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Canada

Exploring the Inequalities Between Men and Women in Relation to Marriage - A Feminist

Analysis of Women In Social Work's Experiences of Marriage

by

Natalie McCormac

Bachelor of Arts, Wilfrid Laurier University, 1998

THESIS

**Submitted to the Department of Psychology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
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Abstract

In this thesis I explore the inequalities between men and women in relation to marriage and the impact of external pressures on women and their choices within their marriages. I interviewed five married women and one woman in a common-law relationship about the story of their marriage. I used narrative analysis to interpret the verbatim transcriptions of each interview. In the findings I present portions of each woman's story in her words along with my own interpretative comments. The findings indicated that women are experiencing indirect pressure from external sources within regard to their individual choices and their choices within their marriage. I identified three main categories: individual, marital, and external pressures and supports. Within these categories I present common themes across the women. I conclude this thesis with my personal journey.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
Community Psychology and Feminist Perspectives.....	3
A Feminist Agenda.....	7
CURRENT LITERATURE ON ISSUES OF EQUALITY IN MARRIAGE.....	9
Current Pressures on Contemporary Marriage.....	9
Research Objectives.....	19
METHODOLOGY.....	19
The Narrative Method.....	19
The Sample.....	22
Interview Topics.....	23
Interview Process.....	24
THE WOMEN'S STORIES.....	29
Jane.....	29
Katherine.....	35
Carol.....	41
Hazel.....	44
Ursula.....	48
Anne.....	54

OVERALL ANALYSIS.....	58
Diagram 1.....	60
DISCUSSION.....	88
My Personal Journey.....	102
REFERENCES.....	106
APPENDIX A.....	110
APPENDIX B.....	111
APPENDIX C.....	112
APPENDIX D.....	113
APPENDIX E.....	116

Exploring the Inequalities Between Men and Women in Relation to Marriage – A Feminist Analysis of Women in Social Work Experiences of Marriage

I was married for a period of my undergraduate career to a fellow student. In an attempt to not carry too much debt, my husband and I decided only one of us would attend school full-time. I offered to work while he finished his degree and we agreed I would go back to school full-time when he graduated. At the time my husband was questioning if he even wanted to finish his degree, so it seemed logical to us (seemed more logical to him) that he not put his education on hold. I, on the other hand, loved school and knew I would return without hesitation. Strangely enough, looking back on this decision I have been able to recognize that this outcome was not fair or logical for me, but rather was an ideal situation for furthering my husband's goals.

In the beginning, I thought we had the same dreams and goals and that I was in an equal marriage. My definition of an equal marriage consisted of sharing responsibilities, working towards our goals and dreams together, and generally helping make each other's lives more enjoyable. My husband was raised in a household that valued equality and he had the education that I thought would reinforce these values. Unfortunately, soon enough our common values became quite different. When my husband finished school and began full-time employment his values changed significantly. My husband wanted a house and children, neither of which we could afford with me attending school full-time. He began to apply pressure on me to quit school. In short, he eventually forced an ultimatum -- him or school. I felt strongly that in making such a request he had not married me for who I was but what he wanted me to become, so I left.

Even though I knew this decision was right for me, I began receiving a barrage of opinions. These opinions came from almost everyone in my social network -- family, friends, and even those acquaintances who did not have the entire details. Comments included, I was being selfish, marriage involved making sacrifices, my role was to be a dutiful wife and mother and if I wanted to have a degree that badly, I should do it part-time. This pressure made me feel angry, hurt, and abandoned. These negative opinions I was receiving, however, were not only pressure on me, but also silent support for my husband's choices.

My experiences led me in the direction of wanting to know if other women were experiencing similar pressures in their marriages. I knew I wanted to pursue this topic further but I did not have the scholarly tools I possess now. In an attempt to satisfy my curiosity, I pursued this topic as my undergraduate Bachelors of Arts thesis. I explored the impact of external societal pressures on women's happiness, decisions, and life choices by interviewing six women regarding their experience of marriage. The findings from this study showed that other women in their early twenties and also in their first marriage were indeed experiencing the pressures I had felt in my marriage. The findings were so powerful for me that my wish to know more about this topic became only more intense. I wanted to know about the pressures women were facing from their social networks and why the pressures existed. It was through the experience of my undergraduate thesis that I chose to continue with this topic for my Master's thesis.

My personal motivations for this study are quite extensive. I have been able to advance my own notions about marriage based on the literature I have reviewed and my own personal experiences. As a result of observing my parents in their marriage I grew up believing that

marriage involved effort and compromise. With these two key components I believed a marriage would be successful.

Years later in my own marriage, I began to identify marriage with issues of power. Men have power and women are disempowered. My husband had power and I did not. This experience created links for me to feminist issues and the many struggles women face with the emphasis and allocation of power in our society. Through the process of researching women's issues, I discovered it was not power I desired, but the experience of being empowered in my own life. The connection between feminist research and my own experience of marriage prompted me to further my knowledge of other women's experience of marriage.

The research I have reviewed advances my understanding of marriage in two significant ways. Firstly, it confirms in my mind that there is room for research in this area and that a thesis with a focus on women's experience of marriage could be a worthy study for women. Secondly, I now believe that there is the possibility of an alternative style of marriage that includes equity for both partners. A marriage that promotes equity would provide both partners with the freedom to pursue their goals, as well as be partners in the responsibilities of everyday living (e.g., childcare, domestic duties, decision-making, etc.). It is my belief that both women and men can flourish within the domain of an equitable marriage.

At this point, I will discuss the connection between community psychology and feminism and propose a feminist agenda within the domain of community psychology. Following this section I will provide a detailed literature review and describe my intentions for this thesis.

Community Psychology and Feminist Perspectives

My literature review revealed the gap between the promotion of feminism in community psychology and the practice of its values. Community psychology is rooted in values and

concepts such as diversity, women's issues, social justice, empowerment, and community. In promoting these values while not practicing them, those who identify with community psychology inadvertently perpetuate oppressive systems such as sexism. Several authors believe that community psychology actually falls short of its own goals with relation to feminism. In fact, much of the community psychology literature in the last three decades has lacked feminist studies. Community psychology has been challenged for not integrating women's issues in graduate training and professional practice (Bond & Mulvey, 2000). There has also been criticism for community psychology not incorporating feminist values and perspectives into research, theory, and practice.

One feminist community psychologist, Anne Mulvey (1988), suggested that community psychologists have not been aware of the natural fit between community psychology and feminism and that there is a gap between community psychology and feminism. Mulvey identified several issues that explain this gap, including professionalism, income, and the protection of the discipline. In the struggle to further community psychology as a respected discipline with other traditional forms of psychology (e.g., clinical psychology) community psychologists are very protective with regard to their work. The support in the academic community for feminist work is still difficult to acquire and community psychology seeks to maintain its reputation as a serious discipline. This lack of support for feminist research may offer some explanation as to why community psychologists have not fully embraced feminist principles within community psychology. Feminist work stems more from a political and ideological commitment than a desire to further its reputation as a discipline. In a more recent publication, Bond and Mulvey (2000) looked at the history of women and feminist perspectives in community psychology and concluded that in the past decade new settings have been created

that include women in community psychology, however, “inclusion and professional development are insufficient for feminist change” (p.624).

Arguing that community psychology would be substantially strengthened by incorporating a feminist perspective, Mulvey focused on the commonalities between the women’s movement and community psychology. For example, both views express that the personal is political, stressing the “powerful relationship between personal reality and structural conditions.” Both community psychology and feminism value diversity: Community psychology argues that there cannot be a single standard based on white middle-class reality and feminism argues that there cannot be a single standard based on male norms. Both feminist research and community psychology take the position that the researcher’s beliefs and values influence research in useful ways and that these beliefs and values do not undermine the methodological framework in any way (Campbell & Wasco, 2000).

In a discussion of the gap between community psychology and feminism, one area that has received specific emphasis is the concept of empowerment. Feminist work has stressed the importance of consciousness-raising as a first step in the process of empowerment and personal and social change (Mulvey, 1988). Consciousness-raising refers to awareness of and action about the relationships among life situations, individuals, and the social-political context. Becoming aware of these relationships facilitates the process of becoming empowered and promoting change. Stephanie Riger (1993) argued that the concept of empowerment is typically associated with masculinity and male definitions, rather than with femininity and female notions of connections with others. At this point, it is important to define the current understanding of empowerment.

Rappaport's (1987) definition of empowerment emphasizes mastery and control. This type of definition is typically associated with masculine values. Rappaport's (1987) definition overlooks feminist concepts such as connectedness and relatedness. Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, and Surrey (1991), for example, define connectedness as establishing mutually empathetic and mutually empowering relationships, which occur within a relational context. The mere mention of exercising mastery and control directly contradicts what empowerment means for women. This difference in the definition of empowerment is important in community psychology, because much of the research conducted in the field focuses on the male-centered definition of empowerment, thereby excluding women. Riger (1993) contended "the empowered individual in community psychology need not be the individual in isolation or even in groups, fighting with others for power and control. Rather, we should consider connection as important as empowerment" (p.290).

A very powerful example of the meaning of empowerment for women is a study by Shields (1995) to determine the understanding of women's experiences of empowerment as a tool in further developing the concept of empowerment. The findings indicated that women understand empowerment as encompassing three core themes. The first theme is the understanding of the internal sense of self through "me," a sense of being in touch with oneself. The second theme focused on the ability to take action based on the internal sense of self. It is empowerment from within oneself, while possessing the skills to take action. The third theme of empowerment for women is connectedness. These themes are supported by the feminist clinicians Jordan et al. (1991) who emphasized that women feel empowered through creating and sustaining connection with others. Through this connection each individual is energized into action. Western society encourages separation and individuation (which have been the ongoing

themes of androcentric empowerment) and does not encourage growth through connection.

Jordan et al. stated that it is only in valuing our human connections that we can begin to take the risks necessary to empower our relationships.

A feminist agenda. In an attempt to close the gap between community psychology and feminism, Mulvey (1988) proposed a feminist agenda, pointing out a number of issues that community psychologists need to address. For example, a major issue for feminism is violence against women. Thus, community psychologists could develop intervention programs based on primary prevention principles, which would be aimed at the institutionalized conditions that perpetuate forms of violence against women. An example of this type of program was an intervention implemented by the Community Education Team at Wilfrid Laurier University (Community Education Team, 1999). The intervention was aimed at schools in southwestern Ontario to prevent violence against women through the use of collective drama. The team used the feminist concept of relationality in working with the participants through collective drama to facilitate social change.

Mulvey (1988) also recommended training and courses in feminism within the community psychology curriculum. Although many community psychology programs touch upon feminist concepts, these programs lack training and courses in feminism. This is ironic in a field that appears to have many women enrolling in its graduate programs. The fundamental values of community psychology (i.e., empowerment, diversity, equality, etc.) that draw women to community psychology graduate programs unfortunately fail to promote these values when feminist concepts are only touched upon. Such programs need to be more focused on women's issues and the systemic effects of institutionalized sexism. Practicum settings and field placement experiences are also very rich areas in which to incorporate feminist perspectives.

Integrating a feminist agenda would mean changing the traditional teaching methods of lecturing to a more participatory approach. This approach would emphasize empowerment models and encourage students to draw from their own experiences.

In a more recent publication by Bond and Mulvey (2000) it was suggested that incorporating a feminist agenda into community psychology required bringing in voices from the margins and linking women across status boundaries. Bond and Mulvey (2000) found that much of the pressure for ideological change comes most effectively from the margins and both feminism and community psychology hold strong values in hearing the voices of the marginalized. It was also stressed that linking women across status boundaries would help encourage the continuation of women in feminism and community psychology. Bond and Mulvey (2000) found in the 1970's and 1980's many women who were initially attracted to community psychology often chose other professional avenues than community psychology because the alternatives were more feminist in orientation. Linking women across status boundaries offers support to new professionals choosing to work in the field of community psychology and practice feminism.

Incorporating a feminist agenda into community psychology could do much to empower women through the use of community psychology values and interventions. Feminist research accepts women's stories as legitimate sources of knowledge, while promoting an ethic of caring in sharing those stories (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). This thesis is an example of how community psychology and feminism can be strengthened by the connection between the two disciplines. Another example of strengthening feminism in community psychology are the women's groups that Bond and Mulvey (2000) describe that come together to promote women in community psychology. Community psychologists have attempted to address many issues with

regard to women through theoretical and empirical work in the interest of women. This shift in theoretical and empirical work in the interest of women means a shift in redefining the nature of knowledge and the process of conducting research, through both a community psychology and a feminist lens (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). I will attempt to further this goal by using the principles of both community psychology and feminism. It is my hope that using the strengths of both of these disciplines will produce a powerful piece of work for women, feminism, and community psychology.

Current Literature on Issues of Equality in Marriage

The following is a review of the current literature available surrounding issues of equality in marriage. Following the literature review, I outline my research objectives for this study. Then I include the methods I plan to use and a brief description of how I analyzed and verified the data. I also consider ethical matters.

Current Pressures on Contemporary Marriage

Western culture has been based in patriarchy, “a hierarchical system of social relations that creates and maintains inequality between men and women” (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1996, p. 142). It is through this cultural bias that men and women learn to interact with one another. Bem (1993) stated that there are three cultural lenses through which women and men learn to view their relationships that maintain gender inequality. These cultural lenses are: biological essentialism, androcentrism, and gender polarization. It is important to understand these terms and their origins to fully appreciate the impact Western culture has on female/male relationships. With a brief understanding of these three cultural lenses we can begin to formulate a foundation of the sexual inequality within a marital institution.

Biological essentialism legitimates social differences and inequalities between the sexes

as a result of biology. Darwin's theory of evolution emphasized the natural selection of certain species based on survival of the fittest. Although Darwin did not directly focus on gender selection, some of his interpreters presupposed that males are more highly evolved than females. What is important to note about Darwin's theory, Bem argued, is that he had very little knowledge about genes. This is important, because Darwin could not assume that males were more highly evolved than females, as indicated by the interpreters of his theory of survival of the fittest. Biological essentialism perpetuates social differences and inequalities because men can fertilize many women, while women can only be fertilized by one male at a time.

The second cultural lens, androcentrism, defines the male experience as the standard for behaviour by which both men and women are judged. Androcentrism reinforces how male power is culturally and psychologically reproduced. The male/female relationship is seen in terms of dominate/subordinate views, with males being the dominant sex.

Bem (1993) stated that, even if biological essentialism and androcentrism were eliminated, gender polarization would remain because social life is so linked to the distinction between women and men. Gender polarization defines women and men in opposite terms and organizes social life around these differences. Gender polarization operates in two significant ways. It defines the scripts for men and women by which they learn how to interact. Secondly, any deviations from these scripts become problematic and abnormal. I do recognize that there are other very different analyses of gender relations available, however, I have chosen to focus on Bem's analyses to simply create a starting point with which to examine gender relations. I found Bem's analyses of the cultural lens provided a meaningful and concrete way of beginning to examine gender relations and appropriate introduction into the literature surrounding marriage.

By traditional definition, a marriage relationship involves a man and a woman who live together, joined economically, socially, and legally (Johnson, Huston, Gaines Jr., & Levinger, 1992). Models of normal, healthy marital relationships surround traditional role structures that emphasize two white, middle-class parents (Rabin, 1994). In traditional heterosexual relationships the man is typically assumed to handle all financial responsibilities. He is the breadwinner and in charge of his family. The female role encompasses childcare and domestic responsibilities. The woman's role is to serve her husband and her family. Such traditional relationships are still quite common (Regan & Sprecher, 1995).

The social construction of gender is a central concept that social scientists have used to understand traditional marriages. In the past, the family has functioned as a "gender factory" (Risman & Johnson-Sumerford, 1998). This term refers to the polarization of masculine and feminine characteristics that are created and recreated on a daily basis. Gender polarization defines exclusive scripts for women and men in their everyday tasks and interactions with one another. Gender is constructed at all levels of social life: the structural, cultural, historical, and interpersonal (Thompson & Walker, 1995). However, the focus of gender appears to be most evident in family and intimate relationships. This is where gender has continued to be viewed as a reasonable and legitimate basis for the distribution of rights, power, and privilege (Risman & Johnson-Sumerford, 1998). This construction of gender perpetuates oppressive power relations between women and men.

There has been a dramatic increase in the flexibility of the roles between women and men as a result of the contemporary women's movement (Blaisure & Allen, 1995). Within close relationships, in particular marriage, there have been many changes away from the traditional definition and structure of marriage. Although many women work outside the home to ease the

family's financial burden, many also now choose to do so for their own self-fulfillment. It is important to note the class distinction that is present in women who work outside the home versus women who choose to have a career. For the purposes of this thesis I am looking at women who choose to pursue a career.

In the last century many couples have been striving to attain equitable relationships (Cooper, Arkkelin, & Tiebert, 1994). These relationships would treat both partners equally, involve mutual respect, and be consistent with sharing all of the responsibilities within the family unit. It would not be the responsibility of one partner alone to maintain the relationship, the family, or even the financial success of the couple. The personal goals of both partners would be deemed equally important. However, it is important to make the distinction between equitable and egalitarian relationships.

Regan and Sprecher (1995) define equity as a concept that is subjectively defined as a person's perceptions of justice and fairness. In other words, people and their understanding of justice and fairness in a relationship define equity. Egalitarianism, on the other hand, is a concept objectively defined, based on equality between the partners in terms of their contributions. These contributions are largely rooted in traditional female/male roles. "Egalitarian" does not necessarily mean equitable. In the interviews with the women in this study I incorporated Regan and Sprecher's (1995) definition of equitable in both the interviews and the overall analysis. Why I chose this definition will be further explained at that time.

Brunstein, Dangelmayer, and Schultheiss (1996) defined personal goals as the "consciously accessible and personally meaningful objectives people pursue in their daily life. Personal goals indicate what individuals are striving for in their current life situations and what

they try to attain or avoid in various life domains” (p. 1006). Personal goals provide us with purpose and meaning.

When studying contemporary marriages, the distinction between egalitarianism and equity and the acknowledgment of personal goals are very important. Women have come to hold high expectations where their lives are concerned: dual-career, individual pursuits, and fulfilling equal marriages. In the 1990’s, there are more dual-career marriages than ever before. This dual-career lifestyle brings unique stresses to the relationship that traditional marriages often do not face (Feinauer & Williams-Evans, 1989). These unique stresses include inadequate negotiation of responsibilities and lack of family time. Much research has been conducted on the dynamics of dual-career marriages in relation to marital happiness (e.g., Schroeder, Blood, & Maluso, 1992; Wiersma, 1994). This literature centers around two main challenges in the dual-career marriage: contributions to the relationship in the form of domestic responsibilities and the distribution of childcare.

Domestic responsibilities are a major issue in dual-career marriages. Regan and Sprecher (1995) stated that this potential conflict is due to the perceived value each person places on the particular contribution. It is this “value” that determines if each partner is giving equally. The problem, according to Regan and Sprecher, is that due to gender differences there exists an inconsistency between partners regarding the value of a given domestic task. For example, when two people are judging the same task (e.g., yardwork), they may not agree on the value of doing that particular domestic duty. One partner could place more value on the yardwork than the other partner. Tensions can arise as a result of conflicting views of the value of the contribution. Even in egalitarian marriages (Risman & Johnson-Sumerford, 1998), women continue to be

responsible for the household operating smoothly. Thus, although the couple may be sharing domestic work, they do not share responsibility.

There also exists much stress surrounding childcare. Women in dual-career families still perform the majority of the parenting (Wiersma, 1994). Men appear to take on responsibility for childcare only when the demand is great (Thompson & Walker, 1995). It appears that this imbalance in childcare responsibilities is largely a result of male sex-role socialization. Men traditionally have been conditioned to be the breadwinners and the head of their household. This socialization is difficult to ignore even when this role has been altered by the presence of a second wage earner. There also exists socialization of women to accept the fact that they perform the majority of the parenting, despite their many other responsibilities. In many dual-career families, it is a husband's willingness to be involved in childcare and household responsibilities that determines when and if the couple will have children (Wiersma, 1994). These challenges and their impact on marital happiness have been widely addressed in the previous research. Researchers have found that marital happiness does decline in many dual-career marriages, in particular for women (Lye & Biblarz, 1993). Based on the literature, it could be concluded that women's marital happiness declines as a result of being overloaded by their responsibilities and their lack of practical support from their husbands.

Stresses for women include lack of leisure time, overly high expectations for themselves, insecurity in their individual identity and role-confusion, as well as discrepancies between cultural expectations for women's roles and changing social norms with regard to career expectations (Feinauer & Williams-Evans, 1989). Blaisure and Allen (1995) described how the concept of distributive justice has been utilized to explain why women fail to consider the imbalanced division of family work as unfair. Women compare themselves to other women and

often come to view their situation as not as bad in comparison. In Western culture, the desired outcome for women is appreciation, not equality (Thompson & Walker, 1995). Women feel satisfaction where their husbands acknowledge their efforts within their household and for their family. Women measure level of care from their husbands in the form of completing disliked tasks as opposed to counting the amount of time and the number of tasks completed.

An even greater challenge is presented for the couples that are living the “myth of equality.” Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1996) defined this myth as the tendency to regard unequal relationships as equal. This “myth of equality” arises out of egalitarian ideals versus societal realities and couples create an illusion of equality within their relationship to disguise the inequalities in the relationship. Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1996) emphasized that this type of relationship creates problems for women, men, and children. As a result, women internalize their self-blame, have low self-esteem, and feel a sense of failure because they cannot handle the responsibilities of running a household. These internalized feelings prevent change within the relationship because the couple is unaware that there is any inequality within the relationship. On the other hand, couples that do not live the myth of equality may agree to strive for change in the relationship to create a more equal environment. The conclusion appears to be that as long as women and men define their relationships in terms of traditional gender socialization, it is difficult to attain equal relationships even if equality is their goal.

As to the influence of parental roles on marriage, there have been previous studies but their focus has been mainly on studying how parents rear children to have a particular attitude towards marriage. Mothers typically have a greater influence on their daughters than fathers do with respect to developing gender-role attitudes (Snyder, Velasquez, Clark, & Means-Christensen, 1997). However, these findings do not address parental influence on women

entering marriage or in an existing marriage. Schroeder, Blood, and Maluso (1991) concluded that, although many college women in the U.S. had received support and preparation for occupational goals, there had been little maternal emphasis on the combination of career and marriage. There appeared to be a movement back to traditional attitudes towards marriage (which I described earlier) for college women. This movement appears to be due largely to their socialization experiences and holding similar attitudes to that of their parents.

With the many changes and challenges described facing women in contemporary marriage, it is useful to provide a feminist analysis of the future of marriage. Feminism places emphasis on the oppressive character of structural inequality based on gender. Recent feminist analyses have provided a fresh look at an age-old problem: relationships as gendered constructions. This focus has emphasized the problematic nature of marriage and family life for women and has provided a critique of traditional gender-structured marriage (Blaisure & Allen, 1995). With this in mind, I will present a feminist perspective to help outline my research objectives.

It is through a feminist analysis that I chose to conduct my study of six women in graduate studies within the context of their marriage, in southwestern Ontario. The findings of my research could be important for women who are trying to combine marriage and career: their choices of a marriage partner, the decisions women make within the marriage, and their overall fulfillment in a marriage context. It is my belief that women can thrive within the institution of marriage provided certain changes are made to ensure their equality. These vital changes, such as support for the decision to pursue further education, need to occur in order to make the move toward an equitable marriage where both partners can feel empowered and free to grow as themselves and within their marriage.

Three specific areas in which women are affected by attempting to create a more equal marriage are: the difficulty in choosing a partner; internal struggles of having both a successful marriage and career; and external pressures from friends, family, and social institutions (e.g., work environments). I will explain these specific areas in turn in greater detail.

The difficulty in choosing a partner is addressed by Novack and Novack (1996), who suggested that women and men ensure they discuss fundamental issues (e.g., the importance of careers) before they are married. What is important from this study is that the researchers recognized that what needs to be addressed is the gap between anticipated choices and actuality. My concern is that what may be discussed before the marriage does not necessarily hold true after the wedding and the introduction of children to the marriage.

The combination of marriage and a career, although widely acceptable for men, is uncharted territory for women. The gender inequality between women and men that has been discussed results in inconsistencies in ideals between what a woman strives for and what she has been conditioned to adhere to. In one respect, women are encouraged to pursue their educational dreams - - until they are married and begin having children (Novack & Novack, 1996). With the onset of marriage and children, women become distinctly aware of what their designated role in society is: to be a wife and mother. The internal struggle of wanting both marriage and a career but receiving mixed messages around this issue can leave a woman feeling selfish and confused. The mixed messages that women receive may further explain the results in the study by Schroeder, Blood, and Maluso (1991) who found women college graduates to be retreating from contemporary attitudes about marriage to more traditional attitudes. The question, in my opinion, is what or who is perpetuating gender inequality and sending women mixed messages with regards to marriage and career aspirations? Another important question to consider is, as an

oppressed group, how have women internalized these pressures, thus unconsciously pressuring themselves (Miller, 1976)?

The impact of external pressures from friends, family, and social institutions (e.g., work environments) with which women come into contact can be great. For instance, Smith and Reid (1986) found that parents of the couple were the least accepting of contemporary marriage choices. This is a critical conclusion, because it is our parents who shape a significant portion of our behaviour and it is from them that we seek approval in the choices we make. In my view, it would also seem logical that our friends and the social institutions (e.g., work environments) we come into contact with would have an influence on our daily lives. Smith and Reid (1986) also noted that couples often seek friends who share similar marriage values and do not discuss personal matters in institutions that they sense will not be approving.

It was my view that the impact of external factors on women's goals and life choices after they are married needed to be addressed. I was interested in if women were still being forced to conform to societal expectations, did their personal social network (e.g., family, friends, institutions) play a part in the coercion? Based on the previous literature and my undergraduate thesis, these were the types of questions that I felt were important for the future of women and their role in marriage. It was my hope that these questions would help answer why Schroeder, Blood, and Maluso (1991) found that some university women were moving back to traditionalism and conservatism. It was my belief that women are being coerced into the role of traditional wife and mother by a patriarchal society that influences the social network of many women. This coercion produces limitations for women to grow and pursue their own goals. These beliefs are my own and I have used a specific section titled "My Personal Journey" as an appropriate outlet to discuss these beliefs in conjunction with the findings of this study.

Research Objectives

The two specific goals of this research were: 1) to explore the inequalities between men and women in relation to marriage; and 2) to explore the impact of external pressures on women and their choices within their marriages. In this study I used a narrative method to interview women varying in age from approximately mid-twenties to mid-forties, in southwestern Ontario, early in their marriage (approximately one to eight years). Interview data entirely consisted of the women's personal stories. Because I was interested in exploring the marriages of these women from their perspective, the interview structure was relatively open-ended to allow the women to express their personal accounts in their own words.

Methodology

The Narrative Method

Most of the research I have reviewed offers statistical, quantitative information about the marital happiness of women rather than the experiences of the women themselves. In my opinion, it is through empowering experiences such as having a voice in a research interview that women can have the opportunity to focus on themselves and their needs. In order to answer my main questions appropriately, research requires the first-hand experiences of women.

Accordingly, women's personal accounts of their experiences provided the data for this research. Many feminist researchers favor the interview method, because it allows the woman to tell her story herself (Reinharz, 1992). Feminist research uses women's subjective experience and their voice as the new resource for analyzing and interpreting gender difference. In addition, I used the narrative method to derive themes. The narrative approach is viewed as a powerful analytical tool because it accesses people's natural abilities as storytellers (Rappaport, 1993). It is through

narratives that we make meaning of our experiences, how we learn, and make choices for the future. It is this element of meaning in our experiences that quantitative research cannot include.

People explain their reason, intentions, and their thinking in narratives. Rappaport (1995) stated that narratives could tell who we are, who we have been, and who we can be. In using a narrative method it was important to determine whether I would choose a modified version (e.g., a questionnaire guide) or encourage full disclosure of the women's stories as they have seen them unfold. This decision presented a challenge, because it was difficult to be sure what would work best for the women and the research questions I asked. To deal with this challenge, I created an interview guide to use if I needed it.

The advantage of a full narrative approach is literally the unlimited fountain of information that is possible to obtain. It is a relatively unbiased, open-ended approach to finding out the women's stories exactly as they interpret them. This approach empowers the women to include or exclude any information they choose. As well, it is the women who are in control of the direction of the interview. I believe it is the full narrative approach that epitomizes the values of feminist research, because it empowers the women to have a voice of their own and explain their experiences in their terms.

The disadvantage of using a full narrative approach is the possibility of not completely answering my research questions. My second goal in my research objective, to explore the impact of external pressures on women and their choices within their marriage, was addressed differently than I had anticipated. My initial assumption was that the women would discuss any external pressures they were feeling from outside sources (i.e., family, friends, institutions). Although these women did not report feeling any direct influence on their lives from external sources, it is important to note that their stories did indicate pressure in some form or another.

This perceived lack of influence by family and friends was due to the finding that the women see their partners as their main source of emotional support. This finding offered a new perspective to examine (which will be further explained in the Overall Analysis).

There are advantages and disadvantages to both a fully narrative method and a modified version (Reissman, 1993). The advantage of a modified narrative approach is that it takes the interview in a specific direction. The researcher has definite research questions and the interview guide enables the interviewer to find the answers. This approach saves considerable time for both the participant and the researcher. With a direct focus the researcher decreases the amount of time for which the researcher needs the participant and the researcher can spend less time sifting through the information that the participant provides. The disadvantage of a modified narrative approach is the specific direction of the interviews. This direction can impose limits on what the participants offer, because they are usually aware that there is a direct goal. A direction can also risk the imposition of the researcher's assumptions and may foreclose anticipated discoveries. The limited amount of time can prevent the participants from obtaining a level of trust that enables them to disclose certain personal information. It is this personal information that may provide some further insight into the key research issues of interest.

It is also important to address my preference for the full narrative approach and my own interpretations of the women's stories. I am referring to the possibility of projecting my own issues onto what the women may be disclosing. To deal with this bias I kept a personal journal (Reinharz, 1992) that provided an outlet for my own issues and feelings about what the women disclosed in the interviews. I believe creating this type of outlet for myself prevented me from projecting my own feelings on the women or what they offered from their stories. I have included a section further on that allows the reader some insight in to my personal journey during

this thesis.

The Sample

The sampling strategy I used was to solicit volunteers through the MSW program at Wilfrid Laurier University. I placed a Participant Recruitment Posting (see Appendix A) throughout the Social Work department at Wilfrid Laurier University and the women were self-selected for the study.

This sample fit the profile of the type of women I wanted to study: married women pursuing further graduate education. One of the women was living common-law with her partner and I felt this was appropriate for this study. The age range of the women was approximately 20 to 40 years old. Three of the women had children. The ethnicity and class of the women was Caucasian and middle-class. The goals of this thesis did not specify an ethnic preference or a class preference, however, based on the women who volunteered it is important to draw attention to the fact that there is some class-bound implications. At this point I will make a distinction between women who work outside of the home versus women who choose to pursue a career. Many women who work outside of the home do so for economic reasons and it is often not a choice. Women who choose to pursue a career are a very different group of women and the findings of this study I suspect would be quite different for these two groups of women. This study could not be generalized to women who are working outside of the home.

I interviewed women from one university, which may have also been a limitation because the culture from university to university is often different. Another limitation to this sample was the possibility of the women recognizing the identity of their peers as a result of the women all volunteering from the same MSW program.

Another limitation is the lack of generalizability of the results of this study to the

general population. With a sample size as small as six and a population as limited as women from the MSW program at Wilfrid Laurier University, I cannot with confidence state that the findings could be generalized to the broader population of women. It is important to note that the goal of qualitative research is not to generalize. However, the findings of this study could be transferable to another sample of six women with similar criteria (i.e., women in an MSW program, similar age range, etc.)

Interview Topics

I provided an Interview Guide (see Appendix B) that was used very loosely to help outline certain topics I hoped to learn about. The broad topics I covered were: background information about the women, the story of their marriage, the women's definition of equitable marriage, and any outside influences and external pressures. I selected each topic area based on the literature I reviewed, my own personal experience, and my experience conducting my undergraduate thesis, "Exploring the Impact of Societal Pressure on a Woman's Life Choices and Individual Happiness Early in Marriage" (Ozolins, 1998).

First, I elicited background information about the women and the story of their marriage to enable the reader to have some insight into the women's experience, in their own words. Background information about the women was sought to keep their stories personal and to give the stories a context, while taking steps to protect their confidentiality. I identified the topic of the women's definition of equitable marriage, because, as outlined by Johnson et al. (1992), Rabin (1994), and Regan and Sprecher (1995), there are many different definitions of marriage and I was interested in how the women themselves defined marriage. I was eager to see if the women had similar definitions of an equitable marriage and if their definitions were direct reflections of the reality of their marriage. I felt this would be an important if the women's

definitions of marriage did not reflect their reality of marriage. From a personal perspective I also found my own definition of marriage changed from when I was single and then after I was married. I also felt, as Cooper et al. (1994) pointed out, that many couples are striving to attain equitable relationships, thus I needed to ascertain a clearer definition of equitable marriage from the point of view of the women who volunteered to participate. The final topic I chose, outside influences and external pressures, was sparked by both the literature and my undergraduate thesis findings. These topics served as very general guidelines to help the women have some direction to their stories, however, quite often the interviews took on a life of their own.

Schroeder et al. (1991) concluded that there had been little maternal emphasis on the combination of career and marriage, suggesting a movement back to traditional attitudes towards marriage. Novack and Novack (1996) stated that women were encouraged to pursue their educational goals until they are married and begin having children. Once married, women are expected to fall into their designated role as wife and mother. The experiences of the women I interviewed for my undergraduate thesis were consistent with these findings. All of these women reported feeling pressure from their social networks (i.e., friends and family) to change some of their life choices once they were married.

Interview Process

I conducted two interviews with each woman. The first interview provided the framework for the in-depth stories of the women and their marriages. The second interview allowed the women the opportunity to make any changes to their stories and make any comments on their experience of the interview process. This process ensured consistency between what the women shared and my recordings of their experience. Both interviews with the women occurred at their choice of location.

The interviews began with me asking the women to tell me about the story of their marriage and each woman started with the story of their courtship. Some of the women were unsure if that was the appropriate place to begin and I encouraged anything they wanted to share with me. My specific topics were addressed throughout the interview at various points. Occasionally I would use my Interview Guide (see Appendix B) as mostly probes to help the interview along if the women were struggling with where to take the interview. I audio-taped the interviews (with permission from each woman) in order to obtain an accurate record of the interview. In addition, I recorded my personal reflections about the women's stories after the interviews were completed. After each interview, I transcribed the tape-recorded conversations verbatim. I provided each woman with her own transcript to give her the opportunity to make any changes or to clarify any information. Several of the women made grammatical changes to their transcripts and one woman edited out specific personal information in her transcript. The overall responses to the transcripts was that the transcripts represented what the women were telling in their stories.

Data Analysis

Riessman (1993) suggested a method of narrative analysis that uses verbatim transcripts of narratives, as well as the researcher's interpretations. It is this method of narrative analysis that I chose to follow. By studying the sequence of the women's stories in their interviews, as well as the thematic and linguistic connections between them, I was able to see how each woman tied together significant events and described the important relationships in her life. For the purposes of this research I looked at the individual women's stories and then at the connections among the women's stories as a whole in the Overall Analysis.

At the beginning of each woman's interview I included an individual profile for two main

reasons, to respect the individuality of each woman and to offer the reader an impression of each woman's situation. Following the individual profile, I offered the reader each woman's story as she herself told it to me. Each story is reflected in the sequence the women chose to tell it and very little is left out. When I excluded a portion of the interview for any reason, I explained it in the individual profile of the woman. I included direct quotes to demonstrate to the reader the focus each woman took in her interview. It is my belief that direct quotes help the reader gain insight into the true experience of the woman, in her own words. Throughout the women's stories, I also included my opinions and interpretations to offer the reader a sense of my own thoughts during each interview. After each woman's individual interview, I compared and contrasted all the women's stories in an overall analysis.

My first step in the process of creating the overall analysis was to again look at each individual woman's main themes in her interview. For each woman, I created a list of the themes she addressed in her interview. Once I had completed a list for each woman, I then compared the lists to see if there were any commonalities. I then created another list of themes that were common among the women. To break the analysis down one step further, I created a diagram (see Diagram 1) that included: first the women's individual choices, goals, and decisions. Then the women's marriage and the themes in the context of that marriage and then lastly, the external pressures and supports. I divided up the themes into three categories: individual, marital, and external pressures and supports. It is within these categories that the emerging themes are presented. As stated earlier, I also have provided a separate section of my own personal journey, which includes my own biases, frustrations, and general thoughts about the interviews.

Verification and Trustworthiness of Data.

Establishing the trustworthiness of the data is essential in any research, but particularly in qualitative research due to its relatively unstructured nature. As a researcher, I attempted to ensure that I am accountable to the reader for the research I have conducted.

To ensure the trustworthiness of my data and credibility I first used the process of member checking. Feeding back the information to the participants assisted me in not misinterpreting their responses and enabled the women to change any of their responses. The women were given this opportunity through two interviews and ongoing contact with the participants. In meeting with the women twice, I felt I was able to establish a trusting relationship with them and record their stories accurately.

Ethical Considerations.

A research study cannot take place and is not complete without a focus on the ethical concerns of the study. This research required special ethical considerations due to the sample and the nature of the content being studied. The highly personal content of the study presented some challenges to the women that require careful consideration of their ethical rights.

Each woman was involved on a voluntary basis and could withdraw from the study at any time during the entire process. I also gave each woman the option to not share any information she was uncomfortable with, thereby reducing any feelings of threat or risk to the women. I provided each woman with an Information Sheet (see Appendix B) at the beginning of the interview explaining the study. I also provided the women with a contact number to reach me in case they had any questions about the study. I then asked each woman to sign an Informed Consent Statement (see Appendix D) outlining her rights in the study (e.g., the right to withdraw from the study, the right to not include certain information). I alone reviewed the consent forms

and transcripts. Upon completion of the thesis I intend to destroy all consent forms and transcripts. During the process of the study, I stored the transcripts in my home in a locked drawer to ensure confidentiality. After obtaining permission from the women, I audio-taped the interviews to ensure accuracy. I alone reviewed the tapes and will erase them once the study is complete. In the final report, there are no actual names or identifying characteristics used to ensure that there is no connection made to the women; in fact, I assigned pseudonyms to each woman to protect her confidentiality. In addition, through the process of two interviews the women were offered the opportunity to verify my notes and add or delete any information. This procedure ensured that their rights were respected and that I was not misinterpreting their personal stories.

An important ethical challenge that I faced with this study was confidentiality. Although I took measures to ensure the confidentiality of the women (i.e. pseudonyms, destroying the transcripts, etc.) anonymity was still an issue due to the sample size and the familiarity among the participants and their MSW peers. In order to further protect the women's identity, particularly from each other, I was very careful not to be too descriptive in their background information. For example, I chose to provide an age range rather than specific ages of the women and make their descriptions vague, while providing the reader with just enough information that a general sense of the woman could be established.

An important benefit of this study to the participants was the empowering experience of the women who had the opportunity to have their voices heard. These women indicated eagerness in their comments to me about participating in a study for women. The experience in itself can be very valuable for women. In research surrounding marriage, women are not often given the opportunity to express themselves in an open narrative fashion.

To provide feedback (see Appendix E) about this study to the women, I will mail a copy of the main points and findings from the completed study. If the women request a copy of the entire study, I will provide them with information on how to obtain it. I will also provide the women with a contact number so the women may call me if they have any questions about my feedback report. Feedback is a strength of this study for the women as it will provide them with a critical social analysis. Using feedback as a critical analysis is an example of feminist research in practice.

The Women's Stories

Jane

Jane was the first woman I interviewed so I was feeling a bit anxious. Jane was my pilot interview. Jane was very eager to participate and she helped make the interview a relaxing and enjoyable time. After discussing with Jane where the most convenient location to meet would be, we agreed that my office on campus was the ideal location, because it provided privacy and was easy to find. At the time of the interview, Jane had been with her partner for eight years and married to him for three years. This was Jane's first marriage. She appeared to be in her late twenties or early thirties, and she had no children. Before beginning the MSW program, Jane had been working in front line work in the social services and decided that she did not want to do that long-term, which prompted her to pursue her MSW. Jane made no changes to the transcript in the second interview and Jane concluded our time together by commenting that she found the interview experience a comfortable one.

Jane's Interview

Jane began by discussing her decision to pursue her MSW and the impact that decision had on both herself and her husband. Jane stated that her husband was supportive of her decision

to return to school, but she expressed how frustrating this decision was for her husband due to finances:

He was supportive for the most part, a little bit frustrating I think because when we first got married we were forty thousand dollars in debt from OSAP from both of us, and so we worked really hard to pay it off in a year. It was pretty tough for me to go back to school after we had gone so far to get rid of financial stresses and then one income and then basically living on ten thousand dollars a year, so, it's like one step forward, two steps back, so I think he was a little bit frustrated with that.

Jane emphasized how difficult it was to return to a time when money was so tight after working full-time and living on two incomes. This was a change both Jane and her husband had financial pressures to adjust to with the decision to return to full-time studies.

Jane then provided an understanding of how some women might struggle with internalized pressure surrounding a personal decision, such as returning to school. In discussing her need to take on more household tasks than her husband:

As much as I try not to do it, there is still the pressure of doing certain things because it's what your supposed to do, um, I don't necessarily do that, yes and no. I think I put a lot of pressure on myself to do things more so than he does, like, whoever gets home first starts the dinner but I find that as soon as I walk in the house I take over – but I find that's more me than him.

Jane expressed an internalized pressure to take on more responsibility than her husband did for completing routine household tasks. It appeared that Jane felt she had to take on more responsibility at home to help justify the pay cheque she was not bringing home. It is clear that Jane felt that this pressure stems more from her own guilt due to returning to school when she said:

I think it's because, um, I have a bit of guilt for going to school. While he's the breadwinner, see that drives me crazy because it's almost like because I'm in school he's automatically the breadwinner which brings everything else that follows the breadwinner, like I rely on him financially right now, and I think that might be more my issues about not wanting to rely on a man.

I found it very interesting to hear Jane say that she was struggling with guilt for returning to school. I found myself again pondering my initial questions about who was creating this internal struggle? What is making Jane feel guilty about pursuing her own goals and do men experience this same internal struggle when they pursue their goals, such as returning to school?

Jane continued by explaining that she alleviated this guilt somewhat by working full-time. Jane used words like “putting my share in” and the “feeling of independence” to identify how she justified working full-time while attending school full-time. These word choices (seem to) imply that it was very important to Jane to feel as though she was continuing to contribute equally, even though she was attending full-time studies. Contributing equally appeared to refer to bringing in an income comparative to her husband. Jane further describes the emphasis on income:

I think it's the guilt thing again about um, that he makes more money than I do or he works harder or something – I think it has to do with something like that, I don't think he necessarily works harder than me but I think it's more, it's that whole thing where you sometimes go back to that old take care of him ideas, and I try not to do that.

Jane then shared with me her experiences of what marriage was like in the beginning. Jane is demonstrating the struggle between traditional and modern/egalitarian views of marriage. She explained that it was a stressful time because their marriage was following traditional patterns. Jane provided an example of the direction her marriage was taking:

Birthdays with extended family, you know, typically, stereotypically, the woman, the female partner takes care of all that stuff, they go buy the cards, they keep track on the calendar, they remind the husband to call brother, sister, mother – I did that as well as the banking, all the household stuff and then anything he needed – “Oh, you have to call so and so, can you call the paper and cancel it” so all of that stuff was my list of things to do and I did all of that, his list was pretty much nothing.

The above story illustrates Jane's frustration at having taken on much of the responsibility to keep the household operating smoothly. Jane demonstrated that there was a

tendency for her to take on too much and a silent acceptance by her husband for Jane to do all of those tasks. She used the word “stereotypically”, drawing attention to the fact that many women may find themselves in similar situations where they also are responsible for the smooth operation of the household. Jane using the word “stereotypically” also automatically sets up certain expectations for each partner in the marriage. The expectations can be seen in Jane continuing to keep the household operating smoothly and her husband continuing to silently accept this. At one point in the interview Jane identifies that both she and her husband had these types of expectations of marriage.

At this point I was interested in Jane’s definition of an equitable marriage. I felt that Jane’s perception of an equitable marriage might provide some insight into the type of marriage Jane and her husband were striving toward. Jane’s narrative about the definition of an equitable marriage was an interesting segue into some power issues in their marriage:

I think giving and taking without any thought of, like I have found that when we first got married he, the dynamics were very different. It was like a roller coaster, one person was feeling great, while the other person was feeling down and that was very much, I think there wasn’t a safety there yet, it wasn’t secure, it was still new and so I think there was more power, I don’t know if I’d say power, ya I’d say power. One person would have the power and the other person would not and that would fluctuate extremely and it would cause problems but I think that’s equaled out over the years.

Jane’s story demonstrates the power imbalance that existed early in the marriage. The power imbalance seemed to be a result of insecurities between Jane and her husband. Jane later suggested that there was still some insecurity between her husband and herself when she returned to school to pursue her MSW. Jane also expressed some frustration at having to discuss her decision to return to school with her husband. Jane’s strong focus on the guilt she felt made me think that there may be some underlying explanation for the guilt, insecurity, and frustration that

Jane felt within her marriage and about her choices. My feeling prompted me to ask Jane what she thought was the underlying explanation.

Jane then shared with me the environment in which she was raised. It seemed Jane felt that she had been conditioned to be a stereotypical wife and mother. She explained the pressure that she felt in the following excerpt:

I grew up in a very traditional home, my mom didn't work, she worked in the home, she was very traditional – to the extreme, dinner would be ready when my dad came home, everything would be taken care of, like it was the extreme I think and so I think I try to fight against that sometimes.

This excerpt helped me understand Jane's feelings of guilt, insecurity and frustration at not portraying the traditional wife and mother. Jane continued by explaining how initially her family appeared to not completely understand her relationship with her husband. It seemed that Jane did not receive much emotional support from her family. In fact, she stated that she received the most emotional support from her husband. Jane also stated that their network of friends was somewhat weak. Friends were present but not influential. It struck me as sad that there was not more emotional/social support from family and/or friends. This narrative also raised an important question for me: what has happened to community? By community I mean a union of family and friends who are there to support one another through life. Jane's narrative demonstrated that for herself and her husband it was easier to support one another than to rely on support from family and friends.

Jane then disclosed to me her feelings about having children. The topic of children appeared to bring out some confusing and strong emotions in Jane. There was a definite feeling of pressure on Jane to have children and she makes this pressure clear in the following excerpt:

I've had comments said to me from friends who have just had a baby, started asking us so when are you going to have a baby. They (friends and parents) don't understand. We

usually just shrug it off. Sometimes I think it gets to us a little bit more than we are willing to admit. Like I'm not going to have a baby just because it's time.

Jane highlighted the fact that she is not willing to have a baby "just because it's time."

The term "it's time" represented to Jane the expectations and thoughts of friends and family with regards to the appropriate time in life to have a baby. Jane appeared to resent the comments and silent pressure to start having children. It is not surprising to me that Jane displayed some resentment, because it seemed she was often being forced to defend her choices with regards to children. For example, Jane had stated that at this point in her life she would prefer to have foster children rather than her own children and once again was made to justify this to family:

I don't know if I can see myself with children but I can see myself at some time being a foster parent for older children and that just blows people away. People always say, "Why would you do that?" well I just think there's enough children out there that could benefit from that than having my own.

The last excerpt that Jane shared with me was her insight into the changes in her marriage, because "had we continued down the road that we were both leading, trying to fit into prescribed roles as husband and wife in society, our marriage wouldn't have lasted at all." Jane expressed that if her marriage had not undergone major changes in the ways she and her husband related to one another, they wouldn't be together today. Some of these changes included Jane's husband taking on more responsibility in helping the household run smoothly (i.e., taking care of family birthdays, etc.). These changes did not occur without arguments between Jane and her husband along the way. Jane describes a crucial turning point:

I know things had to change or I would leave because I was so unhappy and I did leave because of it. I said I'm not doing this, I'm not. I ended up moving back but it took me leaving for him to recognize.

Jane appeared to feel strongly that, if she had not left and showed her husband that she was serious, things would not have changed. Jane continued with her narrative to explain that

initially her husband did resist the changes and Jane's assumption was that the resistance was due to her husband feeling comfortable in his role. Jane expressed an opinion that women also contribute to these roles because they "feed into that". It is my opinion that it is our societal norms that "feeds into that role" and that women respond to the pressures placed upon them. Jane also agreed that the pressure was stemming from a societal pull toward traditional patriarchal attitudes.

It is obvious from Jane's interview that she is a very independent woman, resistant to allow anyone to influence her against her own beliefs. I found Jane to be a "breath of fresh air" with her spunky attitudes and her ability to articulate her views. She was a very personable woman and I enjoyed our interview very much.

Katherine

I interviewed Katherine in a classroom we found empty in the Faculty of Social Work. Katherine was traveling from out of town to school, so it was most convenient for her to meet in between classes. Katherine and her husband had dated and lived common-law for approximately three years and have been married for three years. Katherine appeared to be in her thirties and this is her second marriage. Katherine and her husband have a child who was almost three years old at the time of the interview. At the time of deciding to pursue her MSW, Katherine had been working in business and decided it was not the line of work for her. After a great deal of soul searching she had decided that she would pursue her MSW. Katherine appeared to be a very confident and assertive woman, who knew what she wanted out of life. As a result of Katherine's commute and her busy school schedule, I offered to email her transcripts to her and have our second interview via the email system. Katherine was very appreciative of this

arrangement. Katherine felt comfortable with the transcripts and she had positive feedback about the interview process.

From the following accounts of Katherine's interview I have excluded a section describing her family and a section describing her husband's friends and interests. Katherine had stated that she and her husband received most of their support from each other so it did not seem relevant to include the brief descriptions of her family. I did not include the details of Katherine's husband's friends and interests because this interview is about Katherine and I chose to keep the focus on her.

Katherine's Interview

Katherine began our interview by describing her courtship and her wedding. Katherine and her husband had been living common-law and only made the decision to get married when they learned of Katherine's pregnancy:

We decided actually that we weren't going to get married, we were happy living common-law and we weren't going to get married. Then we planned our pregnancy, got pregnant and then sort of, as soon as we got pregnant (Katherine's husband) sort of felt the need to get married. I was fine with that, I didn't really care whether I was married or not.

From the beginning of our interview I had the impression that Katherine's marriage was not based on traditional norms. This was both Katherine's and her husband's second marriage, and it appeared that Katherine knew exactly what she wanted and did not want from a marriage. In fact, she stated, "because we were married before, we both were very clear about what we wanted in a marriage", prompting me to ask her to elaborate on what she meant when she said "we both were very clear about what we wanted in a marriage". Katherine went on to explain that her first marriage was based on typical gender roles:

I was working full-time and coming home and doing the second shift, doing all the cleaning, the cooking, that type of thing. And also looking back, huge sort of

communication breakdown between us, like when I was angry I wouldn't express my anger, I would keep it in. But then I would passive aggressively make sarcastic comments, so I sort of destructed the marriage that way. This was constantly, throwing sarcastic comments and that type of thing. So really it was textbook difficulties.

I found Katherine's reference to the "second shift" very interesting. This "second shift" refers to many women who face a second full-time job of operating a household, upon returning home from their paid employment. It appeared to be very clear that, although she had succumbed to the pressure of doing all the cleaning, cooking, and general household responsibilities in her first marriage, her awareness of the second shift made it possible to not repeat this pattern in her current marriage. An important aspect I would like to draw attention to is that due to Katherine's educational background (she minored in gender studies) she was able to label some of the inequality in her first marriage, for example, the "second shift". I found myself wondering if women in similar situations but with less education would be so self-aware.

Katherine continued the interview by discussing the presence of gender roles in her current marriage:

Oh, I think gender roles are always present, personally. In my present marriage, though, they are a bit more balanced. The gender roles are still sometimes around the different tasks. For instance, if the plumbing breaks, (Katherine's husband) does that. But he also does some of the typical gender roles like cleaning and shopping. But when it comes to looking after (Katherine's child), it's probably sixty-forty. Looking from the outside you might think it's equal. But it's the responsibilities of packing the bag, making sure that the bag has everything in it, that's what tips the childcare in to my work.

This excerpt demonstrates not only the fact that Katherine handles more responsibilities but it also important to comment on the burden of having these extra responsibilities. Stress results not just from the extra tasks involved but also from the amount of energy it requires to be constantly aware of and planning the extra tasks.

Katherine also mentioned that there was positive communication between herself and her husband with regard to responsibilities such as family birthdays, etc. It appeared to me that

because both Katherine and her husband had been married before, they were prepared for the type of marriage they wanted to be a part of and were willing to put out the effort to make the marriage successful. Katherine's attitude that there are always gender roles present appeared to make communication easier for herself and her husband because they were comfortable speaking quite openly about the presence of gender roles within the relationship.

At this point in the interview, I inquired about Katherine and her husband's support network through family and friends. Katherine spoke briefly about family and made a concluding statement that she and her husband offer an "amazing amount of support to each other," attributing that to learning from their first marriage and recognizing that the initial support to each other is necessary. Katherine then discussed the role her friends played in her marriage. She explained that her more intimate friendships were with those friends who are not as traditional:

I'm not as intimate with friends who are in traditional marriages as I am with those who are in egalitarian relationships. Mostly, that stems from my personality type, of not wanting to conflict with people and so that if somebody is, I mean I will speak up, but I wouldn't go into an hour debate justifying what I do.

Katherine continued to further say that she avoided certain topics with this group of friends. I asked what type of topics needed to be avoided and Katherine described a very interesting example. Katherine described a common assumption from the traditional group of friends that it is her responsibility to look after her child when out:

Sometimes if (Katherine's husband) and I are out with them, the traditional group, they'll often think that I should be looking after (Katherine's child) all the time, so if (child) falls and cries, my first reaction to that is to sort of sit back and wait to see how (child) responds. As soon as (child) falls I don't run, either (Katherine's husband) or I will go to (child).

I found this example interesting, because it offers the reader a concrete idea of what some subtle differences can be among certain groups of friends and how that impacts on Katherine's

marriage. I would assert that the assumption that Katherine should be taking care of her child at all times, made by the traditional group of friends, offers very little support to Katherine and her husband surrounding the choices they have made. I would also suggest that this lack of support creates pressure on Katherine, because if these people are friends then it is quite possible their opinions matter, at least to some degree. This pressure often results in a feeling of having to justify one's choices and actions.

The interview then took a slightly different direction as Katherine explained her definition of an equitable marriage:

Well, for me there's the, an equitable marriage is when two people are committed to each other and their relationship but also allow for self-growth individually and for me what that means is having the time to do that. So, what stems into that are the household tasks, the responsibilities of care, arranging for babysitting, that kind of thing. Just supporting each other.

This definition of an equitable marriage was interesting, because it appeared to have a connection with Katherine not having to do a "second shift" in her current marriage. This definition also suggested for me what is important to Katherine in a marriage relationship, the key components being support and self-growth. In addition to taking on responsibilities at home, we learn that Katherine's husband supports her journey in self-growth by encouraging her individual pursuits. Katherine then described what her individual pursuits consisted of:

Spending time with my family in general. Having time to call them up and talk for a few minutes on the phone or deciding let's go out to the park for the afternoon and that type of thing. The other one is social time with friends outside of work and family life. I find it's really important to me to have that outlet to talk about different things. A third goal is, we're not on a path to work as much as we can to become rich, we just want, like my ideal is to work three days a week. Spend the rest of the time growing myself or building relationships.

I was both in awe and inspired by Katherine's ability to have these goals as works in progress. Katherine admitted that she has not always placed herself among her list of priorities

and that this is an ongoing goal. Katherine's willingness to place herself amongst her list of priorities is very evident in this excerpt. I was reminded of how all too often women do not place themselves on the "list" of priorities.

The last topic Katherine and I discussed in the interview was power issues. Katherine felt the power issues that existed between her and her husband were around childcare and finances. Katherine felt she possessed more power in childcare and her husband held more power in terms of finances.

Although if you were to ask him the same question, I don't think that he would say the same thing. He would say he thinks our finance are equal, like I have full access to everything but for me a lot of that money was his money, so he had a lot of money before he entered into the relationship, so he works like what's mine is ours but I personally have struggled with accepting his money. So that's why I figure he has more power. Ever since I started undergrad I started to fight gender imbalances and so I have worked really hard to get where I am now having this equal marriage. What comes to mind is gender finances, childcare and those gender roles.

This excerpt makes it clear the conflict Katherine feels with gender role stereotypes and her own issues with power. Even though her husband feels that they share equal power, Katherine struggles with the issue of her husband having more power because he initially had more money. The question I have is, is it easier for the partner who holds more power to label the relationship an equitable one? Katherine further explained what she meant when she said, "I have worked really hard to get where I am now having this equal marriage":

The first thing was to educate myself on gender issues and stereotypes. In my undergrad doing a minor in gender studies, that opened up my eyes to gender stereotypes, which prior to that, although I knew about them, I didn't know how extreme they were. Also coming to terms with conflicting feelings of if I'm a good mother is it o.k. to let my kid fall? Watch and wait for my husband, who is the father to respond? At one time I had a cleaning lady and it was very hard to admit it because it was my job. I still have a hard time admitting it. It's those things, I'm not there totally yet.

This was a very important part of Katherine's interview. This excerpt illustrates two critical messages. The first message was that Katherine was very aware of gender stereotypes as

a result of her education. The second message was sharing the struggle she faced and continues to face with following her own path of marriage and motherhood. Katherine stated that she did not think these struggles would entirely ever be over because of gender stereotyping occurring so early in children's lives. "It's right from the time their born, the first question is what is it, a boy or girl?" This last quote really highlights how strongly women hold internalized expectations; how much struggle and awareness is required to resist giving in to these expectations.

I found Katherine to be a very assertive, confident woman who definitely had a sense of herself and a helpful level of social analysis. It is obvious from her interview that she has learned a great deal from her experiences in her first marriage and that these experiences have helped shape who she wants to be and the type of marriage she chooses to be in. Katherine left me with a great deal of food for thought.

Carol

Carol and I met on a sunny afternoon and decided to conduct the interview during a walk and a stop at a Tim Horton's for coffee. Carol was very personable and in a very short time it felt like we were old friends. Carol's approximate age was mid-twenties. Carol was employed in a variety of jobs, none of which satisfied her. She and her husband lived together for four years and have been married for three years. This is a first marriage for both of them and they currently have no children. At the time Carol decided to return to school to pursue her MSW she was working full-time and had decided she wanted to do more, in Carol's words, "link with people directly". There were no changes between our first and second interview, and Carol did not feel it was necessary to make any additions or deletions to the transcripts. Carol concluded our second interview by stating that she felt very comfortable during the interview process and she was pleased to be a part of research for and about women.

Carol's Interview

Carol began the interview by sharing with me how she came to the decision to return to school to pursue her MSW:

I think in second or third year one of my profs made the comment of me pursuing beyond that and (Carol's husband) was always o.k. with it, he was always supportive. I think (Carol's husband) likes the idea of going on for education, um, I think initially he was really excited, even when it got to my acceptance I think it was a hundred and ten percent and I think now he realizes that the sacrifice just won't have to be mine it will have to be his as well. I think that excitement is kind of dwindling, like I think he psychologically believes that education is a wonderful thing but I think in terms of practicality and reality I don't know that he is a hundred and ten percent behind it.

It seems apparent from this excerpt that Carol struggles with making a decision such as returning to school when it impacts on not just her life, but her husband's as well. Carol revealed that on the surface her husband appears supportive of her decision, however, she was uncertain as to his full support of her decision. As Carol considered what she was saying about her husband's level of support, she also attributed some of his resistance to returning to a time when resources are lacking due to a single income. The underlying guilt that Carol appeared to be experiencing prompted me to inquire whether Carol felt she was in an equitable marriage:

No, I'd have to say that's it's fairly traditional in terms of um, major decisions. A lot of them I believe are up to (Carol's husband), I think that I have more of a supporting role as opposed to a direct equal partnership.

As Carol had clearly defined her marriage as not equitable, I was interested in her definition of an equitable marriage. With some thought, Carol shared her thoughts on an equitable marriage:

I would say equal in terms of not even, not so much in terms of contributions but I mean I think an equal relationship is where both needs are being taken care of, both needs are being considered, um, goals and priorities of both parties are just as important, like obviously there's going to be some trade-offs in terms of whose needs get met when but I think there should be a balance between that.

It is possible, judging from this excerpt, that Carol's definition of an equitable marriage stems from the feeling that her needs, goals and priorities play second to that of her husband's.

This feeling of being second to her husband, raised the issue of power within Carol's marriage:

I think initially, I think our relationship is the way it is because when I first started dating (Carol's husband) I was 19 and I was looking for someone to be a guiding figure, someone who would take care of me, who would support me and now that I think that I've come in to my own and feeling more comfortable, it's difficult to change those fundamentals because they've already been established, so certain power struggles, me wanting to do certain things and pushing for some of my needs, (Carol's husband) tends to see it as a power struggle, my need to control him as opposed to my need to be taken care of, taking care of myself.

Carol is once again expressing her desire to have her needs met, which appears to be the main struggle between herself and her husband. It is interesting how Carol has changed over time within her marriage, her own personal process of maturation. This process of maturation has clearly created some struggles within the domain of her traditional marriage. I thought it was interesting that the power issues were about Carol's needs and did not seem to surround household responsibilities. Carol stated that (Carol's husband) was very supportive when it came to a concrete division of responsibilities:

Um, I would have to say that especially when I'm in school (Carol's husband) does most of it. Um, he's very, very good with that in terms of if we're both working it's fifty-fifty that includes laundry, groceries he always gets, cooking is pretty much who gets to it first. Birthdays depend on whose side of the family it is. His side, he takes care of it, my side, I take care of it.

Carol continued by sharing her opinion that she feels many marriages are still quite traditional. She also felt that women were not so much happy with their marriages as much as content and hesitant to change.

At this point in the interview I inquired about Carol's family and their attitude about Carol's decision to return to school. Carol was quick to insert that neither her family nor her husband's were supportive of many of the decisions they have made:

They don't encourage a lot of the things that we do in terms of, on neither side both males and females aren't supportive of me going to school, aren't supportive in my debate of whether I want to have children, um, the lack of desire to be a stay home mom, to want to have a career that's not secondary. I get a lot of comments about being a secondary role, a secretary or being a nurse as opposed to a doctor.

It would appear that there seems to be a pattern of Carol's wishes and needs not being respected by those around her. There also does not seem to be a great deal of support for the decisions she has made for her life. Carol then revealed why she is hesitant to have children:

It's been discussed, both of us talk about it quite often, especially with people around us having children, um, I'm still not sure if I want them or, not especially when I see how busy people are, mostly the women, how busy they are once they have children and I still see that as a primary female role and I'm not willing to make that big of a sacrifice so if I do have them it won't be for a number of years because I'm still not committed to the whole idea.

Carol has some reservations about having children because she is afraid of being solely responsible. I would suggest that it is frightening for Carol to imagine having to give that much of herself when she already is struggling to have her own needs met. Carol is a very sensitive and thoughtful person. She appeared to be the type of person who was accustomed to taking care of others and was struggling with defining herself as anything different. Carol was one of my most enjoyable interviews due to the fact that our personalities meshed really well.

Hazel

The first interview Hazel and I had was in my home and the second interview took place in my office on campus. In the second interview Hazel chose to delete some of the transcript, so that information will not be used in this thesis. Hazel was a very upbeat woman who shared a great deal of personal information with me. In order to protect her confidentiality from her peers, I decided to only include the information that is relevant to this study and exclude any information that may draw attention to her identity. Hazel has been married to her husband for eight years and this is her second marriage. She appeared to be in her forties and has two

children from her previous marriage. Hazel and her current husband have no children. At the time Hazel had decided to return to school to complete her undergrad degree she was working in a job she described as a “grungy, government clerical job.” This type of job prompted Hazel to return to school to pursue her undergrad degree and at the suggestion of a professor she went on to pursue her MSW.

Hazel's Interview

Hazel began the interview by discussing her decision to return to school and how her husband responded to that decision, stressing that he was supportive of her choice. Hazel then shared with me the story of their courtship, which gives the reader some insight into the personalities of both herself and her husband:

I was actually looking for a date for a wedding and there was a big dance after the wedding and I didn't feel like going alone and not have the opportunity to dance and stuff like that. I was looking for a date and she (mutual friend) knew a number of single men so she introduced me to him but he was very shy and I knew there was no way he would just go on a whim somewhere with someone he doesn't know, so I thought I would have lunch with him a couple of times and see where it goes. It actually turned out that because I was so aggressive about it, he was very nervous.

From this excerpt, we get a clear picture that Hazel was a more assertive person than her husband. In fact, when discussing his mother Hazel herself states, “I think he's attracted to a strong woman and I'm the stronger one, I'm the dominant one in the relationship”. Hazel felt that he was attracted to her strength, as his mother possessed the same characteristic. I found this relationship very interesting because Hazel, in her view being the dominant partner, did not follow traditional gender stereotypes within a marriage. My interest prompted me to ask about household tasks and responsibilities:

He does most of them. I don't like housework; I don't like cooking, some days he says to me “if I'm going to eat, I'm going to have to cook it myself”. I think a lot of that happened when he was working part-time, so he was home a lot more than I was because I was working full-time and going to school. I think we agreed before we got married

that he would do most of the cleaning because it's something he does better than me. At that time I was working and making more money so that was sort of the trade-off. I would be the breadwinner and he would do the housework.

This description of how household tasks are divided up appeared to be a complete role-reversal. Hazel and her husband also received accepting attitudes from their families with regard to their marriage, largely because Hazel's mother-in-law was a dominant woman (she had passed away) and because Hazel did not see her family a great deal.

Hazel's next excerpt illustrates what she learned from her first marriage:

Um, my first husband when I married him my self-esteem was really low. He was very dominating, very jealous, very bad tempered and controlling. Now I'm at a point in my life I'm not going to take it anymore and I'm not afraid to walk away from a marriage if something is wrong, whereas the first one I stuck with.

At this point in the interview it became quite clear why Hazel is the dominant partner in the relationship. She had learned from previous experience with her first husband that she was *not* going to be in that vulnerable position again. Hazel definitely appeared to know what she wanted from her current marriage based on these past experiences. This dominant role has its price also. Hazel and her current husband went through some difficulties while she was working full-time and attending school. She fell into a depression before her husband realized the strain everything was putting on her. Hazel described how her husband dealt with her depression:

He was great, he was there, he was supportive. He was doing everything for me but as soon as I got better he would disappear again back into his own little shell. So, I don't think he appreciated the effect it was having on me. I don't think he realized that he wasn't doing anything. I think it was quite a wake up call for me to say "I can't do this, shape up or get out of my life".

This excerpt illustrates that even when a woman plays the dominant role in the relationship, there can still be challenges. In Hazel's situation it was lack of support for her emotional needs. Hazel described feeling that as soon as her husband sensed that she was feeling

better, he continued his practice of not supporting her emotionally. I wondered if perhaps Hazel's husband viewed her as so strong that she did not have any emotional needs.

Hazel continued the interview by addressing the fact that she feels her marriage is an unusual one. She commented that she felt many of her friends were envious of the fact that she could go back to school, "start a new life" and her husband supported her. Hazel pointed out that she thought some of the women in the MSW would look for jobs in this region upon completion because this is where their husbands are located. Hazel explained in the next excerpt why she thought women stay where their husbands are:

I think it's really hard for people to make that change. I think it's easy for people to say "that's the way it should be, but that's the way we were raised, that the man is the dominant partner, the man is the one who makes the money, the man is the one in charge, the man is the one who the woman follows". I think some changes are being made but not enough. I don't think women are comfortable enough being the dominant partner.

I think it is obvious that Hazel clearly felt that many changes needed to occur for women to reach equality within their marriages. My one concern with this excerpt is still the referral to a dominant-subordinate relationship. It would my opinion that to reach equality within a marriage, the partners need to start thinking in terms of an equitable marriage where there is room for negotiation. The changes that Hazel felt are necessary begin with parental influence. She stated that society at large needs to change, but that it needs to begin with how we model our behaviour to our children. Hazel described her own children, pointing out that they were raised in a non-traditional environment:

My son, he and his girlfriend – he makes the most money, he is the dominant one. And with my daughter I'm not really sure. I don't think she's been in a long enough relationship to really see. She can be very determined, which translates into dominance sometimes but her self-esteem isn't great and if she thinks the relationship is in jeopardy then she'll do whatever he wants, so she kind of fluctuates a bit.

I questioned Hazel's theory about changes beginning with parents when she herself is so dominant and confident, while her daughter lacks confidence. Hazel shared with me that she was not always confident and in control. There was a time in her life when she was dealing with her own personal issues and her daughter was seventeen "by the time I started to put my life in order".

As the interview was coming to a close, I asked Hazel to share with me her definition of an equitable marriage:

I think where each partner feels that they have some control of what they both do, have control over what they do themselves and has the support of the other person to do that. I don't think it's about housework, or who earns the most money. I think it's about sharing power and control and having the freedom to do that, to do your own thing, be your own person within the relationship.

Hazel concluded our interview by stating that she wasn't sure without her husband's support if she could do all that she is doing right now. I thought that this statement by Hazel was powerful because to me it demonstrated that although she is dominant, assertive, and independent, she is also a woman who requires the support of her husband.

Hazel was a very bubbly and outgoing person. As I stated before, she shared a fair bit of personal information that I have chosen to exclude to protect her identity from her peers. I admired Hazel's strength in pursuing her goals.

Ursula

Ursula and I met on campus, where we found an empty room to have the interview. Ursula was eager to participate and I liked her instantly. Ursula and her partner have been living common-law for two and a half years and they have no children. Ursula appeared to be in her twenties. At the time Ursula decided to return to school to pursue her MSW, she had been working for three years doing outreach work and she knew her undergrad degree would not help

her get the jobs she wanted. Ursula stated she was getting burnt out and needed a change.

Ursula found the interview to be a comfortable process and I discovered at our second interview that she became engaged to her partner. I excluded two pieces of information from this thesis. The first was a brief discussion of Ursula's religion and how her certain religion impacts the operation of the household. I did not wish to reveal her to her peers through the detail of her religion. The second piece of information was when I asked Ursula if she and her partner had experienced any power struggles in their relationship. Ursula did not identify any real power struggles in her relationship, which will be discussed further in the discussion.

Ursula's Interview

Ursula began the interview by discussing her decision to return to school. At her job, she was being kept in a low position and had realized that in order to move up she would need a higher level of education. She described the role her partner had in making this decision:

It was pretty much individual. I should say one thing we did discuss was finances because obviously once I did this we became a one-income family, so we did discuss that it would kind of depend on what kind of funding I could get but he would have to take on a little bit more responsibility for the financial, otherwise it was a pretty individual decision.

Ursula went on to say that her partner was supportive of her decision and was thrilled when she was accepted into the MSW program. She also mentioned that he was planning to return to school upon Ursula's completion of her studies.

Ursula then shared with me how she and her partner met. They had met at a conference and became fast friends. The relationship progressed slowly because Ursula had just ended a long-term relationship. After a year of dating, Ursula and her partner moved in together and have been quite happy. Ursula told me that wedding plans were likely in their future. I asked

Ursula if they were happy living together why they would get married, and Ursula shared with me her feelings about marriage:

Oh, that's a good question. That's not something I really thought of. I just, I think I've always wanted to get married, it's something I believe in, I think it's good to live with someone before marriage just because there's also the saying "you don't know someone until you live with them" and there isn't anything more true than that and we have lived together and it's worked well, but I still want to be married, I still want to be a part of that institution.

This excerpt illustrates to the reader that marriage can still be quite important, even to an independent woman like Ursula. I found myself wondering what it is about the institution of marriage that is so important. Ursula also explained that her desire to marry is also a spiritual one based on the religion she and her partner share.

Ursula continued the interview by sharing with me how their household operates:

Well, I have to say that my partner is very responsible, especially since I've gone back to school, um, I would say before I went back to school I was doing the majority of the cooking, just because I'm a better cook (laughs) but we were doing equal cleaning, in terms of laundry or cleaning the apartment and that kind of thing. Now that I've gone back to school he probably does more than I do around the house. He, um, I'll still cook a lot but he'll clean up the dishes. We do sort of have a rule that whoever cooks doesn't clean but that isn't always followed. If he cooks, sometimes he'll still clean up – if I'm really stressed or I have a lot of work to do.

I believe that this excerpt illustrates to the reader how supportive Ursula's partner is of her decision to return to school and of Ursula as a person. Not only does he appear to share an equal amount of household responsibilities but he also adds on extra responsibilities when Ursula is stressed and busy. I did not get the impression that Ursula felt any guilt for her partner picking up extra duties. She appeared quite comfortable with allowing him to help her when she needed it. Ursula continued this excerpt by describing the routine when it came to actual responsibilities, such as birthdays, etc. Although she remembers dates and important events

more often, her partner plays an equal role in ensuring the tasks that need to be done are completed.

The interview then moved in the direction of children. Ursula shared with me that she and her partner have discussed having children and plan to raise them in the practice of their religion. On Ursula's thoughts about childcare:

Um, well it's been interesting the past couple of months because his brother just had a baby in January. So it's been a nice preview to see what he's been like with this baby, um, plus I have an older niece and nephew and he (Ursula's partner) is fantastic with them, um, but seeing him with a baby has been a bit more eye opening because I think he needs to have someone older he can do things with, like he doesn't know five minutes and says here you go. I hope he gets better, he and his brother are very close and very much alike in personality and his brother has been incredibly involved in the childcare but mom is home with the baby and his brother is out at work and I imagine it will be a pretty similar position for us because I do want to stay home when I have children and I don't want to have to put them in daycare, at least not right away, but in terms of changing the baby I'm sure he'll be involved.

Although the arrangement of Ursula staying home with their children appears a more traditional approach, it seemed that the decision was based on the fact that Ursula wanted to stay home with their children. It may also have been an issue of practicality because in the earlier months of childhood, it sometimes is more practical for the mother to be at home (especially if she chooses to breastfeed).

At this point in the interview, I asked Ursula to share with me her definition of an equitable marriage:

Um, just where there's give and take, even though he is doing more work than I am, at some point I'll give it back, or in another area, um, maybe I can't do as many dishes but I can give him a back massage or pay more attention to some other part of his life or help him with his job search – something like that – just a give and take where we both feel we aren't doing all the work and getting nothing in return.

To Ursula an equitable marriage meant not taking advantage of your partner. Ursula and I then discussed the friendships she and her partner shared. Many of their friends are already

married and it was Ursula's sense that their marriages were fairly equitable. She commented on the friends who appeared more traditional:

We do have some friends who are more orthodox and they aren't married yet, none of them are, but I could see that their households would look very different from ours, I can see where some of the differences might be. They do tease us a lot about living together and not being married – so they get those jibes in, but they're still very, they don't judge us, like they don't come over and preach at us. I don't think they have a problem with me being in school or the choices we've made, they would like to see us married. That's the main thing to them.

Ursula described these friends as supportive of their decisions to live together and her choice to return to school. Contradictory to this support is that these friends tease them about living together and have obviously clearly stated their opinion that they would like Ursula and her partner to be married. It would appear to me that, although their friends do not come and "judge" them, there is a subtle pressure behind the teasing and clear opinion that Ursula and her partner should be married. Ursula did not state feeling any pressure and I had the impression she and her partner just simply ignored the teasing, judging from her easy-going demeanor.

Ursula then shared with me a little bit about her family:

Well, my mom had more of a problem with us moving in together than his mom did. His mom is very liberal, easygoing. She lets her children make their choices and supports them the best way she can. My mom was not so happy about it but at the same I think she realizes times are different then when she was growing up and she would much rather see me in a working relationship than married and unhappy – in terms of me going back to school, I'm actually the first person in my family who has gone on to grad school so they're actually quite proud of what I'm doing and quite supportive of it.

This excerpt demonstrates that Ursula's mother is quite traditional but trying to adjust to a new generation of attitudes. I did not get the impression that her mother's attitudes had much influence over Ursula's life choices. Although she cared about her mother's opinion, Ursula struck me as a woman who would choose her own path. Interestingly enough, I asked Ursula if

her mother's attitudes would change if she were married to her partner and Ursula's response was that her mother just wants her to have a baby, married or not.

At this point in the interview, Ursula needed to leave. At the second interview she had nothing more to add or delete. I found Ursula to be a very easygoing participant. She possessed a very sweet and endearing quality about her that I found refreshing. I was happy to hear that she and her partner had become engaged by the time of our second interview.

Anne

Anne and I met one afternoon in her home. She made me feel very comfortable and I discovered we had a fair bit in common. Both Anne and I have children and we appeared to parent in very similar ways. This fact made Anne's interview very interesting to me. At the time of the interview Anne and her husband had been married for three and a half years and it was a first marriage for both of them. Anne appeared to be in her mid to late thirties with one child. Anne decided to return to school to pursue her MSW because, although she was at a job she loved, she had a supervisor "who sucked the life right out of you." She also described the need to pursue more education. I had a difficult time meeting with Anne for her second interview because she was so busy, so we agreed to email one another. Anne also had discovered that she was pregnant again, so this interview was not the first thing on her mind (which was completely understandable). The only piece of information I excluded from this thesis was the detailed information of Anne's traumatic childhood. My intention was to preserve her confidentiality, as well as to demonstrate respect for the fact that she shared such personal information with me.

Anne's Interview

Anne's interview began with her describing how she and her husband came to the decision for her to pursue her MSW:

My husband has numerous degrees so he supports education. But just the practical aspect of it, if I was to do my masters and work full-time, he would have to do more around the house. He already did lots even back then. But it would be even more, to the point where it would be, let's say, an unfair balance, he'd be doing more around the house than me. And so we talked about this because I said what I need is not just your moral support "ah, honey you can do it" kind of thing, go ahead you can do your masters, I support you in that. He would be proud of me and I know that, it would be the actual physical support of doing things, getting things done. So we had a couple of discussions, quite a few discussions about this and he maintained yes, if I wanted to do this he would support me in it. And he has.

Right from the beginning of the interview I got the impression that there is a great deal of communication between Anne and her husband. The fact that they shared the decision and had many discussions about this choice gave me a clear picture of the way Anne and her husband relate to one another. Both parties knew Anne returning to school would create challenges, however, Anne's husband was willing to meet those challenges and according to Anne he has maintained that attitude. Anne continued with an example of how her husband helps out with the workload:

He's great in, for example, we do cloth diapers. We did disposable diapers for the first two, three months so I could research cloth diapers. So he washes the cloth diapers. So, for example, in the beginning when we had the cloth diapers and the pail was heavy, we had to carry it down a couple of flights of stairs, that's the other thing, (Anne's husband) does the laundry, because when we bought this house, I didn't want it because it had laundry in the basement and I said "I'm pregnant and I don't want to be doing laundry in the basement with a baby upstairs" so he's been really good. With the cloth diapers he would run out and he would keep on going to disposables and I said "look cloth diapers are your thing and you said you would do it, you can't keep on running out and so after that first little initial period he totally does the cloth diapers. So there's a real practical support in the marriage, the division of labour. Now that I'm in my master's and because we're doing attachment parenting with (Anne's child), because of those choices, (Anne's husband) does more of what you would call housework.

This example demonstrated to me that, although Anne's husband had a few rough starts, he was doing what he could to help alleviate the workload for Anne while she is in school.

Anne's husband was also helping in other ways (e.g., washing the cloth diapers), because Anne explained with attachment parenting she has done much of the work. Anne then shared with me a little more of what attachment parenting means for herself and her husband:

The family bed – I tell him (Anne's husband) to let me know when he wanted to move (Anne's child) out of our bed, he'd look at (Anne's child) and say not this week, so I'm kind of in the leadership role or the coordinating role or the information gathering role and I resent the information gathering role a little bit, like when we make decisions about attachment parenting or whatever, I feel like I do a little bit more of the research there but I asked him, I kept on asking him and he'd say "oh, she's so small, not just yet", so then when (Anne's child) became a certain age, a certain size, she was disrupting our sleep and it was hard to put (Anne's child) down. He would look into to it and I would look into it more than him and I would read books on getting your baby to sleep and the fact that your children don't sleep through the night and here we are doing the family bed, and his sleep is interrupted.

In this excerpt, Anne is describing some of the challenges that new parents face with attachment parenting. Anne points out that she is somewhat resentful of fully being in charge of the "information gathering role," even though her husband is an involved and supportive father. Anne continues by acknowledging that she has support for her parenting style through organizations such as La Leche League; however, there are no real support systems for fathers practising this style of parenting. I felt that was an important realization for Anne to make that it may be difficult to seek out the information for her husband when he may be lacking in the resources.

Anne then continued on in the interview to share with me a challenge she and her husband face. Anne's husband is a teacher and has had difficulty finding full-time employment. Anne's husband's struggle in finding full-time employment has created a challenge for him, because he believes he should be the provider:

I can't say he's very traditional or responsible because he isn't traditional in the sense that you know a power dynamic in the relationship. But he is traditional in that he should be the provider. He could do the laundry too, and he's good in the kitchen but he should be the provider. So that's been a challenge for him as a man, it's unfortunately been a character building experience and I'm somewhat resentful of the character building experience (laughs) but he has recognized that the most important thing is to be a good husband and a good father.

Anne explained that her husband's traditional attitude has been tough on their marriage, because his self-esteem was low and their lives were busier than they both expected. Both Anne and her husband expected to parent in very traditional ways and attachment parenting requires more work. An example is that Anne fully expected to put her baby to bed at 8:00 p.m. sharp and leave the baby to cry to sleep. After she had her baby, things changed. It takes time to put a baby to sleep if the parents choose to not leave the child to cry. Anne had reported that she and her husband both felt uncomfortable with leaving their baby to cry.

I then asked Anne to talk a little bit about their families. Anne began by telling me that their families were quite traditional. She stated that in her husband's family there are hardly any divorced couples. Anne then offered a specific example in her husband's family:

And see the other thing is I don't have a diamond ring. That was really important to (Anne's husband), really important for both him and his brother and I only wanted a semiprecious stone and the men said it had to be a precious stone, so it ended being a sapphire. So anyway, the long and short of it, we both ended up with diamonds. She (Anne's sister-in-law) has a big solitaire with two small stones, it's really different, it's marquis, it's not whatever and then my ring is two diamonds and (Anne's husband) designed it. That was a compromise for me, it was really important to him. It was a really important value if I was going to be his wife.

This excerpt demonstrates to me that Anne's in-laws are fairly traditional in their attitudes. This example led Anne to discussing a power issue between herself and her husband:

So that's kind of funny, I would suggest to you the power challenge that we have in our relationship is that my husband has a perceived lack of power. And that's one of his issues and I don't know how much I want to share about that but there's a challenge in our relationship with, just communication and what I have learned is that I need to outline options for him, preferably write them down and give him time to think about them. If I

just say to him do you want to do this, that, or the other thing, if the other thing is the last thing I mention, he might just say that. Or he'll try to pick up on what he thinks I want. Down the road, it will turn out that he didn't want the other thing, he wanted this or that so I have had to be careful about how I present options to him to make sure I get what he really wants.

Anne did not elaborate on the power struggle between herself and her husband other than to say that they only have challenges on some issues while other issues such as parenting; they are "on the same page." It appeared to be troublesome for Anne to have to take the leadership role in her marriage. I got the impression that having most of the responsibility sometimes was difficult to handle.

Anne then shared with me a little about her family:

I'm the youngest of four daughters, I have one sister nine years older than me, seven years older, one year older than me and my parents were separated when I was ten years old. My father came back when I was eleven and then they were separated again when I was thirteen and that would have led to divorce and I don't know when the divorce would have occurred. But I'd say my parents were divorced when I was thirteen, so in grade nine. My parents probably had an unhappy marriage, probably from the time before I was born, I had a sense.

Anne continued to describe a rather unhappy childhood surrounded by mental illness, alcoholism, and abuse. Anne appeared to be very in touch with her emotions about this time in her life. I was curious if she had developed her ideas of a healthy marriage through watching what she did not want to happen. At first Anne said her childhood involving "extreme dysfunction" drove her to a very unhealthy relationship. Fortunately, Anne was able to break the cycle of abuse and move on with her life. At that point I asked Anne if she thought that she was in an equitable marriage. Anne's response reflected her frustration at having to handle many things in her marriage:

Yes, and no. Yes, in decision-making, respect and equality and so on. No, in and this is, man, this is the thing that pisses me off, I don't want to be the boss of everything but we tried to have (Anne's husband) manage the money. When he grew up his father managed the money. He does not manage the books, he doesn't arrange the appointments, he

doesn't lead the discussion on vaccination and I don't dominate it because I value his opinion, it's a very difficult issue, we're constantly revisiting it. He doesn't really manage the money, so when I get really overloaded with work and I say to (Anne's husband) "pay the bills" at least he will. He perceived it as his role and when we first moved in together before we were married, I was working steadily and he was looking for work and I thought it would be kind of gross if I gave him an allowance, so I just said "here, take out a certain amount of money each week and we share it back and forth but we do recognize given a hundred bucks at the beginning of the week, I will still have money left and he will not. So he tells me what he needs or what he wants.

It appears that Anne does not want to have all the responsibility in the relationship that she currently has, but she is unsure how to delegate more to her husband. I also felt as though Anne did not like feeling as if she needed to delegate responsibilities to her husband. Anne shared with me that she and her husband had just had a recent conversation over why women typically do most of the work in the relationship, and her husband said it was a combination of socialization and genetic factors.

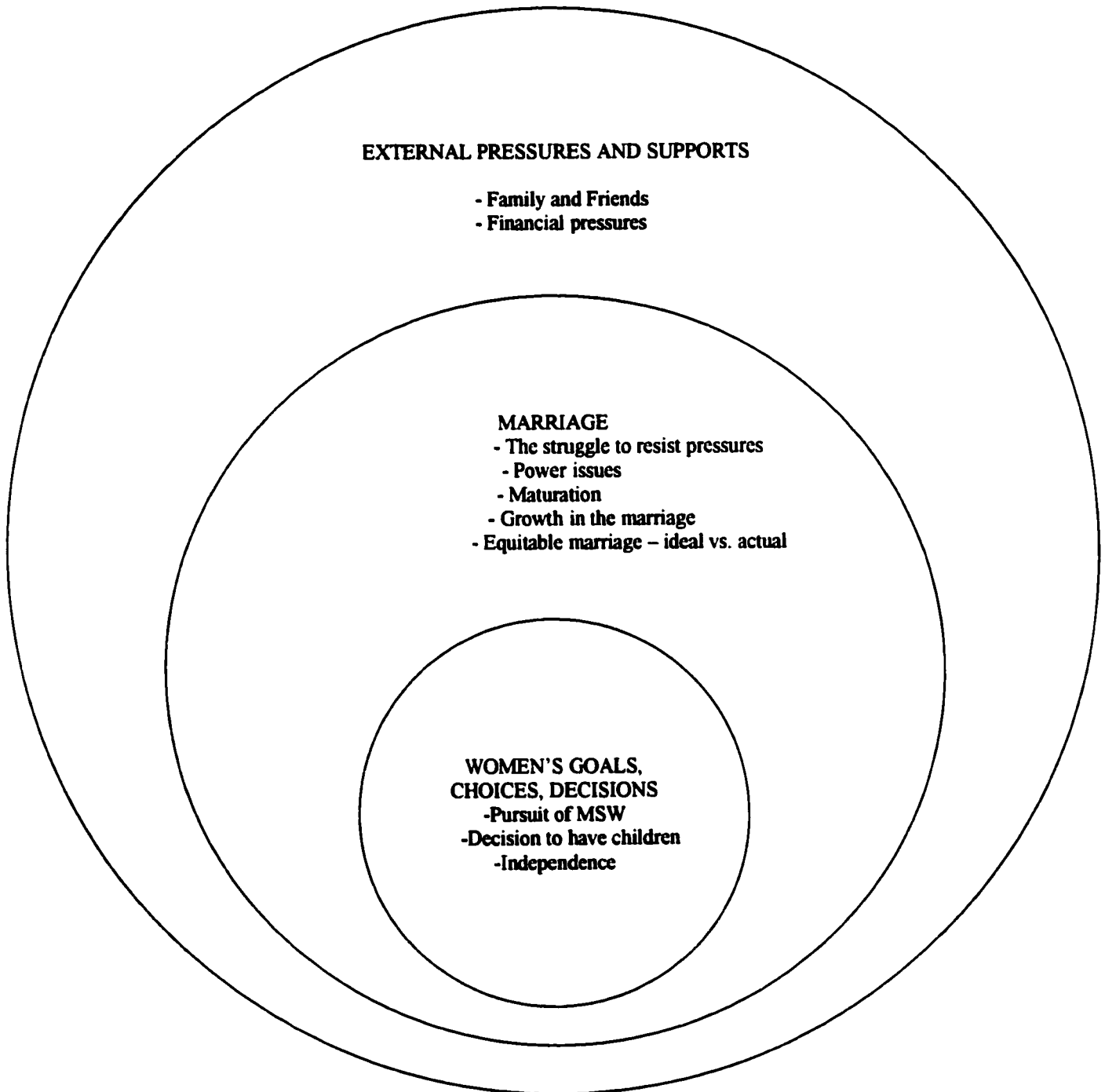
Anne and I concluded the interview with her definition of an equitable marriage: "Communication and respect and that the work is shared, both decide on it. What's equitable?" I found this definition very interesting because the fact that Anne poses the question of "what's equitable?" illustrates that defining an equitable marriage is difficult. It also depends on the marriage that is being defined.

I enjoyed the interview with Anne a great deal. I could relate to her parenting style and her struggle with work overload. Anne appeared to be a very independent, organized woman who, although she faced some challenges in her marriage, enjoyed the relationship very much.

OVERALL ANALYSIS

In the previous section I shared portions of the individual stories of each woman's marriage, in her own words. In this next section I present the collective experiences of the women. My first step in the process of creating the overall analysis was to again look at each

individual woman's main themes in her interview. For each woman, I created a list of the themes she addressed in her interview. Once I had completed a list for each woman, I then compared the lists to see if there were any commonalities. I then created another list of themes common among the women. To break the analysis down one step further I created a diagram (See Diagram 1) that illustrated the women's individual choices, goals, and decisions, the context of the marriage, and the external pressures and supports. I divided up the themes into three categories: individual, marital, and external pressures and supports. It is within these categories that the emerging themes are presented. Following the overall analysis will be the discussion, where I will further examine how these three categories are related to one another and whether they serve to promote an equitable marriage.

Diagram 1**An Illustration of Common Categories and Themes Across the Women's Stories**

Individual

The first category, individual, encompasses each woman's goals, choices and decisions for herself. The three themes that emerged as common for these women were: 1) the pursuit of the MSW, 2) the decision to have children, and 3) independence.

Pursuit of the MSW. Each of the women described her experience of returning to school in the context of her marriage. Each woman voiced her need for individual growth in her employment pursuits. This desire to do something more is what prompted these women to return to school and pursue their MSW degree. Jane described her experience as knowing she wanted to obtain a different job that required a higher level of education:

Um, I was doing a lot of work in the social services area after I graduated from my undergrad, but I think that I wanted to go back to get the graduate degree so that I could get out of front line direct work I was doing, because although I enjoyed it, it was not something I wanted to do for a long period of time.

Hazel shared her experience of wanting more in her life as far back as her undergraduate degree:

... it was time to stop doing the grungy, government clerical job that was totally meaningless and do something worthwhile with my life so I went back to school to get my undergraduate degree.

While working toward her undergraduate degree, a professor suggested to Hazel to continue on in school for her graduate degree and Hazel took the advice.

Katherine's decision to return to school was a result of not being satisfied with certain aspects of her current job:

I didn't like the business environment, the backstabbing, the competition, that sort of thing, that's sort of when my marriage (Katherine's first marriage) started to break down and I, actually my marriage started to break down before I came into the program. I did a lot of counseling, of searching for what I might like to do and that's when I decided that counseling was something that I wanted to get into.

At this point Katherine began her BA, stating she knew at that time she would also pursue her MSW. Anne also did not like aspects of her job, which prompted her to pursue her MSW:

Earlier in that year I had a job that I loved but I think it's a confidentiality issue, I had a terrible supervisor. The kind of supervisor that sucked the life right out of you. I loved the work I did but kind of looking for something more...

Ursula also knew that her undergraduate degree was not going to get her the job she wanted. Although she did not know exactly what that job was, she knew she wanted a change:

I knew that my undergrad degree wasn't going to get me very far and jobs that I was looking for were basically saying you need an MSW or at least a BSW. Where I was I wasn't particularly happy. I was definitely getting burnt out and I needed a change.

Carol's decision to return to school was prompted by her experience in other areas of education (i.e., Teacher's College) and appeared to be a part of a process of becoming more self-aware:

Probably a desire to be involved with people at the more interpersonal level and I found that most other careers keep you limited from that approach. I found that all the other education that you have you can almost, do not even have a supporting role, your very limited in how involved you can get with people and I thought that this would be a way of allowing myself to get past that bridge. Instead of being a supporting role, link with people directly.

I found it very interesting to hear these women talk about their experiences and what prompted each of them to return to academia. What struck me the most were not their reasons for returning to school but the fact that they were able to recognize their want or need to pursue their goal of personal advancement, and they went after it. My own personal need to achieve enabled me to relate to these women who were striving for competency as professionals.

For many of these women the decision to return to school seemed to signify a time of growth for them as individuals, a period of self-awareness. All of these women did not pursue

their education uninterrupted offering further insight into the fact that they spent time considering what they wanted to do with their lives. Spending time in other jobs, other relationships encouraged these women to pursue the MSW program. A common feeling the women expressed was the sense of “wanting more for themselves” – this statement is a very significant one. Many women may not have the self-awareness to even know what it is that they want for their lives. The individual choice of returning to school is more than just to further their education, it is furthering who these women are as individuals.

The decision to have children. This theme held a certain importance for each woman. Even the women who did not have children have discussed the topic with their partner. The decision to have children or not is a significant theme because it is a choice each woman has to consider for herself. This individual choice is demonstrated to be problematic in the following examples based on the women already having stressful workloads and external pressures from outside sources.

Jane addressed her annoyance at feeling pressure from those around her to have a baby:

I’ve had comments said to me about, like friends of ours who just had a baby started asking us “so when are you going to have a baby”, you know, I said “you know I don’t even know at this point”, I’d say I was on the no side more than on the yes side and the comment back was “oh, you’re not going to be one of those couples are you?”

Jane stated that this decision might be based on the stage she and her husband were in, referring to school. Jane also explained how she saw her parental role:

I could see myself doing more of the foster parent role than having my own children and I usually just say to people, you know, to me having foster children one day down the road, that’s my way of being the parent. People always say, “why would you do that?” Well, I just think that there’s enough children out there that could benefit from that than having my own. I’m not going to have a baby just because it’s time.

I applaud Jane’s conviction of not having a baby just because “it’s time” according to our societal norms because it signifies her willingness to follow her own path. I also found it

interesting that those around Jane would not even entertain her ideas of having foster children. It was my opinion that Jane held a responsible attitude as to why she was possibly choosing not to have children. These findings indicate a real pressure on Jane to follow societal expectations of her – to be a wife and mother. I have placed this theme under the category of “Individual” because I feel it is the woman’s choice to have children. However, Jane’s example demonstrates that many people do not consider it to be Jane’s choice. In fact, it appeared as though the decision had been made for her, she was to have a baby and what was taking so long?

For Katherine the decision to have a child tied in with the decision to marry her partner. Although Katherine was comfortable not being married and having a child together, her partner felt it was important to be married:

We decided actually that we weren’t going to get married, we were happy living common-law and we weren’t going to get married. Then we planned our pregnancy, got pregnant and then sort of, as soon as we got pregnant, (Katherine’s husband) felt the need to get married. I was fine with that, I didn’t really care whether I was married or not.

Katherine’s partner feeling it was important to be married before their child was born is significant because it emphasizes Katherine’s husband’s traditional attitudes toward marriage and children. These findings possibly indicate that if Katherine’s husband is traditional regarding the need to be married and have children, then he may be traditional in other ways as well.

Although Anne and her husband were both in agreement to have a child, the challenge came when Anne found herself pregnant at the same time as beginning the MSW program. Although Anne and her husband had many discussions of how to make this new arrangement work, they did not anticipate how challenging it could be:

We’ve just gone through eight months, last September, September of 99 to April 2000 where I’ve been working full-time, finishing up my first practicum, doing two courses in addition each term and I sat down last week and said if I knew it was going to be this

much and this hard, we wouldn't have done it. Because each term, like when I was pregnant I was going to drop out, I was so sick and so tired, so I didn't do hardly any assignments my first term. I did all my assignments second term for both terms and I could do, you know, in that stage of pregnancy and then I was going to drop out in September and take off for two years, in second year and I was encouraged to stay in and see how it goes.

This excerpt is very powerful because of who will find it challenging to have a baby while in school? This is an example of why I have chosen to place the decision to have children in the "Individual" category. Although Anne and her husband agreed to have a child, it is Anne who must go through pregnancy and a newborn while in school full-time. I am passionate about how tough this can be as I was pregnant and had a newborn while attending school full-time. Even though this is my personal opinion, I still feel the analysis is relevant.

Carol described feeling some ambivalence around the decision to have children:

It's been discussed, both of us talk about it quite often, especially with people around us having children, um, I'm still not sure if I want them or not, especially when I see how busy people are, mostly the women, how busy they are once they have children and I still see that as a primary female role, and I'm not willing to make that big of a sacrifice, so if I do have them it won't be for a number of years, because I'm still not committed to the whole idea.

Carol's ambivalence about having a child because she sees how the responsibility of children rests largely on women, suggests that she has recognized the level of inequality that exists in childcare among women and men. Carol's ambivalence also alludes to the fact that she is concerned she will be required to take on much of the responsibility of having a child within her own marriage, making a clear statement about the nature of equality in her relationship.

Ursula stated very briefly that she thought marriage and children would be in her future plans with her partner and for Hazel it did not appear that she and her husband would have children. Hazel already has two almost grown children, so the decision to have more children did not come up in our interview.

Independence. Throughout the women's stories about their marriage there was an emerging theme of independence within their marriage. All of the women discussed how they felt they were independent in their marriage. Jane, for example, described how important it was to her to maintain her financial independence:

While he's the breadwinner, see that drives me crazy cause it's almost like because I'm in school he's automatically the breadwinner. But I've tried to rework that for myself so it doesn't fall into a big deal. I think just trying to remember, cause I work pretty much full-time right now.

It was very crucial for Jane to contribute to the finances as a way of exerting her own independence in her marriage. Depending on her husband financially was uncomfortable for Jane and she needed to rectify that situation by working full-time to feel as though she was contributing to the relationship. Although Jane felt she was demonstrating independence by contributing financially, I would suggest that this contribution was more a result of guilt for attending school full-time and indirect pressure from her husband for the decrease in income.

Katherine's strength and independence were marked by her willingness to sit back and enable her husband to share in the childcare responsibilities:

Allowing myself, like for the first little while I actually had to when (Katherine's child) was first born, it was a real fight for me to let go of the typical mother roles and allow him (her husband) to learn how to nurture our child.

Katherine addresses her struggle at letting go of the typical mother roles and demonstrating her independence by enabling her husband to nurture their child. It is important to draw attention to the struggle Katherine felt in taking this independent step of enabling her husband to nurture their child.

For Carol, her independence came from taking care of herself in the way of not taking on all the household responsibilities:

I would have to say that especially when I'm in school (Carol's husband) does most of it. Um, he's very, very good with that in terms of, if we're both working, it's fifty-fifty, that includes laundry, groceries he always gets, cooking is pretty much who gets to it first.

Hazel knew exactly what she wanted and also exactly what she did not want in a marriage partner. I felt her independence was symbolized in her ability to communicate her wants:

I don't like housework, I don't like cooking, some days he says to me "If I'm going to eat, I'm going to have to cook it myself".

Ursula exerted her independence when she made the decision to return to school on her own without her partner. Although Ursula and her partner discussed issues such as, finances, it was Ursula's decision alone to pursue her MSW.

These examples I have linked together may appear to represent more of a "sharing responsibilities" theme. However, I felt the examples were relevant in demonstrating how each woman exerted her own independence in the relationship. These examples represent more than just sharing responsibilities, they represent the women struggling to create boundaries for themselves. These findings indicate that all of these women struggled with ways to show their independence in the relationship. This theme further provides evidence for the pressures the women had to consciously resist. Each of these women had amazing strengths both as individuals and as partners in relationships. I was very pleased that an emerging theme was that all the women interviewed possessed strength at resisting pressures and independence in their relationships.

Marital

There were six themes that emerged within the marital context of the women's lives: 1) the struggle to resist pressures, 2) responsibility, 3) power issues, 4) maturation, 5) growth in the marriage, and 6) equitable marriage – ideal versus actual.

The struggle to resist pressures. Although each of these women was comfortable in expressing her wants and needs and exerting her own independence, it appeared that this independence was not always present in their relationships. Each faced or is currently facing a challenge in some form of confrontation that changed the dynamic of the marriage. All of the women encountered a struggle in their relationships when attempting to create an equitable marriage.

Jane described the struggle she and her husband had and just how far it had to go before they could move forward in their relationship:

Well, it took me leaving for him to recognize, he's the type of guy, I don't want to stereotype, but there's quite a few guys who need a slap in the head before they wake up and smell the coffee.

Jane had to resort to giving an ultimatum to her husband for him to realize she was unhappy and was not going to settle for the current state of their marriage. A decision of that magnitude can be not only be a difficult one to make but a difficult one to follow through on. Given our societal expectations of women and Jane's husband's apparent traditional attitudes, it would be much easier to succumb to the pressures of being the traditional wife and mother. The ultimatum also signifies Jane's husband's silent acceptance of the current state of their marriage until Jane forced the change.

When a relationship begins and patterns are created, it can be sometimes difficult to allow for growth within the relationship. Carol describes her struggle for support during her time of personal growth:

I think initially our relationship is the way it is, because when I first started dating (Carol's husband) I was 19 and I was looking for someone to be a guiding figure, someone who would take care of me, who would support me, and now that I think that I've come in to my own and feeling more comfortable, it's difficult to change those fundamentals, because they've already been established, so certain power struggles, me wanting to do certain things and pushing for some of my own needs, (Carol's husband) tends to see it as a power struggle, my need to control him as opposed to my need to be taken care of, taking care of myself.

Hazel found that her independence had a price in that it signified that she did not need any emotional support or help. I think for a lot of independent and self-aware women, people in their social network tend to assume they do not need the emotional support or help because they can do everything on their own. For example, Hazel said:

I have had, I suffer from quite bad chronic depression. He (Hazel's husband) has seen a couple of bouts of it but, and he was great, he was there, he was supportive. He was doing everything for me, but as soon as I got better he would disappear again back into his own little shell. I don't think he appreciated the effect it was having on me.

Anne also experienced the struggle with independence. Due to her inner strength, she was assumed to be the leader in her relationship:

The family bed – I tell him to let me know when he wanted to move out of our bed, he'd look at her (Anne's child) and say not this week, so I'm kind of in the leadership role or the coordinating role or the information gathering role and I resent the information gathering role a little bit, like when we make decisions about attachment parenting or whatever, I feel like I do a little bit more of the research there..."

The struggle for many of these women appeared to be in the distinction between being strong, independent and assertive, while resisting the loss of the support of their partners, which they need and expect. We can see from these examples the immense pressures that women face, and the internalized conflict these pressures create. These women reported feelings of depression, resentment, and powerlessness. It appeared the only way to draw any attention to these feelings the women were experiencing was through drastic measures (i.e., threatening to leave the marriage).

Responsibility. Within each of the women's stories there was some discussion around household tasks. In addition to the actual tasks there was a common theme of responsibility as being very separate from the tasks. Responsibility encompassed things like keeping track of important dates, planning outings, and managing the household smoothly. This subheading draws attention to the responsibilities that many of the women continue to handle and the burden that these responsibilities place on them.

Katherine states that her husband is quite helpful with household tasks. However, she states she holds more responsibility for other things, such as childcare:

Looking from the outside you might think it's equal. But it's the responsibilities of packing the bag, making sure that the bag has everything in it, that's what tips the childcare in to my work.

Katherine's statement that "from the outside you might think it's equal" appears to indicate that carrying the extra burden of responsibility for these tasks is stressful for her. If Katherine is faced with extra responsibilities that she solely takes care of, this will directly contradict promoting her individual needs due to lack of time. Katherine's goals as outlined in the theme of independence state clearly that she needs time to pursue the things that are important to her.

Carol illustrates her burden of responsibility when she shares with me that she is hesitant to have children because she does not want to be solely responsible for the childcare. Carol states:

I have watched my friends with children and it looks like a lot of work. I have also watched how their husbands take a back seat to that work. I am afraid of that happening to me.

This is a very powerful quote because Carol is aware of the responsibility she will have if and when she has children. It also offers some insight into how Carol thinks her husband will

handle the responsibility of children – it appears Carol thinks she will shoulder the majority of the work. This quote gives some insight as to how Carol's decision to have children is impacted. So even if Carol very much wanted to have a child, she will think twice based on the marriage she is in and the marriages she has observed.

Anne spoke a great deal about her responsibilities within her marriage and how she felt both resentful and tired of handling these responsibilities primarily on her own. Anne offers several examples to illustrate these feelings:

I'm kind of in the leadership role or the coordinating role or the information-gathering role and I resent the information gathering role a little bit...

What I have learned is that I need to outline options for him (Anne's husband), preferably write them down and give him time to think about them.

...this is the thing that pisses me off, I don't want to be the boss of everything but we tried to have (Anne's husband) manage the money.

These three examples link both Anne's stress around carrying all these responsibilities and her continuing struggle to find a compromise with her husband.

Jane's burden of responsibility was internalized guilt due to being in school and not bringing in a pay cheque. As a means of handling this guilt, Jane stated she felt pressure to take on more responsibility of handling household tasks.

Each of these women appeared to be dealing with two very different stressful situations – that actual “doing” of the tasks they were responsible and the “burden” that these responsibilities placed on them. This burden of responsibility has many implications for promoting both women's individual needs (i.e., the pursuit of the MSW, the decision to have children, and independence) as well as within the marriage – what is actually happening versus what they see as the ideal.

Power issues. The concept of power appeared to be relevant to this thesis. The findings indicated that many of the women experienced power issues in their marriages. In each of these relationships there appeared to be an ongoing effort to equitably balance the power between the partners. This finding of power is a significant one because the presence of power struggles is problematic in striving for an equitable marriage.

For Anne, the power issue appeared to exist in her leadership role within the marriage. Anne described having to take the lead on many decisions and offer her husband choices to ensure she received his full feedback:

... what I have learned is that I need to outline options for (Anne's husband), preferable write them down and give him time to think about them. If I just say to him do you want to do this, that, or the other thing, if the other thing is the last thing I mention, he might just say that.. Or he'll try to pick up on what he thinks I want. Down the road, it will turn out that he didn't want the other thing, he wanted this or that, so I have had to be careful about how I present options to him to make sure I get what he really wants.

My sense is that giving her husband options could be an issue for both Anne and her husband. Anne stated quite clearly in the interview that she felt frustrated, resentful and "pissed off" with having to be the leader in her marriage.

Katherine described the power issues in her marriage as the division between finances and childcare:

I think a lot of times those power issues are surrounding childcare, like I have more power in childcare and (Katherine's husband) has more power in finances. Although, if you were to ask him the same question, I doubt that he would say the same thing. He would say he thinks our finances are total, like I have full access to everything, but for me a lot of that money was his money, so he had a lot of money before he entered in to the relationship, so he works like, what's mine is ours, but I personally have struggled with accepting his money.

Katherine stated that she did not feel her husband would see these issues as power issues because she stated that he felt everything was equal between the two of them. Katherine appeared quite uncomfortable pooling her money with her husband's due to the difference in

amount. I think this example also illustrates the internal struggle Katherine is experiencing in her attempt to not succumb to the traditional wife who is financially dependent on her husband.

Carol referred to power struggles in her marriage as a result of the patterns she and her husband had created from the beginning of their marriage. Carol did seem to think these power struggles could be overcome but she did think it would take a lot of hard work and time:

I think if it is to get to an equal level it's going to take a long time. (Carol's husband) is very much a creature of habit, so I'd have to be very persistent and very committed to what I was after. Otherwise if it wavers for a minute, he reverts back and the fact that he takes so many of the challenges personally as opposed to him seeing it as something that I need...

It is also important to note that Carol stated she was unsure if she had the energy to put the time into working towards overcoming the power struggles in her marriage. Earlier I cited Carol as stating that she felt many women remain in unhappy marriages due to contentment or the hesitancy to change. Carol's feelings about changing the power dynamics in her relationship appear to reflect her opinion of why many women stay in their marriages.

Hazel and Ursula did not discuss any power issues they felt in their marriage, which I believe is very relevant to the findings. I found this disconcerting for two reasons: were power issues not identified because Hazel and Ursula did not wish to share those aspects of their marriage with me; or were Hazel and Ursula not identifying any power issues in their relationships? If the answer is these women are not identifying any power issues in their relationships, although this may be accurate, it also could mean they are lacking some awareness of any power dynamics in their relationships. The lack of awareness may lead to what I have cited in this thesis as the "myth of equality" and can be problematic for the marriage. It is also important to note that Hazel was the dominant partner in the relationship, so she may have not felt any power imbalance. The power imbalance may have had more of an impact on her husband,

Hazel often makes reference to a dominant-subordinate style of marriage. This perpetuation of dominant-subordinate relationships is problematic regardless of who is exerting control.

This issue of power is a very significant one for equitable marriage. While power is still an issue for a marriage, it creates challenges in striving toward an equitable marriage. Power lends itself to a dominant-subordinate relationship rather than a relationship involving concepts of fairness and negotiation. The findings demonstrate that these women do not have an equitable marriage.

Maturation. This theme is strongly linked to the following theme of “growth in the marriage”. However, I believed it was necessary to separate these themes based on some distinct differences. Maturation deals with how the women expressed their own individual growth over time and growth in the marriage deals with how the marriage changed over time and continues to change.

This theme was very interesting to me because it illustrated how these women changed in their marriage and in their views as they matured. This maturation process for three of the women lead away from a traditional orientation and dependence to more awareness of who they were and who they wanted to be. The change in the women created some struggles within their marriages, in particular where the partners remained the same.

Carol started out in her relationship eager for someone to take care of her:

I was 19 and looking for someone to be a guiding figure, someone who would take care of me, who would support me...

Once Carol matured and changed the way she interacted with her husband she found there was some tension in her marriage because her husband was still interacting with her based on the past:

...now that I think I've come in to my own and feeling more comfortable, it's difficult to change those fundamentals because they've already been established, so certain power struggles, me wanting to do certain things and pushing for some of my needs, (Carol's husband) tends to see it as a power struggle...

What is key here is Carol stating that it is hard to change old patterns. However, it is only hard to change these partners if there is resistance to change. As long as there is resistance there will be tension, both internally and in the marriage. This resistance to change the traditional model is also confining and contrary to Carol's development individually.

Hazel's example of maturation is from her previous marriage, which has had an impact on who she is in her current marriage:

Now I'm at a point in my life I'm not going to take it anymore and I'm not afraid to walk away from a marriage if something is wrong, whereas the first one I stuck with.

As a result of her experience and reaching the place in her life that she is at, she is quite clear on what she will tolerate from a relationship. This maturation appears to be linked to Hazel's assertiveness and independence.

Katherine's story reflects maturation in a similar manner as Hazel's story. Katherine was previously married and over time has learned what she will tolerate in a marriage. Katherine described her previous marriage and her "second shift":

I was working full-time and coming home and doing the second shift, doing all the cooking, cleaning, that type of thing.

I have already addressed the significance of the term "second shift". However, the reference is key here due to it representing Katherine's personal growth that results in the decisions that she makes in her second marriage. Katherine's level of social analysis made it possible for her to be aware of her past and not recreate it.

For all three of these women, their maturation process has promoted who they are as individuals and has changed who they are as women. Does this maturation process happen for

all women? The other women in this study did not speak to a maturation process. However, this tells me that could be because they are currently experiencing some changes or they just did not discuss it. It is important to draw attention to the time dimension of maturation, the process being on a continuum of change over time. Changes in the relationship will happen automatically with the maturation of the women and if the partners are not open to the changes this could be detrimental to the relationship. The ideal would be the partners embracing the changes and both growing together.

Growth in the marriage. As stated, this theme is linked closely with maturation because as the women mature the relationship will change, and hopefully grow. This theme looks at the changes the relationships have experienced over time. Again, I am drawing attention to a time dimension and the continuum of change. Growth in the marriage does not always occur without some real struggles.

Jane described a growth period in her marriage where she had to leave the relationship for a short period of time to encourage the relationship to grow in the direction she needed when she stated, “I know things had to change or I would leave because I was so unhappy and I did leave because of it”. Jane also shared with me how her marriage has changed over time:

...the dynamics were very different. It was like a roller coaster, one person was feeling great, while the other person was feeling down and that was very much, I think there wasn't a safety there yet, it wasn't secure, it was still new. One person would have the power and the other person would not and that would fluctuate extremely and it would cause problems but I think that's equaled out over the years.

Jane's excerpt describing the power issues between herself and her husband also illustrate how the marriage has changed over time. It would appear that the way a marriage starts out will change over time and as in Jane's story, the growth is not always easy.

Carol's story also speaks to growth in the marriage over time in the example I cited above in the theme of maturation. As Carol matured the relationship needed to change. As stated earlier, if Carol's husband did not or does not adjust to Carol's growth then there may be a negative impact on the relationship, possibly resulting in the breakdown of the marriage. At the time of the interview it appeared that Carol's husband was not entirely accepting of her changes (because she reports power struggles). However, that does not mean that Carol and her husband haven't continued to grow together to recreate some new patterns in their marriage.

Hazel describes how growth in her marriage came from conflict. Hazel shared with a time when she was doing so much in the relationship she was quite depressed and her husband was not acknowledging her feelings:

I don't think he realized that he wasn't doing anything. I think it was quite a wake up call for me to say "I can't do this, shape up or get out of my life".

It appeared to me that Hazel was initially excusing her husband's behaviour when she said "I don't think he realized that he wasn't doing anything". However, this excerpt demonstrates the growth that both she and her husband needed to go through in their marriage for the marriage to continue. Hazel needed to clearly state her needs and her husband needed to respond. This growth also is on continuum over time because in the interview Hazel stated that she felt as though as soon as she felt better her husband returned to not supporting her emotionally.

Anne shared several examples of the struggles she and her husband have had on an ongoing basis. I think the growth in the marriage is demonstrated in that Anne and her husband have made some decisions that enable them to deal with those struggles together. An example of this growth is that Anne finds it effective to offer her partner options and let him think them over:

...what I have learned is that I need to outline options for him, preferable write them down and give him time to think about them.

Although this system of outlining options for Anne's husband may change in time, it demonstrates that they are working to find compromises that work in their marriage. Anne states that she resented the extra responsibility and I would guess this system will change over time.

I would like to make a few noteworthy points about this theme of growth in the marriage. First of all, in each of these examples it is the women who have promoted the growth in the marriage. This could be seen as perpetuating the standard for men to do less of the emotional work and growth in the marriage. The second point I would like to make is that these examples share commonalities with the other themes I have outlined. There are many overlapping links across the themes, for example, links between maturation and growth in the marriage, and links between struggle to resist pressures and growth in the marriage. The third point I would like to draw attention to is the possibility that many marriages need to go through a period of growth and continue to grow over time. The continuum of change never ends and the outcome of the marriage is never certain, depending on each partner.

Equitable marriage – Actual versus ideal. One question that I specifically asked each of the women was their definition of an equitable marriage. I chose the term "equitable marriage" stemming from the definition I cited early on in this thesis by Regan and Sprecher (1995) where equitable is defined as a subjective perception of fairness and justice in a relationship. I wanted to see how each of the women perceived an equitable marriage and I also wanted to see their definition in relation to the definition I cited. It was also important to examine the difference between the definitions the women offered versus what was really happening in their marriages. The women's definitions were similar with some slight differences among them. I will outline what each of the women perceived as an equitable marriage.

Jane's perception of an equitable marriage was a process of give and take and finding a balance of power. Jane's definition represents her ideal of an equitable marriage. However, the reality of in her marriage was quite different. Jane stated feeling internalized pressure to fulfill the role of a wife, a sense of guilt resulting in feeling obligated to do more due to income inequality, and the responsibility of having to tell her husband what to do in the relationship.

Katherine's perception of an equitable marriage addressed the growth of the people in the relationship. Katherine's definition of an equitable marriage encompasses giving and taking to one another to allow for the time to experience individual growth. In her definition she said:

Well, for me there's the, an equitable marriage is when two people are committed to each other and their relationship, but also allow for self growth individually and for me what that means is having the time to do that. So, what stems into that is the household tasks, the responsibilities of care, arranging for babysitting, that kind of thing. Just supporting each other.

Although Katherine's definition describes the give and take to allow each other time to grow, it does not appear to be actually happening in the relationship when she says:

Looking from the outside you might think it's equal. But it's the responsibilities of packing the bag, making sure that the bag has everything in it, that's what tips the childcare in to my work.

If the responsibilities in Katherine's marriage are not shared equally as illustrated above, this undermines her ideal definition of an equitable marriage because it takes extra time from Katherine to promote her individual growth.

The main components to Carol's definition of an equitable marriage are that both partner's needs are met and there is a balance between the give and take of each partner. Carol spoke to the definition of an equitable marriage in terms of needs:

I would say equal in terms of not even, not so much in terms of contributions, but I mean I think an equal relationship is where both needs are being taken care of, both needs are being considered, um, goals and priorities of both parties are just as important, like

obviously there's going to be some trade-offs in terms of whose needs get met when, but I think there should be a balance between that.

The main components to Carol's definition of an equitable marriage are that both partners' needs are met and there is a balance between the give and take of each partner. It is demonstrated in Carol's interview that the reality of her marriage does not match her definition of an equitable marriage when she states "I think that I have more of a supporting role as opposed to a direct equal partnership".

Hazel's definition of an equitable marriage focuses on sharing power and control, while maintaining independence:

I think where each partner feels that they have some control of what they both do, have control over what they do themselves and has the support of the other person to do that. I don't think it's about housework, or who earns the most money. I think it's about sharing power and control and having the freedom to do that, to do your own thing, be your own person within the relationship.

The main components in Hazel's definition of an equitable marriage are support and independence. It is apparent in Hazel's interview that her definition of an equitable marriage does not match the reality in her marriage in the example where she suffered from depression due to her many responsibilities. Hazel's independence and ability to be her own person in the relationship was compromised as a result of carrying too many of the burdens in the relationship.

Ursula defined an equitable marriage in terms of give and take between partners and it appeared from her interview that her definition was in line with what actually takes place in her relationship. What is important to draw attention to is that Ursula and her partner were not married at the time of the interview. Although this fact may have no relevance, it is important to note that many men do change their attitudes and behaviours after they are married. There are different social influences occurring with cohabiting couples.

Anne defined an equitable marriage as “communication and respect and that the work is shared”. Anne clearly struggles with the fact that her marriage is not an equitable one, based on her own definition. Anne states that she is in the main information-gathering role, she needs to encourage her husband to do his share of the workload, and she is solely responsible for managing the money.

Each of the women’s definitions of an equitable marriage (except Ursula’s which I have addressed) are different than what is actually happening within their marriages. This difference could have some serious implications for the women’s happiness in their marriage if they feel that their marriage is not an equitable one. It may even be possible that some of the women based their definitions on what they thought their marriage represented and upon reading this could be surprised or unhappy with the analyses. It is also important to note that each of these marriages appear to be working toward their goal of an equitable marriage, again emphasizing the time dimension of the growth in the marriage. Some implications of working toward the goal of an equitable marriage are undetermined because it is unknown how the partners define an equitable marriage or if that is even their goal. It is this researcher’s opinion that many men do not strive for an equitable relationship, as it serves them to have inequality. Often only through the encouragement or coercion of the women, as illustrated in some of the examples, do men succumb to change. As stated, it appeared as though it was largely the women contributing to the growth in the marriage, which may also indicate that it is the women working toward the goal of an equitable marriage.

External Pressures and Supports

My assumption at the outset of my thesis was that the direct influence of family and friends would play a significant role in the women’s marriages. This assumption was based on

the results of my undergraduate thesis. My current thesis found that there were some significant external pressures and supports in these women's lives. The women shared a common thread in their reliance on their partners for emotional support. There were two themes that emerged: family and friends and financial pressures.

Family and friends. When discussing who Jane felt was her greatest source of social support, she emphasized that she and her husband rely on each other:

Each other. We have very dysfunctional families, so we try and stay away from them as much, which has been a little bit hard, because most people rely on families for support and on your extended families for support, but it's better for us not to.

Jane also stated that the role their friends played in their lives was not very influential. However, she did describe a significant amount of pressure from family and friends. Jane describes the pressure she felt at having to be the stereotypical wife:

I grew up in a very traditional home, my mom didn't work, she worked in the home, she was very traditional.

Jane also addressed the pressure she felt from friends to have a baby:

I've had comments said to me from friends who have just had a baby, started asking us so when are you going to have a baby. They just don't understand.

Jane also continued by sharing with me the negative pressure she received for wanting to raise foster children:

I can see myself at some time being a foster parent and that just blows people away. People always say, "Why would you do that"?

These examples shared by Jane demonstrate that although she reported friends and family do not have an influence in her life or her marriage, there is definitely pressure that exists from these two groups of people. The question I pose is if Jane is unaware of these pressures, how much of an impact do they have on her and her marriage? I would assert the impact could be great.

Katherine felt that family was a source of social support but the initial support came from each other:

So as far as support is concerned, his father and my sister are immediate supports for us, my mother also is very supportive. She'll come up or she'll call. So definitely family. Rather than friends, we have friends that we talk with, but (Katherine's husband) and I together offer an amazing amount of support to each other, and I think it's from again, learning from our first marriage. Just recognizing that initial support is necessary.

Although Katherine did not feel family and friends had any influence, she did draw attention to the fact that there were certain topics she needed to avoid with certain groups of friends:

Sometimes if (Katherine's husband) and I are out with them, the traditional group, they'll often think that I should be looking after (Katherine's child) all the time, so if (child) falls and cries, my first reaction is to sort of sit back and wait to see how (child) responds. As soon as (child) falls down I don't run, either (Katherine's husband) or I will go to (child).

This excerpt demonstrates a lack of support from Katherine's friends about her choices in parenting and a silent pressure that she is not doing her job as a parent.

Anne did not discuss in detail the type of support that she and her husband received from family and friends. She did share with me the types of families that she and her husband came from. Anne's family was quite dysfunctional so my sense is that she does not rely much on them for emotional support, and Anne's husband's family is quite traditional in its views so I did not get the impression that Anne and her husband share a great deal about their marriage with his family. Anne spoke in great detail about her marriage through a parent's perspective and how she and her husband operated on that level. One example that appeared to indicate pressure from family was Anne's husband feeling as though he needed to be the breadwinner and an example involving a diamond ring:

He (Anne's husband) is traditional in that he should be the provider. And see the other thing is I don't have a diamond ring. That was really important to (Anne's husband). It was a really important value if I was going to be his wife.

These pressures within Anne's marriage have created tension for her and her husband from time to time, as he is not the main breadwinner. These pressures can also be difficult to understand, especially if there is no awareness that they exist.

When Carol spoke about families she described their lack of emotional support:

They don't encourage a lot of the things we do in terms of, on neither side both males and females aren't supportive of me going to school, aren't supportive in my debate of whether I want to have children, um, the lack of desire to be a stay at home mom, to want to have a career that's not secondary. I get a lot of comments about being a secondary role, a secretary or being a nurse as opposed to a doctor.

Carol talked about a few friends but the main emotional support appeared to come from her partner. What Carol did not point out as pressure, but clearly is, was the lack of support from family for returning to school and waiting to have children:

They don't encourage a lot of the things that we do in terms of, on neither side both males and females aren't supportive of me going to school, aren't supportive in my debate of whether I want to have children, the lack of desire to be a stay home mom, to want to have a career that's not secondary.

Ursula spoke briefly about the support from family for her attending school; however, I cannot say whether family and friends are a main source of emotional support because she did not really take the interview in that direction. Ursula did address several examples that I felt resembled pressure from friends and family. The first example was Ursula's friends teasing her and her partner about not being married:

They do tease a lot about living together and not being married. They would like to see us married, that's the main thing.

Although Ursula states she does not feel judged by her friends, it is important to note that the teasing by Ursula's friends is a form of pressure.

The second example was a comment from Ursula about her mother just wanting her to have a baby, married or not. Ursula stated this comment briefly when she spoke of her family, while explaining that her mother did not necessarily approve of her living with her partner.

The third example in Ursula's story was again in reference to her family. Ursula shared with me that she is the first person in her family to attend graduate school and her family is very proud of her. Although this is a very positive comment, being the first person to attend graduate school may provide some pressure to succeed for others, rather than for herself.

Hazel stated that she and her husband currently are each other's main source of emotional support as they have just recently moved here and do not know many people. Hazel and her husband are fairly new to the area and do not have a great deal of exposure to family and friends.

I originally had mixed feelings about the reality that many of these women and their partners relied mainly on each other for social support. On one hand I felt very positive feelings for their strong emotional connections, but on the other hand I felt there was the potential for conflict when too much emphasis is placed on each other for all their needs. Upon further exploration, I now think that the partners relying mostly on one another may also be an example of growth in the marriage/relationship. I have come to understand that many relationships over time do rely largely on one another until it is necessary to reach out to external supports and then it becomes a question of availability of supports. All of the examples I have cited of the women's stories demonstrate pressure from external sources. Although the women did not report feeling that family and friends had any influence, it does not mean that there is not some internalized tension or struggles in the relationships from the pressures I have outlined.

Financial pressures. I have chosen to include financial pressure within this category because financial pressures were relevant to this group of women as a result of returning to

school. Along with family and friends, there was a common thread among these women with regard to how finances impacted the marriage.

Jane experienced the impact of the loss of income and the increase in debt:

He was supportive for the most part, a little bit frustrating I think because when we first got married we were forty thousand dollars in debt from OSAP from both of us, and so we worked really hard to pay it off in a year. It was pretty tough for me to go back to school after we had gone so far to get rid of financial stresses and then one income and then basically living on ten thousand dollars a year, so, it's like one step forward, two steps back, so I think he was a little bit frustrated with that.

This excerpt really emphasizes the pressure that both Jane and her husband experienced with Jane's return to school.

Katherine did not experience the same loss of income as Jane. However, financial pressures surfaced for Katherine because she felt her husband held more power in the relationship because he possessed more money than she did coming into the relationship:

He would say our finances are equal, like I have full access to everything but for me a lot of that money was his money – I have personally struggled with accepting his money.

This excerpt demonstrates another example of where the person in power perceives the relationship as equitable. It also illustrates the pressure Katherine felt from not having her own money.

Carol's financial pressures stemmed from the idea of having to make the sacrifices that are required financially upon the return to school:

I think he (Carol's husband) now realizes that the sacrifice just won't have to be mine it will have to be his as well.

The sacrifices that both Carol and her husband need to make can create financial pressure within the relationship. The pressure could particularly become problematic if Carol's husband was not willing to make the sacrifices or if he at some point became impatient with the sacrifices.

Hazel reported feeling a great deal of pressure from having to work full-time and attend school simultaneously. Hazel's example is a classic one of how financial pressures can negatively impact the relationship. The pressure Hazel was experiencing resulted in her becoming quite depressed and resorting to an ultimatum for her husband.

Ursula reported the financial pressure of returning to one income and as a result the need to discuss her decision to return to school with her partner. Although she felt this decision was hers to make, she also felt it was necessary to discuss it with her partner due to the loss of income:

I should say the one thing we did discuss was finances because obviously once I did this we became a one-income family.

The common thread for all these women that comes to mind is the need to discuss returning to school with their partners based on financial pressures. It needs to be noted that if the partners had denied these women their right to attend school based on finances, that decision may have been detrimental to the relationship. It is quite apparent that financial pressures can do a great deal in promoting neither independence nor an equitable relationship.

In Anne's relationship the financial pressures stemmed from her husband having difficulty obtaining full-time employment. This financial pressure escalated into tension for Anne and her husband because Anne's husband did not feel he was the breadwinner.

All of the women I interviewed faced financial pressures in some form or another and these pressures had an impact on their relationships. What I found to be most interesting is that in many of the other themes (i.e. growth in the marriage) it appeared to be the women playing a primary role, whereas, in a discussion of financial pressures a common reality was the men experiencing the impact of the financial pressures. This dynamic where the men experience the

financial pressures could also be seen as a distraction from their support for the women's choices.

In conclusion to the overall analysis, it is important to note that although each category and theme was presented separately, there were links throughout both the women's stories and the categories and themes. Quite often one woman's example would illustrate one of more of the themes listed. The linking of categories and themes is further evidence that these women are not currently in equitable marriages and do struggle with many different pressures.

Discussion

I would like to take a step back to re-examine my initial research objectives. As a reminder to the reader, my two specific goals were: 1) to explore the inequalities between men and women in relation to marriage; and 2) to explore the impact of external pressures on six graduate women and their choices within their marriages. I believe that I met the objective of exploring the inequalities that exist between men and women in relation to marriage in this study through the women's experience of their marriages. The women's interviews were very informative and offered a great deal of insight into their experience of marriage.

The second objective of exploring the impact of external pressures on the women and their choices within their marriage confirmed my initial assumptions. The findings of this study concluded that women do experience pressure from external sources. Although the women's main source of emotional support came from their partners, there was still substantial evidence of indirect pressures from external sources for the women in their own individual pursuits and within their marriages.

As a result of the women reporting that they rely solely on their partner's for emotional support, a new issue was created. Originally I questioned whether it is beneficial to the marriage

and to both the partners to rely on each other mainly for emotional support. However, after some careful consideration of the findings, I have now learned that relationships go through a period of growth. Two important conclusions come from these findings – first, that over time many relationships rely solely on their partner for emotional support and that it does not indicate a lack of emotional support from family and friends, and second, relying solely on one's partner for emotional support does not protect one from the pressures from external forces. So, although these women did not report their family and friends as having a great deal of influence over their lives, there was some critical data that would suggest otherwise. It may be more appropriate to say that family and friends did not have any direct influence. However, it cannot be said that there was no pressure from family and friends. It also needs to be said that this pressure had some real implications for both the women as individuals and their marriages. These findings were slightly different than my findings from my undergraduate study. In my undergraduate study, all the women reported direct pressure from their social networks (i.e., friends and family). The subtle differences in the findings of these studies may be due to the level of education of the women and their feminist values. The women in my undergraduate study were primarily undergraduate students and did not appear to be strong in their feminist beliefs. The women in my current study were in the MSW program and appeared quite confident in their feminist beliefs. The sample size and age range for both the studies was similar.

In the following discussion, I examine my findings in greater detail and look at how they compare to the previous literature. I also explore my feminist interpretations of these findings and offer a community psychology perspective on the basis of what I found.

The Links Between the Findings and the Literature

The current findings support Risman and Johnson-Sumerford's (1998) ideas that the family is where traditional gender roles continue to serve as a reasonable and legitimate basis for the distribution of rights, power, and privilege, thereby perpetuating oppressive power relations between women and men. In a study by Regan and Sprecher (1995) of how women and men judge the value of their own and their partner's hypothetical contributions to a marital or long-term cohabiting relationship, it was found that in the past what determined a "traditional" marriage was the presence of the man as the dominant breadwinner. For example, one of my participants, Anne, described how her husband's traditional attitude with regards to gender created challenges for their marriage. Because Anne's husband struggled with the fact that he was not the main breadwinner in the family, his self-esteem suffered, and this issue created challenges for the marriage to overcome. Carol reported feeling as if she placed "second" in her marriage to that of her husband's needs, while Hazel stated that she felt her marriage was unusual because of the amount of emotional support she received from her husband. All of these examples from the women's stories illustrate that gender stereotypes continue to have an impact on marriage. Katherine provided an interesting summation of gender role stereotyping by stating that it will always be present and affect our relationships. She asserted the way to cope with gender role stereotyping is through awareness of the stereotypes and open marital communication.

Cooper, Arkkelin, and Tiebert (1994) conducted a study of female and male business majors and their relationship of their preferred future career-marriage arrangement to their relationship and work values, work motivation, and gender role orientation. They concluded that couples were striving to attain equitable relationships. My study shows support for their findings and confirms that women and men are striving to attain more equitable relationships. However,

all of the women in this study reported a continuing struggle in attaining more equitable marriages. Based on the current findings, the conclusion is that women are spending more energy than men in working towards equitable relationships. Earlier in this thesis I cited Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1996) because they addressed the “myth of equality”. The current findings of this study indicate that marriage may be moving toward a myth of equality. As women continue to struggle with their own internal issues, the pressure from societal norms, and what they see as an equitable marriage, there is the possibility of perceiving the marriage as more equitable than what it actually is. The myth of equality is very problematic because it continues to ignore the inequalities that exist and discourages challenging any inequalities.

In a study that investigated the relationship between marital adjustment and congruency of couple preference regarding wife employment, Feinauer and Williams-Evans (1989) stated that women in dual-career relationships have added stresses of inadequate negotiations of responsibilities, lack of leisure time, and a lack of family time. The current findings do support these assertions. Although all of the women who participated in this study reported that their partners took care of a great deal of the housework responsibilities, this just demonstrates that the actual sharing of household tasks was less problematic. Regan and Sprecher (1995) found that the participation of men in household responsibilities appeared to be due to the “value” they placed on a task, whereas the current findings suggest sharing in responsibilities is not determined by the “value” of the task but rather by the time and availability of the partners in the relationship. Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998) found that women still appear to be responsible for the smooth operation of the household, even with the help of their partners in household responsibilities. These observations appear to be consistent with the current findings of the burden of responsibility for women.

With regards to childcare, my findings confirmed the findings from Wiersma's (1994) study of behavioural strategies used by dual-career couples to solve work-home role conflicts. The conclusions were that women perform the majority of parenting responsibilities. My current findings illustrate that men are much more involved in the actual tasks of childcare. However, the current findings indicate that women are still performing the majority of the responsibility. Thompson and Walker (1995) conducted a study that addressed the question of the place of feminism in family studies and they suggested that the increase of involvement in childcare responsibilities by men is due to women working and the need of extra assistance by the men. At the time of interviewing, these women were working very hard at obtaining their degrees. The current findings confirm Thompson and Walker's (1995) that concluded men are only more involved due to women having added responsibility outside of the home.

Feinauer and Williams-Evans's (1989) findings stated that stresses for women include lack of leisure time, overly high expectations for themselves, insecurity in their individual identity and role-confusion, as well as discrepancies between cultural expectations for women's roles and changing social norms with regard to career expectations, was supported in the current study. The women in this study did describe internal struggles with these issues. Repeatedly the women demonstrated their struggles with cultural expectations and their own fit within these expectations.

Earlier in this thesis, I stated that there were three specific areas in which women are affected by attempting to create a more equal marriage: difficulty in choosing a partner, internal struggles of having both a successful marriage and career, and external pressures from friends, family, and social institutions (e.g., work environments). Novack and Novack (1996) in a study of the dynamics of conflicting demands on young women concluded that the gap between

anticipated choices and actuality is an area that needs to be addressed and that people need to discuss fundamental issues before marriage. These findings were confirmed in the current study. I requested the story of their marriage and each woman began her story with a brief discussion of the courtship period. What is significant about starting with the courtship period is that they were not just sharing the story of their marriage but also the story of the relationship. Earlier I stated that I was concerned with what marital partners might discuss prior to marriage may not hold true after their marriage. This prior negotiation appeared relevant due to the women beginning their stories at the courtship period and several of the women did negotiate with their partners prior to marriage. Katherine and Hazel, in particular, negotiated with their partners around what they felt they could tolerate in a second marriage, based on their first marriage.

I also now realize based on the interviews of the women that many partnerships often experience a transition period or time of growth in the relationship where “ground rules” are set up. An example of this transition period is in Jane’s story, where she described the conflict she and her husband experienced while trying to understand the dynamics in their marriage.

Novack and Novack (1996) also found that women are encouraged to pursue their educational dreams until they are married and begin having children. As a result of this internal struggle between career and marriage, Schroeder, Blood, and Maluso (1991) in their study examining the career and family role expectations and attitudes of women university students and both of their parents, found that women college graduates were retreating from contemporary attitudes about marriage to more traditional attitudes. My study did not confirm these previous findings. The women in this study appeared quite comfortable in their roles as partner and professional woman. The findings did not indicate that these women were moving back to more traditional attitudes; in fact, the current findings continued to point to the internal

struggle the women were experiencing resisting the return to more traditional attitudes. It is important to note that the study by Novack and Novack (1996) may not have been confirmed due to my sample size. It is also important to note that although these women were experiencing internal struggles to avoid retreating back to traditional attitudes, their actions may have contradicted their attitudes (an example of this contradiction is the “second shift” that I described earlier).

The impact of external pressures from friends, family, and social institutions (e.g., work environments) was definitely an issue in the current study. Many of the women reported their partners as their main source of emotional support. The women reported that friends, family, and work environments did not have an impact on their choices or their relationships. However, the findings suggest that family and friends do have a significant impact on the women in form of indirect pressure about their choices, both as individuals and partners in their marriage. The women may have reported not feeling influenced by their family and friends for two reasons: they were not aware of the coercive pressure they were being exposed to, or, the women may not have believed their lives were impacted by the pressures of family and friends. However, the findings clearly indicate that the women were affected, in particular, in the form of an internal struggle to resist traditional expectations.

Feminist Interpretations

Feminism focuses on the oppressive character of structural inequality based on gender. Minas (1993) describes feminism as “a commitment to understanding women’s own perceptions of their situations” (p. 6). Minas describes several determining factors of feminism: women who are feminists must have an awareness of women’s oppression; feminists need to have some explanation of patriarchy’s origins and continuation; women’s experiences are not uniform and

the feminist must attempt to seek out the oppressive elements and analyze women's experiences; and the last defining factor of feminism is translating thought into action. It is the final defining factor of feminism, taking steps toward action, that I am addressing now by recapping my discussion of empowerment theory.

The women's movement has stressed the importance of consciousness-raising as a first step in the process of empowerment and personal and social change (Mulvey, 1988). Consciousness-raising refers to awareness of and action about the relationships among life situations, individuals, and the social-political context. Becoming aware of these relationships facilitates the process of becoming empowered and promoting change. Shields (1995) conducted a study to determine the understanding of women's experiences of empowerment as a tool in further developing the concept of empowerment. The findings indicated that women understand empowerment as encompassing three core themes: understanding the self through "me", ability to take action based on the internal sense of self, and connectedness. These themes are supported by the feminist clinicians, Jordan et al. (1991), who emphasized that women feel empowered through creating and sustaining connection with others. Through this connection each individual is energized into action. Western society encourages separation and individuation (which have been the ongoing themes of androcentric empowerment) and does not encourage growth through connection. Jordan et al. stated that it is only in valuing our human connections that we can begin to take the risks necessary to empower our relationships.

The findings in the current study indicate that the women are experiencing strong connection in their relationships and as a result are empowered in their relationships. All of the women reported strong emotional support from their partners in their decision to return to

academia. It is my sense that the connection the women feel to their partners helped empower them to pursue their goals of returning to school.

It is important to note that the connection the women described with their partners did not happen without any challenges. Two main themes in the findings are the struggle to resist pressures and power issues. The struggle to resist pressures demonstrates that most of the women struggle with internal issues. Many of the women reported struggling with their partners, as well as themselves, around the expectations in the relationship. All of the women described power issues within their relationship. Thus, my conclusion is that power issues will always be present within relationships as a part of gender-role stereotyping. The attitude of Western society and gender roles continues to perpetuate power differentials between men and women.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study

The first strength of this study I draw attention to is using narrative analysis as a methodological approach. This approach allowed the six women who participated to have their voices heard. Given the nature of narrative analysis and the use of the women's personal stories as data, it is my hope that this has been an empowering experience for these six women. I believe the overall analysis demonstrated the links between the women's stories and also represented the combined voices of the women. I would definitely use this narrative approach again given the opportunity because I felt it was a powerful learning tool. The process of analyzing each woman's story and then linking all the women's stories helped me really feel as though I was personally acquainted with each woman who participated.

My study also provides the women with a social analysis of their marriage if they so choose to use it in this way. The process of telling the story of their marriage could possibly be a

consciousness-raising experience promoting change in their relationships. This social analysis is both a strength for the women and also remains true to my feminist values.

A second strength of this study is the goal of furthering feminist research in the social sciences. The traditional theories of social science do not capture the experiences of women (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Creating and conducting a study such as this one offers insight into women's first hand accounts of their lives and helps to educate the reader. It is also through ongoing research that women continue to become more involved in the forefront of other disciplines, such as community psychology. This study is a community psychology graduate thesis, so the attempt is to further feminist research within the context of community psychology. Community psychology focuses on the belief that a researcher's values contribute to social science in useful ways and do not undermine the methodological framework. Feminism takes this belief one step further by emphasizing that the *process* of research is as important as the outcome because the empowering process is considered an outcome (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). It is my hope that my study has succeeded in applying both community psychology principles as well as feminist principles. I also feel that this study contributed in furthering the representation of women conducting research in community psychology.

Another strength I will discuss is the connection between the researcher and the participants in a nonhierarchical, caring research environment. This is both a defining feature of feminist research and a goal of community psychology research. Feminist research asserts that feelings, beliefs and values of the researcher must be included in the process (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). This link between emotion and knowledge strengthens the research in two ways: it acknowledges the researcher's subjectivity, and it breaks down any power imbalances between the researcher and the participant.

A final strength of this study is that it contributes to the body of literature currently available around marriage. All of the literature I reviewed addressing marriage included both women and men in the study, my study examines solely the women's experience of marriage. I believe interviewing only women enabled me to maintain my focus on the women and remain true to my feminist beliefs. I also feel my study contributes to the literature as it is one of the few studies on marriage that are qualitative. In an area such as marriage, there are many benefits to the personal nature of qualitative research.

The connection between the researcher and the participant can also be viewed as a weakness of the study. Criticisms by traditional researchers have emphasized that the boundaries between researcher and participant become blurred and can impact the outcome of the study in a negative way. If nothing else, then it is questioned whether the results are credible. Both community psychology and feminism have disputed this criticism by emphasizing the importance of a trusting relationship between the researcher and the participant. It is often feminist practice to invest their personal experiences and emotions as a means of making a connection with their participants (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). There are also inevitable ways in which the researcher influences the participant in qualitative research methods.

A final weakness of my study I will draw attention to is the sample that I chose. The sample of six women from the MSW program was quite specific, which is what I chose for this study. However, I believe the findings from other samples of women would demonstrate significant differences, for example, women who stay at home.

Some Further Conclusions

The final issue I am addressing is: what operates to promote an equitable marriage and how can community psychology help to promote an equitable marriage?

Based on the women's interviews there were several key components to their relationships that helped to promote equitable marriages. For example, the women reported strong emotional connections to their partners. This emotional connection they describe promotes women as individuals as well as, promotes the relationship. Although the women were not experiencing equitable relationships at this time, there did appear to be effort from both the women and the men to move toward the goal of obtaining more equitable relationships (the difficulty remains to be in women doing more than men to accomplish this goal). The women's self-awareness of what they want in a relationship is important – there just needs to be that bridge crossed between the actual and the ideal. Diagram 1 illustrates how each category and theme presented in the findings can either aim to promote equitable marriage or not promote equitable marriage. The diagram is a circle representing each category as being linked together. For example, the inner circle represents the individual woman, the middle circle represents the marriage and the outer circle represents the community. These three circles are interconnected and serve either to support and sustain the inner circle – the woman, or serve to breakdown some aspect of the entire picture. If one of the circles is not operating on a level of support, equitable marriage is an ideal, not a reality.

Related to what promotes an equitable marriage is what does not promote an equitable marriage. As seen by the findings, the pressure from external sources (even indirectly) can manage to create some significant struggles for women and couples in their effort to promote an equitable marriage. The discrepancy for the women in their definition of an equitable marriage and their reality can also operate against promoting an equitable marriage. For example, if the women feel their marriage is not living up to their expectations this may create some real problems for the women and the marriage. Where each woman is in terms of her feminist beliefs

will have an impact on the promotion of equitable marriages. If the woman is very strong in her feminist beliefs the internal struggles she experiences may not impact her in the same way as another woman not quite as feminist in her beliefs.

Another means of not promoting equitable marriage is through the reversal of oppression. If women begin to dominate in their relationships, the power structure surrounding control is perpetuated. Regardless of who is dominating – the man or the woman – equitable marriage is not promoted in a dominant-subordinate relationship.

Community psychology can play a role in promoting equitable marriages. In promoting the community psychology value of equality in all situations, traditional attitudes will begin to change in all institutions, including marriage. Community psychology seeks to dismantle inequality in all sectors, automatically promoting more equitable marriages. Promoting the value of equality can take place in research, graduate training in community psychology, and the practice of equality in everyday life. Community psychology needs to continue to include more representation of women and feminism needs a significant arena in community psychology. It is through this broader scope that community psychology will help in promoting equitable marriages.

Recommendations for Future Research and Action

The first recommendation I would suggest is to create a feminist agenda within community psychology graduate programs, as cited in Mulvey (1988). This feminist agenda would include practicum settings that are more feminist in nature (i.e., Community Education Team) and feminist issues directly in the curriculum (i.e., issues surrounding violence against women). Directly related to my findings, I would also recommend greater financial support to women returning to school to help out with the increased financial pressures. It was

demonstrated in my findings that even the men who were initially supportive of the women returning to school changed somewhat when the financial pressures set in. I think it would also be useful to “open-up” the classes to the partners of the women attending school to offer them the opportunity to appreciate how intense graduate programs are.

A second recommendation involves expanding the sample that I used. I would expand the sample to include women from other disciplines, for example, engineering, business and science. I think it would also be important to explore the experiences of women who do not have any formal education or women who stay home.

A third recommendation directly relates to my findings, in particular with regards to Ursula. Ursula was the only participant who was living common-law with her partner. At the beginning of my thesis I felt it was quite appropriate to include common-law in my study, as this arrangement is a legal marriage. However, as demonstrated in the findings, Ursula did not experience quite the same issues the other women described (i.e., she did describe any power issues and her definition of equitable marriage matched what she described as her reality). It would be interesting to explore if there are any differences between the couples who choose to live common-law and the couples who decide to formally marry.

The final recommendation I suggest is to inquire if the women who participated in my study would be interested in a focus group to discuss with one another their findings and experiences. It would be my goal to promote a social support network for these women and other women who would be interested. There are many support groups available (i.e., support groups for new moms) but there is nothing that exists for married women. My study would support the need for support groups for married women, as it has been demonstrated the numerous pressures that married women continue to face.

My Personal Journey

This thesis has been an incredible journey for me. I chose the word journey because it was not only an academic endeavor but a personal one as well. Consequently, I have split this section into two parts: my personal trials and triumphs during the work of this thesis and my experience of the women who participated in this study.

As I have stated before, I first became interested in the topic of women and marriage in my fourth year of undergraduate studies. My own unsuccessful marriage encouraged me to pursue this topic and I had an outlet to do this research through my undergraduate thesis. The findings of my undergraduate thesis struck me as unfortunate. The women in that study were experiencing many of the same things in their marriage that I was in mine: pressured to be a wife and mother and discouraged from pursuing personal goals. When I was accepted in the MA program I had another opportunity to see how women were faring in marriage.

My personal journey in writing this thesis largely centers on my pregnancy and the birth of my daughter, Tyra, on January 15, 2000. This was truly an amazing time of my life. A “normal” pregnancy involves many changes and new experiences that would create challenges for anyone attempting to complete a thesis during this time. I recall telling my committee members about my pregnancy. They expressed some concern over the amount of work that was involved, particularly from the woman I had chosen to be on my committee. I reassured her that I had it all under control and a perfect plan in place. After all, newborns sleep all the time, right? She gave me a knowing smile – upon reflection I see how naïve I must have appeared.

My pregnancy was anything but “normal,” because it seemed to me if there was something that could go wrong it did. Despite the many health scares I experienced, my daughter was born happy and healthy. However, as a result of the various frightening aspects of

this pregnancy, my thesis was often the last thing on my mind. There were numerous times I faced losing my baby and, in the greater scheme of things, a thesis was just not my first priority.

After the birth of my daughter, I quickly learned that babies do not sleep *all* the time and in the first six months, I slept when she slept. Who knew? That woman on my committee knew and I was only then discovering the depth of what she meant with that knowing smile. When I was finally ready to return to the land of thesis writers, I had to deal with the demands many new “mommies” face: on-demand breastfeeding, night-waking, hours of what I call the “baby-bop” (this consisted of a constant swaying motion, while standing, for a duration that could range from 15 minutes to an hour at a time) – not to mention any of my own needs.

So needless to say, this thesis has been a both a journey and a struggle. I have learned that I am not only capable of the things I was before my daughter came into my life, but I am now capable of many more things. I am both amazed at my own evolution and also very pleased that there are still remnants of who I was pre-Tyra days. The completion of this thesis is one of the sweetest victories I have ever known.

The second part of my journey was the experience of the women who chose to participate in my study. I had many personal feelings about these women’s stories that I wrote down in a journal as a means of channeling the feelings appropriately. It is in this section that I share with you my feelings throughout this study.

I had originally anticipated the women reporting a high influence in their lives from external social supports (i.e., family and friends). Although the women in this study did not report experiencing any direct influence from family and friends, there was definitely pressure present from these two groups that had significant impacts on the women.

I had many mixed emotions throughout this thesis with the women's responses. On one hand I really respected the responses of the women, while on the other hand I felt as though the women sometimes had just switched places with the men – they were in control. Terms such as “dominant” role in the relationship tell me that equality is not the goal but rather control. Feeling as though the women were in control made me both happy and angry. I was happy in the sense that it was really refreshing to see women treat men the way men have been treating women for centuries. I was angry at the inequality I sometimes felt continued to exist and this time it was women perpetuating the inequality. My own personal thoughts led me to worry about the possibility of the oppressed group (the women) seeking to oppress, rather than empower and be empowered. However, I also questioned my own conditioning to our patriarchal society. Was the reality that at times the women were exerting unnecessary power over their relationship or am I so used to men in control in relationships that any display of strength from women stirs uncomfortable feelings for me?

The possibility of my own uncomfortable feelings then forced me to contemplate my own feminist ideals. Am I a feminist? Do I embody feminist ideals? Do all feminists battle with their own conditioned dragons? This thesis has been a tremendous period of growth for me and the answer to my questions is: yes. I am a feminist, I do embody feminist ideals and even though I struggle with the dragons that does not mean one day I won't conquer them.

I started out this study with two key goals: 1) to explore the inequalities between men and women in relation to marriage; and 2) to explore the impact of external pressures on women and their choices within their marriages. I was able to meet my goals; the women offered rich information in their stories of their marriages and there was an impact of external pressures on the women in this study. Much of the previous literature that I reviewed was confirmed by the

study. My thoughts on future research have shifted to a more feminist exploration. Based on my above questions around my own growth as a feminist, I think it would be useful to interview women about their feminist ideals and struggles. Do other women struggle with whether they are a true feminist? My assumption would be that other women do struggle with where they are in their own feminist beliefs and I am curious to know how they handle the struggle. My goal would be to continue to incorporate both community psychology values and feminist principles, as it is my belief these two disciplines are very complementary to each other.

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Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Posting

ATTENTION ALL MSW MARRIED WOMEN!!!!!!

I am a graduate student in the Community Psychology program at WLU and I am looking for interested MSW students to participate in my thesis research.

WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

This study is about women just like yourself. I want to interview women about their experience of marriage. Share with me how you find contemporary marriage. These interviews are completely confidential and no names are used.

HOW MUCH OF A TIME COMMITMENT IS INVOLVED?

There are two meetings involved. Each meeting will last approximately one hour.

WHY SHOULD I PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY?

To be involved in a study about married women. This study focuses just on the experience of women in marriage. Much past research on marriage has ignored the experiences of women and this study seeks to bring the experience of women to the forefront.

THE ONLY REQUIREMENTS ARE:

- ❑ YOU MUST BE MARRIED ANYWHERE FROM 1-5 YEARS**
- ❑ YOU MUST BE A MSW STUDENT**

If you are interested in participating please call Natalie at 896-0963 and leave a message.

Appendix B

Interview Guide

The following is a list of potential topics to be discussed during each interview:

Background Information About the Participant

- ❑ General information about the participant (i.e., age, years married, children, etc.)
- ❑ Information about career goals, educational goals, etc.
- ❑ Goals that have been accomplished and goals that are still in progress

The Story of the Marriage

- ❑ Courtship
- ❑ Planning the wedding
- ❑ Any children (before or after)
- ❑ The “after shock” of marriage
- ❑ What marriage is like now

Experiences of Marriage

- ❑ The Participant’s experience of marriage
- ❑ Understanding of power, inequality, etc.
- ❑ What creates a fulfilling and happy marriage
- ❑ The understanding between the couple of career/marriage balance

Outside Influences and External Pressures

- ❑ Parents perception of marriage, in particular, to the participant’s marriage
- ❑ Friends perception of marriage, in particular, to the participant’s marriage
- ❑ Spouse’s outside network of influence (i.e., family, friends, co-workers, etc.)
- ❑ How the couple handles outside, external pressures and influences

As stated, the second interview will be to cover any information still outstanding and will mainly provide an arena for feedback.

Appendix C

Information Letter

The purpose of this study is to empower women through their own voices on the topic of contemporary marriage. This study is about women and for women, so therefore, only women are invited to participate.

My research objectives follow two specific goals: to develop a deeper understanding of women's experience of marriage; and to explore the impact of external pressures on women and their choices within their marriages. These goals stem from a gap in the existing literature of the woman's experience of marriage, as well as, a personal interest in how a woman shapes her individual self in relation to her marriage.

My methodology will encourage full narrative analysis, allowing the woman to tell her story as it unfolds. The process will involve two interviews, lasting approximately one hour for each interview. These times are not restricted, meaning it is entirely dependent on the woman participating. Each woman may share or omit any information she chooses. The times and locations of the interviews will be the women's choice to help convenience them.

Pseudonyms will be used for all participants throughout the study. In addition, the transcripts will be identified with pseudonyms only. Nowhere in the notes, transcripts, preliminary or final copies of this investigation will participants' identities be revealed. Throughout the interview process the participants will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts and make any additions or deletions. I may choose to use some direct quotes from the transcripts in the final draft of the thesis, but not without the specific permission of the participant. During the process of the thesis any identifying information, e.g. transcripts, fieldnotes will be kept in a locked drawer at my home and then destroyed upon completion of this study.

All participants are free to contact me, Natalie McCormac, at any time if there are any questions or concerns and participants have the right to have all questions about the research answered clearly and in detail. Participants may also choose to contact my thesis advisor, Richard Walsh-Bowers, regarding any concerns or questions about the study. Participation is strictly voluntary and participants may choose to withdraw at any time.

Researcher: Natalie McCormac 519-896-0963

Thesis Advisor: Richard Walsh-Bowers 519-884-1970 ext. 3630

Appendix D
Wilfrid Laurier University
Informed Consent Statement
A Feminist Analysis of Current Pressures on Contemporary Marriage
Principal Investigator: Natalie McCormac
Thesis Advisor: Richard Walsh-Bowers

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to empower women through their own voices on the topic of contemporary marriage. My research objectives follow two specific goals: to develop a deeper understanding of women's experience of marriage; and to explore the impact of external pressures on women and their choices within their marriage.

INFORMATION

In this study I intend to use a narrative method to interview women (of any age) early in their marriage (approximately one to five years). The interviews will be entirely the women's stories – open-ended to allow the women to express their personal accounts in their own words.

The sampling strategy I plan to use is volunteer participation through the Masters of Social Work Program at Wilfrid Laurier University. I intend to interview approximately 6 women based on their willingness to participate. Although the interview is meant to be as open-ended as possible, I will have an Interview Guide to help in the interview process, if necessary. You have been given an Information Sheet initially to determine if you would be still interested in participating in this study. In signing this Informed Consent Statement, you have agreed to continue to participate in this study. You understand that you may still withdraw from the study at any point during the process.

There will be two interviews required of you, as a participant, lasting approximately one hour for each interview. The time and location of the interviews will be chosen by you. Prior to each interview, verbal consent will be requested as a means of ensuring that you wish to continue with the process. I alone will review the Informed Consent Statement, any fieldnotes, and transcripts. Any identifying information, e.g., transcripts, fieldnotes will be kept by myself in a locked drawer in my home. Upon completion of this study all Informed Consent Statements, fieldnotes, and transcripts will be destroyed.

Each interview will be audio-taped (with permission from you) in order to obtain an accurate record of the interview. I will be the only person reviewing the audiotapes. I will also record any personal reflections or observations throughout the interview. At the end of the interview, your impressions of the process will be noted.

After completing each interview, tape-recorded conversations will be transcribed verbatim. The entire transcript will be read while replaying the audio-taped interview in order to gain a complete sense of the quality of each discussion, as well as to register any relevant changes in your intonation throughout the interview. These thoughts, and the personal reflections noted

during the interview, will be recorded in the margins of each transcription. All transcripts will be given to you to review, providing you with the opportunity to make any changes and clarify any information.

RISKS

You may experience some discomfort at having discussed an issue that may be a source of tension or possibly may not even have been addressed up to this point. It is possible that you may have already noticed issues in your marriage and these issues may cause you some concern. The confirmation of these feelings may cause some discomfort.

The measures I intend to use to minimize these risks to you is to provide you with resources to contact if you wish. I will provide the number and location of counseling services on campus in the event you wish to discuss these issues further. I will also provide off-campus resources, such as, K-W Counseling Services, Interfaith Pastoral Counseling Services, Catholic Family Services and Sloan Counseling. This will enable you the option of getting assistance as a couple off campus.

You may be inconvenienced because it is your time you are volunteering, however, I am hoping you will be interested in participating in a study designed to solely focus on your needs. You will be free to choose the time and location of the interviews to make it more convenient to you. I also intend to provide refreshments during the interviews to make the atmosphere more relaxing and pleasant.

BENEFITS

There are many benefits to participating in this study. An important benefit is the empowering experience for you, as the participant, to have the opportunity to have your voice heard. The experience itself may be very valuable for women in a research context. Women are not often given the opportunity to express themselves in an open narrative fashion. I am hoping this process will be a time of sharing and learning about oneself in a safe and comfortable environment. Through the process of sharing your personal story, you are providing a wide base of rich information that I am anticipating will help to answer the research objectives I have outlined.

Another benefit to this study is my hope to further the feminist research that strives to put women at the forefront. My goal is to have this study published to add to the growing feminist perspective on current women's issues. I am hoping you will experience a deep sense of satisfaction having your experiences contribute to a body of literature aimed in representing women.

CONFIDENTIALITY

You are involved on a voluntary basis and can withdraw from the study at any time during the entire process. You also have the option to not share any information you are uncomfortable with disclosing. I alone will review the Informed Consent Statement, any fieldnotes, and

transcripts. In the final report, your name and identifying characteristics will be protected through the use of pseudonyms. This will ensure there is no connection made to you in the context of the thesis. Throughout the entire process you will be asked to review the transcripts to ensure accuracy. This will also allow you to make any changes or deletions to the transcript. Upon completion of this thesis, I will destroy your Informed Consent Statement, any fieldnotes and transcripts.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study) you may contact the researcher, Natalie McCormac, at 55 Greenvalley Drive, and 896-0963. If you feel you have not been treated according to the description in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Linda Parker, Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, Wilfrid Laurier University, 884-0710, extension 3126.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix E

Template of Participant Feedback

**Natalie McCormac
55 Greenvalley Drive, 314
Kitchener, Ontario
N2P 1Z6**

**(Participant's Name)
(Participant's Address)**

(Date)

Dear (Participant's Name),

As promised, within is a summary of my study, "A Feminist Analysis of Current Pressures on Contemporary Marriage". My research is now complete and thanks to your generosity the process was an enjoyable and rewarding endeavor.

I think you will find the summary of my research comprehensive, but, should you have any questions or additional comments please feel free to contact me. Once again, thank-you for your donation of time and energy to my research.

Sincerely,

Encl.

Natalie McCormac