates the paradoxical situation of maternal learning. On one hand she acknowledged childbirth as part of the natural world, a world she had observed and learnt from, whilst simultaneously she put herself under the direction of her doctor, willing to do all that she was told. Expert knowledge was elevated above any of her own learning.

Florence also recounted her birthing experience from the perspective of compliance. However as Florence developed the life-threatening condition of toxaemia and eclampsia, her account of heroic medical intervention over nature is not surprising. *I owe my life and [that of my son] to the fact I was at that hospital* [Crown Street Women’s Hospital]. The authority of medical advice continued throughout Florence’s account.

Florence: *My doctor called [my husband] and said “I can’t tell you not to have any more children but” he said “if you take my advice, you won’t put your wife through this again”* (serious tone).

In Florence’s account, birth was understood as a crisis that required highly specialist guidance. In contrast, Lucy, the only other woman to describe birthing in any detail, evidenced an ambivalence towards expert medical advice. Like Florence, Lucy had toxaemia which for Lucy was followed by a caesarean. Throughout most of her narrative on family, Lucy spoke of mothering as something women did ‘just naturally’, or that they learnt from each other. Her account of pregnancy was similar.

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2Eclampsia and toxaemia: Eclampsia is a serious complication of pregnancy in which seizures occur with high mortality. Eclampsia is always preceded by the warning state of pre-eclampsia (formerly known as toxaemia). This consists of raised blood pressure, oedema and protein in the urine. (Collins Dictionary of Medicine, 1992, p.193)
Lucy: [Pregnancy] was just part of everyday life. There was none of this checking books or anything like that—hadn’t even heard of that! (strong tone).

Lucy: I had lots of friends who had babies. You heard all their tales—what went on! It didn’t quite prepare you for what went on with you though (laugh).

In acknowledging that women’s networks did not fully prepare her for the birthing experience, Lucy did not however acknowledge medical expertise as heroic as Florence did, instead she highlighted the fallibility of the medical profession.

Lucy: [The medical staff] messed around and cheerfully told me they couldn’t get the baby’s heart beat...they told me I had a lovely red-headed little boy who was as bald as a pound of lard when they bought him in!...Finally I was allowed home, probably the shortage of beds, provided I was carried in and rested. The district nurse came every day to dress the wound. Well, that didn’t work! I got up and would watch out the window and hop into bed when I saw her coming (laugh) (humorous tone).

In this extract, Lucy makes it clear that although expert at one level, the medical profession was far from infallible. She particularly emphasised their lack of commonsense and practical sense. As across her personal narrative these are two personal attributes that Lucy is proud of in herself, she subtly contrasts her own ‘sense’ with that of the medical professions and maintains her own credibility.

Overall, the lack of personal engagement in the telling of birth accounts by the seven women is remarkable. Although heavy sedation was typical practice and to some extent may account for the little detail in the memories, these women’s experiences appear typical of the medicalised childbirth practices of the day. Only partly explained by the convention of this age group of women not to discuss intimate details, birthing warranted little narrative attention. Neither their first births nor subsequent births were recalled as a significant learning event. The women spoke of deferring to medical authority, and becoming passive recipients of treatment, rather than speaking as active participants in a significant life experience. They tended to suggest that the product, a healthy surviving child, was more important than the process.
This uniform absence in the narratives illustrates the historical context of discourses well. If we were to ask mothers of the 1990s about their birthing experiences very different ‘experiences’ would be told. Today birthing discourses include notions of reward, fulfilment, success, failure, the birthing couple and for some birth as the ultimate life pinnacle (for example, Kitzinger, 1989; Robertson, 1994). This new language reflects the new discourses available on which women may draw to make sense of the birthing experience. However, from the personal narratives I was told, it could be said that because of the medical view of birthing and the language it provided, these women spoke as if they were not ‘present’ at their own children’s births.

In the accounts of the time immediately after birth the experts also remained in charge. Routine practice was to separate mother and child, except for timed periods for breastfeeding. In Dagmar’s account below, she illustrates an acceptance of medical expertise and control, and the resultant lack of confidence in her own ability to mother. If maternal instinct and natural mothering existed, they were to occur no less than ten days after birth.

Dagmar: You stayed in bed for seven days and went home on the tenth...your baby was taken away from you and put in the nursery...Why they couldn’t just wheel in the little bassinette that she was in I don’t know — but no, she musn’t be touched (worried tone)...After the seventh day you could walk around and have a look at them through the glass again, but you couldn’t go into the nursery (brisk tone)...they didn’t tell you anything in the hospital either—the child was bought in for a feed and that was it. And they didn’t come and tell you—I mean, if they thought she hadn’t had enough they brought her back again, or if you had too much milk and you had to express and then that was alright - but that was all you knew! And you didn’t bath them before you left the hospital, and when you got home you thought—I’ve got to bath this infant somehow! (fast, concerned tone).

Louise spoke of birthing in a very different way from the other women, explaining that she did not share her experience during birth with anyone, until many years later.

Louise: My other son was born, actually, during the retreat into Tobruk—I remember that very well, because I had a very extraordinary ESP experience—I’ll tell you about it. Because there I was, sedated, waiting for [my son] to be born (he was a breech baby and his birth was over three days) and I’d be in a state of being half asleep/half awake, and I could hear—I’d close my eyes and I could hear guns firing, I really could hear them! Now, I didn’t know what it was, and then after a while, I felt I was hiding under bushes, the leaves were very thin and the sun was
coming through in lots of places, and (pause)—I looked down on very dry, slightly sandy small pebbly gravelly soil and I was watching ants going along. It wasn’t until quite some years afterwards that I discovered that a man I’d known in a shy kind of way when I was at the University of Adelaide, who was then attracted to me. He was an engineer in the war. When an army was in retreat, the engineers would blow up bridges and roads to slow the advancing army. He got lost and he had been hiding. He was lost for some days. They thought he’d been caught but he did get to Tobruk. I knew that he was over there in North Africa, but (pause)—I didn’t dream I was connecting to the experience that he was having (quiet laugh). But the various experiences that I’ve had like that during my life, have also been a very penetrating education (firm tone). It’s been a great quest to find out how this happened (very quiet, querying tone).

In this re-telling, Louise understood birthing from a psychic rather than a physical perspective. Her account has little resonance with the dominant techno-rational and mechanistic view of birthing, rather it reflects a para-normal perspective.

This was not the first experience of an altered state that Louise had had in her life and it was not to be the last. Louise recalled that her struggle to understand such experiences was made even more difficult because no one she knew could understand this experience, however, as it did relate to prior experiences, she spoke of maintaining a silent quest to understand. She explained that eventually in the 1960s the discipline of transpersonal psychology gave her the language. Although medical discourse would probably understand Louise’s experience as a side effect of medication (‘twilight sleep’ drugs such as morphines and scopolamine were common in the period (Reiger, 1985)), this explanation was not taken up by Louise.

Louise described her young adult interests as intellectual, and it is probable that her reading and university friendship groups may well have provided some alternative frameworks to those of the medical profession. Although far from dominant, the theosophic discourse was available, indeed the transpersonal psychology that Louise utilised to explain many of her experiences acknowledges such early transcendental pioneers. Theosophy had a small but ongoing presence from the late 1880s. Popularised by clairvoyants such as Miss Annie Besant, theosophists understood human experience as

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on a number of planes from the physical to the mental and the astral (Leadbeater, 1896/1974). Louise's experience would have been explained as within the "fourth subdivision of clairvoyance in space, for the sleeping man (sic) often travels in his astral body to some spot with which his affections or interests are closely connected, and simply watches what takes place there" (Leadbeater, 1903/1968, p.105). Theosophy was one discourse of the time that would have understood Louise's birthing as an existential experience. Across all of her life-story, Louise invested in a notion of herself as an intellectual who understands life experience from the physical to the metaphysical. This account of birth is compatible with that life theme.

Beyond the birth accounts of Lucy, Florence and Louise, the women did not speak about their hospital experience in any great detail. Although the rhetoric of the time was that there was a scientific way to be learned to conduct infant care, none of the women spoke of the hospital as the beginning of this learning or as a positive learning environment in any sense. Rather, I would suggest that the total co-option of care for babies by medical staff left each of these women concerned and vulnerable. As Dagmar said hospital practice wasn't a good introduction to motherhood. From the perspective of significant learnings leaving the hospital was to be the start of their maternal careers.

Mothering in the early childhood years

Lucy: To me you're a mother—you've got to do things for your child and you just do them. It just comes naturally to you...I don't think you can really learn about anything like that, it's either there or it isn't! (energetic tone).

Val: I got books on child psychology and bringing kids up! and various people said to me "what do you want to do that for—you've got enough brains to do it yourself" (re-enactment) But I said "no, there's a modern way of approaching these things—let us look into it a little bit" (measured tone).

These extracts illustrate two very different ways of understanding mothering; ones that are reflected in the seven narratives as well as in the popular magazines and manuals of the 1940s and 1950s. As the seven women told of how they understood their mothering, an
ongoing negotiation between the discourses of mothering-as-natural and mothering-as-learned became apparent. This is not to suggest that one group of women spoke from the position of natural (unlearned) mothers, the rest as scientific (learned) mothers, rather it appears that, except for childbirth, each constantly discriminated between what parts of mothering could be seen as natural and what parts needed to be learned.

Health care professionals were acknowledged as a source that most of the women used to gain greater information or direct guidance. Advice was also available from chemists and popular texts of the time such as the Australian Women’s Weekly, however the seven women did not directly acknowledge these sources. There appears to be a socio-economic dimension as to who was spoken of as a credible guide to young mothers. The middle-class mothers such as Val, Dagmar, Louise and Margaret did not always comply with the professional guidance but they did appear to think of professionals as appropriate sources of support. However, for the two working-class mothers, Lucy and Florence, whilst never totally rejecting the role of the health professions it was from their own mothers or other women of their family that these women accounted for the advice that was most congruent with their situation.

Working-class mothers were in a potentially vulnerable relationship with the various child development specialists, whose aims were to impose ‘appropriate’ standards on all families regardless of their material conditions. These standards were described as objective and scientifically derived, however they were in fact the standards of the middle-class (see Reiger, 1985; Gilding, 1991). Lucy and Florence were thus faced with the middle-class imperatives of the omnipresent, omni-responsible, guiding, nurturing and educating mother. However as their financial situation determined that they needed paid work in their children’s early years, such middle-class standards were unachievable. These two women spoke more of the role of their own families in ascertaining what should be learned. At the least the women of their family had mothering experience in the working-class environment and, in both cases, their mothers and mothers-in-law
provided some of the mothering through regular child-care. Further such women had negotiated the fine line of being a good working-class mother as judged by middle-class standards in their own time as mothers.

This is not to say that the middle-class mothers' relationships with the health care professionals were told as unproblematic or that the working-class mothers accepted their family's advice unconditionally; rather, each of the women speak of continually weighing up advice. I would suggest that as they told their stories they recalled the situations that were challenging or problematic (as is typically found in memory work, exemplified in Haug, 1987) and which were indicative of achievement in what was for them their primary role—motherhood. I believe they also highlighted situations in which they could demonstrate some positive resolution and some aspect of successful learning that they recalled as a source of pride and resolution.

Speaking of mothering-as-natural: the informal advisers
When the women spoke of their mothering-as-natural, most notions of learning appeared to be primarily drawn from family tradition and observation. This was not always articulated as learning, rather it was explained as family tradition or good family standards. This was a notion of mothering as a commonsense process. Any acknowledgment of learning was linked back to their family of origin.

Lucy: I think coming from a big family—you learn such a lot. We had nine in our family—so you learn.

Louise: There were a lot of things you learned just from observing—I learnt just through observing my mother.

Margaret: I was the youngest of my family but my sisters and brothers had children. So I had the baby-sitting style of experience (laugh) and plenty of opportunities to look at how other people did things with children and that's all part of preparing yourself I think for parenting.
Here the women were quite explicit about the relevance of experiential learning and learning through observation. The learning environment was described solely within the biological family.

The women who spoke of mothering as emerging from both instinct and family background, spoke of assessing the processes of their family of origin; that was where the natural benchmark in part lay for them.

Florence: [Mothering is] instinct, I suppose —whatever was instinctive. I think parenting is—I guess it’s a help to go to lectures (laugh) but if it isn’t in you, I mean it’s instinctive somehow.

BP: Did you follow to some degree the patterns of your family or your husband’s family? Was that part of it?

Florence: I think you do. That’s all you can do because that’s what you’ve been brought up to [do], you know.

Such responses indicate the pervasiveness of family tradition that the infant welfare specialists of the time decried (Reiger, 1985; Selby, 1994). It is probable that few women, including this group, totally followed family tradition, however child health specialists set up such family advisers as an enemy to health. For example, in 1937 Sir Robert Wade decried cross-generational advice.

Parents know little of the feeding and care of the baby until recently; this is being remedied by the infant welfare centres...It is really pitiful to think of the amount of stupid advice the poor young mother receives from female friends and well-wishers, but above all, from the maiden sisters and grandmothers. (O’Connor, 1989, p.66)

Or in the New South Wales Department of Public Health (11th edition, n.d., first published 1931) handout to mothers “Our Babies”. “There are probably few greater causes of unhappiness than interference on the part of grandmothers and others in the management and handling of babies” (p.45).

A second dimension evident when the women spoke from a position of ‘natural’ mother was a strong distinction between family and friends. All of the women’s accounts suggest...
that it was acceptable to turn to your family, particularly your biological family, for learning and support.

**Dagmar:** [My mother] didn’t come unless I needed her—she was very good...but it was a big help to be near my mother. I was really pleased that we’d not had any children in Sydney, although my mother-in-law was there—but it’s not quite the same.

Margaret, having moved cities when her first two children were babies, sheds light on the difference between family and friends. Margaret did speak of these friends as a supportive network in other parts of her account, however in the mothering context she described them as ‘strangers’ - a descriptor that emphasised a distinction between family and other.

**Margaret:** There were good supportive people [in the ACT] because most of the families had come in the same position as we were...so there were always people to call on if you needed them (strong tone), but you hesitated to call on people who were strangers—it’s not like ringing up your sister and saying “I’ve got a bit of a sniffle come and give me a hand” (quiet tone).

The role of biological families as support and for learning was also problematic. The middle-class women did speak about the support and pressure from women of their own family, however as they lived in separate nuclear residences they spoke of having some control over the timing and interaction with mothers and mothers-in-law. For the working-class women, financial constraints compelled them to share homes with the extended family. Both Lucy and Florence told of this as an added challenge in learning to be mothers. Lucy recalled the need to assert herself as a mother, no longer solely a daughter-in-law.

**Lucy:** I was living with my mother-in-law (we owned the house—but she lived with us throughout our married life)...When I first came home [from hospital] I wasn’t allowed to do anything. She had things set up to wash the nappies—I said “what are you doing” and she said “I’m doing the baby’s napkin” And I said “no, you’re not! it’s my baby and I do everything like that” (re-enactment, defiant tone).

As early as the first few days of her mothering career, Lucy found it necessary to delineate boundaries. For Lucy, infant care was a mother’s job and even close family had to respect this. In contrast, Florence spoke of a similar encroachment, this time over the issue of the new kindergartens for children. In the post-war period kindergartens, or
nursery schools as they were called in England, were beginning to become a part of state management of childhood. At the time it was argued that teachers could ensure the best development of children as is reflected in the texts for early childhood teacher training of the time.

[Teachers] need true scientific understanding as well as mother-wit and mother-love. The nursery school teacher can often help where the mother would fail. (Isaacs, 1948, p.72)

For Florence her son had always been physically frail and somewhat behind other children.

Florence: There was a kindergarten and it cost a lot that you couldn’t afford. Really with [my son] I shouldn’t have sent him there I could have done more myself. I had a very over-powering mother-in-law who insisted that he go to kindergarten. You didn’t stand up to your mothers, or mother-in-law, then—you wanted to please them and do the right thing always. I could have done better I think myself with him because he was so little and so frightened (concerned tone).

Florence’s account illustrated the contradictions of family responsibilities. By seeing herself as a ‘natural’ mother who was the best person to ‘instinctively’ and through observation monitor her own child’s development, Florence revealed a belief in her own knowledge and judgement. She now regrets abrogating her maternal responsibility. However she also showed an awareness that a good mother should utilise the modern services that emerged from the scientific research on children’s needs, as well as an awareness of her family duty to maintain due respect to the matriarchs of the biological family. Florence spoke of wanting to do the right thing always - You do the best you can. It’s every mother’s challenge - but the right things were contradictory. Her regret reveals maternal guilt. Both Florence and Lucy drew on a sense that it was their duty as the biological mother to be responsible for the needs of their child. As families became more child-centred, mothers became omni-responsible (Gilding, 1991).

The link between support and learning is an important one when considered across the whole of a narrative pattern. As I have discussed in the Cameo chapter (Chapter 5), the women generally spoke in a relational and ecological way. In their accounts of schooling
they did not take up the individualised, separate sense of knowledge as personal attribute or property. Thus when they spoke of maternal learnings, their linkage of support and learning becomes significant. This link suggests that for these women learning is enhanced through connectedness with significant others. However not all connections appear to be linked to learning. Other mothers outside of family were not spoken of as credible. Friends were discounted as advisers in most of the accounts.

Lucy: (of the only other young mother in the street) But you didn't kind of mix in much.

Louise: I made some good friends but we were all in the same boat and I don't think (pause)—we'd look after each others' children a little but not as much as all that...No I think you have to learn to draw on your own resources (quiet, strong tone). You do develop your inner strength. You can't lean on anyone because there's no one there to lean on (defiant tone).

The discounting of other women as support and guidance appears to reflect discourses of over-individualisation of mothering which left women in a subtle competitive tension with each other. A good mother was measured by her child's developmental progress. This is typified by an advertisement in the Australian Women's Weekly of January 6, 1940, (p.40) in which a ladder of health is presented asking in large print "IS YOUR CHILD AT THE TOP?". Mothers and their children were implicitly compared with each other. The women alluded to this competition with other women and their babies.

Louise: The other boy didn't put on weight as he should. So I felt so ashamed about that—that I was somehow failing that.

Florence: We pushed [our son] to do things in those early days that we shouldn't have because that's what other kids did. He was supposed to perform too, but it's wrong (quiet tone).

Other women and their children thus became both a support and a pressure (Urwin (1985) noted a similar finding with United Kingdom mothers in the 1980s). Therefore it is not surprising that the women of this group link support and learning within the family.

As Kereen Reiger (1985) has argued:

(t)he considerable preoccupation with graphs, charts, and standardised measurements belied the repeated claims that each baby still had to be treated as an
individual. The notion of the average or normal baby increasingly took on statistical as well as *moral* or idealistic overtones. (p.145, emphasis added)

Florence’s account illuminated how the role of the infant welfare sister further exacerbated this competitive dynamic between mothers.

**Florence:** Oh [other mothers] wouldn’t be game to say much. You were all sitting—Sister was up there—and of course she had a set of scales and woe betide you if he hadn’t put on weight! (wry, humorous tone).

The delineation made between friends and family is revealing. The maternal instinct/biological mother–child bond effectively padlocked women to their children. It was acceptable to some degree to turn to the women of your biological family for support and learning as this could be seen as a natural extension of the maternal bond, but to reach beyond familial links went against the ideology of good mothering when good mothering is understood in terms of maternal instinct and bond. Most of the women tell of ‘good’ mothering as an individual path, a personal challenge and achievement - ‘a struggle that was worth it’. This is not to say that women’s networks did not exist. Rather they were constructed as minimal, as these women spoke of themselves as successful mothers by achieving the challenge of their time to ‘do it on your own’.

The one experience that contrasted with this ‘do it on your own’ ethos was that of Emma. Living 65 miles from town on an isolated rural property, Emma remembers three women (a nurse friend, the manager’s wife and an older woman) as crucial in her early years of maternal learning. Emma drew neither on mothering-as-natural or as a solely individualised challenge.

**Emma:** I knew nothing about babies...but I had my friend [a double certificate nurse] with me—she was wonderful. She came again when [my second child] was born - which I’m eternally grateful (quiet tone)...It was a bit scary taking a new baby home...she was a February baby and again, dreadful heat and even with [my friend] there—we were in this old place that was so terribly hot and (pause) we looked for the coolest place to put the pram. We put the pram under the White Cedar trees, very shady but the poor little thing got heatstroke. We sat up with her all night, sponging her to get her temperature down, I learnt a lesson from that (very quiet tone). We didn’t have any electricity, no fan. We just sat and kept her cool. She was only a tiny baby of ten days old (quiet tone).
The manager’s wife, living on the same property, provided crucial ongoing support.

**Emma:** She was an enormous help!—with my babies and likewise I helped her...we were both new to the country. She was a bit like me in that way—she was determined to make a success of it too (quiet, proud tone).

For these two young women, an older woman, the wife of a nearby station manager, provided special support.

**Emma:** [the older woman] who was a very close friend of mine, worked like a slave for all those years very hard, brought up four children—taught them, but was never paid, and I learnt a lot from her (energetic tone). She was a nurse—many of the outback women were ex-nurses...again and again you’d find...nurses would be the bulwarks (energetic tone)...She was a double certificate nurse, a lot more experience than I had, and with two babies already. She was a mentor for [us]. We’d ring and talk a lot. Learnt a lot from her...She died last year out in [outback Queensland] and [we] both felt that we’d really lost an older sister. As [we] said she was like a mother in a way to us. We didn’t have our mothers handy to ask and we used to turn to [her] (quiet tone).

This one experience of a supportive women’s network during the early mothering years is closer to the notions that are idealised today in the middle-class self-help groups such as the Nursing Mothers’ Association in which more experienced mothers provide the guidance and advice that the biological family may have provided in the past. Indeed many of the discourses on rural life both past and present feature the place of such self-help and mutuality. Emma told of the depth of support and learning that was possible through women’s networks, but for this cohort it must stand as the exception that proves the rule. Emma lived on a remote rural property, under conditions of privation due to drought and location, and it was no accident that she turned to a woman who was able to give a combination of natural and professional advice. However it is interesting to note how the professional skills are absorbed into the natural abilities of a good mother/woman, once outside the clinical setting. With limited informal networks and medical advice 65 miles away, decisions were often primary ones of survival as Emma’s newborn’s heatstroke illustrated. In itself however this account stands out as constituted as ‘exotic’ not ‘normal’. However, as Wendy Selby (1994) also found in her study of Queensland rural mothers, 1918—1939, Emma did stress that for her learning from and with other rural women became essential for survival.
When the women drew on the mothering-as-natural discourse it had particular ramifications for how they saw themselves as learners. In the first instance, this construction had an effect of over-individualising the experience of mothering. If a maternal instinct exists, it lies within the individual mother, thus, to turn to others for advice or guidance was to acknowledge a failure of one's own maternal instinct. Some of the women resolved this dilemma by including biological family as acceptable guides, others like Emma looked for friends who had well-developed skills. When any of the women spoke from the position of mothering-as-natural, they did so with little ambivalence. This was their specialised gendered achievement. However it appears that the language available to describe learning in this context was problematic. It does seem that for these women maternal instinct 'ran' in families and could be improved from generation to generation. There were things to be observed, standards to be determined and a lot of commonsense to be absorbed. However, little language of this as learning is visible.

Perhaps mothering-as-natural is best described as an immersion model of learning. Within the family setting, mothers and sisters appear to offer a component of modelling to the women. From outside the family, there was some evidence of a mentoring role as a process for learning. Overall however, learning in this context is not easily seen. I would suggest that this immersion learning becomes even harder to articulate when it is recalled alongside the highly visible instructional model of mid-twentieth century scientific practice. When the women spoke of their interaction with the professionals, they were able to articulate their position more clearly. This is not to say they conformed with professional guidance necessarily, rather I would suggest it made certain learnings visible and provided a language which could be co-opted or resisted.
Speaking of mothering-as-learned: the formal advisers
When the women spoke from outside the discourse of mothering-as-natural, they most frequently drew on a notion of the modern, educated mother. Across both the working-class and middle-class women, there were certain issues that were deemed to require more specialist guidance. Indeed all of the women noted that they were properly schooled and ‘brought up well enough’ to recognise the need for expert input to their mothering. However, to fully comply to any expert direction is to place oneself in a passive and dependent position, therefore it should be no surprise that these seven women spoke of negotiating a more empowering relationship with the experts to whom they turned. This was true of their relationships with both the health professionals and to a lesser extent the education professionals.

The health professionals
As is evidenced from the positive experience of Emma, a supportive environment can enhance confidence and pleasure through even the most difficult learning experiences. Much of the rhetoric of the early infant welfare and child health services was directed to such support – “Infant Welfare Centre Mothers are Happy Mothers” (A Victorian Department of Health poster, 1940, cited in Reiger, 1985, p.151). For the seven biological mothers, their relationships with health professionals ranged from gratitude for advice and expertise, through to ambivalence and subtle resistance or, as is the case for Emma and Lucy, only fleeting reference to health professionals was made. Not one of the women was willing to reject outright professional input to their mothering for to do so would place them outside the bounds of a ‘good mother’, but when the advice became problematic the remaining five mothers spoke of moderating or avoiding that advice (Reiger (1985) and Selby (1994) record similar findings). In this way, the women were able to speak as active learners as well as good mothers who took on the ultimate responsibility of judging what was best for their own child.
One response to the health professionals was to speak of them from the notion of a collaborative alliance. This allowed the woman to speak as a proactive agent, seeking advice and guidance if, and when, she judged fit. Dagmar and Val in particular spoke in this way and told of their ability to discriminate and weigh up conflicting advice. Both of these women spoke of themselves in young adulthood as responsible, self-directed people who, particularly through wartime experience, had developed a self-confidence in both public and private spheres. This theme was carried through into their accounts of mothering. Dagmar made a clear distinction between the advice of friends and professionals and in doing so placed herself as the self-directed mother.

**Dagmar:** *You'd speak to one friend and they'd say such and such and you'd say something to another one and they'd say—so you'd ignore them both and go and get the expert! (laugh).*

For Dagmar the experts were both the clinic sister and the general practitioner (GP). Although these experts also sometimes disagreed Dagmar articulated her own guidelines for consultation.

**Dagmar:** *The clinic sister was the expert. And I don't know that they always were because I know there was often conflict between clinic sister and doctor too. And jealousy too (fast pace)...Something that cleared up quickly—I relied on the sister. If it was a rash that stayed a bit longer I would go to the doctor (matter of fact tone).*

Dagmar’s discrimination between the role of clinic sister and doctor is one that reflects the debates surrounding medical responsibilities that arose from the 1920s onwards (Smith, 1990). Indeed the title of ‘Baby Clinic’ was changed to ‘Baby Health Centre’ in Victoria as “it was felt, was more appropriate for the scope of the work being carried out, with its accent on ‘health’ and the prevention of sickness, and indicated that medical treatment was not given at the centres but sick babies referred to their own doctors or to the hospitals for treatment” (Victorian Baby Health Centres Association, n.d., cited in Reiger, 1985, p.133). This debate continues today in community-based infant welfare services (for example, Lemin, 1982; Royal Australian Nursing Federation, 1983).
However, for Dagmar, and perhaps many mothers, there was also a gendered aspect to the advice. In the two following extracts, it is evident that Dagmar related to the female clinic sister in a way not dissimilar to her earlier account of her own mother’s support. The male doctor was the more distant expert.

**Dagmar:** [My doctor] proved to be one of those people who you could talk to just as easily (fast pace)...he didn’t ever make you feel that you were going to him for something trivial and that’s important too. Because after all your baby is much more important to you than it is to the doctor (strong tone)...it’s your baby after all. I always felt that he was a tower of strength (quiet warmth).

**Dagmar:** Fortunately most of the sisters were - I was about to say “fair, fat and forty” but that’s not nice—but they were very motherly types and they didn’t think you asked stupid questions (strong tone).

Common to both accounts of health professionals is Dagmar’s need to be seen as an intelligent mother. Both doctor and nurse were valued because they did not infringe on Dagmar’s sense of her own competency and knowledge. She spoke of them as complementary sources of advice - the maternalistic and the paternalistic.

In a similar way, Val spoke of her clinic sister and GP as equally supportive, and told of regularly travelling the 60 miles into town to the clinic. Although keen to have her baby weighed and receive advice on feeding, Val spoke of also weighing up the advice. Like Dagmar, Val saw the doctor as the higher authority.

**Val:** [My son] wasn’t putting on weight sufficiently and I said to the doctor eventually that the sister was not letting him drink long enough—I had plenty of milk, I had to express it to get rid of it...It finished up we gave him more. He was much better (firm tone).

Dagmar and Val did utilise the experts’ advice but there is no sense of their passive compliance. Indeed these accounts reflect the discourses that maintain the centrality of a mother’s responsibility for her infants’ well-being. It was a good mother’s duty to seek out and listen to the advice of the experts, an alliance reflected in Val’s use of ‘we’. But in the end, the message of the time was that she, the mother, might in the first instance be ignorant about her own child’s best management although in the end was ultimately responsible.
The New South Wales Department of Public Health booklet “Our Babies” (11th edition, n.d., first published 1931) was given to all new mothers in the state. It illustrates this message clearly.

**MOTHERCRAFT...IS A PERFECTLY SOUND, SIMPLE MEANS BY WHICH THE BABY IS GIVEN THE VERY BEST CHANCE IN LIFE OF HEALTH AND HAPPINESS WHILST THE MOTHER IS TAUGHT THAT MOTHERLOVE, WHEN GUIDED BY KNOWLEDGE, RESULTS IN REALLY JOYFUL MOTHERHOOD...all the wonders of modern medical science cannot wipe out a first year of wrong feeding and bad handling. (p.37, original capitalisation)**

After all, a mother is responsible for the baby and she should be encouraged and assisted in the training and management of her baby on sound lines as taught at the Baby Health Centre. (p.46)

**MANY MOTHERS CEASE TAKING THEIR CHILDREN TO THE HEALTH CENTRES AT ABOUT ONE YEAR OF AGE. THIS IS THE HEIGHT OF FOOLISHNESS AND IS TO BE STRONGLY DEPRECATED. (p.153, original capitalisation)**

Both Dagmar and Val spoke of a partnership with the professionals in a way that reflected a maternal alliance with professionals. This allowed them to speak of mothering success as a personal achievement and as a reflection of themselves as successful ‘modern’ mothers.

However not all the relationships with health professionals were spoken of as positively. More often they were told with ambivalence, particularly as changing infant care practices have provided these mothers with direct contrasts to their own experiences. The post-war period was one in which hygiene and regulation of baby’s activities were primary. Timed feeding, early toilet-training and regular routines were promulgated as best practice. However, from the 1930s and strengthening by the mid 1960s, increasingly permissiveness underpinned professional and popular understandings of mothering (Urwin, 1985; Knapman, 1993). The women who brought up children in the post-war period have been exposed to a second and contradictory ‘commonsense’ notion of mothering (Newson & Newson (1974) have explored the responses of older generations to changes in expert opinions on child rearing).
Florence’s account was the one that directly acknowledged this conflict. It is not possible to ascertain whether Florence’s account has been revised as the more permissive approaches to infant care emerged from the sixties, however it is clear that Florence felt she had little control, and recalled this time as one of failure. The conflict between the discourse of scientific motherhood and mothering-as-natural caused discomfort to Florence, possibly at the time and certainly in retrospect.

Florence: You went each week to the Baby Health Centre... although I’ve been sorry ever since. I mean you don’t know anything about babies until you’ve had your first baby. And then it was a case of—and the Baby Health Centre sisters they were real ogres (emphatic tone) —you fed three hourly and you didn’t feed in between. The poor kid had to wait and cry until that three hours [was] up—and now it’s feed on demand —just the opposite (cynical tone). My poor kid, I mean I tried to do the right thing with [my son] but he was little and he couldn’t consume the amount! each time! What he really needed was, instead of three meals a day, it was five small ones.

BP: But the sisters didn’t see it that way?

Florence: No, they liked every baby in the same mould—they had a lot of influence (indignant tone)—But if I had that all over again I’d do what I thought was right, rather than what [the clinic sister] reckoned was right (firm tone).

In using the term ‘they’ Florence’s account suggests that she felt the whole of an institution pressuring her rather than just one local infant welfare sister. The effect of mass education through pamphlets, booklets and advertisements can not be disregarded. Mothering practices were recommended to women as based on hard, scientific evidence. It is not surprising that many first time mothers, like Florence, did not feel able to resist the experts’ edicts. It is apparent that for Florence there was a hierarchy of discourses with that of scientific mothering being further strengthened by the authorising bodies of the child health field.

Although her account of mothering her new baby was told as a time full of regrets, later in the narrative Florence spoke of her personal achievement of successfully raising a difficult toxemia baby. Again this is an illustration of the ‘struggle but worth it’ understanding of motherhood. It is also evident in this account that rather than speaking as a victim of professional advice, Florence was able to illustrate how ‘they’ are the failures. Despite
scientific knowledge ‘they’ changed their minds, thus Florence was able to claim power by asserting that a woman’s responsiveness to her own baby’s needs would be a more reliable knowledge.

The women who had second or subsequent children provided an interesting contrast to the vulnerability that Florence expressed in her account of first-time mothering. From their accounts it appears that there is a cumulative aspect in some women’s narratives of their learning as mothers. The accounts of Dagmar, Margaret and Louise’s experiences with their second children demonstrated how having had one baby, these women felt able to speak of a personal basis from which to judge professional advice in light of their own learning and experience. As Dagmar said of going to the clinic with a second child, it wasn’t as necessary. You felt you knew it all by then (confident laugh). The women spoke from a ‘banking’ model of learning (Freire, 1972a)—once you had been ‘filled up’ you did not need further teaching or learning.

Margaret and Louise directly contrasted first and second time mothering. Neither of these women overtly challenged the authority of the experts in their explanations, rather they show how they resisted total compliance, whilst still remaining in the framework of being a good mother. Both women focused on the trip into town to see the infant welfare sister as the issue.

Margaret: I went [with my first child] fairly regularly [to the clinic] and found it a great help—but I didn’t go [with my second] so regularly because it wasn’t all that easy to trail all the way down to [the town centre] through the dust with two children and a pram; and I was an experienced mother by that stage and I certainly felt I knew about breast-feeding (firm tone).

Louise: Well, my first boy was so healthy that he—sort of went right off the chart—the sister got very worried about this, but he turned out to be a very healthy specimen. The other boy didn’t put on weight as he should. So I felt so ashamed about that—that I was somehow failing that...[I] got sick of going [to the clinic] so I didn’t go (fast pace, laugh) - It was so much of an effort—with the first boy I was living closer to the clinic. But it was such an effort—this was during the war— to get to where they had the baby health centre; a lot of pram pushing and I just couldn’t be bothered. I don’t think I was particularly confident; it was just too tiring to do—it was better to try and cope with the situation because obviously whatever advice I was getting, wasn’t helping him (quiet tone).
Margaret was able to articulate a sense of personal competence and told of balancing priorities rather than rejecting advice. In contrast Louise reflected the effects of the normalising discourse of good mothering, 'confessing' her failure, however, underlying her account as well was a sense of her own competence and her ability to find a solution on her own.

Much of the debate within the child health arenas at this time focused on the problems with compliance, a term very clearly setting out the expected relationship of mothers to experts (Selby, 1994). Dagmar, Louise and Margaret would never have located themselves in the group of non-compliant mothers as this would have been an act of overt rejection of the responsibilities of a good mother. Rather for them, successful management of their first child's infancy had led to some sense of achievement and personal confidence. I would suggest that in particular Dagmar and Margaret claimed maternal competency, the result of their own maternal learnings, albeit learning that in part emerged from their interaction with the health professionals. They were able to rationalise their rejection of the experts' advice through both a sense of their own competence and the adoption of peripheral reasons, in this way they managed to remain within the fold of 'good mothers'.

Speaking about written advice
Although I have drawn on some of the written advice to mothers of the time to illustrate the contemporary discourses, the role of this advice was minimised in all of the accounts. None of the women recalled the Baby Health Centre books, however, all but Emma recalled the weight chart and some the immunisation record. Reading was acknowledged as a resource that was valued by some and discounted by others. Lucy primarily embraced the sense of mothering-as-natural and as an individual life achievement.

Lucy: *No! I didn't read anything! At all! Just muddled my way through* (proud tone).
Lucy was, and is, an avid reader but child health or guidance advice books appear to have had little relevance to her constitution of mothering as primarily natural. Val and Louise did note that they probably read some books on infant care but make no further comment, however Margaret and Dagmar did remember particular books.

Margaret: *I never did read Doctor Spock until I finished having my children and then I thought “Yes, he’s quite right—he agrees with me!”* (laugh).

Dagmar: *My sister gave me a book written by Truby King. I’m glad I didn’t read it very much because I thought—well you could worry yourself with doctors’ books and things* (laugh).

This formal advice on mothering, the ‘doctor’ books, although acknowledged by the women, was not integrated in the narratives to account for learning. Throughout the seven women’s early mothering years, the Australian Women’s Weekly regularly carried editorials, letters and articles on mothercraft, but these were not mentioned by any of the women.

On mothering-as-learned the Australian Women’s Weekly (AWW) carried the following articles:

- a letter arguing that mothers should “study to fit their position of adviser and companion to a child” (awarded a one pound prize) (AWW January 6, 1940, p. 19);
- a doctor’s advice column “What my patients ask me” emphasising “the rules for treating summer diarrhoea in babies” (AWW, February 10, 1940, p.5);
- a full page advertisement for baby powder where the baby says “You had to learn sometime, mummy” (AWW, Mar 13, 1948, p.30); and
- advice on handling the tiny baby by “our mothercraft nurse, Sister Mary Jacob”. (AWW January 21, 1950, p.49)

On mothering-as-natural, the magazine published:

- a discussion condemning the “modern cry of freedom for women” arguing against mothers who fail to care for their children (AWW January 13, 1940, p.19);
- a letter arguing that poor mothers are “overawed by ‘ologies’ and ‘complexes’, that too many modern ideas and conflicting opinions are forced on us” (AWW January 27, 1940, p.10); and
- an article arguing that some mothers seem “to possess child psychology naturally, and some haven’t a clue” (AWW February 17, 1960, p.37).
While none of the women made direct mention of these sources, I would suggest that these popular texts reflected the ready availability of the two discourses.

In the narratives of early childhood mothering, each of the seven women were able to name their mothering as a personal success. Their children survived and thrived. Although the discourses of mothering-as-learned and mothering-as-natural are fundamentally contradictory, in these accounts the women overcame the contradictions by telling of their mothering as a personal achievement that involved continual, active negotiation. Mothering provided an investment that above all could be claimed as their own specialty. This is particularly true of the early childhood period in which each of the women could speak as a committed maternal learner, especially in relationship to the health professionals.

The education professionals
In contrast to the mothers’ accounts of interactions with health professionals in which most of the women could name and claim some maternal knowledge and experience, the interaction with school professionals was told with less confidence. It is of course a major milestone in a child’s life when s/he begins school and thus spends a significant period each day within that institutional setting. However, since the turn of the century, early childhood teaching practices have been highly compatible with the role of guidance through play and activity that was idealised as the goal of the educated, middle-class mother (Urwin, 1985).

During the twentieth century the direct involvement of parents with their local school increased. Parents’ committees (known as Parents and Citizens, Parents and Friends, Parent/Teacher Associations, or similar terms) began to emerge, often as fund-raising bodies to help equip their school with the latest innovations or at the least to provide basic teaching aids (Gilding, 1991). Education days or weeks opened the classroom at least
once a year to parents, whilst due to the growing psychologies of education some teachers became open to offering advice to the parents in the home. The role of mother now extended into the years of schooling as she became responsible for supervising and monitoring her child’s educational progress (Matthews, 1984).

From the popular texts of the post-war period it is clear that schools were expected to continue the development of the child and to work in a second maternal alliance. Home and school are the two great formative influences on which the future of the individual, and, through him (sic), of the world, depends. It is the sacred duty of teachers, parents, and governments to make these influences as fine as they can. (AWW, February 4, 1950, p.50)

However in these popular texts there is also evidence of a rivalry between home and school. As an Australian Women’s Weekly editorial noted “(i)t is difficult indeed for mothers not to be jealous of the way in which that other world [school] quickly becomes [children’s] larger life” (February 4, 1950, p.18). Later in that decade, the Australian Women’s Weekly featured “The Teachers’ Warning” in which teachers complained about the growing lack of discipline they found among their pupils; a problem noted to be Australia-wide. Again ‘parents’—and I suggest this means ‘mothers’—were implicated. “Parents, whether they like it or not, must accept the primary responsibility of training their children in discipline” (AWW, September 21, 1955, p.2). It appears that school/home relations were as much adversarial as collaborative (Trezise (1995) usefully elaborates this argument).

It is clear from the narratives of four of the women that in the mid-century mothers were expected to be active in, if not responsible for, the education of their children. Both the working-class women (Lucy, Florence) and the middle-class women (Val, Emma) illustrate that the social rhetoric might have named parents (e.g. the Parents and Citizens) but the expectations were that this was a mother’s role. Lucy spoke of educational aspirations for her only child, a son, and as a mother Lucy had a clear position on the education of boys.
Lucy: When I was working the train would pass Melbourne High—a school with an excellent reputation—and I always said if I had a son that’s the school I want him to go to.

As a working-class girl who had to leave school at 12, Lucy’s ideal of one of the elite single-sex government schools reflected her maternal commitment to access a different cultural capital for her son. It was not just education she wanted for her son, but ‘better’ education. However, Lucy’s son was not accepted to Melbourne High but was allocated to the local suburban high school. Lucy put on her fighting pants, an appropriate masculine metaphor, and confronted the school. Within six weeks he was transferred to Melbourne High. I knew what I wanted. My husband wouldn’t have confronted the school. I was the one to speak out about things.

In her account of wifehood, Lucy invested in the notion of separate gender roles in a similar way. For her, the responsibilities of motherhood were to ‘fight for your child’ and to attain the best possible options for them. Lucy made it clear in her account that she could, and did, achieve this goal of good mothers. Further, Lucy spoke of her close monitoring of her son’s education. The many nights of supervising homework, combined with her early starts in the morning for her cleaning job, were told as hard work. The facilitative, nurturing mother-as-teacher has been acknowledged as a middle-class construct (particularly in the work of Valerie Walkerdine, for example, Walkerdine (1985) and Walkerdine & Lucey, (1989)). Despite her material circumstances, Lucy spoke of personal sacrifice to meet this middle-class standard of mothering as it related to formal education. I believe this investment however appeared to Lucy to have a potential pay-off for her son in what was portrayed as a meritocratic and democratic education system. Lucy could believe that her maternal reward would be the greater success of her child. However in her account Lucy also explained this role as one of self-education. Thus this investment was understood by Lucy well beyond self-sacrifice.
Lucy: Sitting with [my son] and helping him in the stages I could, I think helped me a lot too (proud tone). Because my husband and his mother would be up in the lounge looking at TV and I would be down going through spelling etc, you know.

Florence constructed a similar role of mother-as-teacher/learner when supporting her son through schooling. She and her husband spent seven hard years in a struggling mixed business. Although she had no choice, she recalled this as a failure in her mother-as-teacher role.

Florence: When [my son] was seven, we went into this mixed business that I never wanted to, and we were in that seven to eight years...and all of his schooling years I realise now, I couldn't give him the time to help him personally that I should have done. I think kids need help from their parents. I didn't have the time and I regretted it. I've regretted it ever since. But I don't know what else I could have done (slow, thoughtful tone).

On the advice of the headmaster, Florence reluctantly supported her son’s choice to leave school at Intermediate level. Like Lucy, Florence spoke of education for her son as the path to a better future. After two years as an office boy, Florence recalled that her son realised he had little future without the Leaving Certificate. For two years he studied at night, but each year failed the essential English. Despite working in a full-time clerical position, Florence saw her role clearly. She spoke as the responsible mother: responsible amongst other things for her son’s learning.

Florence: [My son] didn’t have a clue with the English really. So I said I’d go with him and I’d do the English Leaving and see what they’re looking for—what they expected—I wanted so much for him to—he’d tried so hard and he just wasn’t getting [there]—I had to find out just what they were looking for (energetic tone)...[My son] got a B—he passed his English—he got his Leaving Pass.

Just as in Florence’s account of the infant welfare staff, ‘they’ as professionals were spoken of as distant authorising bodies. Florence did not speak of her son wanting or needing to learn, but of the need for credentialing. As a ‘knowing’ mother, Florence was able to be his guide, and as Florence noted, she did this with success. It is important to acknowledge that, as with Lucy, for Florence this year of study was also told as a personal achievement. This was the only ‘second-chance’ Florence had for formal
education and she spoke with quiet pride as she concluded the above passage with *I got an A*. Florence spoke not just as a defender of the family but as one who had proved her own intelligence.

Two of the other women spoke of teaching roles as part of their narrative of mothering. Living on isolated rural properties, both Val and Emma were responsible for the supervision of their children’s correspondence school. Emma and Val noted that the teaching of children was clearly the mother’s job. For Val, this was told as an exciting, rewarding time and a personal achievement within motherhood.

**Val:** *I corresponded a lot, but there was no radio and the phone wasn’t used a great deal. So it was all letter writing. You’d write a letter and they’d answer you. So I really sort of had to concentrate hard on that one. But that was so as I could simplify it for him* (energetic tone).

These two women’s accounts provide evidence that teaching children was a mother’s sole responsibility. Where Val was able to claim success, Emma confessed failure.

**Val:** *Definitely onto the mother. Well, I think I felt it was amazing [the correspondence school] was so good* (strong tone).

**Val** *I had very good books for them, I sort of really self-taught them…I went into it very thoroughly on what children that age should be doing* (firm tone)...*No, I found it was very good and we [my eldest] and I, went along exceedingly well—we could talk. He was very keen on learning, very keen on everything—he knew what he wanted to do. He used to read a lot. We had a little old battery radio and we’d listen to School of the Air on those. But he had a most inquiring mind—well he turned into a scientist eventually. So I mean he had the know. But right from the word go he was very keen on it. [My youngest] wasn’t, he was more of a mucker up. He’d come in and say “oh have I got to do this?—I wanted to go out and help the boys with the sheep” or something. He was always the ‘landie’ type, but [my eldest] never ever varied—he wanted to do it. It was easy. I never felt that I was inadequate* (strong tone).

**Emma:** *I looked forward to having to teach [my eldest], it was such fun* (warm energy). *I knew it was hard to find time. I’d watched [my friend] go through all of this! But I still thought it would be okay, but I was quite wrong because there I hadn’t reckoned with [my son] (firm tone). Well, he was a little boy who was holding spanners before he could toddle. And everything that went on out in the shed was fascinating. That was where he wanted to be! He didn’t want to be sitting in the dining room with mum. He didn’t ever want to pick up a pencil and try and make letters or anything like that (laugh). It was just a scream (pause), so I failed that* (quiet, short, sharp statement).
Emma 'confessed' her failure, and in the ensuing passage explained how her son was later able to make progress in the school setting. Unlike Val who laughingly accredited her son’s success as a research scientist to her early grounding, Emma saw the male influence the only positive one for her boys in this period.

**Emma:** *My son* was seven or eight when we left the outback. *He had a strong grounding in mechanics from his father. What he learnt from his father was incredible. Both boys learnt a lot like that—had a wonderful grounding* (quiet emphasis).

Because of her struggle to teach her son, Emma was unable to claim any value for her son from her teaching or indeed from the domestic environment in general. She could acknowledge the male environment and its learning, but she could not acknowledge anything that a young boy like her son may have learnt from his mother. Both Val and Emma understood part of the role of mother as that of teacher. In the formal setting, one speaks of success, the other of failure. However once again both accounts provide examples of women taking on the notion of omni-responsibility for the guidance and progress of all aspects of their child’s development.

Each of the seven mothers spoke about engagement with their children’s school activity, but unlike infant care there was little they could call on to forge any account of a partnership or enabling alliance with the school professionals. Rather they typically spoke as the supportive and private back-up for their children, facilitating the best environment for educational opportunities, this in turn reflecting the interplay of consumerist and democratic educational discourses.

**Guilty mothers**

I have suggested that for the seven women the role of motherhood offered them a lifelong investment that was able to be spoken of as their own speciality and their personal achievement. From the 1930s to the 1990s rearing children has been reiterated to be the most important and fulfilling thing for a woman to do. However in their accounts, there
can also be found moments of confession which I believe are as telling as the many constitutions of success. The concept of the guilty mother that is apparent in the narratives of seven of the women is a clear example of the capillary nature of a discourse, or in this case, discourses. In the seven personal narratives every one of the mothers at times took on a confessional mode within the narration, evidencing their awareness that here was an issue for self-monitoring. Just what issue the confession revolved around provides an indication of a particular form of mothering that was problematic for that woman. The confessions revolved around one notion - that the good mother should be omni-present and omni-responsible.

An example from Emma has already been used in the preceding section. Here as she confessed I failed that, she took full and personal responsibility for her son’s lack of early academic progress. In contrast Val, who spoke of success as a teacher, confessed a lack of assertiveness in protecting her sons from the vagaries of her father-in-law. For Val, her own knowledge of the modern ideas of child discipline highlighted the wrongness of her father-in-law’s inconsistent behaviour and as a mother she was concerned. However, as a loyal wife, she saw this as a double-bind. She told of not wanting to hurt her husband after all it was his father. Val linked this distress to her development of high blood pressure. It was at this point she could act to change things, because as she explained there were now three conflicts: her sons’ needs, her husband’s needs and her health needs. Her doctor encouraged her to speak out.

Val: [My doctor] finished up having me crying and then he sent me outside and said have a really good cry and come back and tell me the truth. So then I came back and told him all about the father-in-law and how I wouldn’t even complain to my husband because it was his father and I didn’t want him to feel that he shouldn’t have had his father there—he shouldn’t have, but I didn’t want him to think I was complaining. And a phrase comes to mind that I’ve often said “peace at any price” - I used to do anything so as not to have a row. But I think that it doesn’t pay—I wouldn’t advise anyone to really go on the way I did because it’s not, I mean father-in-law should have been made aware. (quiet tone)

With this professional ‘permission’ Val’s account suggests that this enabled her to acknowledge a ‘real’ problem, rather than her own lack of competence.
The remaining confessions of guilty mothers arose from a common issue. Good mothers were to be in the home ready to respond as needed. For Louise and Margaret their narratives located this issue in relation to their taking up of paid work.

Margaret: Later, [I wondered] whether it was a good idea to go [back to work] before [my youngest son] also finished at High School. I was never quite sure, but I perhaps think it might have been better if I'd been round the place when he came in, but...

Louise: [My second son] wasn’t very happy (quiet tone, pause) and I regretted afterwards that I’d [taken a part-time job]. Because I don’t really think it helped him and I really put myself before him I think (strong tone).

Florence recounted the same dilemma, however, for her, the irresolvable contradiction was between the roles of wife and mother. Her husband had been unable to hold down jobs after the war and he thought a small corner shop might be the answer. Florence acknowledged the incompatible needs of her husband, her son and the need for family income, but the impact of middle-class discourses of the omni-present, omni-responsible mother is obvious.

Florence: It was circumstances and it was in a sense a difficult thing to do (quiet tone). Because [my son] was only five and had just started school and he had to come home to the lady next door after school. She was a dear old lady next door—I was really lucky to have someone for him to come home to (warm tone). But then when he was seven, we went into this mixed business that I never wanted to, and we were in that seven to eight years, so he was fourteen by that time...and all of his schooling years I realise now, I couldn’t give him the time to help him personally that I should have done. I think kids need help from their parents. I didn’t have the time and I regretted it. I’ve regretted it ever since. But I don’t know what else I could have done (slow thoughtful tone).

Lucy, like Florence, also needed paid work to supplement the family income. She showed equal evidence of the omni-present mother discourse. Her confession was not one of guilt, but the avoidance of guilt by taking an early morning cleaning job rather than the 9–5 shop position she dreamed of. In this way, Lucy was able to meet the middle-class standards. Dagmar as a middle-class mother showed the same awareness.

Lucy: [I took] only early morning work so I was home when [my son] came home. He never came home to an empty house! Never! (firm tone).
Dagmar: If your children are a little bit inclined to be bad in some ways, or naughty and you're not at home with them—they come home to an empty house! You've got to have good children (pause) and trust them (strong tone).

Such examples of narrative confessions well illustrate the dominance of certain maternal discourses. To Jill Matthews' (1984) observation that mothers in the twentieth century became responsible not just for the physical development but also the psychological development of their children, I would now add, and for their educational development as well. To do this women had to be omni-present, regardless of their material circumstances. The accounts of the seven biological mothers exemplify how such a discourse is both constitutive of, and constituted by, daily practices.

**Beyond child-rearing: accounts of never-ending mothers**

In all of the accounts mothering was told not just in the child-raising periods but across the whole life span. This is a particular bonus as it enables us to see how women make sense of the experience of mothering across time and as they are exposed to new discourses as well as new challenges in differing family stages. As I have already reiterated, I have worked from accounts that have been told by aged women. Each woman (re)presented and (re)constmcted a coherent and logical life-story as best she could. Over the series of interviews mothering was the one experience that all of these women constructed as a life project: a life project that revolved around care and connection. Within this overall theme however each woman forged her own particular theme in order to tell of a meaningful life project. In this way, the women spoke as individuals. This (re)presentation appears to have enabled each of the women to claim at least one part of the mothering experience as her own particular expertise.

There were three themes within which the women’s stories of life-long mothering could be grouped. I have called these maternal tradition, maternal egalitarianism and maternal citizenship. The women who spoke of their role as one of a developmental guide to their children continued this theme into their descriptions of adult relationships via a notion of
democratic or egalitarian supportive families. In contrast for the women who privileged the maternal instinct their accounts suggest that for them this instinct never dies. It follows that they as mothers need to be available to provide the continuity of family support and tradition as their mothers had before them. When mothering was told as a personal and a social issue, the women spoke of their mothering as a contribution to a better society. To forge such themes enabled the women to highlight the investments that paid off across a lifetime and to illustrate what aspects of the mothering experiences presented opportunity rather than constraint.

Maternal tradition
From these accounts I would suggest that if one is constructing a narrative of mothering that privileges the commonsense, natural ability of a woman to meet the needs of her children, family tradition and observation (maternal tradition) will underpin much of the learning that can be named. This dynamic can continue when those children become adults. Underpinning the notion of maternal tradition is the belief that extended families should be there for each other. Mothers should offer support and guidance as new family stages emerge. This is not necessarily a form of maternal intervention but rather of support and of modelling the acceptable ways of handling life events; one in which the mother continues to be present as a guide.

Lucy: I think it’s always your business because I’ll tell you this—the moment something goes wrong they come back to you.

Lucy: I’ve learnt this lesson too late in life—[your children] lean on you and it’s like a man with a crutch and if you’re not there it’s just as if someone’s kicked the crutch from that man and they just fall flat on their faces—because they know there’s always someone there to back them up. Mum will do it, Mum will do that! (strong tone).

It is apparent that Lucy accepted that to some degree children will always be dependent, thus her support role will always be needed. She did not speak of this with resentment but rather understood herself as a ‘pillar of strength’. Both Lucy and Florence illustrated this position as they spoke of their responsibility and need to be near their adult children,
particularly in times of a child's difficulty. Both women moved to Canberra to facilitate such support. In Lucy's case, this was to support her son during a divorce; and for Florence it was because of her husband's terminal illness in which she explained her son needed her support to cope with the issue. Both women spoke of a commitment to continuing the nurturing family environment albeit in a modified way.

This notion of mothering allowed Lucy and Florence to speak of learning to be family guides by offering subtle, unobtrusive support and guidance derived from their own greater understanding of life. Whilst these women do speak of their children as fully fledged adults, Lucy in particular retained a sense that her child cannot be as worldly-wise as his mother. Both women had a commitment to continue a nurturing family tradition of guidance. Their role was the 'pillar of strength' - a role that lasts a lifetime. To some extent this appears to illustrate the consistency of the discourse of the omni-present mother.

Maternal egalitarianism
On the other hand if, as a mother of young children, one of the women privileged the notion of optimal development towards autonomy, she was more likely to speak of a family of adults in a way which constructed an equal relationship with them. Goals of autonomy and independence for one's child demand a recognition of that person as a fully-functioning adult no longer in need of guidance as the marker of successful mothering. In turn this necessitates speaking as an equal adult rather than a guiding parent. The women who privileged maternal egalitarianism reversed the learner/teacher relationship to speak of what they now learnt from their adult children.

The accounts of Dagmar, Val and Emma suggest that egalitarianism and individualism informed their maternal thinking. In their accounts of early mothering, they drew on child psychology to speak of their children as emerging individuals. In the three extracts below
it is apparent that the women are drawing on a similar way of thinking about adult children.

Val: I finished up much more than my husband did—being a real mate with both of the boys...See the psychology in bringing up children, I was definitely laughed at a bit by my friends, they thought I was a bit queer. But I still stuck with it because I felt it was the better approach. I thought you talk to them and you understand them, you don't order them...you make mates of them...you don't have them as you're the little kid and I'm the big mum.

Dagmar: You learn to handle children at different stages of their lives—when they were little to come and tell you things and confide in you and when they were older—that you trusted them. And I think that's something that's stuck by them for the rest of their lives too.

Emma: I think it was a strength because I think it was the fact that I was always available, I would always listen, always find time. It's what gives me the enormous strength now with my family. We are such good friends and I just gain so much from them all the time...apparently in my family's eyes I am a little extraordinary in that I can talk to them as equals and I have learnt from them. I have learnt from them, I've learnt an awful lot. And I can see the barriers in some cases amongst my friends. They haven't always adapted to their children's different values, different ways of life and I feel that they're the poorer. The family learnt from me and I know I learnt from them (strong tone).

In the last extract Emma verbalised a dynamic that was also expressed by Dagmar and Val. When their children were young, the three women spoke of their family from a liberal egalitarian discourse. Within a family setting this appears to have enabled an adult family form to emerge in which connectedness was maintained but not a connectedness that constructs a subservient mother. As Val said you're free to change your mind and to fit in with your family - not to be hen-pecked or sat on by the family, but to do this as a group. The egalitarian discourse enabled the women to see their children as equal adults.

Dagmar, Val and Emma were able to elaborate with great detail how this has led to rich personal learning. Emma's following extract is an example.

Emma: I've learnt so much from [my children]. I've learnt an awful lot from [my daughter], about Aboriginal people, through her interest in Aboriginal people. They've broadened my outlook a lot. I would never have got this from [my husband]...[My daughter] taught in two Aboriginal communities and we visited her there...So it's been absolutely fascinating. I've learnt a bit about the Buddhism religion—because she's married a man who's a Buddhist and she's become a Buddhist too...And this further thing, I've learnt about natural childbirth from my two daughters. And I think they're very brave in some of the things they're interested in, brave and wise and they go about things quietly. They go and find out
various services and they wanted to include me!...I knew [my daughter] was wanting to have the baby at home and she finally said to me, "what do you think Mum?" and I said, "I am terrified but if it is what you wanted to do I know you’ll go about it sensibly" and she said "would you come to some Homebirth meetings with me" and that opened my eyes tremendously and I wasn’t afraid. It was just one of the most wonderful experiences of my life when [my grand-daughter] was born (warm, energetic tone).

**Maternal Citizenship**

Margaret and Louise invested their notions of mothering with both a public and a private aspect. On one level, Margaret spoke as a mother within conventional constructions, being committed to care for her children and grandchildren in a traditional way. However, she also spoke of her mothering as imbued with social responsibility. She spoke as a ‘mother of the world’ and by connecting her daily mothering to global need she invested in a particular notion of the power of the mother. Her’s was a daily expression of the tenet that the ‘personal is political’ as she expressed a connectedness between her daily practice as a mother and a world that is in need of thoughtful practice.

Margaret did not speak of her philosophy of mothering as informed by any particular movement, however I believe there is a spiritual dimension to her constitution of mothering. Margaret spoke of reading widely, especially in non-fiction, therefore it is probable that she was exposed to a wider discourse on mothering and spirituality. However, at a more popular level, ‘mothers as maternal citizens’ has been a common notion in Australia, particularly in both post-World War periods. Some extracts from popular literature exemplify this:

- In a 1940s baby care booklet— "The mother who patiently gets her baby into good habits is actually doing the world a service by preparing the child to be a healthy young citizen". (New South Wales Department of Public Health, 11th edition, p.8)

- In a 1943 marriage manual— "The wives of the world have the morality and health and welfare of the world very much in their keeping". (Tyrer, 1943, p.232)
Margaret appears to have forged deeper meaning into her mothering by imbuing it with a societal dimension. By investing in a notion of the social relevance of her daily practice, she has blurred the public/private divide and created a meaningful context for her care within the home and within the world. This theme appears to have had currency across the lifespan, from early childhood to adult family stages.

Margaret: How can I say this without sounding yucky (very quiet tone) I think I have a role to play in keeping all these people together - all the in-laws and the out-laws (laugh) - to have a place where you can be together and be comfortable and I love having them here and I think it does a service to all those folk to come here (warm tone).

Margaret: To me it's very important if you have a family, to have a haven. Things can be pretty rough out there in the world. You can work in very aggressive atmospheres. There are irritants about you quite often, even if it's only because someone near you feels 'dead-mean' in their attitude (quiet laugh). It's sort of a strain and if you can come home and 'poof' let it go - sort it out. And don't turn into the same sort of person yourself! (strong tone).

Margaret: I brought the children up to be pacifists, or I tried to do so. You know, I really thought during the war, this shouldn't happen. If everybody brought their children up not to be violent, this would help towards peace (quick, strong tone).

In a different way, Louise also imbued her mothering with a sense of societal responsibility. Unlike Margaret, she did not directly relate her maternal practice to a 'better world', but rather she forged a sense of her maternal contribution to a 'better future'.

Louise: I think you feel that if you do develop yourself you will help your children and grandchildren because you know that you've got some wisdom there that you'd like to pass on to them... (discussion on grandson) maybe it is all to help the younger generation in some way. In some sort of way the maternal instinct goes on and on. (quiet tone).

By speaking of her mothering as a contribution to a better future, Louise was also able to construct a notion of her own wisdom. As a woman who spoke across her life-story as an intellectual this was a compatible development. The Western, and Australian, culture
places little store in the wisdom of the elders, indeed the whole concept of elders has little currency, however Louise claimed a place for herself as an aged woman by utilising her maternal role and a revised notion of the maternal instinct to speak of herself as one able and committed to passing on her knowledge.

It can be seen in the accounts of the biological mothers that the theme they utilised to explain their mothering had coherency across a whole life. The investment in the notion of wife was more time limited, whereas the notion of mothering had utility across the whole lifespan. Motherhood was a central life achievement for these women.

**Never-ending mothers: the single women**

It is apparent that whether married or single, this group of women saw themselves as nurturers and care-givers. Irene and Josephine, the two single women, were no exception. Throughout their accounts of both work and family life, Irene and Josephine were able to articulate their skills related to care and connection; skills they valued and of which they were proud. Themes of nurturing and care informed both the public and private facets of their personal narratives.

Irene recalled the affective dimensions of her paid work as paramount. In her early jobs, she chose temporary work in order to nurse her dying mother. Later when in a permanent position she spoke with pride of her ongoing role as help-mate at work.

**Irene:** If [my boss] was annoyed with the men—the manager or the assistant manager—he’d ring the switch board and say “ask Miss Richards to bring a book in please”. So I’d go in with a book and two sharp pencils expecting him to dictate a letter. He said “I don’t want to dictate a letter I just want to talk”. (re-enactment, proud tone).

After 22 years in this position, Irene continued to seek out jobs that were directly nurturing, first working as a medical receptionist.

**Irene:** It was a demanding job—very demanding because when very sick people go to see a specialist they don’t know what they’re going to be told. You must drop everything you’re doing (slow, serious tone).
She then chose to work as a companion/housekeeper to an elderly gentleman.

_Irene:_ He needed someone to look after him. His wife had died many years before.

Irene did not directly describe her work as nurturing but rather she explained this as part of ‘doing your best’. I would suggest the sub-text was ‘doing your best as a woman’, and Irene could be seen as the dutiful woman and a modification of ‘the good woman behind the man’ concept. In the accounts of workplace learning, Irene provided examples of her development of interpersonal skills, especially those of supportive caring. In contrast she seemed to take little pride in her business skills beyond always giving a full day’s work.

The more traditional woman’s nurturing role became available to Irene when her sister died leaving daughters aged ten and twelve. A gendered pro-family discourse was apparent in Irene’s acceptance of a woman without a family as one who was deficient in some way. The contradictions for single women are apparent in the following extract.

_Irene:_ Well it didn’t bother me that I was sort of on the shelf kind of thing. Well put it another way an unclaimed treasure (giggle). Well I felt that I didn’t miss having a family because when my sister died her two children were only ten and twelve (slow, deliberate tone). So I have always been—they’ve come to me with their sorrows and their joys. I used to barrack for them and so on (laugh). _But I sort of had a substitute family you see. So that filled in a very big gap_ (quiet, strong tone).

Now validated with a legitimate mothering role, Irene was able to account for a range of domestic responsibilities and skill achievements in a similar way to the biological mothers, as well as acknowledging like all the never-ending mothers, the lifetime theme of care and connection.

_Irene:_ [My sister’s family] used to say that I was the sewing lady. I used to make their cardigans, etc. for them. Of course I did some of the cooking too. I stayed at the house and looked after them for quite a time, but I used to go to my own unit for the weekends and they’d spend the weekends with their father (matter of fact tone).

_Irene:_ At this ripe old age I’m still very much in their life and I think that is the achievement. As I say, I know I’ve learnt to be more tolerant, not that they take me to task or anything, and I value the girls’ friendship (warm tone).
Irene privileged the interpersonal work that was needed to maintain a positive connection with adult children. This connection would have been possible as a family aunt, however for Irene it became a legitimate maternal duty and was told as rewarding her with life-long connections. In a culture that has few ways of thinking about connectedness outside the family unit, Irene told of gaining the most legitimate place in ‘the family’, that of mother.

The utilisation of the concept of nurturing is equally apparent in Josephine’s account of both work and family life. Josephine’s choice of a career was nursing, a classic one of women’s care. Unlike Irene, Josephine was able to articulate considerable technical learning throughout her career, however she continually related this to the affective dimension of nurturing and care. Her understanding of work was grounded in her understanding of herself as a woman who cares. Her experience in England is a good example.

In her last year in England, Josephine told of finding her perfect job in a diagnostic neurology ward for children, where children who had been committed to mental institutions were reassessed using the new technologies. Josephine told of the successes as a highlight of her life. In this job, the discourses of scientific and heroic medicine intersected in a positive way with those of nurturing and compassion. Although Josephine named this job as one she could have committed to for life, the needs of her ageing mother had to be balanced with this job. Josephine explained that this duty to her mother was her primary responsibility. It appears that this family care-taking was accepted without regret. Since the turn of the century, it has been increasingly viable for single women to invest in a notion of ‘careers’ instead of family roles of wife and mother. Josephine did have a series of jobs that could have been understood as a career, however instead she told of a life-long theme of care and connection with her biological family as her primary theme. The concept of a career appears to have had less resonance than that of women’s traditional role in the family. From this point, in her personal narrative, until her
mother's death when she was 50, Josephine told of the balancing of paid work and family.

The death of any family member is inevitably one of transition, and in some circumstances that of crisis. Josephine had structured her life and career with her mother's needs as paramount, in no different a way from those of many mothers to their children. The major difference for a mother faced with the death of a child is that the strength of her grief is acknowledged and accepted whereas the death of an aged parent is regarded as a lesser grief and loss. For Josephine, the loss of her mother was devastating as her core nurturing relationship was shattered. The learning and adapting that she had to do was made doubly difficult by the lack of acknowledgment of single women's nurturing and mothering roles. Josephine resolved this crisis and has today recreated her family role in a similar way to that of Margaret - as the hub that keeps all the extended family in touch.

As never-married women, both Irene and Josephine cannot draw on the usual 'rites of passage' associated with the life courses of married women: marriage, birth of a child, first child at school and even widowhood. Because of this, much of their experience is rendered invisible. Other women who had similar life courses to Irene and Josephine may have drawn on feminist or career narratives in order to forge a positive sense of their single status. However Irene and Josephine's personal narratives illuminated the pervasiveness of the discourse of women as nurturers; the double bind that both constrains and develops women. Although the learning from mothering is often trivialised for biological mothers, the learning from single women's nurturing is even less likely to be acknowledged. These two women are family-keepers, an essential, but covert strategy, that many families use to maintain their cohesiveness (Allen, 1989). By constituting a family role for themselves that was one of nurturing and caring, these two women were able to speak with some credibility and coherency as women. Both women did not invest in the notion of careers which may have enabled them to speak of learning and development through paid work, instead they elevated their activities as carers and
nurturers both at work and in the extended family. And like all of the other mothers, they reiterated that the reward was through the life-long emotional connections of family.

**Conclusion**

In the accounts of mothering across the whole lifespan, what I have called ‘never-ending mothering’, it is apparent that these women have made sense of the various stages by forging a coherent theme across the whole. Whether it be the notion of maternal presence and support, or the developmental guide, or of social responsibility, it was this theme that enabled each woman to explain her own particular skills. The forging of a coherent theme enabled each woman to speak of mothering as her specialised personal achievement and in this way each woman (re)constructed her own mothering as a success.

Mothering has a time line unique to each woman across her own life course and material location, and is a fluid experience which cannot be understood outside of its particular discourses. It must be seen as located within a dynamic interactive context consisting of social, political, historical and personal factors. The accounts of the nine women illustrate contradictions between, contestation of, and compliance with the dominant discourses. They show what the women determined as natural and what was not and in turn how this impacted on the way in which they could speak as learners.

When a woman constituted a part of her mothering as natural, it was difficult to speak robustly of learning, and yet each of the women strove to acknowledge themselves as successful maternal learners. They drew on ideas of coaching, apprenticeship, mentoring and learning. On the other hand when a woman spoke of her mothering as modern/scientific, concepts from formal education had greater utility. Each woman could speak of achieving competencies, learning from the professionals, acquiring knowledge and becoming a skilled mother.
In the accounts of both wifehood and motherhood, it is apparent that all of the women understood the domestic setting as their particular site of expertise. As I have demonstrated these women’s accounts challenge the fictive nature of the public/private divide and most importantly illustrate that the home can be a site for active agency. Lesley Johnson (1996) has recently argued that for some women in the 1940s and the 1950s home was not seen as a withdrawal from the modern world but a contribution to it. This group of women would fall into that category. Home was a sphere of the everyday world in which they were actively and ‘thought-fully’ engaged, and therefore they could acknowledge their learning achievements.

The private/family sphere was the central setting for much of the narrative attention of each of the nine women, and as both wives and mothers, or as never-married family carers, the women privileged their activities in the home. However in order to fully explain their learning, all of the women recalled significant experiences outside the home. This is the focus of the following chapter.
Chapter 9

SPEAKING OF DISRUPTIONS
AND EXTENSIONS

The last two chapters have explored how the nine women of this study spoke about their home and family experiences. I have argued that although the experiences were particularly framed as the private sphere, it became apparent that the women spoke of learning and development through engagement across both the public and the private sphere. In this chapter, I am interested in exploring how the women spoke about issues and activities that crossed the public/private divide. The women’s narratives reflected Eryl Maudsley’s belief that although the home may be the centre of women’s lives, it should not be viewed as the boundary (The Hen Coop, 1993, p.51).

As I have illustrated in the previous chapters on childhood, wifehood and motherhood, the women’s personal narratives reflected the discourses of domesticity, and of private affective relationships particularly those of caring. Together these enabled considerable positive investment, particularly in motherhood which was a site of juncture with discourses of learning. However as discourses are fluid and have changed across the century, mother, wife or child are not fixed roles but changing constructions. Further, as the women interacted with the public sphere, they were exposed to new discourses, with different possibilities. Therefore I was interested in examining the narratives for evidence of what I have called disruptions: disruptions to the notion of a woman’s self as primarily domestic, caring and private.
What I found was not so much disruptions, but extensions; hence the title of this chapter. The personal narratives revealed that most often a woman took up new discourses in a way that allowed her to extend, rather than radically disrupt her family-based sense of self. Or put another way, the women used discourses of domesticity and in speaking of themselves outside home and family. There was some evidence of disruptions but they were minimal, however, both disruptions and extensions are indicative of ways in which the women actively constructed their own subjectivity.

Such extensions and disruptions are particularly relevant to the concept of transformative learning as outlined in the chapter on frameworks of learning and development (Chapter 2). As I explained in that chapter, Jack Mezirow (1990, 1991) has defined transformative learning as a change in meaning perspective that arises when a person becomes aware of the premise or presupposition embedded in an experience or a problem. As all premises and presuppositions are discursively constituted, this is highly compatible with the perspective taken in this thesis. However, Mezirow and other transformative learning theorists such as Stephen Brookfield (1988) argue that transformative learning arises from critical reflection, a notion inherently suggestive of a conscious rationality. Through my analysis of the nine personal narratives, I would suggest that although critical reflection may be a useful concept in formal learning environments, it has less relevance in the informal learning of everyday life. I would argue that when an individual is faced with contradictory discourses, there is also potential for transformative learning; however, this contradiction may not always be consciously apparent to the individual. Rather, as the individual moves across and within a discursive field on a daily level, some movement has greater potential for transformation than others. This was apparent in the accounts of the women when they told of their moves from the private (female) sphere to the public (male) sphere.
As the women spoke of their life passages, there was not one account of an ‘a-ha’, a ‘flip’ or a ‘quantum leap’ of thinking that would suggest a perspective transformation in the sense used by Mezirow and his colleagues. I believe that this does not mean that the women did not have major challenges to their meaning perspectives but rather as aged women looking back over a whole life, this group were able to understand that shift as perhaps a challenge but one which had a commonsense and natural outcome. Indeed I did directly ask each of the women whether they had ever heard an idea or had an experience that radically altered the way they saw their world. All of the women responded by describing changed environments such as moving to the city or meeting a wider range of people through the war and travel. As Bronwyn Davies has argued:

(1993, p.11, emphasis added)

I believe that transformative learning is apparent in the nine narratives, but I would argue that in the context of personal narratives, transformation was told more as a process of gradual change rather than of radical shift. However as the following section will explore there were disruptions as well as extensions.

**Disruptions**

As I have argued in Chapter 3 entitled “Subjectivities and self”, for an individual to make sense of a life it is crucial to develop themes and coherency from discourses that constantly pose compatibilities or contradictions. Within a cultural context in which discourses constantly modify, recede or emerge, new subject positions at times become possible. Coupled with this is the impact of personal material change whereby shifts of subjectivity may be related to a new context which requires other aspects of a discourse to be mobilised. This was evident for example in Emma’s earlier account of wifehood in which on moving to a country property she modified the discourse of romantic love to one of dutiful wife. Thus in any one personal narrative underneath the thematised,
apparently coherent subjectivity, one must expect to find indicators of contradictions or challenges that offered the potential for different subjectivities.

Two particular themes emerged in the personal narratives as potential moments of disruption: war and death. Although not all the women described death and war as challenges, they provide useful starting points to understand how a similar experience can disrupt one woman's sense of self whilst be understood by another in a more unified way.

**War**

In all but two of the personal narratives, war was understood as a disruption only in the sense that it interrupted what the women saw as their 'normal' life trajectory and brought outside issues into the domestic sphere. Wartime offered new opportunities for work outside the home, both paid and unpaid, and there were new positionings available (Finch, 1995; Lake, 1995). For example, in most of the personal narratives voluntary work was told as a little adventure and as the duty of a good woman citizen.

**Lucy**: (laughing) *Oh yes, you learnt about incendiary bombs and this one you did this with and that one you did that with!*

**Florence**: *Oh well, we were all rather young and it was rather exciting to go and sleep on the floor of the Council chambers one night and do this first aid bit. It was, in a sense, looking back—it was more a bit of adventure!—rather than that we would have been much good at anything (laugh). It really wasn't likely to happen out where we were but you had to show you were willing* (energetic tone).

As has been discussed in the chapter on wifehood, wartime was also spoken of as a time of sexual danger. Florence, Irene, Lucy, Dagmar and Val particularly stressed their difference to girls who took sexual risks. In these accounts, war confirmed heterosexuality and monogamy. For example, as a single woman, Irene told of long hours of voluntary work in hostels, canteens, nursing homes and fund-raising. When explaining that she didn't invite servicemen home she related that *it didn't appeal to me, because I mean, there was just mother, my sister and I*. Irene's mother died in 1930 and
World War II began in 1939, therefore this statement would be discounted by some. However I would argue that this ‘mistake’ should be seen as symbolic of Irene’s understanding of war as a potential threat to women. Across Irene’s personal narrative she took up the notion of her connection to her biological family and the account of war was no different. Family was told as the safety net in more ways than one. War was used to confirm Irene’s understanding of herself as a family woman, not to transform it.

However for Dagmar and Josephine, war was told as a pivotal point in their lives. Both women recalled their war service as a turning point, and I would suggest that their narratives do reflect evidence of some new discursive positions. Josephine had followed family tradition in becoming a nurse—it was a sensible choice for women—but she described the outbreak of war as where I think that suddenly I found that life was real and life was earnest. To this point in her personal narrative, nursing had been told as a job, but with the outbreak of war, Josephine began to explain herself as a witness to history. To Josephine, the war had direct relevance to her life as she related her patients’ injuries not just to her nursing role but to her understanding of overseas theatres of war. When Josephine was posted to New Guinea she came close to death with scrub typhus. She took this experience from a nursing approach speaking of it changing her attitude to what nursing was really about.

The war also exposed Josephine to a wide range of people, and vicariously to a wider range of learnings. In the following extract Josephine illuminates her exposure to the widening discourses of women’s sexuality. Josephine did not return to this theme but instead linked this experience to a sense of herself as an adventurer who through the adventures became worldly wise. Josephine constructed herself as the caring woman (nurse) but by recalling her life in a series of historical cameos, she represented herself particularly as an eye witness to history. She drew on a combination of the discourses of scientific progress (medicine) and caring (nursing) in a way that allowed her to speak
about the traditional affective feminine skills as well as the technical knowledge of the
sciences.

Josephine: I was green. I was not only green I was bilious almost (laugh). Because I thought I knew most things, but one of the things that absolutely
shocked me was the type of—see all the women that I’d trained with at kids
hospital—they had similar backgrounds to mine. We all had rooms to ourselves
with the exceptional few—mostly friends who shared. I landed in the army and
some of us were living in dormitories and some of these other women from all
sorts of hospitals up and down and around Australia. They were from every walk
of life. Living in a dorm and me being very young and them being much older—
they used to discuss very personal aspects of their love life and the boyfriends, in
graphic detail. I was shocked. I didn’t think people talked like that. These things
to me were very private. It wasn’t so much how they felt—it was what they did!
(energetic tone). I’d sort of been in the country and knew the basic things about
most things, but I was absolutely horrified at how women—I thought men had
odd talks, but to come across it with women was really quite shocking. I think
now—God I must have been—thank God I kept my mouth shut.

Josephine proudly tracked her work narrative parallel to medical advances and the
professionalisation of nursing. Her first graduate job was with children’s orthopaedics:

Josephine: I was scared stiff the war would be over or I would be caught by
Man Power— it was great fun—but suddenly we were given orders that all the
kids had to be sent home—the army was taking over.

Later Josephine saw active war service:

Josephine: In New Guinea the sterilising was a cut down kerosene tin on primus
stoves...under every bed was a stretcher and as they brought in the new casualty the
one in the bed was put under and the new bloke got the bed...But there was
something that drew you all together.

Josephine continued the narrative as a witness to history well beyond the end of war. She
told of her experience in the United Kingdom with the latest medical advances.

Josephine: They did fantastic surgery, massive surgery...they did forequarter
amputations, hindquarter amputations, amputations of the hip and leg. Some people
survived. Some didn’t.

Her neurodiagnostic position in the United Kingdom provided personal triumphs: If I did
nothing else in my life, I rescued Richard, a misdiagnosed institutionalised eight-year-old
who was able to return to live at home for the first time in many years. On return to
Australia, Josephine told of beginning a self-help group for tracheotomy patients: that was
satisfying, of instigating theatre quality assurance and being one of the first graduates of
the new professional nursing administration courses. The following extended extract
illustrates how Josephine spoke in a way that located her in a larger context as a witness to, and actor within, what she saw as important historical times.

Josephine: Well at the amputation ward, some of the soldiers there had trodden on mines and had no feet, others had really horrible injuries so badly infected they'd had to amputate. There was a strict rule that if it was a badly shattered leg you amputated at the site of injury but leaving enough tissue for treatment later. Anyone who had a gunshot wound with a fracture ended up with osteomyelitis and they were filthy and frightful. It was heavy work. But then when penicillin was available—about a year after we had it we closed the amputation ward because we weren't getting new casualties only the older ones (proud tone)...The poor unfortunate hurt people had to have an injection every three hours. If a fellow was hit by a bullet or was injured with a gun shot wound then the stretcher bearers would put a field dressing on and get him back to the field dressing station where immediately doctor, sister or orderly would give him an injection of this penicillin and tie a big blue (like a luggage label) on him with PEN in huge letters on one side and on the other side there would be the hours of the day—24 hours army day. The medical orderly tied the tag on to a button or piece of shirt. As they went back through the lines of communication from the stretcher bearers to the field ambulance to the casualty clearing station etc. right back to the AGH [Australian General Hospital]—every three hours willy nilly regardless they got an injection of 10cc of penicillin. By the time they reached the AGH they had a clean wound. All you had to do was set the fracture and it was a simple injury...Following the introduction of penicillin osteomyelitis was a rare complication - on the whole the result was quite magical. People have taken it all for granted now, but it was absolutely incredible, it really was (energetic tone).

By taking up a position as a participant/observer in important historical times, Josephine was able to accredit her own skills and development in a way that enabled her to (re)construct what was for her a unique identity. Josephine’s historical commentary that began from her war experiences located her as a particular ‘knower’ or learner. This was a very different identity from the family-centred young woman whom Josephine described prior to the disruption of war.

Dagmar was the second woman who spoke of her war experience as a pivotal disruption: one which reflected an uptake of a different discourse about her own competency. Prior to the outbreak of World War II, Dagmar was a 19-year-old clerk in an insurance company, a time she (re)constructed as limited and limiting.

Dagmar: I wanted something that was more of a challenge I think... I looked around and thought it's going to be a long time before I'm personal secretary to anybody. That was one reason why I wanted a way out of it (firm tone).
Dagmar recalled that she did not hesitate when the Australian Women's Army Service asked for three recruits from her company. Dagmar undertook induction training and a six-week course for officers and reached the rank of Lieutenant and Acting Adjutant of the Special Unit, noting that *once I started to get promotions I was determined to go the whole way!* In this position Dagmar worked with regular army and those who went behind the lines. She reflected that for an Australian girl in the thirties, the range of men she met through the job was radical for the times.

Dagmar: *[The unit led] into getting to knowing people from all over the world. Which was quite a big thing in those days actually* (proud tone).

BP: *Oh yes.*

Dagmar: *They were mostly very casual sort of people. You'd never seen a less-armyfied lot of officers* (warm tone). *The signallers were taken from the trained ranks, but these men would come in and sort of forget to salute the colonel... They were given officer rank...although it was army it was semi-casual* (fast pace).

In World War II Brisbane was a garrison city with a large influx of American soldiers (Taylor (1994) further examined Queensland women and World War II) and Dagmar recalled the riots and violence in Brisbane as well as the war overseas. She told of a war that changed her life and she began to draw on a sense of self that was competent, multi-skilled, practical yet remaining caring. Again in Dagmar's account the effect of personal context was apparent.

Dagmar: *I think if I'd been put in a different type of unit my life would have been different. Being in that special unit and being helped by a CO who thought your work was good and who pushed you and good promotion and into officer school and so on. Your self-esteem went up too, because you knew you could do these things* (emphatic tone). *If I'd got to another unit, or doing search light work or something, you would have sat there for the rest of your life and I think the army gave me a really good push ahead for myself. I knew I could take responsibility and I knew I could supervise people and so on* (energetic tone).

Dagmar recalled that her Commanding Officer (CO) was a mentor, *he sort of adopted me and I think I fulfilled his dreams of an officer in the family; a promotion* Dagmar noted that neither of his own sons achieved. In her account of war service, Dagmar spoke of her skills in a less gendered way than in peace-time. She emphasised her management skills,
her ability to work under stress, her ability to maintain confidentiality and her skills of dealing with men from diverse backgrounds. She did not echo the popular texts’ conflation of war service, consumerism and femininity that was privileged at the time, whereby women were encouraged to do their patriotic duty and remain feminine at the same time. The following Australian Women’s Weekly advertisement is typical.

Putting on a Brave Face—Despite the clouds of war, beauty still carries on. By day, uniforms replace the frivolities of yesteryear but, when the stars are twinkling, romantic loveliness still holds sway. There are Cashmere Bouquet Make-ups to complement discreetly tailored uniforms or softly feminine gowns with flowing skirts. (Australian Women’s Weekly, n.d., cited in McKeman, 1983, p.92)

Indeed when Dagmar spoke of her time in uniform she provided a direct contrast to such a romantic account, however in doing so the concept of glamour as the feminine norm is maintained.

Dagmar: We had the most glamorous clothes! We had khaki lisle stockings! (laugh). They were on issue but the women that we had to give them to up in Victoria Barracks wouldn’t give them to you until you mended the ones you were handing in! You couldn’t hand them in with a hole in them! If you mended them, it proved you had worn them. Anyway, we would go up to the Kit Store. Underwear were hilarious. You were issued with your stockings and pants. They were more like bloomers without elastic in the bottom—and no elastic in the top incidentally! because you couldn’t get elastic. There were two buttons on the side and the material stretched (laugh) and you were always in mortal danger of losing them, so you always had a safety pin in them! Into your singlet. They were khaki too. They were glamorous (laugh). You were issued with your stockings and pants and skirts and blouses and summer drill uniforms. Once you became an officer you had to provide your own. You were given a uniform allowance and you had to have your uniform made to measure. But I always remember those glamour pants with a big safety pin as big as you could so it wouldn’t tear the other material (humorous tone).

At the end of the war, Dagmar was eligible for post-war reconstruction education. She fleetingly considered university, but instead elected to be practical and took a series of homemakers’ courses, and her war adventure was over. On the surface, a feminist analysis could suggest that Dagmar was a victim of patriarchal control, returned to the home when no longer needed. However, Dagmar’s narrative challenges such a simplistic generalisation. On her return to the home, Dagmar told of moves into community voluntary work, not as a member, but as a leader. She moved from town to town with her
husband, always taking significant roles soon after arrival. Although Dagmar left the work-force on the birth of her first child, her war experience had led her to develop a sense of self that incorporated strong leadership qualities. This enabled Dagmar to speak across her personal narrative as a community leader not just a member.

Dagmar spoke of her army service as a turning point where it is apparent that alternate discourses became available and she found greater investment in these. Prior to this point in her personal narrative Dagmar had spoken from gendered positions: as a daughter, as a female student and as a woman clerk. Her war service enabled her to speak as a citizen, a patriot, an adventurer, and also as a particular ‘knower’.

Dagmar: I found that when I came out [of the Army] I was thinking differently from a lot of the people that I'd been friendly with before that had stayed in jobs in [my home town]. (strong tone)...But I think having proved to myself that I have the confidence to give these talks [as part of officer training] and to do the work that I did, I think it was the thing that changed my life, more than most other things I suppose (slow, deliberate tone).

It is apparent that, in contrast to the other women, Dagmar’s and Josephine's experience of war offered quite different discursive possibilities. For Josephine the transformative movement was from local nurse to historical witness, thus she was able to speak in collaboration with other workers who were part of the heroic advance of medicine. The transformation for Dagmar was evident from her incorporation of the language of leadership into her accounts of everyday life after the war. Dagmar did not reject the role of wife or mother, rather her account suggested that to speak of community leadership became a compatible development. Both women’s accounts illustrate another form of immersion learning that allowed them to speak as ‘knowers’ in a very specific context. The learning arising from war was both transformative and transportable.

Death
The death of a close family member was told as a traumatic event in all of the narratives, however only two accounts suggest that the death was understood as of transformative
potential. Val, Lucy, Dagmar and Emma explained the death of their husbands as the end of the marital relationship and the beginning of a new era of widowhood. Without minimising the pain of the deaths, the women explained this time as one of adaptation. Florence’s and Josephine’s accounts however suggest that for them the death of a family member was transformative. Both women told of ‘nervous breakdowns’ following the death.

Although Florence knew her husband was dying from Motor Neurone Disease, an experience in his last year was told as a challenge to her lifelong Christian position.

Florence: Twelve months before [my husband] died he went to a faith healing service. I don’t know how you look on these things, but after that he did have — he had the best twelve months that he’d had for a long time. I couldn’t cope with that really well. But he certainly was better. Then of course when he died so suddenly—that was a shock because I hadn’t expected—it wasn’t the way he normally would have gone with that condition. I thought “Did you heal him Lord or didn’t you!” or have I been on the wrong track! Oh, it was dreadful at the time, really to cope with and understand. I still of course don’t understand, but I’ve learnt to live with it (very strong tone).

A year later, Florence experienced a ‘nervous breakdown’ and was hospitalised for 15 months in a psychiatric institution with severe clinical depression.

Florence: But then twelve months after he died I had a breakdown. So I guess that was a backlash, I don’t know. They do say with a lot of trauma it can physically react a long time after. So that’s why I ended up here at [the retirement village].

BP: So you had a period after he died of probably recuperating to some degree, but then the breakdown...

Florence: I think it was a combination of two things I think in that initially it was physical. I believe that most breakdowns have initially a physical cause which develops into a depression and an inability to cope.

After treatment with medication and therapy, Florence was able to live in the hostel section of a retirement village. Florence drew on her Christian beliefs to make sense of this time. She believed the Lord was testing her and preparing her to serve others in the aged care facility.

Whilst I fully accept the religious coherency that enabled Florence to positively incorporate this experience into her personal narrative, I would like to supplement this
with a poststructuralist understanding. From the time that Florence’s husband returned from the war, damaged and needy, Florence took on a sense of family maintainer, financially and emotionally. Just as she planned a new era of retirement, his disease demanded an even greater contribution through physical as well as emotional and financial support. On his death, all these investments dissolved. What actually broke down were all of the subject positions that Florence had invested in to that point. None of the discourses available to her made sense. However over time, Florence was able to reassemble her investment both as a carer and an unpaid worker as she found new relevance in her life at the aged care residence.

The death of Josephine’s mother was the second account of death as disruption. On her return to Australia in her late thirties, Josephine had become the primary carer for her ageing mother. Although her mother’s death was not unexpected, Josephine told of it as a crisis.

Josephine: I had a wonderful relationship with my mother and when her health and memory was declining I had the responsibility of her. And therefore—that was a big responsibility and it was a very unhappy one because this disintegration of personality was absolutely heart breaking really and it wasn’t till after—I think I mentioned that when she died that it was so sudden and it wasn’t a lingering thing and that she didn’t deteriorate any more. I still knew her as a personality that she—there was some days when she was just her normal self. But, and, later on the effect—of that, of her, of that period of my life and the effect of her death had a very bad effect on me and I had a sort of a break down. I didn’t grieve - there was no—I missed her. It was almost like missing the cat—it’s terrible to say that, but you see I was intensely relieved and I went slightly mad afterwards, because for two and a half years I hadn’t been able to have a moment to myself. So I had no mum, so I had parties. I partied on. I did all sorts of weird things, which were, entertain madly, and I got myself into, and then it suddenly hit me that this—what in hell am I doing with myself—and I had to sort of—and I was quite disturbed for a while. And it was a nasty,—I went through about a nasty two years of sort of having to more or less—analysis—go back to basics and analyse myself and things about me and sort of I had to, and I came up against a few things that I didn’t realise (quiet tone).

Josephine did not expand on the psychiatric care she had, except to say they were good blokes to talk to, nor did she elaborate beyond the few words of a few things I didn’t realise. However immediately following the extract above Josephine moved on to discuss her acceptance of her distant relationship with her brothers, and their lack of
understanding of her achievements within nursing. It is clear Josephine’s mother’s death was a crisis involving her identity and the ensuing narrative attention to the biological family suggests her revision of family relationships. No longer ‘daughter’, Josephine did maintain a sense of herself as ‘family keeper’ with her extended family. As with Florence, Josephine’s account revealed which parts of the available discourses were able to be mobilised to move on from ‘breakdown’. Her illness had forced Josephine to retire early from paid work therefore there was no potential to draw on the discourses around paid work. However when telling of her life after this period Josephine concentrated on her many community activities including a political lobby role for army nurses and on her activism for the elderly and in this way appears to have resolved the private crisis by moving on to speak of herself as serving others through her public roles. It is intriguing to note how Josephine linked her commitment to political advocacy back to her learnings from her mother. Again this illustrates the fluid public/private divide.

Josephine: If [my mother] had problems she would go and see the Stipendiary Magistrate—the Stipendiary Magistrate and your members of parliament, State and federal. So she was always on good terms if there was something bothering her, so I knew you could do this (business-like tone).

When both Florence and Josephine experienced nervous breakdowns, they were temporarily positioned in a passive role—as victim/patient/client. For two women who had themselves been family heads this was a radical disruption. In response neither woman took on totally new discursive positioning instead they both found their way back by drawing on familiar discourses. Both accounts reveal how the transformation was to privilege one discourse above another. For Florence, Christianity was told as a life commitment, but one that had minimal attention in the personal narrative until her husband’s dying days and her subsequent breakdown. The Christian faith enabled Florence to transform her confusion and grief into a trial with a pay-off of service to, and reward from, others, thus Christian service and the caring woman are spoken of as compatible. In a similar way for Josephine, the death of her mother and her subsequent breakdown led to her forced early retirement and it can be seen Josephine lost both her
major roles in life at the one time. This was not told as a total crisis as Josephine had invested in a notion of herself as a public figure in paid work therefore it was compatible to continue this in unpaid roles. Josephine forged coherency into both paid and unpaid work through this notion of the public self.

In the disruptions found in the nine personal narratives, it is apparent that in the re-telling these disruptions were not understood as radical transformations. Alternative discourses can provide radical transformative learning; as is evidenced for example when women begin to understand domestic violence as a power issue rather than as the result of their own perceived inadequacy. In this situation a new discourse names what a woman already suspects but has not been able to name. Due to changed circumstances, in Josephine, Dagmar and Florence's accounts, I would argue that transformative learning can be seen as also possible through the elevation of new facets of an existing discourse. This shift in perspective enabled the women to resolve crisis in a way that opened up potentially more rewarding investments.

Extensions
By focusing on the accounts of Josephine, Dagmar and Florence, I do not wish to suggest that the remaining six women did not experience times of trauma and challenge. Each of the women faced a number of life crises, however in their accounts of learning from these crises, the women did not obviously draw new discourses, or elevate a different discourse, rather they extended their discursive understandings to incorporate the crisis or challenge. Because of this it is important to examine how the women spoke of their activity outside the home and family, and therefore the following section will examine how the women spoke about extensions through paid and unpaid work, through travel and through reading.
As examined throughout this thesis, each of the nine women of this study privileged the discourses that place home and family settings at the centre of female subjectivity. Through a range of uses of the notion of caring they imbued their daily activities with a meaning that became enabling to them as individuals and that could be perceived as rewarding. It was this discourse of caring that also enabled the women to speak coherently of their moves outside the bounds of the domestic sphere. Just as the women spoke about caring for and about their family, they were able to extend this to speak of a caring for and about others in a community setting.

**Speaking as community carers**
The notion of caring was an investment that within the domestic setting appeared to give greater returns than a notion of service. In the nine personal narratives, caring for the needs of others outside the biological family was told as a compatible extension. It allowed the women to speak of activity outside the family in an acceptable way. As a result, the skills and attributes related to family caring are spoken of as portable. To speak as carer within the community was one way the women appear able to resist the limitations of the discourses of domesticity and yet at the same time to validate these discourses.

The way that these nine women utilised a discourse of caring to understand and validate their activities outside the home sheds light on a subtle form of resistance to the limitations of the dominant discourses of domesticity. I hasten to add that resistance is a word that the women themselves would personally discount and in saying this I do not wish to call on myself as the more knowledgable interpreter. I believe the women would understand
resistance as an overt oppositional action. Instead I am drawing on a Foucauldian notion of resistance, one inextricably linked with power¹.

Bronwyn Davies (1991) has suggested that maintaining particular subject positions in frequently used discourses is one way in which it is possible to create a coherent sense of self. The notion of carer worked in this way for many of the women. Whilst I do not wish to romanticise the confinement or minimise the damage possible for some women within the domestic sphere, I have found in the narratives of these nine women telling accounts of how through ideas of ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’ projects outside the home can be productively held in tension with those within the home. Such projects can be understood as part of a process of resistance to the limitations of discourses of domestic life, especially to one of service. The narratives revealed that to utilise the notion of caring provided a congruent first step beyond the home, one that enabled each woman to become exposed to a wider range of discourses. In the nine narratives, caring for was extended into the accounts of voluntary work, paid work, and social action.

For some of the women, caring in the extended environment of the community setting remained central to the account and was told as a validation and expansion of valued skills and learnings. For others, their extension into the community sector, although told as beginning with an enrichment of existing skills and learnings, was told as eventually providing new horizons for learning. Within the home, it was most congruent to speak as a caring self, however when accounting for activities outside the home some of the women began to draw on a sense of self-in-development. Yet the notion of caring was central to each of the narratives as the rationale for the first step beyond home and family.

¹Just as power has been conceptualised by Foucauldians as a capillary process rather than a monolithic property, resistance must be conceptualised in a similar way (Foucault 1980a; Weedon, 1987). In contrast, Marxist use of the term draws on an oppositional politics, connoting a struggle for what has been determined as the property of power (Gore, 1993). Discourses are not static rather they are constantly in flux. Thus they can attach to strategies of domination or resistance (Gore, 1993). For the individual, the possibility, indeed the need, is to adapt competing discourses in the most positive way that is apparent to that individual; to seek the best possible investment; or the one that presents the least intrapersonal conflict. If we understand resistance as a daily process of adaptation to competing discourses, and a corollary to the process of power, its capillary properties become visible.
When the women spoke of their activities outside the family, for five of the women their caring was articulated through their activities as voluntary workers in their community. These were the middle-class and married women, Louise, Margaret, Emma, Dagmar and Val. They were women who had the material security to enable them to extend the application of their skills from their family's needs into the community of need. However, this is not to say that the remaining women did not undertake significant unpaid caring. Florence, Lucy and Irene appeared to be less able to label their unpaid activity as it was enmeshed with the domestic setting and arose from the needs of extended family and more local neighbourhood needs.

**Lucy:** I was always visiting elderly people because I had old friends, more so than young friends. Well, I suppose my mother had a lot of old friends and it would be "Oh, Mrs So-and-So is sick". You'd kind of just pop in.

**Irene:** What I thought was so wonderful in those days [pre-World War II] we helped our friends! and the ones who were out of work you did something to help them (warm tone).

The middle-class women were able to claim some of their activity through the notion of volunteerism, whereas the working-class women subsumed their extended caring under the rubric of family. Thus for the working-class women their community activity loses visibility and acknowledgment as an extension beyond home and family.

Lucy, Irene and Florence in particular spoke of themselves as neighbourhood carers, but because this caring was not organised through community agencies, they explained it as part of what a good woman/neighbour did. In their later years, and as their economic circumstances changed, these women began to speak of their community work as significant. It appears that the construct of retirement is compatible with volunteerism and for the working-class women, their accounts suggest it was necessary to continue to undertake work that was socially useful and that allowed them to continue to invest in a notion of themselves as hard workers. Common to both groups there remained a baseline of caring for others beyond the bounds of biological ties.
Women have been the major providers of voluntary welfare work in Australia (Fisher, 1983). This predominance of women reflects a patriarchal culture in which women traditionally have been located as wives, mothers and daughters first, then have been permitted to extend into volunteer work that might meet similar needs for caring and service in the wider community (Misson, 1990). Australian women have been extensively used for service provision, in contrast to the United Kingdom where women have primarily been home visitors or the USA where their role has been fund-raising (Baldock, 1992).

Anne Misson (1990), in her historical review of Australian women as volunteers, has argued that women’s voluntary work falls into two categories which are extensions of Anne Summers (1975) “Damned Whores and God’s Police”: ‘the good woman or lady bountiful’ and ‘the bad woman or political/social activist’. In the early decades of this century the work of the ‘good women’ volunteers included philanthropic work focused on infant welfare, the new kindergarten movement, family nutrition and hygiene and alcohol reform (Reiger, 1985). In the war years it involved fund-raising, emergency service training, victory gardens and comforts for the troops (Taylor, 1994). However from the 1950s as the Australian welfare state developed and government agencies took over much of the work of family support, public health and the like, the need for women as benevolent volunteers receded (Curtis & Noble, 1993). Their remaining spheres typically included church or school fund-raising, children’s recreational activities such as Girl Guides and some support activities, particularly for the aged or those with disabilities (Fisher, 1983).

The work of the ‘bad women’ volunteers has equally varied across this century. This group encompasses women agitating for women’s suffrage, for access to education, employment equity and for marital rights, thus they can be seen in unions, political parties, and community activist groups. Many of these activities could be classified as
‘feminist’ as they challenged the patriarchal discourses and their prescriptions concerning women’s place (Misson, 1990). Women have been also found in more generic social justice movements such as the peace, environment and local lobby groups. At the core, ‘bad women’ volunteers are notable for ‘speaking out’ and questioning the status quo.

However the arbitrary division between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ women volunteers can be misleading. Benevolent volunteerism has been rightly critiqued for its paternalism (maternalism) and its contribution to the maintenance of social stratification in which certain women controlled and oppressed other women (Voigt, 1986). Social activists have equally been critiqued for not acknowledging the class dimensions of their action (Ollenburger & Moore, 1992). Further, many women have been found in both categories at the one time; for example, early in the century women could be seen to be agitating for improved infant welfare practices for the working-class, the right to vote and abstinence at the same time. The women of this study were no exception. As voluntary work varies from conservative to radical it remains crucial to explore individual understandings of the place of voluntary work in any one woman’s life. Importantly, although paid work has been accepted as a learning environment, voluntary work, until recently a typically feminised arena, has been under-recognised as a site for learning at a personal, social and political level (Elsey, 1993).

As the women spoke of their unpaid work, it appears that it was first understood as an extension that was only possible when family needs were met. Not one of the women told of significant voluntary work when their children were under school age. Once children were at school, labour outside the home was possible. This understanding of voluntary work as an extension of mothers’ work was reflected in the Australian Women’s Weekly of the day.
The following extract is taken from a special feature "How to Survive Parenthood".

All mothers work, whether they go out to a 9-to-5 job as well as rearing a family, or feel themselves fulfilled by creating a happy and orderly home and taking part in the community around them...We desperately need those women who work so hard for better schools and communities, who help to inform the public about important social issues. (March 13, 1968, p.12)

In all of the accounts, family care-taking remained central, however, as the needs of schools, churches and disadvantaged groups became apparent to them, most of the women spoke of recognising and utilising their transferable skills.

Emma: I think my people skills came to the fore when I said how much I enjoyed Canberra when I got involved with the schools and Guiding again and on committees—and liked working with people and found it fun to be working for fetes. That's what we were all doing!—organising things that had to be organised! (energetic tone).

Val: One thing I've found frustrating is when these different [voluntary] organisations—you know your ideas should work but the bosses won't even listen to you.

BP: So they don't recognise the strength of your knowledge?

Val: No! The knowledge is there! and also the experience! and we have done it and made mistakes and corrected ourselves and gone through the whole experience (defiant tone).

Margaret and Val, although also serving on fund-raising committees and the like, privileged their work with children with disabilities. They spoke in similar ways about the compatibility of their caring approach to mothering and the skills they used as volunteers. Margaret understood herself as an observant mother and volunteer, whilst Val spoke as a guide in both situations.

Margaret: (Speaking of her children) I was very fond of [my] children and still don't find children a bother. I find little children very interesting. You can see their thought patterns on their faces (laugh).

Margaret: (Speaking of the children with disabilities) I was very fond of the children in the preschool and I would have been very happy to work in some way there.

BP: Having done some work in the disabilities field [myself]—it's a wonderful field. A lot of people say "isn't it depressing?", "isn't it sad?"—but it's the opposite.

Margaret: Tremendous happiness.
BP: It is, and every little achievement is a huge one. You get so much more excited when a child can spoon something into their mouth for the first time.

Margaret: When they see a butterfly or something—it seems as if they've found some happiness that few of us attain.

Val: (Speaking of her children) I didn't have to be Mum—"here do as you're told"—that was dictating to them. They had to do—well we'd discuss it.

Val: (Speaking of the children with disabilities) There were children who had never been out of their homes...They learnt much! so easily! because we explained it to them, quietly and calmly.

For Val, the extension into community caring was told as a response to her husband's early death when she was in her mid-forties. Prior to this, Val privileged her caring within the family. The death of her husband was told as a time for overt reflection.

Val: I thought "well I wonder if [the Centre for children with intellectual disabilities] do need any help" because I couldn't live with golf and being a nice lady and entertaining and things. My husband had gone and I wanted more to do.

BP: So, how long after his death was that?

Val: Practically straight away. He died in 1965...It would have been 1966 when I started. I had friends who were being a bit of a nuisance. They kept trying to organise men friends for me. I was so fed up—I wanted to get away from my friends—it sounds terrible (strong tone).

BP: No, but their help was misguided?

Val: They couldn't understand that I just wasn't interested. I started talking [about volunteer work] and I got right into it then.

Due to the increased longevity of women compared to men, a new life-stage of widowhood has been constructed in popular texts. Concepts such as 'the empty nest syndrome' and 'active' old age are reflected in magazines such as the English Women's Weekly. Val's need to be more than a nice lady and wanting more to do was compatible with this emerging constitution of successful ageing as one that should be productive.

If you fritter time and procrastinate, promising yourself to do something 'next week' without fail yet not filling that time with something else rewarding...You are letting [time] slip through your fingers, as if it were sand instead of the most precious thing we have. (English Women's Weekly, June 17, 1978, p.31)
[The women featured in the article, a forty-, a fifty- and a sixty-year-old] each bear witness to the cheerful truth that middle-age can be a halfway house with a door which opens on to something new; the end of one road but the beginning of another...The important thing which these three women have provided is that you must never accept an ending as a full stop, but merely a comma, or a pause, when you can look around, take a deep breath and begin again. (English Women's Weekly, June 26, 1982, p.25)

It appears that a woman's work is indeed never done and in her older age a good woman looks for extensions as Val did.

Although Val's friends saw her future as remarriage, Val clearly spoke of resisting sequential heterosexual coupling. Instead, as in her account of wifehood in which she had constituted her role as one of an equal working partner, Val preferred to continue to invest in the notion of herself as a worker. Voluntary work, although unpaid, was work. To move into the community as a substitute mother was told as a congruent first step; a step that allowed Val to continue a sense of independent work. Val began with full-time voluntary work with children with disabilities but when finances became tight, she turned to paid hospital work as a ward clerk for fifteen years.

Val: [The ward clerk job] suited me because I wasn't trained for anything else as you know—no training of any sort. And it suited me because I was amongst the people and with the people and able to help outside the jobs that were set down that I had to do (business-like tone). And that sort of developed my theme of get out there and see where people needed someone even just to listen to. Everyone wants someone to listen to them. I developed a—in fact I think in 1982 when I had one of the first courses was learning to listen properly – Lifeline gave me that too. You learnt to listen and respond.

In this extract, it is apparent that Val did not formally acknowledge the domestically derived interpersonal skills that she brought to both her paid and unpaid work. She spoke of just helping. As she linked the disability work, the hospital work and her later work as a Lifeline counsellor, she did begin to articulate skills of empathy, effective listening and of a supportive presence. Because she undertook Lifeline training, a formal course, Val appeared able to draw on this formal acknowledgment of skill to finally accredit her own learning. She clearly linked real learning with formal training.
Throughout her family and work narrative, Val spoke of valuing the dimension of empathy, listening, understanding and responding to people, whether they were her sons or her patients. She construed this as a natural talent, but paradoxically one that she has also worked to develop. For Val, anything outside the home was told as a form of work, but work itself continued her sense of a self as one who developed knowledge to help people and who strove to deepen her interpersonal skills as a part of her caring for and about others. In this way she is similar to Misson’s (1990) ‘good woman’ volunteer.

Whilst Val explained unpaid work as a contribution to a ‘better life for the needy’, in Margaret’s account there was evidence that she found a limited investment in that sense of volunteering and spoke of more resonance with the volunteer work that aimed for social change as with Misson’s (1990) ‘bad woman’ volunteer.

**Margaret:** *Mainly I think (pause) I felt I had to do something with my life and I’d been terribly involved with committees and schools (emphatic tone) and it wasn’t what I wanted to do and I thought a lifetime of being a committee lady is not what I want. I thought I’d escape (laugh) and do something different (slow, emphatic tone).*

Here as Margaret spoke of *escape* she alluded to a sense of resistance to the notions of the traditional female volunteer. As was discussed in the chapter on motherhood, Margaret imbued her narrative account of mothering with an awareness of the societal dimensions of the role, and it is this same strategy that she used to explain her voluntary work. As well as the traditional family-based voluntary work of school and community groups, Margaret was an active member of the Communist Party, and of movements for peace, anti-nuclear and the environment. She spoke of a sense of social justice and an intellectual connection to these issues. Her narrative was indicative of the link between ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’ (Tronto, 1989), and the possibility that any one woman can be both a ‘good’ and a ‘bad’ volunteer.
Early in her personal narrative Margaret explained how she was not like her mother and father whom she described within the benevolent middle-class charity model.

*Margaret:* *There had always been discussion in the house about [social issues] and although [my mother] would have been by no means My Lady Bountiful or anything like that—my mother was not that sort of woman! But she didn’t feel that it was improper!—that some should have and some should not! She didn’t have that sort of social conscience thinking that there should be a different way of doing things. My father thought that it was strange that people were ungrateful for soup kitchens and I could always understand why people were ungrateful! They didn’t want a blinking soup kitchen!—They wanted to have a job* (energetic tone).

I would suggest that Margaret, as a middle-class woman, may have had a particularly difficult position within the ideology of the Communist Party. When Margaret in the earlier extract spoke of her political voluntary work as an escape, I would suggest it was from the traditional benevolent middle-class perspective that she also wished an escape. Margaret spoke from a Marxist understanding but as a middle-class and privileged woman she was to an extent an outsider to the working-class communist movement.

*Margaret:* [referring to her time in the Communist Party] *I wouldn’t say I was a political animal! by any means!—it’s not something I want to do — it didn’t—it was something I had to gird myself to do — I didn’t enjoy it one bit. *I did things because I felt I should do them* (firm tone). *I think it was when the need was there and something was being organised and you felt maybe you should step in and do something to help; but I was never what you could call a valuable member* (quiet tone, smile).

The Communist Party did have popular appeal until the about-face of the Menzies Government in the 1940s (McKernan, 1983). Even the Australian Women’s Weekly featured the gallant women of Russia as allies in the war effort photographed in their job of felling of forests to provide Moscow with firewood for the winter (October 7, 1939, pp.28–29). However the Communist Party of Australia has been critiqued for its gender insensitivity, and Joyce Stephens (1976) has argued that:

*(n)o organic connection, however, was perceived between a woman’s life in the family and the public world of paid work, except for the negative attribute of her failing to understand a narrowly defined class struggle.*(p.27)

Margaret was not one of the paid workers but a mother who had described her role as creating a haven in a difficult world. She explained her awareness of the class struggle;
however, as a comparatively privileged woman, perhaps Margaret could not speak as a ‘valued’ or ‘real’ member of the Communist Party. Instead she drew on the notion of duty to explain her political activism. The contradiction of middle-class volunteerism within a working-class movement seems to have caused Margaret to discount her contribution, and she diminished the subsequent learning. As both a woman and middle-class, she spoke as an outsider to the Communist Party.

**Margaret:** Oh no, [political action] wouldn’t have been my choice. You needed someone—you know, noses were to be counted—you felt you’d put your nose there—and I was very interested, but I’ve never enjoyed a good argument or anything like that and I think really political animals love a good argument don’t they (firm tone).

**BP:** Yes, they do.

**Margaret:** No, and I don’t consider that I would have been a valuable member of any of these organisations—I was, you know, she also ran, sort of thing (laugh).

Emma, like Margaret spoke of two stages to her work as a volunteer. Like Margaret in her child-rearing years, Emma recalled voluntary work as a simple extension of nurturing, service and duty. Emma’s early voluntary work had paralleled her children’s stages—Girl Guide administration, school fund raising and the like, however at times this was told as problematic even though it was traditional women’s work.

**Emma:** Back to [my] organising abilities in the Guiding world—I used to get involved in these big camps that they’d run and [my husband] used to get fed up with me then! He wasn’t interested in Guiding. He was quite interested in me being Commissioner and being someone of note in the district—but the nitty gritty! He used to think it was ridiculous that I was worrying about getting loads of wood for the campsite (further description).

**Emma:** Yes, I would have done [Lifeline training] years ago and [my husband] just wasn’t keen on it. I thought “I won’t go into that—causing problems” (quiet tone).

Emma did not review her husband’s effect on her wish to do voluntary work. She maintained her sense of loyalty and duty until his infidelity. This she understood as a turning point. I realised that I must be more independent, must pursue more of my own interests, and I’m still working on [that]. Over the ensuing years, Emma became a Lifeline consultant and a support worker for a palliative care association. Emma told of this unpaid work in a matter-of-fact way, drawing it into the continuum of skills of carer.
and nurturer, rather than of individual personal achievement. Although Emma continued
to speak of family as her central connection and caring, her husband’s infidelity appears
to have enabled Emma to move with greater confidence into nurturing roles of her choice
outside the family. Her actions show quite clearly a rejection of her husband’s power and
authority and she extended the discourses of caring into the environment outside the
home. This action did offer Emma a revised sense of independence and competence not as
a transformation but rather an extension of existing discursive positions.

As volunteers, Emma, Val and Margaret were able to talk of an extension and enrichment
of their nurturing skills beyond the family, however as this skill was seen to emanate
from biological family roles it was ultimately constructed as natural, thus unlearned or a
gift. Eva Cox and Helen Leonard (1991) have found a similar dynamic in women’s
accounts of their voluntary work in the 1990s. They acknowledge that to enable the
women to name and claim formal skills it was necessary to use extensive group work.
The women were then able to claim competencies such as mediation, conflict resolution,
counselling, operating networks, implementing programs, training, setting priorities and
developing communication systems to name but a few. Emma, Margaret and Val did not
explicitly name their competencies although examination of their voluntary roles suggests
that each woman could claim some, if not all, of the competencies from Cox and
Leonard’s work. Instead of naming such competencies, the three women used the concept
of caring in a new environment to account for their learning. Nurturing, service and duty
are thus seen to be portable investments. Indeed Nicholas Brown (1995, p.149) has
argued that in the decade of the 1950s, Australian women’s domestic commitments and
their community commitments meshed through the discourse of the ‘civic minded
woman’.

Voluntary work did offer the first and most congruent step outside the bounds of home
for most of the women, and it had the potential to expose a woman to new discourses.
Some of these discourses were compatible with the carer/nurturer role, however some
offered extensions beyond traditional caring. It appears that different competencies and skills were possible to articulate if a woman took up these discourses. Although beginning with a sense of caring, the women who took up other discourses began to speak more as a self-in-development.

**Speaking as a self-in-development**

The understanding of one’s self as a self-in-development was evident to some degree in the narratives of home and family although, when contrasted with the narratives of paid and unpaid work, the sense of a self-in-development is generally muted in the domestic accounts. Louise was the one exception, speaking as she did of a continual need to maintain her own development when she had small children to care for.

When speaking of the self-in-development in this way I am referring to the accounts that constructed a need to develop as a more autonomous self in the liberal humanist sense. Elisabeth Porter (1991) has argued that liberal individualism has four dimensions: “the priority given to the individual, the importance of autonomy, the solitariness of this autonomous individual and the parallels...between this rational autonomous individual and the rational economic man” (p.131). Since suffrage was granted to women, a rational autonomous individuality for women was partially constituted by discourses of democratic rights, and increasingly women have been exposed to a number of discourses that elevated individual self-development as a generic goal. The citizenship discourse encouraged all nationally thinking people to develop in order to contribute to their nation. As has been discussed mothers have been exhorted to develop for their own good and for that of their children. Particularly from the 1960s onwards self-development, the finding of your inner self, has become a middle-class fashion, evidenced by a plethora of self-awareness and individualistic therapies and movements.
Such discourses were evident at the time that the women of the study talked about extending beyond home and family, and indeed they were reflected in the women’s accounts. As the following article from the Australian Women’s Weekly suggests, women were exhorted to plan their self-development.

No one can predict life. We cannot count on anything but the moment at hand, and to use it for fulfilment, for self-realisation...if [a mother’s] homemaking has included outside interest and hobbies, community service, opportunities for growing and learning through reading or taking courses, if she has continued to develop skills around her own special interests, then she can make the gradual adjustments [to children growing up] that will be needed. (March 13, 1968, p.13, original emphasis)

Magazine articles often featured mature-age women who, as wives of public figures, showed their success and pride in self-development as well as loyal wifehood. For instance in an Australian Women’s Weekly biographical article New South Wales Premier Askin’s wife Mollie said:

I see myself...as an independent individual. I feel I’ve achieved being myself, quite apart from my husband. This seems very desirable for all human beings. And I’m all in favor (sic) of working wives, so long as satisfactory arrangements can be made for the children...besides, women really have a need to express themselves. (February 21, 1968, p.3)

Beyond the popular discourses of the 1960s that encouraged self-development, it must be noted that mothers in the 1960s were exhorting their own daughters to develop to their full potential by staying at school, then taking up the opportunities for a job such as teaching or nursing. As Lesley Johnson (1993) has noted the daughters of the 1950s and 1960s were given a specialised time of development through the construction of the life-stage of ‘teenager’. If as mothers to these teenagers women were encouraging their daughters to reach their full potential as human beings, that discourse must have had some ramifications for their own lives. The following popular poem published in the early 1970s reflects this mother–daughter mutual developmental link.
Since I had a mother whose many interests kept her excited and occupied

Since I had a mother who interacted with so many people that she had a real feeling for the world

Since I had a mother who was always strong through any period of suffering

Since I had a mother who was a complete person I always had a model to look up to and that made it easier for me to develop into an independent woman.

(Susan Polis Schutz, 1973, p.31)

The discourse of a self-in-development was particularly apparent in the narratives of paid work. It appears that when the women spoke of themselves in the family and in the community care settings, they focused on the development of others. However when speaking of public and paid work, of travel and of their reading choices, the women were able to more readily draw on discourses of a separate self rather than of the connected domestic self.

**Public work**

In all of the accounts the women spoke of paid work as real work. Unpaid community work in contrast, although told of as rewarding, generally had more resonance with the private domestic sphere and its overtones of ‘natural’, women’s work. Paid work was told as a step away from the home, into the public world. However there are two exceptions to this. Louise and Dagmar spoke of their community work as a public action and it is for that reason I have called this section, public work. Through public work, certain skills were spoken of in a formal sense and the transferable domestic skills were at once valued yet discounted.

Continuing in, or returning to, work for the working-class women and Val as a middle-aged widow, was an economic imperative; however, for the middle-class women,
returning to work was related to both the work ethic and self-development. As has been
discussed earlier Emma explained her return to work as part of developing a more
independent self following her husband’s infidelity. Other return-to-work narratives were
less crisis-driven.

**Dagmar:** That [town] was where I got bored (laugh)...I went to church and it was
totally uninspiring. I decided not to get involved in that. That’s when I decided to
go back to work and went up to [the Army base]. Being bored was the best thing I
ever did (fast pace). It got me back into the work-force (quiet tone).

**Margaret:** It was a bit of a worry thinking about going back to work because I
didn’t have any formal qualifications to do anything really!...I just sort of felt “Oh
well, off you go, do something—you can’t lurk round for the next forty years
perhaps!” (matter of fact tone).

It is apparent that for all of the women their paid work was understood as a job, thus there
were technical aspects to be mastered. The ensuing skill development was understood as
part of ‘doing a good job’ rather than as valued personal learning or achievement. When
the women spoke of their work, it was the work relationships and interpersonal
dimensions that were elevated in the accounts. In this way, the women illustrated how
they continued their sense of caring into the public sector.

**Emma:** [Geriatric nursing] [In the nursing home] I didn’t work as a sister. I
decided I didn’t want the responsibility. I made very firm friends with two
other women there who I had enormous respect for, and they decided the same
thing. I could see that I could get all the emotional—and the fulfilment
without the responsibility (warm tone)... - so I took the easy way out
(laugh)...but of course I think that there is no mental stimulation [in geriatric
nursing].

**Margaret:** [Clerical work] When you work at the National Library you see all
these interesting people doing their work—Manning Clarke and you’d see
Judith Wright and Rosemary Dobson and all sorts of people—remember those
beaut people?

**Val:** [Hospital ward clerk] I wasn’t a desk type but we made it very
personal—the ward clerks then—I mean if someone looked a bit woozy, you
went and made them a cup of tea. Later on I was told at the hospital—just keep your
fingers out of it...it was nothing to do with you—so the whole thing changed
completely. I wouldn’t go there if you paid me twice as much now (insulted tone).
Irene: [Medical secretary] I always tried to make the patients feel that they were most important—you know my typing didn’t matter.

Florence: [Secretary] [The office I worked in] it’s very impersonal now. Where in my days and even up till I left 15 years ago—it was more family oriented personal relationships.

Across the accounts there was little claiming of workplace skills beyond the simple descriptive limit. This is a similar dynamic to that found in learning as mothers in which the women spoke of having learned with their first child (in a ‘banking’ sense), then being competent from that point on. Instead of speaking of ongoing skill development the women instead elevated their caring for those at work, both at the level of fellow employees and clients. This affective level was further emphasised by long-term friendships that the women told as an important ongoing outcome of their paid work experiences.

Two accounts of public work drew strongly on the notion of a self-in-development—Dagmar in unpaid and paid work and Louise in unpaid work. In the 1960s and 1970s the discourses of the omni-present mother were changing and a notion of quality mothering began to emerge. Again a feature article in the Australian Women’s Weekly reflects this change.

(T)here are women who work away from home who despite some guilt and a great many plain, ordinary, realistic problems and burdens, have so much to give, and play so many roles well, that they love their work and do it well, and also have a ball with their kids, because their times together are so precious. (March 13, 1968, pp.13–14, emphasis added)

After she had children, Dagmar spoke of the importance of her leadership roles in community groups. She told of this as an important balance to ‘just being at home’. For Dagmar private life needed to be supplemented and community work offered that possibility without any rejection of her domestic responsibilities. It is apparent that domestic work on its own did not offer enough return; community work—sanctioned women’s work—offered new possibilities.
Dagmar: We started a new mothers' club and I was the first secretary and the second president of that. And that's where I met friends too...

BP: So that was where your networks started to develop too.

Dagmar: Yes. Also where you got back a bit more of your confidence again too, by being at the school and being somebody important.

Here Dagmar illustrates how she maintained a connected self that's where I met friends whilst at the same time speaking of her community work as an environment in which she could reclaim the leadership competencies that had become valued through her war work.

Dagmar talked about her community work as a compatible extension for a 'good' woman when her children were young. Her accounts of supervising major fundraising and organising teams of women illustrate how via voluntary work Dagmar could speak as both competent and caring simultaneously. When she returned to paid work, she made this next step compatible with family caring by acknowledging it first as a financial contribution to the family, and second by asserting her maternal judgement that her children, both now in high school, were ready for independence. She did not dismiss family duty, rather she incorporated it through a notion of working for the family but she acknowledged the limitations of family at the same time. I found it boring at home. I thought rather than just doing voluntary work—I'd go to work to pay the house off (laugh). Dagmar's narrative about paid work explicated her work place skills as well as the personal challenges, responsibility and team networking.

Dagmar: [At work] It was just that you liked having the authority to do things on your own. And use your own judgement and initiative and so on. If you made a mistake well you made a mistake. But just routine office work you were just bored stiff. I think if people hadn't been so nice to work with it would have been different of course. But it was always if you don't know anything go and ask Dagmar (firm tone).

Dagmar's account showed how the work environments made it possible for her to articulate continued development of her leadership, authority and judgement skills to construct a sense of personal competence. Dagmar's resistance to what she saw as a limited domestic canvas created a whole new learning environment, one that allowed her to speak of personal development, responsibility and leadership. This matches with the
emerging discourse of a woman’s right to fully develop, as illustrated in a feature article of the Australian Women’s Weekly.

But if you need to do what you do, if it fulfils you in special ways, if you feel a sense of joy and satisfaction, then it’s worth what you have to put up with and it won’t destroy your children. (March 13th, 1968, p.14, emphasis added)

Louise’s narrative of activity outside the family was explained as a necessary part of her intellectual development. Through ideas of spirituality and connectedness, Louise was able to speak of learning that although important for her own development was also connected to the development and well-being of certain others. Although this development had the potential to take Louise far from home in her account, she constantly linked this extended learning to her family and the families of others. Her learnings were thus made compatible with a self who was both a caring and connected family woman and as a self-in-development. Louise spoke of a life project that was a search for meaning. Her child and adult experiences of extrasensory events such as out-of-body experiences and premonitory dreams, coupled with a number of years of academic schooling, led Louise to speak of her development as an intellectual pursuit. This was reflected across Louise’s personal narrative in that she linked her own development to the development of a better world in an intellectual way.

*Louise:* But then you see I felt strongly that the basis is a kind of mysticism and the more you know about it the more you can see the connections between religions and maybe if you really could see these connections clearly and other people could see them, perhaps that...because there’s terrible fights between religions...if only they could sort themselves out this would be a plus in the world, wouldn’t it...so I think this is another thing that’s special (thoughtful tone).

In this extract Louise speaks of connectedness in a way well beyond that of a simple family connectedness. She used an expanded sense of connection in a way that linked to her social activism as well as her own development. Therefore for Louise, a caring and connected self was a concept that extended well beyond the immediate biological family. Louise told of her social activism as part of her own self-in-development as well as part of an expanded sense of a caring self.
Louise did not work in paid positions except for two years as a part-time art mistt-ess at a private girls school; she was however active in the Repertory Society and the preschool movement in her twenties and thirties, and in her sixties was a founding member of Women’s Electoral Lobby, helping set up the first Canberra Women’s Refuge. She was instrumental in founding Canberra’s only Transpersonal Psychology group when she was in her seventies. When Louise spoke of her voluntary work she linked it directly to her intellectual curiosity and her belief in human rights. She spoke as a public actor, not as a private nurturer. I would suggest that her family experience provided some of the stimulus for her community activism. In the following extract, Louise speaks from within the fold of good women volunteers helping others whilst at the same time instigating social change that could indeed disrupt the status quo, the role of bad women volunteers.

Louise: When the Women’s Electoral Lobby started in Canberra I joined it and was quite active—a lot of work—that was an explosion in another direction (emphatic tone).

BP: When did they start? The 70s?

Louise: 1972 I think. I was active for some years—until about—really very active for about four years and (pause) some other change came upon it (hesitant tone)—some newer people came in and some of the strident type of women—all wrapped up in lesbian rights, etc. but bored the socks off me (pause). I was really much more interested in equal rights for women, their married lives—to have that working as well as possible for the sake of the children; family life (energetic tone); I thought that was far more important—to introduce human rights into marriage and divorce in Australia. So I think I’ve got a low threshold of boredom (laugh).

Louise’s use of the word *boredom* was a telling indicator throughout the whole of her personal narrative. Perhaps because of her life-theme of peace, spirituality and global connectedness, Louise appeared unwilling or unable to directly name conflicting beliefs and interactions. In this account, she appears to have found resonance with the early 1970s liberal feminist goals of equal rights for women. In her account she connected this to her long-standing interest in social justice. I would suggest that this liberal egalitarian feminism also connected with her lived experience that she will only describe as a difficult marriage. When the Women’s Electoral League agenda expanded to sexuality choices and rights, it is possible that for Louise there was less, or even no, connection or potential
investment. When she spoke of boredom, Louise avoided recalling direct conflict and illustrated that an investment in equal rights discourse enabled her to act and think in a way she found compatible with her beliefs of family duty and social responsibility.

Although paid and unpaid work did enable some of the women to explain themselves as a self-in-development, two more conventional forms of self-development were apparent in the personal narratives - reading and travel. In differing ways the women all used these areas to illustrate how they were active as learners across their lives.

**Travel**

New places, new people and new experiences were a logical reason why six of the nine women would acknowledge travel as important to their learning. Lucy and Florence did not tell of travel and as working-class women it is probable that finances were not available. Margaret did travel overseas more than once but did not include this in her account. Jeannie Douglass (1994) has argued that overseas travel offered Australian young women of the 1950s a temporary and socially acceptable release from the expectations of domestic femininity of the time. Indeed this is apparent in the accounts of Josephine and Louise, however for the remaining women although travel was told as part of their older age these accounts suggest that travel was linked with independence in that age stage as well.

Louise explained that she had always desperately wanted to travel and in the following extract a discourse of cultural inferiority is evident.

Louise: *Australia was so cut off from other parts of the world. It was a torment!* (strong tone).

Throughout her personal narrative, Louise maintained a focus on travel and adventure as part of her intellectual life, however her account of her first trip particularly illustrated how she held both home and family and her own needs in tension. Her account of travel across England and Europe was told with great detail and Louise recalled herself as a
traveller who immersed herself in new experiences and was far from a tourist. Further through explaining the privations, both physical and financial, Louise constituted a sense of resilience as well as independence and adventure.

Louise: *I realised I had an opportunity of going overseas if I could be careful with my money so I had my two boys put to school over in Adelaide so my mother could watch over them. I completely forgot about my Canberra life. But that was a very enriching experience. It was a big adventure.*

Josephine also explained her seven-year sojourn in England primarily from a position of independent adventurer, noting as Douglass (1994) also found that this was a typical adventure for single women in Australia in the 1950s.

Josephine: *A lot of Australian girls went over at that particular time. Seemed to me the thing to do! to travel!* Like Louise, Josephine recalled travel from a discourse which defined difference as exotic and in which she emphasised her role as a participant observer. The following is typical of the many word pictures Josephine painted. Here there is a sense of travel as confirmation of cultural difference.

Josephine: *[The Scottish family] lived in this wonderful old home right on the top of the hill looking up the valley. And, my dear, they had ancient servants, very elderly retainers. The maids had frilly caps with streamers down the back who stood behind your chair. It was likely something out of a book! And my bedroom was like something out of a book too—it was pure Victorian. The hot water was brought in every morning in a copper kettle with a towel over it, and when I went up to my room in the evening, I found my nightie laid out. I had one decent one, so I left that out. I wore the other one but left the nice one out (laugh).*

Through picturesque oral portraits, Josephine described the people that she met as ‘characters’ which enabled her to speak in a way that minimised the social differences between herself and them - a Scottish Laird with his one leg and beautiful wife, another droll Scot who had an Australian relative, *did rather well for himself - chap named Gowrie* [an Australian Governor-General], farmers with a foot and mouth outbreak in an English county and, back at work, Richard, *the most gorgeous child* and the Lady Matron
who took her two spaniels on ward-rounds, just like two Corvettes. Travel provided the initial impetus for Josephine to draw on ‘characters’ not ‘class’, a process she continued in her account of activities as a lobbyist in the 1990s. In this way, it is possible to see that Josephine created a particular form of liberal egalitarianism. Travel was a means by which Josephine engaged with a wider world but in the telling via ‘characters’ not ‘class’ Josephine was able to constitute herself as equal but different.

Josephine: It didn’t matter who they were or what they were, they are all the same as far as I’m concerned (strong tone). There are certain protocols of course, but I was very fortunate that I had I suppose the type of upbringing where I was able to meet anybody at any level and I wasn’t fazed by it at all. Every now and then I get the giggles to myself and think “Oh my God what am I doing here” (laugh). They’d ask me all sorts of interesting questions about Australia. I really did have a wonderful time and as I say it was a great learning experience. I went to places that normally I wouldn’t have gone to. I became involved with looking after kids—being the chauffeur, the nanny and the barmaid and things like that. You needn’t be unemployed if you’re willing to do anything. (energetic tone) I was very fortunate I think. It’s been interesting (quiet, strong tone).

In contrast to Louise and Josephine, the remaining four women who spoke of travel explained it as an adventure of mature age not youth. The discourses of individualism and independence underpinned all of the accounts except for that of Irene. Irene continued her life-theme as a worker as her travel was primarily as a companion to an elderly gentleman. Irene did acknowledge this difference between her own and the usual adventure travel of youth.

Irene: I remember seeing a photo in the paper where the ships were leaving the Quay in Sydney and all the streamers coming from the ships and the passengers standing at the rails with flowers. I think I always felt that I would like to do that. I then did it on three occasions, minus the spray of flowers, of course (laugh).

Emma told of travel as recreation and as part of a togetherness in marriage until her husband’s infidelity when she was in her mid-fifties. From this point her travel narrative altered dramatically.

Emma: It wasn’t until our relationship changed that I could think of planning my own travel—I wouldn’t have dreamed of it before that Then suddenly I needed to do my own thing and travel was one of them. Also, I was spending my own money.
Prior to this time, Emma spoke as a companion and a tourist, however following her husband’s infidelity, she told of a deliberate re-positioning of herself as more than a wife. As was discussed in the chapter on wifehood, Emma moved away from being a dutiful wife to understanding herself as more of an independent self. Travel with her daughters and their partners, and on her own, provided the illustration of this independence. Emma described these travels as cultural immersion, as part of her whole family connection and as a part of her second blossoming.

Emma: I think the next blossoming is much more recent. Of realising that I must be more independent, must pursue more of my own interests. And I’m still working at it.

Emma: [My daughter said] she felt that we’d progressed from mother to daughter to becoming friends, and I said how lucky I was to have them to do things with and she said ‘Yes, and we wanted to do things with you, because you did adjust to the way we wanted to travel. You were prepared to carry your pack, and put up with the discomfort and inconvenience’. It was a whole new adventure and a very exciting one for me.

Dagmar’s account of travel paralleled Emma’s although her travels arose from the forced independence of widowhood. Like most of the women, Dagmar found travel extended her horizons, however Dagmar’s account illustrated the challenge of conceptualising herself as an independent individual. Even though in her account of her paid work Dagmar was able to speak as an individual with leadership abilities, travel appears to be different. In the following extract, it appears that travel for Dagmar was a test, and a way to strive for independence in a different manner from that of the workplace.

Dagmar: [Travel] I think is a great teacher and the money angle is pretty difficult just now with the Australian dollar not being what it should, but I think making yourself go overseas on your own and so on has been a great thing. In fact doing lots of things on your own... One of the hardest things is to go into a restaurant on your own. The first time I went to a picture show on my own and it took me a long long time. And I thought people are think “what’s wrong with that woman, she’s got to go on her own, or she’s got to have a meal on her own”. I’ll go into a coffee shop and have something. But still, after 20 years, I don’t like going into a restaurant for a meal on my own. I’ll do it in Sydney where nobody knows me.

It must be acknowledged that travel was only possible for the women with material security. However, as a working woman who could not consider travel because of material circumstances, Lucy’s narrative provided a powerful illustration of how local...
adventures could be considered in a similar way to the extensions of travel. Recurring in
Lucy’s narrative is what I have named an extension through the acknowledgment of ‘daily
joys’, illuminating how the notion of hard worker can be enriched by a creative awareness
of daily life. For example after a twelve hour wartime factory shift and travelling home in
black-out conditions, Lucy recalled one of the daily joys.

**Lucy:** *I can still remember that I’d get off the train and as you know the [local]
station is right on the beach. And the windier it was, the better I’d like it! I seem to
have an affinity with the sea. And then you’d go home and open the door and you’d
smell the beautiful soup. They were lovely days* (warm, energetic tone).

This is a nostalgic comment but one that does not draw on idealisation of the past, rather it
indicates a daily life enriched through sensitive observation. In another example, Lucy
explained moving to another suburb because she had always believed its Aboriginal name
was so beautiful. The small ‘daily joys’ in Lucy’s account illustrated how one woman
could speak of extending herself in a materially constrained situation.

Although travel did include a strong recreational element, the narratives of the women
indicated how it also offered some new extensions. In particular, adventurer and active
learner were combined in the accounts, and each of these women told of undertaking as
much travel as she could afford. Except for Josephine who has had health problems, the
others continue to be adventurers. Perhaps Josephine’s forays as a lobbyist into the
foreign lands of government ministers’ offices could also be considered as part of her
continuing adventure.

**Josephine:** *I couldn’t see the point of living in Canberra with all the politicians
all around us and not making use of them, and getting them on side or at least
talking to them... I knocked on doors and talked to people and it was fascinating
really. And one thing led to another... but knowing who to talk to and getting
their interest. And if there’s something that needs to be done, or that you’re
willing to put pen to paper and develop your argument from there, I think that [is
what] a lot of people are scared of... I got to know the people like the national
headquarters, and some from interstate. It opened up a different lifestyle.*
Reading

In the times before television and mass entertainment, reading was an affordable and accessible extension for most people (Lyons & Taksa, 1992). Although Irene spoke of not being a reader, the remaining women told of books as always part of their life. Two particular themes of reading emerged - reading as an intellectual passion and reading as a way to enter other lives.

Val, Louise and Margaret told of their reading as a passion, part of investigation and wider understanding. Each had their own favourite direction - Val family psychology, Louise spirituality and transpersonal psychology and Margaret Australian history and social issues, although each spoke of being broad readers. They told of maintaining their passion even when their family responsibilities were greatest. Margaret’s comment was the most extreme.

**Margaret:** *I did miss being able to read. When my last child went to school I started reading and it was a very strange feeling because I couldn’t stop reading. I’d read the labels on tins from one end to the other—I just read and read and read and I’d even find that it was time for them to come home for lunch and I’d done nothing but read. I must have been starved for it I think.*

These three women integrated reading as a part of their lives rather than an addition. Throughout their narratives these women drew on their reading to explain and elaborate about their lives and in doing so I would suggest that their reading may have been used to develop increased subject positions. For example, Val spoke of how her *usual investigation sort of thing* helped her with marital and family relations, understanding disabilities, counselling and more recently a chronic illness. Louise linked many of her life experiences to her reading, almost in a formal referencing manner. For example she related her war experience to recently released government documents and related her family structure to those of which she had read. In a similar way, Margaret referred to her reading whilst in the Communist Party and her monitoring of ‘alternative’ newspapers and journals as they shed light on social issues. For these three passionate readers, the activity of reading was not separated from the activity of life.
Dagmar, Lucy and Florence also named reading as an important part of their lives, albeit in a different way - as a way in which to learn about others. Indeed Lucy told of how her mother-in-law and husband did not believe her when she said she was making her weekly visit to the council library. They believed it was more probable Lucy was meeting someone, for who would want to go to a library weekly? However, for Lucy reading was recalled as providing an additional way of understanding people and extending her knowledge of daily living. She told of a particular interest in autobiography.

Lucy: *I mean you get a person set in your mind and you think “Oh I wonder what their life is like?”*

Throughout her personal narrative, Lucy privileged the understanding of others. Reading contributed to this whilst also providing recreation. Florence and Dagmar told of a preference for historical novels, explaining how fiction was an escape but one which provided ‘factual’ information at the same time.

Florence: *While it’s fiction, it’s true to form for the period, and the people that lived in that environment then and it’s really quite educational...that’s why I like fiction, you can go in and out of different worlds, different eras, different situations, from comedy to tragedy, etc.*

These three women did not draw an arbitrary line between fact and fiction. Instead they appear to have used fiction to gather facts about others’ lives and to consider their life in light of this. One could suggest that as readers they were not as political as the other group of women, the passionate readers, however I would suggest that because their reading was applied from private life to private life it appears to have less grand application than the reading about social issues and social change. None the less, each of these women told of reading as expanding the horizons available to them.

Not one of the women spoke of popular magazines as part of their lives. Louise and Emma spoke of daily newspapers with guilt, feeling they should have read them but just didn’t find themselves able (willing) to make the time. The women who did account for reading as a joy in their lives illustrated how it was able to be incorporated with little cost
into family life. Reading was seen as a private way of extending understanding of family life and in some cases of opening new intellectual areas. In the following extract Louise illustrates how a private reader could extend well beyond home and family.

Louise: In 1975, I went into the National Library and I saw on the outside of the New Scientist—it said Right and Left Brain—so I picked it out and read it. I think this was the original article published by the people doing research in California on the right and left brain. It was such a revelation and I understood it and I thought this explains so much—well, about two months after that I think, I took a trip that took me through Moscow. I was in Moscow for three days, and the people on this tour were invited to go along to a party put on by the Russian Australian Association and along I went...We arrived and there was this table covered with goblets and food; and a three piece orchestra going for its life; and a group of Russians including the Orthodox Archbishop from the Kremlin—in fact I think I saw him on TV recently, more or less blessing Yeltzin—and anyway a woman interpreter came up to me and kept by me. The President of the Society made a speech and he finished by saying 'I propose a toast to art' which of course was a nice comfortable subject, not political. Now in the tour there was a Roman Catholic priest—who really was attached to the church in London but he'd been to Australia—he'd been sitting at my table, and I knew that he'd be terribly anti—that it would be terrible if he started to make speeches. And I saw that he was about to make a move to reply and this is where, Barbara, I had to work quickly and use my wits—I said to the woman beside me “is a reply expected” and she said “yes” I said “look it's International Women's Year and I can think of a reply” (fast pace). So she shot up to the President—got there well before the priest...so I was asked up there...and she sat beside me. What I thought of was that I could use this information about the two halves of the brain—that I thought it was new!, it was a good thing to say in Russia! to point out the importance of the old right side!—the imaginative, the intuitive, spatial side. Well anyway, there was I—years ago I just could not have done it—I would have been terrified (emphatic tone). But I got up there and I'd say a few words and the woman would touch my arm and translate me into Russian. So I explained about the article that I'd read and they'd discovered the brain is in two halves and the newer part is the logical, left side develops speech for sequential thought. Then at the end, and I said of course, we've neglected—our education is concentrating on the left side, neglecting the right side—we're becoming unbalanced and it's making us all a bit mad (laugh). They thought that was wonderful. So therefore, and women are collected in the arts, and therefore I whole-heartedly supported this toast. And honestly, I was quite pleased that I had the guts to get up and do it (smiling).

Reviewing the narratives beyond home and family

As the nine women spoke of their activity outside the home, it became apparent that a subtle and un-named form of resistance to the restrictions of a solely domestic life was constructed. At no stage did any of the women explicitly reject the socially sanctioned world of women's familial responsibilities. Instead they illustrated how it was possible to move beyond the domestic horizons of wife and mother by finding extensions outside the
home that were compatible, or to frame conflicts within extensions in a way that created such compatibility.

In the paid work environment, this compatibility was often maintained by naming work as a direct contribution to the family financial resources rather than as a search for an outlet or personal skill development. Although every woman in some way described her engagement with paid labour as personally satisfying and as extending, for most that aspect was not privileged. Work was also spoken of for its affective dimension as a place to continue the role of caring and the maintenance of interpersonal networks. This was done by extending the concept of caring beyond the bounds of family to the world of unpaid and/or paid work. Thus the women were able to name interpersonal skills and learnings that were transferable from their domestic experience. In this way, what emerged was a deepened level of such learning. It is interesting to note that this was not a two-way exchange as there was no evidence that the women transferred learnings from the work place to home.

When women drew on a sense of a self-in-development, this appeared to emerge in the first instance from the extension of a caring self. Development was described in a more individual way, but this was told in a manner that maintained the primacy of relationship at the same time. Therefore, although new attributes such as leadership, personal progress, technical expertise and greater autonomy were able to be articulated, these accounts maintained a connected sense of ‘we’. As was explored in the chapters on wifehood and motherhood, the notion of caring is compatible with a sense of self as connected. It appears that in differing ways each of the women co-opted this notion of caring in order to sanction and understand their activities beyond the home. For some of the women this led to narratives that extended the notion of a self-in-relation into wider relationships; for others it allowed them to speak as a self-in-development, extending on from an initial basis of the educated wife and mother. This is not to say that the women exclusively spoke as either a caring self or a self-in-development, rather they appear to
draw on whichever of the two was the most compatible with the activity they sought to
explain.

Remembering that these were personal narratives that were told to explain learning across
the lifespan, it appears the notion of caring provided a coherent link in the stories of
learning outside the home. As each of the women had privileged a connected and caring
self in the domestic setting, the theme of a self-in-relation beyond the biological family
was compatible. Thus when a woman began to speak of herself as a self-in-relation
outside the home, she could continue to speak of the skills and learning that had
developed in the home. In this way, at the least she was able to account for a growth and
increment of skills particularly those skills with affective and interpersonal facets.

In talking about voluntary and paid work, caring and nurturing remained the central
theme. However, there is an important political dimension apparent within the accounts of
voluntary work—work that typically has been seen as conservative women’s work. Six
of the women spoke of their voluntary work as a form of social service, with Josephine,
Margaret and Louise the exceptions naming their work as social action. Except for Irene,
all of the six women began by primarily drawing on a discourse of nurturing and caring to
explain their social service, however, over the time of their voluntary work they came to
speak more politically. Voluntary work initially took the five women outside the home
into an environment where their nurturing could continue, however as they gained
experience as volunteers, they told of beginning to recognise the ‘needy’ as the
‘disadvantaged’. As a result, in their seventies, Val, Emma, Lucy, Dagmar and Florence
are able to name social issues as much at a macro level as an individual level.

It should be noted that indeed discourses have changed over the fifty years of these
women’s voluntary work, exemplified by changing terminology - charity work, voluntary
work, unpaid labour to name but a few. However as the women spoke of their changing
perceptions, it appears that what may have begun as a simple ‘coping’ resistance, of
needing to do more outside the home, had the potential to become the basis for more extensive learning. Josephine, Louise and Margaret spoke of their volunteer extensions beyond the home as an overt choice of activism. However societal activism became more relevant to the other five women when they were exposed to social issues first hand and as discourses provided new concepts. This exemplifies how both lived experience and the changing discourses available can offer the possibilities of extending, deepening or revising learning.

I have used the notions of the caring self and the self-in-development to examine how this group of women spoke about their activity outside the home and family. The discourses of caring and nurturing continued to be a crucial commonality in all of the narratives, enabling the women to speak from within the community of good women and in differing ways allowing them to illustrate how they individually extended within this community. In this way, each of the women seemed to be telling me that she was more than just a wife and mother. By extending the concept of caring into their community work, the women were also illustrating the portability and utility of this concept. Although this meant that they therefore did not draw on other concepts associated with paid work, such as management, conflict resolution and competitiveness, it made their private and public work compatible. Further it enabled them to explain the development of maternal competencies as a lifelong project. Even the disruptions of death and war were to an extent underpinned by understandings of caring. It appears that for these women the notion of caring was a particularly pliable concept in the context of home, work and community. For this group of women, there was an intricate connection between caring, knowing and learning.
Chapter 10

SPEAKING ABOUT LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT:

THE ANSWER WITHOUT A NAME

In 1963 Betty Friedan coined the phrase 'the problem without a name' to describe many middle-class American women's sense of concern with their lives which they could not name. As the nine women of this study tried to share with me how and where they had learned across their lives, I became aware of a similar dynamic. I have come to call this 'the answer without a name'. As I have argued in Chapter 2, 'Examining the frameworks of learning and development', the language that we have readily available to describe learning predominantly arises from the teaching/learning interface of formal education.

This language was utilised by the women but it did not serve them well. Using the criteria of formal education, the women were not able to speak articulately about their learning. For some they were education 'failures', for others there were some 'successes', however for each of the women it was apparent that much of their learning could not be explained using the language of formal education.

This chapter will examine the ways in which the women were able to speak of themselves as learners. Because formal education gave the women neither the tools nor the confidence to speak as learners, I suggest that they spoke of themselves as knowers, rather than learners. Further as the women spoke of development and learning as linked, I will examine how they explained their development by contrasting development as 'learning to do woman', rather than 'learning to be a woman'. Finally, I will examine how the nine
women's accounts present a challenge to the conventional adult learning concepts of reflection and of transformative learning.

**Naming learning**

Formal education in the twentieth century has developed its own language through which to name learners and learning. The epistemology is one that assumes one objective and knowable reality. Knowledges are therefore conceptualised in a hierarchy with the objective, testable facts being privileged above the subjective, apparently less knowable aspects of reality. It follows that as knowledges are not all equal, and people are not equal in their competencies some people need only manual learnings, others mental; and other areas do not even need to be learned for they are deemed to be natural. Further knowledge has been regarded as something the individual appropriates, an activity in which some individuals are better than others.

Formal education offers a number of paths to facilitate the individual appropriation of relevant knowledge, and this group of women had a particular path available to them. Their formal education was a domesticating education. If a woman's cultural capital matched that utilised by the education system some compatibility with the goals of formal education could be articulated, however if a woman's material life was significantly different then it was even harder to name one's self comfortably as a learner within the constructs of that system. Lived experience however provided the women with other information that related to learning. The women were able to recognise certain skills and knowledge developed through everyday life. Whether she found as notable her mothering skills, community development skills or workplace skills, each woman was able to draw on other environments in order to acknowledge that at least in some ways she was indeed a successful learner.

This is not to suggest that the women spoke of non-formal learning environments as a direct and readily available alternative to those of formal education. Rather their accounts suggest that although they did not have confidence in naming and explaining their learning
they could clearly acknowledge the settings in which they had particular competence and in which they had developed. Although it appears that the learning arising from the non-formal settings was regarded as 'lesser' to that of formal learning, it was recognisable by the women as learning that was worthy of acknowledgment.

To differing degrees, all the women of this study found the formal education system limiting and its language not applicable to themselves as learners. Only the accounts of Louise and Margaret reflected some formal utilisation of language that arises particularly from the education system, for example critical analysis, induction and information testing. These were women who had undertaken university education, thus they had such language available to utilise in their personal accounts. However for the remaining women, and indeed frequently for Louise and Margaret, their learning in everyday settings was not able to be explained by the language of formal learning.

At one level, this did mean that the women were silenced, as they struggled to explain how they were learners but not the 'real' learners of formal education. They did not find an alternative language of learning. However I would suggest that what they did instead was to show me, albeit obliquely, the many ways that they were 'knowers', were 'skilled' and were women who had 'developed themselves'.

Whenever we name the world we are simultaneously naming ourselves. As the women spoke of the everyday world that they inhabited they revealed how they understood their place within that world. Through the action of constructing life themes, the nine women told of this place as logical across a whole lifetime. It must be acknowledged that over their seventy-plus years of life, historical and cultural discourses of a woman’s place have been fluid and as the women individually spoke of their learnings outside formal settings, they were also revealing their knowledge as situated. Interest therefore turns to how and where the women named their world in a manner that enabled them to speak of themselves as learners in ways other than those of formal education.
At any one time, there are a limited number of discourses from which we can draw in order to understand and explain our lived experience. Most relevant to this group of women was the discursive field of the 'good woman', within which can be found discourses which define and describe wifehood, motherhood, citizenship and the like. When a woman finds rewards from investing in subject positions compatible with being a 'good woman', and continues to develop that sense of self, I would argue that she is determining at the same time what are to be the most compatible learning environments, and indeed what can be spoken of as learning. In other words to take up any one of the positions within a discourse is to take up a concomitant way of speaking of one's self as a learner. For example, if a woman explains herself primarily as a 'career' woman, it is congruent to speak of individual goals and competencies, 'learning the system', work place achievement and rewards, and perhaps 'climbing the ladder'. In contrast if a woman understands her work as 'a job' and 'a contribution to the family', it will make little sense for her to draw on such career ideas of learning; rather it could be expected that she may speak of learning the basic skills, giving a good day's work and learning to balance family and work place responsibilities.

The women of this study took up positions within the discursive field of a good woman that were constituted by, and constitutive of, the private sphere of the domestic. It therefore was congruent for them to speak of their learning utilising concepts from what was constructed as typically private - ideas of nurturing, care and interpersonal relationships. Because this private sphere has also been constituted as the female sphere, they were also able to claim this learning as particularly specialised women's work.

As was noted earlier in this thesis, the private/public dichotomy is in itself a social construction and I do not wish to argue that this is the place in which women are naturally 'real' learners. However, these accounts do illustrate how one group of women utilised the concept of private to (re)construct a speciality area of learning. Further if we utilise
Karen Hansen’s (1987) extension of the public/private/social, the women of this study illustrate how they found learnings from the private portable into the social.

To claim a particular sphere as their own speciality allowed the women to go some way towards naming their own learning beyond that of formal education. However when they were explaining how and where they were specialist ‘knowers’ they utilised some of the concepts of formal (rational) learning, integrating this at times with affective (non-rational) language.

**Private and social knowers**

As the women strove to explain themselves as specialist knowers, they were most articulate when they were illustrating the rational facets of knowledge. This was most often the cognitive aspects. However equally present, but less overtly presented, were the non-rational, and usually emotional, aspects of knowing. Formal education did give some language to explain the rational knowing, but the non-rational was explained more as a personal trait.

The part of their knowledge that appeared to be the easiest to articulate was any knowledge that derived from some form of teacher/learner interaction. As women who were exposed to the discourses of the ‘modern’ woman (wife, mother, consumer, sexual subject), they were able to name when they were in a teacher/learner relationship, particularly with the experts of that field, as a clear learning situation. This is not to say that the women spoke as passive recipients of the experts’ knowledge, but rather that this was a situation comparable to other ‘real’ learning events. Further when a woman believed that she had become competent in an area (such as mothering) the accounts suggest that she then understood herself as competent for all time. In this way, learning is understood from a ‘banking’ principle. Once she as an empty vessel was filled, she could go forward with competence. She had learned with success.

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1 Hansen defines public as the polity; private as the individual, household, family; and the social as the economy, civil society and community (1987, p.120).
It was not only the experts who were regarded as appropriate teachers, indeed at times expert advice was discounted as it did not accord with that of other experts from within the family. More experienced women such as mothers and sisters, and occasionally friends, were also acknowledged as teachers or mentors who could show/teach a woman the ropes. Nevertheless when a woman spoke of learning from either public experts or private experts, she revealed a sense of learning based on a transfer of information from the skilled across to the novice.

It is interesting to consider how static the banking notion of learning is, in that once you have become competent (filled up) you remain competent. It is noteworthy that this form of competence was particularly related to maternal competence. One could expect that as children change from infants to toddlers through to young adults, there would be new ways of knowing needed, indeed I would suggest that this was probable. However as the women were remembering themselves as maternal learners, I believe that they responded to their lack of language about this informal learning by constructing themselves as a particular type of mother, one that was able to be made coherent across the whole experience. In this way a woman could demonstrate that she had learned ‘good’ mothering skills and standards from having her first child then successfully applied this to subsequent children. Because a woman could show an application of her knowing that proved a successful model for more than one child she was suggesting that her ‘way of knowing’ was appropriate.

To name a maternal theme was one way to make sense of diverse experiences. In this way, a woman could speak of herself as a particular (maternal) knower, with particular skills and most importantly as a success in this specialist area. Because learning has been constituted as an individual achievement, each woman could therefore name her own mothering as her own achievement. She was taught and she could demonstrate how she was a successful learner.
However when we consider other processes of learning within the private/social sphere, it is apparent that the language of formal education is less applicable. I would suggest that a significant part of the learning that the women attempted to explain was silenced, or at the least muted by the constitution of this learning as natural. On one hand the private sphere did give the women a socially constructed environment that they could claim as their own speciality area but on the other hand a tension arose as this was understood as a woman’s natural sphere.

When a woman spoke of her achievements as part of what was constituted as naturally a good woman’s capability, it was difficult to acknowledge any learning. The concept of the ‘natural’ mother for instance draws on a biological essentialism that attributes this capacity as ‘instinct’ or ‘genes’. This suggests that you have that capacity or you are deficient, and thus any language of learning becomes problematic. Nevertheless, although frequently ascribing to the essentialist sense of a ‘natural mother’, the women gave examples of how this discourse can be modified to enable a greater sense of individual agency and thus of learning and achievement. This was apparent when the women spoke of inter- and intra-generational learning, of immersion learning and of a particular form of experiential learning.

It was possible to speak both as a ‘natural’ mother and a ‘knowing/learning’ mother by drawing on a sense of family tradition. This suggests that ‘good’ mothering does ‘run’ in families, but within that biological given, a ‘good’ woman must learn to discriminate what aspects of mothering are worthy of reproduction. This was not directly acknowledged, but rather by positing herself as different from her sister who didn’t succeed as well, for example, a woman was able to constitute herself as other. This enabled an individual learning achievement to become visible, without directly claiming it.

The private sphere in particular appeared to be most often regarded as an immersion form of learning. The concepts of ‘picking up’ skills, of ‘trial and error’ and of an ‘apprenticeship’ were not readily articulated as again the women were hampered by the
sense that it was ‘natural’ to pick up such skills. However again in elaborating on what she in particular was able to pick up and indeed what she discriminated as worthy of knowing, a woman was able to demonstrate her individual achievements within the norm.

Overall when speaking of themselves as natural knowers, the women reflect a particular form of experiential learning. Implicit in their accounts is the assertion that they were able to learn from experience, as Florence called it from the university of hard knocks. Each of the women could and did name individual ways in which she was a specialist knower. However what is also apparent, and what is under-utilised in the adult learning and development literature, is that these experiences are historically and culturally located. The criteria for a ‘good woman’ whether it be as a wife, a mother or a worker, were constantly modifying; and as ‘good women’, these women’s accounts show that learning from experience is not a simple and generic adult learning process but a complex process of subjectivity in which culturally available discourses play a significant part. In saying this I do not wish to suggest that the women were cultural pawns but rather that experiential learning is important not because it is something that we should do but that we must do.

As the women explained how and where they were knowers, they shed light on how certain discourses enabled certain learning to be ‘speakable’ and made other learning less congruent. It is therefore crucial to acknowledge this constant dynamic whenever we utilise the idea of experiential learning.

However not all of the ways that the women spoke of their learning were within the rational/cognitive mode. They also explained the non-rational or emotional components of knowing. This was an important part of the personal narratives and again was to a degree subsumed under the rubric of ‘natural’—I’m just naturally a person who likes to help other’ or of course, I wouldn’t want to hurt [others]. The subjective, and in particular the emotional, facets of learning/knowing were an important part of the women’s accounts but they were not easily named as part of the learning process. I would suggest that because much of our language about learning draws on the instrumental dimensions of
learning, there is little compatibility between language describing the affective and language describing the instrumental.

I believe that within their personal narratives, each of the women revealed that it was possible to speak of the non-rational ways of knowing despite the lack of readily available language. I have found three recurrent concepts that were utilised in order to address this dimension. These concepts were caring, connection and interdependence. Although they were used by each of the women in differing ways, nevertheless these notions did allow all of the women to go some way towards an explanation of the non-rational facets of knowing.

**Caring, connection and interdependence**

As I have illustrated in this thesis, the concepts of caring, 'caring for' and 'caring about', were particularly versatile notions that appeared to be portable across a number of discourses, both public and private. To explain one's self as a carer did allow certain instrumental learning to be acknowledged, for example that of physical care and protection; however, I would also suggest that to speak as a carer allowed a woman to acknowledge the relevance of the affective dimensions of interpersonal knowing.

Most of the women did not critically analyse the dimensions of their caring, again the taken-for-granted naturalness of the concept had an impact, however their repeated use of the concept across their personal narratives suggests the importance of it to their own subjectivity. Further I would suggest that the recent trivialising of women's caring by feminists and non-feminists alike may have had an impact on these tellings. This was typified by Margaret's uncomfortable tentativeness in describing her family which she prefaced by saying *So - how can I say this without sounding yucky?* Despite this, caring was important to the women as it enabled them to show how typically female affective abilities were part of their own commitments in life, thus something they utilised and developed.
Not only did the concept of caring allow a woman to acknowledge the affective dimensions of her knowing/learning, I believe it may also be a strategy that allowed her to resolve the dilemma posed by the highly individualised models of learning. Caring for and about are at once acts of the individual and acts of connection, therefore it becomes possible to speak of individual achievement without diminishing the importance of others.

From Chapter 5, the Cameo chapter, to this point, I have demonstrated the many ways that the women spoke of themselves as connected to others, a subjectivity that has been described as relational (Surrey, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c). I am cognisant of the feminist concern with the dangers of a relational self for women (Miller, 1986; Allen, 1993) and the critique of its gender exclusivity (Spelman, 1988), however I draw on the concept of a relational self here to illuminate how it enables a woman to speak as a particular knower. I do not wish to claim it as the women’s way of knowing but as a social construction that appears useful in speaking about learning beyond the over-individualised model. To understand one’s self as an individual and as connected allowed a woman to speak of a dynamic and constant exchange with others. She may not have been able to name the process but it is apparent that it was different to a subjectivity based on separateness.

The accounts of the women of this study suggest that the concepts of caring and connection allowed a woman to understand herself, at times, beyond the dichotomy of independent/dependent. The women did not use the term ‘interdependent’ but I believe this word most adequately describes the sense of connection with others that they valued. This is not to say that the women did not ever speak as dependent and/or independent but rather that as they were attempting to describe their non-rational ways of knowing, at times their accounts suggest a knowing drawn from their sense of interdependence with others.

I would suggest that when a woman spoke in a connected way she was illustrating another way of knowing. As a result of a sense of interdependence, there appeared to be a move from seeing knowledge as an individual asset/product to a sense of knowledge as
negotiated process. Interdependence is a holistic concept that implies a mutual and interrelated learning process. As the knowing from connectedness is always produced between two people as part of their ongoing and dynamic relationship, such knowing is always provisional. In this way the women's accounts show that it is possible to speak beyond the highly individualised, separate ways of knowing.

As the nine women told their personal narratives they were able to constitute themselves as particular types of knowers. They did acknowledge formal learning as one source of knowing but one that was not easily utilised throughout most of their lives. The women did constitute the private/social sector as particularly relevant to them and by explaining the rational and non-rational aspects of this learning environment they were able to suggest, although not overtly name, particular learnings. In this oblique, but I believe telling, way this group of nine women show how it is possible to speak robustly as knowers/learners.

There was a second and equally important way in which this group of women acknowledged themselves as learners. They demonstrated that they were actively developing women. This is a dimension that locates these personal narratives firmly within the twentieth century in which the discourses of individual and self development have been particularly pervasive. Again I would suggest that by focusing on how and where they developed themselves, this group of women found a way to speak of learning beyond the bounds of formal education. If a woman could not draw on ideas of qualifications, credentials, intelligence testing and the like in a positive way, she could demonstrate how she could, and did, develop herself in other ways.

Naming development
The oft quoted phrase of Simone de Beauvoir (1953, p.273) that "(o)ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" provides a relevant starting point for examining the dynamics apparent in the nine women's accounts of development as part of their learning. De Beauvoir's statement indicated a significant break with biological determinism by focusing
on the *process* of subjectivity. I am not the first to extend de Beauvoir's statement by saying that it must be noted that one becomes a woman in a particular time and place. In other words 'becoming a woman' is always discursively located.

As the women of this study spoke of their development, they revealed that they also saw 'becoming a woman' as an active process. In differing ways each spoke of her own goals for a 'good woman'. However although the women spoke in a way that suggested a linear development towards a given 'good woman', what is apparent from their accounts is that across their lives the goal posts for a good woman were continually shifting. In other words as discourses modified, and as lived experience interacted with discursive possibilities, as for all women, this group of women could be seen to be 'doing' woman rather than 'being' woman. In differentiating between 'being' and 'doing' I am suggesting that 'being' implies activity directed towards a fixed essence of woman whereas 'doing' highlights a dynamic, fluid process and the constitutive impact of discourses. And, to extend the Marxist tenet, as with all women, this group of women were 'doing' woman in 'conditions not of their own making'.

Discourses are always multiple and at any time will offer a woman a range of possible subject positions, and as has been already noted, different historical times offer a different complex of possible subject positions. What must be added to this is that the context of the individual's lived experience also impacts on her subjectivity. For example, a move from the country to the city or the death of a family member may be the impetus for new understandings of self. Further, as a woman speaks of her life, it is apparent that certain subject positions are more viable than others depending on the stage of family life in which she is located; for example as a mother of young children compared to a newly-retired grandmother. Thus 'doing' woman can be seen to be the outcome of the interactions of a complex of individual and discursive factors.

This was particularly apparent as the individual women spoke of their development. Common to all of the accounts was a sense of development as a process based on
individual progress. Indeed, I would suggest that this was why the women so clearly linked development with learning. Each of the women spoke in a way that was compatible with the stage theories described in Chapter Two ("Examining the frameworks of learning and development") in that they understood their life as one of progress that involved accumulating greater skills with each stage. As I outlined in the methodology section, I encouraged each of the women to tell her life story in the manner and order that made sense to her, therefore the choice of ordering development in stages becomes relevant. On one hand, stage theories would have made sense to the women as when their children were growing up the contemporary literature spoke of child development in stages, thus a similar model for adulthood would be logical. Further by explaining their own development as one of successful progress through incremental stages, I believe that the women were illustrating that they had been learning successfully.

Each woman told me of her development as a child, as a young woman and as an adult. Although these could be read as revealing ‘stages’, I believe that equally they can be seen as a series of snapshots that allow us to see particular moments of individual development in their historical and cultural location. In other words the women’s accounts of development indicate the possible options by which to ‘do’ woman in a given time and place. As we live a life, the processes of subjectivity are often obscured from the individual. Susan Oyama (1993) has suggested that just as the physiological processes that maintain life are evanescent, so are the moment-by-moment social interactions by which our subject positions and subjectivity move. This subtle dynamic is not readily described or easily able to be acknowledged by the individual, however the snapshots of development in a particular time and place enable the impact of discourses on development to become apparent.

It must be acknowledged that each of the personal narratives was constructed as a logical story of development: a narrative that characterised the present as it named the past, telling of the development of what a woman is by how she came to be (Oyama, 1993). There are two levels of development apparent in the personal narratives: the first relates to how a
personal narrative reveals what that women ‘is’ to herself. For this group of women this was apparent through speaking of a life using a life theme. The selected snapshots therefore may reveal *I am/was a coper; I can/did do it on my own or I struggle(d) and it is/was worth it.* This strategy enabled an overarching theme to be forged, in retrospect, across a life-time. It allowed development to be explained as a particular personal achievement.

The second level is the sense-making revealed in a snapshot because of its time and place. To speak of ‘being/doing’ a good mother in the post-war years revealed a particular set of goal posts for development that made possible personal goals of being a family maker, a maternal citizen or a nurturer/care-giver for example. Later in this group of women’s lives, development often became spoken of as a more individualised form of self development. In the 1960s as the self awareness and individualistic self-celebratory psychologies became popularised, some of this group of women responded to that discourse by setting goals for more individual personal development. The interactivity of age, material location and available discourses is central. For example as a ‘good woman/mother’ it was possible to explain self development as an individual, inner search only if family responsibilities were less demanding, and if material circumstances permitted.

Explanations of development are therefore complex, revealing both the individual and collective understandings. It must be remembered that although changing discourses may offer new opportunities for being, seeing and doing, individual circumstances constrain what may be possible. But what is apparent from these accounts is that individual development was a central way by which a woman could speak about her own learning. Education was one way that development could be enhanced but as these women had limited and limiting experiences in education they instead illustrated how they utilised the learning of everyday life in order to develop. In speaking of her own development as a life project, each woman claimed a particular form of agency. It is possible as an observer to acknowledge how the goals for development are discursively constituted, however at the
level of the production of a personal narrative, it was also possible to see how an individual woman moved within discursive possibilities in a way that enabled her to speak as an active learner, an active developer and indeed an active woman.

In highlighting the ‘activity’ of how a woman may speak I do not wish to construct a binary opposite to ‘passive’ and suggest that the women are either active or passive. To do so would be simplistic. What I am suggesting is that as this group of women tried to respond to my interest in how they learned across their lifetime, the discourses of development provided some relevant language through which they could acknowledge their learning through everyday life. Each woman was able to provide snapshots of development that placed side by side showed a form of individual progress. I would suggest that it is this idea of individual progress that links learning and development in a logical way. Further as development can arise from any setting of life, the women could utilise this concept in their many informal and everyday environments, and thus constitute themselves as active in both learning and development.

How the women spoke about their learning and development was not always direct. I have suggested that this may be due to the impact of the discourses surrounding, and language available from, formal education. Nevertheless they did speak about learning and they did speak about development in ways that allow us to reconsider some of the ways by which learning and development have previously been understood.

From monologue to dialogue
For most of the twentieth century, the concepts of learning and development have had one central feature: they revolve around a particularly individualistic notion of the self. From the behaviourist, the liberal humanist, to the psycho-analytic understandings, the individual has been constituted as the focus for attention. I would argue that this conceptualisation has led to an understanding of the process of learning and development as a monologue. By this I mean that whether it be the inner search for the true self, the development of the person as a self-directed learner or the development of an individual’s
skills and capacities, the dynamics of the learning process create a cycle that begins with the individual and returns to that individual. It is a process in which the narrative is understood as within the individual. This is not to say that the individual/society relationship has been ignored; indeed in the fields of socially critical education this interaction has been of particular importance. However I am suggesting that the narrative process always starts from the individual and regardless of the parameters of the social factors returns to that individual, in what I am calling a monologue.

To give an example—as was discussed in Chapter Two on frameworks of learning, self-directed learning has been a dominant focus of adult learning in the second half of this century. Interest here has been, for example, on how an individual learns best in a learner-centred environment, has the ability to be a self-teacher, needs to be autonomous and is able to direct and assess her/his own needs given an appropriate environment. Differences between learners and learning environments have been acknowledged as arising from a combination of individual and societal factors, but this level of analysis inevitably feeds back to a consideration of how the individual’s learning can be better enhanced. The cycle returns to the individual in a monologic way. An even more telling example of monologue can be found in the human potential movement of self development. In this conceptualisation, there is rarely any acknowledgment of societal factors, as the developing individual is understood to be one who can undertake continuing cycles of self-analysis and inward reflection in an extremely limited cycle of monologic thinking.

What is totally absent from such conceptualisations of learning and development is any acknowledgment of the individual as both discursively and materially located, and as a narrator/interpreter of a lived experience. As discourses both constitute and are constitutive of reality, and as lived experience is located in a particular time and place, I would argue that learning and development are better conceptualised as a dialogue encompassing all of these facets. This dialogue is multi-levelled and beyond a simple individual/society exchange.
On one level, there is a dynamic between a person and their culture. For example the women of this study were white women from an Anglo-Australian background. As this group of women understood their learning and development by drawing on the discourses available in their cultural location, there was a constant process of responding to the discourses which allowed some learning to be possible and others to be less congruent. Further, as some of the women were materially privileged, others were less resourced, therefore material location introduced another factor to the dynamic.

At another level, the women were located in a particular constellation of relationships—all were members of communities, extended families and friendship networks, and most had families of their own. Therefore, they had available to them a limited and specific number of subject positions. Subject positions however are not fixed as role theory would suggest, rather they must be constantly negotiated and renegotiated by the individual on a daily level. Again this adds to the complexity of the dynamic of dialogue.

Finally, it is apparent that over a lifetime, the individual women were faced with changes external to their own family and community. For this group of women, macro events such as war and economic depression impacted on their lives, and on personal levels children were born, family members died and their environments changed.

Given these three levels alone, it becomes apparent that the location of any one woman must be acknowledged as a complex dynamic in which she is best conceptualised in dialogue, rather than in monologue. Indeed if the word was less clumsy, I would suggest a process of ‘polylogue’. However, in contrast to the individualistic notions of generic learning processes and the simple concept of individual/society exchanges, the crucial point is the fluidity and dynamic nature of the individual within the complexity of discourses and material location.

The women of this study reduced the complexity of the dialogic dynamic in order to make sense of the multiple realities available to them. They did this primarily by constituting themselves within the discursive field of the ‘good woman’. However although in itself
this did reduce some interactions it is not possible to remove complexity totally. Both the individual, the discursive field and the society were continually changing and it is an awareness of that dynamic that enriches our understandings of adult learning and development.

Two concepts of learning and development are particularly enhanced by conceptualising the learning process as dynamically dialogic. These are the concepts of reflection and of transformative learning. Although recent use of both concepts indicates a move away from the modernist notion of the rational self, I believe that harnessing the poststructural insights gained from women's accounts of their subjectivity via personal narratives provides a complete rupture from modernism and suggests a potentially rich direction for new theorising.

Reflection, critical reflection, conscientization and critical thinking have been used somewhat synonymously to explain the activity whereby an individual is able to consider aspects, both individual and social, of her/his lived experience. Along with theorists such as Boud, Brookfield, Freire and Candy, I would agree with the centrality of this process for learning and development. However I would suggest that what has yet to be fully acknowledged is that reflection itself is discursively located and constituted. This means that reflection is not a simple skill or a strategy that can be taught to enhance learning but that in itself reflection is a social construct that draws on a particular discourse or discourses for meaning. We must become aware that individuals may draw on the concept of reflection in different ways depending on the discourse that informs their understanding. Ways of reflection arise from the discourse as much as from the individual.

When I considered the changes and movement across the nine personal narratives of this study, I found that there was little evidence that the women 'reflected' on their lives in the conscious, rational way suggested by many of the learning process theories. As the women themselves said in different ways, they just got on with life. However, although
they could not name it directly, the accounts of all of the women did suggest that they sought to make sense of their everyday experiences, and indeed this is a form of reflection.

Reflection has been linked to transformative learning in almost a cause and effect way—if you adequately reflect it will lead to a transformation. Indeed much of the recent literature focuses on how teachers can create conditions for effective reflection that will enable transformations of perspectives (in particular the work of Stephen Brookfield, 1986, 1988). This may have some relevance in the education sector, but goes only a little way to explain how people may experience transformative learning in the settings of daily life.

The women of this study did not speak of reflection or transformative learning directly but in the telling of their personal narratives I believe they shed some light on that dynamic in everyday life. When we re-name important aspects of our world, we transform ourselves. If for instance, a woman understood herself as girl waiting to find the man of her dreams and then on marriage began to speak of herself as a co-worker/partner, she transforms both herself and her world. It is movement within or across discourses that facilitates such transformations.

From the nine personal narratives, it was apparent that transformations can be radical or gradual. Inevitably discourses present contradictions and in order to resolve this, relatively small movements within subjectivity are needed. This is not usually a conscious, rational choice, although it can at times be such, rather it is a process of looking for the subject position that appears to offer the best investment. Transformational learning can arise from contradictions within discourses.

It is possible on the other hand that a discourse that has previously provided rewards may no longer be as rewarding. For example, many of the women of this study spoke of having to re-formulate how they understood themselves as mothers as their children grew up. The facets of the discourses that they had drawn previously had become constraining
and either a new discourse was needed or other facets of an existing discourse redeveloped. Transformation therefore can arise from constraint.

Finally, in extreme situations, it is possible that all available discourses lose relevance and crisis is faced. This was evident in the accounts of ‘break-down’, a word that when examined in a poststructural sense is highly relevant. All available discursive positions can appear to have broken down. Again transformation becomes possible. New discourses may present better investments or again old discourses may be able to be re-worked. In this last example transformation can arise from chaos.

Although transformative learning has often been conceptualised as a perspective transformation akin to a quantum leap of understanding, I would suggest that, although possible, this is less common than gradual transformative shifts across a life, shifts which are often unremarkable for the individual. Discourses work at the level of commonsense and when a new discourse is taken up, it is usually done so as part of the daily activity of subjectivity formation. A new way of understanding life just makes more sense than in the past. Transformation can be radical but more often it is seen as just new commonsense.

Transformations are likely to be invisible to the narrator as, to be functional, they must be able to be woven in to the life themes and narrative storying that makes sense of that individual’s life. As if transformations occur, the story of life is re-worked to incorporate that new commonsense. Occasionally transformative learnings will stand out as crisis, more often they will simply be re-worked into the story of a coherent life.

It is now possible to see that the concepts of reflection and of transformative learning provide examples of how it is possible to reconceptualise learning and development beyond the present fetters imposed by modernist epistemology. In rejecting the search for the core being, attention turns to human experience as a narrative process that is discursively located, thus learning and development need to be conceptualised in a way that utilises rather than dismisses the impact of time, place, gender and culture.
The personal narratives of this group of women do not provide an alternative way of speaking of learning and development. Indeed it would be problematic to argue that any one group of accounts could provide such data because, as I have illustrated, learning and development are essentially hermeneutic. They are not fixed products but dynamic processes of interpretation. Thus any one group can only reveal the historical, cultural and personal factors that impact on their particular processes.

The personal narratives of this one group of women do reveal the potential for a greater understanding of learning and development through the examination of accounts of everyday life. The discourses of formal education and learning have made informal learning the binary 'other', less visible and less valued. The accounts of the nine women I believe indicate the everyday as a rich, and under-utilised, aspect of the human experience of learning and development. Personal narratives reveal the differing impacts of discourses, whilst they simultaneously reveal the processes by which an individual makes sense of the multiple discourses available. This is the focus of the next, and last, chapter.
Chapter 11

MAKING THE BEST OF LIFE

My interest in the nine women's accounts of their lives, their learning and their development began from the naive belief that I could uncover and validate learning that had been previously invisible. My vision was that by claiming learning for one disadvantaged group, other groups may be able to utilise a similar methodology to name and claim their own learning, thus we would enrich our understanding of 'other' learnings. The simplistic nature of this aim is now apparent. Learning and development can be conceptualised as products but I would now argue that to do so inappropriately directs our attention away from the dynamic and complex nature of learning as a process. This is a process that exists not in the activities of everyday life but in the sense-making of everyday life. As the nine women of this study spoke of their lives they revealed some of learning and sense-making, and, because they spoke of theirs as successful lives, they were able to illuminate in particular how it is possible to 'make the best of life'.

Because personal narratives are historically, culturally, socially and personally mediated they are valuable in understanding process and in this last chapter, I wish to highlight the process of personal mediation that became apparent as the nine women shared their life-stories with me. They revealed themselves as sense-making individuals; they spoke as knowers, rather than learners; and above all they were able to explain their lives as successful. In other words, as the title of the chapter suggests, they were able to speak of 'making the best of life'.
It may appear to be of little portent that the women of this study were able to speak of their lives as successful, indeed some may suggested that this might have been a reflection of ‘false consciousness’. I would strongly argue to the contrary. As we name our world, we name ourselves and therefore, by being able to find subject positions that appear more positive than others and by adapting those positions flexibly across a lifetime, we are in fact creating a positive life. It is significant that this group of women were able to do this as discourses equally have the potential to create double binds and contradictions, therefore how they spoke of ‘making the best of life’ must be of interest.

It is apparent that first and foremost the women’s accounts show a commitment to making meaning. They speak as if they are sovereign subjects who are capable of understanding and to a degree controlling their world. Each woman reflects a sense of autonomy in that she believes in her own ability to define the meanings of acts in what she perceives to be her own way. Although it is apparent that all of this is discursively constituted, I wish to highlight the important factor that when a woman is able to understand herself as a knowing, thinking and acting being, she is able to claim personal authority in the same way. She is not a victim or a pawn of her society. Steven Angelides (1995) has proposed the term ‘subject(act)ivity’ to describe this sense of personal agency within subjectivity. When this activity is evident in a positive way in a personal narrative, I have come to call this the ability to construct an ‘enabling fiction’.

It was apparent from my reading of the nine personal narratives that there were two commonalities across the narratives that made these personal narratives enabling fictions. First, there was a positive application of an ecological self; and second, the story was made coherent by the forging of life themes and thus life investments across the whole narrative.
An ecological self
When a woman constitutes a life-story she is faced with a particular contradiction. If she speaks as a fully independent, autonomous, self-determining human being she places herself beyond the bounds of most discourses of the good woman. In other words to understand one’s self using a discourse of male development is to be a deviant woman. However in our Western cultures that so privilege the individual over the collective, a woman must find some way to develop a sense of an individual self.

If a woman remains within the binary logic of independent/dependent, she will be faced with a constant struggle between being ‘not too dependent’ or ‘not too independent’.

Throughout the personal narratives, this struggle was apparent. However there were times in most of the narratives when the woman appeared to speak in a way that moved beyond this dichotomy. This was when she spoke from a position of interdependence. Although almost every woman did speak as a relational self in a way that illustrated how she was connected to others, this did not mean she therefore automatically spoke of interdependence. It was apparent that the connectedness of a relational self may reflect a connection of dependence, in which the woman spoke more of servicing and developing others rather than herself. However there were times when interdependence was apparent, and interdependence was an enabling factor in the development of an ecological self.

When a woman understood one of her relationships as a mutual exchange it became possible to see one aspect of interdependence. Exchange did not have to be equal but it did have to be equitable in meeting the perceived needs of both parties. Hence there was an important dimension of reciprocity. Further interdependence seemed to arise from situations in which a woman could identify a whole that was greater than the sum of its parts. Although in these nine personal narratives this ‘whole’ was usually the ‘family’, I do not believe this is the only site for interdependence. The narratives also suggest that it is possible to understand a local community or even the global community as the ‘whole’, thus one’s daily actions make sense at an individual and collective level simultaneously.
The 'family' as the 'whole' did however provide a meaningful concept through which some of the women could constitute themselves in a positive way as interdependent.

Finally, by speaking of their relationships as interdependent, particularly in the family setting, I believe that the women were understanding their investments as both for the present and for the future. Exchange is important but, when the women spoke of their mothering particularly, they seemed to acknowledge that some rewards come in the future. I believe that this is an act of faith in the future that made sense of the different levels of giving needed at different times of life. This seems to be one important way that women were able to speak of their investment in family work and avoid any notion of subservience. Interdependence therefore has a temporal, an holistic and an interpersonal dimension. Interdependence was an important component of the enabling fiction.

**Life themes**
The second strategy that contributed to the development of an enabling fiction arose from the ability of a woman to forge a coherent and positive life theme across the narrative account. This activity demonstrated that the individual woman could constitute herself as a particular form of a 'good woman' in a way that again revealed individual subject(act)ivity. In this way the women showed that they were not victims of dominant discourses but rather contestants in their production.

This group of women forged life themes that revolved around their own specialist family positions. Across the whole of the life-story each woman found at least one theme that showed her investment in that particular subject position as one that paid off. It is also apparent that a worthy investment was one that could be largely transferable across discourses. This action diminished conflicts and contradictions between discourses and allowed a sense of a coherent self to be more readily retained.

A second positive facet of forging a life theme into the personal narrative was that it allowed each woman to speak of progress and development. By illustrating how and
where she was a particular type of good woman and how and where she had adapted to change (both discursive and material), the woman was able to tell an ongoing and positive story of progress across a lifetime. In this way activity was spoken of as enabling. Further to illustrate a life theme across the whole of a personal narrative gives the sense of a self who has been able to make the right, or best, choices. Thus the ability to claim a life theme reveals the success of the ‘right’ individual progress.

Finally the ability to create a coherent life theme reveals the individual’s ability to acknowledge herself as a member of the ‘right’ collective but does so in a way that enables a woman to speak of this as an individual achievement. In telling a personal narrative, a good woman is able to show how she is at once the same but different, different but the same. Underpinning this once again is the ability to speak as an experiencing, knowing subject who is individually active.

Personal narratives are inevitably a (re)presentation, however it is important to understand how such representations can be enabling or disabling. To engage in subject(act)ivity in a way that is enabling for an individual is a crucial act of well-being. Through their ability to tell their life-story as an enabling fiction, the women illustrated how they are both products of history and producers of history.

Conclusion
In this thesis, I have chosen to examine the personal narratives of life and learning as told by nine aged women. By focusing on their storying, their perceptions and views of their world, I have been able to understand more about each life as a unique historical experience. This has shed light on how nine women have made sense of their learning across a life, and how this is both an individual and collective act. By acknowledging that all personal narratives are socially shared, dialectically created, culturally embedded and personally mediated, our understandings of learning and development can be enriched.
However I am cognisant of the fact that by focusing on the narrative aspect of the
accounts I have illuminated only one of the levels at which discourse acts. It is crucial to
recognise the other levels that also demand examination, although these were beyond the
parameters of this particular study. It is important that we look up, and out, from this
group of personal narratives to determine the structures, practices, institutions and
language that hold this group of women’s ideas in place. When we ask what holds ideas
such as these in their place, we illuminate other levels of analysis that also require
attention. By focusing on one level this study inevitably throws other levels into the
shadow. However by placing this work beside other postmodern analyses of learning and
development, I hope it will contribute to our collective knowledge.

As I move into the final paragraphs of this thesis, I wish to step aside somewhat from my
poststructural position, but perhaps in doing so I am merely revealing how everything we
say is discursively located. To some the following may be dismissed as romantic, self-
indulgent or even naive, however, that merely would reveal that discourse positioning me,
would it not?

I wish to acknowledge how much I have learned from the women of this study. As they
spoke of their joys and their sadness, and shared with me how they believe one should
live a good life, my own life has been enriched. In times of personal challenge, I have
often recalled how one or more of the women understood a similar time in her life and I
have gained a valuable perspective. I believe there is wisdom to be harnessed from most
everyday lives. I have been privileged to have had such a resource so generously given. I
believe that to live a life that draws on discourses of care and connection can be a political
act. In the fragile world of the twentieth century we could do no better than to understand
our lives as interdependent. If we reject discourses that separate us from others, if we
acknowledge the symbiosis of every binary pair, then individually and collectively we can
make the best of life.
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