

Social Silencing

A feminist action research inquiry into the hermeneutical injustice of 'being silenced' in everyday conversational life



*A Woman in the World
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Contents

Abstract	8
Acknowledgements	9
A Special Thank You	10

PART 1

Chapter 1. Introducing my Research	11
1.1 Introducing my research	12
1.2 Overview of findings	14
1.3 A Summary of the Chapters	15
Chapter 2. The Skeleton Dance	19
2.1 Introducing Myself	20
2.2 How I came to be inquiring into women's experiences of being silenced	23
2.3 The question guiding my research	25
Chapter 3. The Noise of the World is Made out of Silence	27
3.1 Imagining Different Conversations	28
3.2 Conversations make relationships	29
3.3 Silence and Voice: Powerful Metaphors	30
3.4 Voice as participation in social interaction	33
3.5 Silence as participation – being silenced and choosing silence	35
3.6 Silence, Gender and Organisations	36
3.7 Conversations in a patriarchal society	37

Chapter 4. Feminisms and Foucault	43
4.1 Introduction	44
4.2 My Introduction to Feminist Relational Theory	45
4.3 Social Silencing – An Epistemic Injustice	52
4.4 Testimonial Injustice	54
4.5 Hermeneutical Injustice	55
4.6 Virtuous solutions	58
4.7 Feminist theories of power	59
4.8 Foucault & Feminism	60
4.9 Concluding Thoughts	62
4.10 Reflections	64
Chapter 5. My Methodological Quest for Feminine Fusion	67
5.1 A Methodological Quest for Feminine Fusion	68
5.2 Ontology and Epistemology	68
5.3 Feminist Action Research	70
5.4 Gaining Clarity of Intent	72
5.5 Bringing Together Feminist and Participatory Methodology	74
5.6 My Action Research Journey	79
5.7 Early First Person Action Research	81
5.8 Towards Becoming a Reflexive Feminist Action Researcher	85
5.9 Cooperative Inquiry – ‘From Novice to Knowing’	89
5.10 Convening Groups of Women	92
5.11 The Power of Images	95
5.12 Starting with Stories	96
5.13 Are We Actually Doing Research?	98
5.14 Reflecting on intentions of co-researching	100
5.15 Concluding Thoughts	101
<i>Figure 5.1 – Overview of research process</i>	103
Chapter 6: Transforming Silence into Language and Action	105
6.1 Constructing and Crystallizing: Working with My Data	106
6.2 Thematic Analysis	107
6.3 A note about Validity and Action	110

PART 2

Chapter 7. An Introduction to Technologies of Womankind, Silence, and the Self		113
7.1	An introduction to the Technologies	114
7.2	Finding Form	114
Chapter 8. Technologies of Womankind		117
8.1	Technologies of Womankind	118
8.2	Woman Talk	119
8.3	Our Sense of Discomfort Starts Early	120
	<i>Figure 8.1 Reasons for joining the cooperative inquiry</i>	120
8.4	Feeling ‘Locked Out’ or ‘Locked in’ as Metaphors for Oppression	121
8.5	What Happens When I Try to Be ‘Who and How’ I Want to Be?	126
	<i>Figure 8.2 – Collages: Cooperative Inquiry Groups (i)</i>	128
	<i>Figure 8.3 – Collages: Cooperative Inquiry Groups (ii)</i>	130
8.6	Technologies of Womankind	131
8.7	Technology 1 We develop our sense of identity (what we know and what we see) and judge ourselves according to masculine definitions of femininity	131
	8.7.1 Women Often Don’t Know Who They Are, or How They Want to Be	131
	8.7.2 Early Experiences of Definition and Discipline	131
	8.7.3 The Power of the Male Gaze	136
8.8	Technology 2 We nurture, nourish and sustain relationships in order to ‘exist’	141
8.9	Technology 3 We find it difficult to embrace our power and the value of conflict	145
8.10	Technology 4 We hold our emotions in check	152
8.11	Summary	158
8.12	Reflections	160

Chapter 9. Technologies of Silence **163**

9.1	Introduction	164
9.2	Constructing Social Silencing as a ‘Phenomenon’	164
	<i>Figure 9.1 – The Technologies of Social Silencing</i>	167
9.3	Historical and Philosophical Context	168
9.4	External Technologies of Power – Institutional Power	172
9.5	Pre-Experience	181
9.6	Technologies of Power - Post Encounter	183
9.7	Intent	185
9.8	The Encounter – Tactics of Silencing	187
	<i>Figure 9.2 – Tactics of Silencers at the Point of Encounter</i>	188
9.9	Concluding Reflections	192

Chapter 10. Technologies of Self: Claiming Our Feminine Voice **195**

10.1	Technologies of the Self	196
10.2	Passion to Voice, Power to Change	197
10.3	Life as a Work of Art	198
10.4	Finding Voice through Technologies of Self	200
	10.4.1: Freefall Writing	202
	10.4.2: Constructing Collage	203
	10.4.4: Consciousness-Raising	206
	10.4.5: Planning, Preparing and Reflexive Experimentation	208
10.5	Concluding Reflections	210

Chapter 11. Transforming Silence and Voice: My Contribution **213**

11.1	Introduction	214
11.2	‘Social Silencing’ – No Longer a Hermeneutical Injustice?	215
11.3	Quality and Validity	216
11.4	Participation power and reflexivity in Cooperative Inquiry	219
11.5	Internalised Oppression in Cooperative Inquiry	224
11.6	The Power of the Feminine – My Contribution to Feminist Theory	229
11.7	Working with Abused Women	231
11.8	Working with Abusive Silencers	231
11.9	Dreams and Aspirations for Discourse (Where Am I Now?)	232

Appendix

1.	Letter of resignation, September 2012	267
2.	Letter of invitation to co-operative inquiry participants	271
3.	A short guide to co-operative inquiry	273
4.	Tactics of silencers at the point of encounter	283
5.	Diagrams of Thematic Analysis	289
6.	Embodied experience – Words from the transcripts	291
7.	Technologies of silencing – Michelle and Tim.	295
8.	Making sense of social silencing – The framework with guiding questions	297
9.	Working with Conversation	299

Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of women's experiences of being 'silenced' in everyday organisational life. Through feminist action research, drawing upon feminist theory and philosophy, and Foucault's work on technologies and language of power (Foucault, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1991) the complexities of how 'social silencing' happens are exposed.

Using first-person inquiry and co-operative inquiry methods, the women involved in this research revealed the context, dynamics, and impact of their experience of social silencing. This contributes to our understanding of interactive social experiences and also to our understanding of social experience more generally. The impact, implications, and also possibilities for finding and strengthening voice to overcome social silencing are explored and explained.

Social experiences relating to power are often structurally prejudiced against women—or those with the least amount of power—such that dominant collective interpretations of experience mask a void where the name of a distinctive social experience should be. This is due to unequal participation within groups in achieving a proper interpretation. Social silencing is such an experience. This thesis argues that women who are silenced are often put at an acute cognitive disadvantage and are unable to dissent from distorted understandings of their social experiences. In essence they are 'wronged' by the injustice of having some significant area of their social experience obscured, unnoticed, and unheard. This is because when a particular experience is not named, not defined, or not integrated in everyday discourse, the ability to interpret the experience and any defining language is hindered. Thus, it may not be possible to discuss, report, resist, or change it. This research draws on experiences of family life in the home, teams and leaders at work, and the corporate boardroom. The findings hold important implications and relevance for leadership and organisational development, especially for practitioners working to improve quality of conversation and relationships, team effectiveness, and cultural change in organisations.

This thesis will explain the experience of *social silencing* as a hermeneutic injustice. A framework is offered as a means of examining personal experience and enabling those silenced to develop a critical understanding of their experience and discover ways of strengthening their voice. A range of 'practices' are also identified as strategies for overcoming feminine issues of identity, power and voice. These provide potential for disrupting the *technologies of power* that are at play and overcoming social silencing.

This thesis contributes to the identification and empowerment of those silenced. It offers practical strategies for enabling wise and confident decision-making in silencing situations. It will also facilitate critique of, and intervention in, the cultural, social and historical processes of everyday organisational life.

'It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our lives that we must draw our strength to live and our reasons for acting.' – Simone de Beauvoir (1948, p.9).

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to all the women in the world and to all men who strive to have better conversations with lovers, work colleagues, family, friends, or even themselves. It is both a political intervention and an invitation for us all to understand and explore our participation in everyday conversation and develop more ethical ways of relating.

In acknowledging the generosity of others and the contributions they have made to make this work possible, I begin with the women who participated in the cooperative inquiries and co-inquiry conversations—their openness and thoughtfulness in describing their everyday lives, their willingness to discuss deeply personal experiences and speak out about their challenges in intimate relationships and workplaces. Their experiences are the foundations of this thesis. I thank you all.



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A Special Thank You

‘A woman must have money, a pair of running shoes, and a room of her own if she is to write’ (Adapted from Virginia Woolf, 1929)

I am deeply indebted to my two beautiful friends Ghada and Sarah, who allowed me to take over their homes when I needed space to write. While content in my solitude, within your spaces I felt connected, safe, and at my best. Thank you for your generosity and love.



Chapter 1

Introducing my Research



Art courtesy of Rachel E. Morris

‘A woman with a voice is by definition a strong woman.
But the search to find that voice can be remarkably difficult.’
Melinda Gates – October 2003 – Powerful Voice Luncheon

1.1 Introducing my research

This thesis is an endeavour to further our theoretical and social understanding of how women are silenced in everyday conversational life. Through a feminist action research process (Brydon-Miller, Maguire and McIntyre, 2004; Reid, 2004; Reid and Frisby, 2008), I claim to have generated data from over 23 different women's experiences of being 'silenced' in various social situations - 17 focused, one to one, inquiry conversations, a cooperative inquiry of five women and a co-inquiry with another woman, both continued over ten months. Guided by methodological principles grounded in feminist and participatory epistemology (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Stanley and Wise, 1998; Preissle & Han, 2012; Heron & Reason, 1997); I have sought to call attention to women's lived experiences of being silenced as the starting point for building knowledge, and pay particular attention to issues of power, relationships, ethics and reflexivity throughout the research process.

I analyse the phenomenon of being silenced aided by Foucault's conceptions of social and disciplinary power (Foucault, 1979; 1994), and selected feminist theories (Frye, 1983; Gilligan, 1993, 2011; Baker-Miller and Pearce-Stiver, 1997; Bartky, 1990; Fricker, 2011). I propose a framework for examining the complex negative space, when silencing happens, in oppressive situations. As well as the profound and destructive impact these experiences can have.

I claim that this approach enables an illumination of the power relations that silence some women, specifically in social situations where a woman could and should speak. It shows how the differential social constructions or normalisations of gender, in which we participate, serve to both define and discipline the feminine voice from early life (Gilligan, 1993; 2011; Gilligan and Richards, 2014; Beard, 2015; 2017). What is more, this study also shows how etchings left through these early effects of power, constitute a woman's identity, and way of being in the world. When enmeshed with hidden mechanisms of power embedded in our social contexts, they can work together to produce the silent woman.

As a feminist, I situate this work within the historical context of a patriarchal society and the universal condition of women's oppression (Solnit, 2017). For the purpose of this discussion and within this thesis, I refer to "society" as the material (people, institutions), ideological and otherwise arrangements that constitute our present social world.

I use the term *patriarchy*, to reflect a particular and persistent social structure and ideology, that organises economic, family and public life. As such patriarchy is variously understood and contested (Miller, 2015). Yet inequality, hierarchy and male dominance within that hierarchy have characterised western cultures since antiquity (Stark, 2007; Miller, 2015; Gilligan and Richards, 2014; Beard, 2015; 2017) I employ the term here to refer to a world view in which some men dominate other men, and generally all men dominate women. An omnipotent social framework, deeply embedded in western culture (Miller, 2015; Beard, 2017), that promotes and reinforces male privilege. I am particularly interested in how the mechanisms of patriarchy or inequality, impact a woman's voice. These mechanisms silence women, refuse to take them seriously, and exclude them from literary, political and public life (Moore, 2002; Baxter, 2006; Beard, 2017).

I do not, however, seek here to essentialise the identity of 'women'. I acknowledge there is no 'singular' female self. How we assert our identities, and how we experience the world are both similar and different. Yet how interlocking systems of power impact each of us, across our social differences, matters a great deal (Crenshaw, 1989; Hooks, 1994; 2000). Thus, whilst this thesis does not in any way speak for all women, I see relevance in focussing on experiences women generally have in common, such as the embodied, varied, and complex experiences of being silenced and being allowed to speak (Solnit, 2017).

When a woman is prevented from speaking through the oppressive acts or omissions of another, in any social situation where her voice should or could be heard, she is '*socially silenced*'. This is not something for which women are to be blamed; it happens in social interactions, which always involve two or more individuals.

In theorising my contribution, my aspiration is to convey my analysis and representation of these women's experiences in a way that shows careful consideration and an ethical approach (Preissle & Han, 2012). I use the term *social silencing* to conceptualise the relational and contextual complexities of the experience of being silenced. I claim that scrutiny of our micro-level, everyday interactions is necessary to reveal the social patterns of our context, and the quality of relations in our organisations and at home. These social patterns, enacted continuously, perpetuate the injustice of social silencing, and have prevented women from making sense of and understanding their experience.

1.2 Overview of findings

This thesis focuses on three central themes that together represent the knowing revealed through the experiences of the women involved in this research. Particularly their experiences of being ‘socially silenced’. These themes open up choices for action and for working with other women to achieve noticing, naming and understanding of their experience. Each hold implications for conversational practice in all aspects of work and life.

1. Technologies of womankind

Interpretation of data revealed a number of inscriptions and practices the women developed unconsciously through their early years, that constituted their adult subjectivity and shaped their behavioural norms. I provide insight into a selection of these feminine technologies. I argue that these practices, or ‘ways of being’, should be unlearned and new ones mastered if we are to find and enable our rightful voice and place in the world. If it is not possible or desirable to unlearn them, just being aware of them uncovers possibilities for change.

2. Technologies of Silence

Analysis of many everyday experiences of being silenced revealed the nature and operation of social power in our conversations at work, at home and in many aspects of everyday life. I offer a framework outlining the micro and macro factors or ‘technologies of power’ that produce the silent woman. I contend that as women who experience being silenced, begin to recognise and see these technologies at play, it is possible to appreciate the extent of the hurt we sustain when silencing happens and the impact for us at work and in life generally.

3. Technologies of Self

Understanding the micro (surface) and macro (deeper) technologies of silence opens up possibilities for finding ways to sustain our voice in ways that ‘feel good’, in situations we might previously have misunderstood. This third theme explores how options for action can be generated through a commitment to consciousness raising, self-creation and social reflexivity. I present a selection of practices women can employ to resist oppressive power in the context of our everyday interactions. I claim these practices offer transformational potential, and that to some extent we can be the architects of our own voice and way of being in the world.

In summary, this thesis offers a tentative and emergent construction of the technologies of power involved in the silencing of some women. I contend that in a context of respect and reciprocity women can choose to disrupt the power relations that silence them, strengthen their voice, and claim their rightful place in conversational life. More importantly those who silence others can choose to participate more ethically and equally in their interactions, thus transforming the experience and quality of social relations for all.

I call for a recognition that we all participate in constructing the unequal spaces in which women are silenced. Thus, realising these aspirations requires us to think about power, social relationships and how we participate differently. Removing inequality at the micro level of social interaction prepares the ground for desperately needed inclusive and collaborative cultures to develop, and equality at the leadership levels of organisations to emerge (Sandberg and Grant, 2015; Eleftheriou-Smith, 2018). Whilst undoing the cultural and physical infrastructure of patriarchy will require continuous work over generations (Miller, 2015; Solnit 2017), it is work that ‘involves the smallest everyday gestures and exchanges and the changing of laws, beliefs, politics, and culture’ (Solnit, 2017, p. 66). I contend such work can be achieved one conversation at a time.

1.3 A Summary of the chapters

The following section explains the structure of this thesis. In eleven chapters, I chart my journey as an action researcher towards the final contribution. I begin by introducing some of the grounding aspirations and concepts informing my research. This is followed by a detailed exploration of the feminist and Foucauldian theories that inform my analysis and thinking. My onward intention is to show how experiences of being silenced—my own and those of other women, have been scrutinised and analysed. I aim to show how I have worked with my intent and how it has shifted and clarified as the research progressed.

As you read, I ask that you keep in mind that action research is not a linear process. Whilst the chapters presented here may focus on certain necessary discussions, they all comprise cycles of inquiry that were going on at the same time; as I have moved between cycles of inquiry, each has informed the other, and so my chapters have evolved. In the interests of quality and validity I also aim to be transparent and open as I clarify and reflect on the choices and processes of inquiry and as I ‘crystalise’ my findings (Ellingson, 2009). I have sought to be reflexive: to show awareness of my role and privilege in constructing this thesis, and my responsibility to demonstrate integrity, consciousness and respect for the voices of my participants.

Of course, this thesis does not represent all of the data generated from our inquiries or all of ‘me’ as a researcher. I have, through purpose and necessity, made choices about what to include or not. Thus, the knowledge offered here is inevitably situated, partial and constructed. My aim is to bring together multiple methods and multiple genres to enrich the findings (Ellingson, 2009). Each partial account complements the others, to bring together the pieces of ‘the meaning puzzle’ (Ellingson, 2009, p. 13) but never completing it.

I start in **Chapter 2** by introducing myself in order to situate myself in this research and highlight some relevant aspects of my past. I discuss the experiences that led to me inquiring into women’s experiences of being silenced, and the research question that eventually guided production of this thesis.

In **Chapter 3**, I situate my research in the context of a lifelong quest for finding voice in relationships. and a long-term interest in conversation as the core process of life. As an Organisational Development Consultant, I argue that this aspect of organisational life gains little attention and reveal my broader aspirations as a feminist interested in the empowerment of women. I situate my interest in the silencing of women in the midst of personal experiences and the broader quest of feminism for equal voice in all its forms.

In **Chapter 4**, I provide an overview of the key theoretical insights grounding my research approach and informing interpretation and analysis of the data. Firstly, I consider feminist psychological and relational theories to expose a necessary contextual understanding of the complex male-centred forces that keep a male-privileged system in place. Secondly, I situate the experience of social silencing within Miranda Fricker’s (2010) notion of *hermeneutic injustice*. Thus, constructing the social silencing of women as a distinctive social experience, requiring collective social interpretation and understanding. Finally, I introduce the relevance—to this research—of Michel Foucault, a French philosopher whose analysis and theories address the relationship between power and knowledge, subjectivity and ethical practice, I have found helpful for the work I have undertaken in the course of the study.

In **Chapter 5**, I explore how my methodology for this research inquiry evolved as I sought to remain true to my emerging ontological stance (how I believed things to be), and the ideological goals of feminist research. I discuss some of the issues I grappled with as I

clarified my research questions and intent. I then discuss how I brought feminist and participatory methodology together to ground my research practice. I give an overview of my inquiry processes and reflect on my praxis as a researcher. And some of the complexities and challenges I experienced in conducting the research.

Analysis of the data emerging from the various strands of inquiry was intertwined with ongoing inquiry. I worked with the data transcripts for long periods of time, each time finding it difficult to connect with them. In **Chapter 6** I discuss the process used to analyse and interpret the data. This has been a process of connecting and voicing what I know and has itself been an emotional and iterative process of coming to voice. I discuss how I found it impossible to separate inquiry, process and outcome, and how, in representing the voices of the participants, I have worked with the intent of fulfilling my research interest, and at the same time sought to ensure their safety and enlist their thoughts to validate my interpretations.

Chapter 7 provides a brief introduction to Chapters Eight, Nine and Ten and

Chapters 8 and **9** are entitled ‘Technologies of Womankind’ and ‘Technologies of Silence’. Here I introduce the practices and power relations I have found to contribute to experiences of being silenced. First, in **Chapter 8** I discuss how I worked with the women involved in this inquiry and some of the issues and challenges we encountered. I explain how I made sense of the data to arrive at two examples of how formative and systematic experiences of oppression can silence women in early life. I then discuss a selection of four feminine technologies (thoughts and practices), often developed unconsciously through early experiences, that I suggest may contribute to the process of ‘social silencing’.

In **Chapter 9**, I explain my construction of the elements of ‘social silencing’ as a complex social phenomenon. I draw on the experiences we shared, feminist theory, and particularly the work of Foucault and Fricker to construct and articulate the multiple lived truths of the women involved in this research. I offer this framework as a means of making sense of the power relations or micro-politics at play in interactions where silencing happens. I show my interpretation of how the interrelationship between the Technologies of Womankind and the Technologies of Power can produce the phenomenon of social silencing.

In **Chapter 10**, I reflect on a selection of practices I and/or others have found useful in finding and strengthening our feminine voice. I claim that Foucault’s notion of Technologies (practices) of the Self can be successfully effected by our own means or with

the help of others to overcome issues of identity, voice and power. In particular I introduce ‘Writing as caring for self’, ‘Constructing Collage’, ‘Consciousness Raising’, and ‘Planning, Preparing and Reflexive Experimentation’, as transformational methods and practices of reworking ourselves. I suggest that developing awareness and working on our self, we can build capacity for disrupting experiences of silence in the moment or whenever it is most appropriate.

Finally, in **Chapter 11**, I summarise the findings of my research as presented here and offer some concluding reflections. In ‘naming’ the phenomenon of ‘social silencing’ and offering a tentative and emergent construction of the technologies of power involved in the silencing of some women, I discuss my contribution to feminist theory, communication studies, and organisational development. I offer some insights into how the heuristic framework offered here has impacted my own life, and how I am using it in my organisational work. I will also reflect on the quality and validity of my research.

Chapter 2

The Skeleton Dance



**'You are the wish and I the fulfilment.'
(Kaye Donachie, 2008)**

2.1 Introducing myself

‘If you cannot get rid of the family skeleton, you may as well make it dance.’

George Bernard Shaw (1930, p. xxvii)

In this Chapter, I introduce myself and explain how I came to be inquiring into women’s experiences of being silenced. I feel it is important to give you a sense of my background, my personal story, and the particular experiences that led to my research question. Starting my thesis here provides contextual grounding and honours the particular experiences that led to my research question. Further, I situate the research question that steers this thesis and the curiosities that have sustained me in getting to the stage of revealing my contribution to this important yet relatively undeveloped area of scholarship.

As I started my doctoral research, I wondered about my early life and whether there might be experiences and patterns of thinking and behaviour from my past that are playing out in my present. It seemed important in these early stages to look backwards. This aspect of my inquiry did not take place in isolation. It ran parallel to other inquiries, and I returned to it regularly to analyse and make sense as my thinking was informed by new insights.

I introduce myself here as a feminist action researcher. As such, I embrace the diversity of human perspectives, none of which can claim absolute knowledge, authority, or truth. Thus, the following multiple versions of my personal narrative are partial autobiographical (Tenni et al., 2003) accounts. As both participant and researcher, my intent is to highlight some key aspects of my past and to situate myself in this inquiry. It is not so much to extract or explain but to attempt to connect you with my embodied struggles, against a background of a challenging yet instructive past. As such it provides no analysis but simply asks for your consideration.

One version of my story is one of academic and professional success:

I am the daughter of working-class parents, born in the north of England in 1963. My parents were moderately ambitious and strove to make a decent living in the industrial community of Oldham. Seeking a more prosperous life, we moved to the south shortly after my third birthday and the birth of my brother, Allen. My father began a long career as medical officer in the prison service and my mother worked as a personal secretary. I was an average student at school, leaving after GCSEs to pursue a career in nursing. My passion for high standards and learning enabled me to climb the career ladder quickly from staff nurse to senior leadership positions and university lecturer. I gained a distinction in

my nursing studies, a first-class degree in nursing education, and several leadership awards.

I left the NHS to embark on a self-build project and gain more flexibility bringing up my two sons, Alex and Freddie. Soon after leaving, I was invited to deliver various healthcare and education-related consulting projects. I enjoyed the challenge of consulting in different organisations and became interested in organisational development (OD). A few years later, I completed an OD Practitioner programme at Roffey Park Management College and later a Master's in Organisational Consulting at Ashridge Executive Education. I commenced the doctorate in Organisational Change in 2011.

In 2014, with 14 years of consulting experience, I joined Ashridge Executive Education as a member of faculty and OD consultant. My passion is supporting organisations to co-create cultures of equality and creativity, where individuals are engaged, fulfilled and perform successfully in their work.

But there is another equally credible version of my identity marked by vulnerability, self-reliance and determination.

As a child I was clever, popular, and emotionally troubled. I experienced my mother as demanding, dismissive, and a bully. My father, overwhelmed and threatened with divorce, gave up trying to protect and support me. Often left outside 'to play' and not knowing how to fit in I remember wandering the streets of our estate, lonely and bewildered. I didn't know why I was sent out, or alone, I just was. As a teenager I felt ignored, dismissed or ridiculed if my views differed. I had a strong sense of not fitting in.

At school I developed a few strong and valuable friendships. In their homes I observed a different form of family life characterised by love, care, and affection. Later in life, I became determined that my family life would be different too. I left home at 16 to work in a nursing home before starting my nurse training at 18. I was a good nurse yet, despite being top in my year, my mother's expectations of me were unfulfilled. At my graduation she said, *'I told you, you could have been a doctor'*. I spent my early adult life vulnerable, seeking love and belonging, yet I was strong and determined.

Aged 20, I met Ralph, my first husband. We married six years later in 1988. In the same year I gave birth to our son, Alexander. A few months later my husband died suddenly, and

I became a single mother, working full time and studying to ensure a secure future for my son. Six years later I remarried and had a second son, Freddie.

As a mother and wife, I made love, care, and affection primary; the shadow side of this is that my vulnerability and need for love myself shows through at times. I can see now that my then-new husband (who turned out to be abusive), and others, have sought to use this as a means of taking advantage of, or controlling, me.

I can also tell you the story of my feminist commitment and political activism.

My early feminist consciousness evolved as I was helped by counsellors at Relate (a relationship guidance charity) and Women's Aid (a women's charity) to understand that I had become enmeshed and subjugated in an abusive marriage.

Initially, the meanings I made of my experience were dependent on the discourses available to me at the time, and much of that was my husband's rhetoric. As I talked to experts, attended a support group of women in similar situations, and sought out literature, I was gradually exposed to a different discourse of power and abuse. I was able recall more of my experiences and categorise them.

A feminist facilitator led our support group. She was an ordinary woman who listened, empathised, and patiently challenged our thinking. I gained further insights from literature on abuse and controlling relationships (Bancroft, 2002; Horley, 2002; Stark, 2007), online resources, and personal accounts from others. I was fortunate to meet Sandra Horley, author and Chief Executive of Refuge UK, and other similar experts in the field.

I embarked on an intense and emancipatory period of learning, reflection and analysis. I recall how liberated and empowered I felt, as my new insights freed me from the suffocation of blame. Decisions about my future evolved from a more informed perspective and I developed a strong desire to help other women experiencing abuse. Eventually I joined Women's Aid as a volunteer, initially as a facilitator of the Freedom Programme and later as a Trustee.

It was when I joined the Ashridge Doctorate in Organisational Change in 2011 that my feminist consciousness evolved exponentially. My introduction to feminist theory led to a committed feminist ontology (discussed later in Chapter 4), an overwhelming desire to

make sense of my experience, and a real sense of the centrality of my voice. As my research inquiries progressed, feminist theory introduced me to alternative ways of interpreting my experience and generating social meaning that resonates with others.

2.2 How I came to be inquiring into women's experiences of being silenced.

The story at the heart of this thesis is a painful one. My initial interest was in 'generative conversation' as a core life process. I was enthusiastic about exploring the conditions necessary to enable quality conversation to happen. My perceptions of 'good conversation' and 'good relationships' had (and indeed still have) reciprocal and moral undertones that at the time I was hesitant to articulate. I recognised I was pursuing something that I was also seeking to understand.

I commenced my doctorate studies during a traumatic divorce process as I disentangled myself from an abusive marriage. In this context I struggled to be heard or understood. In conversations with my husband and many of the professionals supposedly responsible for supporting and helping me, my voice seemed of little value. I wondered why these people seemed unable to hear or understand what I was saying, and at times wouldn't allow me to speak. It seemed my experience was of no significance and even denied completely by lawyers and those in positions of safeguarding responsibility. For example, friends, social workers, my GP, the police, and others believed my ex-husband's stories that I was mentally unwell, making up my accounts of abuse, or even that I was the violent and abusive one. I was denied restraining orders to protect me and my son, I was told that there was no 'real' evidence of my experience. On one occasion, my husband punched my 12-year-old son causing him to be thrown across the room. He later persuaded my son to deny his experience. My account of the event was never believed. At times I wondered if I had a voice at all. During this time, I kept a journal. I was desperate to make sense of what was happening to me and had learned in my earlier career as a nurse how to use journaling for reflection and sense making. Analysis of my journal exposes how I became increasingly confused, isolated and distressed as the pattern of silencing and abuse continued.

I was new to action research and soon realised how integral and important my personal experiences would be to my research. My desire to understand and change my predicament both challenged and sustained me over the following years. Using first-person inquiry methods (inquiry into our own life and moments of action in the world), supported and deepened by second-person inquiry (communities of inquiry) with my supervision group, I

interrogated my experience of, and participation in, conversations, both in the past and in my daily encounters at work and at home. I will explain these methods in more detail later.

In September 2012 we were required to write a 'Transfer paper' charting the progress of our research inquiries. My paper was a critical inquiry into my experiences of 'being silenced'. Seeking to identify and understand themes that connected to my ongoing inquiries 'the skeletons in my family cupboard', I wrote an autobiographical account of my background and early life experiences of losing and finding voice. I also wrote extensively of my inquiry into experiences of being silenced as I came out of an abusive marriage (Bayntun-Lees, 2012). I used poetry and journal accounts to access and record my experiences, and theoretical insights to make sense of and frame my analyses. I was able to identify the micro-level tactics my husband used to silence and isolate me, and some of the cultural and social processes that reinforced my situation at the time.

These writings began as early pieces of reflection and first-person inquiry intended to situate myself in this research. I sought to identify and reflect on themes and patterns in my early development that contribute to who and how I am in the world today. I discussed how understanding my past in a more detached and analytical way was important for my reconstruction of self as a woman, and my grounding as a researcher.

My transfer paper provided constructed accounts that would of course be different if I wrote them today. However, inquiring into my past experience opened up possibilities for creative and personal transformation. These inquiries revealed some of the relational patterns I continue to dance with throughout my adult life and fuelled my determination to construct my life differently. I gained clarity about the primacy of voice and why I believed women's experience of 'losing voice' or 'being silenced' in particular, needs to be understood and explained in the academic arena.

I make no apologies for my own personal history, experiences, and perspectives of being silenced, driving my inquiry and offering insights as data. Indeed, I consider my personal knowledge and autobiography as a valid form of knowledge production, and a prime example of how personal experience can advance scientific knowledge, emancipate individuals, and empower personal change (Etherington, 2004; Olson, 2005; Brockmeier, 2012, Walker, 2017). I will return to this issue later on. Being more than personal narratives, my early life stories offered an important set of social and individualised contexts to explore and an opportunity to unpack the development of my identity.

Etherington (2004) reminds us that our personal history, when it is known to us and processed in ways that allow us to remain in contact emotionally and bodily with others whose stories remind us of our own, can enrich our role as researcher. Similar to Brydon-Miller's (2008) notion of finding our 'centre', Etherington encourages the process of articulating our own value systems and exploring our multiple and historical selves, to open up possibilities for creative and personal transformations. As a researcher and practitioner these inquiries have enabled me to remain more mindful and open to the challenges that new relationships and experiences bring, thus allowing examination of my actions and feelings with integrity rather than fear and self-defensiveness.

In these early stages of my doctorate I was perplexed that even I, a strong, successful, energetic, and, in many ways, powerful woman, sometimes experienced having my voice silenced and distorted by others. These experiences left me feeling befuddled, hurt and often angry. I knew that other women had similar experiences and wondered how it was for them.

Over time I became increasingly conscious of being silenced in other aspects of my daily life. As an organisational consultant and coach, as a leader, and as a Trustee of a women's charity, a strong voice and emotional resilience were essential to my success. As I became better attuned to how my voice was respected and heard, I realized the workplace and indeed other social contexts would be good ground for learning. Thus, integral to this research was both a personal and a professional challenge, to test and challenge my own assumptions and social practice. I sought to inquire into my experiences and build my capacity to interact effectively in the workplace.

2.3 The question guiding my research

Having the right to show up and speak are basic to survival, to dignity and to self-determination. Yet in situations where we are prevented from speaking or from being heard when we do, we can be crushed into silence, self-doubt and self-limitation (Solnit, 2014).

In this context the above insights evolved as an expedition into the intimate conversational worlds of women. Generated by a passionate interest in the possibility of producing conversational spaces in all aspects of life that enable human flourishing. Generative

spaces where women feel equal and enabled—to be the person they want to be, to be heard, and to sustain their voice.

I notice my idealism and potentially huge aspirations; however, my passion for equality and justice in these micro aspects of life is what has sustained me. However, I recognised nothing can be changed until we understand:

How do women in the midst of oppressive encounters experience being silenced? And is it possible to resist the power of others, sustain our voices in ways that feel good to us?

The aim of this research is to shed light on the oppressive restrictions that silence. And, to pursue compelling, transformational treasures to use in our daily conversational practice as—mothers, sisters, partners, colleagues, leaders, workers, friends. My aspiration is to understand how women can converse with confidence and at the same time generate possibilities and transformations with others. Through unsettling unhealthy power relations and coming to know how to initiate and participate in conversations that ‘*spread equality*’, I seek to enhance the quality of life in both our personal lives and our public lives in the world of work and community, thus contributing to the ongoing quest for social justice in our world.

Chapter 3

The Noise of the World is Made Out of Silence

Aspirations for ethical talk and a socially just world



Silence by Sara Riches

3.1 Imagining different conversations

Imagine a world in which the quality of conversation and relationship is the most important aspiration for all humanity. Imagine if all conversational spaces in our personal, corporate and community life embodied respect for human dignity and vitality. Imagine that each time you talked with another you felt able to say what you feel most deeply. Imagine leaving each and every encounter feeling you have been the best you can be.

Most people engage in ‘conversation’ for most of their working and social day, potentially consuming and generating much creative energy, collaborative insight and possibility (Brown & Issacs, 1996). Indeed, Brown & Isaacs (1996) urge us to consider conversation as the most important work we do, the medium through which we organise action and determine the strategic future of our relationships and organisations. Yet in my experience this powerful aspect of organisational life, gains little attention in terms of resources or development. We barely think about, let alone invest in or consider improving, this aspect of our daily practice. Reflecting the general ethos of our ‘stop talking and get to work’ workplaces (Brown & Issacs, 1996). A senior female medical leader in the NHS once said to me:

‘I don’t have time to think about the quality of my conversations and relationships, I just need to get things done.’

As an organisational consultant, researcher and, indeed, in all my life roles, I participate in many connecting and purposeful conversations and meetings, through which those involved attempt to negotiate and agree on how to proceed. These purposes connect to broader purposes of organisations and institutions, which connect to the broader purposes of our culture and society. We know that power plays a part in these interactions, yet what emerges is rarely entirely predictable. Who is present and who gets to participate are not the same things, with critical consequences for our politics and sense of wellbeing (Baxter, 2006; Glaser & Glaser, 2014; Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014). Furthermore, whilst our encounters with others will often motivate and inspire us, there are so many opportunities wasted where people come together and either nothing happens, (Zeldin, 1998) or we leave feeling disappointed or worse.

This chapter introduces some of my aspirations and associated concepts grounding this research. I begin by exploring the centrality of relationships and conversation as organising principles of life. I then discuss concepts of voice and silence from a feminist perspective, considering their relevance, and situating my research in this ongoing quest for equal voice in all its forms.

3.2 Conversations make relationships

Since my early adult life, relationships and how I experience them, have been central in how I perceive quality in my life generally. I envisage all human and organizational life as consisting of networks of relationships within networks of relationships, co-created and sustained through human interaction. Shaw (2002), and others (Brown and Isaacs, 1996; Brown and Isaacs et al., 2005; Hollingworth, 2007, 2012; Smith, 2019), also view conversation as *the* ‘organising principle’, ‘*core business process*’, the central tenet of all aspects of life. Conversation thus is a central means of our agency and participation in the world. Yet we often struggle to talk well with others, particularly with people at the different intersections of life.

Many others (Bohm, 1996; Yankelovich, 1999; Isaacs, 1999; Ridings, 2019) have articulated the theories and benefits of collaborative dialogic conversation. Whilst having clear influence in some political and organizational arenas (Browne, 2013; Kemp et al., 2013), their espoused benefits have failed to transfer to mainstream everyday life. Indeed, Reitz’s recent research (2015) identified that many leaders hang on to outdated constructions of leadership; the practical and social enactment of dialogic conversation thus being the exception rather than the norm in many social contexts and societies. Ridings (2019) also suggests that the comparing and contrasting, speaking for or against of ‘debate’ has become a habit so familiar we have become unaware of its presence. Such that we forget to ask if a different form of conversation might fit the circumstances better. In order for this to change the attitudes, mindset and how we carry ourselves into a different type of conversation are required to be different.

My experience is that we often do not listen to each other, often talk becomes monologue, we speak *at* each other. People often come together, speaking different conceptual languages and embodying different ways of seeing the world. When I see or experience this myself, I wonder about the opportunities we miss as we rush past each other without curiosity. Genuine, mutual understanding and compassion seems to be the exception rather than the rule in everyday communication.

Working at this micro-level of human interaction means that we leave behind the imaginary organisation we ‘design’ and learn to work with the ‘real’ organisation (Shaw, 2002; Busche & Marshack, 2015). My sense of the *real* is the potential inherent within the complex networks of relationships, how we participate in the everyday, ongoing construction of reality, including the quality of our social interactions. This allows us to consider potential for leadership, role and team effectiveness, work performance and satisfaction, and ultimately success in all aspects of life.

I wonder why it is, then, that so many people in our organisations and community’s express unhappiness and or dissatisfaction in one if not more of these areas. And why the workplace can damage the way we talk to each other (Zeldin, 1998; Fine 2010). I am particularly interested in what goes on when women feel unable to speak, the impact of words on others, and what patterns of talking we engage in that cause distress and destruction. How does silencing happen, and what impact does it have? What does an ethical voice sound like?

3.3 Silence and Voice: Powerful Metaphors

While our individual experiences of silence and voice will be different, the use of these concepts by feminist scholars in terms of their application and perceived usefulness is multifaceted. In this section I consider aspects of these metaphors relevant to this research.

The concepts of ‘silence’ and ‘voice’ are used extensively as metaphors to represent the historic condition of women (Ingraham, 1999; Solnit, 2014; Beard, 2017). Their use is central to our struggle for equal rights, inclusion and liberation and as such are discussed widely in feminist thinking and research. Since antiquity women’s voices have been excluded from education and almost every role in the public sphere, including the church, politics and religious institutions.

‘If to have a voice, to be allowed to speak, to be heard and believed is essential to being an insider or a person of power, a human being with full membership, then it’s important to recognise that silence is the universal condition of oppression, and there are many kinds of silence and of the silenced.’

(Solnit, 2017, p. 24)

Solnit (2017) and other contemporary feminists (Baxter, 2006; Moore, 2002; Beard, 2017; Gilligan and Richards, 2008) recognise that the mechanisms that silence women are still deeply embedded in the organization of our society. Whilst we have a lot to celebrate in terms of progress, equality for women in terms of freedom to use our voice, and to have our words heard and valued, remains a site for struggle (Solnit, 2017; Beard, 2017). Paradoxically as women and men have discovered the power of voice, much work has been done to make sense of the dissonance between women's voices and the voice of prevailing knowledge, and to bring about change.

Early feminists used feminist theory principally to challenge stereotypical masculine theories to analyse inequality, exclusion, and non-participation; and to explore the absence of women's voices from psychological and organisational research (Gilligan, 1993; Belenky et al., 1986; Baker-Miller and Pierce-Stiver, 1997; Bartky, 1990, Hearn, 1994; Morgan, 1992; Marshall, 1986; Simpson and Lewis, 2007) as well as literary voices in general (Olsen, 1978). The two concepts are also powerful figures of speech for many aspects of women's experiences.

In Carol Gilligan's, influential writing *In a Different Voice* (1993), she divorced herself from ways of theorising that portrayed men as human and women as other. She articulated how feminine moral development was different to that described by Kohlberg's male orientated perspectives, and how the feminine ethics of care and goodness worked to enforce a woman's silence, as she listened to the masculine voices of authority, and responded to their needs and concerns. This so-called ethic of feminine goodness served to hold in place a culture where in everyday conversations men spoke as if the omission of women was insignificant or inconsequential. She found that women themselves were also overlooking the omission of themselves, and not seeing it as a problem.

Gilligan (1993, 2011) and other early feminist theorists (Baker-Miller, 1976; 1986; Baker-Miller and Pierce-Striver, 1997; Belenky et al.; 1997; Fletcher, 2003) were helpful as I inquired into my own voice and early experiences. For example, I came to understand that serving others and building connections is a basic principle around which many women's lives are organised. The threat of disruption of these serving roles and connections is perceived not as just a loss of relationship but as something closer to loss of self (Jean Baker Miller, 1976;1986). I saw this in my own experience as a young girl. I learned early on to 'fit in', and to put aside my own needs in order to gain recognition as 'good' from others (Gilligan, 2011). This often meant focusing on what others had to say, making *them*

feel listened to, and tending to *their* sense of wellbeing. These were not conscious decisions, but they enabled me to stay in relationship with others who didn't reciprocate care and concern.

In systems of unequal power one of the markers of the more powerful is considered to be the entitlement of having others adopt a relational approach that allows them to anticipate your needs and desires and respond to them without being asked. On the other hand, markers associated with being less powerful is being required to do the anticipating and accommodating without any expectation of reciprocity (Miller, 1976; Fletcher, 2003).

Whilst even now, the end of a relationship is something I will strive hard to avoid; I am more mindful of my personal boundaries and the extent of my responsibility. I can also see how my strong tendency to anticipate and attend to the needs of others (in some situations), may appear to others as timidity and a subservient disposition.

My sense is these theories can be read as interventions, and as such can help women understand their own experience and remind other feminists of what we have in common. They have also challenged the assumptions and traditions of social science creating a shift in how research is carried out. Many have been heavily contested, particularly by those aligned to positivism, and others have been elaborated in later work (Gilligan, 2011). All have paved the way for more enlightened study of male and female development and the impact on our voices and relationships in the world.

Women often refer to 'losing or gaining voice' as they reflect on their development as speakers and knowers (Belenky et al., 1997), also as they grow in confidence, for example, through gaining qualifications, knowledge and status at work. Such attributes are seen as key enablers of self-assurance and confidence to speak (Simpson and Lewis, 2007; Simpson et al, 2005). Essentially these works attempt to describe and defend the previously unarticulated, intuited or ignored 'different' voice and experience of women. Often sources and causes of silencing are identified as social and developmental, with solutions based on the virtues of women's development and inclusion. The actual intricacies in the moments of conversation that bring about silencing are left relatively unexplored.

3.4 Voice as participation in social interaction

Our voice expressed as vocal sounds or talk, or in other forms such as poetry, writing and art, is an essential aspect of our humanity and agency in the world.

‘voice is embodied and in language, it connects with biology and culture without reducing it to either’. (Gilligan, 2011, p. 177)

Yet our participation in everyday social interaction is full of conflict and paradox, and for women our voices are in question. Often thwarted in our attempts to speak and share what we know, many women find comfort in remaining invisible or complicit in our own oppression (Fielding-Singh, 2018; Eleftheriou-Smith, 2018). I have wondered why we shy away from questions about how we construct our voice in the world, whether our voice fits in certain situations and why, and how we experience the nature of our conversations. Whilst gender equality at the level of interaction has been of interest to researchers, the various perspectives on how men and women participate in social interactions and why, have failed to offer liberating advice or foundations for change.

In the field of linguistics, studies looking at the unequal participation of men and women in conversation usually refer to deep-seated gender differences in communication styles and assign meaning to their behaviour (Zimmerman and West, 1975; Lakoff, 1975; Dale, 1980; Tannen, 1990). These researchers tend to refer to women’s absence of voice, speech, talk and sound, or speech practices that reflect and reinforce a subordinate role in the use of language and perpetuation of inequality. They tell us what we know: that more often than not, men control and dominate conversations, they talk more, they control what gets talked about, they interrupt more.

The work undertaken by Aries (1996) considers the complexity of these issues further. Through her critical review of the literature and research on interactions between men and women she applies a postmodern perspective. Exposing the possibility that the ‘facts’ of previous research may be open to multiple interpretations, depending on how researchers choose to interpret and communicate the data or evidence. Her re-evaluation of the research literature including her own, leads her to conclude that actually the similarities between men and women outweigh the differences. Aries provides a compelling argument that the various aspects of situational context such as status, sex role norms, cultural norms of how men and women should behave together, and the consequences of deviating from expectation, also need to be considered as influencing the manifestation of gender

differences. In different situations and contexts, men and women behave differently, displaying both masculine and feminine (socially constructed) characteristics. Thus, to explain gender difference she says we need to move away from a conceptualisation of gender as an innate or internalised attribute or style, to an understanding of gender as something people do in social interaction.

‘We need an understanding of gender to help us explain why gender differences are so variable in their appearance and why the effect of gender is so much stronger in some situational contexts than others.’ (Aries, 1996, p. 16)

Gilligan’s later work (2011) reinforces the role of oppressive institutions and practices in influencing how women and our voices are shaped and perceived. In *Joining the Resistance*, she explicitly identifies patriarchy as the system of attitudes, values, moral codes and institutions that separate men from men as well as from women and divide women into good or bad. This situation she says often leads to men and women disengaging from what they know about themselves. In an omnipresent context of oppression, men and women continue to hold on to these false stories of what comprises manly and womanly attributes and moral behaviour, including who should speak and when.

Integral to these ongoing struggles, to encourage the capacities that constitute our humanity, and to release democracy from the grip of patriarchy, is, according to Gilligan, a feminist ethics of care. She contends that as long as human qualities are divided into masculine and feminine, we will be alienated from ourselves and from one another. I see and experience this alienation in our organisations and institutions, causing women to bury their knowing in their guts and hearts, often preventing us from forming relationships that make us feel good. Hierarchies of power both rely on and perpetuate the dissociations that Gilligan identifies, and compromise attempts to develop more relational and collaborative cultures.

Karpowitz and Mendelberg’s (2014) exploration of women’s participation and influence in meetings and decision making, also evidences the influence of culture on women’s voices and democracy. In their experimental research they analyse the silencing of women, revealing how the gender composition of groups and institutional rules can impede women’s voices and diminish their authority. Affecting who speaks up, how the groups interact and the kinds of issues the group takes up, and what the group ultimately decides.

The importance of context is emphasised as a key factor in achieving gender equality at the level of group interaction—the remedy being to design institutions and organisations that can teach people and motivate them, to think about alternative ways of doing things and the legitimacy of different points of view.

My sense is that these studies help us to understand our culture. Furthermore, they refrain from portraying patriarchy as a battle between men and women. Instead the quest for democracy is seen perhaps as a pursuit to overcome social hierarchies, recognise and resist self-silencing, and creating the institutional conditions to enable different and equal voices to be heard, and great relationships to develop. I explore patriarchy further in section 3.7, however for the purpose of this discussion and others in this thesis, I consider Gilligan & Snider's (2018) depiction of patriarchy appropriate. They define patriarchy as a culture based on gender stereotypes, hierarchy and power. A framework or lens within which we learn to 'see human capacities as either "masculine" or "feminine" and to privilege the masculine' (Pg. 6). In this culture we see some men are elevated over other men and all men over women. Furthermore, the elevation of men over women and the rules that specify how men and women should behave constitutes both men and women's way of being in the world.

3.5 Silence as participation – being silenced and choosing silence

Feminist discourse around silence and silencing usually refers to the experience of women as a powerless group (Belenky et al., 1986, Gilligan, 1993). Signifying women's exclusion in the production of culture and knowledge, and exclusion from or absence of speech. Yet within feminism itself and related disciplines *silence* also refers to a variety of different phenomena.

Feminist researchers DeVault and Ingraham (1999) explored their own conceptual differences of silence and how these manifested as assumptions informing their research projects. In addition to 'not talking' being silent is taken to mean not being heard, being ignored, having no authority, not being present, not participating, and so on. Their conversations also revealed some of their own personal silences and resurfaced the complex and powerful system of social control, and the continuing effects of gendered silencing practices. Despite radical challenges over time we are reminded that women are still silenced in a variety of ways. If we are unable to discourage or prevent, we have to find ways to compensate and survive.

Feminist discourse doesn't usually consider the use of silence as an interactive response such as an expression of respect, when we are listening intently, or the chosen silences of enabling and cooperation. Linguists however, look at how silence, together with speech is used in conversation where it doesn't necessarily mean a lack of power (Kurzon, 1992; Aries, 1996). Fivush (2010) an eminent psychologist also identifies multiple meanings – silence as imposed 'being silenced', silence as shared: 'being silent'; transforming silence: 'creating narratives of resistance' and silence as power: 'life scripts and master narratives'. She argues that our construction of resistance narratives, and ability to tell our stories of trauma and oppression have far reaching implications for both developing an understanding of who, and how, we are in the world.

In summary then, while silence can be constructed as an expression of verbal discipline, the choice to be silent is different from 'being silenced'. The silence of quiet is different from imposed or oppressive silence. Whilst the sound is the same, the experience is entirely different, and because it matters what is voiced and what is silenced, for the sake of our identity, our well-being and our relationships. It is oppressive silence I am concerned with here.

3.6 Silence, Gender and Organisations

In literature on gender and organisations, the voices of women, their issues and their grievances, are often transformed into silence by the more powerful masculine voices. For example, silence can exist in organisations around female areas of sexuality, emotions and discriminatory practices (Mills, 2002; Simpson and Lewis, 2007). Thus, experiences of silence and voice play an important role in organisational discourse, as well as in the creation of social and psychological identity. Dominant groups often use silencing as a means of 'othering' women or minorities—for example, a silent response to someone expressing fears or concerns about sexually orientated behaviour at work, or disclosure of sexual orientation. How we come to see each other as men and women at work is a product of such discourse.

There is often a silence around conflict as dominant ideologies deny the existence of points of view that could be disruptive of existing power relations. I experienced this 'tool of domination' (Lewis and Simpson and Lewis, 2007) with a team of three male leadership consultants for which I was responsible a few years ago. As their leader I strove to improve the quality of how we 'talked and worked together'. Yet I experienced resistance from every angle. Through my first-person and second person inquiries I examined the

complexity of our interactions over time. It seemed that my attempts to lead them in a feminine (relational) way were considered weak and not how leaders should behave. Often it felt like nothing tangible was said or done, yet I felt ‘done to’, harassed, and ignored. My attempts to achieve some sort of mutuality in these relationships were unsuccessful (I will return to this example later).

Prevailing and ‘normalised’ rules and practices can also suppress issues like sexual harassment (Collinson and Collinson, 1996;) or even perhaps ‘social silencing’ as issues worthy of consideration and debate. ‘Naming’ is thus an important form of social acknowledgement. A lack of naming can render a woman’s experience ‘blank’ or ‘rubbed out’, serving to keep her invisible and making it difficult to construct her identity and to act (Simpson and Lewis, 2007). I also consider naming an important element in developing collective social meaning associated with experiences we struggle to make sense of with our current resources, and thus overcoming a hermeneutical injustice. It is through naming our experiences of social silencing that we will be able to make sense of and share our knowing and mobilise resources to enable a different quality of conversation.

3.7 Conversation in a patriarchal society

I along with most feminists and others use the word ‘patriarchy’ to conceptualise the social system or world in which we live. The term is used extensively to explain male dominance as a social phenomenon, system and ideology, and is variously understood by anthropologists, evolutionary psychologists, sociologists and feminist philosophers, seeking to trace its history and empirical substantiation (Miller, 2015).

The word ‘patriarchy’ literally means the rule of the father or the ‘patriarch’, and originally it was used to conceptualise a specific type of ‘male-dominated family’(Sultana, 2016) yet overtime patriarchy is used to refer to male domination – the power relations that keep women dominated in both the private and public spheres (Bhasin, 2006; Sultana, 2016).

My understanding of patriarchy as ‘a society that promotes male privilege’ evolved from interrogation of evolutionary theorists and historical perspectives (Lerner, 1986; Khule, 2012, Eagly & Wood, 2011). Whilst I drew comfort as I saw my own oppression embedded in our evolutionary and historical pasts, I could also see that as our conditions change and culture shifts, social inequality albeit modified, is reproduced over time. Thus, how patriarchy is defined and resisted changes. I thus consider feminist theory and

research necessary to interrogate the complex social structures and forces that keep a male-privileged system in place.

Many theorists seeking to understand the historical deprivation of women or find ways out of patriarchy, capture the depth, pervasiveness and interconnectedness of different aspects of women's subordination and oppression (Lerner, 1986; Walby, 1990; Bartky, 1990; Stanley and Wise, 1993; Gilligan and Richards, 2009; Gilligan & Snider, 2018),

The varying perspectives across feminisms and academic disciplines deliberate patriarchy origins, the triggers of inequality, and how the system continues to be reproduced. Despite the differing constructions there is general agreement that the organising role of patriarchy in society remains the strongest force in social relations and is the prime obstacle to women's development and democracy (Gilligan & Richards, 2009; Sultana, 2016) Patriarchy is a persisting social injustice that has consequences for everyone.

Some might say the origin of the word patriarchy has lost significance in feminism, and it has become a code word for men's oppression¹ of women. However, the feminist movement has continued to rail against oppression of women in all its forms paving the way for a deeper understanding of the impact of patriarchy and the mechanisms keeping the women dominated and subordinate, as well as retheorising how structures of power organise around the intersecting relations of race, class and gender to maintain control (Fenstermaker & West, 2002).

Gilligan & Snider (2018) construct patriarchy as a framework or lens that 'leads us to see human capacities as either 'masculine' or 'feminine' and to privilege the masculine, elevates some men over other men and all men over women, and forces a split between the self and relationships so that in effect men have selves, whereas women ideally are selfless, and women have relationships, which surreptitiously serve men's needs' (p. 6)

This definition in my view encompasses many of the problems women have in relation to the human capacity of *voice* in all its forms. Gilligan & Snider's analysis highlights the

¹ Merriam-Webster defines oppression as a sense of being weighed down in body or in mind, or the unjust or excessive exercise of power. Feminist the systematic manner in which certain groups are privileged and others are disadvantaged because of their gender and intersecting with race, class, sexuality, background, age etc. Oppression can be economic, political and psychological. For further explanation see Bartky, S.L. (1990) *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the phenomenology of oppression*. New York: Routledge or Freire, P. (1970, 1992). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

tension between the cultural and insidious psychological aspects of patriarchy on men and women. Exposing how we can unconsciously absorb and reify the rules, codes, scripts specifying how women and men should act, that we consciously and often actively oppose.

A socially constructed understanding leads us to see that while people go about making their own history, they do so within the confines of their cultural circumstances and conditions and the dominant discourse of the time (Foucault, 1980). Thus, gender, can be seen as ‘social performance’ (Butler, 1990) or as a ‘contingent and situated accomplishment’ (Fenstermaker & West (2002). The concern is, whose acting out of gender gets noticed? How power relations define and shape difference in society, how they determine the prevailing norms and expectations, determines who gets to speak and whose voice gets heard. Given that we are all part of this reality, we construct our sense of self and each other through ‘the two-sided dynamic of (discursively related) gendering practices and the practicing of gender’ (Simpson & Lewis, 2007, p. 27).

Despite women’s increasing legal rights, occupational status and representation in corporate leadership, politics etc (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014), individuals are still predominantly sorted into gendered roles. How we see ourselves, and our sense of voice, authority and confidence as men and women are products of discourse and this has important implications for whose voice and how voices are heard, and how political power and authority is understood and used. It is at the level of interaction that gender inequality compromises women’s influence and authority in both public and private spheres of life.

Contemporary feminists are also now recognising and confronting the effects of patriarchal oppression on men (hooks, 2004; Gilligan & Richards, 2009; Solnit, 2017; Gilligan & Snider, 2018). Gilligan and Richards (2009) identify how men also learn to separate within themselves early in life. They learn that relational desires, empathy and emotional intelligence are unmanly, leading to attitudes, values and moral codes that separate men from women. They learn to be silent not only to others but to themselves. Women are complicit in enforcing such demands on men, also on each other, and the next generation (Gilligan, 2011; Gilligan and Richards, 2009). We all perpetuate how patriarchy becomes rooted in our inner worlds.

In Gilligan’s *Joining the Resistance* (2011) patriarchy is firmly linked with this fragmentation of the psyche and trauma. She concludes that a *feminist* ethic of care enables women and men, girls and boys, to resist the pressures to disengage themselves from their

honest voices and desires for relationship. A feminism joined with this ethic of care Gilligan says, would be reflected in our interactions - attentive listening and respect, curiosity accompanying disagreement, and a surge of energy and hope for resolving the divisions and conflicts in our relationships.

Gilligan's (2011) focus is on possibilities for resistance to the forces of patriarchy. She contends that men and women have the resources within us to overcome divisiveness and social hierarchies and realise our relational ideals. Along with others (hooks, 2004, 2016; Gilligan and Richards, 2009; Solnit, 2017), I find myself fuelled by a desire for more ethical, equal and loving relationships, inclusion in all aspects of life, and the ideology of democracy, and, encouraged by the call for a more integrated and collaborative approach to change. I argue here that the social patterns and structures of domination are produced in and through our conversational encounters. Our voices and the language we use expresses who we are and our authority in the world. Over time we come to know what standards and norms (predominantly defined by men) for life are expected of us. Including who can speak and who can't. Who has power and who doesn't.

Where there is a concentration of particular worldviews, in our societies and cultures (our context), these are reflected in our patterns of social behaviour. Through talking together, we create meaningful realities and valued actions. In other words, through our participation in relationships with each other, 'the world comes to be what it is for us' (Gergen, 1999 p. 5). And as we introduce children into our society, they come to construct the world in much the same way as we do. This is how patriarchy is reproduced.

This does not mean that all men are powerful; indeed, many men in patriarchies do not feel powerful. Nor does it mean that all women are powerless. However, as Johnson (2009) says we do 'spend most of our days doing what other men tell us to do whether we want to or not' (p. 6), often then failing to realise our own power and potential. Where there is a concentration of power, men are the ones more likely to have it. When voices previously unheard are heard, stories told that have never been heard power relations are disrupted (Solnit, 2017). By redefining whose voice is valued, and redistributing power, we redefine our society. Perhaps those who highlight the losses associated with patriarchy (hooks, 2000; 2004; Gilligan & Snider, 2018) by both men and women will generate more ethical perspectives and collaborative resistance between the sexes. As Gergen suggests, we are not bound by history or tradition to continuously recreate the world as it is:

‘as we speak together, listen to new voices, raise questions, ponder alternatives, and play at the edges of common sense, we cross the threshold into new worlds of meaning. The future is ours together to create’ (Gergen, 1999 p. 7).

These views of seeing the world as socially constructed are contested ideas (Holstein and Miller, 2006), yet I have experienced ‘coming’ to see the world, and myself in the world, significantly differently through engaging in first- and second-person inquiries (see Bayntun-Lees, 2012). As I listened to different voices including feminist theories, I came to view my experiences of abuse², including being silenced, differently. I saw the evidence of oppression and patriarchal forms of control over time. Furthermore, my attempts to access the support I needed as I disentangled myself from an abusive marriage, were thwarted, as my experiences were hardly understood in my social context.

Feminist movements across decades have attempted to disrupt gender inequality and patriarchal control. Only to find the technologies or networks of power that keep it in place are robust. These networks are structural and social, existing in every nook and cranny of our organisations and social communities. Many argue patriarchy will not be resolved without restructuring our social environment, social opportunities, and the sex role prescriptions for behaviour (Aries, 1996; Fleming Miller, 2015; Gilligan & Snider, 2018). The enormity of this request and its related objections however, generates a risk of complacency which we must resist. We must continue to find ways to understand and expose the injustice and contradictions of patriarchy. Only then will we realise the equal voice of women and the quality of relationships fundamental to a democratic and loving society.

My research focuses on the aspect of silence and silencing specific to women in the midst of social interactions. In this thesis I explore the phenomenon of social silencing; an embodied silence in the moments of interaction that allows silencers or oppressors to continue unchecked.

² I use the term abuse to refer to Domestic Abuse. Defined as ‘an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer’. It is very common. In the vast majority of cases it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men (Home Office, 2013;2017; Women’s Aid, 2019)

I will show how inscriptions from our early social interactions are embedded in our present social behaviour, and, how day-to-day patterns of domination, both institutional and interpersonal, both produce and maintain systems of domination, in particular in our interactive processes. I argue that our conversations produce our ongoing reality, this means the structures and practices of patriarchy are kept in place through how and why we talk like we do, what is talked about, and the actions taken as a result. If we stand any chance of constructing a different world we have to start with where social construction takes place—in our conversations at work, in our intimate relationships, in life.

As discussed earlier, my inquiry stems from personal experiences of losing my voice and an ongoing quest to find and sustain my voice. In all my life roles, I also notice many (not all) women struggling to sustain their voice and power in everyday situations. I see or hear stories of how they either adapt their behaviour to resist, or avoid oppressive situations, often responding in ways that made them feel ‘bad’ about themselves. In this thesis I inquire deeply into some of these experiences.

My inquiry seeks to find ways that I and other women can sustain our voice in ways that make us feel ‘good’ (and what does ‘good’ mean?), enable us to live according to our values, enable us to do what is right at the right time, and at the same time recognise that all this may not always be straightforward, easy or possible.

My research seeks to contribute to the empowerment of these women to free us of the muddles and puzzles created through abuses of power and oppression in the context of our everyday interactions. Is it really inevitable that so many conversations should be either fruitless or destructive, or at worst damaging? I think not. My sense is that whilst diverse voices and inclusive cultures are centre stage; *‘the business imperatives’* of today, the art of good generative conversation is in its infancy.

Explanations of silence and voice at the micro-level of interaction (the doing or acting of gender) go beyond the notion of difference in interacting styles. Indeed, men and women are both capable of displaying feminine and masculine behaviour in different contexts. Gender differences in conversation are contextual and steeped in power, which in my view should not be ignored. I contend that more understanding is needed of what people do in interaction, and why, and how they use power to relate, and influence outcomes? I discuss this issue further in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4
Feminisms and Foucault



‘No woman is ever simply or singularly female,
but it is always of consequence that she is’.

Zillah Eisenstein, 2013

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the key theoretical insights grounding my research approach and informing my interpretation and analysis of the data. The insights discussed here also represent informing aspects of my journey into feminist territory and the work of Michel Foucault. A series of inquiry conversations with selected theorists that began in earnest after the transfer stage of the Ashridge Doctorate Programme influencing my development as a feminist researcher. This chapter has been reconstructed several times as my feminist consciousness evolved, and the emphasis required shifted throughout the research process.

Firstly, I explore theories of women's psychological development and relational inclinations, including some phenomenological analyses of women's oppression in everyday situations. I was particularly drawn to these earlier feminist theories, claiming to surface deep-seated norms in our intimate and social lives and our institutions. They expose a contextual understanding of patriarchal oppression of women as subjects, knowers and speakers, particularly relevant to this research.

Secondly, I situate the experience of social silencing within Fricker's (2010) notion of 'hermeneutic injustice'. Thus, I construct the 'social silencing' of women as a distinctive social experience, requiring collective social interpretation and understanding. I go on to suggest that Foucault's poststructuralist analyses of power (1977; 1978, 1991, 1996), facilitate identification of a modern conception of power relations that integrate previous feminist conceptions of 'power over (dominant power) and power to (agency)' (Baker-Miller, 1976; 1997; Allen, 2013) and encourage us to consider how complex social power relations both produce and sustain women's experiences of being silenced and patriarchal oppression generally.

Finally, I summarise Foucault's later work on ethics, technologies of the self, and 'practices of freedom' (Foucault, 1984; 1997; Martin et al., 1988). Whilst traditional techniques of self can be seen as 'normalising techniques', or methods of assessment and self-construction into the norms of any culture or society (McLaren, 2002). I contend that, if consciously revised, they can provide a potential platform for empowerment. Through developing reflexive connections between our self-understanding, our contextual experience, and our agency, there is considerable potential for disrupting power relations and social transformation.

4.2 My Introduction to Feminist Relational Theory

Initially my readings were recommended texts by feminists such as bell hooks (1999, 2000) and Carol Gilligan (1993), and early relational feminist theorists —Jean Baker-Miller (1976), Jordan, et al (1991); Belenky et al., (1986). These texts proved helpful as I explored my own experience through first- and second-person inquiry (Reason & Bradbury, 2001; 2008; Marshall, 2016). I was particularly struck by writers and theorists who studied the effects of patriarchy on the identity, experience, and bodies of women. Also, relational theorists who identify the connection between relationship and human development, emphasising that learning, and growth take place between individuals in relationship with each other. I found what I read inspirational, confirming to me that this was the territory in which I wanted to immerse myself. I gained comprehension of the absence of women in the production of knowledge, particularly ‘about women’, due to the dominant intellectual ethos of our time.

The early ground-breaking studies of for example, Baker-Miller, 1976; Gilligan, 1993; Belenky et al., 1986; Jordan et al., 1991; Baker-Miller & Striver, 1997, claim that the female self or ‘identity’ is *produced* by patriarchy. I use the term ‘gender identity’ here to refer to the differential constructions of human beings into female and male categories or types. These theorists give us insights into how gender inequalities in status and power, and the resultant domination, impedes women’s psychological and intellectual development, and their expression as knowers and speakers

Whilst the silencing of women’s voices is a constant theme, representing a kind of relational and shared silence, the nature of silence ranges from an absence of speech, a strategy used in the face of coercion, to not participating or not being present at all. It is evident across these early studies, (for example Belenky et al., 1986 & Gilligan, 1993), that many of the participants have a strong sense of what is expected of them in terms of particular kinds of talk and expression, and also the consequences of speaking up in the context of their intimate and social relationships, when it is not desired. This awareness is still evident in contemporary accounts of women’s silencing (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014; Sandberg & Grant, 2015; Beard, 2017; Solnit, 2017; Eleftheriou-Smith, 2018.). The rules of any given institution or society play a part in determining how women’s voices and authority are impeded or not.

Feminist relational theories do not claim to speak for all women, nor do they claim that all women subscribe to them. However, they are positioned as alternatives to the masculine-

biased mainstream theories of psychological, intellectual and moral growth that underlie most of how society is structured. Jean Baker-Miller (1976) and other psychological theorists (Gilligan, 1993; Jordan et al., 1991; Belenky et al.; 1986; Robb, 2006) proposed that there were important sex differences in the experience and construction of self. The central theme of these works is that women's development proceeds on a different basis to the formulations of separateness and individuation offered by the male models. Instead, women are inclined to stay with, build on, and develop in a context of connection and relationships with others. The primary experience of self is thus relational, and further relationship is seen as the basic goal for development. 'Women's sense of self becomes very much organised around being able to make and then maintain affiliations and relationships' (Baker-Miller, 1976, p. 87).

These and other related theories align with participatory perspectives and a socially constructed view of reality. In their representation of women's experiences, they provide compelling evidence of how women's way of being in the world is constructed through social relationships and based on the prevailing notions of femininity at the time.

I also found they resonated and were helpful in making sense of some of the confusing experiences and directions I took in my early life. I reflected on my childhood and my tendency as a young adult to take responsibility and work hard at sustaining my own, and others' relationships with my mother. I experienced her as angry and aggressive alternating with declarations of love. I examined the ways in which I sought relational connections in my work after a difficult and disconnected childhood, and my continuous pursuit of development in areas of relational practice, such as nursing, teaching, and consulting (Bayntun-Lees, 2012a).

Relational theory (Baker-Miller, 1976 Baker-Miller & Pierce-Stiver, 1997) explains how the threat of disconnection is perceived not as just a loss of relationship but as something closer to loss of self. Women's healthy psychological growth is seen as dependent on growth-fostering relationships, and disconnection—keeping more and more of our experience out of our connections—thus becomes a strategy to sustain connection in the face of serious disruptions in important relationships. This process is seen as the central relational paradox and is fundamental to understanding many psychological problems, such as depression and anxiety (Jordan et al., 1991; Baker-Miller & Pierce-Stiver, 1997). I wondered if my own experiences and episodes of depression could be explained in this way.

Relational interactions characterised by mutual empathy, mutual empowerment and mutual, ethical responsibility are seen as essential features of the specific kind of relational interaction through which growth occurs (Baker-Miller, 1986; Baker-Miller & Stiver, 1997). Whilst such relationships are considered the central tenet of women's existence, many women are often unable to achieve this sense of connection in their early lives or intimate relationships, particularly in contexts of individuality, secrecy, separation, and isolation (Fishman, 1978; Belenky et al., 1986; Baker-Miller & Stiver, 1997). The evidence suggests that this can lead to feelings of disconnection, confusion, loneliness, unworthiness, and shame. Furthermore, without experiences of growth-fostering connectedness, relationships can be less resilient, and the effects can lead to mental health problems.

Gilligan (1993) also describes the importance of women finding their own voice in order to describe 'ourselves to ourselves'. She indicates that women's experiences of connectedness to others lead to more developed conceptions of self, morality, and visions of relationships. I recognise my own continuous pursuit of 'good' relationships has in fact served me well, and the ethical connotations of my understanding of 'good relationships' resonating with these early feminist works. Yet recently I have developed a different clarity of what constitutes 'good' in relationship. Feminist relational theory has helped me to become more discerning and determined to seek relationships of shared responsibility and mutual qualities.

In the early stages of my research '*good*', for me, was a concern with how I *feel* in relationships and interactions, yet I was hesitant to articulate what was required for me to *feel good*. First-person inquiry into my experiences of being silenced, informed by relational theory, enabled me to construct more considered versions of what 'good' is for me:

A good conversation or interaction is one where I feel comfortable and able to speak, am listened to, and I am heard. I am able to enact my power from my value base and with conscious intent. Sometimes I also want to listen hard and speak less, without criticism. When I'm doing this I am often having valuable conversations in my head, I'm thinking, bringing ideas together, and making sense. My talk then is thoughtful; as Zeldin (2000) says, 'talk without thought is empty' (p. 85). This, however, is the starting

point. Anything less is not good enough. In my view the best conversation is collective, purposeful and ethically mindful work, where thoughts and expressions are shared, mutuality and integrity are cultivated among participants, and learning happens. Thus, good conversation for me is participative and connecting, reciprocal and positively productive. It is through ‘good conversations’ that ‘good relationships’ emerge and develop. (Journal, 2016)

I notice again how my sense of responsibility for creating the relational conditions is embedded in my description. However, I am mindful to pay attention to the responsibilities of the other. Relational theory proposes that men and some women are encouraged to deny themselves the relational skills needed to survive psychologically, relying instead on the construction of women as the predominant social care-takers of relational activity. In recognising these factors in my own relationships, I am confronted with the challenge of overcoming the responsibility issue, and indeed the skills and attributes required to participate in conversations and relationships of this nature.

Sociologists, West & Zimmerman (1987) in their ground-breaking article ‘Doing Gender’ introduced helpful distinctions between the ascribed characteristics of sex (male/female) and the achieved characteristics of gender (boy/girl or man/woman).

They reconceptualized gender not as a simple property of individuals as male or female but as an integral dynamic of social orders. Their view of gender as an accomplishment (‘doing gender’) diverted traditional perceptions of gender associated with natural and intrinsic traits and features, to something that is performed or ‘done’ as an ongoing activity embedded in everyday interaction in a continuing social context.

West & Zimmerman’s sociological perspective relies on social conventions and practices which codify and manifest masculinity and femininity. These productions of gender are the result of social structures and in themselves also serve to perpetuate and reinforce them. ‘Doing gender’ thus means to perform complex social activities that create differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are social constructed, not natural, essential or biological. ‘Once the differences have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the ‘essentialness’ of gender and can then be portrayed as fundamental and enduring dispositions. If we apply this notion to the gendered construction of women as

caretakers of relationships it is possible to see how inequality in this realm can be sustained over time.

West and Zimmerman's perspectives enable us to understand how gender (and other categories) operate with one another and how performance might vary across interactions and situations. We are also able to address the mechanisms that produce power and inequality in social life, for example how institutions and societies determine what characteristics are associated with men and women according to what is valued.

Gilligan's (1993) 'In a Different Voice' also identifies one of the main factors maintaining women's subordinated status as the discrepancy between the female gendered self, associated with the ethic and orientation of care *produced* through patriarchy, and the values ascribed to these, as opposed to the masculine ethic of justice in our society. She and others (Baker-Miller, 1979; Baker-Miller & Striver, 1997) argue that women's psychological growth and development lies in the recognition of the continuing importance of human connection and relationships. Progress towards a fuller women's development of voice and active participation in everyday life, appear mainly in solutions of therapeutic intervention, and an ethical focus on inclusion.

These early studies whilst resonant in many women's experiences, were written in the 'silencing' (positivist) tradition, to some extent privileging an abstract, generalized knowing, and devaluing local knowing (DeVault, 1999). They are relatively silent about how culture and our oppressive institutions distort and discipline women's voices day to day. Whilst Belenky et al. (1986) argue for young women to be 'full participants in any ongoing dialogue' (p. 33), any emphasis on how their participation might change that dialogue, or how the feminine perspective might influence the production of culture are left relatively unexplored.

In DeVault's (1999) review of Belenky et al.'s (1986) *Women's ways of knowing*, she also highlights how the authors characterize or construct the women interviewed as 'silent', for example, as a result growing up in isolating and aggressive contexts. In making silence a way of being, the source and cause of silencing are displaced, and the actual process of silencing unexamined.

I, along with many feminists, accept the fact of women's oppression (patriarchy) on the basis of my own and other women's experiences. I use the term patriarchy now to reflect 'a

historically and socially constructed organisation of society where men have power over women' (journal, 2012)

The nature (or construction) of patriarchy differs according to individual perspectives, the focus of their work, and changes over time. (See Walby, 1990; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Bartky, 1990; Miller, 2015; Gilligan & Snider, 2018). However, ongoing analysis is essential to capture the depth, pervasiveness and interconnectedness of the different aspects of women's oppression. Indeed, theory about patriarchy can and should be developed to take account of the different forms of gender equality over time and between classes and ethnic groups.

At the same time, there is a need to separate the notion of progress in the position of women, from that of changes in the form of gender inequality and oppression (Calas & Smircich, 1993), and raise questions about what theory is and what it is for. It is here that I believe theory generated through action research has the potential to help, as a way of seeking generative and equalizing practice in the world.

In my post-transfer paper writing, I asked questions about the omnipresence of patriarchy. I was clearly concerned about, and struggling to understand why, women – feminists even – behaved in ways that 'I believed' a feminist would understand as oppressive:

Feminists believe that patriarchy infiltrates everything and I do believe that at the macro level. At the micro level it's hard to make the same generalisations around gender, as women can be oppressive in their intersubjective relationships too ... why is it that I feel so determined to look at the micro-practices of power from a feminist perspective? (Post transfer writing, November 2012)

Around the same time, I was trying to come to terms with some difficult experiences in my role as a trustee of a Women's Aid Charity. These poignant experiences of oppression (in particular, what I now recognise as experiences of social silencing) in a feminist-led organisation came as a shock and took a while to comprehend.

When I joined the organization in 2010, I believed I was joining a group of like-minded people working to support women suffering domestic abuse locally. Over a period of two years, I struggled to have a voice in this organization, and interestingly, so did another

trustee (Irene) who was a survivor of domestic abuse. It seemed that our ‘expertise’, our ‘experience’, was not welcome and we experienced behaviour from the other trustees that mirrored that of the abusers we had left behind. I felt diminished and confused. Irene recounted her own experience in relation to the ‘Moving On’ programme I was trying to launch, in one of our co-inquiry conversations (I will explain these further in the next chapter):

I think it’s this notion that if **you** are successful, **they** would lose control, it was all about control, I have no doubt in my mind. They needed to control everything ... I thought it was very strange when your programme was clearly very successful and could benefit the women ... then as you produced more and more evidence, they started saying you were too closely involved emotionally. If you had been you wouldn’t have been able to produce that piece of work, wouldn’t have had the objectivity, you had run the pilot, you had experienced its success, evaluated it ... I can’t believe ... I just couldn’t understand ... they fought so hard ... it was a year really from start to finish. They treated you very badly. (Irene)

I learnt here that feminism means different things to different feminists. I believe these women had lost sight of how our experience is the ontological basis of our knowledge. I made several attempts to call attention to what I now perceive as their (in particular, the Charity manager’s) somewhat underhand and, dare I say, domineering ways of working (I will discuss some of these later). Their actions, to me, were abuses of power that were not only denied; I was also accused of ‘not having any evidence’, my experience was not enough. My desire and encouragement to work in more open, transparent and equal ways failed dismally and eventually I made the painful decision to leave (see Appendix 1). Irene, my trustee colleague, left before I did. The Charity therefore lost the two members of the board with real experience of domestic abuse.

I consider this experience a clear and shocking expression of women oppressing women, a consequence of imposed structures and internalized behaviours and attitudes. Along with many others in this inquiry, it confronted me with the realization that many women oppress too. I learnt that as women we ourselves internalise the social norms of our patriarchal societies. This for some means that to be powerful we have to learn to exert power over others. In my letter of resignation (Appendix 1), whilst clearly articulating my experience, I aimed to express and represent a more contemporary feminism in action.

It took a while to feel justified in my sense-making, yet I was in no doubt that I, too, was a victim of the established order of things. Thus, as I progressed in my inquiries, I sought to surface any deeply entrenched internalized patriarchal attitudes I have, and feminist theory was helpful here. For example, Bartky (1990), who grounds her work in everyday life, provides some riveting yet controversial phenomenological accounts of various aspects of oppression and how modern patriarchy has taken root within our very identities. Later this became evident in the experiences of participants in this inquiry. In Chapter 8, you will read how early life experiences and culture harm and subjugate women. This impacts our ability to know ourselves and realise the potential of our voice in the world (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1993). I was further surprised that almost two-thirds of the accounts of women being silenced concerned women silencing women. (I discuss this phenomenon later in section 9.4.)

The fact is that women's oppression has consequences for everyone, not least children, and even men themselves are oppressed by their own status as oppressors (Stanley & Wise, 1993; Gilligan, 1990; hooks, 2004, Gilligan & Richards, 2014). Evolutionary (Wilber, 2001; Kuhle, 2012), historical (Lerner, 1986; Walby, 1990), and contemporary perspectives (Gilligan & Richards, 2014; Miller, 2015; Gilligan, 2018)) have been helpful to me in grounding my understanding of the construction and development of patriarchy, how I am complicit in its reproduction, and my purpose as a feminist researcher.

4.3 Social Silencing – An Epistemic Injustice.

Miranda Fricker's (2007, 2010) work on epistemic injustice has been influential in my exploration of social silencing. Fricker as a feminist philosopher and lawyer focuses on epistemic practices (our practice as knowers in everyday life). She builds on Foucault's conceptions of power and takes his work into the micro aspects of social interaction, subjectivity and epistemic ethics. She brings ethics and circumstances of everyday knowing together in a way that makes these injustices instantly recognisable.

Fricker's account is a complex exploration of the ethics of our human practice in the world, as 'knowers' and 'hearers'. She gives a compelling exploration of the precarious friendship between ethics and epistemology, and the negative space in which a distinctively epistemic type of injustice occupies, when someone is wronged specifically in his or her capacity as a 'knower'. Whilst a number of related phenomena may be brought under the general heading of 'epistemic injustice', the focus of her analyses is the

epistemic practices we engage in in the context of day to day life experiences. Inquiring into these negative spaces of epistemic injustice Fricker identifies two central forms of injustice - testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice, homing in on how power operates at the micro level and the harm done to people through their capacity as knowers through social power. In her analysis she negotiates with Foucauldian conceptualisations of power in matters of knowing and doing. She uses a compelling selection of literary examples to reveal the existence of these injustices potentially disturbing our embedded assumptions and practices as knowers and speakers. Both of these forms of injustice are relevant to the experience of being socially silenced.

Fricker asserts the capacity to convey knowledge as being fundamental to being human. Therefore, when the harms of epistemic injustice are perpetuated people are prevented from being who they are. However even though these injustices may be experienced and performed individually, Fricker identifies how testimonial and hermeneutical injustices come from and refer back to the structures and patterns of society. Patterns in our culture within which the biases and prejudices that embody and sustain them are tightly entangled.

Building on Foucault's (1980b) idea that power is to be understood as a socially disseminated 'net-like' organisation, and Wartenberg's (1992) concept of 'situated social power' (pg. 89), Fricker asserts that operations of agentic power (what we say or do to each other in interaction) and operations of passive power (contextual structures and systems in place that enable what is said or done to happen) combine to create a given social order and a working conception of social power.

Fricker's exploration also identifies how structurally some groups such as women are marginalised, diminished, and ignored through patterns of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice that often seems everyone's and no one's responsibility. The silencing of women is highlighted drawing on historical examples and classical literature to illustrate how these injustices are inflicted. My research takes Fricker's philosophical account a step further by inquiring into and identifying the processes through which these harms are inflicted in relation to women's experiences of being silenced in everyday social situations. These processes and injustices are explored and brought to life in Chapters 7 and 8 so that they can be named, recognised and engaged with in social situations.

4.4 Testimonial Injustice

Testimonial injustice happens when a ‘prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker’s word’ (Fricker, 2010, p. 1). For example, a policeman might choose not to listen to, or believe, the experience of a black witness, due to the influence of the policeman’s identity prejudice rendering the witness’s account incredible or unbelievable. Fricker suggests that the extent of the prejudice of the hearer will surreptitiously inflate or deflate the credibility afforded the speaker, and sometimes this will be sufficient to cross the threshold of belief or acceptance so that the hearer’s prejudice causes him or her to miss out on a piece of knowledge. The speaker then is the object of a ‘credibility deficit’.

When a person’s capacity as a knower is repeatedly undermined through different dimensions of social activity—work, education, legal, political, religious—because of social identity prejudice (e.g., racial or gender prejudice), it becomes a case of systematic testimonial injustice and renders the subject susceptible to an array of other injustices besides the testimonial kind. Fricker describes the influence of identity prejudice in a hearer’s credibility judgment, as an act of identity power. The impact of the use of identity power lies in one party controlling what the other will do—for example, preventing them from conveying knowledge. Thus, testimonial injustice, according to Fricker, is not a one-off event; it is a general pattern of prejudiced perception and judgment of credibility across a speaker’s experience, with socially constructive powers. This means being able to produce and sustain social stereotypes within an organization or institution, and in society more generally.

In fact, Fricker suggests that testimonial injustice is a normal feature of our testimonial practice, such that sometimes it may do little harm to the knower, in trivial situations, and at other times its impact may be seriously harmful, particularly when it is persistent and systematic. When you are not taken seriously in your capacity as a knower, your fundamental standing as a human being is compromised. Fricker argues this primary harm can be understood as an act of objectification; when you are not treated as a credible knower or speaker you are not considered fully human.

At worst the prejudice operating against the speaker may have a self-fulfilling power, so that the person suffering the injustice is socially constituted. For example, when a woman conforms to prejudice against her as a woman, she comes to see herself as a particular stereotype depicts her. Fricker draws on social construction theory and expands on

Foucauldian notions of ‘productive power’ to explain how a subject’s identity can be constructed and distorted such that she no longer knows herself as she really is. She is wronged in her capacity as a giver of knowledge and suffers intrinsic harm ‘inhibiting the very formation of her subjectivity’ (Fricker, 2010, p. 145).

She goes further in her explorations and explains how testimonial injustice can be institutional. This occurs when the people associated with an institution, e.g., the police, collectively and persistently wrong certain individuals and groups due to identity prejudice.

4.5 Hermeneutical Injustice

This thesis is also particularly concerned with Fricker’s second form of injustice, namely, ‘hermeneutical injustice’. Hermeneutical injustice occurs at a prior stage to that of testimonial injustice, ‘when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences’ (Fricker, 2010, p. 1). This means that a person is rendered unable to make her experience communicably intelligible to him- or herself, or others, when it is in their best interests to do so. She defines hermeneutic injustice as ‘[t]he injustice of having some significant area of one’s social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource’ (p. 155).

We come to know our social world through interpretation. This means that we are drawn to interpreting our experiences through collective forms of social understanding. These are usually developed by the most powerful in our societies such as politicians and the professions. Fricker highlights how some socially powerless groups, women being one of them, suffer an unfair disadvantage in making sense of their own social experience, and having their experience heard, because of the broad patterns of social injustice (such as prejudice and bias) we live within. She describes these processes of sense making or coming to know, along with the process of conveying knowledge to others by telling them, as ‘epistemic practices’. She analyses these practices in the context of real-life experience in any given situation

According to Fricker (2010), hermeneutical injustice is generally suffered by these socially powerless groups and is caused by structural and discriminatory prejudice against people identified as members of such groups. She calls this ‘structural identity prejudice’. Fricker uses the example of women’s experiences of post-natal depression and sexual harassment

drawn from a university workshop on women's medical and sexual issues in the late Sixties, as relayed by Susan Brownmiller (1999) in her memoir of the US women's liberation movement, to show how women were harmed due to a void in the collective social understanding. Such structural discrimination in a society can be seriously disadvantaging.

Through collective sharing and analysis, the women were able to give a name to sexual harassment (Brownmiller, 1999) and in Fricker's terms, overcome 'extant routine social habits (ways of thinking—my words) and arrive at exceptional interpretations of some of their formally occluded experiences' (Fricker, 2010, p. 148). Together the women were able to realize their resources to understand, describe and give meaning to a set of experiences that were as yet only implicit in the social interpretive practices at the time. Until this time experiences of 'post-natal depression' and 'sexual harassment' were hermeneutical injustices. They were experienced and scantily understood, yet there was no language or shared collective meaning to explain them or make them intelligible to others. In essence, the women were prejudicially excluded from participation in the spread of knowledge.

Feminists have long been concerned with the way in which power relations can constrain women's ability to understand their experience (Bartky, 1990; McLaren, 2002; Fricker, 2010). This, Fricker says, is because the epistemologically powerful (men and the masculine) have an unfair advantage in structuring collective social understandings. Her explanation resounded with my liberating experience of gaining knowledge about abuse and then being able to 'call it that'. 'From a hermeneutical position of relative comfort', she says 'one can forget quite how astonishing and life-changing a cognitive achievement of this sort can be' (Fricker, 2010, p. 148).

I experienced mixed emotions during my initial readings of Fricker's work. In my journal I wrote: 'As I read MF I find myself getting more and more agitated and emotional ... I can relate to all that she is saying but I don't know what to do with it yet' (Journal, May 2011). Over time I considered my own experiences of not being heard or understood by lawyers, social workers, police and others in the light of Fricker's conceptualisations. I identified situations where it 'felt' like I was disregarded and disbelieved because I was the woman. I found that Fricker's concept of testimonial injustice resonated with my experience—for example, when the police left my house believing that I was the abuser rather than the man who was hurting me, and whom I had begged them to arrest. I believed that as a 'speaker' I should have been heard and that I suffered harm because my account was disregarded. I

concluded that many experiences of being silenced could be seen as a testimonial injustice. I will discuss this in more detail later on.

I also started to consider and construct the notion of ‘being silenced’ as a hermeneutical injustice. I reflected on how some of my own experiences were difficult to make sense of, articulate and even believe, because the explanations of others crowded my thinking and I couldn’t find a way to explain. I wondered if this was due to the ‘lack of interpretive resources’ and appropriate ‘collective meaning’ that Fricker considers necessary in order for us to make sense of an experience. I asked myself: Was this an example of unequal power relations, where my husband’s interpretations were impacting on my own understanding? Were the refusals to listen and help me, and my inability to render my experience intelligible to others, a form of hermeneutical marginalization or prejudice? Was I being prevented from knowing my own experience because of ‘hermeneutical injustice’? I continued to consider and integrate Fricker’s conceptual constructions as my research focused more intensely on the micro and macro dimensions of how the women in this research experienced being silenced. I conclude that socially situated silencing is indeed a hermeneutical injustice. I have experienced the lifting of ‘hermeneutical darkness’ that Fricker (2010) describes as I became able to understand and articulate this significant area of social experiencing through this research.

Fricker’s exploration is a valuable resource for my feminist ethics related project. She helps us to see how, the hermeneutical tools that we have to make sense of things can be unevenly informed by the experiences of different (more powerful) social groups, and our experience can be obscured and rendered unintelligible, even to ourselves. This systematic or even incidental injustice can be frustrating at least, and at worst compromises our identity as knowers, with potentially disastrous effects.

In order to reveal the ethical dimensions of our social epistemic practices, the focus, she says, must shift to the injustice itself. Looking into the negative space of ‘epistemic injustice’ has the potential to disturb our assumptions and everyday practice as speakers and knowers. If we can also analyse the nature of the wrong inflicted, we can give a clearer idea of why something constitutes an injustice. I believe my research contributes to clarifying the injustice of ‘social silencing’ and substantiating my initial intuitive concern that our experiences constitute a wrong done to us in our capacity as knowers and speakers.

4.6 Virtuous solutions

If we accept these epistemic injustices, Fricker's (2010) work helps us to identify them more reliably when they occur. However, we must also consider how might they be remedied? Whilst testimonial and hermeneutical injustices and the harms they produce are intertwined, particularly as operations of identity constructive power, they operate differently. The harm of testimonial injustice is an individual to individual operation reliant on prejudices within social groups, whereas hermeneutical injustice is grounded 'in the collective hermeneutical resource' (Pg. 158), invoking and sustaining institutional and social practices and policies. These are often tacitly justified, and may render our experiences obscured and unnoticed, and, preclude our ability to express ourselves at all.

In constructing solutions to minimise operations of domination and identity constructive powers, both Fricker and Foucault (in Bernauer & Rasmussen, 1988) appeal for a reflexive self and social awareness, as a means of developing moral and virtuous life practices. In particular Fricker's solution lies in the human and institutional development of epistemic virtues to disrupt the patterns of bias and prejudice in our epistemic practice and counteract oppressions contributed by testimonial and hermeneutical injustices. The virtue of testimonial justice is achieved by development of 'ethical hearing' and practices of 'testimonial sensibility'. This means noticing and catching our biases, and correcting familiar prejudices, and then being critically open to the words of others, when we may otherwise not be. The virtue of hermeneutical justice in addition, requires cultivation of a hermeneutical sensibility – 'an alertness or sensitivity to the possibility that the difficulty the interlocutor (person interacting) is having as she tries to render something communicatively intelligible is due not to its being a nonsense or her being a fool, but rather to some sort of gap in the collective hermeneutical resources" (p. 169).

Fricker's illustrations of these virtues and how they might work are ambitiously and rigorously explained. However, there is no recipe or process offered for achieving a reflexive and more socially virtuous orientation or for showing us how or if attempts to do so can disperse stereotypes and prejudices deeply embedded in the social fabric of any given society or culture. Whilst 'repeated efforts of critical reflection' (p. 97) are advocated in order to achieve our possession of them even if only partial, achieving such personal and or collective change is a complex endeavour. There remain many questions of how or if this can be achieved individually, socially or in any given situation.

4.7 Feminist theories of power

Power has been a central concept in feminist theorising about gender and societies' gendered expectations on the use of it. Second-wave feminist perspectives, whilst varied in their focus, primarily addressed the socially prescribed requirements of femininity being the embodiment of patriarchal domination and oppression. Such characteristics and practices were seen as imposed on women, by men having 'power over' the subordinate women (Beauvoir, 1974; Frye, 1983).

Later many feminist scholars rejected the definition of 'power over', arguing that women define power differently. These conceptions were associated with relational feminist theory (see above) and include notions of 'power to', which is about empowerment, and 'power with' (Guinier, 1998; Fletcher, 2004), a generative and creative force rather than the win-lose requirement of 'power over'.

Whilst these conceptions of power proved useful to the extent that women could start to claim their embodied power and its transformational potential, the feminist literature evidences the bind in which women were placed through association with these gentler definitions in the context of dominant masculine constructions of power associated with power over. Exercising 'power with' thus gives the appearance of powerlessness rather than a new, more adaptive exercise of power (Fletcher, 2004; Shapiro, et al., 2011). Organisational researchers and theorists (Brock, 2000; Eisler, 2005; Catalyst, 2007; Schein, 2007; Shapiro et al., 2011; Cooper, 2013; Caprino, 2017; Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014)) also evidence the pressure on women to be *like men*, and to use power according to traditional gender stereotypes, particularly in hierarchical, domination-style organisations. These gendered expectations of how men and women are supposed to use power place women and men in a position of choosing one over the other, and when they do, they find themselves in a double bind. Whilst the proficient exercise of power was (and, I believe, still is) seen as essential for managerial success, these studies show how different meanings or types of power are accessible to men and women, and how institutional expectations and social norms determine both who and how power can be used.

Furthermore, feminist debate reveals the limitations of understanding the conception of power within the dominant perspective: 'social understandings of domination itself have been distorted by men's domination of women' (Hartsock, 1983b, p. 1). I wondered how, if the language of power and its collective meaning in society are masculine, women are

supposed to understand, enact, and value their own power. According to Hartsock, the feminist task of understanding power is to reconceptualise power from a feminist standpoint, one that is rooted in women's experiences. This, she believed, would lead to understandings beyond those debated at that time.

Feminist theory is seen as offering further important insights into the relationship between gender and power as they enabled the two previous aspects of power—*power-over* in the form of domination, and, *power-with*, as an empowering, transformative capacity, or *power-to* act, as inherently and complexly intertwined (Allen, 2013a).

4.8 Foucault & Feminism

Most post-structural feminist work on power takes Michel Foucault's (1978, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1988, 1991) analysis of power as its point of departure (Butler, 1990; McLaren, 2002; Fricker, 2010; Allen, 2013a). Foucault did not set out to analyse power (Foucault 1982), yet his work is hugely influential in shaping understandings of power. He was in fact primarily concerned with subjectivity and conduct of the individual (Foucault, 1982). As his historical explorations revealed the human subject enmeshed in relations of production and of signification, he became interested in the complex power relations in the context of these processes.

Foucault's main objective (he says) was to 'sketch out a history of the different ways in our culture that humans develop knowledge about themselves' (Foucault, 1988, pp. 17–18). Throughout his works he concerned himself with the technologies of power and domination, whereby the self was and is objectified through scientific inquiry and through what he termed 'dividing practices' (Foucault, 1961, 1973, 1979). It seems that his underlying commitment was to realise his own and others' freedom from oppression, and his life was one of political and social activism. Apparently, his hatred of oppression often flared out in the midst of the most complex and erudite discussions (Gutting, 2005). Foucault maintained that his motivation was also curiosity: 'The only curiosity worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is that is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of one's self' (Foucault in Bernauer & Rasmussen, 1988 p. viii).

Moving away from analyses of how power is wielded by people by way of individual acts of domination or coercion, Foucault offers a socially productive, embodied conception of power. He emphasizes a fluid and constantly shifting set of relations that emerge from and

constitute every social interaction, thus pervading the social body. Power, he says, ‘is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere’ (1978, p. 93). His focus was on how power flows through society, and its productive capacity in terms of the structures and social norms of societies, and the human subject—in other words, the micro and macro levels of social activity.

Foucault’s extensive analyses are central to this inquiry and my analysis of women’s experiences of social silencing. In particular, I draw on his socially constructed conception of power and later works on technologies of the self (techniques of self-formation).

Foucault’s relationship with feminist theorists and writers is variable. His work presents a challenge for feminists who are particularly anti-anything post-modern (that is, anything that is a departure from the scientific objectivity that modernists believe constitutes knowledge). He is criticised for rejecting positivist norms, and for his view that truth and knowledge are always produced within a network of power relations. In moving to this new epistemological space, he is accused of relativism and nihilism (McLaren, 2002).

Other feminists are understandably concerned for his almost total neglect of the issue of sexual difference, gender and anything related to the feminine experience. Furthermore, there is a perception that Foucault’s accounts of power and subjectivity do not allow for agency and resistance (Hartsock, 1990; Alcoff, 2010). Consequently, Foucault is charged with ‘gender-blindness’ and androcentricity, and his work is seen as insufficient for the formation of identity politics or a feminist theory of power (Hekman, 1996; McLaren, 2002). Indeed, it is widely accepted that in his discussion of bodies he does not make distinctions between male and female bodies or between masculine and feminine disciplinary practices. However, despite these and other criticisms Foucault’s work has provided important theoretical resources for feminist theorists and researchers.

Feminists have worked long and hard to articulate the dissonance between women’s voices and previous psychological and social theories (Baker-Miller, 1976; Gilligan, 1977, 1993; Belenky et al., 1986; Jordan et al., 1991; Baker-Miller & Pierce-Stiver, 1997). On this count alone, as a man, a ‘Master’ (in his field), and his failure to address the experience and subjectivity of women in his work, the disagreement and rejection of his androcentricity is somewhat understandable.

The proponents of post-modernism, however, see Foucault's work as essential to a progressive politics (McLaren, 2002), and this is the ground on which I stand. Foucault's analysis of power articulates the way power operates on individuals through social norms, practices and institutions—in other words, how knowledge is enmeshed in disciplinary power. In his work on ethics and technologies of self his focus on subjectivity is explicit, and his concerns are about how the subject is constituted through power relations and encouraging active practices of self-constitution or transformation. As I came to understand his analyses, I became interested in their application to my experiences, in the nature of power in the workplace and in the home, and in how women in particular and people in general can overcome oppression in the context of interpersonal relations.

In summary, Foucault's work deals with various mechanisms of objectification, which collectively through processes of regulation and governance, work to transform human beings into subjects. His later work offers ideas upon which practices of resistance and change can be built. These issues and practices are at the heart of feminist interest and of this inquiry. The question asked by Allen (1996) is useful here: 'What do we.... need a theory of power to do?' (p. 266). In this respect I believe Foucault's work provides a practical framework; his historical perspective, thematic analysis of power relations, and the contingency of our institutions and organisations reflect the interests of feminism and have provided a valuable lens for this research.

4.9 Concluding Thoughts

Aligning myself with post-modern feminism implies a certain way of being and acting in the world. Whilst holding the socially constructed notions of 'power' and 'relational' ways of being discussed here 'tentatively', I recognise that they are loaded. I try to test this new information in my practice and sense-making. My actions are then tacit forms of experimentation in which I test my theories in action (Schon, 1991).

In seeing the social world differently—for example, as a collection of evolved patriarchal societies—and considering myself as a relational being who embodies power in everything do, I have wondered how I can best seek and influence change in my social context. For me, patriarchy is a social system of domination that we *all* participate in, a complex arrangement of shared understandings and relationships that connect us to each other and to something greater than ourselves. Thus, my view is that patriarchy needs to be understood at the micro level of interaction, and in the macro level structures in the societies we co-create. My grappling with the 'micro' and the 'macro' is evident in the

following extract from my journal. Later on, I will show how I gained further clarity as I inquired into my data.

Today I have been reflecting on my perception and understanding of ‘wholeness’, and power and its misuse ... patriarchal power seems to prevent me at times from being whole. I have to contain myself in many situations—either I stop myself from participating, and/or separate what I want to do from what I think is expected of me, and from my emotions. This makes me feel powerless, and fragmented. It stops me connecting with people in a way that feels ‘good’. It saps my energy! How can I keep ‘in relation’ with myself, keep myself whole and keep my power and effectiveness alive!? This is about more than just one to one relationships why do I feel like I have to contain myself, I need to understand this ... ?
(Journal, 2013)

In my practice, I seek to work consciously and reflexively, and to participate in a way that keeps me connected with myself and sustains my power. Feminist theory has helped me to do this. This is demonstrated in the following excerpt from my journal in 2012, involving a male manager (K) in a large NHS Hospital Trust. I found it difficult to work with him. Every time I met with him, I felt ‘drained and depressed’ and I was convinced he was finding being managed by a woman untenable.

Today I had another email from K saying that he wanted to meet with me on Friday to discuss ‘team dynamics’ and ‘things he had on his mind’. I immediately felt a sense of gloom, and then anger. I noticed my assumption that he was trying to gain control again after last week when I had to reprimand him for using Trust telephones for long personal conversations abroad. When I called him to clarify what he wanted to discuss he told me he ‘didn’t know yet, the issues are not clear’ and ‘I don’t want to discuss them on the telephone’.

I noticed here that I was able to notice and inquire into my anger and my assumptions about what I perceived as underhand and controlling behaviour. Whilst I am really getting fed up with his tactics, I am going to plan our meeting. I want to conduct myself in a powerful way and try to stay in relationship with him. This means I need to construct some good

questions to deal with his concerns, and some responses for when he tries to talk at me about how ‘he’ feels, and perhaps some careful challenges about responsibility and relationships. I will be firm about how much time we have and keep to it!! And I need to be open about how I feel (pay attention to my emotions and find a way to voice them in the moment!). If I am not enjoying the conversation, I will try to find a way of telling him with explanations as to why, and, be prepared to end it if I want to. And at the same time stay open to his concerns, listen carefully and be prepared to act on them if convinced they are valid... (Journal, 2012).

My inquiry into feminist theory, integrated with other inquiries running parallel, has introduced me to new ways of interpreting my experiences and generating social meaning that resonates. I will show later how I integrate these theories to make sense of ‘social silencing’.

4.10 Reflections

As I draw this chapter to a close, I emphasise both the partial and the contingent nature of this theoretical discussion. Whilst I have chosen to present here some of the insights that I believe have grounded my practice as a researcher, its construction has changed and evolved over time as I question my interpretation and usefulness of the theories. What I found here were ways of thinking about women and power that resonated with my experience and how I see the world. Some are also theories that inform me, as I seek to improvise my action in the world. In this sense this aspect of my inquiry has been, and is, both confirming and transformational. I considered this an essential inquiry if I were to go forward with intent as a feminist action researcher.

As a feminist, my aspirations for this thesis are both academic and activist. Learning to be a researcher involves the embodiment of knowledge (Hunt, 2009). Therefore, the ‘self’ as researcher is central to the research process. I have sought to make methodological and practical choices that align with my developing feminist philosophy, as I inquired into experiences of ‘being silenced’ over time. The following chapter tells the story of how I crafted my inquiry and how it evolved in congruence with my feminist values and aspirations.

The image on the following page, depicts a group of women purposeful in their mission and joyful in communion (my interpretation), The artist is unknown, however the image

has been used by Christian feminists and groups to represent the circle of equality and to convey guiding values of unity, belonging, support and communion (WMDOC, 2012³; Unity Church in Redding, 2015⁴; Johnson, 2016), Christian feminism engages in the critique of the sociological and structural aspects of patriarchy within and towards the tradition and community of the church. Grounded in scripture Elisabeth Johnson (2016) cites realisation of “the full humanity of women” and “equal dignity of men and women” as guiding aspirations for Christian feminist research. This image embedded in the context of these aspirations seemed an appropriate reflection of my own research aspirations. More recently during the construction of this thesis I have been exploring Christianity and my own faith. Inevitably this has led to explorations of Christian feminism.

Feminism (Christian or otherwise) is concerned with a critical reading of patriarchal culture and rewriting of the master narrative (Davies, 1991; Johnson, 2016), As such our work is a political interpretation of our social world, and men and women as social subjects. In this respect I consider my research as both personal and political intervention. To this end I sought methods and means to ‘seriously disrupt’, yet to contemplate my options calmly as I made choices about how my research would be designed and practiced.

³ Women’s Ministries Disciples of Christ (2012) Preferred Future
<https://discipleswomen.wordpress.com/tag/jesus-talks/>

⁴ Unity Church in Redding (2015) <https://discipleswomen.wordpress.com/tag/jesus-talks/>

Chapter 5

My Methodological Quest for Feminine Fusion



'The Sacred Circle of Support' (Artist Unknown)

5.1 A Methodological Quest for Feminine Fusion

This chapter presents a discussion of how my inquiry methodology manifested in response to the evolution of my research questions—my most pressing concerns. Firstly, I will explain my philosophical position as a researcher. What ontological and epistemological beliefs underpin my quest and approach to discovering, understanding and influencing the world.

Followed by a summary of how my aspirations led me to action research as overarching methodology and discuss some of the issues I grappled with as I clarified my research questions and intent. Thirdly, I explore feminist and participatory methodology to find ways to bring them together in fusion to ground my research practice, and gain confidence as a feminist participatory action researcher. Further on I discuss how I acknowledged and tempered some of my emancipatory aspirations and assumptions, and then my research journey—including first-person, second-person and co-operative inquiry methodologies. I conclude by giving an overview of my inquiry processes and some personal reflections.

5.2 Ontology and Epistemology

Ontologically I see myself situated in a world that is constantly changing and that I am in constant relationship with. In this participatory worldview we must be able to hold and live in a reality that is multiple, where ‘what is real’ or ‘known’ changes from moment to moment and place to place. All knowledge is thus situated in a particular social and historical context and is always open to revision and critique. It is through our relationships or encounters with each other that we socially construct and reproduce our social world (Heron, 1996. Reason, 1998)). This way of seeing the world became very real for me when I was helped to understand my abusive marriage and develop a feminist consciousness (See Chapter 2). As a feminist, I also align with the critiques of the political and social consequences of objectified knowledge and the role it plays in marginalising the experience of women and other non-dominant groups. Again, this was a stark reality as I tried to make my experiences of abuse known to others. Thus, the other complimentary aspect of my social ontology is that of patriarchy and feminist thinking. I support the view that whilst patriarchy as ontology has undergone many years of research to understand its origins and gain insights to help defuse its injustices (Miller, 2015), the patriarchal systems characterising many societies, institutions, and social relations continue to perpetuate the inferior or secondary status of women in today’s modern civilisation. This predicament is the result of the joint action or ‘co-creation’ of men and women together. In this world we believe our human participation makes a difference, or at least those of us who connect to

ideas like social justice and gender equality and human flourishing think that the things we do towards these ends are worth doing.

These are post-modern perspectives, incorporating a social constructionist approach (Burr 2015, Gergen, 2010), and it is here I claim to be situated. Thus, I take a critical stance towards the positivist worldview that sees the universe as dead inert matter, and in which knowledge grounded in objectivity, single truths and an ethically neutral stance is taken for granted (Reason, 1998; Skrbina, 2001; Burr, 2015; Coleman, 2015). Alternatively, a participatory worldview sees a universe that is continually active, animated, and co-creative, emphasising holism and incorporating a strong axiological foundation (Reason, 1998; Skrbina, 2001). The purpose of knowledge is practical, in service of human flourishing, in its broadest sense (Reason, 1998). This for me means generating knowledge that enables people to live together in ways that ensure everyone flourishes, and that together we take care of the communities, and ecological networks of which we are a part. All of this takes place within mutual interaction. This form of research or knowledge generation is grounded in an epistemology that goes way beyond the ways of knowing of positivist orientated scholarship. An extended epistemology stresses the need to pay attention to experience with our bodies, emotions and cognitive sensibilities; to know phenomena in many ways including and beyond the propositional. (See further explanation on pg. 90.) The primary focus shifts to the practical purpose of knowledge creation, drawing attention to the moral dimension of action research – that it is in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, ‘for the flourishing of persons, communities and the ecology of which we are a part’ (Reason, 1998. Pg. 47). This emphasis on multiple ways of knowing requires involvement of participants throughout the research process, striving for consensual validation through data collection and analysis, and an understanding of knowledge as socially constructed (Lykes & Hershberg, 2012).

Working from a feminist perspective with an extended epistemology I assert the rights and experience of those who do not see their experience of the world represented in objectified positivist accounts, and the significance and legitimacy of women’s ways of knowing. As action researchers we employ different ways of knowing ‘intentionally’ as we go about our daily lives, and work to validate knowing through the congruence of the four ways. In other words, if our knowing is grounded in our experience, expressed through our representations (images, stories, poetry and so on), understood through theories which resonate and make sense to us, and expressed in worthwhile action in our lives (Heron & Reason, 2008). Working at this interface of feminism, extended epistemology and action

research I have experienced how participants are enabled to access, represent, and work with deep tacit knowledge, particularly that which was challenging to explain or painful to return to. In doing so we have shared and represented our collective knowledge and co-created a conceptual framework (propositional knowing) for practical purposes.

5.3 Feminist Action Research

It was from this standpoint and ambition to fulfil the aspirations outlined in previous chapters that I found myself drawn to the democratic, participatory values and processes of action research—the overarching approach to my inquiry. I was also mindful of my feminist orientation and aspirations. Thus, determined to seek a methodology that excavated the real experiences and concerns of women (DeVault, 1999), leading to action and social change of benefit to women.

Participatory research is built on critique of the positivist paradigm as outlined above. As the dominant paradigm in social science for many years, certain people, groups, knowledge and methods have been considered invalid and not of value, and therefore excluded from social science research. Indeed, much of early feminist critique focused on areas such as human development and psychological theory, highlighting the exclusion of women's voices from many aspects of knowledge production. As Carol Gilligan (1993) has pointed out, women have been missing even as research subjects at the formative stages of our psychological theories. If my research was to liberate, not perpetuate systems of domination, I had to find a different way.

The above views are supported by Rowan (1981), who captures the discontent among many post-modern researchers and social scientists about the perceived usefulness of social science based on positivist assumptions and traditional scientific methods. Proponents of action research disagree with many of the assumptions underpinning traditional methods and, whilst not denying there is a place for them, are directly opposed to the dominance they yield.

Research doesn't have to be another brick in the wall. It is obscene to take a young researcher who actually wants to know more about people, and divert them into manipulating 'variables', counting 'behaviours', observing 'responses' and all the rest of the ways in which people are falsified and fragmented. If we want to know about people, we have to encourage them to be who they are, and to resist all attempts to make them—or ourselves—into

something we are not, but which is more easily observable, countable or manipulable. (Rowan, 1981, p. xxiii)

The critique of positivism as the dominant paradigm is multifaceted. Firstly, it is argued that traditional scientific methods distort reality, by distancing those who study ‘reality’ from those who experience it through their own lived subjectivity. Secondly, the methods used—for example, experiment, surveys, questionnaires, interviews—may reinforce the passivity of marginalized or powerless groups through making them the objects of another’s inquiry, rather than the subjects of their own. Thirdly, whilst what is understood as ‘legitimate’ knowledge lies largely in the hands of privileged experts, positivist sources of knowledge obscure or deny us other forms of knowing and the voices of other knowers (Gavanta and Cornwall, 2008).

My own experience of oppression and silencing generated affinities with some of these assumptions and critiques. As such I consider the personal experiences of women to be rooted in their political situation, and a context of structural gender inequality as discussed in Chapter 3. Thus, my aims are to expose dominant power relations, seek knowledge creation processes that minimise harm and control (oppression) in the research process, and for women to gain control over their lives in ways that feel good to them. Such ‘critical emancipation’ becomes a possibility as we attend to the dynamics of power and knowledge building and explore political and cultural resistance to hierarchical modes of structuring social life (Hesse -Biber, 2004). This requires us to access experience as a primary source of knowledge, and emphasise participation, democratic and conscientization processes, and social change, within our research.

I was attracted to the recognition in action research that knowledge is created in the context of human relationships, and further, that democratising the research process has the potential to create both knowledge and social action (Bryson-Miller, Maguire and McIntyre, 2004). This means we invite people to participate as subjects rather than objects of the inquiry process and seek to develop a critical consciousness towards change.

Action research has always been about people exploring and making sense of human action and experience (Reason and Rowan, 1981). It provides alternative approaches to orthodox research, which do justice to all those involved in the research endeavour and pursue opportunities for social justice. Early articulations of participatory methods however, often ignored and repeated many of the androcentric biases of dominant social

science research and failed to problematize gender oppression (Maguire, 2001; Reid, 2004; Lykes and Hershberg, 2012). For example, early proponents of action research advanced ideals of deepening social knowledge, empowerment and social justice, yet continued with assumptions that women could be automatically included in terms such as ‘people,’ ‘community,’ or ‘the oppressed’ thus rendering gender and women’s diversity invisible (Hall, 1993).

Maguire, Brydon-Miller and McIntyre, (2004) were among many who have tried to redress this balance by critically exploring the intersection of the overlapping practices and diversity of sites where feminist and action research communities engaged. Drawing on this work and others Lykes and Hershberg (2012) emphasise the aspiration for transformative praxis:

‘researchers who work at the interface of feminisms, participation and activism embrace a continuous and iterative process or approach to life, an attitude toward being and doing ‘in the world’ rather than a single research method’.
(P. 335)

My decision to undertake feminist action research was grounded in these aspirations and has not been without challenges (I will discuss these later on). Over the past five years I have inquired into my own participation and experience in the world—in all aspects of my life (first-person inquiry). This inquiry has also involved second-person inquiry (See Heron 1996) with at least 22 other women. In one-to-one inquiry conversations and a small cooperative inquiry group, experiences of voice, silence and power in everyday situations have been surfaced and explored.

5.4 Gaining Clarity of Intent

I have discussed previously how my initial research concerns grew out of my experiences in an abusive marriage. I couldn’t understand why I, a strong, successful woman, was often left feeling unheard, ‘rubbed out’, befuddled and scared. My aim was to understand *generative* conversation and develop my participation in achieving this. However, this was not just a personal inquiry; my aspirations were and are much broader than this (as discussed previously). My intention was to unravel the minutiae of my experiences and those of other women—to really get to the ‘nitty gritty’ of how silencing happens and how other women experience being silenced, and to find ways to overcome oppression and participate more fully in conversation.

I had heard many stories whilst attending and then facilitating a women's support programme between 2007 and 2010. I noticed that some of what happened to these women at a micro level, in other words in the nature of their/our interactions with others, was similar to what I was seeing and hearing about in corporate life in my work as an organisational consultant, and amongst many women friends in general. I heard about and witnessed women losing their voice, including at times my own, across a range of social and organizational contexts, not all of the time, but a significant amount of the time. By this I mean being prevented from speaking, or having our words ignored, misconstrued or used against us. As a result, my interest in helping women sustain their voice, power and influence, particularly in the face of oppression, gained momentum.

For a while I wrestled with the controversial nature of my questions and grappled with what it means to be a 'feminist action researcher'. I have described previously some of the feminist theoretical interests which gave me a sense of grounding and confidence. However, it took a while before I found clarity in my research intent. I became concerned that in order to be able to sustain our voice and power in the world we shouldn't have to behave in ways that are at worst abusive or that require us to adopt behaviours associated with the masculine ideology of power and control. To be respected and accepted as epistemic human subjects (Fricker, 2010)—in other words, agents of knowledge, or 'knowers'—and to be effective in our various roles, we should not have to engage in oppressive behaviour ourselves. Whilst women's conceptualization of power as 'power with' resonated with my own experience, it lacked appeal as a tool to stand up to oppressive expressions of 'power over'.

As I moved on from my foray into feminist theory, to think about how I would go about my research, I was mindful of the omnipotence and complexity of the patriarchal system, and at times wondered (albeit briefly) if it was possible to make any sort of difference in the world at all. I was grappling with more fundamental life questions: 'Is it possible for women to sustain their voice and power 'in those moments' when faced with the oppressive power of the 'other', and can women sustain who they are—'be who (or how) they want to be'—in these moments? How do they do this?' These feminine-focused research questions, and my aspirations towards the ideological goals of feminist research 'to correct both the invisibility and distortion of the feminine voice' (Lather, 1991), had implications.

It thus seemed important that if I was to inquire into women's experience of voice and power, I conduct my research in a way that privileged voice and shared power.

5.5 Bringing Together Feminist and Participatory Methodology

To engage in feminist-informed action research I consider my grounding in feminist theory essential. Since the late 1900s feminist theorists have extended feminism into theoretical and philosophical discourse in an attempt to address the cultural, social, political, economic, and psychological dimensions of 'female' - 'woman' questions, in national and international contexts. Whilst no theory explains everything, and whilst no feminist theory can explain every 'woman experience', the power of feminist scholarship should not be underestimated. The answers to feminist research questions have led to activism and movements, and the movements have led to changes in women's condition. So, research builds theory, that informs praxis, and praxis in turn changes theory. Feminist theory and praxis thus enrich each other, potentially changing everything. Throughout this thesis my own experience of personal change 'feminist praxis' will become evident.

In Chapter 4 I described how I came to define my feminism, and how my evolving consciousness has transformed my way of being, thinking and performing as a woman in the world. I envisaged further transformation as I pursued my feminist ideals and came to understand that feminist development has no end. Similarly, like any other form of knowledge, feminist theories also become dated, because each one is responding to its context and time. As a fledgling feminist scholar, I hope that acceptance and respect for feminist scholarship will strengthen as life context changes over time.

Whilst some feminist research is conducted in the positivist paradigm, much feminist scholarship, like feminist activism, is often caricatured in oppositional terms—our research endeavours considered provocative and antagonistic to the scientific concern. According to Morowski (1997):

Such portrayals not only misrepresent feminist science but also displace the fact that there are multiple feminist approaches toward science, each advancing particular notions of appropriate methods, objectivity, subjectivity, and the jurisdiction of scientific inquiry. Acquaintance with the variety of feminist approaches toward science will enable feminist scholars to better configure their research and strategies. Comprehending science itself as culture is crucial to these ends. A contextual perspective on science

as culture will enhance our abilities to effect cultural change through our research projects. Such comprehension also will prepare us for improving the environment in which we work as well as the nature of that work. (Morowski, 1997, p. 667)

Thus, one of the greatest challenges for feminist scholars, Morowski, contends is ‘modifying the near environment in which researchers conduct their science, learn, teach, and judge the efforts of other scientists’ (p. 677).

I am mindful that in writing a doctorate thesis I have to meet the academic expectations of our traditional scientific and education institutions. Whilst paying attention to tradition I have been choiceful and creative in how I write my contribution. To this end I have chosen to write this chapter as a methodological story. I aim to convey ‘how I came to do my inquiry’ as embodied in the underlying principles of feminism and participatory research.

Feminists have argued against traditional epistemologies on the grounds that they ‘intentionally or unintentionally, systematically exclude the possibility of women as ‘knowers’ or agents of knowledge’ (Harding, 1987, p. 3). Like other feminists I believe our distinctiveness doesn’t lie in attempts to add women to traditional analyses; instead I was intent on conducting my inquiry in a different way. In considering the context of my life and work here in the UK, along with my research interest in women’s experience of power and oppression and voice in their daily lives, I needed an approach that not only accessed and enabled exploration of women’s experiences of ‘voice’ and ‘voicing’, in other words the micro practices of relationships and interactions in the context of our daily lives. It was also essential to me that the research process itself enabled the participants to voice our experiences in our own words.

Researching or inquiring into women’s experiences is not without judgment. It is often said that feminist research is not merely research ‘about’ women, it is research ‘for’ and ‘with’ and ‘by’ women. That is,

‘when women do feminist research, they take a step beyond merely hearing each other. Instead the hearing is for a higher purpose, in order to derive better understanding and identify ways to bring about change to alter the subordinated and oppressed position of women’. (Wadsworth, 2001, p. 1)

Thus, while some feminist research commences initially in the phenomenological domain—a first ‘experiential’ step—it moves secondly to ask: Given that this is how we currently experience things, how can we explain these experiences? What are desirable experiences? How could things be improved?

It is not surprising then that the main tenets characterizing feminist scholarship are, firstly, that women’s perceptions, meanings and experiences are taken seriously and valued. The second is that the information gathered about women’s perceptions, meanings and experiences cannot be understood within constructs and theories that were developed without a consideration of women’s perspectives or concerns (Millman and Ross Kanter, 1987; Foss and Foss, 1994; Stanley and Wise, 1993). This means that women need to find their own approaches and methods to achieve the answers to their questions.

Foss and Foss (1994) define personal experience as ‘the consciousness that emerges from personal participation in events’. Thus methods of research are needed to gain access to and inquire into perceptions of ‘experience’ and personal participation as a form of data and knowledge. As an emerging feminist researcher I was interested in designing and proceeding with my research in ways that delved into the ‘nitty-gritty’ experiences of women’s everyday life. Through action research I aspired to influence and develop women’s ability and personal conviction to take their experiences seriously, and to have empowering, emancipatory and developmental outcomes for the women involved, including myself.

Whilst these all seemed achievable, worthy and virtuous aspirations, I didn’t know if all of this was appropriate in a research context. I asked myself, ‘How should this ‘research endeavour be different to running a support or learning group or an action learning based developmental programme’? Harding (1987) says that if one begins inquiry with what appears problematic from the perspective of women’s experiences, one is led to design research for women. Thus, the goals of inquiry are to provide the knowledge and explanations of social phenomena for what ‘we’ need, as opposed to including gender as a variable and answering the questions that, for example, the medical establishment, advertisers and other social scientists have ‘about’ women. Feminism’s more pressing concerns instead revolve around

the need to know and understand better the nature of the hurt we sustain as a group—a group which is subordinated on the grounds of our female gender.

This is not 'knowledge for its own sake' but rather is knowledge explicitly dedicated to bringing about change and improvement in our situation as women. (Wadsworth, 2001, p. 1).

Thus, the act of knowing and who counts as a knower are ethical and political issues.

Wadsworth (2001) defines feminist research as

research which is carried out by women who identify as feminists, and which has a particular purpose for knowing (a 'why'), particular kinds of questions, topics and issues to be known about (a 'what'), and an identifiable method of knowing (a 'how'), which distinctly draw on women's experience of living in a world in which women are subordinate to men. (p. 1)

In considering these central tenets I concluded that through inquiring together as communities of inquirers and learners, it would be possible to grapple with the hard work of understanding our daily experiences, and understand the tangled web of oppression, privilege and power. In doing so we would not only be promoting the goals of feminism, we would embody another of the main tenets of feminism: that we grow and develop and possibly transform our lives 'in relationship' with one another (Baker-Miller, 1976; Jordan et al., 1991). In asking questions about how our daily experience arrives in the form it does, including critical examination of the nature of social power embedded in our social culture, such as our medical, media and other institutions, my research through a feminist lens of analysis aims to unsettle and change the power structures, in the relationships and social mechanisms in everyday life.

The literature articulates how, despite their similar emancipatory aspirations, the relationships between feminism and new forms of social scientific endeavour, for example action research, have developed slowly. Feminist theorists both agree and disagree among themselves regarding the (original) values of feminism and what should be expected of feminist researchers, yet the emphasis on personal experience, voice, collective effort, power relations and emancipation are central. Whilst contested by many researchers in the positivist camp, others have come to appreciate the role personal experience can play in our search for knowledge (Bartky, 1990; Olsen, 2004, 2005; Brydon-Miller, Maguire, and McIntyre, 2004; Coleman, 2015). Furthermore, for many feminists seeking to understand oppression, the unfolding of experience is seen as central. With the proper tools individuals

can perceive personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his or her perception and participation in that reality, and deal critically with it (Freire, 1992; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012).

These values and such acute ‘attention to the bubbling underbelly of life as it is lived’ (Coleman, 2015), whilst challenging the subtle but pervasive messages of the dominant discourse that all ‘proper knowledge’ is objective, also align with new paradigm research ventures that aspire to liberate, transform and improve social justice.

These orientations to research, such as action research and participatory action research (PAR), seek to create participative communities of inquiry, in which qualities of engagement and curiosity and question-posing are brought to bear on significant practice issues (Reason, 1999; Reason and Bradbury, 2008b; Heron, 1996). As I gained understanding of action research and PAR I perceived their aspirations as interlinked and their outcomes as intertwined with those of feminism. Given the similarities, I sought to understand why the two approaches have in the past seemed to proceed quite independently of each other.

It seems the main sources of conflict relate to the practice of feminist research within traditional scientific paradigms often lacking in the ‘values’ to realize generative potential and purpose, or even the ‘right kind of questions’ (Stanley and Wise, 1998). Conversely, early action researchers and PARs are criticized for the androcentrism that characterizes their work, and the domination of men carrying out PAR. Therefore, the focuses and practices of action research have lacked consideration of gender issues, feminist oppression and theory. Feminists were left to conclude that the discrepancies between the liberation theories and the participatory practices that PARs espouse prevent many transformative possibilities being realized (Maguire, 2001; Brydon-Miller et al., 2004).

Much feminist research in general has been criticized in the past for concentrating on theorizing and articulating ways that organizational and social practices are systemically biased against women yet lacking in ‘action potential’. Efforts to move out of ‘armchair theorising’ has gained momentum (Ely and Meyerson, 1997; Meyerson and Kolb, 2000; Stanley and Wise, 1998). Thus, the action orientation and transformational aspirations of many feminist researchers have gained momentum. Action research as a form of feminist research, and a movement towards more participative methodologies including participatory action research (PAR), are gaining increasing support and recognition

(Brydon-Miller et al., 2004, Reid & Gillberg, 2014; Chakma, 2016).

5.6 My Action Research Journey

My action research practice broadly complied with the three broad pathways advocated by Reason and Bradbury (2001b, 2008b) and Reason and Torbert (2001): first-person in personal reflective inquiry practice, second-person inquiry with a face-to-face community, and third-person inquiry where the community of practice is too dispersed for face-to-face communication and one has aspirations for a wider impact by extending and interconnecting events to develop social movement.

A fundamental ‘practice’ of action research, is that of cultivating an approach of inquiry to all we think, do and feel, including being curious about our perspectives, assumptions and behaviours (Marshall and Reason, 2008). The intent is to develop our awareness, practice, choices and effectiveness in context, through developing the ability to bring inquiry into the heart of our ongoing practice at home, at work, and in social and community life (Marshall, 2016). Judi Marshall captures the practice of integrating disciplined academic work with our existential being in the world which at times is difficult to articulate, with the notion of “Living Life as Inquiry” (Marshall 1999; 2016). She also highlights this as a highly aspirational notion, yet an essential quality process for all non-positivist research, especially those that engage with other people directly and open up issues of potential change.

Cultivating an approach to inquiry begins with learning the art of asking good questions with a serious commitment to really finding our something of significance in the world (Marshall & Reason, 2008), and, developing ‘our own capacity for an attention supple enough to catch, at any moment, glimpses of its own fickleness’ (Torbert, 2001 p. 209). In order to do this, we have to learn to ‘exercise’ our attention and become disciplined in doing so. Marshall (2001, 2016) and Torbert (2001), as long-time practitioners of ‘attention exercise’, were helpful to me as I sought to develop my muscles of self-inquiry.

Marshall (2001, 2016) advocates ‘engaging in inner and outer arcs of attention’ (p. 2). In paying attention to my inner arcs, I seek to notice myself, perceiving, judging, making meaning, and framing issues. I notice my energy, my patterns of behaviour, my emotions and my choices—for example, ‘to voice or not to voice’. I work with these inner arcs of attention by recalling other experiences and searching for sources of knowledge to add to the sense-making crucible, while at the same time trying to maintain a critical eye across

all the emergent possibilities. In reality my working out often takes place in journals, notebooks, voice recordings and in my head, often while running or in the middle of the night. The following is an excerpt from my journal as I reflected on one of my inquiry conversations:

I feel full of emotion on my way home after the inquiry conversation with KK. There was so much going on for me ... I was stunned that such an amazing, intelligent, articulate woman was putting up with such uncomfortable working relationships, and in my view severe OPPRESSION! Her experiences of being silenced were embedded in almost every aspect of her work. I noticed as we talked how I had to catch myself from going into coaching mode. I also wanted to tell her what (I thought) she was doing to herself and what the consequences would be, but I didn't. My desire to help her was strong yet I was able to stay in inquiry ... I told myself she already has a coach who understands her predicament. ... I noticed how nervous she was of being seen with me, every time she heard a colleague outside the room her attention would be diverted. All of this ignited feelings and emotions and judgments that I tried to put to one side to stay focused on inquiring into her experience ... now I can experience and think about it all, reflect on her stories with my glass of wine ... I want to get the transcript done and look to see if there is any literature on 'quota appointments' it would be useful to know other women experiences ... on reflection our conversation may have helped her anyway, if only to help her make more sense of her experience ... I remember that we can all be changed through the inquiry process itself. (Journal, July 2013)

Pursuing outer arcs of attention involves reaching out to others, actively questioning and seeking out conversations to raise issues and test out my developing ideas. I actively seek to incorporate inquiry into all my working and social roles. This form of personal practice, if it is to be done regularly and well, requires energy, and a willingness to engage multiple ways of knowing, as well as the attentional discipline discussed above (Marshall, 2001, 2016). In good times, when I am well rested, and fully present with time to contemplate the detail of events, and engage with my embodied knowing, inquiry can be interesting and developmental for me, evidenced by detailed writing and shifts in thinking and ways of doing. In other words, a guiding force in my everyday practice. I am now more able to

notice how my past experiences may be influencing how I frame current situations and events, I can be curious and seek different perspectives from theory, colleagues, my supervision group, and be open to shifting my perspective on things. These are disciplines I aspire to, however, when I am not at my best, I may forget to address experiences, or my notes will lack focus and depth and may be left unexamined. I have found that when I inquire well, my action in the world is more considered and sometimes remarked on by others. For example recently when discussing a work challenge in my action learning group, my colleagues remarked on how I had dealt with a difficult situation with a client – they were impressed with how I had managed to ‘sustain relational quality, while standing my ground regarding quality of client work issues, whilst at the same time dealing with the experience of being rejected’.

Marshall (2016) suggests that inquiry is alive when we are addressing ‘current puzzles rather than largely historical, when something is at stake’ (p. 46). She warns of the risks associated with persistently interrogating ‘problems’, or negative experiences. She warns against becoming too obsessive or self-engrossed, which may lead to a loss of pleasure and ease in daily life. Instead she encourages researchers to see living life as inquiry as ‘a floating choicefulness, always seeking to be self-reflexive’ (p. 45). I would suggest that feminist action researchers, by necessity, are particularly at risk as more often than not we interrogate issues and experiences of oppression, and its impact. There have been many times, for example when inquiring into my own experiences, and working with the data have generated a range of intense feelings and emotions. At these times researchers may need support and help to make sense of them.

5.7 Early First Person Action Research

As the focus of my research gained clarity and as I started to discover more of who ‘I’ was in relation to my research aspirations, answers to questions of ‘how’ I would gather information about women’s experiences began to emerge. In addition to the discipline of self-inquiry described above, this came about through an intense and rather convoluted process of first-person inquiry.

My first-person inquiry did not begin as formal action research inquiry. I began seriously inquiring into the nature and effects of my own internalized oppression when I became conscious of the abuse I was suffering in my marriage. In 2007 I joined a women’s support group (mentioned previously) which ran over a twelve-week period, termed The Freedom Programme. The purpose of the group programme was to share, unravel and understand

our experiences of domestic abuse. I attended the whole programme three times over two years. This exploration initiated my feminist consciousness (as discussed earlier) and helped me to make decisions about my life. After my divorce was over, I became a qualified facilitator of the programme myself. Later I developed other programmes for women who had successfully disentangled themselves from their abusers and were *moving on* from abusive relationships.

It was during this time that I read Olsen's (2004) autoethnographic account of her experience of abuse. This early experience of consciously learning from another woman's experience—a first-person inquiry and academic/published paper—has stayed with me. Olsen (2004) inquired into how her identity was (re)constructed during her abusive marriage: firstly, how a subjugated identity was created during the entrapment phase of the relationship, and, secondly, how an autonomous, self-confident sense of self emerged from 'the shackles of an enmeshed identity' (p. 1). I was fascinated by her account and was able to recognize aspects of her experience in my own. To me this was feminist scholarship, and it gave me a concrete example of personal experience as evidence of how knowledge could be generated from life experience for the benefit of me, for us, for them. In my view Olsen integrated her 'personal expertise' with 'presentational expertise' in a way that was accessible and rigorous. She did this by integrating writing as both a participant (the victim/survivor) and an academic researcher.

Another interesting factor was that this account took six years to write. When I am struggling to write and analyse my own difficult life experiences, I remind myself of this, along with Barbara Turner-Vesselago's (2013) wisdom; she advises that autobiographical material will be more resonant and easier to work with if it is more than ten years old. Indeed, I have found that, as time passes and I employ various complementary methodologies to 'work through' my experiences, I change, and so do my views. In my writing I aim in feminist mode to 'let my changes of mind, and the processes of change, stand as evidence' (Brison, 2003, p. xii). For example, in writing the *Skeleton Dance* (Chapter 3) I notice how my telling of the story changed as I gained theoretical insights and adjusted my sense-making. At the same time, even after nearly ten years I find that returning to data relating to my abusive marriage still generates vivid and painful emotions.

In methodological terms autoethnography is a means of using true-life experience to generalise to a larger group or culture, implying a process of evocative, reflexive, narrative

writing and theoretical reflection (Olsen, 2005), connecting the personal to the cultural, social and political through 'systematic sociological introspection' and 'emotional recall' (Ellis, 2004, p. xvii).

When I started 'doing' first-person inquiry I was intent on using autoethnography to learn about myself through rigorous analysis of my experiences. Olsen's powerful personal account led me to scrutinize my own experience of becoming entrapped in an abusive relationship, enabling me to act differently in future relationships as I recognized the behaviours and phases she described. In my transfer paper I attempted to use her work as an example to analyse and write my story of 'how' (at the micro level) I had been silenced in the latter stages of my marriage. Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggest autoethnography is 'action research for the individual' (p. 754). Through theoretical and cultural reflection and the process of writing my account I experienced much of the vulnerability required to scrutinize yourself and reveal yourself to others, and the emotional turmoil this can generate (Ellis, 2004). I was able to work for short periods only, often with tears streaming down my face as my memories re-evoked my emotions at the time, compounded by more emotion generated as new understandings emerged. I also experienced how the insights you gain about yourself and the world around you make the pain bearable, and as Ellis confirms, '*even welcome at times*' (2004, p. xx). I was able to reflect and theorize on what had happened to me, thus exposing micro-practices of power and oppression as 'the subject', and a deeper understanding of others. Through bringing myself into critical view, inquiring into how 'I' experienced oppression and how 'I' participated at the time, I came to understand myself in deeper ways and develop more of the critical consciousness needed in my research and practice going forward (Mcilveen, 2008).

I conclude that the autoethnographic gaze, although a qualitative research method in its own right, is a powerful method of first-person inquiry for action research, particularly as a means of exploring painful and difficult interpersonal experiences. Through inquiry of this nature personal experience is scrutinized and represented as empathy-evoking narrative, providing a means for understanding and communicating experiences others may then come to recognize in their own lives and learn from. Thus, autoethnography is a powerful feminist tool for making room for other ways of knowing, enabling self-expression and introspection and giving voice. That said, often these scholarly accounts are read only within the academic arena. The usefulness of this technique beyond that of the researcher or writer seems somewhat limited.

My autoethnographic experiment (see Bayntun-Lees, 2012a) as an early first-person inquiry, opened an avenue for doing something meaningful for me, for women, and for the world. It helped me to generate direction and focus for my ongoing inquiry. It guided my discovery of what was really ‘bothering me’ as a woman in the world today, and generated questions to myself about what type of woman I wanted to be, and what I needed to find out to make a difference. In response to the silencing and oppressive acts by those who abuse others with their power, I now sought actions to disrupt—a way to sustain my voice and power in ways that felt good.

Alongside and following the autoethnographic inquiry I kept a reflective journal, firstly to record experiences of conversations or interactions (my own or observed) that created in me a sense of discomfort. Secondly, I recorded my practice experiments as I sought to intervene differently in order to sustain my voice in the world. Thirdly, I recorded details of interactions that ‘felt good’, as a means of learning what ‘good’ looked and felt like. I did this regularly over a period of 18 months and less frequently for a further year of the research period. I would write detailed accounts of what happened, how I felt at the time and my perceptions of what was going on. As I wrote I would often become emotional. Revisiting my experiences would reveal emotions that I had suppressed and sometimes bring back those I had at the time. I would reflect on why I felt the emotions I did. Not every event made it into my journal. Sometimes I would write about my experiences at work or on the train and send them to myself by email, and later print them out for working on.

I would return to my original writings as I gained insights from theory or through second-person inquiry with my supervision group. These insights would often lead to alternative meanings, and sometimes painful realisations, for example, on more than one occasion I was helped to see how my desire to sustain relationship, led to a focus on another’s needs at the expense of achieving any sense of mutuality, attending to my own needs, or developing some clear boundaries – in others words, when would I decide I tried for long enough? How was my decision making or participation playing a part in keep the situation as it was? And, is my participation congruent with my values and aspirations of how I want to be in the world?

Second person inquiry helped me to develop the required discipline and attention. The expectations of doctoral study also helped to sustain my diligence in completing cycles of

inquiry, otherwise in normal everyday life I would use my journal to inquire deeply only when a specific purpose emerges.

5.8 Towards Becoming a Reflexive Feminist Action Researcher

The development of researcher reflexivity is a fundamental ethical principle of feminist and participatory inquiry (Lather, 1991; Reid and Frisby, 2008; Brydon-Miller, 2008).

Cunliffe (2014) explains how reflexivity draws on social constructionism to emphasise our responsibility for shaping our world. Reflexive praxis goes deeper than reflection, by interrogating what we might be taking for granted as we interact with other people, try to make sense of our world, and create knowledge. She advocates adopting a ‘critical and questioning stance towards our ways of being, relating and acting, and thinking about how, in our living conversations with others, our assumptions, words and responses influence meaning and help shape realities and identities’ (p. 73).

Feminist research brings a particular multifaceted and holistic perspective to the understanding and practice of reflexivity as both personal process (Hesse-Biber, 2012), ‘whereby researchers recognise, examine and understand how their social background, location, and assumptions affect their research practice’ (p. 17), and methodological tool for deconstructing power and cocreating knowledge (Reid, 2004; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012, van Stapele, 2013).

Reflection and interrogation of power is considered the core principle of reflexivity (Reid, 2004; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012), potentially exposing the exercise of power throughout the entire research process. This includes – ‘a researcher’s power to perceive, interpret and communicate about Others’ (Reid, 2004. p. 11), as well as addressing the central concerns of feminists in relation to knowledge and power (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). This means that researchers and participants venture into relationships across difference and acknowledge and converse openly about that difference as they work together to co-create knowledge.

Reid (2004) suggests that action researchers must strive to be “deliberately reflexive” (p. 12) in all aspects of the research process. In practice this means paying specific attention to the ways in which our own agendas and “conceptual baggage” (Kirby & McKenna, 1989) influence our choices, for example how and why we select our research question, the selection of method, and the ways in which we analyse, interpret and author our findings. It involves being open and transparent about our own positionality, attending to difference,

silenced voices and speaking with care about the experiences and contexts of participants. Without reflexivity we risk positioning our own experiences as the norm.

Hesse-Biber & Brooks, (2012) also highlight the transformative power of reflexivity: “whether practicing reflexivity takes the form of critical self-reflection and conversations within the self (on the part of the researcher self or the participant self) or of active dialogue and discussions between researcher and participant identities are unhinged” (p. 515). Reflexive interrogation in this sense has the potential to shake up the boundaries between researcher and participant and taken for granted roles. This creates a potential space for fluidity across roles and transformative knowledge building.

In practice this means working to make explicit the power relations and the exercise of power in the research process. It involves critical reflection on a number of levels, and a transparent, attentive approach to the influences, contradictions and complexities in all stages of inquiry (Reid and Frisby, 2008; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). As a novice action researcher with emancipatory aspirations I considered development of my reflexivity central to understanding the worlds of my co-inquirers and participants, and how to design my research and practice in ways that would spread equality and encourage participation. According to Lather (1991) the researcher then joins the participants in a theoretically guided program of enlightened action over time.

Critical self-examination allows us to articulate our own value systems, our multiple identities and locations of power and privilege, and the ways in which these understandings influence our interactions with others and our research practices. Brydon-Miller (2008) likens this to ‘dance training’ in which you are encouraged to find your centre.

Moving from the physical core of your body, you are balanced—able to move with grace and respond to the movement of other dancers around you with spontaneity and energy. Becoming aware of your own core values allows us to respond to unexpected ethical challenges or issues with a similar sense of being morally grounded and confident in our actions. (Brydon-Miller, 2008, p. 205)

It also gives us the opportunity to re-examine these values and to confront contradictions in our ways of understanding the world. Indeed, I experienced this sense of being centred or

‘grounded’ through reflection. I am also developing a sense of wholeness and congruence in my actions guided by the intention to be the woman ‘I aspire to be’, in all aspects of my life. This means not separating myself in different roles and situations by acting with conscious intent according to my values, beliefs and aspirations. Later I will show the collage I developed as I inquired into my values and aspirations for the woman I want to ‘be’.

My values and relational aspirations, and what I know ‘works’ (see example on previous page), form my ‘underpinning philosophy’ of relational practice, and what is beneficial for me, for others, and for the greater good. I don’t always feel I get it right, for example when under pressure, or when values collide, my actions towards others may not be how I aspire to be, and, I’m still becoming aware of what I value, believe and aspire to, but how I act in the world feels more right now than ever before. This is not a linear process. For example, through the feedback I discussed previously, I identified an aspect of my practice that for a while I called ‘relational generosity’ (Writing for DSG, 2013). Through inquiry I surmised that some people experienced me as having a particular way of ‘being’, particularly in new encounters, that enables the equalizing of power and the development of generative space within a very short space of time. Having started to identify the various elements of ‘relational generosity’, I would consciously ‘try it out’. On some of these occasions I encountered interesting and less positive outcomes of relational generosity. For example, after a first meeting, lasting ten minutes, with the new HR Director in a client organisation, she told my colleague that she experienced me as ‘quiet, and not having an opinion’. On the basis of this judgment she made the decision not to renew my contract. This led to another period of reflection and learning, resulting in a greater awareness of how and when I use this skill, sometimes not always having the answers.

I saw J today and asked her why she had concluded that I was ‘quiet, and not having an opinion’. It was an interesting conversation. I explained my intentions and perceptions of the conversation—I wanted to get to know her really, it was an impromptu visit to the leadership centre ... and, I am not one to assert my views about quite sensitive issues on meeting someone who potentially would be my new client for the first time. I also wanted to listen to what she had to say (and she did talk!) ... She told me that she expects people to be forthright and strong, express their opinions, ‘if you have a view, say it, otherwise I will think you don’t have one’ ... I wondered if she wanted me to disagree with her ... I concluded from the

conversation (which was much more detailed than here) that her judgments were unfounded, yet I questioned if trying to ‘equalise the power’ and connecting relationally was not the right approach with this individual. How would I know that it wasn’t the right approach?

I returned to the piece several times. A month later I wrote:

I’ve wondered about my initial hurt at being misjudged and have since berated myself for doing the wrong thing at the wrong time. I notice how I framed this initially as ‘me doing the wrong thing’ ... now I wonder if I would have worked well with J. I am also reminded of my earlier reflections and the risk of being perceived as powerless as I act ‘in relation’ and pay attention to the needs of others.

I work best in collaborative relationships with my clients ... I believe my relational skills serve me well most of the time. This puts me in what feels like a double bind for similar future situations. Do I act according to the positional power and expectations of people like J, or do I be myself and see what emerges? Being myself does not mean I don’t adjust my behaviour according to the situation ... it’s just that I am trying to be true to my values. If however I am more concerned about my contract and the financial consequences of losing it, acting according to expectations might be the answer ... this feels very wrong. (Writing for DSG, 2013)

In summary, I consider first-person inquiry as a means of developing myself as an integrated ‘whole’ woman and as a liberating process. This includes mentally interrogating and elaborating my ideas, then testing them through imaginative action. Experimenting with new ways of action in turn gives me more data to reflect on. Another aspect of this liberation is the process of naming and articulating my competence. This is particularly important because, for many years, much of the work I do in organisations has been ‘invisible’—development work with individuals and teams that is often not talked about or acknowledged openly. Even in my supervision group I struggled to articulate what I do. I agree with Joyce Fletcher’s (2001) findings such that organisations often say they need relational behaviour, yet they ignore it and certainly don’t reward it. This undermines the possibilities for radical change and innovation. In this respect I have sought to inquire into what I do that really ‘works’, to continuously integrate learning from experience, and

inquiry with others, to enable conscious choices of action. I record this working out in my journals and odd pieces of writing as cycles of inquiry.

5.9 Cooperative Inquiry – ‘From Novice to Knowing’

The cooperative inquiry group and one to one inquiry with Charlotte were my chosen methods for investigating issue and experiences of voice, silence and power with other women. The Cooperative inquiry process involved 8 meetings, held between April 2013 and January 2014. Each meeting lasted 3 - 4 hours. At the final meeting, we spent further time reflecting on our time together. We considered the emergent journey we had accomplished, and how the inquiry had changed us. The meetings with Charlotte followed the same process.

I also conducted 17 focused inquiry conversations with colleagues, coaches, women I invited or were put forward by others. And many more conversations were had in passing. Often these were unstructured, and all involved “telling of their experiences” and exploring the context that organised their experience. In conducting these conversations and the cooperative inquiries I applied feminist principles (DeVault & Gross, 2012). I paid attention to building rapport and trust, active, reflexive listening and ethical considerations. I also asked each woman for permission to use their experiences as data for this research. My experience of these conversations was interesting ground for inquiry, in order to explore some of the issues I encountered while trying to apply these principles I focus the remainder of this section on the method and practice of co-operative inquiry.

We gather knowledge of oppression through our experience with others, collecting information through our senses and often holding that knowledge within ourselves unless suitable spaces emerge for sense-making. The translation of feelings into conceptual knowledge may then provide insights into ways our oppression is achieved and sustained (Douglas, 2001). The opportunities for sharing experiences and sense making together in this way made cooperative inquiry my preferred choice of method. Cooperative inquiry within the context of FPAR with its explicit values is a method that both empowers participants to contribute their knowledge and sense-making skills, and validates the contributions made to understanding and deconstructing oppressive systems and experiences. The primary value is practical knowing in service of human flourishing (Heron & Reason, 1997).

Cooperative inquiry is a way of working with other people who have similar concerns and interests to yourself, in order to:

- Understand your world, make sense of your life and develop new and creative ways of looking at things; and;
- Learn how to act to change things you may want to change and find out how to do things better (Heron and Reason, 2001, p. 184)

As a form of second-person action research, cooperative inquiry participants come together and work as an inquiry group as co-researchers and co-subjects. Everyone is encouraged to be involved in the design and management of the inquiry. As co-researchers they work through cycles of action and reflection whilst paying attention to the quality of dialogue and participation (Reason, 2006). This means that everyone (according to the theory) gets into the experience and action being explored; everyone is involved in making sense and drawing conclusions; thus, everyone involved can take initiative and exert influence on all stages of the process (Heron and Reason, 2008; Heron, 1996). Quality in cooperative inquiry and indeed action research generally involves participants engaging in an ‘extended epistemology’ (Heron, 1997; Heron & Reason, 2001, Reason, 2006), this means drawing on diverse forms of knowing, not just empirical and conceptual, but also experiential, tacit, intuitive, presentational and aesthetic, relational and practical (Seeley and Reason, 2008; King and Coleman, 2012; Reason, 2006; Marshall and Reason, 2008; Seeley, 2011). Practitioners engage with and seek congruence between different modes of knowing across territories of experience (Torbert, 2001), widening awareness of possible incongruities amongst their intent and strategies, their way of being and their effects in the world.

In the cooperative inquiry and my co-inquiry with Charlotte we engaged with these diverse forms as we moved through cycles of action and reflection. For example, at different times we used stories, collage, photographs, card displays, taking time to represent our knowing following periods of action, we would then look for patterns and draw on theory and ideas to inform our next stage of practice. This process allowed us to ground our knowing in our experience and work towards a more fine-tuned and worthwhile action in the world (Reason, 2006). This action evolved as practice experiments where we would, for example, try out intervening in conversations in a different way, or in another cycle we explored how and when we felt powerful and when we lost our sense of power in the context of everyday interactions.

Extended epistemology presents us as knowers with an interesting developmental challenge. Heron and Reason (1997) call this challenge ‘critical subjectivity’. Developing ‘critical subjectivity’ involves becoming more aware of how the four ways of knowing are interacting, and the ability to develop ways of changing the relations between them so that they articulate a reality that is unclouded by a restrictive and ill-disciplined subjectivity. This involves finding ways to challenge preconceptions, and staying with our experience, and possibly examining it in diverse ways, not staying with ‘the same old stories and thus recreate existing realities and confirm existing beliefs’ (Reason, 2006. p. 13). It means that we attend to both the grounding relations between the forms of knowing, and also to their consummating relations similar to Torbert’s (2001) ‘consciousness in the midst of action’, or the notion of ‘reflexivity’—‘the means of changing the self, of relinquishing thoughts and behaviours that exploit or harm others’ (Binns, 2008, p. 603). It has the power to ‘free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently’ (Foucault, 1985, pp. 8–9).

The wider and deeper conceptual and contextual context understood by the participatory paradigm means that critical subjectivity extends to and is enhanced by critical intersubjectivity (Heron and Reason 1997). This means having a critical consciousness about our knowing, necessarily including shared experience, dialogue, feedback and exchange with others. This understanding of the participatory generation of knowing has led to the development of collaborative forms of action research, including the method of cooperative inquiry (Heron, 1996).

As I became familiar with the literature on cooperative inquiry, I wondered how I would keep track of whether we were doing all that the theory espouses. I was also concerned the participants may not share my commitment for the inquiry over time? What if it all went wrong? How would conflict be tolerated and dealt with? On the one hand, I imagined the invisible and passive ‘power of others’ at play (Fricker, 2010), on the other, the possibility that if I got it wrong, I would lose the confidence of my co-researchers.

My anxiety was tempered by knowing I had the skills to facilitate an inquiry of this nature; my first-person inquiry and feedback in a variety of contexts affirmed my aptitude for facilitation. I was able to convene safe spaces, build trust and work with individuals and groups to explore difficult issues. Thus, on the one hand I was struck by my self-assured stance to working with the groups I had in mind, and at the same time I grappled with theoretical considerations and their potential implications.

My initial lack of confidence generated from the unknown, yet the prospect of building new relationships in the context of a doctorate project had the potential to be intimidating for them as well as for me. This was a new venture and I knew I had to step into the swampy lowlands of research practice as a novice but with the capacity to learn ‘on the job’. A fortuitous walk in the grounds of Ashridge with Kate McArdle was helpful. Kate’s doctoral study (2004) was entitled ‘Cooperative Inquiry with Young Women in Management’. In her thesis she evidences the practice of cooperative inquiry as a first-time researcher, exploring the key themes and questions that emerged. It seemed appropriate to seek her views on the issues I was grappling with.

I explored with Kate my ideas for convening two groups of women. Firstly, I wanted to work with survivors of domestic abuse, and secondly, with a separate group of professional women. I imagined the survivors of domestic abuse would be interested in the issues I was interested in, because of our shared experiences and the work we had already done together. I concluded from my own personal experiences and stories already heard that work context and levels of leadership or authority were not factors I necessarily needed to consider. Women in many walks of life experience issues to do with power, silence and voice. Therefore, it was irrelevant who joined me in inquiry as long as they were interested in inquiring into their everyday experience. I was genuinely interested in any women’s experiences irrespective of race, class, sexual orientation, job role, where or if they worked. Talking with Kate reminded me of the experience and abilities I had with groups. I felt encouraged to progress with my ideas and get started.

5.10 Convening Groups of Women

‘The beginning fundamentally shapes what follows’ (McArdle, 2004. P. 294)

In reality, women who had shown interest or I considered might potentially be interested in issues of voice and power influenced my choices. I thus began exploratory conversations with some of the women I had met through my work as a facilitator for Women’s Aid, and also for the second group I explored the idea with a friend in Norfolk who had introduced me to a variety of interesting women over the years she had lived there. Some of them, but not all, knew each other.

As the initiator of the inquiry I took responsibility for convening and structuring the first meeting. Opening the space for communication started before I sent out a written invitation. It began with a few conversations. I chose to speak to some and not all of the

women I was intending to invite; others (mainly those I knew least or not at all) had conversations with those I had already spoken to. This was an informal opportunity to explore if there were any initial sparks of interest. Most of the women spoken to expressed interest and wanted to know more.

There were several issues I considered important in creating a written invitation. Firstly, I was anxious to ‘speak’ in a way that generated further interest and enthusiasm; secondly, I was keen to impart some form of explanation about what a ‘cooperative inquiry’ was (for further discussion of course). I also wanted to make it clear that this was a serious venture requiring a degree of commitment and responsibility. I was asking the women to become researchers and to commit time out of their busy daily lives over a period of at least 8 months. To me this seemed a big ask. Most importantly I wanted to express implicitly rather than explicitly that this was an opportunity to give time to themselves, to ‘voice’ with no restrictions on subject matter and to learn about whatever it was that mattered to them.

Another purpose within the invitation was to convey my legitimacy as a researcher (Reason & Wicks, 2009) and some of the values and purposes of action research and cooperative inquiry—in particular; that its approach is participative, experiential, emancipatory, and action-orientated. Many of the women were familiar with academic study and I anticipated my approach would not be what they would expect.

At the time of sending the invitation (see Appendix 2) I considered it an appropriate length with just the right amount of information attached. That several of the women responded positively confirmed that it had been enticing enough to gain commitment for an initial meeting at least. However, I didn’t assume the attached documents were read and understood. I planned to discuss their content at the first meeting.

Following a period of consideration involving some phone conversations and email correspondence, two groups of women were established. One group comprised five professional women (including myself) who lived in Norfolk, and the other was a co-inquiry with a twenty-six-year old local woman called Charlotte. I knew Charlotte from the Freedom Programme and later the Moving On group I facilitated at Women’s Aid. Whilst all the women from the Moving On group were invited and expressed interest and enthusiasm, the practicalities of meeting every 5–6 weeks proved to be a limiting factor;

after several failed attempts to convene a first meeting, two of us decided to go forward alone.⁵

Having established interest and a date for our first meetings, I set about thinking how we might proceed. I considered it necessary to explore carefully the different expectations of each of us, and to work out how we might proceed together. I had a further discussion with Kate to gain affirmation for my plans and was mindful of the importance of spending time in the early stages getting to know each other and gaining commitment for the project. In planning our initial meetings, I paid attention to timing, environment and the questions I might ask to gently structure our group encounter. My aims were to facilitate the opening

⁵ I had originally intended to convene two cooperative inquiry groups. The second group consisted of four women I met during the Moving On program I ran for Women's Aid (see section 4.2). These women were initially motivated to be involved. However, three of them eventually conceded they were unable to commit to regular meetings. Despite my offers of flexibility around timing and where meetings could be held, they decided they could not participate. At the time I felt it inappropriate to inquire deeply into their reasons for fear of intruding. However, issues of childcare were mentioned by two of them. One woman also felt that the only time she had to herself was after the children had gone to bed, she implied that the responsibility of attending the group was another ball to juggle. The third woman who lived alone told me she was seriously considering having a child using sperm donation.

I wondered about the two-single mothers who were both juggling work and child-care. Eliza Garwood (2014) examined the social construction of motherhood informed by a Foucauldian analysis. She argues that we live in a culture where motherhood continues to be framed as fundamental to feminine identity and judged according to the normalising discourses of our time. Women who don't conform to the dominant idea of the perfect mother (middle class, married, heterosexual) can be seen as inappropriate. Single mothers in particular can be viewed as breaking the codes of ideal femininity and seen to be on the lower rungs of the 'marriage hierarchy'. Garwood concludes that these mothers can often feel stigmatised, isolated or unnoticed. The dominant views of motherhood can also be internalised by the mothers themselves leading to self-judgement and low self-esteem.

Garwood goes on to argue that single motherhood is continually problematised by the state, its rhetoric and the policies implemented serve to enhance the power of motherhood discourse. She gives examples of how our own government's rhetoric frames those with low incomes, including many single mothers as irresponsible. "*Despite the fact that it has been shown that poverty is caused by wider social and structural problems, particularly patriarchy, the problems faced by mothers are perpetually brought back to a deficiency of individual morals*" (pp.23).

These women had low incomes, no transport and scarce resources for childcare, they had courageously left abusive husbands or partners and were trying to meet the responsibility of parenthood alone. In the social context of our time it is easy to see how social and structural forces can severely limit their ability to make real choices or to flourish as independent women. They could not overcome their difficulties to attend even one meeting.

On a somewhat contrary note the third woman who worked for a local government body did go on to have a child through sperm donation. This is an example of a woman subverting the normative social discourse that links femininity with motherhood. She *chose* to remain single and to embrace single-motherhood. Whilst Foucault would hail such decisions as resistance and a challenge to dominant relations of power Garwood (2014) concludes that responses to these challenges, (voluntary childlessness being another), does little to change dominant perceptions and discourse around motherhood. These mothers are more often viewed in a negative light, being seen as deviant, unfeminine and selfish.

I have had little contact with the three women I refer to as I have moved from the area. The fourth woman Charlotte and I agreed to meet every six weeks at her house. Our meetings took place in the evenings after her son had gone to bed.

of a communicative space where the women were able to express their needs, get them met (Wicks and Reason, 2009), and build the foundations for our ongoing work together.

5.11 The Power of Images

At the start of my co-operative inquiry and co-inquiry I purposely avoided articulating ‘my own’ inquiry questions to the groups. I did not disclose my interest in ‘being silenced’ or issues of ‘voice’ and power. I was interested to know what concerns or challenges ‘they’ were experiencing in their everyday lives, and my aim was to not ‘put words in their mouths’ but to construct the topics of conversation collaboratively.

I wanted them to feel comfortable in discussing their experiences with me and to participate in directing our inquiries. Hence my questions were open and broad. I was prepared to remain open and adjust my own questions in response to whatever emerged from our conversations, and in the spirit of maximizing participation I anticipated we would formulate our ongoing inquiry questions together.

I invited participants to come prepared to discuss their reasons for joining the inquiry, and what were the current challenges they faced as women in the world. I took a box of pictures (old postcards, art cards, and random images) and used these initially to generate awareness, initiate reflective thought and facilitate access to emotions and feelings about ‘being a woman’. I invited participants to pick out two or three cards that represented something about how they experienced themselves as women in the world. The connections we made with the images stimulated thought, feelings and emotions and promoted sharing.

As an initiating strategy, use of images facilitates a creative access to ‘knowing’ that cannot always be achieved through memory recall. Most people can’t really provide accurate descriptions of why they do things, or like things—let alone their identities and motivations—at the point that you ask them. Interestingly, most language-based studies capture and preserve those instant responses as ‘data’ (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006). I found that images provided an alternative way into inquiry. As we were choosing, considering and explaining our chosen images I noticed how easily the women (including myself) grasped the question and moved into a reflective process. The data you end up with then is the result of thoughtful reflection.

I chose this one because it sort of says to me about nurturing, it's something I feel I've always been really good at, really positive. Looking back through my life the nurturing is probably the strongest thing I have. (Willa, April 2013)

The use of images to help people think critically about their lives and experiences is not new (e.g., Freire, 1970). Images provide routes to knowledge and tools through which we can encounter and imagine other people's worlds. When participants explained the meaning of their images, they often talked about *feelings* the picture and its meaning evoked. The pictures helped us to represent our knowing, and the group to understand our inner thoughts and experiences. This activity of sharing, exploring and visualising helped us to get to know each other, understand each other's internal and external contexts (Irving, 2007, Broussine, 2008; 2010; Pink, 2013; Hogan & Pink, 2012), and helped to create feelings of connection and trust within the group (Plouffe, 2018)

You will notice I have used images at the beginning of each chapter of this thesis. Each one chosen carefully to depict the essence of the Chapter's content. Each has a meaning reflecting my thoughts and feelings. They may evoke different meanings for you as reader.

5.12 Starting with Stories

Throughout this research I followed the example of other researchers and scholars by creating opportunities for stories to be shared. A week before the first meetings I sent out another email confirming venue and time. I suggested that we start our meeting by sharing with each other why we were interested in the inquiry and what we hoped to achieve by being involved. In preparation for this I suggested we each consider the following - *'What are the most pressing issues for 'me' as a woman right now?' 'What would I find interesting to inquire into?'* I also asked them to *'think about a time recently when you experienced being acutely aware of yourself as a woman. It doesn't matter why, where or how'* (email, 21 April 2013). Rather than asking directly about experiences of being silenced I was curious to see if this was a conscious issue for them. In asking them to think about recent experiences my intent was to encourage and engage in story-telling as a means of connecting as a group and opening the space for learning in a way that might feel natural, easy and fun (Gearty, 2015).

Storytelling has a powerful role in giving individuals an appreciation for their own personal experience and in establishing a sense of common ground and common goals

among community members (in this case my CI group) (Freire, 1970; Brydon-Miller, 2004; McIntyre and Brinton-Lykes, 2004; Gearty, 2015). Gearty's (2015) compelling research inquiry into 'collective action and learning from an action research project' also evidences how *storytelling or narrative* can help participants make sense of their world and so build understanding of themselves and what they do. Importantly, she draws attention to the personal learning and change that happen during and after storytelling, as well as the wider, and often political, questions of how change happens and what we take as evidence of that. Gearty suggests change can be a way of being, such as 'being inspired'; on the other, it can entail more profound change as individuals come to see the world differently through telling their own stories or engaging with the stories of others. These forms of change are difficult to evidence in research such as this, as I was to realise later on.

Telling our stories at our first meeting was enlightening and affirming. It gave us the opportunity to relive our experiences in the context of 'friends' (although some of our friendships were new) and connect with each other, as we heard our similarities and differences discussed and accepted by the group. As stories were told we offered each other support and often identified with each other's issues and concerns.

Storytelling also has the capacity to help break through the dominant languages of professional groups and, more importantly, serve a 'destructive' function, equally important in developing inclusive conversation and dialogue between individuals and in groups (Delgado, 2000).

As we continued telling and hearing each other's stories there were discussions about their validity, including the feminist view that our experiences were an important source of knowledge. However, I noticed myself becoming unsettled when one participant questioned the validity of our story-telling practice: 'I don't know how this is going to help your inquiry'. Later she expressed her discomfort further: 'I suppose I've spent my whole academic career moving away from subjectivity and this is so subjective, I keep asking myself how it can be research' (January 2013).

As I talked with my co-inquirer, I felt the power of the dominant cultural narrative. Her comments echoing the difficulties and dangers Brydon-Miller (2004) discusses, of storytelling being dismissed or disputed within our traditional knowledge institutions with accusations of self-indulgence and lack of rigor. I found myself defending the growing

acceptance of subjectivity in research and feminist scholarship; explaining the search for and absence of women's experience reflected in the master narratives of many academic disciplines. Later I reflected on my own feminist journey concluding that as women we have to learn to trust in the significance of our own experience and believe that experience is a valid source of knowing before we can attempt to challenge or disrupt dominant discourses, and even our own personal limitations.

At that first meeting we discussed ways that we would share responsibility for leading the group, when and how often we would meet, and agreed how the meetings would be recorded and transcribed. We agreed that transcripts would be completed within a week of the meeting and circulated to everyone to read for identification of inaccuracies and consideration before the next meeting. Whilst there was general agreement for sharing responsibility for decision making and leading the group, no one wanted to take the initiative so early on. It was suggested that I continue as leader until they felt more confident in the process. This created a tension within myself, but I respected their tentativeness at this early stage.

5.13 Are we actually doing research?

As we settled into our work together, I noticed how I worked continuously to develop the quality of our conversations and inquiry. At times I became anxious that we were not going 'deep enough' or if we were even 'researching at all'. I inquired into my concerns with my supervision group. Our supervisor, the Director of Action Research at Ashridge, said:

Maybe you are making it what they want it to be, maybe they can be women for a couple of hours where they are not being a wife, mother, worker, colleague ... maybe you have created a generative space and that's the best thing you could have done ... try not to think about what it ought to be like and try to think about the qualities of the space that you have made.

(Journal, 2013)

I was encouraged by these insights and reflected further. Generative space as a place where participants fulfil their agreed or desired expectations, and at the same time, through their experience in that place participants develop and grow together, experience increased support from each other, and their quality of life improves in a manner they can articulate

in their own terms. By its very nature the quality of the space progressively and tangibly improves over time (Adapted from Ruga, 2017). Whilst I had developed considerable skill in convening and facilitating safe spaces, and working with groups, and I had experienced such a space within my doctorate supervision group, I concluded that one cannot create such a space alone. Generative space required more than my participation, and this was something we would have to work at together.

I noticed different levels of engagement and support at each meeting. For example, during a period of illness I found it hard to sustain concentration and alertness in meetings. I also noticed that it takes longer for a woman who is not used to talking openly about herself and her feelings to develop confidence to participate. I concluded that there was many factors affecting our participation, and many of them would remain unknown unless we inquired into this aspect of our group.

It took a while to feel at ease with the changing nature of our conversation, the boundary between ‘just chatting’ and quality inquiry space can be quite subtle. Reason and Wicks (2009), also observed that cooperative inquiry can evolve out of conversation, just as a cooperative inquiry group will ideally become more ‘conversational’ as it develops over time.

During the period of ten months, we engaged in cycles of inquiry that took us in a variety of directions. During each cycle we moved between the four phases of inquiry, this involved cycling between action and reflection, examining different aspects of voice and the experience of being silenced. Together we explored our experience from different angles, refining our knowing through thoughtful questioning and giving feedback to each other, and developed ideas for taking into the next period of action (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2001). Research cycling can be both divergent, as co-researchers look at different issues on each successive cycle, or it can be convergent when co-researchers look several times at the same issue, possibly to explore the issue in more detail (Heron and Reason, 2001). We found that on the whole our inquiries were divergent, moving to convergent in order to deepen the inquiry, for example when we inquired into our understanding of ‘power’. In Chapter 8, I explain the themes relating to voice, silence, and visibility that emerged at our initial meeting and how explorations of ‘who’ and ‘how’ we wanted to be in the world evolved. Later on, we moved on to explore ‘what happens when we try to be who we want to be?’. This led to inquiries into our perceptions of and relationships with power and experiences of voice and being silenced.

5.14 Reflecting on intentions of co-researching

Our conversations took on various forms, some more inquiring than others, and they certainly had a different quality to them than ordinary ‘social conversation’. Most of the time I experienced a level of care and empathy, openness and interest among us that generated a sense of safety. In addition, there was a real willingness to allow equal contribution in discussions, I often noticed participants intentionally bringing those who had been quiet, into the conversation or asking for their ideas and thoughts. At the same time the quality of my usual social conversations with some of the participants, who were also my friends, developed a different quality too. At times this has not been easy; we challenged each other outside the group in ways we haven’t previously. This has meant that some of our unspoken differences have been surfaced and worked with. Nevertheless, our friendships remain intact and perhaps even stronger than they were.

Heron (1996) describes two complimentary intentions of participation involved in co-operative inquiry. Firstly, epistemic participation where the researchers as knowers participate as subjects in the experiences that are to be known, and their experiences involve multiple forms of knowing that they can only study through their own embodiment. Secondly there is political participation, which involves participating in the thinking and decision-making that generates, manages and draw’s knowledge from the whole research process.

Participation on equal terms is perhaps aspirational ideology created by the advocates of co-operative inquiry. As we start co-operative inquiry there is already an imbalance between the lead researcher – as initiator and knower in relation to methodology, and co-researchers. Whilst initially my co-researchers were enthusiastic about the democratic processes I described, our intention to participate equally was not achieved.

As our responsibilities became more clearly defined most seemed less keen to participate in the sense making and analytical aspects. For example, I was initially encouraged by the willingness of several participants to read the inquiry meeting/conversation transcripts. Some even reflected on them, leading to further inquiry and interesting conversation. Later, it became apparent that transcripts of each meeting were only read and considered only ‘if there was time’.

Reading the transcripts provides us with opportunities to engage with our collective data, and do some initial sense making and interpretation (Intemann, 2012). I was disappointed. I wondered if there had been greater participation, we may have made different decisions about how the research was to progress. A different interpretation of the data may also have been generated.

It is useful to reflect on the power dynamics in these situations. The word *participation* itself raises issues of power. The word is both a descriptive term and a powerful normative ideal (Marshall, 2016.) On the one hand, we were in relationship and meeting regularly, at the same time we failed to realise the potential for mutuality and equal engagement (the ideal). Thus, we shared knowledge of our experience as equal subjects, and to some extent, we shared influence and shaping of the directions our inquiries took. Disappointingly, my co-researchers were less enthusiastic to invest in the other aspects of the research process.

At times, I felt the need to assert our commitments of co-researching made at the outset. I did attempt to explore ‘how we were doing as a group’ and raise the issue of ‘participation’. Some of the responses of my co-researchers indicated they considered the research my responsibility (as the doctorate student), and they would ‘do what they could’ in the context of their other commitments. One participant openly said, ‘I’m quite happy to be just a subject’. These unexpected responses can lead to feelings of disappointment and powerlessness. I found myself weighing up the desire to challenge more, against my wish to keep the group positive and inquiring together. I explore this issue further in Chapter 11 – see section 11.4.

5.15 Concluding Thoughts

This chapter gives a broad overview of some of my methodological journey and the choices I made. However, whilst it may be perceived here as a neat progression of events, that’s not how it was in reality. Conversations ‘happened’ unexpectedly, and my experience of cooperative inquiry was different to my expectations. For the purpose of clarity the diagram below gives an overview of my research activity over the timescale.

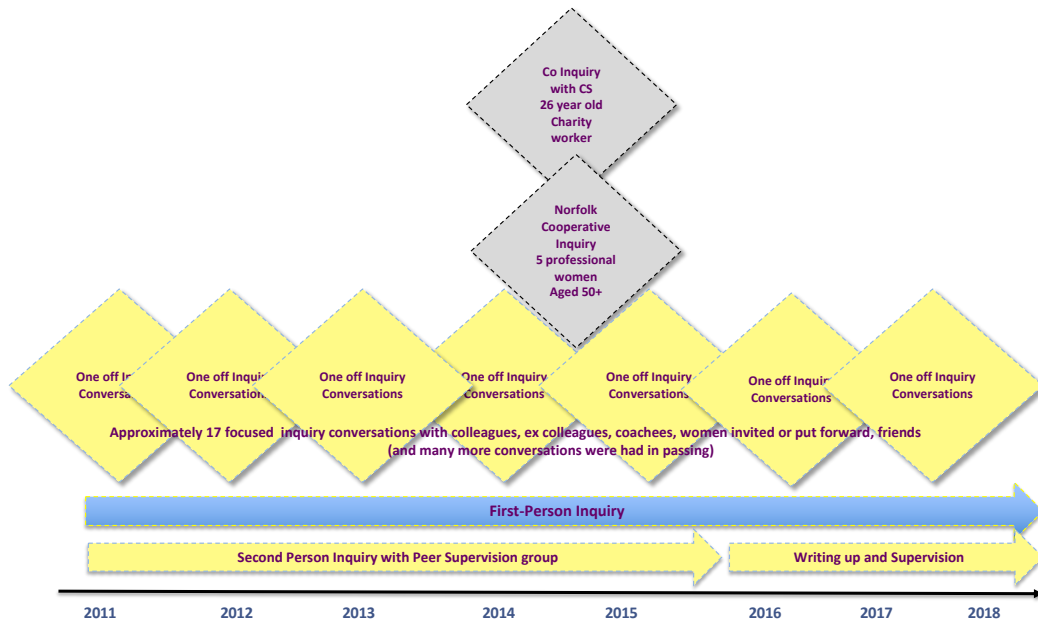
I found the literature invaluable in understanding methodological principles, and a sense of what inquiry and co-operative inquiry ‘*should*’ be like. I was also aware of the messiness of action research that some authors eloquently describe (Marshall, 2001, 2004; McArdle, 2004). I found myself grappling with ‘*trying to get it right*’.

For me, first-person inquiry is the fundamental ground of inquiry from which all other methods can be embraced. Once we can accept that there is no end to our learning *in relation* and embrace the creativity first-person inquiry offers us, risks can be taken, and the consequences become sources of further inquiry. In reality I found my research questions led me to where I needed help and the right methods to explore the answers. First-person inquiry enabled me to keep myself open to learning and be reflexive in my practice, and as my inquiries progressed, to grapple with the unexpected and the conflicts I experienced.

My realization that I could theorise (generate knowledge) through first-person inquiry was personally and politically liberating. Knowledge generation became a political act. I developed a sense of empowerment and clarity I had not experienced before. I developed my standing as a feminist and my understanding of, and my relationship with power were transformed. As mentioned previously, these processes enable us to revision the position others have in our lives (McArdle, 2004) and take responsibility for our experience.

My ability to develop the quality of attention required for first-person inquiry was greatly enhanced through second-person inquiry with my supervision group. In our group we worked at developing quality inquiry. As we moved through each cycle of inquiry, we discovered differences in our values and perceptions of experience and worked well together to explore these. There was no pretending in our processes, and I appreciated the challenges and feedback we gave to each other, providing validity to our personal inquiries and transformations. I feel my experience of peer supervision deserves more expression than I am able to dedicate here. We have made a joint commitment to write about this separately.

Figure 5.1 Overview of research process



Chapter 6

Transforming Silence into Language and Action

Connecting and voicing what we know



Bedouin Women Carrying Water Jars by John Singer Sargent (1891)

**‘While we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness,
the weight of that silence will choke us’**

(Lorde, 2007, p. 44)

6.1 Constructing and Crystallizing: Working with My Data

This chapter describes the process of interpretation and analysis of the data emerging from the three main sources; verbatim transcripts and images from the cooperative inquiry and co-inquiry meetings, transcripts and/or notes of individual inquiry conversations (narrative interviews), and my first-person inquiry journals and transcripts, where I captured my own experiences and sense making.

Of course, throughout the research, interpretation and analysis happened continuously. I listened⁶ to recordings or read transcripts after each CI meeting and inquiry conversation (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Devault & Gross, 2012). As personal knowledge became explicit unexpected dimensions of the silencing process were revealed thus impacting the focus of ongoing analysis. I used journals and flip charts to capture this ongoing sense making.

For example my original intention had been to attend specifically to what happened during the moments of interaction to analyse '*how women experience being silenced*'. However, most of the women gave detailed accounts of early life experiences that impacted on their participation in conversation as adults, both in terms of form (how they should speak) and content (what could be said). These effects were various in nature and consequence and played out in their everyday interactions with others. This seemed an important aspect of the silencing process and thus these accounts would be noticed as I explored the data. Similarly, context, conditions and consequences of silencing were all connected through action, interaction and emotions in the moment.

In pursuit of a jointly constructed understanding, I used a process of *thematic analysis* (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012)) to generate a rich, detailed and multidimensional account of the data. Examining the experience of silencing and how

⁶ Devault & Gross (2012) emphasise the importance of active listening at all stages of feminist research if we are to avoid hearing only what we want or expect to hear and risk producing work that may reinforce dominant perspectives. This they say means listening around and beyond words (spoken or transcribed) and being constantly attentive to histories, experiences, and perspectives that may go unnoticed, are unfamiliar, or easily neglected or unrepresented. They define active listening as more than just physically hearing or reading; *rather, it is a fully engaged practice that involves not only taking in information via speech, written words, or signs but also actively processing it. It means allowing that information to affect you, baffle you, haunt you, make you uncomfortable, and take you on unexpected detours*" (p. 216). Examples of good analytical approach to listening as an element of research interview can be found in DeVault's (1990) *Talking and Listening from women's standpoint*, and Balan's (2005) research on listening to women who are in workplace transition. As well as multiple readings of the inquiry transcripts for this research, I was particularly mindful during the CI inquiry meetings and one-to-one inquiry conversations for listening for gaps and absences and checking out my interpretations, for example when Lucy decided that she wanted to no longer be a co-researcher she didn't express herself explicitly at first. It was through noticing silences and changes in the way she talked that I was then able to inquire into the changing nature of her participation.

the women made sense of their experience, and unpicking or unravelling the broader social context and structural conditions in which silencing takes place.

I interpreted the data drawing on feminist theory and Foucault's conceptualisations of power, to structure and substantiate a different understanding. I was then able to offer an interpretive presentation of the analysis as learning from these experiences, for the purpose of conveying our experiential and extended knowing to others. My intent is to offer insights and knowledge for purposeful action in the world: action that will enable us to sustain our voice and feminine power in the face of adversity.

My encounter with postmodern thinking has led me to have a certain scepticism about 'truth', and an acceptance that it is not possible to passively observe reality. We construct meanings actively, then frame and organise our perceptions and experience, in order to 'represent' what we see or know (Gergen, 1999; Aries, 1996).

This orientation applies to the analysis of research data. How we choose to interpret the evidence, informs what we notice, and choose to include, as well as the interpretations we make. Thus, my interpretation of the data is just one version, there are other truths that could be found. Whilst my aspiration is one of '*giving voice*' to participants, this involved excavating unacknowledged pieces of narrative evidence (Braun and Clarke, 2006), that I have selected, edited and deployed to construct my arguments.

At various points during the analysis and writing up I invited feedback from participants and co-researchers on the outputs. The categories, themes, and eventually the framework I constructed made sense to me. However, it was important to explore resonance and the perspectives of those whose stories I was representing.

6.2 Thematic Analysis

Working with the complexities of the data, and indeed the emotions it generated, has in itself been a process of coming to voice. The following is a summary of how I worked with the data. Over an initial period of approximately four months I examined and interrogated across the whole data set. My process of analysis was inductive (See Braun and Clarke, 2006), and iterative. Immersing myself in stories of oppression and hurt (including my own) has at times been painful, requiring resilience and persistence over time.

Whilst linear in presentation, in reality I moved backwards and forwards across the phases. I engaged with literature and theory throughout the process (Tuckett, 2005).

1. Initially I compiled three sets of data transcripts with pages numbered: one to refer to, one to cut out relevant quotes or sections to categorise or illustrate themes, and one to stick notes or reminders into of my thoughts and reflections
2. I reviewed in detail the transcripts, images, and notes, I focused on *listening* to the data, noticing what played on my mind. I would get flashes of insight often when I least expected it. (For example, when I woke in the night, while running, or making a coffee).
3. I reviewed the whole data a second time intent on '*trying to notice what I wasn't noticing*', immersing myself in each *data item* (journal, transcript, image) (Braun and Clarke, 2006), staying open to what it was saying, and what it wasn't saying.
4. As I located meaning in the data (Guest et al., 2012) I coded and clustered the data around different themes and categories. I created a visual representation of each CI meeting transcript, using my judgement (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to identify patterns of meaning, themes, questions, and actions (See Appendix 4) . I did the same for each of the inquiry conversations transcripts, and my journals.
5. I then identified common themes and relationships across and between the different forms of data - see developed thematic map and initial framework (see Appendix 4) Reading and writing was an integral part of the process (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I moved continuously between the data set, the coded extracts of data, and the literature, jotting down my sense-making and ideas as they occurred. I cut out the participants' words, and wrote notes of my sense-making, referring to numbered pages in the data or particular journals, so that I could return to them later.
6. These endeavours produced a mass of collective knowledge in the form of a *room* of displayed flip chart paper, with Post-It notes and cuttings from the data, arranged around the constructed themes. This room, initially created in my Norfolk writing retreat (Ruby Cottage), moved four times—once to my home in Buckinghamshire, and three times to the house in Tunis Village, Egypt. Each time the data was revisited, pondered and refined.
7. I continued at an *interpretive* level of analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006) to develop the themes, constructing the broader meaning and significance of patterns, and theorising their implications, in relation to feminist theories and informed by Foucault's conceptualisations of power. This enabled a tentative

construction of a coherent framework of the social practices and operations of power that produce social silencing (See Page.153)

How I represent our conversations and knowing here is of course not unmediated, and issues of safety and validity have been prime considerations. My task is necessarily one of reconstruction and reflexive interpretation, and by necessity I have been selective. I have evaluated and chosen aspects of conversations, stories and experiences as they speak about the issues of significance to the research question. Thus, the conversation reclaimed in the following chapters has several participants, and I count myself twice; firstly, as a co-inquirer with the others and secondly for the act of reconstructing the inquiry for its epistemological virtue and value.

This selectivity may not do justice to all the ideas and contributions to our inquiries. My specific interest is in the technologies of silence in everyday life, and the potential of women to be ‘ethical architects’ of their own voice and social power. Thus, you as the reader will hear and participate in a richly textured conversation about a range of experiences and issues we explored and grappled with.

Protecting the identity of my co-inquirers and interviewees and ensuring their involvement in the data analysis has required careful handling. In order to facilitate choice and autonomy for co-researchers and participants, I discussed with each of them their expectations for confidentiality and desire for recognition (or not) DeVault & Gross, 2012). Whilst not all participants necessarily wanted to separate themselves from their story, it was eventually decided that pseudonyms would be used for all to increase confidentiality and protect those participants requesting anonymity. This choice was made predominantly to protect others connected to participants (Lahman et al., 2015). Names in common use were chosen to maintain a sense of cultural sameness.

Thus, my own experience as a participant is to some extent obscured by our anonymity. At the same time I as the doctoral researcher write my own interpretations of the data, integrating theory and where possible validated by my co-inquirers. I attempt to voice each woman’s view, remaining authentic both to their experience and to their self-reflection as they reviewed their stories (Marshall, 1995). The multiple voices of participants enabled fuller answers to the research question to be constructed.

Heron (1996) says the agreement sought and reached about the findings by co-researchers is not an agreement of identical representations or practices. Instead it is one of varied perspectives or behaviours, which illuminate a common area of inquiry. It is about how the different experiences do and do not overlap, and about how this mix of diversity and unity articulates more or less the inquirers subjective-objective reality. In the chapters that follow, my intention is to represent the ‘corporate truth’ (Heron, 1996, p. 175), this means articulating our common area of inquiry – social silencing, through illuminating and combining both the significant similarities and differences, of my co-inquirers and participant’s experiences. Whilst my articulation of this phenomenon may or may not be clear and unambiguous to them, I have sought to gain agreement on my representation of their similarities and diversity.

Finally, what I have to say may not sit well with all who read my interpretations. Presenting data of women who are not necessarily feminists and are also friends is a heavy burden (Stanley, 1984; Cotterill, 1992). They may not agree with my interpretation of their lives if they do not share the same political or ontological views, which shape those interpretations. I have endeavoured to be as honest I can and mindful of not undercutting, discrediting or diminishing perspectives different from my own.

In the words of Jane Roland Martin (1985): *‘A good conversation is neither a fight nor a contest. Circular in form, cooperative in manner, and constructive in intent, it is an exchange of ideas by those who see themselves not as adversaries but as human beings who come together to talk and listen and learn from one another’* (p. 10). It is in this spirit that I have tried to capture our contribution.

In transferring what I know into the academic requirements of a doctoral thesis, I acknowledge the requirement for some adherence to social scientific writing conventions. My overriding intent, however, is to be creative. What finds its way onto the paper here is a quilted, crystallized, and partial representation of understanding.

6.3 A note about Validity and Action

In the interests of quality and validity, I invited all of the cooperative inquiry participants, most of the women I co-inquired with, and two of the women I had one-off inquiry conversations with, to read my analysis and interpretations. I sent Chapters 7–9 along with my invitation expressed as follows:

I send this as an invitation for you to sense check the Chapters. You may or may not agree with my analysis, and that is absolutely fine. However, if you feel I have misrepresented your/our words in any way please say. In any event, if you have time to read it I would really value your comments.

Those co-researchers who responded were appreciative:

‘I’m glad to see that the inquiry produced some interesting results, although it is a bit scary to see private thoughts/emotions in print’. (Lucy)

‘I have read the Introduction and Chapter 7 in my lunch and yes my story makes a lot of sense and definitely matches my experience—you have captured it perfectly’. (Katya)

‘Yes, go ahead! This is so important. What you’ve written seems all about me, I can see myself in the pages. (Susan)

At the early stages of my research I was encouraged by the willingness of several participants to read the inquiry meeting/conversation transcripts. Some even reflected on them, leading to further inquiry or interesting conversation. When I sent these chapters to the participants I was both anxious about how my interpretations would be perceived, and enthusiastic to hear their thoughts and views. I noticed how reassured I felt when I received the above comments.

Heron (1996), however, suggests a much broader meaning to the term ‘validity’ in cooperative inquiry. He says the conclusions of cooperative inquiry are valid when they have ‘the quality of being well founded’ (p. 40). This means that the research conclusions asserted as propositional knowledge (the way things are) are coherent with the experiential knowledge of the researchers as co-researchers, and their experiential knowledge is coherent with their practical knowledge in knowing how to act together in their researched world. In other words, the conclusions are consummated through coherence in action—when the inquirers’ new-found practical skills are applied concertedly in their researched world.

As I reflected on our cooperative inquiry I wondered if I should be concerned. Any form of coherent concerted action seemed to be beyond the confines of our cooperative inquiry. Whilst we shared similar experiences, we had different interpretations and were

experimenting in our own unique ways. Heron's view is that if the research world is underdeveloped, with too few people interpreting it in a particular way, some degree of coherent experience of it may be possible. In such cases, he says, we must allow that there 'can be provisionally valid inquiries, resting simply on the central criterion of coherence with experience, where this does not include coherent concerted action and where such action necessarily awaits further development of the researched world in question' (Pg. 43). In this respect I considered the words of my co-inquirers helpful in validating my representation of their experience and the sense I made of it.

My perception is the women who participated in cooperative inquiry, including myself, all changed in different ways. Whilst some changes were openly shared in our conversations, others remain unknown. Our diversity of action in the world may therefore be evident in our ways of being, or not. Furthermore, seeing the world through my feminist lens, my sense is that our researched (patriarchal) world may well be treacherous ground for concerted action. Instead, in the chapters ahead, I suggest tentative and conscious consideration of our action to overcome social silencing.

Chapter 7

An Introduction to Technologies of Womankind, Silence, and the Self



'Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.' (Foucault, 1980, p. 93)

7.1 An introduction to the Technologies

This chapter is an introduction to Chapters 8, 9, and 10. These chapters bring together the technologies of power—or ‘*social practices*’ evidenced in the stories of this research inquiry. I offer these constructions as a way of explaining and understanding how the phenomenon of social silencing is produced. As I explain my analysis and represent our knowledge of social silencing, I draw mainly upon Foucault’s analyses of power, subjectivity, and ethical practice, along with selected feminist psychologists and relational theorists.

My analysis here integrates feminist and theory, to substantiate the hermeneutical injustice (Fricker, 2010) of ‘*social silencing*’, offering a different perspective and a framework for making sense of these experiences. In particular I offer a means of resistance and action within the interconnected networks of power that produce the silent woman.

7.2 Finding Form

I have chosen to write (construct) my interpretations and illustrations of our knowing in a form I am calling ‘The Technologies’. The term ‘technology’ is used here to describe the application of knowledge for practical purposes, in a particular area, and ‘a capability given by the practical application of knowledge’ (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Drawing on Foucault’s work I use the concept to mean ‘a set of social or discursive practices’, ‘the way we do things’ including operations on our own bodies, thoughts, conduct, and way of being (Foucault, 1988), or the nebulous processes of how we ‘act’ in the world ‘through which (dominant) reality comes into being’. In essence, for me, technologies are how we create the phenomena of social life or the ‘power relations in society’. Foucault’s conception of power enabled us to make sense of these practices as we noticed them through our inquiries.

The main phenomena I am concerned with in the following analyses are power, voice, and ‘social silencing’. The technologies explored in Chapter 7, 8, and 9 represent the complex themes that emerged from the data. They are elaborated, justified and contextualized through Foucault’s and other insights, through a process of crystallization (Ellingson, 2009). I will examine and show my analysis of the power relations at play in the participants’ everyday experiences of conversation and social interaction, offering a means of explaining the technologies of ‘social silencing’—how some women experience being silenced in everyday interactions at work and socially.

In **Chapter 8**, ‘Technologies of Womankind’, I aim to give insight into a selection of the feminine technologies—the experiences, thinking, and self-policing practices of the women involved in this inquiry that have constituted their/our subjectivity. Our inquiries together revealed a number of practices women might develop unconsciously through our early years. I argue that these practices, as ‘mechanics of our being’, are significant in our experiences of being silenced. They often have to be unlearned and new ones mastered if we are to find and enable our rightful voice and place in the world. If it is not possible or desirable to unlearn them, just being aware of them uncovers possibilities for change.

In **Chapter 9**, ‘Technologies of Silence’, I will explore how social power constitutes our internal and external context, determining how we see the world, how we make choices, and how we act. I suggest that through our unconscious subjective constitution we unknowingly perpetuate our own oppression. Through inquiring into the technologies of silence in the context of our everyday conversational practice, we (the women involved here) revealed what we know about the nature of social power in our conversations at work, at home, and in many aspects of everyday life. I contend that as we (those who experience being silenced) begin to see these technologies at play, it is possible to appreciate the extent of the hurt we sustain when silencing happens and the impact for us at work and in life generally.

Finally, in **Chapter 10**, ‘Technologies of Self’, I discuss some practices women can employ to resist oppressive power in the context of our everyday interactions. I suggest that understanding the micro (surface) and macro (deeper) technologies of silence enables us to find ways to sustain our voice in a way that ‘feels good’, in situations we might previously have misunderstood. And, even if, due to the strength of the powerful forces at play, it may not always be possible to sustain voice in the moment, my sense is that it does become possible to make conscious choices. We can feel good about making a decision to not respond or voice in the moment, to wait, or suspend responding until a time when more impact is likely, or perhaps not to respond at all. By using this awareness and attention to the flow of power in everyday interactions, along with the transformational potential of these technologies of self, I claim that we can be the architects of our own voice, power, and way of being in the world.

Chapter 8
Technologies of Womankind



Untitled by Joni Castle-Jimnak

8.1 Technologies of Womankind

This chapter is about the issues and challenges that the women involved in this inquiry, and I, explored and, particularly, what we came to ‘know’ through sharing and inquiring into our experiences of being ‘socially silenced’. I start by explaining how and why I offered a broad invitation to explore ‘everyday challenges and concerns’ of being a woman in the world, and how a safe ‘communicative space’ (Wicks & Reason, 2009), access to knowing, and critical reflection were facilitated initially through the use of images and collage. I then explain how I worked with and made sense of the data that emerged from these conversations, to arrive at two examples of how formative and systematic experiences of oppression and abuse can silence women early on in life—to the extent that they may reach adult life with a warped sense of voice and indeed of ‘self’.

I go on to discuss a selection of four practices (technologies) women may come to ‘do’ as we are moulded and regulated by the power of our social and cultural systems. These practices emerged as strong themes from the data. They represent insidious and often invisible technologies of power that produce us. As we who participated in this research made sense of our experiences we came to understand how: (1) we develop our sense of identity and judge ourselves according to masculine definitions of femininity; (2) we nurture, nourish and sustain relationships in order to ‘exist’; (3) we find it difficult to embrace our power and the value of conflict; and (4) we hold our emotions in check.

It is through analysis of the thinking and knowing that we shared over time that I now attempt to represent these social practices of life that we participate in, and how they contribute to our experiences of being ‘socially silenced’, now and in our pasts. My sense is that we take these practices into all of our interactions with others, where they have the potential to play havoc with our voice.

The reader will see in Chapter 8 how these technologies play a significant part in the complex interplay of the technologies of power that produce social silencing.

The title of this chapter, ‘Technologies of Womankind’, may infer a general assumption that all of womankind experience these technologies. This is not the case. Whilst these were common among many of the women in this particular group, I do not claim that all women experience the technologies discussed here. Neither is it the case that the four discussed here represent all of the technologies at play when we are socially silenced.

In different cultures and contexts, and for women at different intersectional locations I imagine there will be many others. The participants in this research were all white, British and aged between 26 and 55. Thus I anticipate what is written here will resonate with other women and some may not. And some women may not experience being silenced at all. My suggestion here is that whilst individual women may share similar experiences, we all experience being silenced differently. Thus, I offer these ‘Technologies of Womankind’ as partial and contingent.

I argue, however, that ‘Technologies of Womankind’ are omnipresent in our patriarchal worlds. We are constantly working at and constructing ourselves as women as we develop new collective and social meanings and reproduce the old. I offer the technologies here as examples of how we learn more of ourselves if we are prepared to inquire into our experience and how we participate in our social interactions. Reflection and exploration of the technologies of womankind at play when we are being silenced, or afterwards, can help us to reconstruct our sense of self, re-establish our own needs, and find ways of reclaiming our voice.

8.2 Woman Talk

When women start to think and talk about themselves through sharing stories and experiences something special can happen. When we feel free to speak our truth the possibility of affirmation and healing is real. And when we hear the words of other women, we open to new dimensions of ourselves.

Our stories contain the answers to each other’s questions. What I cannot find in searching through the riches and rubble of my own life may become apparent to me in the witnessing of yours. It’s through our stories that we begin to name ourselves, to say who we are under all the social trappings, and to emerge from those trappings like a butterfly from a chrysalis. We are midwives in a way to each other’s rebirth. (Phillips, 2016)

Of course, sharing stories is something many women do well. However, in the context of my inquiry conversations, and cooperative (group) inquiries, it was important to pay explicit attention to safety and concerns of anonymity, particularly in writing up. Whilst a degree of safety was achieved during our encounters and as we bonded, I noticed and indeed paid attention to how our sense of safety and trust wavered at times, particularly when disagreements and conflict emerged. My sense is that this reflected where we were in

our individual and collective abilities to work *with* conflict. Looking back, I see how we worked through some of the issues of conflict, in how they reappeared in subsequent meetings. This serves as a reminder of the times I wondered if we were actually achieving anything important. We can never fully know the outcomes or impact of inquiry when it ‘ends (Reid et al., 2006; Reid & Frisby, 2008) . Thoughts and actions will continue to emerge over time. Thus, the following is at best a partial account.

8.3 Our Sense of Discomfort Starts Early

What unfolded in our initial conversations was a deep and rich exploration of thoughts, feelings, curiosities, and experience. All our talk, including our individual reasons for joining the group (see Figure 8.1) and/or choosing to participate in an inquiry conversation, had everything to do with concerns and perceptions about identity and voice, experiences of silence and invisibility, and power.

Figure 8.1 Reasons for joining the cooperative inquiry

Well, I wanted to do it because I don't tend to think of myself in terms of whether I am a woman or not, really, and it's not something that comes into the forefront of my mind most of the time, about my femaleness or whatever. So I was quite interested in what other people felt ... it's interesting to look at things because we behave in certain ways and we don't think it has anything to do with our gender but when we examine it maybe it does.’ (Sophia)

‘I guess mine is probably kind of similar. I have always thought of myself as being quite a strong character, a strong woman, and yet I've found myself in situations where on a personal level, I have kind of lost myself, and didn't feel that I was in a position of any sort of power at all, despite the fact that I actually think I am really strong. That was quite a wake-up call and also I look back on it and think that I had allowed myself to be in that position type of thing and I guess one of the things that appealed to me to do this was to get to know myself a little better in that respect ... figure that bit of it out ... why in some situations being a woman, I can use it to my advantage and think I am quite a strong woman, and in other situations completely and utterly lost, not able to use my strength and that power thing.’ (Willa)

‘I started thinking actually ‘what is being a woman?’ You can be mentally a woman, or you can physically be a woman, it's not just one thing that's easy to encapsulate, I think ... I think about the Margaret Thatcher thing, why did I hate Margaret Thatcher so much?’ (Belle)

‘Mine's to find a voice actually ... I've had a whole lifetime being invisible ...

Our conversations during this first meeting revealed some interesting perceptions of ourselves in certain situations at silenced, invisible, powerless and lacking in strength. These terms can be considered in a general metaphorical sense relating to issues of inequality, However the concepts were often linked together conveying what seemed to be

a deep sense of exclusion. For example, Willa linked losing strength with being voiceless and Lucy linked being voiceless with invisibility. These perceptions seemed to relate to a range of experiences across their life span. Including being deprived of opportunities to share thoughts, ideas and ambitions in early life, and feelings of invisibility associated with internalised expectations of gender norms in their everyday lives. Perceptions of invisibility were also associated with losing attractiveness (to men) in mid-life and fears about being judged as ‘stupid’ or ‘making a fuss’. There was also a common sense that our sense of being in the world was very much concerned with what was expected of us rather than who we wanted to be. I will return to this in 8.5.

Over lunch we summarised these discussions into themes together and they remained constant in each of our cycles of inquiry. As important issues or experiences emerged, one or more themes would take precedence and we would construct questions to work with over the ensuing weeks.

We noticed early on how, despite our inquiry questions focusing on the ‘*here and now*’, our early years and past experiences began to show up almost from the start and remained as integral and formative themes throughout our meetings. As we made sense together we realised how our ‘*sense of discomfort*’ as women can start early in life, and how in the context of even loving family lives we readily learned to ignore it. Instead we worked hard to become what is expected of us in the hope that the discomfort would go away. Furthermore, as we talked in these early conversations many of the women recalled and drew on their early discomforts to inform their present, and often significant, predicaments and discomforts. I will show examples throughout this chapter.

I explained earlier (In Chapter 6) how I worked intimately with my transcripts and other data, using a process of thematic analysis, and how I ensured the safety of my participants in the writing of this thesis.

8.4 Feeling ‘Locked Out’ or ‘Locked in’ as Metaphors for Oppression

In our first meeting Lucy, a 49-year-old part-time lecturer, chose an image of a locked gate and revealed how as a woman she was ‘locked out’. ‘Not locked in’, she said, ‘this is what I feel like all the time ... which is why I love blue skies ... it seems a complete contrast, I feel both at the same time ... Locked in, and soaring above the clouds, in a sort of good way. I’m locked out by choice though, not trapped ... I suppose. This can be quite emotional, this, can’t it ... I’m getting quite emotional.’ (Lucy)

Lucy later explained that early in life she had learned ‘the best way to go through things is not to be seen, it works for me ... I think I probably got fed up of banging my head against a brick wall when I was younger, when I thought I was good at anything ... I would think I can do this, and I can do that, which I could, but you just stop. I got fed up with it (being told I can’t) and just stopped ... so you just conform like everybody else and I think that has to do with being a woman as well, because if you’re a chap who’d said that, everyone would think ‘there’s a really ambitious person there, give them a hand’ whereas for me it was ‘What are you doing? That’s not your role.’

Lucy explained how she had spent most of her married life raising her family and supporting her dyslexic husband, Simon, by doing a lot of his work-related writing (reports, papers, etc.), including his PhD thesis. Simon was also a lecturer and held a position of responsibility in a prestigious university. Over time Lucy came to see herself as almost totally responsible for Simon’s success at work, and his ability to progress in his career. She came to view his PhD as ‘their PhD’ and explained how she felt recognised for that (by Simon). Her own PhD had been put on hold. She explained:

His career is my career and when he went into academia it was our understanding ... It’s our career, our achievement, when he got his doctorate, it was our doctorate.

She told us how she organised her week so that she spent two days doing his work and three days her own. If she made mistakes or forgot how things ‘should be’ it would cause conflict, frustration, and sometimes more. In the midst of these conversations Lucy explained how she felt she had lost connection with her own emotions and ability to ‘think’.

I do get frustrated with some things because if I’ve got pressure from my own work and it came up recently with all the marking I had to do, which meant I didn’t do Simon’s work for three weeks, which caused a major blowy. Because I had forgotten the balance needs to be the other way round, his career is the one that is keeping us afloat and that was the agreement, so it helped me to remind me that it was a partnership and if I come out of it and concentrate on my work it throws everything out and spoils things ... It (my work) can’t take precedence because it damages Simon’s work, and

that's more important. That's the way we have structured it, I made that choice 20 years ago.

Lucy's story reveals how she had learned to 'lock herself out' early on in life. This seemed to be a protective strategy and, in my view, a profound example of what Baker-Miller and Pierce-Stiver (1997) call 'seeking connection by staying out of connection'. Lucy's practice of 'locking herself out' enabled her to stay in a situation that severely prevented her from being a free agent. Many of Lucy's own needs (although I think she had lost sight of what they were) seemed to have been engulfed by the needs of her husband, her family and her work, yet she saw that sticking to her 'choice'—albeit a choice made over 20 years ago—would enable her to keep her family life intact. My interpretation of Lucy's (continual) emphasis on the fact that she chose to live her life in this way, and her evident acceptance of the outcomes of her 'choices', were actually attempts to justify or even deny unequal outcomes and experiences. She had been and still was unable to voice or act on her own needs, for over 20 years, because Simon's took precedence.

The significance of choice is supported by Catherine Hakim's (2000, 2002) preference theory. Uptake and internalisation of the rhetoric of choice (based on perceived equality or opportunities) enable women to diminish the impact of discrimination or gender disadvantage. She predicts that men will retain their dominance in the labour market, politics and other competitive endeavours, because only a minority of women are prepared to prioritise their jobs or other activities in the public sphere in the same way as men.

Lucy's aspirations for finding out why she chose '*not be involved in things*', and for finding her voice and 'visibility', were clearly understandable (see Figure 1). So was the emotion she expressed as she started to share her stories, which demonstrated the impact of her choices. As the inquiry progressed, I do believe Lucy made attempts to inquire into her disconnection, which seemed to affect most aspects of her life. Indeed, one of her main concerns was that she felt disconnected emotionally and found it hard to recognise emotions in or empathise with others.

Yes ... becoming aware of how difficult I find it to empathise was quite helpful, but the next step would be to work out how to come out of that and become a bit more connected emotionally with what is happening with people. Simon is always saying, just talk to me and tell me what you are thinking, and I say, no I don't know what I am thinking, it is really hard. On

a personal level that is really hard, but I have been able to do it ...
sometimes. (Lucy, January 2014)

As time went on, no matter how other participants tried sensitively and supportively to open up inquiry, and explore possibilities with Lucy, my perception was that she would find a way to close them down. Eventually she locked herself out of the inquiry process. In one of our later meetings I admitted to Lucy my sense that she had disengaged. She said, 'Yes, I'm quite happy being a subject'. I noticed at the time, and even now, my sense of frustration as she stopped participating. I wondered what else I/we could have done to encourage her. I felt concerned and wasn't sure why.

I later suspected that engaging with the inquiry was generating feelings and thoughts that Lucy may not have wanted or been able to handle. I learned from my experience of being in the group at Women's Aid that once the veil is lifted and we start to see and understand the injustice of our experience, many women become empowered, and others frightened. 'Knowing' your experience means living with what you know and making choices based on what you know. The choices will often have huge, life-changing implications.

I share this story as an example of how early experiences set us up for later relationships. We carry the inscriptions of others and the associated behaviour patterns forward into our adult lives. Charlotte, a 26-year-old counsellor, also shared stories of a traumatic and abusive childhood. She used the metaphor of being 'caged in' both verbally and in her collage (see section 8.5) to describe her feelings as she struggled to deal with an overbearing and aggressive manager at work. Similarly, Charlotte had felt 'caged in' since her early childhood.

I just want to be free of everything, all the baggage that I'm currently carrying. I do feel caged in and want to be free of it all ...all of this ties in together ... free of everything that is going on at the minute and the emotions that go with it. (Charlotte)



The image of the 'cage' and being 'locked out' are metaphors used by feminist theorists to convey aspects of the systematic nature of oppression (Frye, 1983; Baker-Miller & Pierce-Stiver 1997). Many of the restrictions and limitations we live with are more or less internalised and self-monitored as we progress through life. Some of these will be discussed later. However, If a person's

life or activity is affected by some barrier or unwanted force that the person encounters, we may not conclude that the person is oppressed simply because the person encounters the barrier or force; nor simply because the experience is unpleasant, frustrating or painful; or because the processes which maintain or apply it serve to deprive that person of something they value or desire. Systematic oppression is a complex web of power relations that requires a macroscopic perspective to understand.

As the caginess of the birdcage is a macroscopic phenomenon, the oppressiveness of the situations in which women live our various and different lives is a macroscopic phenomenon. Neither can be seen from a microscopic perspective. But when you look macroscopically you can see it—a network of forces and barriers, which are systematically related, and which conspire to the immobilisation, reduction and moulding of women and the lives we live. (Frye, 1983, p. 7)

Through sharing and reflecting on her experiences of an overbearing and aggressive manager, Charlotte could see how her cage (or panopticon) was formed through the power still in place from childhood and was still silencing her.

I don't like confrontation ... she makes me feel really anxious and reminds me of people in my life ... like my mum ... Bobby ... all of them. Certain people who make me feel like I can't stand up for myself ... or be me. (Charlotte, April 2013)

Even though there may be no particular agent *actively* exerting control at the time of interaction Charlotte could be considered as being controlled by the identity defined for her earlier in life. Such that she has developed a social-conception of herself as not being able to speak up. If someone is consistently made to act or feel a certain way in certain situation the resulting ways of being (or behaviours) can be reinforced as normal, such that a person will resort to them without thinking. These operations of power can then be considered structural serving to create and preserve a given social order (Foucault, 1997; Fricker, 2010). Certain people in Charlotte's life made her feel anxious and that she was unable to stand up for herself. It could be that these regular active operations of power served to sustain control over her even in situations where no one was actively trying to control her. (Fricker also suggests a dependant relationship between these active and passive modes of power). In that if Charlotte was to remove herself from the people or situations where she is dominated and made to feel that she cannot stand up for herself,

instead finding situations and people who encourage and listen to her, and value her, the passive influence of her early experiences and its effects may dwindle.

8.5 What Happens When I Try to Be ‘Who and How’ I Want to Be?

At the end of the first meeting, whilst preparing lunch, we talked about the various themes of our conversations. This led to a suggestion for the next cycle of inquiry into ‘what happens when I try to be who I want to be’. Arriving at this question, I sensed the group felt a sense of achievement. However, as we chatted over lunch, I asked the group if they were happy with where we were. At this point Lucy said, ‘Yes, but I’m not sure I know what I want to be or how I want to be ... how do you know? I won’t be able to know what happens if I don’t know how I want to be.’ During the discussion that followed it became apparent that the others had similar concerns; how they wanted to ‘be’ was not something they had given any serious thought to before.

At this point I suggested we create collages using images and representation to present a range of examples and possibilities of ‘how we want to be in the world’. This was not a planned methodology. I had worked on my own collage as a form of first-person inquiry and was slightly shy of sharing it with others. Also, I had previously used it with a group of women ‘Moving On’ from abusive relationships. Whilst as a researcher it is important to be well prepared in the theoretical grounding and practical methods, I learned that it was important to follow my/our intuitive sense of ‘how to uncover knowledge’. In this case it was identity knowledge. The process of creating images or collage can actually be an alternative way into a research question, engaging the brain in a different way, and enabling participants to communicate meaningfully about their identities and experiences (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006; Butler-Kisber, 2008). When I realised that here were several women who had limited knowledge of how they wanted to be in the world it seemed an appropriate way forward. I saw this as a means of accessing our deep-seated values and beliefs, and our tacit knowing of how we should and/or want to be in the world. For me, collage provided a basis for clarifying and testing out the core beliefs and values that determine my action in the world, and a point of contrast from which new ways of practicing in the world may develop.

Our collages (below) captured and revealed our individual and collective psychologies – many of our individual and shared values, desires and aspirations and emotions. As a visual representation, they assisted our inquiries over the following months, as we inquired into how we as women (our identity) and the nature of our ‘being’ (our action) in the world

are insidiously ‘produced’ through the invasive and complex apparatuses of patriarchal power (Bartky, 1990) and the contexts of our lives. These are not words many of my co-inquirers would use. Nevertheless, all of the participants, including those who participated in one-to-one inquiry conversations, had stories to tell about the impact oppressive early life experiences had on their current way of being. Many of our aspirations were about fitting in, looking good and being loved. Their rich and fascinating stories and images revealed that even those of us who think we are liberated are all invested to some extent in the powerful social norms underlying the belief that men should be on top.



Figure 8.3. Collages – Cooperative Inquiry II (with kind permission of participant)



8.6 Technologies of Womankind

The following four technologies (practices) represent some of the main themes that emerged from our inquiries together over the ten-month period. Initially we explored our experiences—what happens ‘*when we try to be who we want to be*’, our inquiries diverting into issues of voice, power and experiences of being silenced.

The four technologies I explore here, as combined social and cultural and often self-regulated ‘Technologies of Womankind,’ we believed were significant because they come into play when we try to be who we want to be, say what we want to say, and do what we want to do. Mostly they are unconscious practices we have learned over time, and in the context of everyday social interaction they contribute to experiences of being silenced. They are thus an important element of the **Technologies of Silence** discussed here and in Chapter 9.

8.7 Technology 1: We develop our sense of identity (what we know and what we see) and judge ourselves according to masculine definitions of femininity

8.7.1 Women Often Don’t Know Who They Are, or How They Want to Be

Questions of identity were a key theme in our collages and conversations. Indeed, as we explored our reasons for joining the inquiry, questions of ‘*what does it mean to be a woman?*’ and ‘*is it okay for me to think about how I want to be?*’ emerged (see Figure 1). It’s interesting that all the women involved, including myself, had to think hard about ‘*how we wanted to be in the world*’. However, addressing these questions through collage was a good starting point. Creation of my own collage continued over a period of a year—I would add to it or change it as my values, beliefs and aspirations gained clarity. I concluded that answering these kinds of questions can require iterative processes of deep reflection and inquiry over time.

Whilst each individual’s experience is never the same as another’s, the different faces and voices of patriarchy, known through our parents, husbands, colleagues, the media, and books, offer different possibilities for creating self and knowledge. This makes it difficult to develop a strong sense of identity and how we *want to be* in the world:

I find it quite difficult to think about what I want without feeling bad about it ... I don’t know whether it’s having lots of children and putting other people first but I think it is quite hard for me to think ‘I want that’, it feels

selfish, and then I don't know how far I can go I find it quite difficult to distinguish between the kind of person I want to be and the kind of person I feel I ought to be. (Sophia)

I also notice a difference working with survivors of domestic and sexual abuse. These women start from a different place; often they can't identify or articulate what they value, like, enjoy, or feel passionate about. Even considering when they last felt happy or energised is a challenge for them. Charlotte wrote the following words in an email to me after we had agreed to do the collages:

A big blank, empty hole is 'me' ... perhaps if I sit and wait I will find the answer to 'me' ... I know I am the only one who can find 'me', the answer to 'me' is 'ME', and in going through this tornado of feelings etc. I know somewhere I will find a sense of inner peace. (Charlotte's email, 7.2.13)

To explore issues of identity further I have selected two interrelated themes that emerged as central in this inquiry: early experiences of definition and discipline, particularly the influence of mothers and families; and the power of the 'male gaze' generally, which was particularly evident in stories of the cooperative inquiry group and many of the one-to-one inquiry conversations. These themes were evident in our experiences of being silenced.

8.7.2 Early Experiences of Definition and Discipline

Our early experiences in life, with those we are in relationship with, start to define who we are. Our identities are continually constituted through our relationships with others. However, it has only been over the past three decades, through a chorus of feminine voices within the human sciences, that new ways of listening to women's experience of subjective development have emerged (Baker-Miller, 1976 Gilligan, 1993, 2011; Bordo, 1993; Goldberger et al, 1996). These studies explore and reveal how authorised and culturally sanctioned knowledge (of what girls and women, are, do and look like) form girls' bodily and psychological experience of subjectivity. This means that our perspectives, feelings, beliefs and desires are inscriptions from outside influences.

Foucault also observed that 'there are two meanings of the word 'subject': 'subject of someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his/her own identity by a conscience and self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to' (Foucault, 1981, 212).

The self or subject, he suggests, becomes divided against itself through an incorporation of knowledge that functions as a form of power. Developing knowledge of what is right, true and moral creates ‘normalising’ discourses that are then incorporated into human subjectivity through the ‘power’ of these discourses to create a desire to be ‘normal’, what is right, true and moral, and enacted in how we are in the world. These two elements of subjectivity described by Foucault can be seen in Sophia’s recollection of early criticism.

One of the things that caused me to lose my confidence, and I was very lacking in self-confidence as a teenager, was the fact that my brother was always boosted by my parents and I was always knocked down and criticised. ... If I succeeded in anything it’s ‘oh Sophia’s being cocky again’, but if he did anything, he was boosted ... He’s probably dyslexic but not diagnosed, he struggled at school, but he was always boosted up, all the time, and that carries on to this day. Everything he does is wonderful, whereas my sister and I aren’t so wonderful. This really knocked my self-confidence when I was growing up. Still to this day I can’t do certain things when people are watching because they used to criticise me when I was young. They (her parents) would die if they knew—I can’t play tennis if people are watching, can’t sing in front of people. I belong to a choir, I love singing but can’t sing in front of people because my father, who is an amazing musician, used to criticise my singing when growing up, it’s taken a lot of fun out of it. (Sophia)

Sophia is a 55-year-old lawyer. Her experiences of criticism and put-downs from her family led to internalised beliefs about what she could and could not do, and what she felt was safe to do in front of others. Over time Sophia internalised the criticisms about her tennis and singing incorporating them as beliefs into her sense of identity, while she knew she ‘could’ sing and play tennis, her own truth became buried under or split from her knowledge that she ‘could not’. So, she didn’t.

Whilst Foucault didn’t use the term patriarchy or indeed refer to the plight of women very often, he did support the idea that the body and sexuality are social constructs rather than natural phenomena. In his explorations of the subject and power Foucault (1997; 1982b) discusses how categories of identity are formed through exclusionary practices such as these seen above. He uses the term *dividing practices* that divide (either internally or

externally) the normal subject from the abnormal. Normal is defined by the majority or dominant group, and those who deviate from this norm are marginalized. Feminist theory whilst recognising Foucault's contribution has shed further light on the gendered nature of these disciplinary techniques.

Sophia's desire to be a 'normal' girl (as defined by her family), meant that she didn't voice her experience, and 'stopped being cocky'. She hid her success and ability to sing and play tennis, and was denied enjoyment. Such expectations require loss and dis-integration of self (Gilligan, 2011; Debold, Tolman & Mikel Brown, 1996). Sophia's lack of confidence and reluctance to perform in front of others is now part of her identity, her script for life, and the criticisms of her father are inscribed in her psyche.

Early experiences such as Sophia's lead to 'the shoulds and should nots of our lives' and often render women silent and isolated. Through listening to the voices of young girls, theorists such as Carol Gilligan (1993) in *A Different Voice* have found that as young adolescent girls come to know the dominant (patriarchal) culture, they typically find themselves torn and ultimately split from their own power to authorise their experience as real and as knowledge. Gilligan conducted three research projects over a period of ten years. All relied on interviews and included the same set of questions relating to self and morality, and experiences of conflict and choice. Her aim was to trace the development of women's voices through the language and logic of their thinking and experience. She presents the contrast between male and female voices to highlight distinctions between two modes of thought and to focus on what she saw as a problem of interpretation rather than a generalisation about the development of either sex.

Previous psychological theory was predominantly based on empirical observation of men, and women's psychological development was typically judged against it. Thus, despite significant criticism of her methodological assumptions by the dominant scientific establishment (Hekman, 1995), Gilligan's goal to validate women's experiences as a source of truth (of the ethic of care) was established. And women's voices gained presence in psychological and moral developmental theory. In highlighting what was missing in previous knowledge of psychological and moral development, women's experiences could also potentially be seen as a basis for generating new theory and a broader more encompassing view of the lives of both sexes.

In Gilligan's later work with others (Gilligan & Richards, 2009; Gilligan & Snider, 2018), it is further contended that initiation into patriarchy requires both men and women to sacrifice aspects of themselves in order to fit in to the patriarchal order and hierarchy. This has complex and powerful effects on the psychological development of men and women, forcing a split between self and relationships 'so that in effect men have selves, whereas women ideally are selfless, and women have relationships, which surreptitiously serve men's needs' (Gilligan & Snider, 2018. p. 6). These effects result in the sacrifice of mutuality—the ability to connect and form loving relationships, and the ability to communicate feelings, empathy and compassion for another's suffering or humanity. In turn these losses of love and relationship make it easier for hierarchy to persist. Any resistance to internalising the expectations of patriarchy leads to defensive moves out of relationship in order to protect ourselves.

When I looked back at my own childhood (see Chapter 3) I recalled how I was often told I was 'wrong' and 'stupid', even if I didn't agree with my parents. I was labelled as 'trouble' as a rebellious teenager. When I qualified as a nurse, my mother's words defined me as 'a failure' because I wasn't a doctor. Even now when I know these words are not who I am there are times when I question myself, and there are times when these defining words can be reinforced by other adults who seek to control. This is the same for Sophia, whose brother will often bring up her childhood misdemeanours if she challenges him or doesn't conform to his worldview. Whilst these words are etched on our identity script we have both learned to some extent to put them to one side when our voice is in question. Sarah, however, a 35-year-old senior nurse, is regularly silenced by her father.

I think really carefully before I disagree with a consultant ... it's really hard to explain. It's either something related to being a little girl and being shouted at by my dad ... told to be quiet, something about that psychologically ... or something else that's going through my mind is that in the town I grew up in women didn't really go to work, women stayed at home.

In any patriarchy society men and the masculine are seen as privileged and more often than not elevated over women and other men (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). Again we see here how Sarah as a girl learned to silence her voice in order to 'fit in' and have relationships. Gilligan & Snider (2018) describe this process in the form of paradox:

we give up relationship in order to have ‘relationships’, meaning a place within the patriarchal order (p.14)

Sarah experienced loss of connection with her father through being silenced by him early on. She learned not to speak what she knew or what she felt. This loss of voice carried through into her professional adult life.

8.7.3 The Power of the Male Gaze

How women feel about their appearance, personality and general way of being in the world is a precarious thing, and as we get older it can be challenging to maintain a sense of positive identity. I mentioned earlier the women I talked to, aged between 40 and 55, were concerned and anxious about the effects of aging on their appearance and attractiveness to men. How they felt about ‘how they were faring’ and their ability to ‘conform’ to culturally accepted standards in this respect had a direct impact on their confidence and self-esteem. As our conversations progressed, however, a degree of awareness of the level of reliance we have on men to confirm our worthiness began to emerge. Yet the desire for connection and to be in relationship with a man seemed to overwhelm any attempt to resist.

I’ve lost a lot of confidence over the last few years and I think that has affected my relationships with men. With my girlfriends I trust them to be supportive, whatever I am like. I think that I feel much more invisible nowadays. I think that whether I feel attractive or not now doesn’t come from inside but comes from other people’s reactions to me and I hate giving other people the power to make me feel in a certain way, and I want to reclaim that for myself. I want it to come from inside whether I feel good about myself or whether I feel attractive, and I want that it doesn’t extend from other parts of my personality, because if a man says I’m stupid, I don’t care because I know I am not stupid but if a man says I’m ugly I believe him, and what’s that all about? (Belle)

I think you switch off that side of yourself, somebody told me that they thought I was really attractive recently and flirted with me a bit and that made me very aware of myself again and actually made me think maybe there are some people out there who think I am attractive, and that made me

feel angry with myself because it shouldn't depend on what someone else says about me, I should be able to feel that inside. (Sophia)

Sophia later remarked:

It's interesting that as we talk about ... you know ... what makes you feel like a woman, I realise there's always a male aspect to it. None of it is independent, even your reaction to those women (in Egypt) who were covered up, they were seeking not to attract men's attention and you felt acutely aware of the fact that you couldn't look in men's eyes. Each one of us has relied on how we feel about being a woman is, on a man's aspect ... and our desire to be with them.

If we accept West & Zimmerman's (1987) view (see section 4.2) that we are born male or female, but not masculine or feminine, we can see how reliance on significant others and society to teach us what femininity means as a form of discipline. Thus, femininity becomes an achievement and a set of criteria against which we can judge and be judged.

Interestingly whilst West and Zimmerman's empirical work was seen as a major contribution to feminist theory, it was French feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir who in *The Second Sex* (2011) first distinguished sex from gender suggesting that gender was an aspect of gender socially constructed and gradually acquired, 'one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one' p. 293, De Beauvoir was clear that one 'becomes' a woman because of a cultural compulsion to become one, not because of compulsion associated with sex differentiation. She also asserted that there was no guarantee that the 'one who becomes a woman is necessarily female.

Judith Butler's later work 'Gender Trouble' (2007) was rooted in De Beauvoir's analysis. Inspired by the consequences of a culturally constructed gendered being and the idea of the body as a passive medium for a set of externally constructed meanings she questions to what extent we can harness agency to participate in the construction of our own gender identity. Butler conceived the term gender performativity—constructing gender as 'a performance' or even a 'parody' which in itself is 'compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence' and is 'constituting the identity it is purported to be' (p. 34). In this sense Butler suggests 'gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed' (p.34). We can thus understand gender as an

impersonation of an ideal that no one actually inhabits, involving a continuous negotiation between one's sense of self and the cultural and social influences and judgements made towards that self. At its limit Butler's theories open possibilities for a variety of consequences and indeed choices—'being' female and 'being' a woman are two very different sorts of being (Butler, 1986. P. 35)

Contemporary intersectional feminists – those who assert how all aspects of social and political identity discrimination e.g. gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, etc. overlap. (for example: hooks, 1981; 2000; 2004; Lourde, 2007; Holvino, 2008), also discuss the losses associated with patriarchy and the interconnectedness of the continuous performance of gender, race and other aspects of identity. At these intersections different specific concerns need to be addressed so that the people in all spheres of life can understand the need for feminist theory and struggle.

Whilst Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* does not talk specifically about women in his account of the normalising disciplinary practices that produce the 'docile bodies' of modernity, women are subject to many of the same disciplinary practices he describes. These practices constitute the social influences, norms and judgements discussed above and many feminists (for example Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993; McLaren, 2002) have used his insights to articulate and recognise the gendered nature of disciplinary techniques and their effects.

Bartky (1990), in her essay 'Modernisation of Patriarchal Power', considers three categories of such practices: (i) those that aim to produce a body of a certain size and general configuration; (ii) those that bring forth from the body a specific repertoire of gestures, postures and movements; and (iii) those directed toward the display of the female body as an ornamented surface. She examines the nature of these practices, how they are imposed and by whom. Women are expected to master them in pursuit of a body the right size and shape and also to display the proper styles of feminine motility.

Bella and Sophia experienced both a sense of discomfort and recognition that they were judging themselves according to someone else's (a man's) ideal, but they didn't know why. Hence Belle's closing, '*What's that all about?*' and Sophia's attempt to answer with '*Because we want to be with them*'. They and other participants, including myself, also noted how as we got older it was becoming harder to feel satisfied with our personal appearance. These perceptions and a growing discomfort of being more socially

constrained were evident, such as not being able to wear particular clothes we had previously enjoyed wearing, not feeling confident enough to dance in public, and not expressing ourselves for fear of being labelled.

When I am overweight, I will find opportunities to opt out. I feel that people are looking at me, judging me, and thinking ‘how can she possibly have anything intelligent to say when she can’t even look after herself ... keep herself under control. (Dalia)

Similarly, in the work context, women can be expected to look and behave according to both descriptive gender stereotypes (designating what women and men *are* like), and prescriptive gender stereotypes (designating what women and men *should be* like). Heilman (2012) suggests these stereotypes have implications for women in general and female leaders in particular. Indeed, the unconscious bias and prejudice women suffer in the workplace and the effects they have on progress are well-documented (Heilman, 2012; Groysberg & Bell, 2013).

During the first weeks of a new job, Willa, a 46-year-old solicitor, was advised by a colleague: ‘I don’t think you’re cut out to be a litigator, you’re too laid back, too nice ... and that sort of made me think maybe I’m not’ (Willa). Similarly, when I started work in my current role, the first time I met a group of students on a leadership program was when I sat in on a colleague’s program to get to know the content I was being asked to deliver later in the year. The male colleague who was facilitating later described me to his colleague and co-facilitator as having ‘low energy’. As an observer and a newcomer, I was there to learn and to get to know him, yet as a woman trying to get control of her voice, his words cut to the core of me. It seems that he felt that I should have proved myself by getting stuck in straight away to show off my skills. Every time I see him now his defining words are at the forefront of my mind.

These powerful remarks and the story that follows demonstrate some of the idealised stereotypes and concepts describing femininity and leadership in our society and workplaces today, and how they owe far more to male conceptions of who women should be and how they should relate to men, than to women’s own experience of themselves and their roles (Marshall, 1986).

Thirty-two-year-old Katy is the only senior female partner in a large city firm of architects.

The other 11 partners are male, and Katy is well aware she is '*a quota appointment*'. She explained to me how hard it was for her to bring any of her real self into the workplace.

I am not 'me' at all here. If you are you, and there have been times when I have been 'me' ... maybe I've behaved in a sort of fashion ... the others sort of look at you, going 'why would you behave that way, why are you having a joke or a laugh? We don't do that'. I am quite a soft person with a very stupid sense of humour, but in an organisation like this everything is very on the surface, everyone is watching what everyone is doing and no one shows personality here at all. I think it filters from the top down. If my peers are like that, I have to be like that. If I do show some form of personality, you get looked at like, it's not appropriate. It's interesting, the more senior you become, the more robotic you become, because you don't want to show that side of you, because your partners aren't doing it ... You can often get criticised for speaking or behaving in a certain way, which isn't deemed to be a leader.

She went on to say:

I find that if I am robotic and do things, people will just do what they do but if I start being a little bit warmer and softer with people I find that they will start to take advantage and be a little less diligent. I have seen that push-pull type thing happen often. The more you pull back, they push ... I don't think it's right, I think you should be able to be a bit warmer, but I find the more you are a little less yourself the easier it is to keep things moving forward.
(Katy)

Even in very senior roles we can see here that women's authentic way of being (interacting), and thus their personal power, is restricted. The cage of oppression is omnipresent (Frye, 1983). Katy is constantly surveyed by her male colleagues and compared to *their* norms of social and leadership behaviour. Eventually we see how she adapts her behaviour accordingly in order to comply and prevent further criticism. She is desperate to find ways to '*be*' herself and is thwarted at every turn.

In the face of these restrictions, and albeit invisibly, Katy contributed significantly to organisational functioning; however, the impact on her was significant. The weight of

oppression she experienced not only defined who and how she was, it prevented her from developing any authentic sense of leadership identity or voice. She gave several examples of how she avoided conversations and confrontations and even presentations with her colleagues.

8.8 Technology 2:

We nurture, nourish and sustain relationships in order to ‘exist’

‘Relationships provide the essential threads and colour in the tapestry of life for women’ (Arnold, 2005, p. 642)

One of the things that many women do know is the strength of their fundamental need for connection. Our pursuit of connection, relationship and love as the central organising principles in our lives was indeed evident in all of our collages (see section 8.5 pp. 117–119) and within each conversation as we explained them to each other.

This is about being connected and being in a family and that family being sustainable and that stems from not having had that in my own childhood and this is very important to me now. Connected with my friends, connected at work, these are images about how being in relationships with people, connected and maintaining those connections is just really important to me. (Dalia)

The swans are me wanting to put love at the centre, for someone who doesn’t show emotions this is an issue for me. That’s being a partnership and trying to create that. (Lucy)

Relationships as our organising principle is a well-documented central theme of psychological feminist theory (Baker-Miller, 1986; Jordan et al., 1991; Baker-Miller & Pierce-Stiver, 1997; Gilligan, 1993). Jordan et al. (1991) explain how women’s primary experience of self is relational. This means our sense of self (our identity) is organised and developed in the context of important relationships—being able to make and maintain affiliations and relationship becomes our way of ‘*being*’. Separation and individuation, on the other hand, are the values which predominantly characterise the male sense of self and development (through the historical permeation of cultural values and ideals). Women have a different path. Our relational pathway is primary and continuous throughout life. Women stay with, build on, and develop in a context of attachment and affiliation with

others, and it is through healthy relations of connection and mutual growth that we sustain our emotional wellbeing (Baker-Miller, 1986).

Yet whilst our foundational desire for connection with others is a fundamental strength essential for our development and social advancement (Baker-Miller, 1976; Jordan et al., 1991), it seems at the same time the inevitable source of our current discomforts and problems. Often women fight to stay in connection with others. As we talked together some of us realised that some of the connections we were striving to sustain were complex, and causing discomfort, distress and angst in our lives. Surrey (1991) defines relationship as ‘an experience of emotional and cognitive intersubjectivity: the ongoing, intrinsic inner awareness and responsiveness to the continuous existence of the other or others and the expectation of mutuality in this regard’ (p. 61). Being in relationship, she says, also involves the capacity to identify with an entity larger than the single self and a sense of motivation to care for this.

We saw earlier how Lucy, through locking herself out, avoided conflicts to maintain the status quo in her life, in particular the relationship with her husband and family. Lucy’s experience is an extreme example, resulting in her being able to define herself and gain recognition only through the work she achieved for her husband Simon. Other examples of women ‘*locking themselves out*’ served the purpose of keeping relationships intact. The consequences of ‘unlocking’ and coming ‘in’ to take care of our own needs and desires were seen to be catastrophic, possibly resulting in at least conflict, and at most total destruction of relationships. Often the reasons for staying locked in were complex and conflicting, and other relationships would be at stake. Thus, staying locked out served to sustain a connection or relationship that served a purpose in some way. Yet each woman’s experience or ability to voice was curtailed.

I employed Katya to transcribe my interview and inquiry meeting recordings. She was married to Robert, a landscape gardener, and worked as a medical secretary at the local hospital. Towards the end of my inquiry work Katya told me that she had decided to leave and divorce her husband and offered to be a participant in my research. Through typing up and producing the transcripts she had come to realise that she was in an abusive relationship. She could see her life reflected in some of the conversations and experiences she heard about on the tapes, and many of the strategies Robert used to define, silence and control her. Most of all she realised there was no real love or respect in her relationship, and she had locked herself both in and out to keep the family unit together and to avoid

'failing' at married life. This meant that she stayed 'in' the relationship, yet she kept her thoughts and words (what she would like to say) to herself, for the purpose of keeping the family intact.

On the day that Katya received a call to say that her mother was dying in hospital, Robert showed no compassion. Despite the hospital staff telling her that it was unlikely her mother would be alive when she got there, he told her that she had to have sex with him before she left. Katya didn't want to but felt she had to because she was leaving her daughters at home and he would become bad tempered if *'his needs were not met'*. Being *'locked out'* enabled her to *'swallow'* what she thought of him, and wanted to say, which was *'no, fuck off!'* By complying with his demands, she could go to the hospital knowing that her daughters would (at least) not be punished and the relationship remained intact.

We can see here how *'being locked out'* in relationship can serve to silence us in social interaction. However, this strategy also served as protection for both Katya and her daughters, in that they were able to avoid Robert's aggression. At the same time Katya was prevented from being able to enforce or negotiate any sort of boundary, or meeting of her own needs. Through reading and reflecting on stories that resonated with aspects of her own life experience, a different, more enlightened and confident sense of self emerged and she divorced him.

Being locked out doesn't just happen in long-term relationships; it can happen in a one-off conversation or group. Kate, the 32-year-old architect, and Susan, a lead cancer nurse in the NHS, both talked about how they *'tuned out'* during meetings when they felt unable to speak and sensed their emotions rising. The similarity here is that whether a one-off experience or in the context of an ongoing relationship the woman's emotions and needs are subjugated. Kate and Susan's tuning out again served to preserve relationships, and avoid upsetting or provoking anger in their colleagues, whether the relationships deserved saving or not.

These extreme cases are important to consider. We can see how our (often one-sided) sense of responsibility for keeping relationships intact plays a part in silencing us in our everyday interactions. Furthermore, we learn to separate ourselves from our emotions as we endure relationships lacking in mutuality and reciprocity. (I discuss this in more detail as Technology 4.)

The connection, the relational work, and the nurturing required, and desired, to sustain our relationships was evident in our stories of the home and at work, and in our aspirations for the future.

Charlotte, Susan and Kate particularly yearned to be able to nurture others in the workplace, yet their experience was of discouragement. Developmental relationships in their workplaces were neither valued nor pursued by many of their colleagues.

A lot of the younger females have a tough time here, they come to me because they don't get to make presentations or taken to meetings with clients ... they get pushed aside and that drives me mad! I feel powerless to help them. One girl came to me upset, she said she was working under one of the other partners, and 'going nowhere' ... when she was with me she was learning, presenting, and seeing clients. Now she is sitting behind a computer ... she's lost her confidence, and these are important times in her career ... I can't 'say' or 'do' anything, I feel powerless ... He would be seriously pissed off that she came to me. (Kate)

We can see in Kate's experience above how the nurturing part of her '*being*' is silenced by the fear generated through the predominantly masculine culture she works in. In order to preserve relationships with her male partners (her own and those of her junior colleagues), she silenced her anger and sense of injustice. Her sense of self-worth, which was derived through collaboration, and the creativity that could have been achieved, were also thwarted. The sense I made from Kate's stories was of a voice that was slowly being silenced and even reconstructed as she adapted to the norms of the more powerful group in her workplace—her twelve male partners.

In Section 4.2, I wrote about my own early patterns of taking too much responsibility for maintaining relationships. Later on in my research I noticed in my journals how these patterns continued to show up at times, despite my attempts to notice when I was silencing myself for the sake of keeping a relationship intact. In Chapter 9 you will hear about my experience of managing a team of three leadership consultants. My journal entries reveal how I made several attempts to make sense of the actions and behaviour of one of these men in situations where I felt silenced. I considered and explored a variety of explanations and eventually came to perceive 'Jay' as employing a range of tactics to silence me, and thwart my '*relational way of leading*' over time. I saw how I worked harder and harder

through our conversations to preserve and indeed develop the relationships of the team. Jay consistently challenged my suggestions and intentions or found other ways to disrupt my efforts. On reflection, if I had recognised the ‘tactics’ earlier, I might have found a different voice, taken alternative action and saved myself significant anxiety and pain.

I feel SO frustrated ... today I told Jay I feel that he is ‘playing games’. I am exhausted. He says that we don’t need to think about principles for working together, and I think we do. I explained to him that he and I frequently have conversations that don’t go well and don’t end well. If we think about those and how we could do it differently we could improve things between us. ... Two hours of going around in circles with this! He just kept saying ‘let’s just have some conversations’ ... and changes the subject. (DL, December 2011)

The suggestion I am making here is that women such as myself, who have a strong desire to foster and sustain relationships with others, do so almost instinctively. Indeed, most of the women participating in the cooperative inquiry talked with pride about their nurturing and supporting roles at home and with others such as partners and friends. However, as Marshall (1986) points out, In the absence of mutuality or in a context where the *other* is working from more transactional and potentially conflicting perspectives, misunderstandings and conflicts can ensue. This makes us potentially vulnerable to exploitation and our own needs left unsatisfied. In our interactions with others we may fail to see the ways and means others will use to silence us, thus thwarting any hope of the relational aspirations and collaboration many of us need to sustain both our sense of self-worth and potentially progress towards our aspirations, work or otherwise. We can also end up exhausted by our efforts.

It is important to note here that whilst I use the term ‘tactics’, this does not imply that there is always a conscious intent to silence. My sense is that often they are used unconsciously, perhaps through learned behaviour in a patriarchal context over time.

8.9 Technology 3:

We find it difficult to embrace our power and the value of conflict

We have seen in the discussion above how Kate and I felt ‘powerless’ in situations where our desire to nurture others through relationship, or relationships themselves, goes unfulfilled. Our active ‘being’ (Lorde, 2007) in the world is thwarted again by the

technologies of power at play within the masculine culture of our situations. It can also be seen how we continued to sustain connection with our oppressors in these contexts by keeping our experience and our reactions to them out of these connections. Baker-Miller & Striver (1997) call this process of relating the ‘central relational paradox’. This path away from mutual connection and simultaneously away from ‘*saying*’ the truth of one’s own experience, they say, is the path to many psychological problems such as depression and anxiety.

Discussions about power were raised in most of the inquiry conversations and were an integral theme in the co-operative and co-inquiries. Our discussions raised a number of interesting questions. Why do many women find it difficult to acknowledge they have power? Why do we shy away from confronting conflict? Does how we feel about power affect how we interact with others? Inevitably, as we grappled with the concept, the relationship with gender emerged.

The women’s perceptions of power and gender in this inquiry reflected the differing conceptions of the relationship between power and gender, underpinning the various approaches to feminist theory and their lack of agreement on the definition of power (Allen, 2013a). I also see evidence that our cultural myth that women do not and should not have power, and furthermore, do not need power (Baker-Miller, 1991), still persists.

Powerful comes to mind as a term of dominance, control. (Lucy)

I think of power to do with control, like dictators, bullies, people who are controlling ... my mind goes to those connotations. Whereas empowered seems like a positive thing. (Sophia)

In our early discussions several of the women talked of power as something someone else had over them. These women preferred to think of themselves as ‘*effective*’ or ‘*confident*’ in their various roles and wondered if this was a form of power.

I think being powerful can be the same as being effective, but effective is a nicer word. (Sophia)

Similarly, others saw power as being able to be ‘in control of your own destiny and make things happen if you want to’ (Belle), or ‘having the confidence to say something, or to assert yourself, or to prevent yourself from doing something that might be unwise’

(Sophia). These women saw power as an inner strength or confidence that enabled a degree of self-determination and effectiveness.

Lucy's and Sophia's early perceptions reflect traditional definitions of power based on agentic, controlling assumptions about the world (Marshall, 1986; Baker-Miller, 1991). The use of 'power over others' to control or limit others was seen as a capacity one *has* rather than the relational nature of the processes involved. Often a woman will see using power in this way for her own ends as dangerous, possibly precipitating attack or abandonment from others (Baker-Miller, 1986). If her need for others is a central part of her identity, this may prove too threatening. Instead she may be more comfortable using power if she believes its use is in the service of others or of getting something done.

This is reflected in Willa's somewhat different perspective. Willa talked of 'a feeling ... when I'm doing something, that will involve 'me' ... achieving something or getting something done'. She expanded further:

I do think your power comes from within you because of the person you are ... You are the person you are, because you are a woman and you have gone through certain things. Women have a different set of challenges in life than men have, and that's what shapes us. To me the power that you get from that is not necessarily feminine power as such, but born out of being a woman ... the things that I have experienced in my life ... for example: Nurturing is something I feel I've always been really good at, I feel really positive about it. I look back through my life and being able to nurture is probably the strongest thing I have. I don't get this power because I'm a woman, I see it as something I get through being a woman and my role as a mother. (Willa)

Willa's conception of power reflects the view that power is achieved by and through our relationships and development as women and used for the development of and our relationships with others. This type of power is one of 'power with' and requires different modes of action and goals other than that of 'power over': ones that do not seek to limit, but rather enhance the power of others, whilst simultaneously enhancing our own. It seemed Willa and others felt more comfortable considering power in this way. Baker-Miller & Striver (1997) suggest that use of 'power with' grounds a woman's sense of self

and self-worth and is integral to our need to nurture and sustain the connections within which we function.

It was interesting that Willa saw her ‘effectiveness’ at work as something different. Yet she gave many examples of developing and empowering others and achieving ‘with’ others, often in the face of opposition and adversity.

I have pigeonholed the power I get from being a woman (powerful) as opposed to me being effective because of my knowledge and experience.

To me they are quite separate in terms of feminine power. (Willa)

She later talked about feeling confident and powerful at work when she was making decisions, pushing ideas forward and making things happen. Yet she admitted, ‘There’s always something in the back of my mind ‘someone’s going to find you out’, that undermines me ... and yet if I ask myself, do I feel like an imposter as a mother? Do I feel that same feeling that someone is going to find me out? No, I definitely don’t. I have 100% confidence in me as a mother.’

Of course, not all women feel confident as mothers, some may feel deeply inadequate. Similarly, many women still experience ‘*imposter syndrome*’ in the world of work. Despite ongoing improvements in equal opportunities this is still a common phenomenon (Kelsey, 2015). Sophia, a successful academic, also found the idea of having power difficult to grapple with. She associated power with its negative uses and effects such as control, manipulation and aggression. Despite feeling confident and effective at work and having a first-class degree in Law and two master’s degrees, Sophia also admitted to still feeling like an ‘imposter’.

She wondered if this might stem from her relationship with her mother but didn’t quite know why. Sophia had left school and married after A levels to get away from an unsettling and at times overbearing family life. She experienced her mother as emotional and manipulative, and as a child found her lack of control over situations really frightening. ‘I think that’s why I am so controlled; I hate it when I can’t control elements of my life. I’m a bit of control freak, not about other people but about my life, I hate it if any element of my life is out of control’. She eventually married a doctor, had three children, and fifteen years later again sought escape from ‘just being defined as a wife, mother and housewife’. Since then Sophia studied obsessively (her emphasis) and gained

her eminent qualifications. Yet even now she feels unrecognised in her family. Despite the fact that she teaches law in a business school, in her conversations with her mother and brother she struggles to sustain her voice. Her mother prefers to seek out her brother (who has no legal qualifications or qualifications at all) for advice on legal matters.

Psychotherapists Clance & Imes (1978) suggest four factors that contribute to the maintenance of imposter feelings over time. Early family dynamics and later introjection of societal sex-role stereotyping, for example within continuing family dynamics and school life, appear to contribute significantly to the development of the impostor phenomenon. The woman transitions into adulthood having been unable to impress her family with her 'brightness', with a self-image as a phony and thus congruent with the societal view that women are not defined as competent.

If the woman does well, it is often considered not because of her ability but because of some fluke. If the woman were to acknowledge her intelligence, she would have to go against the views perpetuated by a whole society. Often this is too threatening for the woman to contemplate. Yet many women, including the participants in this inquiry, appear to want to also prove themselves and society wrong. Through their perseverance they have continued to succeed, some against tremendous odds.

Unconsciously, many women buy into the societal stereotype of women being less able intellectually than men. This, according to Clane & Imes (1978), begins to exacerbate and confirm at an early age the self-doubts that have already begun to develop in the context of the family dynamics. Despite outstanding academic and professional accomplishments, women who experience the imposter phenomenon persist in believing that they are really not bright and have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise.

Sophia has struggled to get the affirmation she needed from her mother, which she believes contributes to her feelings of inadequacy. Of course, she doesn't feel inadequate all the time, and this is not uncommon. Indeed, much of my own early first-person inquiry sought to understand the relationship with my own mother, whose standards (applied to many aspects of my life) I could never live up to. Yet those of us who have successful careers have seemingly 'stepped away' from our early definitions, and from society's defined roles for us. However, we are not completely 'out', because we still at times feel internal experiences of inadequacy.

It seems that the answers to the earlier questions of why some women often view power as a negative force, and why they might find it difficult to acknowledge they have any power themselves, lie in our longstanding associations with our early experiences of being controlled, and in our experiences of having our relational efforts thwarted, as we experience 'power over'. It seems the negative and masculine perceptions of power prevent many women from acknowledging any other presence of power in the context of social interaction. This makes it difficult for those women to deal with conflict or any form of confrontation. Our care for relationships and deep-seated need for connection, along with the fear of putting others down or limiting others, often stops us from resisting others. In the workplace, Fletcher says (2001, 2003), this can render us invisible, particularly as leadership potential.

Marshall (1986) also highlights how women may have to suppress their emotional tone, adjust their use of language, and even change the patterns of content of their speech, just to be able to 'join in'. This dictating of conversation by male convention causes women to be hesitant in public, which may then be attributed to lack of confidence (Spender, 1980; Marshall, 1986). In addition, they are often denied the opportunity to talk from their own value base and experience.

We can see as adults that our relationship with power is complex. We learn to fear our own power from early childhood as we learn what it means to behave in a feminine way (Baker-Miller, 1976). We are discouraged from using our power even to meet our own needs. This often leads to internal conflict, as was evident in some of the decision-making processes the women here talked about, such as whether or not to seek a divorce or an alternative form of work. Women who have been abused know the full extent of this, as any direct use of their own powers in their own interests frequently brings a severely negative reaction from a man and often other family members (Bancroft, 2002; Stark, 2009).

Even though sometimes we can see all this operating, it's hard to get into our heads and out of our subconscious. Other factors such as contexts or workplaces dominated by masculinised discourse effectively compound the subjugation of female voices, values and relational practices. Several studies have shown – see Simpson & Lewis (2007) that even in organisational contexts where a more feminine discourse is gaining ground relational ways of working rarely become the dominant way. Instead they are eventually engulfed as masculine discourse re-emerges through practices and rhetoric that emphasise control and

performance, and the subordinate position of women. Hierarchical gender relations are shown to be reproduced and maintained as masculine cultural norms and forms of organising re-establish their hegemonic status.

When power is perceived as ‘power over’, the women in this study generally didn’t want to be associated with it, and initially some struggled to recognise any sense of real power in themselves. Through inquiry we were able to explore how our different perceptions had come about and separate the positive, relational acts of power (which we felt comfortable with) from those of control and domination. Marshall (1986) in her research involving 30 women managers found these complexities around both perceptions and preferences of power can make our conversational life difficult, often compounded by the fear of others surrounding our relational power and our willingness to support and collude with male dominance, despite such patterns of relating being detrimental. Fletcher’s (2001) study of the relational practice of female engineers, also revealed a tension between being expected to act relationally and the negative experiences that followed. Their male colleagues often misinterpreting or dismissing their relational acts as acts of ‘mothering’, selfless giving with no expectations of reciprocity. ‘In other words, they were responded to as women within a patriarchal system of power and entitlement, not as peers and co-workers in an organisational setting’ (p. 109). The women concerned were often limited by the organisational language available to describe relational work as powerful activity and unable to call attention to or gain recognition for the outcomes generated. An example of ‘organisational culture eating feminine capital for breakfast’ (adapted from original quote by Peter Drucker).

Confidence for many women comes from our knowledge and effectiveness at work, and as we have seen here, even this can be oppressed by the remnants of our childhood definitions of us, and by societal stereotypes and norms in our adult contexts. This points to a need for women to explore how and when they feel powerful and powerless, and why, and to develop a relationship with power that enables them. Through examining our perceptions of power and coming to ‘*know*’ how we use our power, I believe we can overcome the difficulties associated with acting powerfully and find ways to increase our powerfulness. Developing a positive relationship with power and conflict has the potential to strengthen our identity as women, as well as increasing effectiveness in all aspects of life.

8.10 Technology 4:

We hold our emotions in check

Emotions are a fact of life, an essential part of our 'being' in the world, and some would say as women we have a much greater sense of the emotional aspects of life than men. However, in our dominant tradition, emotionality has been seen more as an impediment, or even sinister in motive (Baker-Miller, 1976). Baker-Miller (1976) highlights our long tradition of trying to dispense with or control emotionality, rather than valuing and embracing its contributing strengths. This was evident in my conversations with those who participated in this inquiry. I noticed that the women rarely discussed their emotions unless I inquired about them. Furthermore, control of their emotions was a key feature in experiences of being silenced.

It has long been accepted that women's emotional problems are central causes of psychological disorder (Belenky et al., 1996). In all of the stories of '*being silenced*' we shared, without exception, some form of emotional turmoil or distress was evident. Also revealed was how many of us are in a constant state of carrying unresolved or unspoken emotions relating to oppressive encounters around in our bodies and heads. Indeed, as I have been writing this section (over two days) I have experienced intense emotion about a situation two weeks ago, when my eldest son was emotionally traumatised by my abusive ex-husband. My son shared his story of being ignored and rejected with me the day after the incident happened. Despite being overwhelmed with anger and emotions as he relayed the story, I responded calmly with support and reassurance for how he had handled the situation.

Here in Egypt, two weeks later, I experience an unleashing of the emotion I have suppressed to avoid distressing my son any further. He, like many other men, finds women's emotions difficult, so I have carried this emotion around for the last two weeks, and only yesterday, as I returned to other oppressive experiences in my data, has it found expression. I cried for all of yesterday evening.

Whilst the crying, and writing about it, helped, I am still holding a huge amount of anger about what happened to my son last week, and the abuse we all experienced during my marriage and since. I have learnt to manage it and contain it and can now accept my anger as a normal human response.

The anger I feel scares me, there is so much of it. I feel I have no choice but to suppress it, and whilst I may get it under control for a whilst I have no doubt it will surface again at another time, when there is another incident and my children are hurt or traumatised. (Freefall, June 2016)

Women and men are situated and experience our social world in different ways. For this reason, feminist theorists (Baker-Miller, 1976 Jordan et al., 1991; Gilligan, 1993; Belenky et al. 1986, 1997; Robb, 2006; Goldberger, et al. 1996) have sought to articulate how women's relational ways of knowing are different than men's. In essence the women in these studies show how they develop knowledge and speak from their connected and situated lives, 'their experience'. Not, as disembodied knowers speaking single truths and excluding the experience of women. The relational self and knower however, faces many obstacles in developing the power of their mind and intellect (Belenky et al., 1986, 1997).

Similarly, and because of our subordination to men, emotional knowing or feelings cannot be expressed or known in a gender-neutral way (Bartky, 1990). Bartky asks, what are 'the different patterns of mood or feeling that tend to characterise women more than men?' (p.84). She identifies shame, guilt and pervasive apprehension as examples of emotions experienced quite differently in our unique subordinated context. This includes our capacity to induce the emotions and experience of shame by passing judgment on ourselves according to how we understand we appear to the Other. Once we come to see ourselves as we might be seen by and expected of us by another, we become an object before ourselves.

I have noticed in my own journals how when I feel 'bad' about how I look, mainly when I am overweight, my feelings of shame and self-disgust have an impact on my voice and way of being. I have noticed how these feelings and thoughts come into my head in the midst of conversations and whilst working with my colleagues and others.

My weight gain over the past 2 years has seriously affected my voice and confidence in the classroom ... I think that's why I don't enjoy it at the moment, it's in my head all day. I know I'm judging myself and other people are too They (my colleagues) know that I'm not confident but I can't tell them what is going on for me ... I would feel too exposed and vulnerable. (Journal, 2014)

Bartky's review of existential philosophy expresses the cognitive dimension of our emotions and moods and their relationship to typical gendered traits or dispositions. Emotions she says are disclosive of our 'being in the world' (p.84). In other words, a mood makes manifest 'how one is and how one is faring' within the social context. We see in the example above how our propensity to judge ourselves through the eyes and definitions of men, as discussed previously, can generate emotions and feelings at the point of encounters that we often have no control over. As we experience these feelings, we then have to decide what to do with them. In the situation above I was not able to overturn the shame I was experiencing, and my lack of confidence was judged. I felt unable to share my inner experience—my emotions and thinking. This compounded my shame, which I took into our later conversations where we attempted to debrief the session.

Jordan and others (1991) found that relational contentment and growth in relationship happen when people feel free to talk about and act on their inner experience, in the context of a safe relationship where another feels the kind of love or pleasure for another that makes them genuinely want to know their feelings and thoughts. This type of relationship is healthy and feels good (Robb, 2007). I have learnt to differentiate these feeling from others I experience in relationships. On this occasion, In the debrief session I felt completely unable to discuss my experience in an authentic way.

In contrast, Willa shared a story about a situation where she chose to voice her emotions to a colleague, who had, amongst other things, failed to communicate with her about some room bookings for a mediation session. However, afterwards she regretted it because it made things awkward the next time, she saw her.

My natural instinct was to do nothing ... to walk away ... but this time I thought, no, I'm going to tell her how she has made me feel ... I wish I had just left it ... sometimes it's better not to cause bad feeling with other people, it's easier to deal with your own bad feelings. (Willa)

In the conversation that followed, the group discussed how unprepared women are to deal with conflict and disagreement in conversation.

No one teaches us to deal with all this ... maybe we need to learn how to use language better so that the other person doesn't feel attacked. (Belle)

It is an unfortunate truth of women's experience that our anger or any initiation of conflict is not well received, particularly by men and often by other women. It is virtually always seen as pathological (Frye, 1983; Baker-Miller, 1991). As adults it seems we are well schooled in suppressing conflict but not in the art of conducting constructive conflict.

Interestingly, expression of a man's anger will often enhance a man's status and competency in the eyes of others, whereas for a woman it can be very costly in terms of how they are perceived (Fine, 2010). This is because anger does not fit the stereotypical view of how women should behave. Our anger is unacceptable, Johnson (2005) says, because it means that we are in touch with our passion and power, especially in relation to men. As such, a woman's expression of power threatens the entire patriarchal order by forcing men to confront the reality of male privilege.

Even in the world of work where the rhetoric of equality rings clear, men and women are judged differently as far as emotions are concerned. Men are often rewarded for displaying anger and aggression in leadership roles, and women learn not to express anger because they know there will be repercussions. Women who choose to adopt a more masculine style, displaying their confidence in using their power, often experience backlash, and can be seen as less socially skilled (Fine, 2005). Some learn quickly to suppress emotional tone and personal reference (important aspects of their world) if they want to be allowed to join in (Marshall, 1986).

We are mostly unconscious of the extent of our conforming to the needs of others and the technologies of power at play in the process of keeping our emotions in check. It is no wonder, then, that 'holding it all in' during our interactions with others, as some of us often do, silences us, leading to further inner turmoil and pressure. Several of the women talked of how this inevitably leads to an emotional explosion. Sophia's story evidences how this pattern starts early. She explained how as a child her anger was often ridiculed.

I would always try to conform and try to please everyone, bottle it up, bottle it up and then it would overflow ... I would be over-emotional, and everyone would be thinking I was making a terrible fuss. She compared herself to her brother, who would just say "no", he didn't want to do something, or that he wasn't happy about something, and no one would mind. (Sophia)

It is understandable that we grow up fearing the degree of our anger is unjustified or excessive, especially if the person causing and witnessing our anger is perceived as necessary to one's existence. The fear of disrupting a relationship exerts a powerful weight, making women afraid to feel the first stirrings of anger (Baker-Miller, 1991). Nearly all of the participants shared similar stories of '*losing it*' and being ridiculed or berated for doing so. In the co-operative inquiry group, we came to see how these patterns persist into our adult lives where they can continue to cause confusion and shame.

Particularly men are very frightened of our anger. I certainly used to swallow it, bottle things up, and then out of the blue I would lose control and out it would all come ... then you get accused of being all sorts of things. You think to yourself, 'this is not how I want to behave', but it's so hard to explain how it got to this, even to yourself, but what you're doing is conforming, trying to make all the wheels go around. (Dalia)

American psychological theorists from the Stone-Center, (Baker-Miller, 1991; Jordan et al, 1991; Baker-Miller & Surrey, 1997) studied both men and women's experiences of anger over 30 plus years of clinical practice. They observed how women's anger was a subject or experience most people did not want to hear about. In fact, women's anger was hard to observe as a proper phenomenon as it was always seen as bad or even pathological. Whilst these theorists do not speak for all women they have sought to broaden and deepen their knowledge of diverse groups of women over the years of their studies (Jordan et al., 1991; Jordan, (Ed.)1997). Collectively they inquired into their own clinical practice and learning, as well as questioning, revisioning and drawing upon existing psychological theories to develop their provocative ideas about women's meaning systems, values, passions and ways of being in the world.

Baker-Miller (1991) suggest that the cultural traditions of patriarchal societies have distorted men's experience and knowledge of anger and prevented it from being integrated within the wider range of acceptable emotions. Many of us have thus come to know anger as expressions of aggression or intimidation. An isolating and destructive phenomenon.

This confusion between anger and aggression has meant that men are encouraged to act aggressively and women as subordinates can be made to feel that they are weak, unworthy and have no reason or even right to be angry. If they do express anger it can be seen as an indication of irrational thinking or behaviour, or that there is something wrong with them.

Women are often taught from childhood that their emotions are to be suppressed, not expressed. Gilligan's work (2011) with young girls reveals how many adolescent girls begin to lose a sense of what they 'know' in their minds and bodies because the cultural norms of the time are telling them something else. Instead of listening to themselves, they learn to listen to voices telling them what is happening and what they should think or feel and say. Consequently, it becomes hard for women to know what they know without feeling crazy. And as we see here, saying what we know about how we feel, and about the people around us, can make trouble for others and for ourselves.

In essence anger is not seen as 'normal' behaviour for women and we are often denied the means of expressing it. Baker Miller (1997) suggests that these unhelpful dynamics prevent anger being expressed and responded to well by both men and women. Thus, anger is prevented from being perceived as a normal emotion that potentially could function in service of moving a relationship forward towards a better connection.

In the context of a relationship where the balance of power is unequal women often reported being told they cannot react that way and more importantly that they *do not* have the emotions and the perceptions that they in fact are experiencing (Baker-Miller, 1991). This is particularly the case in abusive relationships where controlling men not only take away a woman's right to be angry, they resort to belittling and overpowering the anger with their own (Bancroft, 2002).

For women repeated experiences of having to swallow, repress or deny their anger leads to feelings that anger is a threat to their central sense of identity and risks disrupting relationships on which they may be dependant (financially or otherwise) (Baker-Miller, 1991). Baker-Miller and her colleagues saw how these experiences over time led to feelings of frustration, powerlessness and 'badness'. Eventually resulting in perceptions of weakness and low self-esteem. At worst mental illnesses such as depression would develop (Kaplan, 1991).

'It is the suffering of an experience, but then not having the 'permission' to truly suffer it—that is, not being able to go genuinely through the experience, know it, name it, and react with the emotions that it evokes.....that can create profound psychological trouble' (Baker-Miller, 1991 pp. 192–193).

My experience since becoming a feminist has taught me that every day brings experiences that generate anger. Even women who are not feminists—by which I mean those who

don't 'see' patriarchy in every aspect of life—consciously experience domination and powerlessness in many situations. Thus our generally restricted and defined position in the home, at work and in society can be a constant source of frustration and anger (Baker-Miller, 1991). Many women then take care of men by silencing themselves rather than voice feelings about male privilege. We learn to attune ourselves to other people's emotions and are diverted from paying attention to examining and expressing our own.

Feminists and psychologists have argued over time for reclaiming the centrality of the body in meaning-making (Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, & Belenky, 1996). In our bodies and our emotions, we register experience. All our language and knowledge are embodied, which means tied to our body language, experiences, interactions, and environment. Our bodies are therefore the ultimate instruments for making sense of all of our external knowledge. However, being able to 'notice' and 'know' our emotions, grounded in our bodily cues and experience, is a challenge for many women (and men) who have learnt to suppress them, or in some cases disconnect from their emotions. This can lead to depression and other psychological problems (Baker-Miller & Pierce-Stiver, 1997).

8.11 Summary

The examples I have used to illuminate the four technologies of womankind discussed here are in my view examples of oppression. They show how patriarchal power can dominate our internal as well as the external world in which we live. My intention is to show, through the experiences of these women, how we carry these dilemmas and conflicts, and the discomfort they cause, around in our heads and bodies and into our everyday lives. In our various roles and contexts, they affect our voice, agency, ability to be authentic, and our capacity as 'knowers and givers of knowledge' (Fricker, 2010). In social settings we may grasp every opportunity to talk to those who sustain and enrich us. Otherwise, we also learn to have conversations without mutuality. For some of us, the inscriptions we carry affect our ability to forge and sustain the healthy and generative relationships we need to exist and lead a fulfilled life. And most importantly they can cause real psychological hurt and damage.

All of the women I spoke to had experienced being silenced in a variety of ways, often struggling to make sense of these interactions. Our shared stories tell us we have a lot in common with each other, and resonance with feminist theorists who have long since argued that the powerful have an unfair advantage in structuring collective social understandings. Our institutions are thus places that favour the powerful, who perpetually

constitute our social world (Hartsock, 1998; Bartky, 1990; Fricker, 2010). Although I did not set out to inquire into the early and past experiences of women and how they impact on experiences of silence in adult life, the vivid images emerging from our stories evidence the hidden complexity and long-term damage silence can have. We can see here that the complex mesh of power in the form of disciplinary and dividing practices (Foucault, 1994; Rabinow, 1991) is inescapable. As women we are divided inside ourselves and externally as ‘other’.

We take our sense of identity into all our social interactions. The ‘you are’s’, ‘you are not’s’, ‘you should’s’, ‘you should not’s’, become inscriptions—‘the tapes in our heads’ (my emphasis), disguised as thoughts of ‘I can’t’, ‘I’m not’, ‘I should’, ‘I should not’. Thus, we enter into our social interactions, conversations and relationships already partially silenced. These inscriptions have further impact on how we talk and how we respond to our emotions and to conflict in the moments of everyday interaction.

Foucault’s inquiries also traced and stressed repetitions in our pasts. He saw explorations of how past experiences shape our lives in the present, as discovering the formal rules that mankind has designed to discipline life’s experiences. His focus on repetition reinforces his central proposition about the paradox of the human condition. ‘We are beings that create forms which ironically imprison our creativity. This pattern of creation and constraint is ceaselessly repeated. Past experiences do not shape us irrevocably ... we continually reshape our past creations to conform to our present creative needs’ (Foucault in Hutton, 1988, p. 137).

Whilst Foucault doesn’t distinguish between men and women, I wondered about our particular kind of experience and how that has shaped us. The women involved in this inquiry were all British, aged between 26 and 55. We had all been through a particular cultural experience over similar timescales, and in this respect the paradox he talks of is evident in the technologies constructed here.

Foucault’s argument in challenging Freud’s psychoanalytic method proposed that through tracing one’s heritage, one hopes to uncover the continuity between one’s past and one’s present aspirations. He suggests that in reversing the process and tracing one’s ancestry, we will encounter striking discontinuities. The use of ideas in one generation may bear little resemblance to those of the preceding one. Foucault’s purpose then was not to deny or value the importance of recalling the past but to change our perspective on that

endeavour. ‘What fathoming the past teaches us is that there are options among which we are free to choose, not simply continuities to which we must adapt’ (Foucault in Hutton, 1988, p. 139).

I consider Foucault’s framing in this respect, along with his methods and analysis, as offering opportunities for empowerment. Who we are has as much to do with what we affirm in the present, as it does with what we defer to in the past. Any quest for self-understanding or self-knowledge is therefore a journey without end. And the aspiration and responsibility to create new values and meanings is an ongoing task that forms the foundation of our being. For Foucault, it is through such creativity that our power is revealed, and it is in our capacity to use it well that our destiny lies.

I argue that working with women to reveal, listen to, and examine the ‘tapes playing in our heads’ will open up spaces for resistance and lead to more fulfilling and creative relationships with ourselves. Developing a real understanding of our own power as a woman, our true values, and our aspirations for ‘being’ in the world, we are then in a more empowered position to be more of who we want to be and architects of our own power.

Most of the women participating in this inquiry revealed what I call ‘aspirations of goodness’. This means we enter into most of our conversations with an ethical intent. We want to ‘lead with love’ (CS), ‘be powerful with respect, not aggressive and powerful’ (WS), ‘nurturing with others’ (KK), ‘make sure the group has a good experience’ (DL); we don’t want to ‘upset anyone’ (SA) ‘cause an argument’ (LS), ‘make a fuss’ (SA), ‘be aggressive’ (SG), and so on. In other words, we want to ‘do good’ and ‘feel good’.

Of course, not everyone aspires to an ethical way of being. White (1992) suggests that women, or people in general who relate from a connected ethical stance, are not necessarily morally superior, they are perhaps just more perceptive of the severity of certain problems and more attuned to the likely damage. I would suggest that the extent the feelings of hurt and damage that some of our experiences leave behind, often as etchings on our identities and souls, enable these perceptual and empathetic capacities.

8.12 Reflections

The technologies of womankind discussed here, along with our aspirations of goodness or ethical practice, may or may not apply to women of different cultures and backgrounds. The women of Fayoum, or Egyptian women in general, for example, will have different

inscriptions and aspirations, as they are impacted by their own gendered culture. The point I make here is that all women are not the same; thus, I don't seek to universalise by ignoring our differential experiences.

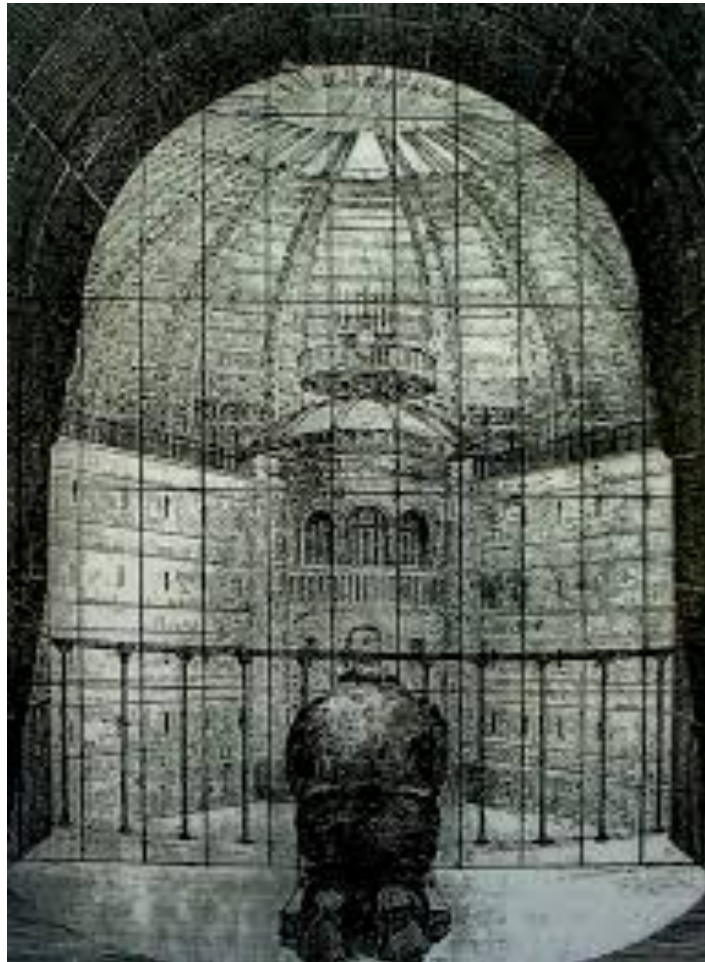
At the same time, I consider that examining our pasts in the way suggested here can enable women who experience being silenced to open up opportunities for resistance and coping. I am also mindful of the challenges such activity may pose.

In the following chapter I will explore further how the Technologies of Womankind as discussed here play a part in our experiences of being silenced in everyday organisational and community life. In the context of the 'whole' experience of being silenced I consider these technologies as 'deeper' or macro aspects of silencing. You often can't 'see' them in the 'micro' acts of social interaction, but they are there, historically inscribed in our minds, and often deeply embedded in our actions, playing their part in this social phenomenon.

In Chapter 10 I will discuss some of the practices (Technologies of Self) we women can employ to strengthen our voices. In doing so we can harness our authenticity (our values and aspirations) and our power, and consciously re-construct and re-create ourselves to be more of the women we want to be.

Chapter 9

Technologies of Silence



‘To have a voice is to be human, to have something to say is being a person.
But speaking depends on listening, and being heard;
it is an intensely relational act.’
(Gilligan, 1993, p. xvi)

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I bring together and explain the elements of ‘social silencing’ as a complex phenomenon. My construction here is the result of the scrutinizing and making sense of the nitty-gritty detail of our stories of being silenced as discussed earlier. I illustrate the various elements of social silencing using examples from the data and draw on feminist theory, and particularly the work of Foucault to crystallise (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Ellingson, 2009), construct and articulate the multiple lived truths of the women involved in this research. These stories came from our everyday life in our everyday contexts. Whilst each individual experience of being socially silenced is different, my sense is that collectively, these experiences whether in the boardroom, the home, and even in the context of abusive relationships, can be understood by examining the technologies (practices) of power and the complex relationships between them as discussed here.

I will bring together different aspects of the data and analysis to examine and articulate silencing at the ‘surface’ level—the techniques (the words and acts) that take place during the interaction itself; at the ‘psychological’ level of the woman who is silenced, highlighting how the technologies of womankind come into play and contribute to the silencing process; and at the ‘deeper’ level, where I consider the institutional, social and cultural technologies of power, and how they support and perpetuate silencing acts.

Through this intense process of constructing and crystalizing the various elements of social silencing I have constructed a framework to bring together the various elements for consideration. I offer this as a means of understanding and appreciating the complexity of this phenomenon at these macro and micro levels (see Figure 4 and 5) and exploring where opportunities for resistance and action might be. Once constructed, I used the framework as I listened to further stories both to guide my questioning, and later to analyse the experience further ‘with’ the silenced woman. I will explore one of these examples with you.

9.2 Constructing Social Silencing as a ‘Phenomenon’

Our experiences of being silenced in the context of everyday interaction are often complex, obscure and harmful. I have discussed previously how returning to them often leads to reliving the emotion and pain experienced at the time they happened. Indeed, unravelling and working with my own stories and those of others has required significant emotional energy and resilience. There were times when I just could not face working with the data. Each time, I am reminded of the psychological hurt sustained, and the significant damage

of this social injustice. Later in this chapter I will show how the women who participated in this research constructed the impact and harm experienced when socially silenced.

I argue that the harm inflicted through social silencing runs deep. Fricker (2006, 2010) says that to be insulted, undermined, or otherwise wronged in our capacity as a knower, and as a giver of our knowing to another, is to be wronged in a capacity essential to human value. In a context of oppression this constitutes epistemic injustice. The wrong inflicted stems from both ethical and epistemic dimensions. This means that the harm suffered is not simply the epistemic wrong itself, but also the meaning of being treated like that. Social silencing is often a form of the injustice Fricker terms ‘testimonial injustice’.

Testimonial injustice occurs when ‘prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker’s word’ (Fricker, 2010, p. 1). In other words, one person prevents another from conveying their knowledge or expressing themselves due to prejudice deflating their judgment of the other’s credibility (for example, because they are a woman or black). I will show in the examples I draw upon how this injustice and the harm inflicted can have both personal and professional consequences.

Furthermore, I argue that the impact of social silencing is a triple whammy. The hurt caused by being socially silenced (being treated like that), and possibly suffering testimonial injustice (being wronged as a knower), can be compounded by the hermeneutical disadvantage of not being able to explain and name what has happened.

Fricker contends that the primary harm of hermeneutical injustice is to be understood not only in terms of being unfairly disadvantaged by the lack of collective social meaning as a resource for making sense of our experiences—the ‘hermeneutical lacuna’ (Fricker, 2010 p. 151), but also the very construction of selfhood. In certain social contexts, hermeneutical injustice can mean that someone is socially constituted as, or even perhaps caused to be, something they are not, and which it is against their interests to be seen as. For example, a woman can be constructed by those who silence her as ‘mentally unwell’ or ‘making a fuss’ (as we heard earlier) and possibly come to see herself in this way.

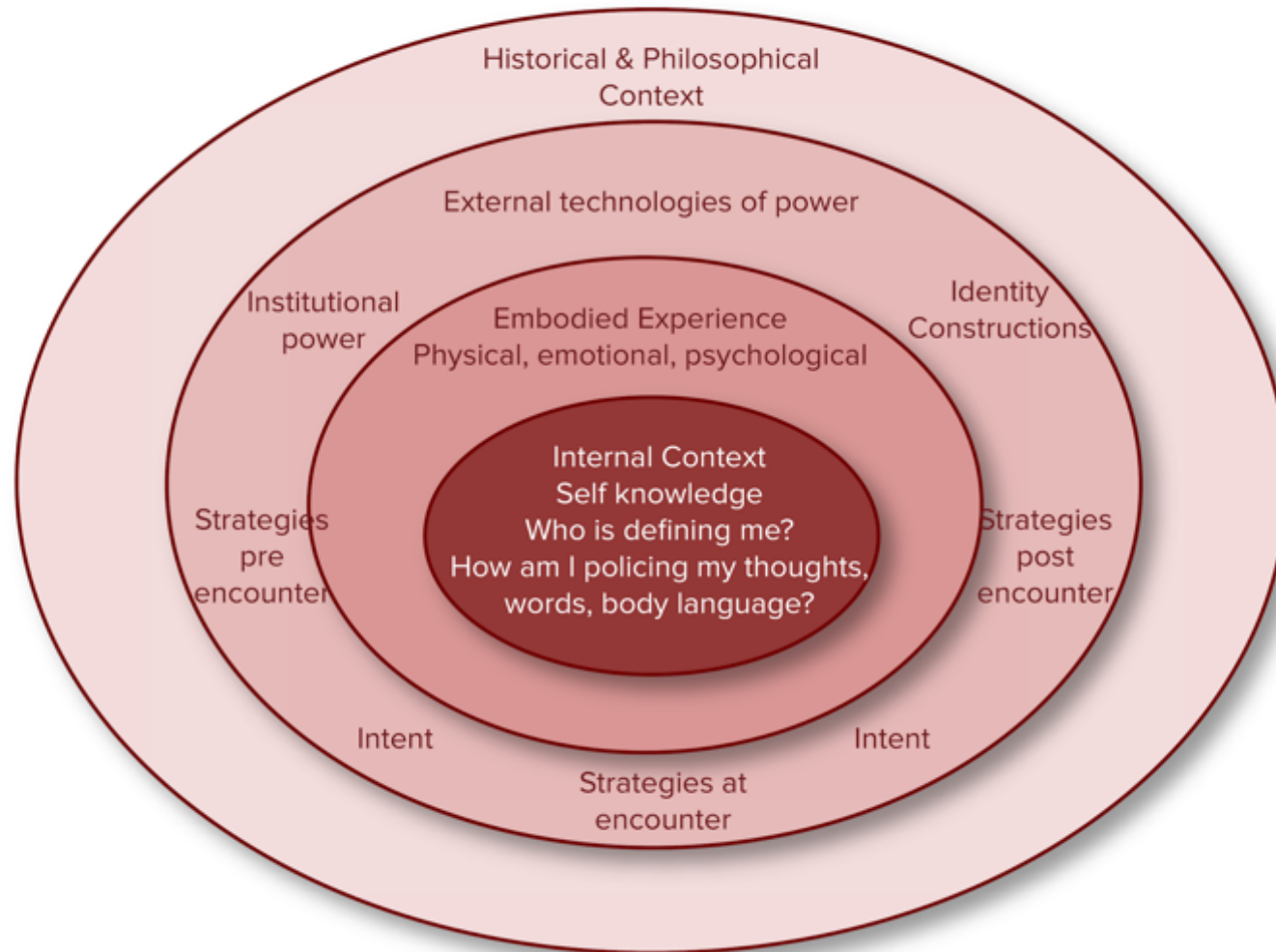
Silencing happens when particular power relations come into play, and no one experience is the same as another. This means there are no quick solutions. However, as I worked with the data a construction of the phenomenon of social silencing began to emerge. Furthermore, it became apparent that these experiences could not be dealt with exclusively

at the micro level (the surface level) of interactions, as I had initially set out to explore. Indeed, the acts that take place, and the power relations at play at a surface level, I found to be only a partial representation. Social silencing also needs to be understood from a macro (deeper) level; by this I mean the context of the situation, including the inner voices of women themselves (as discussed in the previous chapter). I argue that these aspects and the relationship between them need to be analysed to fully comprehend this phenomenon.

Most of the actual experiences of being silenced I heard about were from the women in the one-to-one inquiry conversations, my co-inquiry with Charlotte, and a group inquiry conversation with two women who were working in the charity sector with Charlotte. These experiences revealed various elements or aspects worthy of study.

Figure 9.1:

Technologies of Social Silencing



9.3 Historical and Philosophical Context

Theodore Zeldin (1998) uses historical narratives of private lives to expose the bonds of humanity. Instead of explaining the peculiarity of individuals by pointing to their early life experiences, he shows how we pay attention to—or ignore—the experience of previous, more different generations. Equally, Michel Foucault's historical analysis and understanding of the production of knowledge and power, and how we as individuals become constituted by disciplinary and dividing practices, has been another source of stimulation and informs the basis of my own analysis of social silencing here.

Whilst neither Zeldin nor Foucault can be considered feminist, and they employ very different methodologies, they do share some complementary similarities. Both these eminent historical thinkers seek to reveal the unconscious limits of our thought and the structures and habits that determine how we go on together. They both start with the present day and work backwards in time. They both move from the personal to the universal, encouraging us to look not only at our pasts for possibilities and practices for resistance and change at an individual level—they encourage us to 'change the spectacles we see ourselves and our world by' (Zeldin, 1998, p. 14). At the point of personal change or transformation, the personal becomes political in that personal change incites institutional and societal transformation.

I believe this way of thinking is helpful in understanding the context of our patriarchal present by emphasising the participatory nature of society and how over time we have come to be where we are. We are all participating in something larger than ourselves, or than any collection of us. My own sense is that understanding the historical beginnings of patriarchy as our collective legacy enables us to step back, unravel and critique the various practices of our social patriarchal system today, and change the politics of our everyday lives. Understanding the future is about knowing that social practices (including research practice) are regulated, and open to variation and change. New practices can emerge through our lived experience as we determine the links between our social behaviours and patterns, and the context in social situations (Smolka, 2001). Through understanding the historical and the shifting nature of social life, and when social structures are transformed into processes (Beisser, 1970)—for example, 'silence' into 'silencing'—we gain a sense of empowerment and transformational possibility. Beisser suggests that when this occurs 'one is open to participant interchange with his(/her) environment' (p. 2). Whilst the problem becomes one of discerning where one stands in relationship to a shifting society, Beisser says that as individuals we have to develop our own central gyroscope to guide us in

finding stability, as we are confronted with a pluralistic, multifaceted, changing system. At the same time, we develop the capacity to move dynamically and flexibly with the times.

Zeldin's view is that by looking back we can place current-day difficulties or barriers to our ambitions 'against the background of all human experience in all centuries' (Zeldin, 1998, p. 13), thus using the memories of all humanity to see other possibilities for behaviour and action. Similarly, Foucault looks at how the political relations of the body and social institutions have shifted over time, as a background to self-formation and political intervention. Foucault maintained that his intention throughout his work is 'to show people they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up in a certain moment in history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticised and destroyed' (Foucault, 1982, p. 9). His intention was to change our minds about how we see things.

Foucault and Zeldin's social critiques influenced my thinking about the current social order—how I saw the world. I came to see patriarchy as a legacy that's been handed down to us without our ever being asked about it, and like most people in social systems, we are largely oblivious to what we are participating in. Yet if we look at patriarchy as a system of power, we can see we are connected in different ways and there are ways to create space for resistance. Through what I perceived as their rigorous historical constructions of social practices I gained a sense of liberation and empowerment to resist. My inquiry into women's experiences of being silenced thus became a quest to gain clarity about the connections between the self in relation, and the social context of oppression as a whole.

Whilst mobilised by this sense of freedom, I am also aware of some of the complexities of critiquing and changing social practices. I believe changing how we participate in social life in any significant way requires an understanding of the normative demands made on us and a philosophical conception of what constitutes good or ethical conduct, at both individual and institutional levels (Fricker, 2010). Thus, any such attempts are political work. Through questioning and reevaluating our inherited identities and values, and challenging our received interpretations of them, and the limits and systems of exclusion imposed on us, we can gain awareness of how we are caught in a web of power we have helped to create (Clegg, Hardy & Nord, 1996). Yet the powerful forces in place make gaining any form of social consensus about relating in ways more fulfilling of human needs impossible. Indeed, even if old illusions and practices are replaced with new ones we often see new forms of marginalisation and oppression emerge (Calas & Smircich, 1993;

Fletcher, 2001, 2009; Alvesson & Deetz, 1996). As a feminist I see politics by necessity as local and situational, and thus more important than trying to impose any form of systemic change.

However, we look at it and participate in it, patriarchy is '*a society that promotes male privilege*'. That means the masculine view dominates, identifies and controls most of what goes on. Our cultural ideals about what is considered good, desirable, preferable, or normal are associated with how we think about men and masculinity (Johnson, 2005). Our culture is male-centred and is embodied by everything from the content and nature of everyday conversation, to literature, film and our institutions and organisations (Johnson, 2005; Mulvey, 1975; Simpson & Lewis, 2017). Furthermore, as discussed in the previous chapter, the Technologies of Womankind—the nature of how we participate (involuntarily) in our patriarchal system—emanate from a historical culture where manhood and masculinity are associated with being human, and womanhood and femininity consigned to the marginal position of 'other'. It's about how social life is and how it is supposed to be, about what is expected of people and about how they feel.

In this context privilege can be something as simple as '*being heard*' and taken seriously when we say something or being free to express a view or opinion. When men are listened to in a meeting or a workplace, and women are ignored, ridiculed, or put down, what would otherwise be a common courtesy in conversation—taking people seriously enough to listen to them—is turned into a form of privilege.

This advantage is unearned and available to any member of the social category 'male' whilst being systematically denied to another — 'female' (Johnson, 2005; McIntosh, 2000). However, male dominance does not mean that all men are powerful and controlling or that all women are powerless and non-controlling. What it does mean is that where there is a concentration of power, men are the ones most likely to have it. Despite modern espoused democratic values, our social life is organised around these core patriarchal principles and the powerful dynamics of fear and control that keep it going.

As I have yet to experience a culture where patriarchy has been eliminated, this context forms the social system within which the phenomenon of 'social silencing' can be understood. At the same time our individual backgrounds, educational experience and intersectional locations will determine the uniqueness of each experience of being silenced and should be considered. Holvino (2008) asserts that while patriarchy is the primary

structure of women's oppression it does not exclusively account for the concrete ways in which race, sexuality and class differentiate the experience and the situation of diverse women in organisations. She considers intersections as "simultaneous processes of identity, institutional and social practice", and suggests that understanding intersectionality in this way can support new theory-making, research and practice in organisations. Ways of accessing hidden stories, and identifying, untangling and changing the differential impact of everyday organisational practices, and then identifying and linking internal cultural norms and processes with the external world.

In using this framework, it should not be assumed, that everyone would understand social silencing or oppression in this way. I have recently introduced this framework to a small number of colleagues, and to a group of senior businesswomen in Egypt. They of course described their contexts similarly and differently to women in the western world. When working with the women in Egypt, we initially explored how they experienced being a woman in their world. This enabled grounding of the framework in the Egyptian context, where religious beliefs are central to their being.

This is an important point for anyone applying or using the framework in different cultures. Some of the women talked to me about how they understand and experience patriarchy, or 'their oppression', differently to feminists in the western world. Their experience of oppression and indeed liberation was grounded in the progressive interpretation of Muslim law. Whilst some may suggest that the Arab Islamic cultural heritage and common language preserve a unique character for the Arab regions and their people (Al Maaitah, Al Maaitah, Olaimat & Gharaeibeh, 2011), I have noticed differences and similarities in how women experience oppression both within and across the Arab countries I have visited. Nevertheless, democratisation remains a slow process, which faces various setbacks including regional instability and conflict, economic imbalances, and the lack of freedom to engage in a meaningful democratic process (Al Maaitah et al., 2011). This has hindered and delayed efforts aimed at promoting women's empowerment and equal participation in decision-making and political development.

The religious systems are undoubtedly patriarchal; at the same time there are progressive, influential thinkers who are gradually modernising the religious rulings, empowering modern Arab women to be more of who they want to be. Furthermore, some women would claim that in order to find a way to live within their religious and cultural traditions (which the women I talked with did not want to discard), it is not possible to be against patriarchy

as a social system. It is the repressive interpretation of the religious rules as they relate to women's rights that bother them.

Even such different contextual interpretations and experiences did not and should not detract from the usefulness of this framework. I suggest it offers a means of interpreting women's experience in their individual contexts. Through reflecting on their contexts, they can become more aware of what restricts and enables them, and then make more informed choices of how to be and act.

9.4 External Technologies of Power – Institutional Power

Any power relation studied in isolation from its cultural and institutional context can easily be perceived as an anomaly or exception, and not part of a larger system of domination like sexism, racism and so on. So although analysis of silencing at the micro level can be analysed as a distinct event, we must also analyse the macro level or context in order to fully illuminate the constitution of power relations at the micro level. In relation to the phenomenon of 'social silencing', the macro level of analysis describes the complex background set of social relations that ground every micro-level domination. In other words, they explain how distinct social interactions come to be. Wartenberg's (1992) conception of 'situated power' and Allen's (1996) constructed theory of domination using Foucault's analysis of power both provide a means to understand institutional power and expertise, and Foucault's general and pervasive theory of power in society.

According to Wartenberg (1992), all institutions, from hospitals to schools, banks to businesses, use a woman's gender and marital status as a basis for their treatment of her. Wartenberg uses the concept of 'alignment' to elucidate how this general alignment of the practices and cultures of institutions within the male domination of society results in the domination of women and constitutes the social field for any relationship, thus making it into a power relationship. Similarly, Foucault (1980) used the term 'biopower' to refer to the manifestation of power in our daily practices and institutional routines, where individuals engage in self-surveillance and self-discipline, and thereby subjugate themselves. He suggests the force of this often-invisible operation of power derives from its ability to function through 'knowledge and desire'. Power thus operates through both the production of knowledge, and the creation of a desire to conform to the norms that this knowledge establishes. This desire to conform leads people to sustain their own oppression voluntarily, through self-disciplining and self-surveillance.

In the context of our institutions and organisations these processes can be seen to have two specific features. The first is that the subordinate woman has some desire for the items over which the alignment has control. The second is that the woman be able to affect how the dominant agent (the institution or the woman's manager) will act with regard to her. When these two features are present in a power relation, the structure of that relationship and the interactions within it become much more intentional and explain how such power relationships may result in a process of subjection.

The institution seeks to elicit actions or behaviour on the part of the employees that affect how they will be judged, to the extent that the employee will perform the sort of actions that the manager or colleague will reward her for, with such things as praise, promotion, references, etc.

The result of the existence of such a power relationship over the subordinate woman is that she comes to adapt long-term strategies of action that are predicated upon the existence of this power relation. As a result of the existence of power relationships, the employee comes to adopt certain courses of action for the instrumental value they have in allowing her to realise her purposes. Obviously, this process is precisely one of subjection—the creation of the human agent as having desires that are adopted by the human being as her own, due to her interaction with a power structure over which she has no control.

The crucial thing to realise here is that the presence of the power relationships causes or at least plays a part in the choices that determine the skills and abilities the woman will develop. Since the development of skills and abilities is a fundamental aspect of character, human beings become the sort of beings they are as a result of the presence of power relationships.

This process of subjugation can be seen in how Katy, the 32-year-old architect (discussed in Chapter 8), developed her 'robotic' leadership style. Gradually the 'social norms' of the organisation conveyed strong messages about the leadership style that was expected. The power she experienced with the competitive, driven and aggressive style of most of her partner colleagues, although she saw this as 'the wrong way to do it', rendered her own leadership un-confrontational, compliant and questioning her own voice. Interestingly, she found the 'gay guys' easy and enjoyable to work with:

Most of the straight men I work with are extremely competitive and very aggressive. They like to have and do things on their own, they don't like to talk, and if anything—a potential business opportunity—comes in the door, it's theirs and they will jump on anyone to get to it, it's really funny to watch. And, at the same time really tough, because I'm not one to be competitive or overly confrontational but that's 'how it is here'. It's hard for me to have that aggressive nature, in fact it's hard for me to have a voice when somebody has taken advantage of me ... taken some business development from me or something. (Katy)

My understanding was that Katy was gradually 'told', directly and indirectly, how to 'do leadership' in her organisation. Whilst she found it impossible to comply with many of the apparent organisational norms (i.e., become aggressive), she did however comply in many respects with the expectations of the feminine and was rendered more and more silent.

I am often in a meeting with all the partners, for example, they are all talking ... if I start to say something ... join in ... they just sort of look at me and change the subject. This happens often ... you feel like you're there, you're talking, but they are not listening ... they cut you off midway or just make up another topic ... I just shut up and just let them keep the conversation going.

In meetings no one listens to my opinions. All the guys talk together, joking and sharing things and going for drinks. They are just over there (pointing to the other side of the table) and I'm just over here, and they see no value that I can bring to the table. As much as I have tried to fight it and try to prove I can bring value, I think I know I can but I don't believe they think I can, if you see what I mean. (Katy)

Katy's apparent resignation is indicative of the exhausting work that trying to resist and fight a system of organisational norms keeping male privilege in place is. Her attempts to sustain her voice became more and more fruitless. My sense was that she achieved her success in the firm (and she was successful) by finding pockets of space where she could do her best work—for example, working with the 'gay guys': 'they are a lot more fun, communicate and share more ... that's just my experience'. I too experienced similar pressures fighting a male sense of entitlement, when managing a team of three leadership consultants during a consulting assignment. I too wanted to escape the fighting and associated exhaustion and wondered how these social patterns could be disrupted.

This has happened before. I start out by trying to have an open conversation but as soon as I disagree or don't conform to what he wants Ahmed digs his heels in. I then go into fight mode and try to assert myself. Ahmed starts talking over me, not listening, rubbing me out, and telling me how things are. I change to flight mode and have to get out because firstly I feel distressed (oppressed) and secondly, I 'know' there is no point. I wonder if this is true. Is there no point? Is there anything else I could try to get the conversation back into a generative one? ... So, as Bohm says we participate in how reality unfolds depending on our state of consciousness. In these conversations I seem to lose my presence and consciousness. It's like my mind becomes muddled. I'm struggling to find the right thing to say, maintain my dignity, self-respect, some form of control, but end up achieving none of these things ... So, my inquiry is, how do they happen? Should I avoid them? Or is there a way to create the conditions by changing my behaviour in conversation? (Journal, 2011)

As today's organisations face more and more complexity and competition, it is increasingly the case that organisational rhetoric is moving towards more ethical or integrity-based cultures and governance (Verhezen, 2010). My experience is that women find it easier to align with and integrate the values espoused by such institutions as they are often aligned with their own. This theory is supported by Carol Gilligan's (1993) study of women's voices and development, and others (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Most organisations I have worked or consulted in 'espouse' integrity-based values, accompanied by detailed descriptions of the attitudes, behaviours or competencies expected of employees, including leaders. These are often well communicated and publicised, for example through engagement events, policies, visual representations of values around buildings, company websites, etc. Enactment through appropriate behaviour may then be rewarded through HR processes and recognition schemes. However, in many of these organisations, my experience is that the rhetoric and the action don't match up. I experience this dissonance in the public, private and charity sectors and am often asked to assist leaders in changing these predicaments.

For example, in a large NHS Teaching Trust, organisational values and leadership competencies were developed and agreed upon in consultation with employees. This was followed by programmes of change, policy development and training, directed at aligning

and embedding these in the behaviours of employees. HR processes and appraisal systems were redesigned to support recognition and reward of the new requirements.

Despite all this, the staff survey continued to report lack of engagement and bullying and harassment in many areas of the Trust. The technologies of power in the 'real organisation' were forcefully working to maintain the status quo. This was also apparent in the conversations I had with three senior women who seemed to align easily with the Trust's values of 'Care, Trust, Respect, and Collaboration', and experienced confusion and despondency as they encountered otherwise:

Some of the women here are more male than female I would say. Take JH (an associate director): there's no sensitivity in the conversation with her, there's no care ... no connection ... which one would expect with a relationship, especially a woman to woman one ... I can't communicate with someone who doesn't communicate back. I feel threatened when I'm in the same room as her and I feel that she expects me to manage my teams in the same way ... That's what I feel is being demanded of me ... to succeed here I would need to adapt my approach and become aggressive and I'm not prepared to do it ... she makes it clear that no one else is to have an opinion and to me that kind of dominance has a male trait ... now my eyes are prickling as I think about it ... I clearly don't fit the mould ... not good enough ... clearly not the right personality for this place. (Susan)

The three managers I spoke to had similar experiences to Susan's. Their stories conveyed a leadership culture emphasising hierarchical and positional power, aggressive and punitive management behaviour, and blame. Their sense of oppression was so strong that all three women came to dread any situation where they were expected to speak. Two of them chose to leave during the time I was working with them.

Somewhere along the line, women in particular, some men as well, have to make a choice in an organisation like this ... the aggressive style of managing is prolific, don't you think so? ... If I were to carry on, I would turn into someone I don't want to be or just live in fear of every meeting. You don't have to be that kind of person to manage well. (Rachel)

I have no idea if these women were feminists or not. Yet the language of their stories clearly conveys to me, through my feminist lens, their sense of masculine forms of power

at play. Susan and Rachel's experiences evidence the pull of organisational norms on their own leadership behaviour and culture, as well as the impact of their power at the point of everyday interactions. The behaviours they perceived as expected of them, they associated with masculine characteristics and a perception of 'power over' rather than a more relational, feminine form of power. It seems that women who make conscious choices, or just can't switch to the required style in these distressing situations, often end up losing their voice, impact and visibility in the noise of the oppressive others (Simpson & Lewis, 2007). Whilst this can also happen to men, the women here felt they were much more likely to be subjected in this way. They also had a strong sense that having to switch was not necessary; they believed that they could be effective, if they were left to their own way of leading. Instead they seemed to be gradually worn down by others who silenced and defined them.

Surprisingly, in the same organisation I encountered or heard of several senior female managers described using words associated with masculinity, such as 'aggressive' or 'dominating'. I wondered if they had consciously chosen to 'gender switch' their leadership style or if they had just 'become' that way through their early role models and unconscious assimilation of organisational norms. A woman's access to senior leadership positions is often limited by stereotypes and prejudice. Women are assessed less positively because of the disparity between the way people think about women (as communal beings) and leaders (as agentic beings) (Eagly & Carly, 2007). In order to overcome this, many women adopt more agentic leadership behaviours to align themselves with the normative leadership culture of the institution. This is evident in the words of one of my coachees, Jess, who was at risk of dismissal for 'bullying' behaviour. She could not see 'the point of relationships'; her focus was the 'job to be done' and 'saving' her director. She described to me how she modelled herself on a 'Turnaround Consultant' whom she deemed as 'saving the last Trust I worked in'. She told me, 'He didn't worry about relationships, and he just got the job done' (Jess). Women such as Jess who succeed in male-dominated environments may take a similar attitude to men and see other women who don't as 'problems', rather than a pervasive social problem. They often deny the existence of male privilege, discrimination against women and other aspects of patriarchy. They tend to think they have avoided it or dealt with it in their own lives (Johnson, 2005).

Feminist theory offers further insights into this phenomenon of women silencing and being aggressive towards other women. Many research studies have shown that senior women in the workplace often distance themselves, are rude and belittling, or at worst bully other

women. This phenomenon of women in positions of authority viewing and treating more junior women more critically has been defined by some as Queen Bee Syndrome (Derks et al, 2011a, 2011b, 2016)

Interestingly the phenomenon of women or girls silencing and treating each other badly can be observed at all stages of life. You will have read in Chapter 8 how mothers and significant others, inadvertently reinforce the requirements and attributes of feminine goodness and patriarchal order by silencing expressions of difference in young girls. There are also mothers who are not so nice to their daughters, they can criticise and be hurtful under the veiled intention of having our best interests at heart.

Research studies have consistently shown how girls and young women at college age are much more likely to be relationally aggressive than boys who tend to be more physically aggressive (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995; Crick et al, 1999; Simmons, 2002, 2003; Ayers, 2012). Girls rely much more on indirect and relational forms of aggression, such as hostility, reputation damage and social exclusion – another silence in the lives of women.

There is a hidden culture of aggression where girls fight with body language and relationships instead of fists and knives. In this world friendship is a weapon, and the sting of a shout pales into comparison to a day of someone's silence. (Simmons, 2002. p. 3)

Feminists and psychologists have been trying to explain this phenomenon for decades. Whilst it is hard to believe that some women and girls demonstrate bias against other women and girls, on the whole the evidence suggests that women are not to blame.

Women's workplace relationships are often characterised as antagonistic and plagued by jealousy, competition, and relational bullying. Some women including some of those mentioned in this thesis experience unique difficulties working positively with other women. Some researchers would suggest that this is the way women are because of either evolution, socialization or internalized misogyny or sexism. Others argue that women become aggressive and distance themselves from other women because of the biased workplace cultures women encounter.

Evolutionary theorists offer the view that women are genetically predisposed to be antagonistic towards each other, suggesting that evolutionary processes shape women to be

inherently competitive with other women in the hunt for superior mates and scarce resources needed to sustain their offspring (Villalobos, 2013). According to Villalobos women have been honed, fine-tuned and sharpened to a dagger-like stiletto in the modern workplace, believing that evolution being the sole factor at work in shaping women's hostile relationships with each other.

Other theorists argue that women's relational aggression towards other women is not due to evolution but rather how girls and women are socialised. These arguments highlight how socialisation processes force women to conform to rigid gender norms, shy away from relationships with each other, and women, unlike men are strongly discouraged from expressing their negative emotions or unpleasant feelings, such as anger and resentment (Baker-Miller, 1976; Jordan, 1991; Baker-Miller & Surrey, 1997).

These early feminist psychologists found that some women in senior business positions or professions were criticised by their male colleagues for relating to clients or other female colleagues. Engaging in a relationship with some mutuality or helping in the development of others was seen as threatening an important power base (Baker-Miller, 1976; Jordan, 1991).

Baker-Miller & Surrey (1990) noticed that repeated experiences of poorly expressed anger work to keep women out of connection with others and often masks what is really going on. Anger can then be absorbed, and eventually expressed as aggression or intimidation. They suggest this may be a strategy or reflects a learned behaviour of avoiding the real interpersonal expression of anger,

More recently Holiday and Rosenberg (2009) found similarly, claiming that women lack healthy outlets for their negative emotions, which come out in unhealthy ways leading women to strike out at other women in covert and hurtful ways such as excluding them or damaging reputations.

Other theorists for example Uchem (2012) go further, suggesting that internalised oppression is the cause of women's aggression towards other women. In other words, women's socialisation has also caused them to internalise the dominant culture's sexist ideology. This is characterised by a low self-image and a belief that fundamentally women are inferior to men. Over time this can lead to being ashamed of one's self and one's own group, and, preferring to identify more with the oppressor/dominant group (Uchem, 2012).

Dale Spender (1990) also found that where males are in control, women seek to get male acknowledgement and attention in order to talk, and this can be divisive among women.

Whilst women have made significant progress in the workplace it seems we are still expected to conform to restrictive gender roles such that women are forced to compete with each other, and relationships of mutuality discouraged. Recent studies of the Queen Bee Phenomenon by Naomi Ellemers and Belle Derks and others, found that women in positions of authority create distance and behave badly towards other women as a response to the discrimination and social identity threat that women may experience in male dominated organisations. They suggest that Queen Bee behaviour may emerge as a means of defending gender bias found in modern workplace contexts (Derks et al, 2011a, 2011b, 2016). Having studied the phenomenon in a variety of contexts they found that the conditions in which queen bee behaviour develops are when women are a marginalized group in the workplace, have made significant sacrifices for their career, or are already predisposed to show little “gender identification”— camaraderie with other women. They suggest these women learn the hard way that the way to succeed in the workplace is to make sure that people realize they are not like other women.

Despite many women deciding these aggressive patterns have to stop, and they no longer wish to give substance to the patriarchal order, society and workplace life continue to constrain and even silence women’s individual expressions of identity, and their ability to realise their potential. The nature of women’s working relationships are a result of decades of gendered workplaces. The experiences of many of the women involved in this research, evidence that women treating other women more harshly, including acts of silencing, remains a systemic challenge.

When women and men work relationally, when they care about each other as human beings, are generous and supportive, they expect that this will be met and matched by others. The examples discussed in here show how mutual learning and empowerment are stifled under conditions of non-mutuality. Others have suggested that once women become aware of the hidden processes of workplace bias and their effects, they will become better able to manage their relationships at work (Ibarra et al, 2013; Derks et al, 2016; Gabriel et al, 2018). By becoming aware of their own opportunities being limited by discrimination and the structural bias women face more generally, it is considered more likely they will identify more closely with their group, develop more constructive relationships, and think

more carefully about their leadership behaviour towards other women. These assumptions are worthy of further study.

9.5 Pre-experience

In listening to experiences of being silenced, I often heard examples of how these women experienced ‘excluding’ behaviour prior to the actual encounter (of silencing) itself. These stories emerged as a theme from the inquiry transcripts, revealing how events prior to face-to-face encounters would cause distress and often hurt. This often meant they would enter into a conversation in a state of already heightened emotion. The impact of this either served to fully or partially silence them, or they would display anger. If they did speak, their emotion often spilled out during the encounter and then they would feel shame. I wondered if this might be a typical fight or flight response women have when faced with oppressive power.

Susan talked of how she felt regularly excluded from (men-only) conversations before a meeting started. Her perception was that no one invited her in or made her feel part of the group, and she didn’t feel able to ‘join’ them:

I think the standing of men especially in the finance and operational world is noticeably stronger, and of course the clinicians. Their ability to make chit-chat before a meeting sort of sets the scene ... I arrived at the strategy meeting and all the lead clinicians, they were all talking loudly outside the room about rugby or football ... another time it might be their new cars ... I don’t know if I’m getting to the hub of it but as we went into the room, they are confident, animated, and the volume is up. The rest of the room was quiet ... I was quiet ... what could I say? I sat down and waited... they took ages, standing up, lingering over a chair, still chatting ... there was a lot of presence, a sort of ‘pride of lions’ thing. (Susan)

It could be suggested that in relationships and organisations where exclusion and oppressive talk is the norm, these behaviours could be seen as warning signs of what is to come. Women who are regularly beaten by their partners often have a sense that something will happen (Bancroft, 2002). In Susan’s case she started the meeting consumed with the impact of her emotions, having been excluded and ignored outside. Needless to say, as the meeting progressed, she experienced her voice diminishing as the loud and dominant voices took centre stage.

Sophia told another story. She was feeling really good about developing a new module on Employment Law for the HR students at the business school where she works. When looking at her workload timetable for the year ahead, she saw that she had been removed as leader of the module. Initially she thought there had been some mistake; then she received an email from the professor in charge of the HR Programmes asking to meet her.

I assumed he was going to ask me to deliver it again, he said ‘we don’t want you to do it ... I’m going to tell James (the Programme Director)’ ... so we had this argument ... I was incensed ... he was so arrogant ... he basically wanted his ‘favoured researchers’ to redesign and teach MY module that I had only just redesigned and played to my strengths and knowledge ... ‘because ‘they needed some teaching practice’ and he felt ‘that employment law was irrelevant to HR anyway’. (Sophia)

Sophia successfully argued her case and ‘felt good’ that she had stood up to ‘a professor’ and that justice had prevailed. However, the professor’s attempts to silence her clearly started some time before the actual encounter. She was totally unaware of or prepared for what was to come.

In an interim role as Head of Leadership Development, I received some emails prior to a one-to-one meeting I was due to have with one of the leadership consultants I managed. I saw this as part of a pattern of behaviour over time that I tried to make sense of in my journal. On a train one morning I wrote:

‘The tone of Jay’s emails last week suggest that he is feeling very confident in this situation ... asserting himself over things that have never been issues before. For example, I added an update on the ‘Team Leadership Masterclasses’ to the team meeting agenda. He then emailed me in an arrogant tone requesting that I ‘discuss any allocated agenda items in advance in future, so we can fully prepare, meet expectations and ensure a smooth meeting. Thanks’. Whilst on the surface this seems like a reasonable request, my sense (thinking about other recent examples) was that he was asserting himself in any way he could, to intimate I was behaving inappropriately. AND ensuring he has written evidence. I’m making an assumption here, but it is a considered one. I am experiencing his general behaviour in the department as him feeling more powerful and in control ... I’ve decided to work from Paddington this morning and realise it’s because I’m feeling intimidated (and

a bit upset by it all). Perhaps I can make more sense of this before the meeting this afternoon. (Journal, 1.10.12)

As this pattern of behaviour continued, I experienced ‘not just anxiety a mixture of emotions, memories, thoughts and feelings ... This situation with Jay is bringing up all sorts of stuff for me’. Despite objectively being able to identify the tactics he used to silence and manipulate me, I was exhausted by the emotional energy and time it was taking to make sense of it, and at the same time manage myself in the situation. In the actual conversational encounters I was on my guard, holding back emotions and trying hard to sustain my voice.

There were many stories of these pre-encounter experiences, prior to isolated incidents of silencing, or evident across several experiences over time. Whilst as a feminist I strongly suspect they may help us to see the broader patterns of behaviour silencers use, consciously or perhaps not, I wondered what other sides there might be to these stories. Furthermore, when we tell our stories we are recalling from memory and our understandings are incomplete. Thus, my presentation of this and the following aspects of the framework are tentative. Further inquiry into these experiences may reveal alternative explanations.

9.6 Technologies of Power – Post-Encounter

Several of the women in this study also experienced behaviours and actions after an experience of being silenced that served to reinforce the silencing process. This involved the silencer telling other people ‘a version’ of what had gone on (at the encounter) and seeking support for their own oppressive (silencing) behaviour. It seemed the impact of these acts was further hurt and distress. Often the woman would become confused as she tried to make sense of what was happening and why; she would question herself and lose confidence.

I wondered if these actions by silencers were efforts to reinforce their own sense of rightness and conscience. I often overheard Jay relaying details of our meeting to his two fellow consultants, drawing them into his web of power. He would then say things like ‘Debbie, you need to listen to me, M and A also think the same’. As things started to come to a head, he would also email my client (the HR Director) in attempt to gain support for his cause. I recognised these as power tactics from my early experience of abuse in my marriage. Pat Craven (2008) in her analysis of ‘The Dominator’ names them ‘persuading’—for example, telling others that you are forcing them to behave badly—and

‘head working’—for example, by ‘putting her down in front of others, often using humour ... as a result she loses all self-confidence’ (p. 10). These tactics, she says, are forms of emotional abuse used to control and isolate.

Sue arrived and told me Jay had called her on Thursday evening to discuss what had happened (my request for an update at the Team Meeting and events following). He suggested to her that we should have mediation and asked her for her support in the matter. Having talked it through with her I am reassured I’m dealing with this appropriately and mediation is not the answer. I have written a formal letter to him concerning his attitude and behaviour. (Journal, 2.10.12)

My sense of Jay’s behaviour was that it was a real attempt to bring me down. Over a two-year period, I had tried to lead the team in a way that made me feel authentic, true to my values and the type of leader I aspired to be. My efforts to build trust and inclusivity and to share leadership with the three men were constantly undermined by attempts by Jay, and to some extent the others, to silence and undermine me. I felt pressured to enact a more aggressive style, and to reinforce hierarchy by using my positional status. In fact, they told me on more than one occasion, ‘You don’t use your positional power, Debbie’. I left almost every conversation feeling uncomfortable, at the very least, and occasionally distressed and close to tears. Interestingly, after I took disciplinary action, and was successful, they began to behave differently and praise my leadership style openly. In the midst of these experiences, I began to identify the silencing tactics; however, I constantly questioned myself. Looking back now through my journals, I see just how conscious and pervasive their power was, how much I suffered emotionally, and how much effort I put into keeping the relationships intact. If I had recognised the technologies of power at play earlier, I could have reinforced my boundaries by being clear about my perceptions of what was happening, and confidently outlining my expectations of them and what would happen if they were not met.

Saying this, I still wonder how this would have played out, and what, if anything (other than removing myself), I could have done to stop the silencing processes. Furthermore, whilst I may handle a situation like this differently now, there are always others that are equally challenging. As I move in and out of organisations and contexts, the double bind (Catalyst, 2007) always seems to exist in some relationship or situation. Because we are often evaluated against a ‘masculine’ standard of leadership, we (women) are left with limited and unfavourable options, no matter how we behave and perform as leaders. Thus,

the consequences of speaking out, challenging or being assertive can be too risky. The difference now, however, is that most of the time I am consciously choosing whether to resist or disrupt, or not.

9.7 Intent

I, like many other women who have been silenced, have pondered over the issue of intent. My early attempts to work out or ‘find out’ from my silencer were unsuccessful. Often, when feeling offended, hurt, distressed, alienated, and marginalised, during or following an interaction, I have asked, ‘Why did you do that?’ or ‘Why did you say that?’ The response or argument I get back is that I am wrong to feel offended or hurt, that I must have misunderstood, or even that there is something wrong with me for feeling that way, because their intent was not to generate that reaction. In other words: ‘I didn’t **intend** for you to feel that way, so if you do feel that way, it’s your fault and don’t blame me’. Of course, the words used can be much subtler than that; nevertheless, the intention is still to absolve them from responsibility for what they actually said and how it was received.

This deflection of accountability rooted in the belief that *intent* is more important than *effect* or *impact* is harmful in itself. Given that most people would apologise if they knew they had offended or hurt someone, when someone projects blame or some label to avoid responsibility it serves to compound the impact of being silenced.

It is true, of course, that sometimes our communication is simply misunderstood. Mismatches between intended communication and actual communication happen all the time, even when one endeavours to communicate as straightforwardly as possible. Sometimes it can be a source of humour, or when corrected it is not a problem. If we view words or actions as simply an outward expression of the inner mind, then to make a correct interpretation requires only access to the mind of the interlocutor. The meaning we make, however, is more complicated than simple interpretation. We interpret intent and make meaning through our own preconceptions of truth. According to Gadamer (1975), we confront the words or actions of others from a horizon of understanding—an array of prejudgments or prejudices—that inform the questions we ask of their words and what we accept as possible answers. Gadamer warns of letting our horizons of understanding dominate our interpretations, and simply confirming our prejudices. Gergen (1999) as a social constructionist goes further, suggesting that the meaning we make in our interactions resides within the relationship, proposing that meaning is an emergent property of coordinated action. My understanding is that fundamentally we cannot control the meaning

of our words and actions; we need the other in order to mean anything. I also wonder, if we can really ever *know* our intent? Whilst making meaning of intent is a mutual process, it seems that we often don't *know* our own intent or that of others until we think about it consciously.

In my own experience of dealing with those who silence, I notice how my efforts to challenge or question intent are met with accusations of misinterpretation or, worse, that I am trying to cause trouble. In the past I questioned myself more than I do now. I make judgments about intent based on my inquiries at the time, past experiences and the theories I choose to inform me. I now consider a harmful exchange most likely when the discord arises from a person seeking something for him or herself, without empathizing with how it's being received by the person from whom one is seeking it.

My sense is that when someone shows no empathy or remorse for silencing, hurting or distressing me, his or her behaviour stands for an abuse of power. Their intent to silence, control, intimidate or isolate me is evident in their behaviour and how I experience it. It is controlling at the very least, abusive at worse. I notice too how I can move quickly to judge such behaviour possibly because of the impact and heightened awareness of my experiences. However, I have learned that this form of behaviour can and should be considered both at the interpersonal level and systemically. This means that whilst some silencing practices may have conscious intent others may be unconscious acts, learned over time as the right way to do and be.

My ex-husband showed no remorse at all for anything he did or said. One day, following a heart-to-heart at a friend's house, a male friend said to him:

You 'say' you are sorry but to be honest you are not coming across like you are sorry. Debbie is really hurting inside, it feels like someone is twisting a knife inside her, and you just seem to want to ignore it. You just need to 'show' her how sorry you are, she needs to see that you understand what you've done.' He replied, 'If I do that she will have won, won't she?' (Journal, p. 8)

Recent work with perpetrators of abuse show signs that some men will change and take responsibility for their abuse (Respect, 2010, 2015). However, there is significant evidence (Bancroft, 2002), and a long-term scepticism amongst the women I met, that what abusive men believe about women, their sense of entitlement, and their need to control, are so

deeply embedded in their psyche that there is little potential for change. Their perceptions of what would happen if they gave up the benefits of control appear to be unimaginable to them.

Whilst I imagine many men and masculinised women, who silence others in the context of work and organisational life, may resist changing how they participate in conversation, I am hopeful. As I start working with silencers in organisations, I do see potential for change, particularly with people who have perhaps developed habits of behaviour (unconscious intent) they don't fully understand, and limited awareness of their impact on others. I will discuss this later on. I personally have also found 'asking for intent' as a way of sustaining voice. Inquiring into why someone has said what he or she said, even though they may not be able to give an answer, gives me a way in, thus challenging or interrupting the silencing process.

In summary, in order to understand the intent embedded in processes of social silencing, I suggest there is a need to understand it from the experiences of those silenced, and, through analysis of the technologies of power at play. Whilst inquiring into intent with those who silence may be helpful, we (those being silenced) must also pay attention to our own perceptions and assumptions we make and be careful not to make judgments based solely on our habitual ways of thinking. I contend that conscious attention to our own meaning-making and our own needs and aspirations enables us to make judgments about intent to inform how we respond. Furthermore, as we experience interacting with individuals and groups, patterns of behaviour become apparent and serve to reinforce (or not) our perceptions of their intent.

9.8 The Encounter – Tactics of Silencing

The stories of being silenced in this study reveal a myriad of ways (tactics) used to silence women, and there are undoubtedly many more. Whilst it is not possible to share every single story or tactic here, Appendix 5 provides an overview of many tactics the women participating in this inquiry experienced, each with real examples from the transcripts.

The following is a summary of the tactics we have named:

Figure 9.2

Tactics of silencers at the point of social encounter



I have no doubt that a broader participant group or range of experiences would have revealed more. What is important, however, is that we each learn from examining our own interactions and the stories of others. This will help raise our collective awareness of the tactics that so often go unnoticed or misunderstood, or are masked, as emotion and often powerlessness consumes us in the moments of being silenced.

I suggest that incidents of social silencing involve individualistically orientated interactions of the powerful, often without any sense of reciprocity or relational connection, and where participation of the silenced woman is limited. The impact is at least an uncomfortable embodied experience, and at worst severe psychological distress and physical pain. Hornsby & Langton (1998) describe reciprocity as a 'relational stance that fellow communicators have with one another as communicators', such that relations of reciprocity furnish the communicative space in a way that provides for uptake of a speaker's illocutions. This means that silence occurs prior to the moment at which a speaker's credibility is an issue. For the silenced women this doesn't mean that the silencer regards her words as worthless; rather his attitude towards her in the context is such that she is prevented from (fully successfully) performing her speaking acts. Fricker (2010) regards this as an extreme form of testimonial injustice.

Fricker's concept of *testimonial injustice* is complex, and I believe important in understanding many of the silencing tactics and their productive power above. As such, it is worthy of explanation.

Fricker builds on Foucault's conception of power as a socially disseminated capacity, and on Wartenberg's notion of situated power (1992), to illustrate the 'agentic' and 'structural' operations of social power. These working conceptions of power were helpful to me as I made sense of the various aspects of social silencing. I came to understand operations of power at the point of interaction and structurally through collective shared ideologies and unification of institutions, to effect social control (Gergen, 1999). I considered Fricker's notion of 'identity power' also useful in understanding how social power can be seen to operate not only through practical social co-ordination but also an *imaginative* social coordination—gender being one arena where a woman's actions (voice) can be controlled in this way.

Fricker (2010) is critical of Foucault's claim that 'power exists only when it is put into action' as incompatible with power being a 'capacity'. She suggests that the idea that power is not a 'capacity'—instead popping into and out of existence, as and when it is actually operative—lacks motivation. Instead she considers power as a capacity on the part of all social agents (individuals, groups, organisations/institutions), exercised in respect of other social agents. She defines this exercising of power as agential power; one agent thus exercises power towards another agent, whose actions are duly influenced. In contrast, she says that power can also operate purely structurally (e.g., in the structure of 'the family', our educational or legal system, or a corporate organisation) with no particular agent exercising it. I align with the view that we participate productively in power relations in everything we do. We unwittingly accept invitations to reality and truth, for example, when reading an interesting newspaper article or theoretical construction, when we agree to the rules and procedures in our workplaces, and so on.

As a feminist I perceive the structural power that restricts women in our male-dominated institutions and society, and how we become subjugated as we give up our freedom to the existing order. We may consider structural power as being socially constructed over time, initially exercised as agentic power by agents, and then collectively in institutions and societies. Once in place, power may then develop a life of its own. Indeed, Foucault viewed power as 'productive'. Power relations invite us in, give us things to do, and can provide a

sense of satisfaction (Gergen, 1999). This can be seen daily in our relationships and institutions. For example, I talked earlier of the woman who gains satisfaction as she learns to discipline herself and conform to feminine stereotypes. Foucault presents many more historical examples of agential power operating in structural mode—for example, through the medical categorisation of ‘delinquents’ and ‘madness’. This view of power means that, as we inquire into the operation of power, we must focus our attention on the actions of those of us caught up in power relations, as well as of those perceived to hold power (Gergen, 1999), also the social⁷ and political contexts within which such power relations are supported.

⁷ Fricker (2010), building on Foucault’s work, offers a definition of social power as ‘a socially situated capacity to control others actions’ (p. 3). In other words, it is a capacity we have as social agents to influence how things go in the social world. Power, she says, can operate actively or passively. For example, the active operation of power is seen when a traffic warden gives a driver a parking ticket, and the passive operation of power when the warden (although absent) influences the parking behaviour of other drivers. Understanding the relationship of dependence between active and passive social power is helpful in understanding how the Technologies of Womankind discussed in Chapter 7 and the technologies of silencing here operate even when there is no particular agent operating them. Similarly, operations of social power can be seen in the experiences described previously, for example the continual comments and reprimands made by Katy’s colleagues about her leadership style (p. 134, 165) eventually led to her conforming in the work environment.

Similar to Foucault’s (1982; 1997) concept of ‘dividing practices’ and his exploration of how power operates productively in the formation of the subject (Fricker (2010) introduces the notion of ‘identity power’. Both are subspecies of social power— forms of social power that are directly dependent upon shared social imaginative conceptions of the social identity of those implicated, gender, race, sickness and health being examples. A social-situated account of human practice, Fricker says, is an account such that the participants are conceived not in extraction from relations of social power (as they are in most traditional social epistemology) but through operating as social types who stand in relations of power to one another. For example, the conceptions of what it means to be a woman or a man, gay or straight, young or old are governed by the conceptions alive in our collective social imagination. So whenever identity power is at work (an operation of identity power), there will be a significant degree of shared imaginative conceptions present. For example, gender as one arena of identity power, like social power more generally; Fricker says can be exercised actively or passively. Gender identity power can be seen as active during some, if not all, incidents of social silencing. An example of this is when my ex-husband used his identity as a man to influence my thinking and action. We were discussing and disagreeing over issues relating to my son’s choice of car over the telephone, when at the end of a long monologue he said: ‘The thing is, because you are his mother and you will give in to him, Freddie will defer to you’ (Journal, 2013).

This conversation happened at a time when I was seriously inquiring into my feelings of discomfort in the midst of conversations. The sense I made of his comment was that it was identity power at work: a patronizing attempt to get me to defer to ‘his word’ and silence me by insinuating that because I was a ‘woman’, and a ‘mother’, I was weak. His remark invoked a collective conception of femininity as ‘insufficiently rational and weak’, furthermore, implying that I was incapable of standing up to my son and that Freddie was motivated towards and capable of manipulating me. Whilst I considered that this may have been the case, my perception was that he trying to provoke me to challenge Freddie about the car he had chosen to buy (on my ex-husband’s advice several weeks previous), knowing that this would cause conflict between us. Two years previously I would have perhaps succumbed to his accusations and manipulation and moved quickly to question my son’s and my own motives and actions. On this occasion, I was able to identify his tactic,

It is possible that silencing behaviour is not always a result of testimonial injustice. Absence of connective relational behaviour is evident in many men and women in the workplace and in the home. Masculine conversational styles can often be individually focused, domineering and intimidating, serving to marginalise and exclude those to whom they speak (Simpson & Lewis 2007). In the working environment where this style of talking is the norm, women can end up being ignored when they talk and men's (or dominant women's) voices take over (Sandberg & Grant, 2015). Silence is thus seen here as a tool for the maintenance of domination and furthermore its achievement perpetuates patterns of silencing into the future.

The connection with male privilege and stereotypical masculine behaviour can be seen in the tactics identified above and in Appendix 5. Many of these are not new; they have been talked about prolifically. It has long been recognised, and evident in the array of self-help books available, that men and women have difficulties in communicating. Deborah Tannen's (1992a, 1992b, 1994, 1995) work from a linguistic and liberal feminist perspective is well respected for its explanations of men and women's different communication 'styles', reflecting men's concern with status (dominance) and women's concerns with relationship and connection (1992a, 1995). Tannen believes these styles to be different, at play, and equally valid in every moment of interaction. She argues from an anthropological perspective that they result from, and must be understood through, socialisation into different cultures, each linked to different traditions. Furthermore, she argues that these gendered styles or patterns of behaviour are not linked to identity but are more a matter of 'display'. In other words, 'the behaviour is not a reflection of the individual's nature (identity) but rather of some performance that the individual is

responding then by resisting what I considered his inappropriate use of power: 'No, our differences of opinion are nothing to do with me being Freddie's mother or my ability to stand up to him. The fact is I have a different view about this issue. I am trying to understand your views, I would appreciate you trying to understand mine.' This I consider an example of finding my voice through action research.

Fricker (2010) would call this type of experience, where a stereotype of 'woman' embodies a prejudice that works against the speaker, a form of epistemic injustice. This is a form of social power that I see embedded in many of the tactics used by silencers; for example, see 'ridicule' in Appendix (4). However, noticing identity power in action, such as in the example above, can be challenging and in my experience takes practice. It is particularly difficult when interactions are emotionally charged. Thus, in being ignorant of the power at play, the potential to eradicate or obscure the distinction between what we have a reason to think and what mere relations of power are doing to our thinking, the impact of power on our functioning as rational subjects is evident.

accomplishing' (1995, p. 198). If men interrupt and dominate conversation, for example, it's because it's their way.

Tannen's perspective may be useful in gaining awareness and understanding of cultural differences in behaviour. However, in my view, it fails to address the fact that all cultures are patriarchal and thus need to be understood through relations of power. Indeed, Johnson (2005) is critical of the comfort Tannen seeks in offering education and tolerance of differences as the solution to gender issues, as well as of the fact that she discourages women's anger at men who behave in domineering, aggressive ways, arguing that men don't *mean* to be this way. What Tannen fails to recognise, he says, are the social consequences of dominating conversations, and that a hallmark of privilege is not having to *mean it* in order to benefit from the socially bestowed privileges.

The tactics outlined in Figure 9.2 (and Appendix 5) suggest that whether it is taking up conversational space through presence, noise volume, or talk time, controlling the nature and content of women's talk, or not listening or taking seriously the words women speak, masculine power is able to find a way. Furthermore, the behaviour of men is grounded in the pervasive technologies of institutional and social power that patriarchy protects. Regardless of how individual men and women see themselves, they participate in a system that predominantly grants recognition and reward to masculine styles of conversational practice and leadership behaviour.

These practices, intertwined with the self-policing, historically ingrained 'technologies' (the tapes we play in our heads) revealed in this inquiry (the 'Technologies of Womankind'—see Chapter Seven), in the context of structural networks of power in our institutions and communities, produce the socially situated phenomenon of social silencing. So how do women experience this phenomenon? I summarise in Appendix 6 how women described their emotions, bodily sensations and the impact of being silenced.

9.9 Concluding Reflections

I offer this framework (Figure. 9.1 p.153) as a 'heuristic', a prompt, or a way of thinking about the complexities of everyday interaction and the experience of being silenced. Whilst this means there are no absolute guarantees, I propose using the framework to help women develop a critical and a self-critical understanding of their situation. My invitation is to support women who experience being silenced to explore how their own social participation may be discursively shaped and re-shaped, culturally, socially and

historically, and to understand how technologies of power work to produce our reality, often obscuring our ability to make sense of our experience.

The framework here does not propose a collection of prescriptions for having more ethical conversations. What I hope it does is provide a frame of reference for some women (the silenced) to make sense of their experience. Understanding the technologies of power at play, and analysing our interactions, provides a starting point for unravelling the ‘tapes in our heads’ and reflecting on our conversational practice. My aspiration is that through naming and understanding ‘social silencing’ as an injustice, women in any context will be enabled to gain clarity of mind, challenge the status quo, and make decisions about how to respond in the moment, or not. Furthermore, with careful use in organisational development practice I suggest the framework can facilitate work across genders, examining the quality of participation in conversation together. In summary this framework offers the potential to take action ‘to do something about social silencing’.

Fricker (2010) talks of the ‘guiding intuition’ of women who grope around seeking to understand a significant area of their social experience, and the lifting of hermeneutical darkness and gloom once we identify and ‘name’ such experience. I believe this thesis substantiates my intuitive concern that my own experiences constituted a wrong done to us in our capacity as knowers, and speakers. Social silencing is indeed a hermeneutic injustice.

I notice my sense of relief as I draw this chapter to a close. This comes from having found a way to say what I have been holding in my head and body, and in a room full of paper and Post-It notes, for many months. For me the framework is a tool to critique social practice, and guide intervention in the cultural, social and historical processes of everyday life. The knowing embedded and represented in the framework has enabled me, to some extent, to reconstruct my social practice—my voice in the world, and, gain further understanding of how power operates in my working and social contexts—as seen in the above example of testimonial injustice. I believe the phenomenon of social silencing is an example of how our self-understandings and our social interactions can be shaped and continue to be shaped by collective misunderstandings over time, without our even realising it. Thus, I see this outcome of my action research as both critical and emancipatory

Chapter 10
Technologies of Self: Claiming Our Feminine Voice



‘Make freedom your foundation through the mastery of yourself’
(Foucault, 1984, p. 50)

10.1 Technologies of the Self

I have said previously that it has been difficult to separate out cycles of inquiry for the purpose of writing. Collectively they have interwoven with and complemented each other such that, for example, action phases have emerged at the same time as other issues have been brought into question. Marshall (1999; 2004) is clear that action research is a partly personal (and often a messy) process. Indeed, I have worked explicitly with my personal life issues, believing these to be important sources of knowledge generation. My point here is that my personal action experiments are integral to, and have arisen through, my first-person inquiry. Thus, the Technologies of Self discussed here can be seen as both methods and outcomes of first-person inquiry, inextricably linked and each producing and produced by knowledge. As I discussed earlier, this is often not something we can just sit down and do. It requires personal discipline and is often helped by inquiring with others. It means developing critical subjectivity—a self-reflexive attention to our own sense making, choices and ways of being in the world, and opening them up to critical review (Marshall, 2016).

I agree with McArdle's (2004) view that first-person inquiry encourages us to acknowledge the role we individually take in enabling relationships with others to be how they are, and a sense of responsibility for creating our own experience. Knowledge generation about the self in relation to others and using this knowledge in our practice are thus political acts requiring a re-visioning of self as a knower and a speaker (Callaway, 1981; McArdle, 2004). In this respect strengthening our voice and finding new ways of participating in conversations can disrupt dominant operations of power and possibly even transform the political context in which we speak.

In this chapter I will show through examples of some of my own political acts, or practices of finding voice, and experiences of some of the participants, that Foucault's notion of technologies (practices) of the self (Foucault, 1984; Martin, Gutman, & Hutton et., 1988) can be successfully applied to overcome feminine issues of identity, voice and power. In my view these Technologies of the Self offer a means of exploring and developing 'who we actually are and how we want to be in the world'. Collectively they have transformative potential to recreate identity, disrupt the technologies of power discussed earlier, and overcome social silencing. The technologies discussed here focus on issues of voice and silence. They are some of many that I consider effective.

The technologies I have selected include: Writing as a Caring for Self, Constructing Collage, Consciousness Raising, and Preparing, Planning, and Reflexive Experimentation. I have found that engaging in all or indeed any of these requires discipline, diligence and hard work. Furthermore, for those of us pursuing real transformation, finding and strengthening voice may be a lifelong project.

10.2 Passion to Voice, Power to Change

None of us, in all our particularities, actually unfolds as a perfect printout of the stereotypes of women that are promoted by the various segments of the culture. None of us is a perfect reflection even of the cultural forces we welcome or embrace, not to speak of those we deliberately resist. None of us obeys all the rules even if we want to. But the stereotypes, the rules, the common expectations of us surround us all in a steady barrage of verbal and visual images in popular, elite, religious and underground vehicles of culture. (Frye, 1983, p. xiii)

These words of Marilyn Frye capture our predicament as women. Our experiences of our pasts, their normalising forces, and their hidden silencing powers ‘*produce*’ the Technologies of Womankind, the practices we unknowingly employ in order to be what is expected in the dominant culture. These are forces we cannot escape from, yet they constitute us all in different ways. Indeed, no two women live, in a daily and detailed way, identical lives created by identical ranges of concepts of woman. Some of us, including many of the women with whom I talked, have consciously constructed situations for ourselves in which we will be shaped by our chosen, and wholesome, constructs of woman.

Whilst it may seem ludicrous to some that women need to do further work to address the injustice of social silencing, I argue that if women are to claim their voice in the workplace, socially and at home, there is work to be done on both sides (the silenced and the silencers). This does not in any way place blame on women for the part they play. However, the technologies of power at play, as represented in the previous chapter, all play a part in the process of being silenced and as such need a combined effort. Women, in my view, can no longer be the sole caretakers of relational joy.

We have seen in the preceding two chapters how the interrelationships between the practices of Womankind and Technologies of Power produce the phenomenon of ‘social silencing’, and how women experience this hermeneutic injustice in the home, workplace and socially. We use our voice as our primary means of expressing agency, power,

effectiveness and passion—in other words, our primary means of acting in the world, the central tenet of our existence. In this respect, its value and quality cannot be left to chance; finding voice is thus a challenging endeavour, requiring passion to succeed and power to change.

The technologies elucidated in Chapter 8—Technologies of Womankind—are also technologies of self. This chapter deals with the practices we can affect by ‘*our own means*’, and/or with the help of others. First, we must examine and reconstruct our identity and preferred way of ‘being’, in each of our various roles; second, we must reflect on and analyse our experiences of voicing and being silenced, in order to consider and choose ethical ways of sustaining our voice. Third, we must develop confidence and competence in disrupting social silencing when it happens.

10.3 Life as a Work of Art

‘A beautiful life requires ethical work.’ (McLaren, 2002, p. 71)

Foucault maintains throughout all of his works that his interest is in ‘the subject’. Increasingly, towards the end of his life, he became interested in how ‘a human being turns him or herself into a subject’ (Foucault, 1981, p. 208), and sought to revitalise the concept of ‘taking care of yourself’. He concluded that over time and through the transformation of moral principles of western society, we had lost sight of the benefits of ‘taking care of yourself’. He believed that in modern society we were more inclined to see taking care of ourselves as an immorality (not conforming), and possibly as a means of escaping from all possible rules.

Foucault located the roots of the modern concept of ‘self’ in first and second century Greco-Roman philosophy, and in fourth and fifth century Christian spirituality, two different contexts he understood to be in historical continuity (Martin et al., 1988). He traced the techniques of self-formation from these classical ages through examination of classical texts. As with his previous work the importance of these inquiries lies not in the contribution to the specific history of the period but to what he called the history of the present—‘an excavation of and perspective on the bedrock of our modern conceptions’ (Martin et al., p. 5). Foucault (1998) characterises techniques of the self as ‘the procedures, which no doubt exist in every civilisation, suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it and transform it in terms of a number of ends, through relationships of self-mastery and self-knowledge’ (p. 87). He believed in the Socratic

Imperative: 'Be concerned with yourself, ground yourself in liberty, through the mastery of self' (Bernauer & Rasmussen, 1988, p. 20).

Foucault's conceptual language is reflective of the androcentric foundations of his work Foucault (1984) yet his calls for self-mastery has practical relevance for feminist commitments. I concluded from my interrogation of Foucault's work that this continuous integration of work 'on oneself' requires cultivation of a critical awareness of one's self (self-knowledge) in one's surroundings. Also, persistent and ethically driven and introspective daily work. He suggests these practices of self have the potential to transform and liberate. For Foucault the freedom to question manifests and perpetuates itself through the technologies of self, and through intensifying one's relationship to oneself creatively we can create our lives as a 'work of art.'

'Technologies of the self are the various "operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being' that people make either by themselves or with the help of others in order to transform themselves to reach a 'state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality'" (Foucault 1988, p. 18).

In his later work Foucault sees these practices not as directed towards morality concerned with universal norms (techniques of production), but instead as focused on morality concerned with behaviour and modes of conduct in the context of one's relationships with others: 'The manner in which one ought to form oneself as an ethical subject acting in reference to the prescriptive elements that make up that code' (McLaren, 2002, p. 73). Practices of the self, then, are the specific techniques that one employs to improve one's self with respect to particular goals in relation to others. They are practices of self-formation and invention essential for individual freedom and ethical participation in relationships and politics.

Foucault rejects the notion that we have a '*true self*' (in the modern sense) to be discovered. Instead, he sees us making creative and ethical choices as we constitute our identity, along the way, and these choices are made with reference to a particular vision or aspiration. At the same time our visions and aspirations (the ends we seek) may change as we go along. This work contributes to the formation of ethical subjectivity (McLaren, 2002).

I, and several of the participants in this inquiry, have experimented with various methods and practices of re-working ourselves, with the purpose of analysing and disrupting experiences of being silenced, in the moment, or when most appropriate. Our concern here is just like a vocal artist: we don't get good at being who we want to be, or using our voice to its full potential, without training and practice and a good understanding of how we view ethical ways of relating.

In the transformation of silence into language and action, Lorde (2007) is clear, 'it is vitally necessary for each one of us to establish and examine our function in that transformation and to recognise our role as vital within that transformation' (p. 43). This sense of responsibility is essential; the right to express oneself and the desire to find voice is not enough to change the nature of our daily interactions. We are still left with 'the need to decide what to say, to find someone to listen, and to make your words sound beautiful' (Zeldin, 1998, p. 11). If we embrace the challenge and responsibility of being the architects of our own voice, our potential for working in a more conscious and 'boundaried' way in our social interactions is realised. Our conversations will be enriched, and our experiences of social silencing will gradually be diminished.

The following are examples of how we experimented creatively with Foucault's notion of practices of the self to overcome feminine issues of identity, voice and power. In my view Technologies of the Self offer a means of exploring and developing 'who we actually are and want to be'. They are a means of igniting our transformative journey of finding and realizing the potential of the feminine voice. They are practices of liberty.

10.4 Finding Voice through Technologies of Self

I have discussed how journal and other writing was an important aspect of my first-person inquiry. Initially I wrote on a daily basis, noting experiences of discomfort or energy. I inquired into what '*kept me awake at night*' and thoughts arising first thing in the morning. I noticed my dreams. Focusing on what comes up for us, our 'first thoughts' (Goldberg, 2005. P10) reveals our values, concerns and priorities, learning from what we say and seeing where this takes us is a key principle of writing as inquiry (Marshall, 2016). Early on in my research I used writing as a means of finding out what I really wanted to 'know', to get to the crux of my inquiry focus. In my work with abused women I invited them to use journals in a similar way, initially as a means of starting to get to know themselves, to explore how they wanted to 'be' in the world. Working in pairs, and later in groups, they

learned how to share thoughts and experience being listened to without judgment or critique.

One of the women in the Cooperative Inquiry and both Charlotte and I used journals to record and inquire into our experiences of silencing and related inquiry questions. We would then explore some of these entries together in the inquiry meetings. Sharing writing in this way is a form of consciousness-raising, enabling us to explore experiences from different perspectives. However, in my own experience and Charlotte's, it requires perseverance and confidence to get started. I also notice here our initial hesitance and then firm acceptance of our own reality as 'truth'. My journals helped me to make sense of my experiences and identify patterns of silencing and abuse in my marriage. This material is a rich source of learning.

Initially I didn't know what to write but I realise that what I write is what 'I' think about a situation ... when I look back, I can see things I didn't see before.
(Charlotte)

I ask myself how I can write these notes, this secret record, and be accurate in what I write. How can I remember everything and record it quickly enough? How can I make sure it's real? I decide that I am being real. These are my perceptions, my feelings ... I will try to be as accurate as possible and maybe I won't get it all down, but I will do what I can. (Journal, p. 3, 2007)

The quote above reflects my desire to be truthful and somehow write what was 'real' for me, also a sense of knowing that what I wrote was at best a partial account. I can see how, as I embraced the notions of critical subjectivity and post-modernism, my perception of what is 'real and true' has changed, as well as the limitations of what we believe to be true. As Ladkin says, 'Truths are necessarily emergent, located and ... limited' (Ladkin, 2005, p. 123). Our accounts of experience may change over time depending on the object of scrutiny at any given moment and the dynamic perceptions of previous and current relational aspects. Also, our memory and interpretations change as we integrate other forms of knowing into our sense-making.

When working with a group of women (survivors of domestic abuse) on a 'Moving On' program, it was important at the beginning not to have any hard and fast rules for journaling. Just writing their truth was challenging for them. A method they found

particularly helpful to get writing was ‘freefalling’. Often we would do this during a group session, and then I would encourage them to have a go between sessions when they were alone.

10.4.1 Freefall Writing

Freefall Writing is a writing technique taught by Barbara Turner-Vesselago (2013). It is the ‘technique of writing from the larger Self, beyond reach of the ego and its censors. It involves a state of absorption, in which you learn to write with an open heart and allow the words you had not planned to write flow onto the page.’ Turner-Vesselago (2013) encourages and teaches this discipline of writing from which she says a quality of aliveness, complexity and engagement can emerge. This discipline requires balancing ‘conscious thought and intention’ (p. 13), the operation of will, and ‘surrender’.

Freefall writing is a practice I use regularly in my journal, particularly when I’ve had an experience that has left my thoughts and feelings all mixed up, and I’m finding it hard to express myself. Often these will be experiences of being silenced. (My husband Andrew calls it ‘sky-diving’ and knows when I do it there will be serious discussion). Freefall Writing helps me to access and sort my thoughts and emotions, a way of understanding myself, and also kick-starts my imagination and generation of ideas. It also helps me to calm my emotions and be present to what is bothering me. Often after reading and reflecting on my Freefall Writing, I am able to reframe situations, open up difficult issues for dialogue and see alternative possibilities. For example, I spent considerable time focusing on my own anger. Through freefalling writing, I learnt that there are usually three factors present when I feel anger: I feel powerless, that my voice is not being heard, and my needs are not being met. Now, in the midst of encounters when I feel surges of anger I try to ask myself ‘Why do I feel powerless? How am I being made to feel powerless? How am I making myself powerless? Who is not hearing me and why? And what need am I struggling to meet?’

Freefall Writing is about ‘surrendering’ and then trusting what comes up from our deeper levels of knowing (Turner-Vesselago, 2013). It is not the same as thinking; it has its own logic and power. Freefall helps to get the thinking mind to ‘step aside’ so that the writing becomes a vulnerable, openhearted engagement with the moment. When I write I say things that I wouldn’t normally speak, my innermost thoughts. This then gives me the courage to speak up. Sometimes I don’t even know what I think until I write it. The

following excerpt from a piece of Freefall Writing enabled me to explain my feelings about why I was unhappy about the type of conversations we were having at home:

‘Just join in’, he said, ... ‘our family is used to talking over each other, the loudest gets heard.’ That doesn’t feel good to me. If I sit listening to a one-way conversation, I have no desire to struggle to be heard, to interrupt or to talk over others. This is rude in my view, it feels awful, and I do not enjoy this form of conversation. And, if I bring it to his attention I have been accused of whining and squeaking and given all sorts of other reasons about my past that make it my fault. (Freefall Journaling, December 2015)

Natalie Goldberg, another eminent teacher, brings writing together with Zen meditation practices. She says, ‘writing is a path to meet ourselves and become intimate’ (2005, p. xii). It is a tool that anyone can use to explore the ‘crannies of untouched perception’ (p. xiii), giving us confidence and training us to ‘wake up’ to our experience and ‘connect with our minds’ (p. xv). In her book *Writing Down the Bones* she offers practical advice about using writing as ‘a practice to help penetrate our lives and become sane’ (p. 16).

Sometimes my writing can also be a means of preparation (see 9.4.5 below), sorting my thoughts, crystallizing my intention and exploring possibilities for action. Often, as in the example above, I can then engage with or return to an experience with another, and say what I need to say in a way that feels good. It is a means of finding one’s ‘voice’ (Elbow, 1998).

10.4.2 Constructing Collage

We have seen how images and collage can be used as a research method to explore questions of ‘how we want to be in the world’, and to reach into our psyches to reveal deep-seated values, beliefs and tacit knowing. Whilst this was a good starting point for the cooperative inquiries, Charlotte and I continued to use our collages as a basis to clarify and test out our aspirations, and to see if our espoused beliefs and values were actually determining our action in the world. We had both previously created collages on the ‘Moving On’ program I had facilitated the previous year. Thus, revisiting them was interesting and our new ones were both similar and different. In one of our meetings Charlotte explained how, by consciously trying to live the values she aspired to as featured in her collage, she found confidence to voice her unhappiness with how she had been treated, with her manager:

I was thinking about C (her manager) and my clients, and that I wanted to be 'honest' and 'fair' ... by pretending that I was 'fine' I wasn't being the counsellor that I want to be. My supervisor said I was managing my skills but I wasn't really empathizing with my clients or really having that emotional connection, just skill managing ... and I wasn't being me in doing that, so I decided to do what I did in order to be that person. Not just with my clients, with C as well. So I told her how she had made me feel, I told her that she had upset me, I told her that I didn't appreciate her lack of trust in me, that she knew I was good at what I do, and I am going to talk to her more about how she treated me before I go back, because I can't go back without doing it. We have a team meeting before the summer holidays so I have to do it before then, I didn't do it the other week because I was angry, it wouldn't have come out right.

The word 'collage' comes from the French word *coller*, 'to glue', and is a recognised technique of art production, primarily used in the visual arts, where the artwork is made from an assemblage of different forms, thus creating a new whole (Adamowicz, 1998). The term collage emerged in the beginning of the twentieth century when collage became a distinctive form of modern art (Greenberg, 1959).

A collage may include magazine and newspaper clippings, photographs, portions of other artwork or texts, and other found objects. These chopped-up materials are stuck onto paper, card or other surface, introducing fragments of internally and externally referenced meaning. When someone makes a collage, it can form a narrative sequence and the meaning the creator gets from it or gives to it will depend on what came before it. Meanings may then be explored and revisited over time, amended and recreated as new experiences for making meaning are generated.

Whilst I emphasise here the concept and process of collage over the end product, such as a photograph (Snyder, 1967; Schutt & Berry, 2009), the visual representation of a collage, the artefact, enables us to study the values, structures and functioning of a society at any given moment of time. The framing we give that context is created by the narrative journey of creating the collage; each item in the collage has meaning and further meaning emerges as we go from one item to another.

The artefacts we choose to represent aspects of our lives in collage become ‘fragmented signifiers’ (Schutt & Berry, 2009), colliding as we bring them together. Collectively the items and images are visual language, and through their visceral power, they have the potential to generate explosions of response. This is evident in the emotional experiences the women in this research had in creating them, and also when sharing and talking about them. Indeed, we heard in Chapter 7 how Lucy became emotional as she explained her collage to the group. Similarly, when creating my own collage, I often had to abandon the process as emotions surfaced and required attention.

Images invoke memories of embodied affective experience, and experiences inspire images. They have different meanings to different people. The first time it came to my turn to talk about my collage I remember feeling self-conscious and wanting to get it over with as soon as possible. Now I see endless possibilities of meaning. In my collage now I see a rich tapestry interwoven with my personal identity, narrative, lifestyle, and the culture and society I live in. Embedded in each item or image we choose to represent is additional knowledge; thus, the viewer is provided with ‘a kind of psychic metadata requiring intuition and detective work to uncover’ (Schutt & Berry, 2009, p. 36). Of course, once completed it is contingent—a snapshot of truth and reality in a particular time, space and place.

These factors need to be taken into account when working with women and collage, and as a facilitator I would role-model, telling the narrative in a way that inspires conversations, drawing the images or materials into my narrative through verbal descriptions and references to them. Collage can be used for identity work, to explore values or a certain aspect of life. Through collage we can identify and reinforce our values and ways of being in the world. This identity work is essential knowing for finding and sustaining voice.

We found that the experience of sharing collages with each other also encouraged an attitude of inquiry. Curiosity and questions emerge within an atmosphere of interest, sharing and care. This context has the potential to build trust for further transformational work. It can be a positive affirming experience, and at the same time it may not be.

It’s made me feel a lot better about myself because I had started it thinking there’s so much I don’t do, haven’t done and I’m not what I want to be. There’s a lot of what I am already that I am actually really comfortable with, which I didn’t realize, I guess, I thought there was a lot about me that I wasn’t happy with, but there’s so

much more that I realise that I am happy with. It's quite nice instead of focusing on the negative aspect, which we have a tendency to do, it made me realise positive things, really nice. (Willa)

Charlotte and I also used our collages to facilitate an ongoing methodical re-examination between our self and our relation to self, as well as our relationship with the context in which we live our everyday lives. This provided a point of contrast from which new ways of practicing in the world could develop. Further on we explored experiences of values colliding and what happened when we tried to live up to our aspirations of self.

10.4.3 Consciousness-Raising

Foucault's later focus on the self's relation to self-led him to the ancient Greek practice of parrhesia. Parrhesia involves the moral virtue of truth-telling, and the practice of truth-telling within a democracy. It is a set of practices by which one can acquire, assimilate, and transform truth into a permanent principle of action. In essence it is a process of becoming more subjective (Foucault, 1988).

As a practice of self, parrhesia constitutes the self with the help of at least one other, the listener, in a political context (McLaren, 2002). Integral to this practice are questions of power and one of the main vehicles for these questions are consciousness-raising encounters.

Many of the participants in this inquiry expressed the value of 'women talk'. Sharing and validating each other's experiences is in itself a means of coming to voice. I discussed earlier how feminist consciousness-raising was instrumental in my own self-discovery and transformation. Telling and having my truth heard and being helped to understand the connections between my experience and the political-social context, in a safe place is a feminist practice of self. McLaren argues that consciousness-raising is a practice of self that involves not only self-transformation, but also social and political transformation, thus illustrating the link between the self and ethics and politics that is crucial to both feminism and Foucault.

In our interactions with others, the relationship of power we are often caught up in can constrain our ability to understand our experiences. It is not until others help us, often by chance, that we are able to see things in a different light. Sometimes this may be a one-to-one encounter with a friend, or an informal gathering; for others it may be within an

organised group or forum in a particular context, where experiences are discussed and explored. Participants discover commonalities in their experience and are enabled to see them as social and political issues.

Recently I have started to experiment with the Technologies of Social Silencing Framework (see Chapter 8) and found it useful in this respect.

A few days after I had constructed the (draft) framework, I was on a call with two friends. One of the women, Michelle, was upset and distressed following an encounter she had with a colleague. As she relayed her experience to us, I realised it was one of being silenced. We listened, I asked questions, and as we talked, I wrote notes on a copy of the framework I had at hand (see Appendix 7).

I sent my notes to her whilst we were still on the call, and after reading and talking the experience through, she was immediately calmed. ‘This is exactly it’, she said. ‘This makes complete sense to me’. Exploring Michelle’s experience in the safe context of our friendship was an example of consciousness raising. She was able to see her experience in a different way and feel that her voice had been heard. Following our conversation, she felt empowered enough to speak about her experience with her manager. Whilst this early experience of using the framework was reassuring for me, Michelle moved away soon after and we did not get the opportunity to discuss the experience or her ongoing development again. However, my suggestion here is that the technologies of social silencing framework (see Chapter 8) can be a tool for consciousness raising, and also for supporting the potential development work required for seeing ourselves differently in the world, and strengthening voice.

Often when we think we are alone with ‘*a problem of no name*’, finding like-minded people reveals the causes of powerlessness and the systemic nature of our problems. This insight can build confidence, motivate, and empower us to work on our own to learn more, and to take action (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). However, similar to co-operative inquiry, whilst inviting disruption and rebellion, the transformational outcomes of consciousness-raising are never fully known. A woman’s empowerment is a process one undertakes for oneself. It is not done ‘to’ or ‘for’ someone (Lather, 1991). As we come into a sense of our own power and voice, we also develop a new relationship with our context. Individually or collectively we decide to change the conditions of our lives.

In summary, my suggestion here is that consciousness raising in the feminist sense can be used intentionally as a means of doing work on voice. The technology of social silencing framework offers a tool for women to use with others, to develop awareness of their political and social reality and how they participate within it. Feminist consciousness is difficult work though. As we become aware of our weakness and oppression, we also become aware of our strength, and this has the potential to create tensions within us. On the one hand, consciousness of our predicament as a victim of social silencing can lead to a search for overcoming the weaknesses in ourselves that contribute to the silencing process, and for direct forms of intervening to disrupt the technologies of power that oppress us. On the other, if the potential impact of disruption or putting her own needs first, is considered too great for the woman (as in Lucy's case—see Chapter 8) she may deny herself permission to confront the discomfort of her own situation and continue to subjugate her own needs. Those of us working with women need to remain mindful of these tensions. Consideration of timing and context are important factors in a woman's readiness for the personal and political work consciousness-raising brings.

Once a woman is ready to accept the invitation to work against her oppression, she may look for opportunities in her everyday social reality to practice speaking in new ways and disrupting the technologies of power to overcome social silencing. In my view this work is initially best done in a considered way, as discussed in the following section

10.4.4 Planning, Preparing and Reflexive Experimentation

'Speak what you feel, not what you ought to say.' (Gilligan, 2011, p. 46)

This technology of self concerns the practices of testing out new ways of being, doing or thinking. We can test out new ways of saying what we really want to say, in ways that feel authentic and 'good'. As we seek to disrupt and rebel against the silencing norms in our lives, these practices can be both integral and separate from the technologies discussed above. For example, after Willa, a family lawyer, reflected with a colleague and made sense of an incident with an aggressive and patronising solicitor, planned her strategy to 'wipe the floor with him on Monday ... in a very pleasant way, by making sure I have every legal point covered so well he won't be able to get away with anything.'

Willa talked about how much she and her colleague both valued their regular talks, which were both consciousness-raising and preparation for action. Her younger colleague initially didn't know how to respond when she was confronted with this man's bullying style. Through talking to Willa, she was able to prepare for her next encounter. 'It's good to talk

about it with A, it takes the personal away, one of the reasons we get angry is because we take his behaviour personally, if you know it's not you, you can plan strategies to deal with it ... and when you do it together it gives you more confidence to say what you plan to say' (Willa).

Preparing and planning may also include deciding 'not to voice' to preserve safety in a complex and potentially harmful context. Baker-Miller & Pierce-Stiver (1997) discuss how once we have experienced disconnection in a relationship there is a need for a measure of safety if we are to make our experiences known. We also need some belief in the other's ability to hear and respond to that experience. Without an expectation of safety, it is hard for any person with less power to pursue the expression of one's experience after an initial disconnection. I experienced this with the board of Trustees at the charity I was involved with in 2012 (also discussed earlier)

I wanted to establish the Moving On program that a colleague and I had piloted successfully with a group of women. Most of the Board members were in agreement, but the Manager seemed to be threatened by the innovative new program. Following several confusing and difficult meetings, and my review of my extensive evaluation report including personal accounts of transformation from the participants, I became aware of some unethical practices employed to keep me silent. For example, the manager and the Chair apparently called each of the other Trustees (except one), and my co-facilitator, outside and prior to our meeting where the final decision was to be made. They made it clear that running this program was not a 'good idea'. When it came to the meeting, despite the hurt and anger I felt, I had already planned how I would respond when they made the decision not to go ahead with running the program. It was clear that there was no point in voicing my feelings or thoughts at that time. My sense was that there was no authentic response I could make that would lead to an onward and better connection. Instead I waited, eventually making my feelings very clear in my letter of resignation a few months later (Appendix 1).

Safety comes from our connections in a network of caring, protecting, nourishing relationships (Baker-Miller & Pierce-Stiver, 1997). This means that to avoid harm we need to develop an in-depth understanding of the emotional dynamics of relationships, and a realistic sense of how harm is experienced as the technologies of power come into play. Only then can we assess the ground for experimenting and preserve safety in our interactions. Firstly, one must be able to take some action in the relationship to make one's

experience or views known, and secondly the other people in the relationship must be able to respond in a way that leads to an onward and better connection.

How we think about our ‘self’ and our moral intentions makes a difference to our behaviour. Thus, our ethical practice in the world in all our various roles requires us to be conscious of power and its effects inherent within all relationships, and to use self-reflection to minimise the risks of one’s actions harming another. Sometimes ‘waiting to voice’ whilst we work on ourselves enables us to be more of who we want to be. This was evident in Charlotte’s thinking as she prepared to talk to her manager about how their last conversation had made her feel and the effects on her self-esteem and confidence.

I felt humiliated and furious but I didn’t want to respond in the same aggressive way, so I waited ... I thought about how I wanted to respond ... and wrote down how I was going to say it. (Charlotte)

Binns (2008), in her research looking at gender and the ethics of relational leading, also draws on Foucault’s ‘technologies of self’ and uses the term ‘embodied reflexivity’ to describe this ongoing project of self-knowledge and self-transformation. She sees this idea of ‘self-fashioning’ as a gendered project, with feminised subjects having a greater capacity for embodied reflexivity. She supports this by drawing on Deborah Kerfoot’s contention that ‘[m]asculine subjectivity is reflexive and unreflective in its unwillingness, or sheer inability, to challenge the conditions of its own perpetuation’ (Kerfoot, 1999, p. 197).

Planning and preparing to use our voice may also involve developing confidence through learning new skills. Speaking in public is something I have almost always shied away from. In 2014 I completed a course on public speaking. During the course with seven others I grew in confidence; through practice and feedback I realised I was actually quite good. It’s interesting to me now that I still reject invitations to speak at conferences about my work. My sense is that there are old tapes in my head still at play, regarding how ‘I’ might be judged. Despite my reticence I am still determined overcome this and find the confidence to say what I’ve said here in the public domain.

10.5 Concluding Reflections

The implications of social silencing mean that we need to pay more attention (and often this means learning to pay attention) to our feelings and embodied responses in interactions. When things just don’t feel right, or when what someone is saying ‘just

doesn't add up', or when a situation evokes feelings of discomfort or disquiet, confusion or unease, questions of power come into play. Thus, if we want to resist social silencing in any context, taking care of ourselves necessitates close consideration of our everyday experiences. The technologies described above are practical knowing - some of the ways we can inquire into the 'nitty gritty' of everyday interactions, make sense of our experiences, and take action. These techniques often require guidance from others and will always be related to the social, cultural and political context.

A full understanding of the normative demands made on us in conversational life is not achieved by theorising alone. It is done by making sense of our own social experiences so that we can then see through the negative spaces that are epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2010, 2011). Once women can see the mechanisms of power sustaining unhealthy patterns of interaction, a path of resistance is illuminated, and we can claim our rightful voice, in a way that is grounded in humanity and our aspirations of goodness, not ideology and anger. Thus, Technologies of Self are not just about discovering more of who we are, 'the hidden truth inside the self' (Foucault, 1991, p. 368), but an attempt to determine what we can do with our available freedom, and how we can disrupt the powerful social norms that keep us silenced.

In this quest to sustain or reconstruct our voices, we will, however, be challenged. Old patterns are not eradicated easily and within us we have the ability to spot a false story. When we are accused of 'imagining things', 'overreacting', being a 'feminist', 'just not able to hold our own', through understanding the technologies of power at play, we will know differently.

It is through taking my own experiences seriously, and through the Technologies of Self described above, that I have learnt to 'know' and understand the dynamics of conversation in the moment, or at least notice what is going on so as to be able to investigate further. I have learnt to achieve new perspectives and a firmer ground on which to enact my power both at home and in my work, to participate in relationships, bring people together and make things happen in ways that feel good to me. It is through the Technologies of Self that I strive to live up to my ideals and values of ethical conversation, challenge when I am thwarted in doing this, and take this knowing into my work as an organisational development and leadership consultant.

As I bring this chapter to a close, I feel a sense of pride that the personal work I have done has indeed strengthened my voice and empowered me to make choices in the midst of silencing encounters. However, finding and sustaining my voice has not been a straightforward process nor is it a struggle with an end. At times my voice is powerful and articulate, and at other times I still struggle to find or use it. Feminist technologies of self, such as those discussed here may have transformational potential, but our political development requires them to be studied together with the technologies of social silencing (domination).

Chapter 11
Transforming Silence and Voice
My Contribution



The Awakening Conscience
William Holman Hunt, 1853

11.1 Introduction

In these concluding reflections I will summarise the findings of my research as presented here. In ‘naming’ the phenomenon of ‘social silencing’ and offering a tentative and emergent construction of the technologies of power involved in the silencing of some women, I discuss my contribution to feminist theory, communication studies, and organisational development. I will show how the heuristic framework offered here has impacted my own life, and how I am using it in my organisational work. I will also discuss the quality and validity of my research.

This chapter discusses some of my reflections on this inquiry and outlines its contribution to feminist voice studies and organisational work. I propose that the Technologies of Social Silence Framework and the Feminist Technologies of Self provide a means to work with social relations at the interpersonal micro-political level, as well as at the deeper levels of institutional structures and culture. It cannot be disputed that life is lived and work is done through conversational practice. Thus, changing the power relations at this level can only lead to more healthy workplaces, homes and society.

I believe this research and thesis are a testament to the complexity of power relations and the longstanding concern of feminists of the constraints imposed on women’s ability to understand their own experience, and how our own orientations as women in a patriarchal society may colour what we choose to see. In the preceding chapters we have seen how, if we encourage and inquire deeply at the stage of our experiences of discomfort and distress, a hermeneutic journey may evolve. In other words, it is possible to make sense of a particular kind of experience and name it.

In Chapters 8, 9 and 10 I detailed my interpretations of data generated from my first-person and second-person inquiries, a co-operative inquiry and several one-off inquiry conversations. These methods were employed to inquire deeply into the everyday experiences of women being silenced, in the home, in the workplace and socially. I argue that when women are aware of and able to articulate their grievances, hidden technologies of power can be named and contested. My interpretations, which are grounded in Foucault’s conceptions of power and in feminist theory, expose some of the structural and relational technologies of power at play in the moments silencing happens. This thesis then names the experience of ‘Social Silencing’, proposes a framework for interpreting experiences, and outlines some strategies women can employ for disrupting and overcoming this harmful injustice.

11.2 ‘Social Silencing’ – No Longer a Hermeneutical Injustice?

As I started my doctoral studies, my own personal concerns about not being heard led me to inquire into the conditions required for ‘good’ (generative) conversations and quality in relationships. Influenced by Zeldin (1998, 2000) and Fricker (2010), I realised early on that perceptions of what ‘good’ meant in this context were based on my own values and beliefs. I sought to participate in everyday conversational life in ways that felt ‘good’ to me.

Through a developing feminist consciousness, I came to understand my concerns as patriarchal expressions of oppression, and many of them as experiences of being silenced. Yet I was unable to comprehend how this happened. In pursuing conversations of a different kind I sought to understand how, and why, seemingly capable, articulate women (sometimes) experience themselves as silenced or ‘voiceless’.

Through focused inquiry into the detailed nature (the ‘nitty-gritty’) of these conversations, and the wrong inflicted by them, I was able to identify the values important to me and construct a set of aspirations for how I participate in conversations. Grounded in the experiences and multiple truths of the women who participated, and through a feminist analysis informed by Foucault, I have constructed a framework as a means of interpreting and making sense of the experience of being silenced. Fricker (2010) says that in analysing the nature of the wrong inflicted, we can give a clearer idea of why something constitutes an injustice. I believe my research goes some way to clarifying the injustice of what I now call ‘social silencing’ and substantiating my initial intuitive concern that our experiences constitute a wrong done to us in our capacity as knowers and speakers.

So, what is the value of this analysis and naming of social silencing, and the framework offered here as a heuristic device? My analysis, as portrayed here, offers one way of understanding more fully how mechanisms of power affect our daily lives. If, like Foucault suggests, we conceive of power and knowledge as relational and productive capacities, I believe we can learn to notice how power is enacted, and its effects and potential (knowledge producing) effects as it is exercised. I suggest the technologies of womankind and silencing discussed here are testament to the reality that power produces. Knowledge of them offers potential to inform our action in the world.

This productive and potentially creative element of power is also important as we consider issues of human development. I support the argument that the human subject is not a given,

but produced historically and inter-subjectively, and constituted by power. The technologies of womankind discussed in Chapter 7, show how the 'individual' can be one of power's prime effects. In other words, how our identity is constituted through the corrective or disciplinary elements of power and knowledge. The technologies or practices of self are potential means of discovering our political selves, re-visioning our feminine subjectivity, and disrupting the technologies of power that lead to silencing.

The technologies-of-silence framework introduces a different way of seeing or interpreting social experiences of silencing. As such, it may enable women to make sense of an experience that may previously have been obscured. It offers the potential to name the experience and find spaces and means to disrupt silencing processes. I contend that social silencing has become visible by studying in detail the actual practices that produce it. These processes are in themselves operations of productive power.

11.3 Quality and Validity

As a feminist researcher I acknowledge the impossibility of finding the ultimate truth that leads to freedom. This thesis as a representation of multiple realities is subject to multiple interpretations and uses. The knowledge tentatively offered in this thesis is not detached and independent. It serves as a source of illumination grounded in experience as trustworthy data, and as such my exploration and articulation here is an operation of power. So how will we judge the quality and validity of my work?

The implications of participatory research means a shift from traditional questions of quality and validity such as 'Is the data biased?' to a focus on 'whose interests are being served by the bias', how do we do 'good', openly value-based inquiry (Reason & Rowan, 1981; Lather, 1991), and 'what forms of representation will convey the truths in our research'? In the context of paradigmatic uncertainty in social sciences this means a move away from traditional methods and criteria to validate findings towards one of awareness of and transparency about the choices available at each stage of inquiry (Reason, 2006), and 'primacy of the practical' (Heron, 1996. P. 34) in terms of research outcomes. This means that knowledge for practice is the consummation of the quest for knowledge. Practical knowledge, knowing how, is grounded on and empowered by experiential and presentational knowing, supported by propositional knowing, and enacted, valued and celebrated in our ways of being in the world.

One of the ways validity has been reconstructed for participatory, feminist and other qualitative research is through methods of ‘crystallisation’. Crystallisation, unlike positivist science, recognises there are multiple ways of seeing phenomena. It involves encountering and making sense of data through more than one way of knowing and seeks to produce knowledge about a particular phenomenon through generating a deepened complex interpretation (Richardson, 2000; Ellingson, 2009). This in-depth understanding of a topic is achieved through the compilation not only of many details, but also of different forms of representing, organising and analysing those details. Crystallisation methods seem aligned with the practical aspirations of action research (Heron, 1996; Reason, 2006), the need to draw on an extended epistemology that integrates theory and practice, and our concerns with how we make sense of experience and accounts.

Methods of crystallisation offered me a creative space to work with and bring together the themes and patterns emerging from our experiences. As I articulate those themes, I have sought to support them with stories and evocative moments, highlighting individual experiences, emotions and expression (Ellingson, 2009). I aimed to increase the depth and complexity of social silencing by critiquing and moving between the micro and macro aspects of the data and sought to interweave subjective and propositional knowledge to inform and bring together experience, propositional knowledge (theory) and subjectivity. In doing this I hope to have conveyed a multifaceted understanding of social silencing as a phenomenon.

In Chapter 5 I discussed the holistic process of reflexivity as integral to quality feminist action research. Ellingson (2009) also highlights the need for significant reflexive consideration of the researcher’s self in applying methods of crystallisation (Ellingson, 2009). One aspect of my reflexivity is being honest about my emotions and their impact as I conducted this research and particularly whilst constructing my findings. Writing about my emotions and my vulnerability in being an object of scientific scrutiny has not only been a source of inquiry; I also wanted to show the messiness of real researching life. The emotional impact of previous experience resurfaces, often when we don’t expect it, and this is no different when conducting research. Sometimes this causes me to be psychologically distressed and has an impact on my ability to act (for example, write) in the present. The reality is that ‘*coping with*’ and ‘*healing from*’ these experiences (particularly my experiences of domestic abuse), doesn’t have an end point. Whilst we may gather strength and knowledge to resist them in the future, inevitably the emotions and hurt can hinder us, as well as serve to remind and inspire us.

Reason (2006) says that quality action research seeks an in-depth encounter with experience in ways that challenge our preconceptions. It is through understanding the choices that have been made that judgements can be made about the nature of the knowledge and practice that has been generated, even if this means making our own rules as we go along.

I believe I have shown depth, openness and transparency in my processes of sense-making in this thesis. For example, I conveyed how I engaged with the women in this inquiry by drawing on my journal writing, my communications with them, and the transcripts of our encounters. I have shown, in pictures and words, the complexities of working with the data transcripts and how I constructed the framework offered. Whilst the findings of our inquiries may or may not resonate with others, its usefulness to others is also in reflecting these processes and choices made as I navigated the inquiry (Ladkin, 2005). How I made those choices and the methods used here may be inspiring to others, particularly when working with groups of women. For example, the use of stories and collage to facilitate safe communicative space and to begin exploring the women's motivations for participating in the research, and then their sense of self and being in the world was particularly successful.

I cannot say how challenged readers of this thesis will be or how much it will challenge your preconceptions. However, what I do hope to convey is my own learning, and how deeply challenging the exploration and articulation of our tacit knowledge can be. Indeed, researching experience that was obscured from my understanding and view, and inquiring into that negative space, has been a long, emotional and transformational journey. I suggest that many researchers are unaware of the emotional cost of this challenge, and wonder if and how those of us who survive the task could inform them. How can we support researchers doing this type of work? Whilst I was inspired and energised by other researchers through reading their work, I would have at times benefited from being able to talk to someone who had experienced similar struggles, and to whom I could talk to freely about the reality of my emotions and struggles in actually doing this research, particularly when working with and analysing my data.

11.4 Participation, power and reflexivity in Cooperative Inquiry

As I reflect on the quality of my research, I am mindful of my original aspirations and how I was drawn to the ethical and moral dimensions of action research. Reason (2006) says that action research 'is inquiry in pursuit of worthwhile purposes, for the flourishing of persons, communities and the ecology of which we are a part' (p. 188).

Our practice in the world necessarily involves other people, and I was drawn to the necessarily participative and democratic aspirations of action research (Kemmis, 2006 Reason, 2006). I have shown here how I sought to engage others in this research, and how I invited participants to participate in decisions about the research process as we went along (Reason, 2006). I also invited participants to read and reflect on transcripts produced after all my inquiry conversations and cooperative inquiry meetings. In constructing the findings, I identify each participant's voice clearly and acknowledge my own sense-making power and processes (Lather, 1991). I invited reflection on my representations and correction if they had been misrepresented.

Despite my efforts I did not experience the deep involvement the proponents of cooperative inquiry and action research suggest (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 1997; Reason, 2006). Whilst I believe I approached my participants as 'intentional actors and meaning makers' (Heron, 1996), and it seemed they accepted my invitation as such, my experience was that some of the women in the cooperative inquiry decided (consciously or not) to move into the role of objective-subject and not take up the agentic role of co-researcher. My attempts to inquire revealed little as to why this was and I would have liked to stay with this for longer. However, at the time I felt more probing would have created too much discomfort for the women concerned

Given that the principles of equality, epistemic participation and political participation are central to co-operative inquiry (Heron & Reason, 1997) and indeed my aspirations for this work, I believe my experience holds a number of insights for those who seek to facilitate or participate in this form of inquiry, especially novice action researchers (as I was). I will discuss some of these below.

In many ways my experience of cooperative inquiry bears some resemblance to feminist consciousness-raising groups. When women come together and build safe communicative spaces (Wicks & Reason, 2009), experience can be explored and knowing emerges, and new perceptions and conceptions of self can be developed. Also, women come to realise

that the problems they face as individuals are not ‘personal pathologies’ (McLaren, 2002), but reflect a larger social pattern of discrimination. However, many women who join consciousness-raising groups do not have coherent expectations in relation to the political and epistemic purposes of consciousness-raising (Spender, 1991). In other words, ‘what they want to know’ and ‘what they will do with what they come to know’. Furthermore, each woman’s experience, and willingness to perceive a patriarchal view of the world and the various dimensions of the dominant reality, varies considerably. Women also come and go according to their individual levels of commitment and can be distracted by the impact new meanings have on their lives. Nevertheless, consciousness-raising groups hold great potential for personal transformation.

Similarly, with co-operative inquiry I convened the group armed with a whole load of ‘shoulds’ and ‘should not’s’ gleaned from the research literature (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 1997, 2001, 2008). I also provided a summary outline of what we would be doing, to all the participants (see Appendix 3). I was conscious of my aspiration to ‘do’ cooperative inquiry as it was ‘supposed to be done’, and at times I experienced those needs conflicting with my participation as a co-inquirer. As we progressed, I found trying to keep track of, if, and, how, we were doing CI, energy-sapping, and distracting. I notice now how it took time for me to make ‘the practice’ of doing co-operative inquiry primary. When I shifted my focus away from the ‘theory’ of cooperative inquiry, using it to guide, and did not berate myself for ‘getting it wrong’, I learned more from the experience.

Of course, inter- and intra-personal dynamics are unavoidable aspects of any group endeavour and of great interest to me as an organisational consultant. As a central issue in this inquiry I was conscious of power in the CI group and the co-inquiry with Charlotte, and I experienced conflict as I sought to transform the relations of dominance seen in traditional forms of research (Heron, 1996).

Initially I worked hard to equalise power amongst us all. This is something I do well in many situations, particularly when trying to create safe places to talk. I noticed feelings of disappointment as I experienced varying levels of engagement and focus, as well as some participants not seeming to share my enthusiasm for reading the transcripts, journaling between sessions, or engaging in new ways of acting in the world, from which to glean new insights. Furthermore, despite issues of ‘voice and visibility’ being the primary reasons for joining the inquiry, it was interesting how gender and power and issues of voice were suppressed by several participants. For example, one participant claimed that she did

not experience inequality at work, despite citing examples of being silenced, and another said she didn't think she would feel or act any differently if she were a man (I discuss this further in section 11.5). When this happened, I sensed my anxiety rising and wondered if we were making any progress at all. I felt caught in a paradox—I wanted equality, at the same time noticing that I wanted it to go how I wanted it to go!

Whilst I had embraced my leadership role at the outset, I hoped that the need for direction would lessen as we progressed in cycles of inquiry. In reality I didn't experience 'equality' in these respects and wondered if I was in some way deficient as the instigator. Later, and as I write this now, I can feel the pressure and discipline I was putting myself under to get it right. For both consciousness-raising and co-operative inquiry groups I suggest equality remains an ideal, or at least an exception. Essentially, I learnt it was my research and probably unrealistic to expect the other participants to take equal responsibility for the rigor and processes of our work together. In future research involving cooperative inquiry I anticipate approaching things differently and being more confident to live with what 'is' rather than what should be.

As I grappled with knowing how to 'be', it was helpful to talk to Kate McArdle (2004) and draw on her own doctoral research on cooperative inquiry. She encouraged me to 'stand in my ground' and 'lead with strength and by example'. I realised I was perhaps trying too hard to be 'a participant', and this was helpful advice. I also learnt to accept that cooperative inquiry 'is what it is', and that if issues emerged, not to 'watch and wait', or to 'expect something different', but to bring them out into the open. Each participant's engagement and the extent of their participation were, and are, not within my control. I can do my best to engage, encourage and lead, and the rest is up to them. I have taken this insight into my organisational work, where I have started to introduce and offer gender-related inquiries. For example, I recently conducted a collaborative inquiry with a group of HR leaders in a global retail company. Together we led inquiries into how women experienced working in their company. The insights gained were 'consciousness-raising' and were used to inform policy development and the content of their leadership development programs.

When women come together to talk, at work or elsewhere, we are inevitably at different stages of life and consciousness. Whilst we all come from a position where our own nature or identity has been to some extent defined and determined by the needs of the dominant culture, in my experience any road to self-determination and transformation has to begin

where women begin and where each individual is at. This requires us to explore issues and fears as they present themselves.

As with consciousness-raising groups there were times in the group inquiry when my knowledge and understanding of the issues we were talking about were more informed due to the depth of reading I had done as *'the person doing the doctorate'*. I noticed myself making judgments about when to share and not to share knowledge. Sometimes, depending on how receptive I felt participants were, I would send out articles about issues we talked about, and sometimes I would decide to just *'stay with experience'*.

Inevitably issues of voice emerged in the groups. At times participants would voice their anxiety if they felt that what they were saying was not going to be useful to the group, and one participant asked, 'Am I talking in the right sort of voice ... I don't want it to have a detrimental effect on your research'. I learned that confidence as a participant and skills of inquiry develop at different paces. Charlotte and I progressed to a stage where we were able to challenge each other and deal with the discomfort. We would also plan conversational or interactional experiments to try out in between meetings. Not everyone in the larger group got to the stage of really wanting to inquire deeply into their experiences, try something new, and learn in this way. Similar to consciousness-raising groups (Spender, 1991, McLaren, 2002), I cannot know the full extent of learning and change that happens for each individual woman.

On reflection I wondered if stating my research interest clearly at the outset (instead of my broad inquiry question—see p. 32) would have led to a different level of conversation in the group, or even a different level of interest at the outset. Interestingly, my data revealed how the one-to-one inquiry conversations delved deeper into actual experiences of being silenced than those in the groups. As the full picture emerged it was clear that for this inquiry the combination of co-inquiry and cooperative inquiry was worthwhile. The Technologies of Womankind emerged mainly in the group inquiry, and the Technologies of Silence in the one-to-one conversations.

Prior to starting the cooperative inquiries, I spent considerable time reflecting about the power I held as the doctorate student and initially busied myself sharing the aspirations and my knowledge of action research in attempt to equalise power and encourage commitment to the democratic processes I had in mind.

However, as mentioned above negotiating and minimising power differentials proved to be a complex endeavour. As lead researchers in co-operative inquiry we are navigating many roles - initiator, leader and facilitator, promoting democracy, teaching and coaching method, noticing group process, and levels of contribution and participation, and, being a co-researcher. As I attempted to make conscious choices and act reflexively at the intersections of these roles, I found myself going around in circles, overwhelmed with my own thoughts and sometimes choosing to let things go. At times I felt despondent, powerless and continually questioned my actions and credibility. I have learned that in these moments of doubt, as roles and values collide, we must trust our knowing and be confident in making judgements and choices. It is not possible to be continuously reflexive but it is possible to learn as we go.

The discomfort I felt at times related to the power the others had in defining who I was, why I was doing this research and how much they chose to participate, share, reflect, inquire, interpret etc. On reflection I wonder if there had been more opportunities to explore what it meant for the women involved to be doing this research and their perceptions of me and my reasons for doing the research as we went along. I sensed that their perceptions, choices and meaning making changed over time, and that there were missed opportunities to learn as these changes emerged. Hesse-Biber & Piatelli (2012) call this extending reflexivity outwards. Through shifting the angle of vision outwards, I may have been able to consider for example, how I was being defined and why, as well as analysing my own presence and power. Being able to view myself reflexively through their eyes I would better understand what I needed to do to gain their trust and explore their concerns.

As we uncover and gain awareness of our different experiences, perceptions, emotions and choices through the research process we navigate and become more conscious of our various identities and theoretical positions, and our potential for reflexivity grows (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). Through conscious reflection I became increasingly aware of how my own positioning within feminist discourse and social constructionism shaped my own identity and interpretations of other women's stories and conceptions. Our interpretations of experiences and concepts were often different, and this created some tensions. For example, later in the cooperative inquiry we explored our conceptions of power in relation to our experiences as women in the world. During discussions it became apparent that our conceptions and relationships with power varied considerably. Some of us viewed power as a positive aspect of our being and others conceived power as a negative force to be

avoided. As we shared our thinking and experiences, I sensed that we were all really grappling with the alternative views among us. I recall experiencing some tension on one occasion when one of the women seemed uncomfortable with any positive notion of power. Whilst at the time she remained wedded to her views, in a later conversation she referred to how she had changed her views about power since our exploration and was trying to be more conscious of when she was “using her power”, even though she preferred to think of it in terms of when she was “being effective”. This example of participatory knowledge building led to a different and more reflexive action in the world.

11.5 Internalised Oppression in Cooperative Inquiry

In both the cooperative inquiry and in the course of life generally, I came across several women who told me they are ‘not silenced’, that they do not experience being silenced in their everyday interactions, nor sexism or being oppressed in general. A personal friend told me ‘I don’t think I have anything to offer your research, in healthcare there are many women in senior positions, and they don’t get silenced’. (ND) Sophia, in the cooperative inquiry also explained that she worked in a university which she experienced as an egalitarian environment, ‘everyone is respected and treated equally. The trouble I have is that I don’t think what I am explaining (feelings of inadequacy) comes from men or comes from any gender divide, it comes from inside me. I think the men respect what I do, there are men at work who think I am good at what I do. I don’t think I am getting undermined by men; it comes from within me that inadequacy’.

The fact is that many women are unaware of having personally been victims of sexism or oppression even when they see that women in general are, or when an objective example is brought to their attention (Ibarra et al, 2013). Indeed, over time the above claims were disproved as subsequent conversations revealed instances to the contrary. Stories were told about instances at home or work that were clearly experiences of being silenced. For example, Sophia told us of a senior colleague who asked for a meeting with her. He arrived at her office and set about railroading her into giving up responsibility for a new course she had recently designed, as part of a Master’s program. He apparently informed her that he would be ‘taking over the module’, that his ‘research students would change the content’, ‘so that they would have some teaching to do’. She recounted the incident revealing how she was talked over, ignored, and intimidated in the meeting. Yet she did not recognise this as being silenced. She told me that because she had managed to hang onto her course (by taking the matter to someone more senior), the experience did not count as one of being silenced. I observed another senior leader being discriminated

against twice by a colleague in a leadership simulation exercise. Yet when I brought this to her attention she said, “it didn’t really bother me, I don’t really see it as a problem, we get on really well, maybe he doesn’t realise what he is saying”. She was willing to put up with being treated as an inferior being for the sake of maintaining a relationship with her colleague.

On hearing these accounts, I wondered if there were indeed any women who manage to sustain their voice and are not ever silenced. On reflection I concluded this interesting provocation is an epistemological issue. There will probably be many women such as those mentioned here who don’t recognise themselves in my accounts, because they make sense of the world in different ways. After all, ‘silencing’ and being ‘silenced’ are active states, and both need a level of awareness to be real or known. Speaking from my position as a feminist however, I interpret these examples as manifestations of internalised oppression, the phenomenon of how we learn to enact learned sexist behaviours and attitudes towards ourselves and members of our own sex.

Uchem (2012) describes internalised oppression as a psycho-sociological condition whereby a person who has a long experience of being subjected to punishment, ill treatment, or any sort of unacceptable treatment, begins to accept it as normal. It results in internalising the oppressor along with the experience of being oppressed.

‘The oppressor now living within; takes over. The dominated person identifies so closely with the internal oppressor that she now assumes the role of oppressor. She then begins to oppress herself and her own kind on behalf of the oppressor’ (pg. 1).

Internalised oppression is often characterised by an unconscious self-hatred, low self-image and a sense of inferiority. Uchem (2012) explains how this prevents the oppressed person from taking their rightful place in the workplace or in society generally. She looks to her oppressor for approval or disapproval and evaluates her behaviour according to his or her standards. Internalised oppression is also expressed through minimizing the value of women, mistrusting women, and believing and defending gender bias in favour of men generally (Szymanski et al, 2009).

In recognising our own internalised oppression, we also have to acknowledge our own complicity in its manifestations. Simone de Beauvoir (2011), offers various examples of

the different ways in which women can be complicit in reinforcing their own 'unfreedom', including by embracing and defending their position as sexual objects. For Beauvoir, woman's complicity involves a kind of "resignation" to the unfreedom of her current situation, accepting and even embracing unfreedom by thinking that neither people nor situations can be changed from what they are.

In their exploration of why patriarchy persists in society Gilligan & Snider (2018) argue that our desire for domination is not natural, or at least conflicts with our natural relationality. They ask why we sacrifice the pleasures and benefits of human connection for superiority, and the material benefits that come with social status and power. They suggest that we give up our capacity and potential for 'real relationships' (characterised by equality and mutuality) to have 'relationships' or a place, in the patriarchal order. This sacrifice of relationship is necessary for establishing and maintaining hierarchies of power and status, (even when we are employed in equal positions with male colleagues) and is not something we do consciously. In the cooperative inquiry group, I also considered the possibility that this dependence on relationship was the root of why Lucy disengaged as an active researcher, expressing her wish 'just to be a subject'. I wondered if accepting herself as a victim of oppression would mean she would be compelled to act, and perhaps she made a choice (unconsciously or otherwise) that acting, or the repercussions of acting, were not what she wanted at that time, possibly in order to sustain relationships with her husband and work colleagues, and avoid any dramatic life changes. Whilst as a feminist I consider it Lucy's choice to remain in a position of dependency and perhaps forego the possibility of seeking to develop equality and mutuality within her relationships, I also recognise that in certain situations, I too collude with my oppression for precisely the same reasons.

Whilst social silencing is an act of oppression that happens on a daily basis, the generalised oppression of women is widespread and deeply ingrained in everything we do. To acknowledge its existence necessitates a major re-evaluation of our worldview. It means seeing for the first time that we are inferior beings, and that the messages we may have received about the end of sexism and oppression are untrue. That they are fabrications told to us by a society that wants to keep us in our place. It also means examining the ways that we are complicit in and actively participate in our own oppression.

When women feel able to move freely around the world, make their own decisions and have gainful employment, it is quite common for them to consider themselves free of

oppression and feminism an unnecessary distraction. Developing a consciousness of oppression means becoming conscious of one's *own* victimisation, within a context of systemic unjust treatment of women. It also requires us to revise our understanding of power and its effects. My own experience suggests that this may be difficult to accept or even consider, until perhaps something extreme happens that opens our eyes to a different way of seeing things. Oppression takes a variety of forms and can be difficult to see or understand unless we have the desire to do so. Bartky (1990) describes how women are coerced, bribed and even blackmailed into going along with being disempowered by social discourse and disciplinary practices, such that they may take pleasure or enjoy a sense of accomplishment in developing their appearance, voice, and way of being into that which is expected. Indeed, our values and beliefs and ways of being are formed in patriarchy, and when these are challenged often our initial response is to defend. I have found letting go of values and beliefs to achieve real change in my own life situation challenging and at times painful.

I would agree with Bartky that to recognise women's oppression and regard oneself as a feminist, one first has to become one. This she says involves '*the experience of a profound personal transformation, an experience which goes far beyond that sphere of human activity we regard ordinarily as "political"*' (p. 11). This transforming experience is multifaceted, complex and happens over time, leading to changes in a woman's behaviour in the world. She will often make new friends, respond differently to people or events, she may even alter her living arrangements, marital status and more profound aspects of her lifestyle.

While it is not solely the responsibility of women to change things, denying our own oppression also serves to perpetuate women's inequality. However, the impact of such personal transformation should not be underestimated and as leaders of cooperative inquiry or research groups we must be mindful of each individuals' position on this journey. Consciousness raising is risky business, we must be mindful that action research methods such as cooperative inquiry may accelerate the process of becoming conscious even when oppression is denied or defended. We need to be prepared for these and other responses and develop strategies to deal with them as each situation requires. When my co-researchers denied or defended their oppression, and when Lucy chose to opt out of the role of researcher, my desire to inquire deeply into their actions collided with my commitment to maintain trust and ensure safety. Making judgements in these moments is particularly challenging.

On reflection I surmised that our internalised oppression influenced the nature of our participation in the cooperative inquiry. Heron and Reason (2001) suggest that achieving ‘authentic collaboration’ in cooperative inquiry groups is an important aspect of quality inquiry and involves co-researchers being fully engaged in each phase of the research process and decision-making. I believe we achieved this in our early cycles of inquiry. It was at the stage we were starting to inquire more deeply into our everyday situations that some of the women became defensive. Also, at times denying that their experiences had anything to do with gender. It seemed that they were comfortable looking backwards and thinking about ‘another women’s oppression’. However, seeing their experiences in the present as oppressive provoked a different response. At this point I feel we lost some of the quality in our conversations and that some, not all of the women became less ‘authentically engaged’ during the action stages of our inquiries. One eventually said that she didn’t think the topics we were exploring applied to her, but she was interested to hear about the others in the group.

Reason (2004) also suggests that where significant issues are difficult to address in action research, there is more likely to be denial of experience or minimising of its effect. I would agree with him that this acts against efforts to open up spaces for dialogue and prevents discussion of the impact of experience. I also suggest that as a consequence any attempts to develop individual and collective strategies to resist or take action are compromised. I wonder if I had made a more direct invitation to women who ‘experienced being silenced in their daily lives’, and who had a genuine desire to understand those experiences, whether engagement and willingness to participate in the research process would have been more sustained.

These insights gained from cooperative inquiry are the key aspects of learning here, there are many other aspects worthy of discussion. My intention is to write a separate and more in-depth account of my experience.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the limitations of this inquiry. Whilst I was open to any woman being involved in this research, it turned out that all the women involved were Caucasian, in good health, educated, and all except one were employed. The sixteen participants were aged between 26 and 55. They were all privileged in the sense that there were no financial or other issues that could potentially impact or restrict life options, unlike the women who wanted to but were unable to participate. Thus, the experiences here are those of white women with varying backgrounds experiencing the challenges of everyday

life. Whilst no woman was excluded, and our specifics are embedded in our experiences, a broader range of experience may have emerged if perspectives and stories of different cultural and economic backgrounds had been included. One of my interests going forward is to inquire into the experiences of women from different cultures and walks of life.

11.6 The Power of the Feminine – My Contribution to Feminist Theory

The silencing of women and/or the absence of women's voices has been studied extensively in feminist literature (See Chapter 3). However, the weak presence of women's voice is based on the premise of dominant norms, or masculine bias existing at the heart of organisations and associated disciplines, including organisational development. By giving voice to difference, such work expresses the value of the female world and helps to include women (Simpson & Lewis, 2007). I believe my research offers a focused and very practical contribution to this debate—a means by which women, in everyday situations, can challenge the expectations to conform to the social stereotypes and masculine norms of communication in our society today.

One of the great powers of feminism and feminist research is that it goes so far in making the experiences and lives of women comprehensible. Trying to make sense of our own experience, our feelings, motivations, desires, ambitions, actions and reactions without taking into account the complex forces which maintain the status quo, is, in the words of Marilyn Frye (1983), 'like trying to explain why a marble stops rolling without taking friction into account' (p. xi). What 'feminist theory' is about, to a great extent, is identifying those forces as they apply to a particular experience and displaying the mechanics of their applications to women as a group or to individuals. The measure of success of the theory 'is just how much sense it makes of what did not make sense before' (p. xii).

As women we gain, retain and lose knowledge through what Fricker (1999; 2010) calls our 'epistemic practices' (2010. p. 2), and through our epistemic practices we become 'epistemically privileged'. As women who have experienced being socially silenced, we have knowledge our silencing oppressors don't have. We are thus epistemically privileged in terms of the great expanse of social reality our experience brings into view, and in respect of the consequentially partial perspective in which the world more generally is understood. This thesis is thus the culmination or artefact of our epistemic privilege.

I feel it necessary to mention the work that communication and linguist researchers have covered concerning how men and women talk together. In particular I expected to find Deborah Tannen's work in linguistics insightful and informative. However, as I mentioned earlier, I was surprised to find her liberal perspective narrow in focus and unhelpful. In my opinion she fails to take the connection of male privilege into account in her analysis of the difficulties men and women have talking to each other. For example, she says that being blamed for interrupting is as frustrating as being interrupted, and that conversational differences can be justified by differences in social upbringing, individual perceptions of rights and responsibilities or culture. I notice how my own emotions surfaced as I noted her failings to take into account the personal hurt, not to mention the organisational and social impact, of women's voices not being heard. In contrast, and similar to Joyce Fletcher's work (2002), this action research inquiry highlights the value of feminine relational practice and details how it is diminished and disappeared in our everyday interactions.

My aspiration is that through this inquiry, sense has been made of experiences that didn't make sense before. I have attempted to explain the relations of power at play through the experiences of women leading normal everyday lives. The Technologies of Silence Framework offers a means of questioning, examining, and making sense of social silencing in different situations and organisational contexts. I recognise, however, that any illumination cannot be delivered completely and clearly by one individual onto another's history and situation, even if the two are very similar. If my theorising is sound and correct enough to be useful to another, the other still has to make use of her own knowledge to transfer and interpret it, and to adapt it to the details of her own life and circumstances and make it her own. Furthermore, change at this level is rarely achieved without deep personal work over time. As I take this into my work in organisations, I am mindful of my own experience and the paradoxical theory of change (Beisser, 1970). Briefly summarised, Beisser states that 'change occurs when one becomes what (s)he is, not when (s)he tries to become what (s)he is not'. The work of reconstructing our identity and 'way of being' in the world requires us to become more of who we are and fully invested in our current positions. The framework and strategies offered here can, in my view, be instrumental to this challenge. **See Appendix 8 (p 265). For some guiding questions when using the framework and Appendix 9 (p 266). for an example and some reflections on working with conversation in organisations.**

11.7 Working with Abused Women

The findings here illuminate how the tactics used to silence are in fact abuses of power, and the extent of hurt and harm social silencing can cause. However, my experience working with abused women, and my own experience, tells me this can be amplified ten-fold in the context of a long-term abusive relationship, and there is little hope for improvement.

The necessity of being heard and understood as well as hearing and understanding another is an experience vital for healthy relationships in general and mutually growth-fostering relationships in particular. This is supported by early feminist research and theory (Baker-Miller, 1976; Jordan et al., 1991; Baker-Miller & Pierce-Stiver, 1997). Yet we know from women's experiences that we start to be silenced early in life and the harmful disconnection this brings about. As women experience further abuse they become more disconnected from themselves and suffer irreparable damage to their psychological health.

My experience working with women moving on from abused relationships tell me that these women benefit from space and time to do work on their identity, voice, relationship with power, and sense of boundaries in relationships. I believe this also applies to many women in all walks of life, and at all levels in organisations. This personal work can be achieved through using the practices outlined in Chapter 9. As these women learn more about their feelings and values, they learn how their relationship with others can be different. As they reconnect with their bodies and gain permission to experience disappointment, anger, and other feelings, they learn how their emotions can help them sense danger, and also move relationships along to a better sense of connection. My early experience of facilitating the Women's Aid Moving On program and the evaluations of participants (Bayntun-Lees, 2012) evidence the challenging and empowering work they can do.

11.8 Working with Abusive Silencers

The people who bring about the most serious disconnections and violations of others will also have the most trouble engaging in growth-enhancing interactions about their own behaviours (Baker-Miller & Pierce-Stiver, 1997). Most of us have a hard time admitting our failures or harmful actions. This is especially the case when someone has little self-insight, is unaware of how they affect others, and has a hard time allowing other people to tell them. However, most people who abuse find it difficult to show remorse or empathy to those they abuse. The more 'power over' they exert, the more the danger of harm increases, and it becomes much harder for the less powerful person to alter the course of an

interaction. Whilst I hope this thesis will benefit many of the women either as they disentangle themselves or after these relationships, I consider working with abusive silencers in this way will be fruitless.

11.9 Dreams and Aspirations for Discourse (Where Am I Now?)

I started this thesis inspired by Theodore Zeldin's (1998) historical approach to humanity, and the art of conversation as central to imagining and creating the future. His insights are gained from listening deeply to women around the world. I invited you to imagine a world in which 'the quality of conversation and relationship is the most important aspiration for all humanity. A world where conversational spaces in our personal, corporate and community life, embodied respect for human dignity and vitality. And, each time you talk with another you felt able to say what you feel most deeply. And, leaving each and every encounter feeling you've been the best you can be' (p. 28). I believe this thesis and the injustice of social silencing pay testament to the challenges we face in achieving these ethical ideals. However, a world without dreams is a life without meaning. This research has inspired me to continue working with women and men towards more ethical conversations. The presence of women and men who can value and model ethical interactions and relational growth, I believe, will bring new energy and creativity to the worlds of business, organisations and family life, and eradicate the harm caused by silencing and excluding difference.

My own personal journey of transformation tells me that individuality is not fixed in its expression. For me, looking at everyday conversation through lenses of power has transformed my own sense of power and voice. At the same time, I am acutely aware of the operations of power in, around and on my sense of being and action in the world. As I continue to strengthen and experiment with my own voice in a patriarchal context, I often experience the complete opposite of the mutually empowering connection I seek. I try to avoid situations where I experience repeated or serious disconnections through social silencing. Not because I don't feel strong enough to handle them, but because I would rather avoid the unpleasant experience. I make choices as to where to expend my energy and efforts, and to find ground where my voice is invited and appreciated.

I believe existing in these disconnected relationships may lead us to create restricted and distorted images of the possibilities of relationships between others and ourselves. Furthermore, we may construct meanings that disparage and condemn ourselves. These images and meanings may then limit our ability to act within our healthier connections, to

know our own experiences, and to build our sense of worthiness. This research emphasises the critical connection between power-knowledge in relation to my voice. My feminist politics empowers me and at times silences me. However, in the moments of interaction I bring refined skills of noticing, agency, reflexivity and choicefulness. I continue asking who has the greater power to determine what goes on in interactions and relationships? And, what can I do here to sustain my power, stay true to my values, and be who I want to be in the world?

I believe my personal transformation is testament to the power of action research. However, the usefulness of this research will be judged by its practical use in the world. Whilst I do not claim the findings here are generalisable, the hermeneutic darkness of social silencing has lifted for me and for some of the women who participated. However, the injustice of social silencing will continue unless space and validity are given to this issue.

I believe this thesis validates social silencing as a real condition concerning *all* our lives, right here and right now. I continue to see and hear women being silenced almost every day, in most contexts. My earlier experiences of social silencing during my abusive marriage were amplified as I disentangled myself and caused my children and me significant damage. I have delved deeply into those experiences, and many since, along with those of other women. Together we explored the depths of knowledge we hold and the extent of the harm they cause. The personal is indeed now political and we have begun to illuminate our choices.

The Social Silencing of many women is a fact of patriarchal life, although male privilege may not be enough in itself to explain our social interactions. Our social and educational backgrounds establish our patterns of interacting early on. These are often deeply protected and difficult to change. If we, as organisational consultants, or leaders of change, are to find ways to overcome these issues, we have to see ourselves in relation to a long-term complex process of change. Johnson (2005) says, 'Whether we help to change patriarchy depends on how we handle the belief that nothing we can do will make a difference'. This inquiry is testament to handling that belief. My proposition is that if an end to social silencing is to be realised, essentially, all silencing behaviours must be regarded and assessed within an ethical and political framework, one that views social silencing as harmful to the growth, development and health of women and other silenced groups. Social

silencing, once a hermeneutic injustice, is now a named injustice—an injustice that can be talked about, understood, and overcome.

I believe the power or value of this thesis will be realised as the discourse of ‘social silencing’ is provoked and through the consequences to which it gives rise, in the practical field in which it is deployed. Who uses it, the institutional sites from which the discourses of social silencing emerge, and who has access to the discourse, will determine its legitimisation? Reason (2006) suggests that quality research invites us to stop feeling and doing some things and start feeling and doing others. Heron (1996) also talks of the truth-value of propositional findings transcending into ‘being-values’ of human flourishing, through further inquiry to fulfil them and celebrate them in practice.

This thesis has offered a construction of ‘Social Silencing’ that enables women who experience being silenced to notice and make sense in the moments of being silenced. My aspiration is that women will learn to tell new stories of their experiences and find alternative ways to respond. Whilst I believe the situatedness or circumstances of the reader will influence how this work will be received, I hope I have presented it in a way that proves interesting, and at best, inspires change.

Bibliography