The Gender Mystique

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THE GENDER MYSTIQUE: A MATTER OF REPRESENTATION

PATTY MORELAND

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
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THE GENDER MYSTIQUE: A MATTER OF REPRESENTATION

A Thesis Submitted by Patty Moreland
to the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Psychology
January, 1997
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The degree of Master of Arts
has been approved by

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Date
Feb. 6, 1997

Date
Feb. 6, 1997
Dedication

This Thesis is dedicated to my husband for a life long partnership.
Acknowledgements

I would like to first of all thank the five couples that I have interviewed. Without them, this study could not have been completed. I would like to thank them for sharing so many thoughts and for just being themselves. I thoroughly enjoyed our discussions.

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Patty Moreland

Dr. Cynthia Nelson

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Abstract

The goal of this thesis is to approach gender issues from a different perspective than the more traditional one, which has mostly focused on differences between men and women. This study emphasizes the parallels which can be observed between the genders and argues that in looking at those parallels a dialogue can be open between the genders and the gap which has for so long existed between them can be narrowed as we look towards a “sociology for gender”.

This study brings out the side of the individual self, the side of the human being which is too often repressed because it does not fit into the societal structure. This is because of a friction between what is acceptable by society and what is not. The focus is on the individual and how that individual places himself/herself with respect to societal boundaries.

This study looks specifically at marriage. It relates the life stories of ten individuals (five married couples) from various cultural backgrounds living as expatriates in the same community. The primary focus of the fieldwork is to address each person as an individual in relation to another, in this case, the spouse. The main inquiries of this study are how each spouse places themself as an individual in relation to the other person in the marriage and how each individual understands the choices that they have in their lives. Specific issues are addressed during the interviews in order to bring out what is referred to as the existential self; the self which would have liked to have made other choices at times in their lives but did not because of circumstances.

The conclusions bring out the parallels observed among the interviewees and argue that those parallels are not gender-bound.

The contribution of this thesis to the discourse of gender is to underline that the way we look at gender is a matter of representation and that in order to progress towards a sociology for gender, a redefinition of man and woman is needed in order to do away with the dichotomies which have for so long kept the genders at war.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Reflections

This thesis is about people, about men and women in their everyday world. It is about gender. It is a reflection on people’s lives, specifically on married couples’ lives, on how they have been able to perceive and place their individual self within the marriage contract. The beginning pages of the first chapter are my own reflections on peoples’ lives, particularly with respect to the couple’s dynamics in a community in which I have lived for several years.

In the section on “Individualism and The Self” I situate the “Self” first in the context of the community as defined by Dorothy Lee and secondly with respect to the larger capitalist society and the demands that both have upon the individual. The section on “Following a Path” places the “Self” in a more individuated context and follows a more philosophical approach. Influenced by Sartre (1963) and Berger and Luckman (1967), my own inquiry addresses the question as a married partner with whom we share a life, how do we construct our reality in our everyday world particularly as an individual Self with respect to the Other? I conclude this first chapter with presenting the fieldwork methodology.

Chapter Two looks briefly at the evolution of the state with respect to people’s lives and what influence the state has had in redefining gender roles. This chapter also looks briefly at the evolution of feminism and the need to approach gender with a
different perspective which I call The Gender Mystique, defined at the end of the chapter. Chapter Three introduces the life stories of ten individuals (five married couples) who have reflected on some specific issues of their lives. Those issues include part of their childhood, their past and present aspirations and expectations with regard to education, career and marriage, the day-to-day conflicts they experience in their marriage and the choices they have or have not had in their life. The last chapter is the analysis of fieldwork, my interpretation of it and a further discussion on a sociology for gender.

This study started seven years ago when I moved to Egypt. In the summer of 1989, I moved to Cairo with my husband and daughter, and in the spring of 1990 I went back to the United States to finish part of my studies. It was not easy to leave my family behind but I went back and stayed in the States for six months during which time I totally dedicated myself to the intellectual world of the university with two brief visits back to Egypt.

During my six months in the States, I was no longer a wife or a mother and I had to adjust to a new role: that of a full time student. I met some interesting people, in particular my landlady and four male graduate students who were my housemates and together, we shared many thoughts as well as common experiences. They came from Asia (Indonesia and Korea) and were in the States temporarily to finish their graduate studies. What came out of our discussions as well as sharing the same life with the same experiences (two of the students were married with children and had left their families behind and the other two were thinking of marriage) inspired me to start this study: a study of the lives of married couples through their own stories.
My landlady had been widowed twice and her last husband had been a world traveller. Therefore, her life had mainly been to raise two boys alone. At the time I met her, she was writing poetry and was a part-time secretary at a local church. Living with these five people became not just a valuable personal experience but helped me to eventually begin my study. It made me understand a few things. One is that when people live together what they share together is also personally experienced so that what is logical for one may not be for the other. Of course, our upbringing and our cultural background are our main influences which help us make sense of the world. But we ultimately interpret life as our own and unique personal experience.

If we reflect for a moment on the expression, “a personal experience”, we find a paradox. Experience can be lived in togetherness but that which is personal pertains to the individual alone. The individual is unique. In his/her uniqueness, he/she becomes separate from the Other. This is what I have focused on in this study, the individual. This is also why I have chosen people with various cultural backgrounds because “the individual” does not pertain to any specific culture. One can adopt a culture. We see this happening every day in the world when people flee their own land because of wars and of natural disasters. We see this happening every day when people move to another country to make a better life for themselves. But one cannot adopt to be another person. What is in one person’s soul cannot possibly be taken. It just does not make sense. So my question is: how can people control other people’s wishes, thoughts and lives and allow people to understand what freedom and happiness are under such control?
What I found interesting during my six months spent in the States alone studying was, first of all, how people reacted to my coming back without my child and my husband. My female friends for the most part judged me very harshly. I was a bad mother, deserting my child and not fulfilling my roles as wife and mother. At first it angered me to hear their reactions and to place me in such a narrow position but, too busy with my studies, I could not think about it too much. The students in the house I lived in did not seem to judge me because they looked at me first of all as a foreign student like them. But I was also “female” and from the beginning I had to make it clear to them that I was not going to cook for them or do their laundry and that everyone had to respect each other’s space. On those basic rules, life was quite pleasant. I remember at times when I would take breaks from my studies and went into the living-room where we had common access, how I would always find one of the students eager to talk. They quite often asked my opinions on various situations. The single men especially discussed their views on marriage. They had quite strong “traditional” views of marriage with the visions of the wife-mother raising their children and taking care of the household while at the same time they dreamed of a strong independent career partner who would become their wife. From their stories, it became apparent that they were caught between their cultural taboos and traditions and their own longings and desires. There was much concern of being judged by their family. The distance or the time which separated them from their native land did not lighten their concerns. They very much respected and valued what their ancestors had taught them despite the new things and ways they may have learned while abroad.
In the summer of 1991, I returned to Cairo where I stayed with my family for four years. After those four years, we went back to the United States. In February 1995, alone I took a plane back to Cairo to continue a project I had started some three years back: a masters degree in Sociology-Anthropology. I was determined to finish it. This is what this project is about: aspirations, expectations, frustrations, and reflections but above all it is about choices, the choices that we, individual selves make in our life and how we come to recognize and acknowledge these choices.

My interest in multi-cultural gender dynamics was particularly deepened when I came back to Cairo in the summer of 1990. In addition to the valuable experience I had just had in the States for six months living with four male graduates students from different cultures, the wide variety of cultural backgrounds that Cairo offered attracted me. It seemed that I never met two people from the same country, speaking the same native dialect or language even though we more or less communicated through the English language. I was curious to hear their stories, where they were coming from and why they were here. Their lives fascinated me. Most of the people I met were married and most of them, if not all, had moved to Egypt because of the husband’s work. During my first years in Cairo I shared many of the same daily activities as many of the women in the community and many became my friends.

Observing the dynamics in a closely-knit community has to a large extent helped me construct my own reality and understand further my own place within society. Sharing our everyday life with our family, our friends and juggling between a career and other activities of various characters do not make our lives simple. As we go about our
daily activities, we no longer understand who we are and why we do what we do each day of our life. Life sometimes has no meaning unless we decide to stop for a moment and reflect on it. The “Self” is not easy to place in the everyday routine and quite often we never get to know our “Self”.

I began to know the people around me because we shared the same life-styles as wives and mothers, the same purpose of supporting our husband’s career and the same activities to occupy the empty hours: swimming, riding horses at the Pyramids or taking Arabic classes. As we together juggled around school hours, soccer or baseball practice and ballet rehearsal, I built a closeness with these women. I realized that it did not really matter where we all came from, we had something to share and we were sharing it. This was reflected in the conversations we had but also in my own observations of the community over the period of seven years. The community has a strong identity and whoever identifies with it feels it. One can sense this each morning watching women go about their daily activities so that their everyday life becomes meaningful and watching men hop in a taxi and go to work dressed in suit and tie. While the strong community feeling bonds some women together and alienates others, it is obvious that women in the community are living similar experiences. Although my own life on a day-to-day basis made me more aware of what I saw as women’s reality, I also increasingly felt that men were not as absent as it may have seemed even though they were rarely there during the day. If women had stories to tell, so did men. But the latter did not become so evident until I interviewed them.
When I came back to Cairo to finish my degree, many of the women I had known over the years in Cairo invited me into their homes. Over a period of four months I regularly entered their homes and interacted with their families. I was able to know them better and to continue our conversations. At times, I had conversations with their kids now older, middle-schoolers for the most part. I talked to their husbands whom I had never had the chance to before except for a hello passing in the street. Since their wives had been my friends, they were now curious and they voiced their curiosity to me about what I was doing here alone, about where my family was and how long I was planning to stay here. They were also interested in my studies, what kind of studies and why here? They saw me differently: I was a student. I had no responsibilities except to my studies. At times I asked myself whether it was appropriate for me to be here alone, whether the society which surrounded me approved of it. I was alone here for a reasonably long period of time while my husband was taking care of himself and the children back home. Was not I to some degree defying society’s laws? Afterall, this was not a usual situation at least not one which we are accustomed to see.

Many times friends had asked: “How did you manage this?” , “Managed what?” , I’d asked. “This, how did you convince him to come here by yourself, how did he accept it?” I realised that the “him” and “he” was my husband. When I said that I had chosen to do this for myself because it was important to me, I am not quite sure that my response was understood. As they had been a few years before when I had moved back alone to the States for a few months, people were also puzzled. Most reactions were “Boy, I wish I could do this!” I asked, “Why not? Why couldn’t you do it?” This simple question has remained at the heart of this study.
Over the last two years since I have been back in Cairo, I have had more opportunities to observe the community and many times I have asked myself whether we really have a choice in becoming what we are and who we are. I have seen many people, both men and women, dip into depressions and feel terribly isolated, as husbands have wondered what is going on with their wives and as wives have worried about their husbands’ unhappiness. As a consequence of these situations over seven years I have seen marriages fall apart to the extent that each spouse has become a stranger to the other. The question of choice emerges. Do we have a choice or is that choice constructed by society, the same society which has made us into a “man” and into a “woman” and which has forced us to obey through its social structure and political rules? If we had been conscious of a choice, would we as an individual have considered marriage for example? Would we have lived here? How do we as individuals construct marriage? Is it a partnership in which each spouse has a very definite role, or is it an equal sharing regardless of gender role in which two individuals choose to grow together? How does choice conflict or not conflict with marriage? What were our aspirations in life before marriage and as newly-weds what were our expectations of the Other? Where does having children fit into the whole picture? Would we have chosen to have had any if we had had our own choice?

These questions came to my mind whenever I heard women as well as men complain about the drudgery of their everyday lives and listened to women’s stories in particular. This gave me the idea to let both men and women relate their stories and their perspectives on life and to see how after several years of marriage, they had reflected on
their life both as an individual and as a marriage partner and whether their past aspirations and expectations had been met.

I wanted to hear the voices of men as much as women because I feel that men’s perspectives are missing from the literature. The feminist movement of the sixties with its emphasis on women’s rights and liberation has brought many western women out of their silence. By encouraging women to speak, the movement built a path of strength for women and they fought for their rights until society and the state began to acknowledge their rights. Women voiced their emotions and what they had endured: the glamorous image of the housewife at the mercy of society (Friedan, 1963). Women have now had over 30 years of practice in voicing and writing their stories. Men need to do the same, that is, as the men’s movement in the United States in particular is progressing, men need to take a similar path of voicing their own stories with fears and emotions. If women have told their experiences as individuals rather than just as mothers and wives and have fiercely fought against the traditional and narrow image of the mother and wife, men need to do the same with respect to what has been missing in the man’s image. What is his image? Quite often that image has been blurred by the “warrior” and “macho” image, and in modern times substituted by “the provider” image. But the man as father, as husband and as individual is not clear today.

Both men and women need to distant themselves from the traditionalist perspective of “women are oppressed” and “men are oppressors” to be able to grow from their personal experiences as humans rather than as men and as women molded by society. There is a need for both genders to understand who they are, what they truly
want out of life and there is a need to be understood. This does not mean not to be married or not to have children, as long as this is what the individual truly wants but the individual needs to recognize his/her choice as his/her own choice. Then, only when a dialogue is started between men and women can they look at each other with respect to their own individuality and thus, as close to their own reality as they can, can a gender discourse or a sociology for gender be proposed so that men and women can voice their everyday experiences and their everyday problematique in an equal fashion.

**Individualism and The Self**

My readers may find me quite biased when I start to discuss the individual as a unique entity different from any other individual within the same community. How can I approach this very westernized concept with a cross cultural perspective especially when the concept of individualism is particularly difficult for non western nations to accept because it has not been part of their culture. Not only does this concept defy many cultural boundaries but it is also the cause for many traditions to be broken. One example is the breaking of the extended family in many Third World countries as single nuclear families form and move away from their villages to urban areas for work purposes.

How does the individual separate himself/herself from the Other? On the one hand we take a part in the making of society as we “surge up in the world” (Sartre as quoted in Kaufmann, 1963:290) influencing through our actions other individuals and, on the other hand, we are unique and separate from Others. In acknowledging the Other we, at the same time distant our self from him/her. How do we define this distance in the
context of non-western cultures where the sense of the "group", the "community" and the sense of belonging to it is so important? Many definitions of what the individual is and, in the larger sense of the word, of what individualism is have been offered and my purpose here is not to define them all but to try to bring the concept of individualism into the context of gender specifically within the context of marriage.

Dorothy Lee gives the example of "the autonomous individuals" as people who rebel against their families and who decide for themselves against the plans and advices of others. "They have tried to, perhaps even managed to, wash out of themselves even the sense of community, freeing themselves of its hampering tug. They are independent people" (Lee, 1976, p. 28). In presenting the concept as such, "who decide for themselves against ..., wash out of themselves even the sense of community... freeing...of its hampering tug." conveys some form of negativism because the individual is presented almost as an outcast from society. Lee argues that in this case the individual and the community are opposing forces because they represent “separate units” (Lee, 1976, p. 29) as neither side wants to interact. It becomes a passive act. In that regard community projects a negative influence on the individual because he/she feels at the same time oppressed and rejected by his/her community and the split between the individual and the community does not recognize what Lee refers to as “authenticity” because a passive interaction has occurred between them where the individual rebels against his own community’s rules without really reacting to them. By authenticity Lee means that “It includes an act of involvement at every step in existence” (Lee, 1976, p. 30). It implies energy and a dynamic involvement in one’s own life. It means the act of choosing. This is what I mean by the “individual self”. 
While individualism, a product of modernization, has mainly been interpreted in relation to capitalism in which the focus has been to give more and more importance to "the "private" aspects of existence, to the values of personal conduct, and to the interest that people focused on themselves" (Foucault, 1986, p. 41) I prefer to look at "individualism" more in the context of the individual self or the autonomous self. However I cannot deny the influence that capitalism has had on the individual self. As capitalism has rapidly progressed in non western countries, the concept of individualism has become a somewhat more acceptable aspect of those societies and while capitalism or modernization may falsely be equated with liberation and freedom, it is also blamed for most tensions and dissatisfactions in the world. While on the one hand, it may appear to free people from traditional ties observed, as I mentioned earlier, in the breaking of the extended family, capitalism puts a tremendous pressure on the individual to "make it" and furthermore, to make it on his/her own. This usually implies an accumulation of assets as in investing in a house, a plot of land, a car or whatever, it has a material goal. Accumulation of goods also implies competition with others. It has a dehumanizing and alienating effect on people aggravated by the continuous strain put upon the individual to produce in order to accumulate more. It is an endless process in which achievement, success and wealth become our goals in life.

The dynamics of the extended family change as the young couple moves away to fulfill the capitalist dream: the son no longer takes his father's advice as absolute and his mother loses control over the young bride whom she may have once molded according to her own image in order to pass on cultural traditions. Traditions lose their value as a
more global perspective of the world is needed because of capitalism and even the rites of passage which gave a member of a tribe the right to become an individual can no longer survive in the old way and that individual has to be redefined in the name of capitalism.

While I recognize that modernization has negative effects on social and cultural patterns, I do feel that modernization has certain positive strengths. I agree that Lee's emphasis (Lee, 1976) on the value of the community is certainly important but only to a point. I believe that its importance and its positiveness upon the individual end when the individual enters what Berger (1967) refers to as the second phase of socialization when individualism holds much more validity and strength for the emotional growth of the individual. Berger argues that in order to mature into a functional being a person has to transition into that neither/nor where, in searching for this unique individual self, the individual has to experience and question the world on his/her own. I believe that this transitional phase has been at the root of the gender war over the centuries because both men and women have been constrained by society (as expressed through tradition, culture and religion) to enter that phase only through gender constructions and by definition these often follow very rigid requirements. And because of this rigidity people have not been able to disconnect from the societal mold.

The individual self emphasized in Sartre's concept of existentialism (1963) and which involves that part of our self that we do not generally express for fear of being reprimanded because it does not fit the norm, is not gender bound. What is acceptable for one person to choose should also be acceptable for another regardless of their gender.
What usually makes it unacceptable for one gender is because it does not fit what society has taught us. In other words, by doing “what feels right” to us means that sometimes, somewhere we have to trespass societal boundaries. In doing so, we may have to pay a certain price because we are simply different from what is expected. If we look at the course of history we find that the existential self has been expressed through the genius of scientists, painters, sculptors, composers and writers who have dared trespass societal boundaries. “Person of genius are, ex vi termini, more individual than any other people - less capable, consequently, of fitting themselves, without hurtful compression, into any of the small number of molds which society provides in order to save its members the trouble of forming their own character” (Mill, 1989, p. 79).

Most of these persons were men and if they were eccentric it was accepted by society because they were men. Hence it was alright for Rodin to express himself but not Camille Claudel although she had an existentialist right to her own expression. Her genius was neither recognized nor would it have been accepted because it was not “proper” at the time for a woman to be an artist. But these men who have through the centuries accomplished great things “have become a mark for society which has not succeeded in reducing them to commonplace “ (Ibid.) and they have been referred to as “wild” and “erratic” because they have defied societal rules just by being different.

If we look at the lives of Mozart or Van Gogh we get an idea of the price they had to pay for choosing to be just that, different. Society judges severely those who do not live their lives the way society says it should be done and whose mind is so energetic that it is searching for new truths and new paths. This is currently observed in the ongoing trends in the world with connection to spiritual, environmental and peace
movements. The desire to defy society’s rigid laws and a desire to change is felt through the various cults branching off from major religions and through the rising voices of the third gender (homosexuals and lesbians) in the West in particular and through the reacquaintance with veiling in some Arab countries.

As modernization prevails and progresses especially with respect to technology, people seem to have less time, less motivation to express their self and to create. As capitalism increasingly puts more demands on world citizens, the struggle to make any kind of life gets bigger and fiercer. This is neither gender bound nor culture bound. The struggle is real for all. The roles that were defined as gender roles can no longer fit into our daily patterns because what modernization gives us has no boundaries. At every moment, a major scientific discovery may take place which can overturn our lives as citizens of the world. What happens at one corner of the world affects the other corner.

In many if not all non-Western cultures, the concept of individualism has not been recognized because it rejects to a large extent both the extended family situation and the strong ties found in the heart of the community in most Third World villages. Lee points out how the community turns the individual into a strong being because what he or she does is to please the community, to show that within that community, he or she is able to measure up to the standards of that community. I agree with her to a certain point as long as the community does not become a smothering force upon the individual and as long as the dialectics between the individual and the community remain authentic.
The effect that the community has on the individual can lead to a split where, on one hand the community can destroy a person, and on the other hand it can give that person strength. It all depends on how the individual interacts and perceives his/her community. On one side if a co-dependency develops making it impossible for the individual to disconnect from the community to fulfill a particular need, then the need itself controls the motivation to remain strongly bonded to the community. The need becomes a force by which the individual lets himself/herself be controlled. It is nevertheless a choice. On the other side, if the individual chooses to disconnect from the community it does not necessarily mean that he/she has to become totally alienated from his/her community. What is important is when that individual consciously makes that detachment for his/her own survival and growth. Viewed outwardly, this may appear egocentric while it really implies a self detachment in order to exist and live. This step is at the root of our survival and we all at one time or another in our life, if not for most of our life, juggle with this split. We are caught between being separated from and belonging to some kind of a community.

Sartre states that, "when we say that man is responsible only for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men" (Sartre as quoted in Kaufmann, 1963, p. 291). Individualism exists only in relation to others so the individual cannot really disconnect completely. Do individualism and existentialism go hand in hand? I believe so and furthermore, the "Self" has to be an existentialist and an individualist in order to place himself/herself in society. That is, we as humans have to disconnect even for a short time from society and look at our "Self", the social construct we have become in order to continue on the road we have started.
The individual has to disconnect from the Self because the Self is constructed and therefore controlled by society. In other words what I refer to as the “individual self” or the “existentialist self” is a part of the Self (the social construct) which recognizes that in order to find his/her path there has to be a disconnection between the existential and the constructed so that the individual can \textbf{actively} choose what he/she is to become in life. The way I prefer to define the \textit{individual} is not so much as a separate being in the physical sense but as a part of us which helps us to be involved in what we become, which helps our \textit{Self}, the social construct find its place within society and define our truth.

"I cannot obtain any truth whatsoever about myself, except through the mediation of another. The other is indispensable to my existence, and equally so to any knowledge I can have of myself" (Sartre as quoted in Kaufmann, 1963, p. 303). Sartre argues that before there can be any truth whatever, there is an absolute, simple truth which everyone can easily attain because it is in everyone's reach and this is in one's immediate sense of one's self. But my question is how do we find our immediate sense of self? Is it as Berger refers to as the construction of reality, in how we know this reality to be in our every day to day activities? An adequate understanding of the reality of society, as Berger suggests, "requires an inquiry into the manner in which this reality is constructed" (Berger, 1971, p. 30).
The individual has to disconnect from the Self because the Self is constructed and therefore controlled by society. In other words what I refer to as the "individual self" or the "existentialist self" is a part of the Self (the social construct) which recognizes that in order to find his/her path there has to be a disconnection between the existential and the constructed so that the individual can actively choose what he/she is to become in life. The way I prefer to define the individual is not so much as a separate being in the physical sense but as a part of us which helps us to be involved in what we become, which helps our Self, the social construct find its place within society and define our truth.

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"Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world" (Berger, 1971, p. 33). This reality is quite often taken for granted and we adjust our lives around it. Quite often this adjustment may create conflicts in our lives but we may not be aware of them. The reality which Berger speaks of is what we are born into, it is our society, our community which teaches us as we are growing up the do's and the don'ts without questioning. It is our common sense knowledge which has been passed on through generations and is part of our cultural heritage. This reality is part of my everyday world which makes sense to me and others. It bonds me with others because with them I share the same activities, the same language. This reality is taken for granted because it is the one I feel is real to me, it is the one which has molded me into a particular society. This reality has made me a social construct well defined in terms of what I should do and what I should not do. This reality exists for me, it is there, it is my everyday routine. This is "the natural attitude" that we take vis-à-vis the things which are basically given to us (Ibid). But this reality is nevertheless socially organized and oriented because it is always in the making, it is "an ongoing practical matter of accomplishing presence by and among subjects" (Smith, 1991, p. 126). And the manner in which these social relations function define our place, our self as social constructs within our community.

When we realize that we are born into a particular society which means that these social relations are already present and in coming into a particular community, we also become part of the process which we then help to continue. In other words, "Society
presents the candidate for socialization with a predefined set of significant others, whom he must accept as such with no possibility of opting for another arrangement" (Berger, 1971, p. 154). This is where we may start questioning our purpose in this process and may question whether the world formed by our community is the only world which exists. As we proceed to question more the world in which we presently live, why do we also feel that we are becoming somewhat ill-fitted to it?

Berger suggests that we go through two levels of socialization: primary and secondary socialization. Primary socialization teaches us our fundamentals based on societal boundaries. This is acquired during childhood. Secondary socialization starts once primary socialization is completed during the time at which we start to perhaps question what we have learned so far and realize that what we thought of the world is not quite what we wanted. According to Berger, it is during this phase that “unsuccessful socialization” may happen. He argues that three main factors can lead to unsuccessful socialization. The first one is alternation in which we start re-interpreting the world in which we are and define it to our own needs; we may re-interpret the past in order to fit the present. The second factor is individualism in which we do not find a place “at home” and therefore adjust to other places and, the third is when primary socialization conflicts with secondary socialization.

When reading Berger’s interpretation of what could also be called the maturing process of the individual, it appears to me that the transition between primary and secondary socialization occurs at a specific time, usually during adolescence. While I agree that during that period the adolescent experiences a transitional confusion between
childhood and adulthood, I also feel that this particular phase can happen at any time in a lifetime depending on the level of experience and thus awareness that the individual can have and the manner in which this is different for each of us. “Man is all the time outside of himself: it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that he makes man to exist; and, on the other hand, it is by pursuing transcendent aims that he himself is able to exist” (Sartre as quoted in Kaufmann 1963:310). In other words, questioning our world around us may not happen until one is married, until one starts on the path of a new career or, on becoming a parent. This transitional confusion is often experienced by the individual during his/her life because as politically and socially constructed individuals we can only go so far against our desires.

The role that society had defined for us is being redefined by women who have entered males’ profession, who have asserted their rights as citizens of the world, who are heading single parent households and by men who are also struggling with a search for who they are. For example, this may be felt and observed when at any age, we start breaking down. Drinking, smoking, turning to drugs in any form for relief of emotional and physical pain, landing on a psychologist’s couch, cheating, showing acts of violence are all ways demonstrating that this is not the life we had originally wanted. In Reviving Orphelia, Pipher argues that “many of the pressures girls have always faced are intensified in the 1990s. Many things contribute to this intensification: more divorced families, chemical addictions, casual sex and violence against women” (Pipher, 1994, p. 27). The pressures falling upon the new generation of girls are not limited to them. Boys are equally victimized because when adolescents thought that their life was precisely drawn for them, the world is changing and looks more threatening than before.
Furthermore, they have to draw their own picture of the life they want to have. It is as if the 1990’s were making them climb to the peak of the struggle: breaking with the past and engaging on a new path. While this redefinition of expectations and aspirations is confusing, Pipher feels that it is more confusing to women because throughout history they have not come to grips with the period of confusion experienced during adolescence because society’s expectations have been harsher on them. They have been objectified as reproducers, mothers, housewives and sex symbols as well as made into puppets for the entertainment of society.

Such image of self does not help to confront the more ruthless role that society has yet to redefine in women’s struggle against capitalism. But men also are struggling against capitalism and women have become their competitor. In this changing and chaotic current world, how we come to recognize what we want to be as an individual self versus what we are made to be is a difficult task because “what we are made to be” is no longer so clearly defined. So, “Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing - as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself” (Sartre as quoted in Kaufmann, 1963, p. 291).

In order to understand how the reality of the individual is constructed, I have to first of all place him/her in a structural context and I have chosen to enter couples’ lives because the institution of marriage places the individual in that context and addresses the individual as a constructed gender. Secondly, if a researcher undertakes the task to understand certain aspects of people’s reality in society, he/she has to make an inquiry of
people's lives and let them speak of their own reality situated within the society or the community in which they live.

Methodology

The secondary socialization process which I referred to earlier could be also defined in terms of what Friedan calls the “schizophrenic split” in The Feminine Mystique (1963). “The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity” (Friedan, 1963, p. 38). Therefore women must keep on having babies because “the feminine mystique says that there is no other way for a woman to be a heroine” (Friedan, 1963, p. 39). As Friedan points out this mystique of feminine fulfillment became “the cherished and self-perpetuating core of contemporary American culture” (Friedan, 1963, p.16) during the fifteen years after the Second World War. She further emphasizes that during these years American women seemed to have suffered from a “schizophrenic split” (Friedan, 1963, p. 40). Friedan explains that this split goes beyond what it was in earlier times when the image of woman was split in two: “the good, pure woman on the pedestal, and the whore of the desire of the flesh” (Friedan, 1963, p.40). The new split implies “the feminine woman, whose goodness includes the desires of the flesh, and the career woman, whose evil includes every desire of the separate self” (Ibid.). As I discuss various issues with the couples I have interviewed, I have kept this “split” in mind and I have addressed it after presenting each couple’s interview in a section entitled “My Construction of Reality”. This is my interpretation of the “split” from what people have told me through their stories. This is to understand whether this “split” is a universal and natural process of our life and how
we handle the struggle between what we want to be and what society wants us to be. Thus, when we, men and women, undistinguishably reflect for a moment on our life we may find that many of our choices have been a consequence of that split and that we have been caught between our Self, a social construct and our individual or existential self...

Are we conscious of that split is my first inquiry here. How we understand the relation between the social construct and the existential being is my second inquiry. How we handle the dualism with respect to our everyday life and particularly within the context of marriage is what I have asked couples to tell me in relating their stories. In other words, my problematic is to distinguish and understand how people construct their own reality through the dynamics of marriage and how they define themselves as individual selves separate from the Other but nevertheless belonging to the same world and involved in the same social relations. I further the inquiry in asking whether this individual self has become such because of societal pressure or because of his/her own “free” choice.

The methodology I have chosen is therefore an inquiry. That is, I am not looking for any specific answer but rather I am inquiring to see if there is a truth, perhaps an absolute truth as Sartre claims which is simply to place our self in society, to define who we are and how we have become who we are, how we understand our truth/reality in relation to the Other which is our spouse and how do we look at him/her as the Other? In adressing the Other, my research specifically looks at the issue of marriage: what does marriage mean to us as men and as women? Is it a tradition, a recreation of our cultural past, a passage in time, a long lasting partnership? How do we place our self in society
with respect to our marriage? Does being married mean two people having definite roles as determined by our biology (two people struggling for power where one dominates and the other submits), two people in one where the loss of autonomy has become obvious, or two individuals searching for their own individuality? How do we define that?

I have chosen to look at how people construct their reality as individual selves within the marriage context for several reasons. One is because I feel that this is in the intimacy of people’s private lives, particularly people we know, that one can better perceive the dialectics of gender which may help us through reflection and thought define our place vis-a-vis the system and help us recognize what we truly want in life as “I” separate but with respect to the “Other”. Furthermore, in reflecting on our own current “Self” and perhaps in romanticising what should have been in our life, are we really that far from our own truth, our own individual self? Did we or did not we make the choices in our life which led us to what and where we are today?

My second reason is because the issue of gender has mainly been approached politically and economically and to a large extent marriage and family dynamics have been greatly neglected by most feminists. Gilman, a major feminist of the early women’s movement, argues that marriage and the family could not be too criticized in the early years when women were trying to gain the struggle for women’s suffrage. “The raising of such controversial issues might have lost the women’s movement male support that it needed in order to win electoral election” (Easton p.10). The issue of marriage has not really been questioned except with respect to understanding gender relations within a kinship system or in the more recent context of marriage counseling which is still for the
most part perceived from a political angle. A more inward approach to gender relations
in marriage has not been defined because it is first of all very difficult to enter people’s
private lives and secondly it cannot be done objectively and is therefore subject to bias.

While one of the purposes of this paper focuses on redefining gender as it is
placed today in society, it also expresses a growing concern which is currently felt in the
disciplines of sociology and anthropology, that "feminism" needs to be deconstructed
and furthermore that "gender" needs to be constructed. As mentioned earlier in this
paper, the numerous factors which have contributed to a changing role of gender cannot
be denied. Furthermore, this new role that both male and female face in the future, which
will eventually make us redefine the whole concept of gender, whether one process takes
place before the other, has to be confronted. This can no longer be ignored as new
generations are themselves questioning the old paradigms. It is in effect a normal process
which accompanies evolution as we try to accelerate its pace. In defining "gender", the
same question that Leacock addresses of "human intelligence will rise to the mastery
over property", since "experience, intelligence and knowledge are steadily tending"
toward full democracy and brotherhood" needs to be considered in terms of defining "the
realities of historical process which enable, or even impel, us to move from where we are
to where we can and want to be" (Leacock, 1981, p.132).

I have selected several couples from various cultural backgrounds but with a
similar educational background and living in the same community at the time of my
research. Because I have also been a part of that community, I felt better prepared to
pursue my inquiry within that particular community. What I have investigated is how
men and women come to understand who they are through the organization of social relations. My inquiry is first of all based on something which is real, people's everyday life and furthermore it involves me as well because I exist as part of these social relations. This method of inquiry, to borrow Smith's words "relies on the existence of a world in common, ongoingly created and recreated in human sensuous activities" (Smith, 1987, p.127). I have chosen this particular approach because it implies a continuous process because I feel that most methodologies proposed so far with regard to gender issues have appeared static with no possibility for forwardness: radical feminism which advocates a women's culture and thereby, reinforces the gap between gender in continuing to argue for a "superior female" does not in itself contribute very much to any theory but rather seems more at ease in provoking and accentuating the war of genders. I am mainly referring to the angry tone of most radical feminists who would prefer to do away with the male gender. It would have been rather difficult for marxist feminism to prevail in a nation such as the United States where extreme capitalism is exemplified. As for the liberal feminism, the question of "equality" remains rather unclear. To a large extent, they have contributed to women's economic and political advancement as laws were redefined to improve women's status. So on one hand, the manipulation of feminist theories with respect to political issues have led to further theories. But again those have mainly focused on just the political aspect and the dynamics of gender remain to be defined away from the political perspective.

Another reason for choosing a method of inquiry is because when a researcher regards his informants as objects, there is little room for progress because the dichotomy of the superior/inferior prevails. This is what I have tried to avoid here. A dynamic
relationship that is, an exchange between informants and researcher as well as a learning experience for both is what I have hoped to convey. Therefore, in my attempt to understand what is real to them I have tried at the same time to understand what is also real to me. I have looked with an insider/outsider’s view at people’s lives which means that on the one hand being part of the community greatly facilitated certain aspects of my research as it was not difficult for me to gain trust and acceptance because I already knew people and was considered as one of them. On the other hand I was very conscious throughout my fieldwork that being an insider can also have serious consequences for research. That is, “Information may be withheld when it relates to behavior that must be concealed from public knowledge. If one is outside the system, one’s awareness of goings-on may not be problematic but as a participant, the researcher constitutes a threat of exposure and judgement” (Altorki, 1988, p. 57). I was well aware of this especially while inquiring about a subject as intimate as I set myself to undertake, searching through the dynamics and dialectics of marriage to understand individual truth.

Another drawback of being an insider relates to the question of closeness with the informant and therefore to the degree of objectivity, although I felt that the closeness I already had with some of my informants helped me to be immediately trusted by them. As Johnson points out, “trusting relations are the essential ingredients if the research report is to be a true one. The question is whether the sentiments resulting from the observer’s personal relations with the individuals in the setting necessarily means that the research report will be biased. This does seem to be a distinct possibility, but there is clearly no a priori reason for thinking that it will necessarily occur” (Johnson & Emerson, 1988, p. 215).
I found myself entering people’s life while immediately and consciously disconnecting from any possible emotional involvement with any situation that my informants presented me. So while being an insider as a member and a friend of many people in the community, I also played the role of the outsider in order to look beyond the bonds of friendship and my close identification with the community and “the invasion of “their” lives, the description of the disparities between the ideal and the real in their social worlds, and the exposure of their inermost experiences could have potentially generated a sense of guilt and a feeling of betrayal, were it not for the saving effect of distance inherent in my role as researcher” (Altorki, 1988, p. 61).

Finally, I would like to address the format of this thesis. I have chosen to go through step by step from my discussion on Individualism in the first chapter to the impact that the state has had on feminism in Chapter Two with respect to its connection to gender role because I hope to convey to my readers that it is through the concept of individualism that I am looking at feminism and the broader theme of gender. Furthermore, it is also through the concept of individualism that I propose to redefine gender in what I have called a Sociology for Gender.
Chapter 2

A PASSAGE IN TIME

Traditions and Differences

Our role as humans has been carved for centuries and we cannot separate it from our
gender because from the beginning of time, this is the way in which the world has
conceptualized us and the way we have conceptualized it. The reciprocity exists
because although we can assume who we are, we will never exactly know for sure.
Molded by traditions, our conceptions have been as "women" or as "men". Our
experiences have been built upon who we are as gender and furthermore, this
conception has controlled our actions and reactions in this world and we have
assumed definite roles as dictated by what society came to call, gender role, which
has more or less been in the line of, if one is a female, her role is of "reproducer",
"care-taker of the young" and, "nurturer" while if one is a male, his role is of a
"provider".

Feminists have argued that the former is associated with "nature" while the
latter is associated with "culture" (Ortner, 1981, p.7) bringing about a dichotomy of
roles dictated mainly by biology as perceived by traditions where one gender
reciprocally belongs to the private or domestic sphere while the other, with the public
or political sphere. Rosaldo points out that this concept of private/public spheres has
been universally observed as, “Nearly universally, men control the “public domain
where “universalistic” interests are expressed and managed and, nearly universally,
women are located in or confined to the “domestic domain”, charged with the welfare
of their own families” (Rosaldo as quoted in Ortner, 1981, p.7). Therefore, manhood has not been associated with nurturing rather it is a feminine attribute (Ortner, 1974). So, while these beliefs emerged and were progressively more rooted in our daily lives, they became adopted and taken for granted and no longer questioned and, “from nurture and habit”, as Morgan wrote, “she actually considered herself to be so” (Morgan as quoted in Leacock, 1981, p. 197).

The demands and needs of the capitalist process have largely contributed to the changing role of genders as well as the transformation of its more fundamental structure, the family which has been perceived in many cultures, as an economic, monogamous unit. While the aspect of patriarchy is still been argued, many theorists agree that the nuclear family unit evolved from the capitalist concept and that based on male dominance and female dependence, it is “patriarchal” (Easton, 1977, p.104).

“The word familia did not originally signify the composite sentimentality and domestic strife in the present day philistine mind. Among the Romans it did not even apply in the beginning to the leading couple and its children, but to the slaves alone. Famulus means domestic slave, and familia is the aggregate number of slaves belonging to one man.... The expression was invented by the Romans in order to designate a new social organism, the head of which had a wife, children and a number of slaves under his paternal authority and according to Roman law the right of life and death over them” (Engels as quoted in Agonito, 1977, p.280).

If we compare the nuclear family today to that of the original concept of the family we can see on the one hand a seemingly and totally different concept and on the other hand a subtle similarity with what the family still represents today, including the concept of marriage towards which as Easton points out, contemporary feminism has shifted its focus and sees that “the patriarchal family and the sex roles that are
shaped within it as the major issue for women” (Easton, 1977, p.104) and, I shall add men as well, while “most early feminists did not” (Ibid).

The concept of the nuclear family is also placed in relation to the colonialist and imperialist perspective rising side by side with capitalism which too often is not acknowledged but rather assumed. Thus, it is important to keep in mind and be aware that,

"The structure and images of contemporary Western society are often projected onto other cultures uncritically when women's roles are being discussed, and historical changes that took place with the spread of colonialism and imperialism are ignored. The sheer lack of information on the activities of women and decisions made by them has encouraged this ethnocentrism" (Leacock, 1981, p.200).

Moreover, ""The history which bears and determines us has the form of war rather than language". There are dominant and marginal discourses, innumerable instances of the effects of power and local resistances to them" (Flax, 1991, p. 205).

"Foucault stresses the role of conflict and violence within "our" practices" as he conceptualizes contemporary Western culture as "an ongoing struggle between heterogeneous elements that cannot be assimilated" while at the same time his view provides "more space for the acknowledgment and analysis of relations of domination within "bourgeois" Western culture" (Flax, 1991, p. 205). It is important to realize that when we speak of the family and of the many dynamics embedded in it such as specifically in the function of gender roles, we often forget that "gender", "violence", "bourgeois" and even "culture" are indeed Western concepts which have evolved side by side with capitalism. This is because of the evolution of the family from a larger
group to a smaller unit that we come to redefining the concept of marriage and the role of genders within it with respect to society’s present dynamics.

These dynamics are such that in a competing world both men and women’s efforts are demanded and while many feminists agree that women have reached a certain level of power, much still remains to be done with respect to the harmony of gender (which may altogether be a different quest from their equality). While I agree with Easton that “the fading patriarchal family issue is not the issue but capitalism itself, and we cannot understand the current position of women in capitalism until we go beyond the concept of patriarchy” (Easton, 1977, p. 124), we must also go beyond understanding the position of women only and speak of men’s as well, because if we look beyond the traditionalist view of patriarchy and into the current dynamics of capitalism, both men and women are equally victims of it.

In the previous chapter I discussed existentialism and emphasized its universality in so far as existing, living and dying are equally given to us. In the perspective of modern society, being a victim of capitalism is today, also given to us. Capitalism stares at us in every corner of the world and we have to confront it at some time or another in our life. The way we choose to deal with it, is ultimately what counts. But at the same time while no longer denying the existence of capitalism and in looking beyond patriarchy we cannot address one gender alone because, as humans, "we create our society" in a sense that “social order is a human product ... an ongoing human production” (Berger, 1971, p. 69) and thus, we have a choice of who we are, what we do and how we do it regardless of whether we are a man or a woman.
“The paradox that man is capable of producing a world that he then experiences as something other than a human product” (Berger, 1971, p. 78) is part of the dialectics.

In looking at some of the issues relevant to the life of the married couple in particular such as in past, present and future life aspirations and expectations, marital conflicts and choices which could be assumed to be universally shared by both men and women, I would like to reach the essence of the everyday problematic in these couples’ lives and account for the paradoxes that individuals experience in their everyday lives and how through these binary opposing forces, they come to understand and realize their own Self as unique individuals. The fact that these issues are problematic means that we are resisting something in our lives. Is that “something” still part of the gender battle, or are we facing something more equally which make us all victims of oppression such as being equally oppressed by our own everyday routine with its political and social constraints?

So far, social scientists have voiced many of the problematics but yet as the world is increasingly changing, many new challenges arise. Men, for example, may be very oppressed by their expected role of provider but because we have not been used to looking at men as oppressed subjects, the burden that they feel put upon them by society has not yet been recognized. Women’s oppression on the other hand is part of the “habitus which have been produced by different modes of generation, that is, by conditions of existence which, in imposing different definitions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable, cause one group to experience as natural or reasonable practices or aspirations which another group finds unthinkable or scandalous, and
vice versa" (Bourdieu, 1989:78). How we look at these problematics with respect to traditions, universal trends and cultural differences is equally important.

Women’s Oppression And...

In many societies, women have played a crucial role in the economy which have brought them tremendous power which Lebeuf emphasizes in her example of West African societies where both men and women have had their roles in politics and economics respectively. These roles have been more complementary to each other than dualistic and have not defined a public sphere as "the world of men" because both genders have been equally part of it (Leacock, 1981). So, as Leacock writes, "...evidence now being gathered indicates that "male dominance" is not a human universal, as is commonly argued; that in egalitarian societies the division of labor by sex has led to complementary and not female subservience; and that women lost their equal status when they lost control over the products of their work" (Ibid). And while there is no evidence towards it, it may be possible that even at the rise of capitalism, gender roles were complementary and as capitalism progressed and the gap between rich and poor widened especially during colonial and post-colonial eras establishing a "bourgeoisie", women became objectified because there was less incentive for them to work and women could spend more time on themselves which led eventually at least for one strata of society to loose their identity as economic producers in favor of men entering the world of business. But even if this was indeed women's choice to stay at home, it became evident that this choice was in the long run encouraged by men and, as a result "...many women resented the time and interest men devoted to
their business world, and they were no longer content to practice the womanly virtues of patience, consideration, and submissiveness" (Dubbert, 1979:98).

This is well illustrated in Dubbert's description of men's and women's lives of the late 19th century in America when he writes, that,

"Along with her many other interests, the woman of the 1890s had more time to read. Many of the new magazines and periodicals featured hundreds of short stories about young women, their many moods, and romances. These gushy stories portrayed beautiful young women on the verge of "falling" or in a state of "falling in love" with a charming man of polish and significance...The women of these stories usually came from solid, middle-and-upper-class backgrounds and were raised to expect adult life to be happy and secure" ... Too many girls were then raised in a materialistic culture in which each had been "petted and indulged at home"" (Dubbert, 1979:98).

This vision of women was further carried in the realities of marriage where "a girl assumed that such a life would continue into marriage, only to find that her husband soon became bogged down in business and expected his wife to be a "helpmate unto him""(Ibid).

The more women were seen out of the public sphere, the less they became involved and with men's increasing role in decision making which reinforced women's role in the household, the pattern became a societal habit. Dubbert asserts that this gender dichotomy was further increased during the 1900's due to this particular period which had great impact on women's position in society as they came to represent the moral guardians of that era in the United States and in the West in general as well as in many countries under colonial influence. The "moral" issue which was deferred by men onto women, it has been argued for a century, has encouraged the gender division as men retreated into their own "den"
(Dubbert, 1979:99) or hung out at various male clubs whereas, "women wanted a society that was tasteful and polite, but there was implied a degree of sociability that men were not intellectually and emotionally prepared to adopt" (Ibid).

So the concept of "oppression" has mainly been seen in relation to capitalism. Whether at its origin this economic role substitution was consciously done by men to oppress women still remains to be questioned and the assumption that women may have made this conscious decision based on genetic origins and/or social factors needs to be further addressed. Furthermore, as gender roles became more divided that is, the woman stayed home and the man worked outside the home, it is debatable whether as Lebeuf rightly puts it that "neither the division of labor nor the tasks accomplished implies any superiority of the one over the other" (Leacock, 1981, p. 200). Therefore, women's choice for "idleness" at the time of a more prosperous era at first reinforced by men's increasing power in both the economic and political spheres and rendered women "weak" by the capitalist definition only.

If we look further back into history and if we assume that women had to pay the consequences for choosing "a rich and idle life", their oppression was also highly epitomized when "patriarchy" and "oppression" reached their peak during the prosperous era of the Roman Empire from which the concept of the "family" actually has been said to derive which meant that the Roman patrician had rights of life and death over his wife, children and slaves. So the question always comes back to the capitalist institution and how "patriarchy", "oppression" and "superiority" are related
to it in turn in the conception of the "family" which is the building block of society and which entails that,

"the dissolution of society bids fair to become the termination of a career of which property is the end and aim ; because such a career contains the elements of self-destruction" - that the "next higher plane of society" must be "a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes". That the causes of our difficulties lie not in the nature of humanity, but in our social commitment to property, is the profoundly important message" (Leacock, 1981, p. 132).

So, when we go back to Foucault's argument of the "bourgeoisie", we can deduct that the oppression of women as it came to be is indeed embedded in the more complex dynamics of an era which benefitted from a more materialist well-being that is "bourgeois" which means that the concept of bourgeoisie is closely linked with the oppression of women more so than the more egalitarian, simple or peasant societies. In effect both Marx and Engels advocate the freer proletarian woman and "As the administration of the household lost its public character", in the modern monogamous family, "he is the bourgeois, the woman represents the proletariat" (Engels as quoted in Agonito, 1977, p. 284).

**Feminism**

"The contemporary feminist critique reiterates many of the themes found in the postmodern argument about the relationship of the social and natural sciences. Feminists, like the postmoderns, attack Enlightenment epistemology, specifically its rationalism and dualism. But, unlike the postmoderns, feminists reject Enlightenment thought because of its gendered basis. They argue that the rationalism that is the source of Enlightenment epistemology has been defined as a specifically masculine
mode of thought" (Hekman, 1990, p. 5). Furthermore, "feminists assert that the
dualisms at the root of Enlightenment thought are a product of the fundamental
dualism between male and female" (Ibid).

However, one of the problems with feminists, as Hekman points out, is that many "refuse to accept the postmodern argument that these dualisms must be dissolved" (Ibid). On the contrary, they want to encourage the dualism in reversing it and "privileging the female over the male" (Ibid). The second problem which Hekman addresses is that feminism has mainly if not only been seen from the political and theoretical perspectives and if we keep the postmodernist approach which basically questions every paradigm and advocates the fact that no one truth exists but rather several, the issue of relativism then faces the feminist theory. It has to be constructed into a broader view which may also include the "essentially feminine", "the lesbian continuum", "the woman" and so on but it cannot isolate it from the bigger context which is that of gender. Some feminists themselves reject the term "feminism" and argue that it has to be replaced. I prefer to consider it as part of the gender discourse which can be constructed from both "feminism" and "patriarchy".

I have argued earlier that if the attributes "feminism" and "patriarchy" have to be discarded it is in relation to the system of capitalism. Patriarchy is important in the feminist discourse because that discourse derives from the argument that feminists have built against it. So in this respect, it is important just as "feminism" is important in the construction of gender theory. To reject it may not be necessarily needed. Both terms have been useful for the theorizing to continue and to reach where it is
presently and whether we erase the terms or leave them will not change the fact that they once existed as part of the process and, therefore, largely contributed to the new paradigms. Furthermore, if the question of epistemology is addressed in terms of "patriarchy" and "feminism", the concepts of "oppression" and "superiority" will also have to be reconsidered as well as the concept of "the family". After all the role of the sociologist and anthropologist is not so much to reject than to question and go on as that of the philosopher which "is not to discover absolutes but to continue the "conversation of mankind"" (Hekman, 1990:9).

"Contemporary feminism sees the patriarchal family and the sex roles that are shaped within it as the major issue for women; most early feminists did not. But in fact in the late 19th and early 20th centuries male and female sex roles were considerably more rigid than they are today and there were more American families that were more patriarchal than is now the case" (Easton; 1977, p.104-105). Easton argues that at the time that women demanded equal rights, the focus was such that the issues of women's oppression within the family unit were not really recognized or even questioned as the male economic power had become very much unquestioned. "Though many early feminists condemned the subordination of women within marriage, no leader of the women's movement was willing to reject the institution of marriage itself" (Easton, 1977, p. 109). At the time of women's suffrage, to question the family structure and therefore marriage would not only have been, as Easton points out, "a distraction from that struggle but a real threat" because "The raising of such controversial issues might have lost the women's movement male support that it needed in order to win electoral victories" (Easton, 1977, p. 110). It is interesting that
all throughout her struggle for some kind of autonomy, a woman has always been considered dependent on the male power to get it, another manipulation by the institution which in turn has also failed to give her complete autonomy.

In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan looks closely at the suburban middle-class American housewife and emphasizes that at the time, during the sixties, American society had a very definite idea of what the role of a woman should be. Friedan emphasizes how difficult it was for any woman in that particular strata in America to become something else because she no longer fit the image of the feminine mystique which claimed that the only possibility for a woman to be fulfilled was within her full time role as a housewife. But Friedan showed through interviewing many women of different ages how deceiving the image of the feminine mystique was. My purpose is to approach the Gender Mystique with a similar view. This well-defined role, attributed to each gender especially within the realm of marriage, has to be redefined because this role may not necessarily be the one that men and women wish to have. This issue needs to be approached more holistically in order to look at gender issues so that men as well as women from various cultural backgrounds can be understood based on the assumption that, "Gender-specific behavioral assignments are universal but they are more than a cultural universal : they are an "order-universal" in that they are found throughout the order Primates. Among all primates, males, not females, produce semen and females, not males, bear offspring, but that is as far as the cross-order universal in female-male differences extends" (Miller, 1993, p. 3).
Keeping in mind Miller’s perspective that this is “as far as the cross-order universal in female-male differences extends”, we come to Simone de Beauvoir’s statement that, "One is not born a woman but becomes one" (De Beauvoir, 1976). "Woman" and "man" are social constructs and because we have always known these attributes as such and associated them with specific images (such as the patriarchal views of what "woman" and "man" are), it is difficult to change them. If we follow De Beauvoir’s argument that “One is not born a woman but becomes one”, we then have a choice to become a woman.

I would like to start from both Miller’s and De Beauvoir’s statements that the fundamentals of gender difference, if we can call it as such, at the barest or primary level, is just that, biological as Miller argues and no more. Everything else is a social and political construct. My emphasis is that we are first of all humans with basic values and needs and that existentially, unconsciously these wishes emerge from time to time in our lives. The fact that we become men and women as De Beauvoir points out is our own creation and choice which may be consequences of our upbringing only. Sartre claims that although we are not the same universally, we share some universal human traits which can be recognized in any culture in which we may find ourselves. He further claims that a person can live in self-deception “which does not mean that he does not have abrupt awakenings to cynicism or good faith, but which implies a constant and particular style of life” (Sartre as quoted in Kaufmann, 1963, p. 244).
While the feminist movement of the sixties was mainly oriented to white middle class educated America, it did not limit itself to it. Thirty years later and over the course of those years, women throughout the world have shared an incredible bonding realizing that what affected some women in America could and was also affecting women in Africa. Child-birth, child-care, decision making about their children's education, the management of the household and day-to-day tasks are shared universally by women. They may differ in their actual process but the initial outlook is the same: they become spouses, mothers and workers. This is observed globally. As more women were encouraged to reveal their life experiences and their stories were translated into other languages, the bond which women shared became more obvious. Sisterhood, "the lesbian continuum" (Rich, 1980) are some of the terms which have been attributed to this bond. I am not saying that women share a common universal perspective but I am arguing that women share an organization of social relations which has put them in a defined role and furthermore from this organization they have been excluded. Throughout history, they have been especially excluded from expressing themselves in the same way as men have in the fields of arts, sciences and politics to mention few of them and have been confined to the domestic spheres of motherhood and caretaker.

This brings the discussion to and beyond the feminist discourse because it touches one of the most fundamental concepts on which all cultures are built - the family. As Easton points out, "While some American feminists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries described the family similarly (though without using the word "patriarchy"), very few saw this family structure as the major problem that women
faced or urged the women's movement to focus its attention on the family" (Easton, 1977, p. 104). Furthermore, "The emphasis on family relations and the view that a patriarchal family structure is the basis of women's oppression are products of the contemporary women's movement" (Ibid). Some eighty years ago, Morgan was addressing some of these issues as he perceived that "The nature of the coming changes it may be impossible to conceive; but it seems probable that democracy, once universal in a rudimentary form and repressed in many civilized states, is destined to become again universal and supreme" (Leacock, 1981, p. 92). At the same time, he was also questioning the position of the family as this change would occur and he addressed the nuclear (monogamous) family as such:

When the fact is accepted that the family has passed through four successive forms, and is now in a fifth, the question at once arises whether this form can be permanent in the future. The only answer that can be given is, that it must advance as society advances, and change as society changes, even as it has done in the past. It is the creature of the social system, and will reflect its culture. As the monogamian family has improved greatly since the commencement of civilization, and very sensibly in modern times, it is at least supposable that it is capable of still further improvement until the equality of the sexes is attained. Should the monogamian family in the distant future fail to answer the requirements of society, assuming the continuous progress of civilization, it is impossible to predict the nature of its successor" (Leacock, 1981, p. 92-93).

The Gender Mystique

Much of the literature written on gender has emphasized the differences between men and women without really analyzing their close interactions because it has mainly focused around women assuming "men" as the point of departure. This means that males' roles have always been emphasized through history because men have always been considered the makers and the rulers of the world. In contrast with this vision of
the male, ‘The image says that women are passive, dependent, conformist, incapable
of critical thought or original contributions to society;...’ (Friedan, 1963, p. 256).
Throughout history, women have been considered “absent”, their lives have not been
regarded important and their voices have remained “silent”. Women have always
been constrained to adjust into a male world and have lived their lives in relation to
that world.

Essentialist interpretations of the male/female dichotomy have become a
major problem in comparative studies and in any given setting, gender differences
have often been presented and perceived as absolute and dichotomous. Moreover,
such gender differences, when viewed from an historical or cross-cultural perspective,
have often appeared stable or have repeated themselves “as variations on a single
theme” (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994, p. 3). Generally, most of the studies on gender
have explained these differences as problematic for gender communication and
reconciliation without any attempt to really understand what is going on at the level
of interaction between genders. As Miller emphasizes, "Strange as it may seem for the
discipline of anthropology, of which one of the core subjects is marriage and the
family, their internal dynamics were not much studied before an explicit focus on
women developed, though notable exceptions exist (Whiting & Whiting, 1975;
Broude & and Greene, 1983) (Miller, 1993, p.11). Most of the interest in the domestic
spheres has been with respect to reproductive and health practices especially in terms
of reproductive decision-making (Miller, 1993:11) while the problems encountered
within the household have mainly been revealed in studies done in psychology where
couples’ interactions have been more closely analyzed (Perelberg and Miller, 1990).
Gender relations have therefore been looked at with a somewhat narrow perspective and "The justification for doing feminist anthropology has very little to do with the fact that "women are women the world over", and everything to do with the fact that we need to be able to theorize gender relations in a way which ultimately makes a difference" (Moore, 1990, p.198). This is because,

"The process of daily interaction in the marital relationship is, ideally ....one in which reality is crystallized, narrowed, and stabilized. Ambivalences are converted into certainties. Typifications of self and other become settled. Most generally, possibilities become facticities. In these relationships, in these trivial, mundane interactions, much of the essential work of sustaining the reality of the world goes on. Intimates often reconstruct their separate experiences, past and present, with one another. Specifically, the couple sustain and produce the reality of their own relationship, and, more generally, of the world" (Fishman & Nielsen, 1990, p. 226).

The feminist critique in social anthropology grew out of a specific concern with the neglect of women in the discipline. However, unraveling the history of that neglect is difficult because of the ambiguous way in which anthropology has always treated women" (Moore, 1990, p. 1). In traditional anthropology, women were not ignored, they were always present in ethnographic accounts, "primarily because of the traditional anthropological concern with kinship and marriage. The main problem was not, therefore, one of empirical study, but rather one of representation"(Ibid). The sixties and seventies, surely as a result of the feminist movement in both the United States and Europe, confronted the problem of representation as a growing awareness of the male-biased orientation of the discipline was experienced. This does not imply that gender studies were just being discovered. They had been undertaken earlier as more and more women entered the professions in the social sciences and specifically sociology and anthropology (but in others as well) and, the seventies, in particular, saw the emergence of a new anthropology. The goal of this new anthropology was "to
correct the male bias in traditional anthropology" (Miller, 1993, p. 11) in, first of all, questioning earlier interpretations but also in taking new directions according to women's and men's perspectives as created by their own experiences. Many studies on feminine writing were undertaken analyzing its linguistics and attempting to make comparisons between male and female ethnographers. Studies which had originally been done by males were redone and looked at from a female angle. In all, anthropology in the seventies was experiencing a transition which filled the gap (i.e.: explaining women’s subordination) between already existing paradigms and new ones.

Moore has identified three layers which have been attributed to the male bias of anthropological studies. One is brought on by the assumptions and expectations which the anthropologist has about gender relationships and their significance for an understanding of the wider society. The other is basically inherent in the society itself. That is, the obvious subordination of women in the particular society studied which is conveyed to the researcher. The last one is the Western bias based upon the asymmetries perceived in their own culture which they apply in return to the society studied in assuming that inequalities are a fact of life making it difficult to distinguish what is happening and not happening.

The task of the feminist anthropologist became more challenging as it was increasingly evident that a redefinition of theory had to be formulated in order to even attempt to put away the male bias. Edwin Ardener was the first to recognize and acknowledge the male bias and in his analysis of it, he argues that up to now,
researchers have been able to understand the studies made by male researchers because both men and women have been trained in the tradition, as Ann Schaef would call it, the White Male System (Schaef, 1985). Ardener advances further that women have remained "muted" in a symbolic way in the sense that they have always repressed their own views of the world because it was not appropriate and in accordance to the views of the male system. Some argue that, through time, women have learned to feel excluded from that system and this became a societal trait for most cultures. Anthropologists were only encouraged to further the bias as they were closely associated with colonialism which was in itself an extreme example of the patriarchal system that was not only enforced by colonial males but also by colonial females whose power as teachers and nurses in the colonized nations were merely replicating that of their male counterparts. Furthermore, the linguistics of anthropology which favors the masculine attribute has not helped in reducing the bias. Every tool which has been provided to the discipline of anthropology within its conceptual framework has prevented women to be heard.

Both Betty Friedan's concept of the Feminine Mystique (1965) and Dorothy Smith's The Everyday World as Problematic : A Feminist Sociology (1991) have influenced my thinking. I have been most fascinated by their approaches : one analyzing the feminine mystique as it is constructed by society and acknowledging the missing part or the "something" as Friedan calls it which has been the source of women's unhappiness; the other, analyzing the everyday world as problematic and finding some kind of discourse on which for the purpose of a more general sociological approach we can begin from the "standpoint of women"(Smith; 1990,
p.74). As researchers we need to learn to look at women's experiences with a different perspective. Smith stresses that, "To begin from such a standpoint does not imply a common viewpoint among women. What we have in common is the organization of social relations that has accomplished our exclusion" (Smith, 1990, p. 78) wish to focus on gender relations and begin the discourse from the standpoint of both, husbands and wives.

Smith argues that,

"Our major political discovery is expressed in the equation the personal is the political. This equation locates an oppression invading our most intimate relationships, the immediate particularities of our lives, the power relations between persons. We have seen that intimate and personal experiences of oppression are anchored in and sustained by a patriarchal organization of ruling. Our political vision has denied, for the first time, the distinction between the powers of the public and the private domains" (Smith, 1990, p. 211).

While I agree with their arguments, my critique of both Friedan and Smith is that they are also assuming that men are the point of departure and because of that, I feel that their studies are not complete. Why limit the studies to women only?

Because of this "narrow perspective" and my own feeling that something has been omitted in the feminist/gender literature I am particularly interested to look into some aspects of gender relations in order to perhaps demystify the concept of gender to approach gender relations with a more holistic view and not just from the standpoint of the traditional gender dichotomy that women and men are different. This means to look at what happens in women's and men's everyday lives and at how these events are experienced. It means to understand how men's and women's everyday lives, their troubles and conflicts in particular are generated by the larger
social structure. It is concerned with **how and when** men and women through their own marriage become aware of the **dialectics** between their everyday life and the wider society and, **what these relationships mean** to each of them and lastly, **how any friction** is handled at the level of the household between a husband and a wife. Furthermore, I would like to emphasize that "...irrespective of differences in wealth, class, or professional status, there is a commonality of women's experience which is a fundamental source of strength" (Burck & Daniel, Perelberg & Miller, 1990:84) but this commonality of experience is not limited to women only. It extends to men as well and furthermore men's experiences are part of the gap which needs to be filled in order to understand and harmonize gender.

The gender mystique therefore implies some universalism in the sense that all humans have the right to experience and to share the same fundamental qualities such as existing, living and dying. "Existing" means coming into this world while "living" means making our own life. These conditions of life are objective in the sense that we meet them everywhere no matter who we are, man or woman and where we are in any culture of the world. These conditions are never foreign to anyone even when we travel to a different country and as different a culture we encounter there from our own, there are familiar conditions that we recognize in belonging to the human kingdom. However, these conditions may become subjective because of a particular cultural tradition to which I have to abide but then, I make a conscious choice to do so and I have a commitment to this tradition, a free commitment because no one forces me to do so and if I feel controlled in any way by my culture through family and peers specifically, I can walk away. I proceed through my own willful choice. Can I then
say that this particular cultural tradition forces me to do such and such or rather do I take full responsibility for my actions in life? In other words is it possible for me not to take total responsibility over my life? How do I do that? Let’s say that if someone else does that for me, am I not choosing for that person to do so? Am I not letting in this particular example somebody else take control of my life?

Quite often we are called to create our own laws and our own rules. This is what choices are about. But how can we create our own laws and rules when society has that so well organized for us once we exist? This is what I have emphasized through my couples’ stories. This is also the reason I have chosen individuals from different cultural background. I have selected marriage as my main theme for inquiry because I feel that of all institutions the marriage contract is the hardest to break, legally, materially, physically and emotionally. Marriage is also a universal concept and I feel is therefore better suited to the theme of inquiry in order to define the gender mystique. Marriage is also one of the most difficult conceptsto understand and to some extent to demystify because it involves the most intimate part of people’s lives.

The fact that marriage has survived through the centuries, despite the many conflicts which have surrounded it, demands further inquiry into marriage. The genders have been at war for centuries and yet, they still get married. What is it that draws individuals towards marriage? Materialism, companionship, partnership, sexual fulfillment, fear of solitude and human survival are all valid reasons. Yet most married people I have talked to have said that marriage has inhibited them from
choosing their own life. “If I had known, I would not have married... If I had been able to be....., I would not have married. If I had had a choice, I would not have married.....If I had to start over, I would never marry again .....” The list is endless. Yet people marry over and over. This is also part of the gender mystique.

Marriage, as well as kinship, have for a long time been recognized by anthropologists as critical aspects linked to the organization of relationships in nonclass societies in order to build new families and strengthen existing ones. Brideservice and bridewealth societies are good examples (Collier & Rosaldo, 1981, p. 278). In those contexts gender takes on various interpretations and, depending on the context, the interpretation changes. Furthermore, gender is only viewed in a political economic sense: gender belongs to the public facet while the actual dynamics of marriage have not yet been determined because not understood and therefore the power relations between genders or the binary opposition cannot be identified because it is not clear to the Western researcher. In capitalist societies, gender, however, takes on a different connotation which has to do with roles already established and defined assuming the binary opposition: Woman is associated with nature. She is a nurturer and belongs to the domestic or private sphere while man is associated with culture. He is the family provider and belongs to the the political or public sphere. So, it is not simply a perspective because the lens has been adjusted. It goes further because the anthropological or sociological lens is never totally adjusted but rather shifts back and forth between what Peacock refers to as the “harsh light” which is the everyday life which the researcher undertakes to understand and the “soft focus” which “suggests an openness, a holistic breadth of vision that includes the world as well as the perciever
while embracing those shared understandings known as culture. Yet, this image, like the notion of “perspective” itself, only partially captures the meaning of anthropology. The framework that shapes and the picture that forms from these activities will change as do the activities themselves, necessitating ever new formulations of the anthropological perspective. New uses demand new lenses; new lenses, new formulas to describe them” (Peacock, 1986, p. 114). It is at the same time, as Derrida argues in his reference to Levi-Stauss’s bricolage, a manipulation of the language as well as a philosophical confrontation with past conceptualization and as he points out, “the passage beyond philosophy does not consist in turning the page of philosophy (which usually amounts to philosophizing badly), but in continuing to read philosophers in a certain way” (Derrida, 1974, p. 90).

In their discussion of hunters and gatherers Collier and Rosaldo point out that researchers have been focusing on why our presumed ancestors are not like us. They further state that the arguments concerning hunters and gatherers have done little to illuminate the relationship between experiences of limitation and opportunities for exercising power. Whether or not women are in some places or in tribes the equals of men is due to the relations of the sexes. How these relations are connected to other features of the organization of social existence in hunters and gatherers’ worlds are questions which have not yet been understood (Collier & Rosaldo, 1981, p. 277). It has not been understood in our terms according to our interpretation and labeling of gender. But have we asked ourselves whether men are equal to women?
Although marriage is a universal concept, a marriage may not be interpreted the same by people who live it. This is where to a large extent universalistic theories fail to address people’s lives with respect to the everyday problematique. Although parallels are inevitably found across cultures on the basis of our humanism, it does not necessarily mean that everyday experiences are the same for all of us. In times of conflict in particular, “Universalistic moral theory neglects such everyday, interactional morality and assumes that the public standpoint of justice, and our quasi-public personalities as right-bearing individuals, are the center of moral theory” (Benhabib, 1992:163). The gender mystique focuses on gender parallels while addressing the more private dynamics of people’s lives in view of the public standpoint of justice and making each story unique.

When I am addressing the “Other”, I also ultimately search for my “Self” in the “Other”. This is the purpose of relations and when I address the “Self”, I address the protagonist of a life story. I am a “Self” because I exist, live my life story and will eventually die. In reflecting on my “Self” I reflect on that protagonist. This is where individualism comes in because I disconnect from the Other in order to see my “Self” as if I were looking at a stranger and it is then easier to evaluate because I am not comparing myself with others but rather I focus on my “Self”. In doing so, I can neither judge nor assume what others should or should not do. It is not my place to do so unless I assume a different role in becoming someone else or unless I choose to look at the protagonist with a critical eye. This is what my protagonists have done in relating their stories. They chose to look at the protagonist with a critical eye without assuming another’s role and by just taking on their own role.
Chapter 3

RELATING PEOPLE'S STORIES

Introducing Fieldwork

To conduct my inquiry, I have chosen to interview ten individuals between the ages of 30 to 50. I have focused on the individuals rather than the five married couples because although this study is about marriage relations it involves above all the individual within marriage. I have purposely chosen this age range because I assumed that people would have already reflected on some if not all the issues I am addressing. I am also myself within that age range and I feel more equipped to raise the questions because of my own personal experience. The reader may be curious to know why I did not choose a minimum number of years of marriage. I originally had put a range of at least ten years but as I started my interviews I soon realized that this was irrelevant, at least for the people I interviewed. Although for a few they had only been married two years at the time of the interview, it was not their first marriage and coupled with their age range, I felt that they had quite a good idea on the issues I was raising.

I have structured the interviews through the themes I described earlier in Methodology:

1. Childhood Memories
2. Aspirations/Expectations
3. Marital Conflicts and,
4. Choices
While each theme was covered during the interviews, the questions were not structured so people could relate their own stories. On average, each interview took approximately two hours. During the interviews which were more in the form of discussions, my role was interactive as I led each individual onto the next theme. I already had many conversations with my informants about the issues I was addressing and they were by no means threatening. One of my concerns prior to starting the interviews was how people I had known for a while as acquaintances or friends would react to being interviewed. I used a tape-recorder for that purpose. Another challenge was how could I talk with them about topics we had already discussed but with a more formal atmosphere? But this did not materialize into a problem because my informants showed an eagerness to share their experiences. They were excited to have someone interested in their stories and found it interesting to reflect on their own life stories.

My second concern was whether they were going to reveal themselves with the same vision I had when preparing the study. I was hoping that they would reveal their own truth as individuals totally unobstructed by societal barriers and if so that they would be conscious of those barriers. I was mainly concerned about the men's attitudes to talk especially in view of the fact that I was in some cases their wife's friend. Would they interpret this as a threat? To a large extent I was myself victim of the stereotypic image of the male, someone who is difficult to talk to and someone who does not reveal himself easily but in fact I did not come across that stereotype. Ultimately, I wanted each individual to talk about himself/herself without inhibition,
without any fear of judgement and with honesty. I wanted each to reveal herself/himself as a unique individual. At times, each was put under a situation which may or may not have already happened in their life in order to create what may have happened. This relates, for example, to the question of role-reversal. Many “if” questions were asked and compared with the informants’ present situations. I feel that each one of the individuals interviewed was "true", whatever this means, and I leave it to the reader for his/her own interpretation of what is true to him or her. I am thankful to each of the people I interviewed.

I have addressed this inquiry in a cross-cultural fashion and have tried to emphasize through our discussions that the "schizophrenic split" (Friedan,1963) is originally in all of us. It is not bound by gender or culture. As humans, we all have an urge to aspire, expect, enter conflict and choose but our “Self” becomes gender and culture bound through our learning what the boundaries are within a community.

“"The human infant becomes a “self”, a being capable of speech and action, only by learning to interact in a human community. The self becomes an individual in that it becomes a “social” being capable of language, interaction and cognition. The identity of the self is constituted by a narrative unity, which interates what “I” can do, have done and will accomplish with what you expect of “me”, interpret my acts and intentions to mean, wish for me in the future, etc.” (Benhabib, 1992, p.5).

In addressing the individual I wish to draw closer the parallels rather than the differences between genders. This is what will be covered in the concluding sections of each interview. I have further sub-divided the themes in that chapter to underline parallels from the life stories of ten individuals. I am in no way arguing that these parallels are to be further universalized as absolutes. I only wish to raise questions for further inquiry.
I have chosen to introduce my informants to the reader through their own words. Furthermore, since I have emphasized throughout the text a space for a dialogue between genders to start in order to promote the recognition of parallels rather than differences among genders, I have chosen to present the following interviews in the form of a dialogue between the spouses as if one was responding to the other. I felt that this was an easier technique in order to first, bring out the parallels and second, to further reinforce the dialogue between them.

In order to give my informants anonymity when they wished, some of names have been changed. Although I have encouraged my informants to reveal themselves as individuals rather than to emphasize the gender dichotomy of male/female, it is inevitable at one point or another to use the gender grid that we are so accustomed to in order to give a concrete sense to the analysis of the study. By that I mean that the analysis can only be understood as we have learned to understand things through the concrete codes of reading and writing which have used the gender-sex system in presenting the characters as (biologically) male or female so that they can be placed concretely in the mind of my reader. But fortunately, when the gender dichotomy was emphasized in the formulation of a question such as specific household tasks that were required of siblings or who made the decision-making in the marriage, my informants responded accordingly, “I never helped in the house growing up neither did my sister. In that sense there was no gender difference.”
In identifying their genders, I am only making a biological difference and I would like to emphasize that all throughout the interviews I have tried to focus on what I have referred to as the existential self. This existential self as I have discussed in Chapter One is neither gender nor culturally bound. I have purposely started each interview with the childhood memories of my informants in order to point out the gender dichotomy and thus to look at the patterns of upbringing with respect to it and then lead the discussion away from it in search of the individual. Therefore, what comes out of our discussions does not necessarily reflect the ideas of a man or a woman as traditionally perceived by society because ultimately what we as researcher and informants are bringing out here is the individual or existential self.
Couple # 1

Researcher’s Reflections

Pierre: “I am the typical product of French bourgeoisie with a very traditional upbringing but from the very beginning when I was growing up I understood that my father disturbed those traditions when he married my mother who came from a family of “marechers”s and whose mothers worked. Therefore to marry outside of your class and to marry someone whose mother was working at the time made an impact on the family. So from the beginning of my childhood I understood that at that level there was a problem in the family.

Marie: “As for us, we lived more like gypsies, better than gypsies but very different. And I feel that when two people who are so different live together, there must come to some understanding either they share everything and take whatever to be happy or they separate”.

I met Marie and Pierre almost eight years ago. Our daughters were the same age and went to the same school. Pierre had a prestigious position with one of the foreign embassies in Cairo. He worked very long hours.

When I met Marie, she was already a close friend of my family and had been helping them with the logistics and the language of a school system which they knew nothing about as I was away for a few months studying. I was therefore introduced to Marie by my husband and my daughter who had become best friends with her daughter. So as the girls visited each other after school, we got to know one another.

Marie was not working and her life seemed to revolve around picking up the two girls from school and taking them to friends or activities in the afternoon. Marie’s activities at the time were watching old movies, reading and attending a few
socials at her husband’s work. She enjoyed taking long walks with her dog. Several years later, she had become an avid horse-rider and was riding daily.

For the first six years, I saw both Marie and Pierre separately, Marie for the most part and Pierre only very occasionally. It is not until two years ago that I saw them together and as two couples we shared a friendship.

These are a few recollections of my earlier memories of Marie and Pierre. Then, the text talks for itself.

**Childhood Memories**

**Siblings**

**Marie.** I have a sister and a brother. I am the little one..... My brother is older and we were very close.... I always thought that my parents made a difference between us but I think it was really because as the youngest I felt neglected. In fact I feel that my parents were very fair at all levels with very little means but they tried to accommodate all of us including our extended family because this is the way we lived with grandparents. We were together. It was in Morocco.

**Pierre.** I have an older sister and I think it is easier for a boy to have a younger sister because I believe that I was a pain to her because we are four years apart and I was always the little brother who followed her. So for a while we were not very close and later we became closer again but during my childhood and teenage years I must say that I was not close at all to my sister. She rejected me a little and I already had preconceived ideas which were very different from her and quite often she irritated me. For example I used to not like her choice of friends and I would tell her that they were boring and of course, we had conflicts at times like siblings have. I had already understood that she was very independent from the family whereas I was very close to my father and mother even though we had conflicts because I already had my own ideas and my own personality but we liked each other. My sister was allowed to be independent but I feel that my parents suffered from it.

**Marie.** My brother and sister fought over boy’s rights and eldest’s rights. So there was a continuous rivalry between them. But I never had a problem with them. Now my parents as Italians made a little difference between the boy and the girls and for that my sister and I gave our brother a hard time. We did not have to do chores in the house because even though we did not really have a maid my grandmother had a
young Moroccan girl who was raised at the same time as my mother. She was like an aunt, a sister and she took charge of most things in the house.

What makes me smile is that my parents surely because of their Italian background had that feeling that after reaching a certain age a girl should one day get married even though I was so young. It always made us laugh but I think it was important to them. They would sometimes say things about other people which gave me a hint on how they thought. But they never asked me anything neither did they nag nor push me in anything. It was different for my brother because although they were happy to see him married (he and I got married about the same time) for my mother, it was as if her son was snatched away from her. The daughter in law takes the son and I believe that it is more difficult at this level.

Pierre. There was no difference between my sister and me in terms of our upbringing. My parents helped us “to put our foot in the stirrup” and right away my sister chose to work which disappointed us somewhat because she was a champion of high jump and track and field and she quit for a job. She passed an entrance exam and became a teacher and later on a professor but really to leave the house and get married because she had met a student who could not support them. This my parents did not take very well. As for me I was indifferent. She had done something silly that’s all.

Marie. I do not feel that there was any difference in terms of the opportunities that we each got to study. In fact I thank my mother because this was important to her and she never let this down. However it was funny when my brother got his driving licence and my mother told my father to let my brother borrow his car. When I got my driving licence which I just did by myself and announced it to my father he went pale and he never volunteered to lend me his car. This made me angry because he would lend it to my brother who had had an accident and not to me. My mother did not put up with it because she also drove.

Pierre. In terms of education we both had the same opportunities and our parents made no difference. In fact my parents would have liked and provided for my sister to continue her studies further.

Role Models

Marie. I had a role model which must have had an influence on me to some extent. My mother was the one who had taken responsibility of everything.

Pierre. Due to the education I had gotten, I was quite strong. For example my dad was someone who worked hard and who was not often home although he came for lunch and was home for dinner.

Marie. My mother worked regularly and she was the head of the household. She made the decisions and it did not seem to bother her. On the contrary she felt it was to her advantage. This has had an influence on me in the sense that I have realized that a woman could very well be in control of things, that she could take the decisions and
do as she pleases. And this is really what has stayed in me, I feel it today. This is really what has remained in me..... For an Italian woman she was very strong. She was in charge and worked very hard but I think that she knew what she was also fighting for.

**Pierre.** My father gave himself to France, to my country from the age of 20 to 28. For 2 years he was in the army, one year at war and for five years he was prisoner of war in Germany. This had an impact on me. I am loyal, very patriotic and I love my country. For me, this is important, I work for my country.

**Aspirations-Expectations**

**Education/Work**

**Marie.** When I first left home and Morocco, my mind was really on studying. I think that going from a foreign country to your own country which you do not know was quite traumatic. It was more traumatic than I would have thought. I had never gone to France for so long and suddenly I was alone there. It is not obvious to live alone. I really think that if I had been in a university dorm it would have been better. I would have liked a more isolated job something totally different. In Morocco I belonged but in Denmark because of the language and our status (and this is the same problem here) ... but I am also happy like this. I do many things, do not neglect myself from doing things but I know that if I could have I would have preferred to work. In Vienna, I will push my girls to do more things and to go for it because life is too short and at times I regretted not to have done it. It is stupid.

**Pierre.** So I studied in France after I got my bacalaureate at the age of 16. I left Morocco and went to France alone. It was a difficult period but due to the education I had gotten, I was quite strong.... The technical was alright but I was interested in industrial design, the aesthetics aspect of it. I was interested in the technical but with respect to the aesthetics so I had to do the Beaux Arts..... I wanted to open some kind of agency with my friend. He had proposed that we become associates but I had no fortune and so it meant that he would have had to put the money down to start the agency. The other option was to join the army because I had to anyway and this is what I chose.

**Marie.** You see I foresee a future. But I ask myself many questions about it. Because when I see someone like Pierre who is so busy because his work is his life, I cannot dream. I realized that it was more than anything even if it is not as much as I think maybe. I tell myself that from one day to the next one may have nothing to do, this will be terrible. For him not for me because I can always find something, have contact with other people even volunteer to do things as long as I am capable. I see a continuation for me.
Marriage

Marie. I never really thought of marriage that much as a younger person. I knew one day I would meet someone whom I’d like and I’d want to live with him but it was not to me a question of marrying. I liked children so I knew I’d want some some day but it was not the ultimate (?) (Une echeance). He would be someone to share my life with and be happy but there was no precise person in mind or image.

Pierre. I never thought of marriage because I had many hesitations... I left for Morocco and there I met Marie. I still had no vision no perception of marriage.

Marie. I never really had a definite perspective of marriage. But I feel that I was also quite independent and I did not want to be, I was going to say “trapped” but it is a bit silly, I mean “be taken or fall into certain nets”. When we got married, it sounds very selfish but, above all, I wanted to be happy. I wanted to find my self.

Pierre. I understood two things about marriage. First, there’s the couple who is an “association” (a bond/link) for better and worse. It is also a structure with rules, an institution. I “navigated” between the two. So there was the couple but I could not forget that the institution was right behind. The institution represented the rules of the game. In a couple there are no rules whereas within a marriage, they exist and we have to respect certain things which are even written. We have to sign papers. We make vows to be faithful, to help one another and so on. But it is about two beings who associate with each other for the same interest that they have in common that they share although “share” because a couple maybe a man and a woman but it may also be two gangsters. It is a partnership, a team. At the beginning of our marriage, we both worked and after work we would meet again. Things were relatively simple.

Marie. For me this is not a “scheme”, the husband who makes the woman live, who puts her in the house, who is himself very happy like this. It is not enough. It may sometimes be enough but for me it is not sufficient. My vision was to be above all myself, to continue to be myself, this was very important. It is very important to remain one’s self. I did not really do that. I let myself be “eaten” perhaps because of love, perhaps because of whatever you want but I think it was because of love. And this is above all about this: to remain yourself.

Pierre. I don’t really want the things to change in a major way but I hope that one day we’ll once again be a couple. The family will end as the girls are growing up and they’ll leave and that one day we’ll be a couple and share everything again.

Marie. My marriage then was quite traditional but I was happy. Today I feel that it is less traditional because I have changed. Pierre also has changed. I believe this change comes from both of us. Pierre has kept the same expectations he had before unless I am wrong because he talks very little about it but this past period, it was ok but I want more, I may be more demanding but I aspire for more. At the time, it was enough, you know with the kids, a happy life and a beautiful country, I was not bored I was doing many things that I wanted to do. Our marriage was going well. But he was tired and fed up and with the age, many problems have come. For me it was a normal stage if
you wish: the beginning of a marriage, then the children even if they came eight years later. We spent these eight years very nicely.

The traditional French woman’s role is not just that, the housework, the children, the husband’s self. Danish women work hard but the tasks are shared more equally and I believe the decisions too so that no one is in a definite role. It may be tough and initially women’s lib may have been hard on them but there was in the end a sharing of things. I am not sure that the French are ready for this yet. Men especially are not ready. It would bring so much to women because I also talk to other women around me.

Pierre. ... and what I hope really is for our couple who is no longer a couple right now but a family with a sole provider to assure the material day-to-day to get back into a couple where everything will be shared and much more pleasant.

Marie. I think that in a marriage, we should be able to say openly and all the time when we like something or don’t like something without this affecting our life as a couple. And I believe that the fact that we do not have always the same preferences is very disturbing and this is a shame.

Pierre. It may not be nice to say but this is about compromise. Either you accept to live differently and therefore in my work I can have a different attitude. But in doing so you don’t have a car, you go on vacation less often, you don’t have a horse or don’t buy whatever clothes or jewelry and so on because then I don’t work as much and therefore I become more available. In terms of my career I’ll become a dead brain and of course I will also take the risk to be doing an administrative kind of work. This is a compromise.

Marie. Our marriage has changed and I cannot say that it is positive or peaceful anymore but I feel that if we can get over this period, it will bring us a lot. I do see a future and my vision is not all negative because we have more to travel together and we can do many things on the way. Together or separately but there is much to do. And for me it may be stupid but as long as there is something alive, then it is positive. Obviously I would like our couple to change. I’d like for us to be able to talk to each other because there is no communication. Everything is very superficial. I have no illusions. When I start some discussion, I feel it closes in or it will go bad because perhaps it is not the right time. But is there a right time? After so many years, I should have found that out. But there is somewhat of a progress. Having children makes you somewhat stuck and it is not so easy to take some big decision. When you are alone, it is much simpler and this has had an effect to some extent.

When I see the things I aspired for when I was younger and I see my life today, I cannot say that it does not match. I feel somewhat disappointed about the verbal contact in the marriage not at the level of the closeness that one has in the marriage but at the level of communication because it does not exist and I miss it because it is me. And I feel that when two people who are so different live together, they must come to some understanding either they share everything and take whatever to be happy or they separate. There is no mystery if you can’t accept the other as well as what he/she brings or takes.
For some, marriage is an association with interest, or it brings tranquility, a guaranteed companionship in old age. I have heard many talk about this and one thinks about this at times. Imagine if suddenly I let go and left. It is not obvious, it requires courage. For me it would not frighten me but for the kids, one always thinks of the kids. I know that for some people this attitude is well established but I refuse to think that way. I refuse to be simply married. Even with respect to me. For example, you tell yourself that you're not going to have so many kitchen appliances to make life complicated. Even at any level of materialism. Of course, I feel blessed because I can have everything but it is not because I buy one more thing that I will feel happier. This is not a substitute.

Conflicts

Resolving Differences

Pierre. When we left for Copenhagen, Marie was totally uprooted from her native Morocco but she was very happy to go. It was not at all a joint decision to go and I had spoken to her about it so she knew because the attitude that I have today was the same I had before.

Marie. We took the decision together to move there. We discussed it and I was immediately for it. The children were born in Denmark even though we were not supposed to have kids. For me it was a great joy but for Pierre, it was a shock. The doctor had told him that we could not have any. At first, it was disturbing for him then it was a positive shock. But the biggest disturbance was the second child because this was something he was not expecting at all. It was quite strange. The fact that the doctor had given such a firm answer hurt him a lot.

Pierre. Then the children came. From the beginning of our marriage Marie wanted children but they did not come. I had a problem. Then, they came and changed our life totally. I think that our couple ended at that moment. It was no longer a couple but a family. It was a new beginning. The couple ended. It was a family.

Marie. Certain subjects are avoided, others get abstract answers. We never had real conversations. I don’t think so even on a more personal level. Our discussions are very routine like, perhaps even more now. I feel that this is a shame.

Pierre. We used to share everything.

Marie. One thing I have done though is to change the daily routine somewhat, and this was not well accepted. Perhaps because I did it suddenly I do not know. I have for example changed a little my role in the house in the sense that as the children were growing up, I did not have to be available all the time, you know all the very classic stuff that one may imagine being done in a couple of past years. It means that the wife who waits in the evening with her apron in her hands. I laugh but it is this stereotype and this drives me nuts!
Pierre. I’d like if she found a good job. In fact I’d told her that in Paris I would not make as much and that she would have to think about working again. Even here I had told her one day that instead of spending so much time riding horses at the Pyramids she could take classes to learn for example how to use a computer because today if you don’t know how to use a computer, you’re nothing. Today you have to learn word processing and I had told her that if we went back to Paris one day, she would have to learn something besides riding horses. I told her that anyway she could not ride as much in Paris and that if she could start some kind of course but she did not look at it this way and we even had an argument about it. I would not force her though and if we had gone to Paris and she had not wanted to work, I would have continued to assume the same role.

Marie. It is not only in terms of giving material things. It is otherwise narrow minded and at this level we’ve had many differences even though we do not discuss them. To me generosity means to accept other people’s ideas without disturbing relations even if it is hard to swallow.

Pierre. I don’t talk to her that much on the subject and she does not ask me many questions. I provide materially and we do not talk about it. So in this sense our roles are well-defined and I believe that Marie is not interested in the subject.

So there is no team work in our home. In terms of many things we have both remained very independent.

For example with respect to the coming vacation we had a big argument because she has asked her parents to come and I am sorry but during my vacation, I don’t have to put up with them. She took it very badly and I know that I hurt her. But we could have lived in our flat where I put my parents up but even though the flat is there, I don’t want to impose my parents on her. And everyday, I go alone to visit my parents and if she wants to come, it is her choice. I don’t impose it on her .......I want these social relations to be detached from our family because I can’t stand them.

Marie. ......for example in the case of my neighbor she would never go out and eat with her friends, something I have done myself. For me it was a source of conflict at the beginning and now it is less but for her it is unthinkable. I think that it was eventually accepted in my case but even if it is not, I don’t ask if it is I just do it.

Pierre. The sharing exists though because Marie takes care of the kids and it does take a lot of time but there is no real exchange. Marie never asks me anything in terms of my meeting their personal needs. She buys everything whenever she wants without asking. She just does it. This is the price to pay. I work hard in what I do and I can bring and she makes me pay for my work. She feels that if I do that she can do whenever at the personal and material level.

Marie. I told Pierre this once that it would be better to have less money and have him make more of an effort emotionally. I am not sure how he took this. He did not respond but I rarely get a response. It is a shame. I have more conversations with others than him. I am sure he understands what I say at least I hope he does.
Often I have told him that he was not responsible for each of us totally. After a certain age his girls will be grown ups. You will not be responsible for their acts and this I believe is very hard. We have talked often about it. We did not get far but we have talked about it. It was very hard for him to let the girls ride and I did this against him. I persisted. He has accepted it because he realized that it was not so bad even if it was not the best thing and that nothing went wrong.

Pierre. When you work in an office, you have 9 to 5 hours and of course, your perspective of work is totally different. I am not sure that Marie realizes this. When I walked in the Minister’s office and thought that he was going to offer me a job in the Ministry but instead told me that I was going to Vienna, Marie was very happy on the phone and also the girls. As I told them, someone has to pay the price in this affair. So I have to go back and do the same thing and, I must tell you that I am tired but I do it for them. This is the living proof that I am not ignoring them.

Marie. He told me the other day that he wanted to go to Paris, that it is the “power” there. He talked in such a way that he surprised me and this diaspairs me must say. This has to do with his male role. This really goes hand to hand.

So, you think you’re doing the right thing and you find out that really aren’t.

I’d like to see my marriage happy because I don’t think it is. Not just between us but with respect to everything around us. Right now especially. Moving is disturbing.

Pierre. I don’t mind discussing things with Marie but if she does not share my view and in general I feel that when I decide upon something I have put some thought to it, and if she does not submit then I feel that she should take her responsibilities and take charge and I don’t get involved at all. For example, in terms of her passion for horses, I explained to her that... but she totally removed herself from all the social life that I could have because of the horses. I told her that for me things were different and that because of my work I had a duty to entertain which we used to do but no longer did.

Marie. I have had to bring some balance and fun because Pierre gives a very classic education to his girls. He may even regret that I am not teaching them certain things especially at the level of what good manners should be. He told me so and I responded that this was not essential to me. We can be happy in life without having to keep “our little finger up”. This is ridiculous. He would act the same with a boy, this has to do with his own education.

One day I told him that he has to be fair. We are not his secretaries, we are not serving him. It was very hard for him to hear it and I think it took him a while to... And sometimes the way he talks, he turns the conversation around so that he wins. It took me a while to realize it and it is not always bad but it is not always pleasant either.

Marie. Now you still have to struggle here and even though you may tell yourself that you are not with it or in it, it still taught me a lot. It taught me at the level of people.
Of course I learned some about horses because I knew absolutely nothing but to tell you the truth what I liked was to meet people even if we did not make friends and watch their behavior. It is a different world and Pierre does not like that world at all. He is allergic to it. Because first of all it became my world so I was very busy with it and I gave myself to it a lot because I felt that as long as I am here I should take advantage and also at my age, maybe one day I’ll suffer from back problems.

You know, we never know what life has for us. It is silly to say. I do things as they come, as I appreciate them. I tell myself that for other things I’ll have more time later when I am old, play tarot, watch tv, I don’t know. If you wish I am more fatalistic than he I take things better as they come. I tell myself that tomorrow something will come and will do with it but even if I seem relax like this, if one day I must, I will react and I will react well. For the moment being this is it whereas for him it has to be predicted. We are such opposites at this level.

Marie. Riding was taken very badly by him especially during some specific periods and it made us more distant. For him I did not have any definite time anymore and when I would get back home, even though I felt great, in a good mood, in harmony with myself, by contrast, I was finding someone who was not happy maybe for other reasons. I was always back on time except maybe once or twice. He never told me why he was like that. One day he told me that I was giving his money to the Pharoahs and I did not even go further with the discussion because it could have turned sour. Maybe he was also at the same time in a bad situation so he only made things worse. By contrast he told others that I and the children were crazy about horses. So I get a different story and this really bugs me. Right now, it is a bit better.

Pierre. I told her that horses were for her and not for me and that I was not going to go back to the stables because it was her problem and not mine anymore. I am not sure that if she had a job and provided for her own hobby, it would make a difference.

Marie. I don’t really feel he noticed my physical well-being at least not at the beginning and I don’t know now. He did not live it well. He told me that the housework was no longer done properly. One day in France I told him that something was wrong in our marriage and he answered that the housework was not properly done. I almost laughed. So he eventually took my activity because our life has not changed. This is what I have tried to make him understand. It could be changed for the better that is he could be more relaxed less pressured all the time, find leisure time. It is as simple as this.

I feel that I have accepted many things but not anymore although he feels that he has accepted all. Maybe we think the same. It is difficult until we confront the situation together.

But I don’t have regrets today, not any more because the things I have lived I have lived them well except for the bad times. You see an example of this was the case of the last evening I saw my friends and we went on a moonlight ride. In the past I would have thought more of Pierre being alone and I would have made the choice to stay with him to please him. But I realised that it was the last evening I was spending with them so I told him firmly that I wanted to go. It was a different situation. He was not
terribly pleased but he accepted it also. He did not go, he does not like it, he has back problems. He was also tired and so I am not going to drag him on a horse. I don’t feel guilty either less and less but there was guilt especially during the talks we had which reinforced that guilt because I was not in the mold anymore.

But after a while, I did not feel guilty anymore. I felt good and this was disturbing for him because for me it made me feel good. I feel younger than before as a result. But maybe this is the age, at 40 a woman feels better about herself and this maybe a general view more than a man who is aging who feels deprived from the control, who feels weaker. I think that the male does not accept well the fact that he cannot do some things anymore.

I don’t feel that there is truly a leader in our household. It comes out at times of crisis and in certain issues. If he was less pressured and less tired many things could go well. He only manipulates with his role because of his career and also because of his depressed mood. One day he did tell me that he was not well and felt depressed. So I know this is a reason also for his behavior. You cannot enjoy leisure time if you are not feeling well.

**Pierre.** When you come home after 12 hours of work I must say that you don’t feel like going out again because many times she has told me we never go to restaurants, we never go on weekends. To tell you the truth taking the car and driving 800 kms to go to Hurghada….So again there is no harmony as there is in a couple.

**Marie.** He talks with the girls but he could talk much more. Maybe it is because they are girls and they always come to me because they are always with me. We make decisions together regarding the children and when I don’t agree I tell him. Before I did not really say anything. I would just hint it. I use to think that since he was working so much I was not going to bother him but it is totally ridiculous because we let things build up which make the relation not right, not honest. With respect to the major decisions, there is not one person in charge but I also make sure to be involved in them. He has at times blamed me for not taking care of things but quite often he takes the attitude that he is going to do everything and after awhile, I detach myself. I told him one day that I am very capable of taking care of things.

I just want to not have to put up with scenes whenever I want to do something with friends or the girls. I would prefer that he tells me that he wants to go on a cruise with a couple of colleagues from work rather than making empty promises. This is also what disturbs me. Not to completely like what the other does is totally normal, you’re yourself and you have your own aspirations but to not tolerate that the other does his/her own things, that is not right. Then, there is no more freedom and I have not done anything out of line like going dancing every night although I’d like too. So you see, there are differences in attitudes.

*Representation/Vision of the Other*

**Marie.** I think that my perspective was different from Pierre. The experience that we live today would probably agree with this.
Pierre. In Denmark she was alone without a job. She discovered Denmark with her first dog whom we still have. She did not miss working. She could have come and worked as a volunteer at the library and she did a few times but she was not enthusiastic because she felt that the librarian did nothing and she ended up doing it all so she did not want to pursue.

Marie. Having children changed Pierre’s behavior completely. He felt even more responsibilities and I believe that this has closed many horizons. His role as a family leader is so much rooted in him and I believe that it is against this that he is struggling. I don’t feel that this is my problem because I do not take that role away from him but I modify that role with respect to him because I do not want to be the victim of it. It is very difficult to do that. We do not talk about it.

Pierre. Marie had all her weekends to herself in Denmark.

Marie. I think that we can be a good mother and wife while at the same time having our own personal life but I wonder what the personal life of a woman must represent for Pierre. Even if he says the contrary, I am not sure it would be the truth. I think he has a traditional perception of the woman more than I thought he would unless this has increased with age. I would like to know. This is also influenced by the stereotype of his parents. His mother took it all and I respect her for this because everyone says that she is a pain, makes trouble but it is not always because of her. I have had many interesting discussions with her and many times she told me a few things that were right on target. I am not sure what her life has been but it may have suited her more than for me. Maybe it is from the beginning a matter of character and education, I don’t know. It is also another generation.

.....but I know that for Pierre and we were talking at the family level, certain things are to be done one way and not in another and for him, it is very difficult to accept any change in this domain. He is not very flexible. He says that he is generous and at many levels he is right he is very generous but at the same time generosity to me also refers to ideas.

Pierre. I don’t know if she sees that our couple has ended unless you have talked to her and you know. I don’t know how she feels about it. I don’t know. But I feel that she thinks and she has told me that I ignore her and that I also ignore our daughters. Of course I told them it was not so but I guess my behavior is such that they think that.

Marie. For him I see a stop which although it may lighten him physically it will be hard because I already see it here. I feel that he is restless. He is too tired to do real things, well, he goes swimming but it seems that when he is here he is bored. I am not saying that he is really bored but he is at loss. He is very conscientious about his role in the family. In fact, he is too conscientious.

With respect to responsibilities this has always bugged me but I have always thought that he has never completely trusted me and this has always been a nightmare for me
that he could assume that whatever I did I did it any way which is not true because it is not always me and we all make mistakes, he as much as I.

**Pierre.** One thing I know is that I trust her totally with our girls’ education and she gives them an incredible amount of her own time.

**Marie.** He feels so responsible to the extent that he thinks that when he is not around nothing goes well. He does this at work. He goes for the slightest thing. He is tired but he still goes. I do admire his energy and his courage, I admit it but I tell myself that he is sacrificing his health because it is too much. He does not have a life. He has nothing for himself anymore. I cannot say that he has many friends. He has one true friend but they only see each other so much, there is no real contact so he cannot really talk.

He wonders what he is going to find although he knows what’s waiting for him. Of course, it is disturbing but the fact that I do not see him happy and that he does not do the things he likes bothers me. I feel that he deserves better and I don’t understand why he is so stuck on some things which could bring him an opening on things outside which may not make a profound effect on him for life but which could nevertheless be beneficial to him for the moment being.

He had a very strict education. But with the girls I don’t know if he is playing games or what even with others he presents and tells things that we never do or that we should have done. He gives an image of himself as if he is exceptional. Maybe because he feels guilty that he does not do it, because he makes promises and also maybe because he plays games vis a vis others. This is the image that others have of him. He is generous, “serviable”. I know that I have seen him many times doing it but I feel that it is not normal those two sides. This bugs me ...

**Marie.** At work here, many people would be willing to do anything for him as much as he has done for them. You see there is a kind of “situation”. And this he will never live it at home. I think that the domineering role is typical masculine/male and although it can be more or less strong, I think it is important to him. This control is not always bad and some people like it.

I am not sure how he sees me now and I’ll be curious to know. If I believe what I have heard at times, it is bad and I prefer not to stop to that especially under the present circumstances because his behavior is different afterwards but I’d like to find out how he sees me now. He must find me changed. I believe that at the beginning it was a group, it was a part of the group and I would prefer that he sees me as “me”. This is something that I don’t like, to see in people only the good things not just for me but in general not only things we are interested in but also the not-so-good things.

**Pierre.** We were independent. My parents were back in France. The roles that we each played at the time were not gender bound and came naturally. No one had a particular role. In fact I never even imagined to prevent Marie from working. If she said she was going to work I would have applauded it with both my hands.
Marie. I believe that if I suddenly took a full-time job he would be surprised. I am sure he would like it but at the same time he would be flattered because how it is viewed outside is important to him as I don’t care about that. He is more sensitive to it. I also believe that as a result of getting a job if I neglected many things in the house it would not be right. He does help me in the house but if he had to come back to the house to do things because I could not due to working, then he would probably feel that it would not be necessary for me to work. I believe that this is the picture he has. He may eventually accept it but not easily and not immediately.

You see my work could not interfere with other things, this is where it is troublesome. Again I think it is related to his controlling and he feels unstable whenever I show him that I don’t always need assistance. He has talked about role-reversal saying that he would stay home but I am not sure if he could really do it. Before, I would have thought yes but now, the more I see the situation progress, the more I see his attitude, the less I believe in it. I am not sure why I did not see him like this before, a traditionalist. I was interpreting this differently but I feel that these things are very well rooted in him and they continue to progress. I feel that what I have observed lately tells me that it is well rooted and I am seeing things differently. Maybe the situation was not the same before.

I think that the need to assume the leader’s role has a lot to do with it. I believe that this is innate in men. The need to conquer. When I read comics for example where the future and the past are depicted I always have the image of the male hunting and this drives me nuts. But I have that image perhaps because I live with someone like that. In others, the image is less lighter. I feel that for some it is more rooted in than others because also they have the father’s role model. For Pierre, the model is fine but very rigid and I believe that for Pierre, it is actually less rigid than for his father. His father has made some unbelievable comments to me about who is leading the household. His wife even told me once that she wanted to color her hair and he totally forbade her to do so. I find this unbelievable. I said that no one could tell me what to do with my own physical self.

And he is stuck on many things. I don’t think that I can change this. I believe that I can help him but I cannot change this completely because I am first of all too close to him while at the same time I feel that he thinks that he should have a certain attitude vis-a-vis me. I always thought that there was a side in him which was no true. It is such a shame because if he had at least one person he could talk to as I do on everything. He is very alone really and so there is no opening. I believe again that this is because of the traditional role but this has also progressed more and he has gone down further in that role and I could see it as the years passed. And this has consequences and I feel that some day he will not be able to take it anymore. I don’t know what to do really.

Pierre. Marie never asks any question about the day to day living. For example when we were supposed to return to Paris she never asked how we are going to live or whether we are going to rent some place. She is going now for the summer. I am the one who rented a vacation house, they will travel first class, they have a car waiting for them at the airport. Marie never asks how I manage, how much it cost or does not cost. I just have to provide. So in that regard I am like my father but my mother was
worse because she counted on little envelopes with cash in it because she could never write a check because it was out of question to pay the helpers in the house and the shopkeepers with a check. They were given envelopes with cash in it.

**Marie.** He forces himself at times to please us but I feel that it does not bring him anything. He is tired. We talk about things like that but I feel he is not interested. I would prefer him to say that he does not feel like it gently not the way he does it where he does it to only please us. But of course I do it myself also. Sometimes because of his work, it is important for me to be there with him but I don’t do it systematically because he would tend to rely on me and like it. I did more before but I was more available, I was also alone. To give two hours is not much then. It has also enabled me to see and speak to people I like more than others. But I don’t want to do it every time. I want to take advantage of other more pleasant things.

There is also a lack of spontaneity in our relation and I always felt that something was not quite right. But it has been like this for a long time maybe it is because of his education, there are taboos and therefore, they cannot disappear overnight but I have less taboos. I am less stuck on things. Recently I have cornered him. I think it is very hard for him to talk although he can also say very mean things and this has really shocked me. To tell the truth is one thing, to be nasty is something else. Maybe he feels guilty, I don’t know. People show their guilt differently.

I can never give him any advice on his well-being. I’d have to break a wall down because what I say does not register. He says yes like that so after I tell him, “Then, don’t ask me.” And at this level, I don’t think that it is a lack of trust but that he thinks that everything is alright and that he does not need any advice. You put him in front of certain facts with respect to his health and I am not talking about other matters and he’ll say that it is not important and that it will go away. So from that on, there is no space for discussion. ... It is almost a childish behavior but I will not put pressure on him. He is old enough to take care of himself. You know it is very funny. It is not a balanced reaction. At times he acts like a child and at times it is superman, I am here, I do everything and it is really at times not necessary. But I believe we both have the two sides. We each keep both sides and one side may be stronger for one than it is for the other depending on the circumstances but I believe both sides remain. Maybe it comes from the mothers who raise their son I don’t know. You have a son maybe you’ll tell me one day. I believe that women have terrible conflicts with their daughter. It can even be violent but the bonding is simpler, more natural.

Today I have many points to which to refer to and although I forget some things which are of no interest to me, some are very much in my mind. This has brought me a lot. There are some scenes which I would not have lived as they happened at the time. Maybe this has to do with age and experience with life but also it is about friends whom I have talked to and who gave me support. This has helped me a lot, the experience of others because we have shared common things.

I discovered this progressively and I think that the Scandinavians opened my eyes a little. It was not an immediate reaction but to see them live, you know because they live very differently and the French do not like it much because it is pretty straightforward and the women have their own life as they want it and I think it is
great. This does not mean that they do not live as couples married or not. This means that if they wish to go out with their own friends this does not create a problem. I was going to say to rearrange the furniture but this is not important to me but if this is what my spouse want as long as it is practical I can accept it.

**Choices**

**Situational**

**Marie.** I chose tourism but we were given the wrong information about the school and I never finished. In fact I regret this but I cannot really blame my parents for it. It was not their fault. They had not studied so they were not really informed of what was going on and they thought it was a good school. I did not like it. It was a private school in Lyon not in Paris and, after awhile I gave up and went back home. I was about twenty. I stayed there two years.

**Pierre.** On the personal level I was not allowed much freedom. I had many constraints, in the choice of my clothes, schedule, social life as my friends had to be scrutinized before passing the test. It was a typical bourgeois education.

Since I was a child I was always told that I had to work.

**Marie.** It was like a family "pension". However I cannot put the blame on it but I feel that I could have gone further with my studies and chosen something I would have liked better. I know this because when later on when I was married I tried to take up my Spanish studies again but I only did it for a year because there were mundane things to attend among other things and I guess I was not brave enough to persevere but I know I would have liked to.

**Pierre.** My father was forced to have a traditional career as an accountant. So, he worked for a bank because one had to have a white collar work and as for a uniform, it was out of question. But my father thought that for me it would be the contrary and he insisted that I had a technical training. I did not like it that much. My professors used to say that I would be more suited as a judge but not in a technical school, this is not the best for him. But he imposed that training upon me. It was interesting and I don’t regret anything but it is him who forced me to do it. And he would tell that there were more jobs available in that branch at the time rather than if I had become a lawyer. He felt that with an academic career, there was no possibility of work for me. But he did not choose the school for me.

**Marie.** At the beginning, Pierre and I lived together and we made things official because of his career. We did not see each other any more because he was invited alone and this was stupid. This is why we did it.

**Pierre.** We got married in France but the reason first that we got married is because I was working for the Ambassador who was a bachelor and who refused to invite non-married people. He was very strict in terms of the protocole.
In Morocco I had responsibilities and Marie knew I worked for my country and she accepted it. Of course, her work was in the same frame for the same purpose and already she had discovered my way which was a bit particular. For example, she worked for me so if her supervisor gave her a promotion I immediately eradicated it because I did not want people to think that she was given favors on my account. Somewhere I am sure she found me terribly unfair but she accepted it.

**Marie.** In terms of work, I continued working as much as I could. But because of living like this abroad it is not always easy. Because it meant to work with Pierre and this was something I no longer wanted. This was very unfair to Pierre’s character. There were problems vis a vis his colleagues and tremendous jealousy and horrible people. To some extent I had lived this in Morocco although we were not married.

**Pierre.** She never complained but another example was when we had Embassy lunches where she was invited when we got married. I always told her to make up the hours she was at lunch. It was in both our interests. It was not because of competition between us but it was vis-a-vis the others so that they did not think she had easy hours because she was my wife.

**Marie.** Here it is routine-like and work is limited, this is obvious. Unless one does charity work such as washing babies which I did not want to do because I had some children and preferred to look after them. But I feel it is limited. There is no choice and I think it is because of the country we are in. Others feel the same.

**Pierre.** Here it has been somewhat different because my work took a lot out of me and I suffered for the last seven years.

Until now really I see myself in my father’s role.....

During the time when we were only a couple I had more freedom professionally.... But once “the couple ends” and the family start, I feel totally responsible materially for this family.

All what I do now is for them. I don’t tell them and many times I thought I would not make it but I continued for them because I want to make sure that they have a nice life assured materially. I feel I am the provider and I have to assume the everyday.

But to tell you the truth I came here with a mission in mind. I have achieved my mission today but I am leaving feeling that it took everything out of me.

On one hand when I was told that only I could go to Vienna, it is gratifying. I cannot refuse. I was told I was the best. I did it in Denmark, in Cairo and now in Vienna. On the other hand I feel that they are afraid to see me at the main office in Paris because I know too many things and also I am not easy.

You know I can live differently but I don’t feel that I have a choice right now. Until the girls have their own life, *I will break my back* to provide for their future.
Conclusions

*My Construction of reality: The Existential Self*

Marie. “It is important to me to be myself, in fact it is the most important thing because after awhile you are unhappy “to live beside yourself”*, you feel empty. And I have felt this over the years. There is a period after the initial one and I was very happy for a while but there is an empty period where it was not right and when you feel that you are going down, you don’t react anymore. It is good to feel it but I never wanted to go beyond it.

Marie is torn between the sense of belonging and having a life of her own, “I would have liked a more isolated job something totally different. In Morocco I was apart but in Denmark because of the language and our status (and this is the same problem here)... but I am also happy like this”. I believe that this embodies the essence of what Marie feels throughout the interview. She expresses a longing to work further reinforced by the dichotomous relationship between fulfilling her role at home and searching for her individual self which she sees as being independent.

Going away to Denmark is an expression of freedom because of the disconnection to the near, the familiar and the oppressing,

“Denmark represented the end of the world for me because many had told me that I was going to be very unhappy and that it was very far away. That it was not my country. This was stupid because I lived very well there and in many ways it was good because I changed my way of living. I also changed my way of thinking because of the contact I had with Scandinavian people. It brought me a lot. I wanted to go there. In fact even before I met Pierre. I was ready to go”.

Even though she feels she has gained more self-assertiveness over the years and is able to reflect on particular situations which she may have handled differently in the past,

“What I mean is in terms of going out, making decisions but simple ones not the ones who are important just the littles ones that one can take alone as we please. And it is not that I could not take those little decisions before but maybe if I had insisted more I could have taken them more easily. It may be my own fault for
giving into too many things ... *It is very important to me* those little things and if I give in, it is terrible for me*”.

“But he had to accept forcefully because I did not give up. Should I had given up it would have been back into the *mold*”.

“I do feel that my changing has made me more confident with respect to certain issues. I am also more ready to confront things not all because I tell myself that some things are not important but I know that when I have my mind set on certain things there is little which will make me change that”.

Her disconnection from the Self as the traditional housewife is in the search of her individual or existential self through the world of horses. She has made her choice,

“I found a comfort somewhat with horses, first of all because I like the contact with animals, to be with nature and I have always loved the desert since Morocco. It has always brought me an incredible well-being. Even though I discovered horse-riding very late. This is because of my eldest daughter who insisted to go because Pierre thought it was too dangerous. I said that I was not going to pass any judgement until I tried it. I did and loved it very much. This is all due to her. I believe that if she had not been such a fanatic I would not have been that taken by it, maybe not as much. I became a passionate and learned to love these animals. You see not long ago I was thinking that it would not bother me at all if I went to a place and took care of them even at my age. As long as I enjoy it whatever the activity is, I am ready to do it”.

The split is even felt between what she longs to do now, after discovering something which makes her feel good, and the reminder of society’s values, “even at my age”. It is hard to disconnect oneself from the judging voice of society.

“Riding is an activity which made me blossom physically. It made me feel good to get out of here, to go alone. I found my space and it was important for me. But I think that it has always been like this and I took in too much and ignored my space too much when I should not have...I have found a different mentality in the world of horses from other sports such as tennis for example and in the card games even though I am a player and I like to play. But this activity is very simple. For the most part, I do find myself when I am with horses. The fact that it brings me well-being and satisfaction makes me think that I am doing something and that it brings me something”.
...and her choice is not without guilt feelings, “I was always back on time except maybe once or twice” reinforces the split she experiences. Riding gives her a sense of self but “I was always back on time” gives her the reminder of her traditional role.

“We stayed seven years in Denmark. I did volunteer work sometimes at the center but I did not work. I was very busy, I met many people, this is one of the positive side of traveling abroad. I cannot say that I missed working then. I am totally independent and we have no financial problems which is really important..... My vision was to be above all myself, to continue to be myself, this was very important. It is very important to remain one’s self. I did not really do that. I let myself be “eaten” perhaps because of love, perhaps because of whatever you want but I think it was because of love. And this is above all about this: to remain yourself.”

Marie’s “total independence” goes hand in hand with the vision of “Self”, “to be above all myself.” It has nothing to do with being able to provide for herself which she in fact voices in parallel to it, “I am totally independent and we have no financial problems which is really important”. The general definition attributed to independence in today’s modern society is related to being able to survive on one’s own financial resource generated usually through work. But Marie does not regard it as such. Her “independence” is connected to no longer assuming a traditional role and to find her own space through other more “pleasant things” to do as she puts it and above all to remain herself.

The sense of choice is acknowledged but as she refers in the interview “it takes courage”

“I’d rather go for a walk alone than have a social coffee. But to find activities where I am me, myself, where I find my own sense of self, away from the house, is not obvious here. I could have done it while in Denmark when my kids were very young but I made this choice but I think I will do it in Vienna, this I think about. I hope to change my activities.

Her vision of self is further reflected in her happiness to see her daughters grow up,
“The things which reinforce that image of my own self, my own reality are to
watch the girls blossom, happy and having their own sense of self. This makes
me very happy. Now I also feel that I would be complete if I could find
something. I was going to say work but it is not really for the money but to have
another activity which I will try to do in Vienna, something personal, even for a
couple of hours, it will be better. I also think that if you have something for
yourself you have less the time to stop on certain details. In terms of facing
problems you can distance yourself. But it is not really an issue of freedom but it
is with respect to me”

and to have reached a sense of self where the existentialist no longer feels guilty,

“ I dare things today that I will have never have dared before. But this is not the
right word, I may not have tried perhaps because of being too relaxed or because
of laziness or whatever and also so that not to create problems and conflicts. But
now, no. In all I feel that I am old enough to do things versus others and this is
very important to me because it was always part of me and I left it in the
shadow. But my character is also not to hurt people because it hurts me a lot.
But sometimes it is necessary”.

Pierre. “I don’t regret anything in my life because I am a man of principles”.

In this sentence, which symbolizes in itself a very rigid aspect of the
individual as molded by society (because without the teachings of society the
individual could not possibly become “a man of principles”), Pierre conveys the
struggle he experiences. He reflects at the beginning on his rigid and rather unflexible
childhood extending to the choice of clothing and friends made for him. Yet he talks
with emotions of his long walks with his daughters and his dog while his wife has
“her weekends to herself” which hardly represents a “traditional” image of marriage
as seen by society. Yet he’s a man of principle.... Each side of the “split” is being
voiced, Pierre’s reality expressed in the narration of the walks as he warmly talks
about his women,

“Today when I say “my women”, they are my women. There is no difference
between them. I can’t put a hierarchy here. I invested myself in them a great
deal. I spent with them very intense moments. During the weekends, my eldest
daughter and I both would go out which would free Marie. So every Saturday
and Sunday I would walk for miles with my daughter in Copenhagen along the
seashore. She was in a stroller and we had the dog with us. I was very close to
her. Then the second one came and we moved to the country and again we went for long walks.

Of his wife choosing her freedom in Denmark,

“She was always very independent. At that point she started to organize her life which made her happy. She was fulfilled. She had many friends. She had a lot of autonomy. She did not have a traditional role. She made her own choice. She is not at all the house-type, I am more so than she is. She discovered Copenhagen, she went for a walk with her dog to many places and made friends with many people. When I walked the dog during the weekend many people used to come and said “hi” to me and “so, you are the husband!””

And finding her happiness and the societal mold of the provider, the backbone who tries to survive,

“I survived all this thanks to one hour of swimming a day. I also try to keep up with what is going on in France. I read a lot what the press has to say”.

and furthermore the man of principle but a man who “has suffered” in struggling to make his own choices and who voices it,

“I was not allowed much freedom. I had many constraints, in the choice of my clothes, schedule, social life as my friends had to be scrutinized before passing the test... Here it has been somewhat different because my work took a lot out of me and I suffered for the last seven years..... You know I can live differently but I don’t feel that I have a choice right now. Until the girls have their own life, I will break my back to provide for their future.” and a longing that one day, there will be a choice, “But later on I will be able to have my choice and I hope that we’ll be a couple once again and I will practice again what I love to do. I am an architect by training and I may regain that passion for it. To me what is important though is the fact that my family is happy”.

His existential self is felt when he expresses the desire to lead another life,

“One day I told Marie in Morocco that I was fed up and that we should move to the countryside in France and buy a grocery shop. You are totally free”. It is also expressed in his being different from the Other whatever this Other maybe, “Already
on campus I was considered different. I have always been different from the others” and at the same time independent because of being different,

“So I called my uncle priest and we got married just the two of us which was not well accepted by our families but I had told Anne-Marie that I was not marrying her family just like she was not marrying mine. In this manner we marked our own independence. My sister asked if she could stand behind a church pillar but I said no! So we got married alone first in church which is very exceptional because as you know you are not allowed to get married in the church before the civil ceremony”.
Couple #2

**Researcher’s Reflections**

**Clare.** “The Egyptian family. I could live with it but his father is a very big person in his life and the way they are here, he just calls and you have to drop everything. I can’t live with this. I can’t compromise myself on that. I am English. This is not my culture and I am not going to take it...As an English woman, I was not brought up like that. I was brought up to be self-sufficient, very much so going to boarding school and everything like that.....”

**Ramsey.** We’ve been married five years. I never thought about how my expectations of the past would or would not fit with the ones today. It’s a difficult question. Where I am today is not what I expected. Everything changed the first year my mother passed away. I was expecting to live in England. Also the environment makes a big difference, in terms of the career, the money, everything, the place.

I met Clare at the gym where I was exercising each morning. A common interest in fitness and similar intellectual disciplines brought us together. Apart from her daily activities at the gym, Clare was taking care of her youngest daughter in the afternoon who was two years old. Her eldest daughter was then four and going to school full-time.

I did not really meet Ramsey until the interview. He worked ...... and came back late in the evenings.

I socialized a few times in the evening with Clare and other members of the gym while Ramsey baby-sat.

This is their story.
Childhood Memories

Siblings

Clare. I have an older brother. I only have one brother....My brother and I were not at home all the time because we were in boarding school....

Ramsey. I have a sister who is one year younger than I....... My sister was under control. She had curfews and that sort of thing.... I never helped in the house growing up neither did my sister because there was a maid. In that sense, there was no gender difference. My sister was not pushed to marry. She is not married and will be thirty next year. So, because of age it has been pushed on her very recently in the last few years but not since she was twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two or something like that.

Clare. My parents wanted to give us the best education they could for both of us. They were adamant that we both go to the same school. They based their decision on that. I mean a lot of the public schools are single sex schools or whatever but they were adamant that we both go together. Actually, they thought it was better because they sent me when I was seven and my brother was eight and they thought “they should go together and they’ll be happy”. It was better for their peace of mind. It did not make any difference to us.

Ramsey. My parents gave us equal opportunity in education. In education, yes. Of course, there was a difference otherwise. I had complete freedom to go out anytime. I used to have girl-friends over at the house and sleep over. I used to do all the typical things that a teenage guy does anywhere.

Clare. My parents thought that the continuity of being in public school rather than being shifted every four years would be good. It was quite a sacrifice for them I think. I mean at the time, I regretted it and I told them that you miss out on family life.

I was in boarding school for ten years and I held that against them for a very long time.

At school, they did not visit us. They were in Nigeria and we were in England. There was no way. Three months at school and one month at home. For me, it was a disaster.

Ramsey. My sister after she finished school did a high school diploma in America for a year. She came here and went to Cairo University and then did her masters degree in England. She’s working now.

Clare. My brother went to polytechnic first, then he switched to university and he did a B.A in Economics. He was unemployed for a while and then got a job and this and that. He stayed in England.

Ramsey. My sister went to America on a kind of scholarship and my parents did not object at all to it. I went to university in England. I did my masters there. I went to AUC first. I met Clare there.
Role Models

Ramsey. I don’t think that it was an issue of control from my father’s part to have me stay at Cairo university rather than being under an American influence at AUC. It was mainly because he had a vision of leading a doctor or an engineer and he wanted to open an office. He had this vision that he wanted me to fulfill. For my sister, that’s a good question and come to think of it, no, he did not have a vision for her. She’s a woman, she can study whatever she wants, she’s going to get married, that sort of thing. But for a man, that’s a different thing. For him. Of course, he wanted her to do something which he thought was respectable. If he thinks that it is something that is respectable like economics, politics or something like that, that’s ok. So, if he thought the range was respectable, then, choose whatever you want.

Clare. My dad was a geologist and my mother is a nurse-midwife. When they met they were both working. They were in Liverpool. He went to university and I am not sure whether she finished high-school or not.

Ramsey. Both my parents were working here. My mother was a teacher in Egypt. She was teaching at a private school, then she started teaching at the British Council. My father has his own business. He is a businessman. He has a leather factory. I was at the same school that my mother was teaching at so I used to go to school with her.

Clare. We spent some time in England first. My father went more or less from one country to the other and we joined him afterwards, then I went to boarding school from Nigeria but my mother worked later on in Borneo at night something like that as a midwife. And in Qatar, I don’t think she worked. We stayed four years in each country and they were all Moslem countries which is interesting for me. So, my father worked as a geologist for Shell all these years.

My mother is from quite a poor background, five children, North of England, mining family. When they got married, my mother was already pregnant with my brother. Then, my father went to work in Turkey and I think that when my brother was quite small my father worked for the international section of Shell. So, they got a post there and I was born in Turkey. We left there when I was very young so, I do not remember any of it, when I was two or three.

Ramsey. My father always used to come at ten or eleven o’clock in the evening so I did not see him that much when I was growing up, an hour or so. He only had Fridays off and most of the time he was tired and rested. We did not do any activities together.

Clare. My mother did not really work outside of the house. She used to do volunteer work at a clinic but it was not consistent. Sometimes she did it, sometimes she did not. In Nigeria, she did not work or maybe a little bit at this voluntary clinic something like that.

Ramsey. We had a maid but not a nanny. She did not take care of us. My mother did. We used to have a baby-sitter to take care of us. The maid would cook. My mom did
not come home to a second work. I don’t think that she was looking for a career, growing up the ladder, reaching somewhere. My mother passed away two years ago. I think she was working for the money but not for the career.

**Clare.** My parents’ marriage was very volatile, massive fights and I remember my father not being there, I don’t know why I remember that particular time after we came back from Turkey and before we went to Nigeria, he was not there very often, he was in Nigeria and he’d come back every six months for a short holiday and go away again. It must have been only two or three years but I remember it being very difficult.

My mother ran the house. It’s a very stereotype role. My father gets the money and she runs the house, that’s her job and they had arguments as long as I could remember, “That’s your job, you do that, I don’t do that. What, you expect me to do housework and I am working all day and you’re at home doing nothing”. You know this kind of thing. No, my mom did not agree with that. When she worked I did not see much difference in his attitude especially to the house.

.....the holidays that we were there and she was working, it did not really impact me at all, I did not see any difference at all. Most of their decisions were made financially. I mean like for education.

**Ramsey.** In my parents’ marriage, each had their own specific role. My father, what I’ve seen was always just the breadwinner, the person who brings the money into the house, sorts the problems out. That was his sort of role. He made decisions, the main decisions. The everyday decisions would go to my mother. It would not reach that level towards my father. For example, my father made the decisions about our schooling. My mother had a more traditional role.

**Clare.** Most of my memories are of those few years, I remember between his coming back, my brother would start sleep walking and my mother was in tears and when he did come back, they would fight. Just for a few years, my mother raised us alone.

But when my father was home, you know, it was normal, nine to five job and he never worked overtime and he had weekends as well. This last summer I was talking to him and I think that he deliberately did not get promoted. He made a concerted effort not to. I did not realize that before. I thought why did not he, he could have. But he said that the further you go up the ladder, the more entertaining you have to do. The more involved you become with business, the less time you have for your personal life. So, he’s never been this sort of man who does overtime. It was very important to him but it did not necessarily mean that he spent time with us, just things for himself. I don’t have a great recollection of my father.

**Ramsey.** With my mother, I did a lot of things. She was very-open minded, a lot of fun. We used to go out drinking, partying. She used to support me a lot choosing my girl-friends, things like that, talk to me about what to do or not to do in sex, something like that. We had totally open relationship with her. With my father, no, there was hardly a relationship. We never did anything together.
**Clare.** My parents never sat me down and said that if it was a serious relationship with this guy, you should know about contraception. They never ever came near that. As far as sex education my mother gave me a book at ten about where babies come from and I just laughed at it. This is my mother, illogical, you expect this and you get that...

... Then she came down and asked if I were not using anything and I asked her when she was born. I mean she is a midwife for godsake. I felt that she thought that Clare was pregnant because she's being so stupid. When did I get this big lecture about contraception that I seemed to have failed the test on.

**Aspirations-Expectations**

**Education/Work**

**Clare.** After I finished my A levels, I went to live with my parents and I did not get the grades I wanted. I would have gone straight onto university if I had got the right grades but I did not so, then, I was put into a position of what you do. I did not outrightly failed but you know *when people give you the expectations that you are going to get a's and b's*, the professors told me and then you get, I got two C’s and a D, way below what I wanted, I thought ok, I could have gone to any university but my parents did not push me. I wanted to go to university in London.

**Ramsey.** At that time, I had only one thing in my mind. I wanted to go abroad and I wanted to study and to make a career for myself, sort of make it on my own. I wanted to get out of my father’s influence and support and all that sort of thing. *I wanted to make it on my own*. So, that was on top of my list really.

**Clare.** Perhaps I would have just had to do the last year, I’m not sure but it would have taken time. I could have crammed. I could have been accepted at the university. *I was so disappointed*. I had worked two years for this damn thing. I'd worked really hard and consistently and that.

There’s never ever another alternative to me besides psychology, ever. I just had the end of the degree in sight. I hated the place. When I went back to England I had applied to many jobs, all over England but I did not get any. I wanted to just work in psychology. I did not consider anything else. Psychology has always been my vision. That’s something I would like to do, going back to school because I can’t really work with just a BA. I need to have more and I am interested to.

**Ramsey.** I want to go back to England or Europe. I just see myself with having a good career there and making good money there. Having the financial part is ok, then you can do a lot more, you can travel a lot more. We could do a lot more things together. *My focus can now be more on my family.*

**Clare.** The long-term vision is not good. As an Egyptian (my husband) working in Egypt setting, how can you earn money that we need to earn. I have been brought up in a certain style and I want things for myself and my children. I don’t see why I
should slide back. It’s like taking a fifty per cent paycut. I don’t want to do that. I want to be able to travel and show my children at least what I’ve seen and more. I think it is very reasonable. There should be progress. I don’t see that you can do it in Egypt. The salaries are ridiculous. So, I have always been against coming here. I don’t have to go back to England. I just want to not be in Egypt. It’s a different thing. I want a new challenge. I want to discover new things. I want to broaden my horizons. Because the world is a huge place and I don’t have time. It could be anywhere.

Marriage

Clare. I did actually have a vision of marriage. I met Ramsey and I thought he’s sweet, he’s nice and he’d would be nice to marry him.... I kind of decided to get married. This was the biggest disappointment of my entire life. You grow up and you expect this big courtship, flowers, bended knees, please will you marry me. I was like, so we’re going to get married.

Ramsey. The only concept of marriage I had was of my parents which I did not like and did not want. I like parents or people to do a lot more together, to share things together, to live together, to have a life, doing things with the children. I did not like that very much. It was very old fashioned Egyptian.

Clare. My marriage perception has changed extremely. Definitely. I am much more objective about it and I understand how difficult it is, complicated. I mean why I got married I thought you love somebody, you marry them and if something happens and you don’t love them anymore, you get divorced. This is not simple like that.....It was a very naive vision, black and white, of course you love the person you’re married to but if two people are unhappy together, they should get divorced because I’ve seen my parents, screaming and shouting at each other and God knows they should have been divorced years ago, they even told me they were going to get divorced but they never did.

My view of marriage is very different from what it was before. When I first got married I would never contemplate divorce and now, I feel like I have lived an eternity and what makes me feel sad is that I can manage by myself. The only problem I have is no money. If I won the pools tomorrow and I had a million pound in my account, my life would be different. I probably would not be married, I would not live in Egypt. That is a very sad realization. I find that appalling.

Ramsey. I look to someone who can give a lot of support in the marriage and love but the important thing to me are honesty and share things together.

Conflicts

Resolving Differences

Clare. I said to Ramsey that I would go to Poland with him. I’ll go to Australia but just something new and because I feel it would be a very good thing for us as a family to be placed in a challenging situation where we have to look inward instead of outward. We have to discover emotions, the interconnectedness between us. I could
go anywhere in the Arab World too but the thing with Egypt is because his family is from here. There’s so much emotional baggage that comes with it. With the friends as well, the influence is huge. It is not a positive influence. His father treats him like he’s a ten year old. I mean that’s too nice... This is a huge area of conflict.

When I ask him what our chances of leaving are, he says, “Well, C., what do you think?” Really one in a million.

Before I went to England we sat down and wrote lists of things we wanted to change. I don’t know where they’ve gone.

His father bought a villa for Ramsey in Ramsey’s name out by the Pyramids for a million pounds and it will be finished in two year’s time. So, I said to Ramsey, “Are you sure that is not affecting your decision to stay in Egypt?” This is one of my problems. He can easily say to his father, “I will never live there, sure, having it in my name, it’s very nice, thank you; for security for the future what have you; good investment but I don’t intend to live there.” Ramsey goes and he checks it on and he says, “Can you imagine what it’ll be like to live in a house with a swimming-pool in the back garden”. And his father says that in a few more years of work experience he’ll set him up in business and he could open up his own consultancy firm and he’ll do that for him.

I understand it’s hard for him but instead of saying to me that he will take it one step at a time and we will see but I will try my hardest to be independent from my father and not let his pressure influence my decisions because he admits that the decision to come to Egypt was selfish. He says that it was just for him. That justifies all my anger and all I have against him because he did not consider us as a family. We were four people. You cannot move four people because one person wants to go..... I throw things at him. I try to provoke some response out of this man and I never get it. I never get the kind of assurance I am looking for.

Ramsey. In terms of decision making, it depends. If it is something about where we’re going to be living, that depends on where I’ll get the job if I get it abroad or in Egypt so I make that decision because I believe I am more qualified in this area to make that decision and it is better for the family in terms of more money and career or something. Although I listen to her in the end I’ll make my decision. If it is about schooling, the children or anything else, we share usually, we discuss it and we make the decision together.

Clare. What gives me another problem is that I have an option. I have an empty house. It is the family house in England and I gave birth to my daughter there so, I feel very attached to this house and to the life that we had because we had a nice life there.

He can live a bachelor life very easily. I mean when I went to England to have our second child, I was there for six months with my oldest daughter. He was here by himself for six months. And every year, he has that time to himself and it is not a big change for him. I understand that he misses us but it’s not as if his life is transformed.
without us because he does not contribute to the house that much. I do everything. He walks in and he pays the bills and that’s it.

He expects me to wait on him hand and foot. He said to me once, “I’ll ask you and as long as you do it I’ll keep asking you”. “I’ll push you to your limit”. Why not? I mean if you’re the fool who’s going to do it for him, then more the fool you. Sometimes, I become very abusive with him. When you’re taken for granted that much, I don’t like it.

**Ramsey.** In a way as we are talking about it, I see some similarities with my parents’ marriage but a lot more differences too because I feel I’m not like my father at all. I’m more like my mother. We share a lot, we do a lot of decision-making together here. We are definitely more open. Of course, we have conflicts but we don’t shout at each other. We sort out things together, we discuss it together. But there are similarities with my father and my mother. It’s probably why I don’t do anything in the house like cleaning, my father never used to do that. It’s partly because of laziness because I can do it and I would do it. I don’t see it wrong but it’s just laziness.

**Clare.** The major decisions like the children’s education and things like that, I do that. I dragged him along to Yasmine’s school and said that he should see it but he said, you have a look and you sort it out. You give me the prices and the details. You do all the donkey work, you get all the details and then, we’ll sit down and discuss it. Discussing it means the major points are covered. I really can’t see any major points but finance with him. How much does it cost. This is the basic line. That is his major input.

I’m the one who deliberately sends her to that school so she can learn Arabic where I see it is his responsibility to look out for that. I said to him if you want these children to learn Arabic, you should be more assertive in that. You should read them at bedtime in Arabic. You should speak to them in Arabic. I can’t teach them. I am incapable. If I could I’ll do that as well as well as everything else. He says fine, I’ll go and get some books but he has not followed up on it. This is the response I want this to change and this and this and this.

**Ramsey.** It would bother me to take her role with the kids everyday. I would not do it everyday, sit with the kids and feed them, clean them and so on. I like my work. I definitely get self-value from my work. This is why I was saying in the beginning I believe that it is very important for someone to work not just for financial reason but for theirself. I like my work because of these two.

**Clare.** He has more freedom. If he wants to do something, he just calls me and says that he won’t be home until midnight. He does not ask me. A lot of the time he says that he’s going out with the guys, it’s a business drink or something and sometimes, I find out later he’s been out drinking with these guys.

My biggest problem with him was about the children. These are our children. It takes two of us to make them but only one of us is looking after them. I said to him how did you ever consider who buys their clothes or where their shoes come from or where they eat, any of these kinds of concerns, it did not even cross his mind. Then, he
realized until now I have been taking the full responsibility for Yasmine and Lilly and not him.

I had this discussion with him and I said, “What would you do?” and he said, “I’d pay somebody”. This is always the response. You can’t do it, pay somebody to do it. So, what is my salary for? Childcare is very expensive and it would come out of my salary which I also have a problem with. Why my salary? He has not told me so. Unofficially. When I was going to work at this nursery, the cost of sending the kid is immediately deducted from the salary that I would have earned. I find this despicable. This is my money that I have earned and I should be able to say where it goes.

Ramsey. At face value if you’d ask me I would not agree to role reversal that is, me at home and Clare working. If she made good money, it would then depend how much more and if I could get an opportunity. Definitely, we would discuss it.

Clare. He spends time in the weekends. He’s good at that but he wakes up late. This is another problem I have with him because it’s his weekend. So Thursday night, he stays up until three or four in the morning. I can go out with him but I choose not to because I don’t like his friends. I said to him, you need to meet new people. It’s sad when you go out with people even if you don’t want to be out with them. I don’t enjoy their company. I find that they are very uninteresting so I refuse. I’d rather stay at home.

Ramsey. I would not feel good about role reversal but it does not mean I would reject it. It would depend on the circumstances and lots of other things really. If I could get a job in the same place. We’ve talked about it. I would not reject it but it would depend on the situation.

Clare. This is a huge problem I have with him. He thinks of his work and never thinks of anything besides his work.

I’m still confused because it is all tied up with Egypt, part of it is Egypt and part of it is him. He said to me “Would it be different if we did not live in Egypt and I said no”. This is the truth. Because if you really feel that you have a good partnership, it does not matter where you live. If you feel that a person respects you and you respect them and you know you can depend on them to be there whenever you need them, whenever you need their support, you can go anywhere at all.

He thinks I am a very good mother and he says that I am a good wife and I don’t believe him. The problem is I cannot be convinced of this. It’s like saying you’re beautiful. I have asked myself what he could do to convince me and I have not found any answer. There’s nothing he can do that would convince me. Because many times he’s told me what I wanted to hear and then he did the opposite. He’s told me he’s going to change this and he never has. So, after five years of it, your optimism does evaporate. He’s done this to me so many times that now when he says he will do something I don’t expect it which is very detrimental to the relationship I think. It’s a disaster.
The watershed for me in my marriage was the birth of Lilly because he did not come back to England for that. I was there for two and a half months before that. She was two weeks overdue and he made no effort to come. I was there for six months in all managing by myself with a new-born baby and a two year old in the house and I came back by myself. The second one was also accidental. When I told him I was pregnant with Lilly, he was telling me something about the university and after I told him, he just carried on with his economics. So that evening I had to sit him down and asked him how he felt about this. He said “Oh that’s ok”. That’s such a let down.

So now I have a lot of confidence from that which is very dangerous for the marriage because I know that if I walked out tomorrow, I could manage. It’s a huge strength and a huge confidence that the marriage itself has not given me which is a problem.......I think Ramsey has realized that abundantly because I won’t put up with it anymore and he has to make a big effort now if he wants something to work or whatever but it is very tough and go.

I mean the things that his mother would do for him, absolutely everything she would do for him. I saw that and I’m suffering from that because she died three years ago and until now if he wants a check to be written for a bill, he’ll give it to me to write it. But it is his check. If there’s a query with something of his, he’ll show me the letter and if he needs an official business letter written in English he’ll ask me to write it for him. He immediately assumes that because I’m English I can fix the fax machine. But it is true that I am more capable than he is in these things.

I see Ramsey having very much a separate life from mine. The problem I have with that is that I don’t feel I need to change that which is very sad, to make an effort to try to make us communicate more or on the same level because I’ve given up hope on that because when I do try to communicate with him, I don’t know if I can communicate on the same level even. For the moment, I have no option. If somebody had told me this is what I would be saying in five year time, I would have been horrified, I probably would have aborted Yasmine and said no.

**Representation/Vision of the Other**

**Clare.** But at the time, he was not marriage material. He was very irresponsible and out partying and drinking. He was a minimal kind of guy. He took six years to finish his three year degree which annoyed me tremendously because there’s no need for that.

Ramsey was at the university for three years and then graduated. He was looking for a job in England but not very hard. He had a few months before finishing his dissertation and between that and his graduation, he had five months. He did not look very hard. He has an MBA.

**Ramsey.** I do want my wife to have a career. I think it’s important for a person, man or woman to have a career. Not necessarily a career but to work. I think this need is self-satisfaction whatever you do, in your work, your studies, something, you need to do that. I think a person is not fulfilled without that and I think that’s why I’ve tried to push her to do something. She does not work.
Clare. He knows that I am desperate to leave. He does not really respect that. That’s why we have not left. That is why I still have this problem with him because I feel he does not take me seriously on this which I know he does not. He’s admitted that, “Oh, Clare is having one of her things again.”

He has a good job and he has made a lot of progress and it is good for him career-wise, which I understand, but I also understand that if he wants to go back to England or anywhere, he has to move now because he is getting older and in that field, once you’re thirty-five, you’re regarded as an old man. You’re really past it at thirty-five. He is thirty but it is a crucial time now. He’s got his foundation experience and he needs to branch out, he needs to be challenged. He wants to get a job outside of Egypt but he’s not trying as much as I would like him to. I think he’s trying harder now than he was because I have been pushing him tremendously to do that. He could do a lot more. My brother gave him a list of agencies in London that he could send his cv to and he has not. He’s just all opinion.

Ramsey. I see Clare as a housewife which I don’t particularly like very much but it’s up to her. We’ve talked about it. She’s done a bit of work here and there, but it’s her decision, not mine. I respect that decision. Definitely! I don’t put any pressure on her. I don’t believe my father put any pressure on my mother in terms of that either. She was pretty free but I think that she wanted to work to make more money to spend on us.

Clare. He wants to change things but he’s lazy. He’s Egyptian. It suits him. Egyptians are very happy with the family, the culture. They go out to whatever bar and they find friends. They know they can go alone and they’ll find friends.

I don’t feel that he’s making his own choices, no... His future is what he wants to make of it but he has to decide what his father wants for him or inadvertently tries to pressure him into and what he wants for himself and for his family. He does not make the distinction very well. I understand it’s hard for him but instead of saying to me that he will take it one step at a time and we will see but I will try my hardest to be independent from my father and not let his pressure influence my decisions because he admits that the decision to come to Egypt was selfish. He says that it was just for him. That justifies all my anger and all I have against him because he did not consider us as a family. We were four people. You cannot move four people because one person wants to go. You can’t say to somebody, “You’ve got to go to a country where the culture is alien to you, the language is alien to you, you have very few job opportunities, your children will grow up in a restrained philosophical atmosphere, they will have very few opportunities and this is for your life. You can’t say that to somebody. Ok, I don’t mind six months for him to be near his father after his mother’s death. This is feasible but for the rest of my life to bring my children up in this country and I don’t see why I should put up with it. Besides my house in England, I furnished it myself. It’s my home, it is the only home I have ever had. I have a house there that’s empty and fully equipped. It’s ready for occupation. I have a car in the garage. It’s ridiculous.
In England he was different. There, he was much more irresponsible and he had very little view of what he was going to do and the seriousness of things. But having said that, he’s become more responsible but not extremely so... He phoned me but he did not say the right things... I expected him to ask me questions when Lilly was born. I expected him to ask what color her eyes were... *It is upsetting to a woman.* These little things are upsetting. He did not ask me how I was, how long was my labor... He did not show any concern on this... That was a big mistake for him to make. And every phone call he made, I’d asked if he would try to come and he said no. There is no way I’m coming. Total lack of emotional support there that just took everything away from me. For once in my life, I want the father of my child to be excited at the prospect. Is it asking a lot? He’d been expecting a phone call for two weeks and I phoned him up after two or three hours. It was midday here and I woke him up... These things all add up to be so negative and so overwhelmingly like he just cut off out of mind out of sight. That was the only time I really needed him to show interest and concern and he did not...

He said to me that he was taking it out on me. He wanted to be with me but he was so angry at his situation that he was taking it out on me and I think that it is a very pathetic thing to me. No matter what he’s going through, he was going to work everyday, he was going swimming on the way back and having his meals made. He had no worries, he had nothing to think about. I find that intolerable... He does not seem to feel the same way as I do.

**Ramsey.** I don’t mind her working at all. There’s no problem at all with that, with her independence.

**Clare.** I don’t think he would help out... I think his role is changing. *I forced him to change his perspective* and he’s realized that he’s been very insular and very self observed and he’s making an effort to be more of an equal partner, to participate more and try harder.

But he did admit that he had not towed the line and that he had left a lot of things to me. He has acknowledged it.

He does respect my role but I don’t know how much. He thinks I am a very good mother and he says that I am a good wife and I don’t believe him. The problem is I cannot be convinced of this. It’s like saying you’re beautiful. I have asked myself what he could do to convince me and I have not found any answer. There’s nothing he can do that would convince me. Because many times he’s told me what I wanted to hear and then he did the opposite. He’s told me he’s going to change this and he never has. So, after five years of it, your optimism does evaporate. He’s done this to me so many times that now when he says he will do something I don’t expect it would wish which is very detrimental to the relationship I think. It’s a disaster.

I know one or two people who have encouraged me who have stimulated me to do things. I don’t find that in Ramsey. With him, if I want to do something, I know I’ll have to make the effort. He’ll say yes, why don’t you do it. He shows some interest in that but I don’t feel that I have his emotional backing. I am not sure why. I think that
if you had asked me three or four years ago, I would not have said that. I would have said he’s behind me or we’re on the same path.

I think that his vision of marriage is a woman at home taking care of the house because his role model for his marriage is his parents’ marriage. And his mother made such a huge fuss of his father that it is unbelievable, unbelievable.

His attitude is like Egyptian men “there’s always going to be a woman somewhere around me who is going to cook for me”.

I noticed a difference in him like here he would never wash his plate. Sometimes, he’ll get the guilt panic and he’ll wash a few plates, very rarely. We go to his father’s once a week for lunch and when we’re there instantly he’s drying up, I find this very bizarre. His father is washing up so he feels he has to dry. His father did not use to do this washing up. It’s a recent thing since his wife died. He’s become more self-sufficient and he brags about that he’s self-sufficient. I don’t think this will spill over to Ramsey. He will not do anything unless he absolutely has to.

He will never question why there aren’t enough vests in his wardrobe because he has no influence on that. All he knows is that he opens his cupboard and his clothes are there and if he does not find them, he asks me where they are. These are his things this should be his responsability.

**Ramsey.** I have not thought much about my girls’ future in terms of where and if they’ll go to university. My main concern though is to give them good education and give them a good life, being a good father and a friend as well. I like being a friend to them. But to me, if they go to university, they’ll choose whatever they want to be but I do see them go to university rather than stay at home. I want them to go to university. I would not like it if they just went to high school. I would advise them but if they did not want to go to university, I would even put some constraints on them. I know, I’m older and it’s better for them even if they’re young and don’t want to do it. Even if they wanted to be married instead, I would put some constraints on them. Of course they are girls and I don’t know if it would be different if they were boys.

**Clare.** I want my daughters to travel not just to England every summer and to go all over the world because I have. I appreciated that very much. My father made a conscious effort to make us travel. I think it is extremely important to do so. No, no, not alone. I would love to be able to show them things and experience the first time they see something, their excitement. This is my vision for them.

**Choices**

*Situational*

**Clare.** I’d been accepted if I’d got these grades to go to London and do psychology and anthropology. Since I did not do that, I did a hotel diploma or something, one of these six month courses and I lived with my grand-mother and my parents were in
Qatar. I went to live with them in Qatar. I was actually on holiday and I got a job while I was there and stayed.

I absolutely did not think of redoing the A levels. It was another two years, it could have been a possibility but my parents never sat down with me and said, ok, what are you going to do now?

Those grades were passes, they were not fails. They were just not the highest grades and there are lots of ways you can get into university there.

It's not a big deal but they never pushed me, helped me or suggested so, I just burned out really. I had five universities in mind. You had to apply to five and I was accepted by three or something like that. I was accepted but did not get the grades. They did not push me to follow up on it and chase it to whatever.

In Qatar, I was a chocolate lady. I was selling swiss chocolate. I did very well at it. Something to put on a C.V.

My parents got posted to Egypt and I came with them. The thing is after being away so long, my parents got used to me being at home. They actually wanted me to come with them to Egypt which I found very strange. I gave them all kinds of problems. All of a sudden, they send this girl at seven and she comes back at eighteen and they have got to address an adult. It was a huge problem for us, really huge especially when we came to live in Cairo.

My father wanted me to go to university so I went.

Ramsey. It was difficult to get married because unfortunately Clare was pregnant. So, we either had to get married or abort the child. I was not stuck as something I did not want. I mean I wanted to get married to her but I wanted to finish my degree first and I was in the middle of it. In the end I thought we could get married and have the child and it would be ok. Financially, it was not so much of a concern for me. I really loved Clare and I wanted to get married to her because I thought she would bring me support in my career and my life. There was no doubt about it. It was just a question of timing. From the financial point of view, it was not a problem because my father was still supporting me and sending me money. His support was a bit of a problem but I had to choose.

Clare. Then, I got pregnant. It was very difficult. I wrote to him and asked him what he wanted to do about this. He obviously was quite baffled. I said that there was of course going to be an abortion, no two ways about it. This was ridiculous. He was at the university doing his masters and I did not have a job. I was living with my parents. His sister came and stayed with me for a week and she persuaded me to go and see him and talk about it face to face and discuss what to do. So, I went to see him for a week. We did not discuss it until I was on the way to the train. I was furious. So, I asked him what he wanted to do, that he had to be straight that either I was going to have an abortion and never see him again or we get married and we have the child. So, he said to get married then.
He put me on the train. That was the beginning of my ride in hell. Because I had to go back to my parents and tell them, I'm getting married and I'm pregnant first of all. And of course, this is my mother's story revisited. She was eight months pregnant when she walked down the aisle with my father and she's Catholic, my father is Protestant, you can imagine. And Ramsey is Moslem. It's a big old mess.

I was very excited about the baby. I am quite traditional in that. I think that if you are going to have a child, you should do the best for the child as you possibly can and you should be able to provide for the child. You should find ways or what have you. But I was surprised at how easy it would have been to have had an abortion. I went to a doctor and asked her if I could have an abortion and she just circled something on the form and she said that I had the form ready and could have gone.

I thought that before Ramsey and I decided to get married I would have an abortion. I was extremely upset about it. When I went to see the doctor, I was in tears, absolute floods of tears. It was terrible for me. To me it's a terrible sin to kill your own child.

I was upset because of the circumstances. I knew I could not count on my parents for any support at all. If you're going to have a baby you should be able to count on the closest people you have around you to support you. They should ask whether he's going to support you and if he's not, then they can support you. We'll help you. Let's work this together. They just washed their hands that's it. You sort your own mess out.

**Ramsey.** Having a child right away was not really a conflict. But I would have wanted more time before having a child so that I could earn my own money but it was not for making the relationship better because I thought it was great at the time.

**Clare.** Ramsey said we'd get married but I don't know, I thought we would take it one step at a time. The problem is you have that deadline when you can have an abortion, then it's too late. Of course, we had nowhere to live.

He was living with his grand-parents but there was no way we could raise a child in their house. They were very happy about it, they had no problem at all, they liked me. They were very pleased which is surprising. You would have thought that older people would not. And his parents were very good too. They were very supportive. They said that if I wanted to have an abortion then, fine. His parents were lovely about it. They said it was the wrong time to have a child. He was still studying, we did not have a place to live, we had no income and I agreed with them. But they said that if we were going to go ahead with this, they understood why we would and they supported us.

My parents did not come to the wedding... My father drove two and a half hours to fulfill his duty of signing the book at the registry now that he had officially got rid of me, passed me over to somebody else. He signed the book and left... My mother phoned me two days later and she said that she had thought of me and planted a rose bush for me and one for Ramsey and I was shocked...
Yasmine was born. My father-in-law bought us a house and my sister-in-law came to live with us. She was at the university doing her Ph-D. Ramsey was studying. I was not working. I did think about university but with Yasmine, I thought it would be too difficult to have a young baby and also I did not have the money to study. So, there were really no options for me.

**Ramsey.** When I knew her in Cairo, we had a very open relationship, we travelled together in Egypt. I felt like we lived together. Due to the circumstances, I had to study and did not have much time to do things in the house that much. I had to work hard and Clare because she had the child and she stayed at home and so, it’s expected that she would do that, to clean and so on.

It’s expected in the sense that I’m working. That’s a type of work as well. It’s part of sharing. But of course, I helped doing the garden, washing the car, things like that, or washing the dishes, changing the nappy and washing the baby, things like that. It was tough.

**Clare.** After he graduated, his mother died. So, we came back here, for her funeral and he said we were moving here. I was not very pleased. I said ok for a short-term. I understood that he wanted to be near his father but I was very much against it. As a family it is a good thing and I think emotionally, it is a terrible thing to live here too because of being so close to his father.

**Ramsey.** My mother passed away two years ago so I came back here two years ago. I still have that vision of going. After I finished university I did not have any work experience. When I came here of course, staying with my family, jobs here are very easy to get with my qualifications. That’s why I stayed here and I got some good experience. I thought I was going to stay for another year, get more experience and so you can go back when the market is better in England. It was partly from this angle that I looked at it. So it was partly to keep the family together and to make it to a job.

**Clare.** When he’s that frank with me I think why do I bother. He says to go with the flow and that next year, we’ll be better. It has been like that every year. I told him that my standard of living in Cairo is much lower than it was over two years ago, when we first got married. We were much better off when you were a student. I had a much better life than I do now. He admits that. If I needed things for the house, I could go out and buy them.

**Ramsey.** It was not really my choice to come back here after my mother passed away. It happened so suddenly. They called me one morning and they said, “You have to come back to Cairo because your mother is in the hospital.” I came back to Cairo, I did not know what was going on. Once I got to the airport in Cairo, I was told that my mother had passed away. And they’d buried her yesterday, that sort of thing. In that sense, it was not my choice. But I would have wanted to come back anyway to see my father and my sister because I believe that my mother was the hub who kept everybody together. Without her it would have been difficult. Everybody would be lost sort of thing. She had a good relationship with my father. She had a good relationship with my sister and with me. She kept everybody together. I thought I had
to stay to try to get everything back together. In a way, I took on my mother’s role to keep everything together. This is not what I had expected.

**Clare.** I could never consider having a job. I would consider it but the thing is the division of labor in the house is such that I would have a full time job and I would come home at five to face two very tired children after I myself will be drained from a long day and I would have to give dinner and put them to bed.

**Ramsey.** But now that I’ve been here for two years, it’s difficult to go back, applying there, it’s difficult. I’m trying, I do apply. I do want to go back. And things have changed with my family. My father got remarried about three weeks ago and my sister has a person that she is very interested in and I think that they’ll probably get married in the next few months or so. I think so, I hope so. So, there are no constraints and I have no problem applying now.

**Clare.** But a full-time job is out of the question for me for the moment. Apart from the fact that I want to be here for the children and I want to have the energy because when I work I put everything into my work, everything I possibly have. And to come that drained to face these kids would not be fair on them. On the weekends, I would be catching up, going shopping, doing the menus and this, no.

**Ramsey.** There have been so many changes in the last five years that it has been difficult to make an assessment. One daughter is born, then the other, we had problems in the family, then, my mother dies and we had to come back to Cairo. *These things took over my life basically.* I have not had time to reflect really. No, I have not had any control over the last years. I do want control for the future. I want things to change and I think they will. I’m looking more that in the next five years they will change because I’ve got a good degree, I have good work experience and I have no ties now and I pretty much do as I want. The children are getting older.

**Clare.** For me, I have the children. Everything I think of I have the children. Where he does not. When I consider my next move, I have these two children so I have to think of education, and of providing for them.

**Ramsey.** The expectations of marriage I had previously such as building a partnership with another person, sharing things together, living together have not yet happened because of the circumstances. There have not been choices because I have had to make them around all these things that happened.

**Clare.** If I am going to do some studying it is not until the children are older, until at least Lilly is in school half day because I want to be able to give them as much as I can emotionally until they are five, six, seven. Then, they are more independent and they are finished as far as I am concerned. They are under the influence of their school, their friends and they have interests of their own.

**Ramsey.** My wife and my children were in a secondary position. To give you the picture. When I’d come back from work, I’ll be sitting with Clare for awhile and the children for an hour or so, then I’d go and stay with my father for another two hours or three hours. I was spending more time with him. Whenever he’d need me on the
phone, I would go and see him. Now, I don't spend as much time. I used to go there everyday of the week then, now I don't, a couple of days a week or one day a week. I'm spending more time here.

**Clare.** I am very willing to try. Because of my history with my parents, I don't want my children to grow up witnessing two parents being together for their sake even though they would have a life apart. I don't want that. As a last resort maybe but if I feel that our lives are not happy together, I would divorce instantly. When I reach that stage, I'll get a divorce.

**Conclusions**

*My Construction of Reality: The Existential Self*

**Clare.** "It was my choice to come here the first time, it was a good opportunity, four years, I'm never going to have this opportunity again. I'm living with my parents, I have no rent to pay, nothing to do, I can choose whatever job I want and there's a university here. So, I ended up going to university".

This is the only time that Clare conveys that she has had a choice. She came the first time to Cairo by choice and even through her father wanted her to go to university, she made that decision for herself.

Her existential self is felt repeatedly throughout the interview in her rebelling to rules and control and in feeling angered,

"I was not close to my parents at all. I did not respect them because a lot of times they had problems with me staying out late or overnight and they never said anything to me. They would act in a huff or something like that. I needed them. In a way, I did deliberately to provoke them to say to me "This is not on, we have rules in this house" but to do it reasonably, not to shout at me but to say "Look". But they never did that. Like with Ramsey when they first met him, my mother thought he was lovely and wonderful and everything and then, all of a sudden thought, this is serious. And then, she hated him. She did not want me to go out with him. It was like that for two years before we left here because he was what, I don't know. But if you like at first somebody and then just change it. Then, she said to me, you could do what you like after you finish your university. If you want to marry this guy, it's up to you. I said to her I had no intention to marry him. What is this? I'm twenty years old and I can't have a boy friend?"
Even the atmosphere of the university does not quite fit to her intellectual expectations already shattered,

"No, I did not hate the place but I hated the atmosphere there..., the mentality going into this I don’t give a shit atmosphere every day. Nobody wanting to learn anything. They don’t want to make any effort in anything...It was the easiest degree I could have ever have learned. I was out partying every Thursday and some nights as well and I go off and have drinks in the afternoon and go back to the lectures. I passed with Honours. I got Honours. I thought this is the craziest degree ever. I could not believe it, no effort at all for me. And I’m not brilliant, I am just average".

The existential self is further expressed as she is searching for something deeper,

"I don’t know but I also have this feeling that I’m searching for something and I have not found it. I mean I’m looking for somebody I can have very intelligent conversations with about politics, economics, history or anything. After being with the kids all day, just something and just somebody who brings interesting topics. I have to facilitate that.... This is how I judge my marriage. If I am alone with my husband, what do we talk about, do we have things to say to each other, are we interested in the same things? We talk about mundane things”.

"It’s a comfortable life. I don’t hold that against him but at the same time, it’s like those comfort blankets. It’s the feeling it gives me. It’s the easiest thing for him to do in life but I was not brought up like that. This is what they like from life here because it’s so much hassle I suppose, they like that to be wrapped in that emotional shell or comfort”.

The challenges of the everyday life are referred as “comfortable blankets” and as she is searching for more, Clare voices her sense of hoplessness and her temporary inability to go forward in life,

"Emotionally, I feel very suppressed here. I’m not a very outgoing person whatever and I’m not terribly talented at everything very much but just to have the opportunity to express yourself, to go for walks and do civilized things, I find hard, very hard. I want a new challenge. I want to discover new things. I want to broaden my horizons. Because the world is a huge place and I don’t have time. It could be anywhere”

"I don’t have a vision that’s wonderful because of the kids, because of the responsibilities. The vision is blocked until I can get a job. I have to wait now until they are both in full-time education. Then, I can reassess my own ability to provide. Like I said if I won money on the pools, my life would instantly change. Instantly, you know."
“I feel very shackled by the children. I think a lot of that has to do with the resentment because I did not choose to have them. Yasmine, when I look back on it, it was the wrong thing to do because I was not prepared for children. I think that if Ramsey had been sharing more with me, I would have felt differently about it. But she was a very difficult child anyway and no, I feel that I have a lot of resentment to get over from that”.

“And I have not been able to work because of the children and because of moving here. I have that resentment because I feel I am very young. It’s stifling. I have the energy and I have the ability but not the opportunity”.

Clare is continuously torn between what she really would have liked to do in life and what she feels constrained to do, “As an English woman, I was not brought up like that. I was brought up to be self-sufficient....” Societal influence in the face of her parents, the university who did not accept her grades even though they were not failed grades, and the father-in-law are today embodied in a more powerful relation that with “the Egyptian family” and in continuous battle with the existential self, the person who would have liked to study, to work and do other things for herself and today, live outside of Egypt.

Every phase in life has a meaning to Clare with respect to the societal “should”. Therefore she wants to raise her daughters in the proper way and “because of the history with her parents”, she will continue “to try” to make things work out.

The split is felt when Clare discusses her daughter’s future,

“When Yasmine is twenty or twenty-two and she comes to me and she says she wants to be veiled, I would respect that but I want her to have made the decision because she has seen and experienced enough of life so that she knows she is choosing that way of life”.
Clare is very clear. Yasmine can do whatever with the opportunities which are given to her as long as it is “her choice”. For Clare the message is definitely clear and precise. But the split is further dichotomized with the societal boundaries and in the following, both sides are expressed, “I want my daughters to grow up with an optimistic point of view. For me the most important thing is their values. I want them to know what is right and what is wrong, what is good to do and to have an ideal of how to live. Even if you can’t follow it you should know what you should aim for for yourselves”.

Her reflections on marriage further emphasize the split voiced through the binary oppositions of “love” and “marriage”. Love is boundless, abstract while “marriage” is bound and she voices her disappointment,

“No, my idea of marriage is not the marriage I have. My idea is based on a fundamental feeling about another person and you want to have them there all the time with you. Not necessarily all the time with you... You want them to experience everything with you, you want them to share everything that you do and to feel that it is as important to them as it is to you and somebody whom you feel is supporting you and encouraging you and bringing the best in you, that’s a difficult one”.

“You can only give it so long and then you say, “why should I take this for the next twenty years, where am I going to be in twenty years time?”

“I don’t want to be when the children are grown up and they have left, sitting next to this person and have nothing to discuss with him. This frightens me very much”.

“To find somebody who lives with you who actually brings the best in you, this is very hard. I don’t know if that is achievable”.

Yet, despite the complaints she expresses throughout the interview of her own marriage and the failed partnership and the regret to have married, she would advise her daughters to “love” and “marry” for the sake and in the name of values,
“I want my daughters to grow up with an optimistic point of view. For me the most important thing is their values. I want them to know what is right and what is wrong, what is good to do and to have an ideal of how to live. Even if you can’t follow it you should know what you should aim for for themselves”.

“My attitude with Yasmine is that I tell her the truth about everything. I never tell her some child stories. I also try to give her that opinion that if people love each other, they are married. I have a strong belief in giving her that kind of basis. Then when she grows up, she can do what she likes but I feel it is very important. I don’t know why having said that I would never get married again. But I know it was important for me and I think it is important to have that ideal. But then, you never know what really being in love is. You see it written about and you hear about and that moves people so much. You just think what’s the hell they are on about? But I want her to go out with these kinds of ideas, the best of everything”.

“I want my children to feel that way, to have a conscious about things not well, this is the easy thing to do so do it. They have to have a conscience”.

That conscience lies in religion, a powerful expression of who the Self is and where the Self belongs. We have to learn about the structures of the system before we can progress and search for the individual self. This is powerfully expressed in Clare’s words in wanting her daughter to learn about her religion,

“I want her to know about her religion. I am very adament that she should know that she’s Moslem and what that means. I refused to become Moslem because there is no gain for me. People tell me why don’t you become moslem, they can’t take your children away and that’s rubbish. I went to see a family lawyer and I asked her what happens in case of divorce, they can still take away your children. And that’s the only reason I would consider doing this even though I think it is against what I believe in. Because if you convert consciously as an adult to a religion, you will be held accountable in the after life or the Day of Judgement or whatever if you have not followed through on that. Ramsey says why don’t you sign the papers and have it in your wardrobe, it will make your life much easier and then when you leave Egypt, you can tear it up. Well, this is not how it works for me”.

The existential self is voiced in her last quote,

“I want to have had my own space at some stage, being self-sufficient, doing whatever I feel like doing without being at home to anybody. I would have liked to have done that for at least three years. No, I don’t think it’s ever too late for anything. The question is how important it is to you. Now, it is not so feasible because of the children. It is not a possibility because of them. It is extremely important for me and it becomes more important. Ramsey has pointed it out to
me. He said, “I feel that you would like to live alone.” He knows that I am a very independent person. I said I do, I would because I’ve never had that and I need that because of the culture I grew up in. That’s what you expect to be. You expect to be in them. You don’t expect to have a huge family around you and lots of responsibilities, being told what you should do even if it’s ridiculous like you do here. My response I think shocks him. I think that he would prefer that I say, “No, no, no, I need you desperately.” I think that he really wants to be needed, to feel that I need him emotionally which I don’t”.

Although what is not clear at first is whether she feels it is “too late” in “I would have liked to have done that for at least three years”, Clare knows more what she wants at the end of the interview,

“But also I found from this time when I had Lilly I thought there’s never going to be a time in my life when I am going to have to deal with more and I managed to live through it and I did everything for these two kids. So now I have a lot of confidence from that which is very dangerous for the marriage because I know that if I walked out tomorrow, I could manage. It’s a huge strength and a huge confidence that the marriage itself has not given me which is a problem”.

“I had hoped to have a career. I wanted to go to university and get a job and I envisioned working somewhere, having some kind of a career, being more fulfilled intellectually and challenged. I wanted to live alone for a while because I’ve always lived with lots of people. At school, I was asleep in a dormitory with eleven other people”.

The split remains although she is still torn between what she wants, her own space, living alone, that “she is independent” and because “it is expected from her culture”. She makes the difference here between being trapped in Egypt and what her own culture expects her to be, independent and free. So, her existential self is also expressed through the dichotomy of the two cultures, one which restricts her because of “The Egyptian family”, the other which frees her because of her own upbringing that taught her how to survive and which is for her associated with her own culture,

“As an English woman, I was not brought up like that. I was brought up to be self-sufficient, very much so going to boarding school and everything like that. To be able to survive in any kind of environment under any circumstances and to expect to be challenged”.
An interesting point to address here is when she acknowledges that, “I feel like I have lived an eternity and what makes me feel sad is that I can manage by myself.” While being able to survive by ourself is usually one of the beliefs of existentialism, it saddens Clare. Perhaps it is because of her upbringing which has taught her to survive and which therefore belongs to the societal boundaries in her case because it is part of the English culture as she explains in the interview it enters into conflict with her life and comes to an abrupt duality. She has reached the level of being able to survive and yet is saddened by it.

Furthermore, her ability to become totally free goes hand-in-hand with the ability to provide financially which she points out several times during the interview, “The only problem I have is no money. If I won the pools tomorrow and I had a million pounds in my account, my life would be different”.

“The vision is blocked until I can get a job......Then, I can reassess my own ability to provide. Like I said if I won money on the pools, my life would instantly change. Instantly, you know.”

“Reading makes me feel myself. The only things I do now is go to the gym and read. I try very hard to read at night before I go to bed just to feel in touch with something. I have a separate life from everything else and go to the gym is very good for me, something I would never give up now, never. That’s my time away. I feel anger. Before I went to England when I went to the gym, I was neither here nor there and I lost it somehow but when I came back I was determined to fight. I suppose I am redirecting my energy. I resent it in anger in being in a position that I have found myself in that I never planned that was thrust upon me. I have a lot of anger for that and my ability to change that is very narrow because again I have children”.

“At the gym I find my space and I regain the confidence in myself that I can deal with whatever there is”.
Although she blames the circumstances for feeling trapped, she acknowledges her choice that, “I would not get married again. It’s just I had bad luck, bad timing, lack of support, yes, lack of support in my marriage, not sharing, not being equal partners, having somebody in the house but not really plugged into the marriage. I’m not”, the anger for not having planned all of this is present. The gym fulfills the existential self, the desire to be someone else for just a moment, to believe for an instant that what “was thrust upon me” does not exist and that what I never planned I do not have to confront for the time being.

Struggling with the split, she constantly asks herself what it could have been,

“If I did not have children I could just walk out the door and I could find myself a job and somewhere to live and probably I don’t know and this is another question I have but if I did not have children, would I be married to this man? Would I be living in this country and would I be happy with that? I think it is an escape this kind of feeling. Because I can’t deal with it. I can’t on a daily basis put up with the situation. I go to the gym to get it out. And also to be somebody else. When I am there, I am not this wife and mother, I am this person in my own right and nobody knows that I have this other life which is very attractive to me, too much. I love that so much. I can sit there and meet a lot of people and I’ve met a lot of interesting people. And I have had a lot of interesting conversations with people and it opens up the world that I want to be in, the world of opportunities where people treat me as an intelligent person whose an interesting person to talk to rather than “get me a drink” or “wipe my bum”. This is my escape and I feel human again because I feel that people do respect me. Because in my home I suppose I don’t get that. Very stereotyped. I know I am fighting that too and I see for Ramsey, his mother was the stereotype from that stage in the sixties his parents are exactly like my parents. His father goes and gets the money and his wife looked after the house and the kids and I am rebelling against that because I suppose in a way I am afraid if I do live here I am going to perpetuate this. This is something that horrifies me. This scares me and I was surprised that it does not scare Ramsey”

Is this an escape, as Clare points out, or is it part of the self which is never revealed because not understood?
Ramsey. “Now that my father is remarried it’s a good question to consider whether I’m going to have more choices in my life. I don’t know because my father is very important in terms of financial support so he has quite a bit of control. Significant control let’s put it this way. My children are in some of the best schools here and I can’t afford to pay from my own salary. We have a car, the house. So, he plays a big part even though he’s remarried. I feel it’s good and bad. It’s good that I’ve got somebody to be able to do that. Definitely. It’s a relief that I don’t have to think in today’s market that I’m making enough money. But it’s bad in a way that I don’t have this independence. He has this control. I’m not free. It’s difficult. It’s good and bad”.

The pull that Ramsey experiences is between the comfort and security of his father’s support and the desire to make it on his own and, despite the convenience to remain in his own culture, Ramsey longs to go away to another country; “I want to go abroad and get my independence.” Although he feels that everyone should be “independent” and that he is “rebellious” to his father’s decisions, “in the meantime it is ok for him because, “No, it’s not scary to make that step. There’s no risk because if I don’t make it, if I still need money, I can go back to him. So, it’s not a risk, it’s a desire to be independent because I believe a man should be independent”. Within the desire to leave, the split is also experienced and turned around, the desire to leave becomes the “should”, because,

“A man or a woman should be independent plus I’m thirty years old. I need to be independent, to pay things out of my own money but in a way because of the control he has. He can have control of some decisions although I don’t have to act them out. I’ve always been rebellious to his decisions anyway although he’s supporting me”.

His individual self wants to leave to escape the control of his father while his Self (a social construct) also wants to leave because of society’s pressure as he is getting older. However, he knows that should he not make it, he can always return to his father’s control. There is a continuous friction between wanting to make it on his own and being cared for.
Ramsey's father symbolizes the protector, the controller and the judge. It is society pointing the finger at the individual while keeping him under its wings in order to grow in a certain way. Ramsey is well aware of it.

Ramsey is continuously caught between “the should” and “the want” as long as “the want” also fulfills what “the should” should be. Therefore at times, “the want” becomes “the should”. At times, there is no distinction between the two,

“I’m quite happy to work everyday. I love my work but the provider’s role is a constraint. Definitely. So, on one hand I love my work and would not change anything but on the other hand the provider’s role is a constraint. If Clare works it would not change that image because the money she’d earned would be for her. I would still provide for her. She would make money for her own pleasure. Of course, if she worked it would bring us together. She would be happier about her work and talk about it in that sense for herself”.

“I feel that I am more responsible. My work is everything. This is what validates me, what brings my identity. I feel that I’m the backbone. Not only because I am the financial provider but also if we have problems I’m the one who mainly goes and talks to Clare, discuss it at the moment, try to push it to keep things together. If we lived in England, I would feel the same. There would not be any difference. The culture has nothing to do with it. Whether here or anywhere I’ll still feel I’m the backbone”.

He is very much aware of how much societal pressures have prevented him from realizing his own aspirations,

“The expectations of marriage I had previously such as building a partnership with another person, sharing things together, living together have not yet happened because of the circumstances. There have not been choices because I have had to make them around all these things that happened”.

Or, “My wife and my children were in a secondary position”. Throughout the interview we sense an out-of-control feeling where life has escaped without being really lived. Ramsey has just existed, something which in the existentialist view is
given while at the same time, the right to live this existence has not yet been
exercized and the individual longs for it, “I have no ties now and I pretty much do as I
want.” This is further expressed in the reacquaintance with the teenager, that fragile
phase in human life where the existentialist and the structural come into friction
perhaps for the first time in our life,

“I love reading and I spend four or five hours a day reading. I’m reading for my
work. I’m trying to learn more. Me, when I find myself in a way, is when I go
out drinking with my friends. It gets me back when I was a teenager. There is
really nothing that I regret or wish I never did. I’m pretty happy”.

...and a relief that he will find his space,

“I’m happy that my father has somebody now. Secondly I’m not as concerned
about him as I was all the time. When I talked to him he would say he could not
sleep at night and he was tired. Now that he’s married it’s a relief he’s got
somebody else he can talk to. I just feel happy that he’s happy. I’ll have more
space”.
Couple #3

Researcher’s Reflections

Gary: “It is funny to me ……my brothers and sisters and, I loved them in my way, were basically people who grew up in the same house as me but I don’t feel that sort of sanguine relationship with my siblings and my family that you see in a lot of people. I liked them a lot and I leave them a lot to do their own life and I don’t judge them and I think that they do the same with me.”

Debra: “It was kind of like being raised in the Mid-West and thinking of going to Disneyland. I mean it was kind of unfashionable. I was raised in the Mid West, in a big city, Omaha. It’s a pretty big city. It was about half a million at the time when I was growing up, so, it was a fairly good size. Yes, we were city people.”

I met Debra at the gym. She was working and going to school full-time. She had just moved to Cairo with her teenage daughter Alison. She had just gotten married to Gary, her third husband and lived abroad for the first time. She had been a single parent for many years and she and Alison were very close. I met Gary later on but especially through the interview. He had been living in Egypt for quite a long time after spending a few years in Indonesia.

Childhood Memories

Siblings

Gary. I have four brothers and sisters, two sisters who are twins, two years younger than me, a third sister who is five years younger and the youngest of us is a brother who is thirteen years younger than me. I am the oldest. The first two, the twins were very close to me, they are two years younger than me so, as I recall for the longest time we were a three child family, five of us and by the time my brother and my sister were born that was a change from that concept. The family got bigger. Actually when my brother was born I was already ready to start high school and by the time I went away to college he was only four. So, I know him better now than I did then but at that point he was my brother of course but not like my first two sisters. I probably took care of him but I don’t remember that. It seems that when my brother was very small I don’t remember that time very much.
Debra. Two boys and two girls in the family. I have one older sister and two younger brothers and they are all about two years apart, my sister is closer to three years older than I.

Probably out of the four children in the family, I was the one most concerned about having harmony in the family, most concerned about trying to make peace all the time and keep things stable. My sister had a lot of resentment for my father as did both my brothers although they were still quite young when I moved away from home. The brother who was next to me was constantly at battle with my father and he was sort of considered the black sheep by my father, no good kind of thing attitude about him that was really sad. And of course to some degree he felt obligated to live up to that label. In fact he has done well for himself and he’s a really good person. My youngest brother who was actually twelve when I moved away from home told me later that he’d had some bad running into with my dad and had a lot of argument with him.

Gary. So our family while we are not very close, we are a normal family. We don’t have that sanguine relationship. Only with the twins who were close to me in age we could have gotten quite close. I always felt a kinship with one of the twin, Suzie who is very much like me.

Debra. The girls had to help in the kitchen. We had to do the dishes every night. My brothers had to mow the lawn. I don’t really remember their doing much house things, they may have had to do more dishes later on but it seems to me that the dishes were mostly our responsibility but besides that my mother did everything. We were not asked to do the laundry or anything like that. I used to do a lot of the house cleaning but because I wanted to do it because I did not think that my mother’s standards were very good, you know. So, I had this cleanliness thing but we were not really asked to do a lot.

Gary. There were no big gender differences. I know they were certain things that I did that were available to me that had to do with the fact that I was a boy but within the family. The girls had no access to sports for example because we were raised in a Catholic school, a Catholic primary school. So, we actually did not have very many boys sports but they were no girls’ sports at all.

Debra. The way we were raised though in terms of the difference between my brothers and sisters did not seem unfair to me. Because the daughters were older, we had more privileges so I did not see a disparity there and I am not sure what kind of rules my mother enforced with my brothers in terms of theirs. My mother again was fairly lineant as long as I did not cause any problems, I had midnight, one o’clock as curfews which was pretty much in line. We could not stay much later than that anyway and I always was good about getting home on time as long as did that, it was no big deal.

Gary. There were no restrictions because of gender in my family. In fact as much as I can recall, my sister dated far more than I did in that respect but this had to do with our personality not in terms of my parents.
Debra. My parents did not pay for college for anyone so nobody had any benefits like that.

Gary. In terms of education opportunities, the end result was different but in fact for myself for example when it was time for me to go to university, my father offered to pay for me to go to a private school/university and I was academically very successful and wanted to go to university. My sisters, I really don’t know if he made the same offer but both of them seemed to me although they were both reasonably successful academically, they were not interested in that. Only myself and my brother are university graduates. My sisters have a more traditional role and that is that all three of them married after finishing high school and I think by their choice.

Role Models

Debra. I was raised by both parents but one parent was basically absent.

Gary. I never talked to my mother a lot. I did not confide in her at all.

Debra. I did not argue with my father but had probably the most extreme interaction at one point in my life than anyone else in the family. He never got violent except this one time and it was with me.

Gary. My father and I communicated by doing rather than talking.

Debra. My father was an alcoholic. I used to call him a white collar alcoholic because he was home, he worked and took care of his basic responsibilities but emotionally, of course, he was separate from us and it created a constant high level of tension in the household to always worry about aggravating him in someway, to make him angry so my mother took on the role of taking care of the entire house.

My mother did everything from fixing the iron to carting the A.C from the basement to the second floor and back down every summer. She mowed the lawn and then, she did all the cooking, cleaning and all these things. My father went to work. She started to work when I was twelve. So, she just worked a lot and she catered to his needs tremendously and we were all expected to, “don’t upset your father”, that was a line we heard over and over again. So that was an atmosphere that was very tense, we did not feel relaxed at home very much.

Gary. My father gave me a lot of skills not only with respect to my perception of myself but he taught me a lot. In fact if you read some of the men’s literature, the typical male complaint they have is that they did not have a close relationship with their father, they did not learn their father’s trade and that kind of stuff. I did not learn my father’s trade but I learned a lot of things from my father and even though we were not huggy with each other, I loved my father. He was my role model.

Debra. My mother finished high school, my father did not finish high school. He was very intelligent. He skipped a grade when he was a child, he was an avid reader but he was very poor. He was in management. He had a good job.
My mother did factory like work but my father was very shamed that she was working and he would not allow her to tell anyone that she had a job because he thought that it reflected on his inability to take care of his family. But for her, all her kids were gone all day and I just think she was tired to stay home. I’m sure the extra money was helpful but primarily, she wanted to be out of the house.

**Gary.** My mother had a very definite role in the household and my father did help. As a matter of fact, my father did a lot of cooking which is a rather traditional women’s role. I’d say my parents were very traditional in their views but they also did not express I should say they did not encourage us to believe the same way they did and in fact I have always appreciated my parents a lot for that because I do feel differently than they do and they have never criticized me.

I say black sheep but they don’t resent that. In fact for them it is not a criticism of their way of living as far as I can tell. In fact when I come home they ask me a polite question about how it is in Indonesia or Egypt, a lot of the time they won’t listen to the whole answer because they are very satisfied with their own life...

**Debra.** I remember when my mother was looking for the job. We were all embarrassed about the work she ended up getting, I remember lying to my friends for years about where she worked and what she did. This is because I hung around a bunch of snobby little kids and the school I went to had a lot of wealthy kids. We were not wealthy but we had just enough to live in that neighborhood, there were sections of the neighborhood that did not have big fancy houses but most of my friends had maids and things like that, swimming-pools. We weren’t near that but we were probably lower-middle class but my father tried always to put on the best that he could and I felt the pressure of that all the time that I was in school.

**Gary.** I really think that both my parents particularly my father was probably racist and probably had traditional views about women but he never expected me to feel that way and in fact he never talked about that.

My father was not a macho as far as his manner anyway but he was a traditional male in the sense he felt responsible for the financial stability of the family, for going out everyday, for making the house operate, mowing the lawn, making sure the cars operated ... and my mother by choice or because the way the family was arranged was responsible for the care of the kids, the washing of the clothes and to a certain extent the preparation of the meals although as I said my father cooked particularly on weekends.

Clearly, very clearly my father made the decisions in the house.

**Debra.** My mother really liked working and she said that she took that particular job because the hours allowed her to be home with the kids for the first half hour in the morning and be home before my father got home and have dinner ready by six. She had to be home early enough to have dinner ready by six which meant in her mind
that she could not take any other kind of job. Interestingly enough, she always wanted to be a nurse. It is very funny because I did not want to be a nurse.

Gary. When I first did go to university I was following my father’s sort of view for me.

As I said before I was always very satisfied that my father allowed me to make my own decisions and did not criticize me even though I am sure there was some disappointment on his part, he never voiced it and he used to come and visit me at the fraternity house where I used to live at school and he enjoyed that for himself and for me and enjoyed meeting my fraternity brothers and being in that environment as an experience for himself and he was never critical of me and I have always appreciated that.

My marriage is different from my parents. I am not sure you can say traditional that there is a traditional marriage for this time. We have a contemporary marriage but it is definitely different with respect to my parents. For example if we use the term traditional to describe what my parents have, I don’t have a traditional marriage. I suppose it exists but I don’t see it in families I know now and I think that the marriage that Debra and I have is similar to many other marriages that I know about, for this time. Traditional is probably not the right term for that.

In response to economic and philosophic things, yes I think that women and men are both different now than my parents were when I was a child. You see, my father’s and mother’s marriage was not founded on romantic love, you know what I mean but it manifested itself in a way that it was suitable to a more romantic vision of marriage. They chose each other.

Although with my parents one of the precepts they lived by is that they would not talk about their own interpersonal problems in front of the kids so, I suspect that when we were kids and when we went to bed, my parents talked in bed and we never heard a lot of that stuff and we talked a lot at the table and we talked when we were among ourselves but we talked about day to day things. We did not talk about these kinds of things.

Something grew out of the fifties, our parents’ generation, they went through the depression and suffered with that, the Second World War and then saw the benefit that grew out of the fifties and that was what they wanted and at least myself I picked that goal up from my parents.

Aspirations-Expectations

Education/Work

Gary. I have always wanted to leave, work overseas, and be in a different place and I still feel that way. That’s one difference from my father.

Debra. As soon as I graduated from HS, I moved away. I had saved up some money so I travelled a little bit for a couple of months and then I started working during the
day and going to school at night and I was paying for it myself and I did that for a while.

**Gary.** When I went to school the first time just out of high school, in fact I really only knew that I was pretty good academically and that I wanted to go to university but in fact I had no clear goals.

**Debra.** And then I discovered the community, I knew nothing about college, my parents had not said a word to me about any of it. There was sort of this underlying assumption that I would go and that was in part because of the class of people that we associated with, peers were all going to college but they never suggested that I apply or that I go for scholarship even though I was a straight A student. So no one ever supported that endeavor.

**Gary.** When I went to school I did not apply myself so when chemical engineering started to become hard at about the second year, this was in the sixties and I was also questioning what I was doing because I did not have a clear view of my own so I switched into a discipline which was more art oriented like Fine Arts and I did that for a year and a half and I enjoyed that but I finally flanked out so they asked me to leave.

**Debra.** I wanted to do social work at the time and I wanted to go to the Peace Corps. I mean I was a child of the sixties, please, I was very much a hippie kind of a person, anti-war, I wanted to have a global view of my life and place in the world, so I wanted to do social work so I started out taking classes in Sociology and Psychology and I shifted interest into Psychology.

**Gary.** I flanked out, went to work for 15 years and went back to school and at that time I had a very clear idea of what I wanted to do. I worked as a surveyor and an engineering technician. So I was working in the engineering field with numbers but, also with right brain sort of things. In other words, I had to do graphics and visualize things in three dimensions because I was a surveyor which suited me very well. It was a very satisfying career and the only reason I changed and went back to school is because I felt I had done as much as I could in that field and wanted to get something more, hard. So I went back to school, it took me two years to get a Bachelor’s Degree in construction management and that’s what I am doing now.

**Debra.** Of course, at this time, I am taking preliminary courses and I found that I liked the first couple of semesters of almost everything but as it got into more depth, my head seemed to get turned in other directions with lots of other interesting things to study, so, it was very hard for me to settle in into anything. *And that was the closest I had to a vision.*

And I said I wanted to be in the Peace Corps but, did I ever research it or look into it at all, no! I just kept plotting along in my little world and did not really have the tools to know how to make these other things happen.

I remember being in tears because I could not get on the first flight after graduation the next morning and I was going to go on a later flight because I wanted to go
student stand-by and my father gave me the extra money to get a reserved ticket because I wanted to leave right away. I did not want to wait five hours, eight hours or ten hours to get on the flight, very anxious to get away from home and get out of the household. It was very restrictive. I went to Portland, Oregon. I lived there for five years.

Most of that time I was going to school part-time. I did not have degrees. I enjoyed the classes and I was a good student and I always got A’s but I kept on changing my mind about what I wanted to do and then I decided I wanted to be a landscape architect. I liked to be outside and I had tried art for a while because I always had some artistic talent and my mother did as well. Mostly drawing but I discovered pretty quickly that I really did not have the talent that it would take to do Fine Arts all my life.

_I think I have a need to prove a lot to myself and I have very high expectations of myself._

This work that I am doing at USAID is just a job but it’s very interesting and I’m learning a lot and I’m hoping that it will provide me access to other kinds of work. The work I have is just work. I’m learning a lot but I’m not really committed, I’m not invested is a better word, I am committed. It’s a job definitely. My job in administration in public health was much more of a profession.

_Marriage_

_Gary._ When I was young I had the view of Prince Charming, a more traditional view like my father may have had although my view of my relationship with my wife would have been far different from his. I still felt that I would not have necessarily been the primary provider but that would have been one of my roles in the family and that if it fell to me I would be responsible for the house organized and making the vehicles run and all the traditional male things but I also can cook and love to cook. I can do kitchen work, I like to do it and I don’t mind.

_Debra._ I was very big on equality. That was very important to me. And I also gave no weight to the concept of trying to find somebody who could care for me and take care of me financially in any way. There was absolutely not even a consideration.

When I thought about looking at some kind of partner it was always somebody that I could talk to, that would treat me well, those were the important things. I never even thought about money as an issue at all or being taken care of although I have since discovered that is really an important thing to me to have somebody who takes care of me on some level and not necessarily financially but who feels some sense of obligation for my welfare. I feel that part in the partner in my life is important.

The quality issue was very important to me. I guess I viewed myself as working and having a lovely home, I mean lots of flowers, taking care of the house is actually something I enjoy. I don’t feel that as a burden although I can resent it if I feel I am the only one trying to keep things together.
But I do enjoy making an atmosphere of my own which feels comfortable and clean. The cheapest crumniest little flat, I spent a lot of energy keeping it nice, that has always been really important to me. So, I quickly felt that any partner I was going to have also had to be involved in maintaining the house because I had those standards. Those were really important things to me and interestingly enough the first person I married was not.

Gary. So, in the romantic sense, I had a very romantic ideal about marriage, wanted romantic love and had that view for a long time. I never was married during those years and actually until a year ago which is thirty years later and I have gone through a lot of changes since that time and I have a very different idea about marriage than I had before.

In those early years, sixties and seventies, I did not see a conflict between that romantic view of marriage, women and changing views about the relationships between men and women. I did not see a conflict.

Marriage was never a threat to me and in fact I was married for a couple of years out of college but it was an immature marriage that happened in that sequence you know, high school romance and we did not spend very much time together. Then I had a long-term relationship between that marriage and meeting Debra which never did and would have never ended into marriage but we were very close for a long period of time. The spiritual part of the relationship was there.

Now my view of what I want from marriage has changed from that and the fit is better now than it was between my view of the relationship between men and women and the romantic kind of marriage so it is more comfortable now for me than what it would have been.

Debra. Although I think it is closer to my original vision of marriage which was not a very clear vision but probably closer now that it has been in terms of more of a partnership, less of a possession on both sides. By possession, I mean where you own one another and are completely dedicated to one another and, I don't mean to imply that the dedication is a bad thing but I see in this relationship that I have now more potential for independence and it does not carry a price. Because in the past the independence seems to carry a price that if I tried to be independent, then, I would have to face a certain amount of rejection or anger or something else.

Gary. When I got married this time I think that primarily it is a shift in relative importance. Everyone wants love from their relationship, or, I think, at least I want love for my relationship but I also want friendship and, there is the sexual aspect. In the early view, those would have fallen in the order of romantic love, sex and friendship. Now the order for me would be for example, friendship and love and sex are probably somewhere behind maybe equally important. Friendship is the most important part now. What I want now from a relationship is someone that I can, I mean the feeling of love is there still and also, the desire for the feeling of love but it is not a romantic idealistic love and it is not the kind of love which is so sexually based as it would have been earlier. What I want is someone I can love and be a very good
friend with and the other elements are secondary to me now. So that has reversed now in terms of the importance for me.

I think that the feeling I had before of wanting to be the provider has gone away but I still have retained the part which has to do with my own self esteem and because Debra has a much higher need for self esteem from her work than my mother did for example then that’s part of the mix also. But I believe that earlier this would have been harder to accept because the concept of romantic love was more important.

I think that I would have expected a woman I married at that time to go where I went because of my romantic view and also because of my higher need at that point for feeling that I was the primary provider. I did not know anything else earlier on and the world was changing at the same time.

Debra. So, I am finally to a point in my personal life that I don’t have these expectations as much of myself. I still am haunted to some degree with this idea that if there is something wrong, like if the meal is not right or if the house is not cleaned, it is my fault, it is my responsibility. An example is an unexpected visitor comes to my house, now in the past, I would have been very uptight if things would have been out of place or in kind of a mess. I have gotten over a lot of that.

Gary. Over the last year my expectations probably have not changed a lot but I have seen that there are more potential problems and consequently real problems, details that I did not imagine but as far as what I want from the relationship I don’t think that has changed.

Debra. I have not really thought about how my past expectations match or not the life I have today because I think I have changed, I have matured so, I don’t want that anymore but I think that, in terms of having some kind of partnership and being material in terms of our material comfort level is plenty high for me.

Gary. Where now I still think there’s romantic love in a lot of marriages and it may have more of the position of importance in other marriages than it has in mine and Debra’s, the way marriage manifests itself now as a result of economic conditions, changes in our society, changes in women thinking and expectations and changes in men also, they manifest themselves differently.

I hope that our relationship becomes so that we are only together all the time. I don’t think Debra expects that either but I do hope that we will become very good friends and want to spend time together but I hope that we’ll actually spend time together and do it because we want to.

Debra. I have an expectation that we will find a balance wherein we have private lives and mutual lives and neither is a threat to the other. I mean this is ideal. This is where I would like to see us go get to that place and I think that we have that potential given his expectations and mine that we have the potential to get to a place where we can have separate identities and yet have a big investment in the union of our lives as well. I feel there is a lot of potential.
Gary. I guess I want acceptance not unrestricted acceptance and I feel that has not been forthcoming from her.

Actually, we are at a place now where I think our relationship is very thin at this point, we have not filled it out and I think that my hope is and my confidence is that it will get better.

You know getting married is not an important thing for me although I asked her to get married and she would tell you so if you asked her and I did do that, I asked her because I felt that she would want to get married and that was giving her something that she wanted and I thought it was a good thing too. Really it is neither here nor there in terms of the spiritual part of the relationship but I wanted to do something that I thought she would feel good about but the spiritual part of the relationship I feel you know. The contract has its effect though.

Debra. I think I was somewhat a victim of that classic concept of the house with the picket white fence and the two kids. I think I had that view somewhere in my head but I was not anxious to do it soon. It was somewhere off in the future for me and I did not consider it as something that I would seek. It would just happen.

Gary. When I was young I think even though I remember having a desire for other cultures, other languages, other foods and travels when I was a kid, I think my vision of a relationship with someone was pretty different than that. In fact I think that I saw myself in a kind of suburb with a wife and children and a house with a fence with cats and dogs and I am not sure that I ever thought of that as very satisfying although it fitted my ideal for marriage. But it was composed by society.

Conflicts

Resolving Differences

Debra. I think before it was more of a co-dependence, a union more than an interest to developing a partnership. I don’t feel in this marriage, the pressures of a traditional marriage. It’s very nice.

I feel like Gary and I have pretty equal sense of responsibility for the household both financially and physical care of the household. I mean today was a good example to just after we had decided that you would come over, I set the table and I got a few things done and I said, I really would like to try to get to the gym since they are not here yet and Gary said just go, it will be alright, they’ll probably be a few minutes later than we expected and in the past, I could have never have done that, the guilt and, I don’t necessarily say that it is the fault of the spouse.

He keeps saying he does not expect anything which to me is bullshit because why would you bother to be with someone if you don’t have any expectations. You expect something. I mean I said to him, well you expect me not to bitch at you when you walk in the door. He said, ya, of course, of course. Then, you do have expectations.
Gary. Everyday details but also I think that Debra and I struggle with some of the things that are noted as being very regular problems for couples and I thought that this would not happen but in fact I thought that I knew better than that. Maybe I had a better view of something but in fact things like money, sex, those kinds of things which are the normal things that people talk about I was thinking well, you know we are going into a relationship which has its emphasis on friendship so those won’t be big deals but in fact they are.

Debra. In terms of my schedule we talked a lot about it and I asked him whether I should go to school this summer. I said here’s my thinking, my reason why I should go ahead and take a class this summer and I gave him the reason why I thought it would be functional for us, that it would be a good time to get one more class out of the way. And if he had a big issue with me going this summer, he decided not to address it because I gave him many opportunities to address that. Initially, he did talk about how it restricts on our travel activity and I have a lot of concern about that as well. Not so much this summer but as next year approaches and also, we’ve been in the midst of developing a marriage and that’s very time consuming.

Gary. I have been here five years and Debra just one. I felt very restricted right at first I would say. Since Debra and I have been together now over the course of a year and a half or so, we have talked about these things. What I find is that I have made a lot of changes in my way of life but I don’t feel for most of them as sacrifices and I don’t feel restricted.

Debra. To me in my mind, it is just as important for me to contribute financially as it is for him to contribute domestically. Those are both important things and I prefer a relationship wherein we share those things close to equally. Now if there is some imbalance a little bit, I do a little more of this thing and he does a little more of that thing, that’s fine if we both agree that this works for us.

Gary. In terms of the decisions we make I feel that we make them in common but not with respect to Alison... I defer to Debra and Debra has told me, you know, that she wants, that one of the things that I think she expected from our relationship is not necessarily that I would develop a very close father relationship with Alison...

Debra. When there is an issue we usually agree whether we’ll sit down together or not and talk to her about it or whether he can talk to her the next time it comes up. He has a tendency to put it off, well, I just see if it happens again and so on, maybe the next time. I feel it is important to not wait too long so, we’ll try to talk about it sooner. I think it’s very hard for him and he gets uncomfortable with Alison and I get into an arguing match about some issue that I don’t like the way it’s going. This is how it usually starts. He’s sort of an adult role model for her. He really does a good job into fathering her and she thinks of him in that way to a certain degree. She feels cared for by him.

Gary. So I can support Debra but it is easy for me to come off a position that Debra might take. If I disagree I’ll tell her but a lot of times I think for me, it is neither here nor there, so I’ll support Debra and I find myself easily coming off those positions
when an argument develops say, between Debra and Alison. It is hard for me to make an argument.

Debra. I feel there is lot more honesty in this marriage, I feel that we are trying to face the issues and talk openly about what the issues are and define them. We talk about big issues and it’s slowly getting better all the time. I think mostly it is struggling to understand each other and the motives behind one another.

I think we are somewhat critical of each other’s life-styles. I can’t speak for Gary although he has indicated that he feels critical in the way that I have conducted my affairs but he has never been specific about what those criticisms are. Perhaps it is because it is not matching to his ways. I wish he had more of an emphasis about taking better care of himself heathwise. Sometimes I feel like he’s not really motivated to go and do something interesting and exciting and new. Sometimes I feel that way. I am much more of a risk taker than he is, much more and our backgrounds as adolescents and young adulthood is very much reflective of that. And I did not realize how different we were in that regard until recently.

Gary. Exercise is a very good example because I don’t like that kind of exercise. It is a plain fact, I can do it and it is good for me, my body responds very well but I don’t like it. So, when I do feel some threat from that it is because I think that Debra wants that for me and I think and I don’t know if this is what she wants for sure but I think that she wants me to do that and I don’t really want to. I’d rather do something else even nothing by her perception, nothing, would be my preference in most cases.

So, I’m willing to balance that. I exercise sometimes and sometimes I say no. And she and I have come to the place where originally or initially that was not an acceptable response and now, it seems to be ok for her. And that’s part of the way our relationship will grow I think, basically. It’s what I was talking about before, ultimately what we want, what I want is to be accepted and what happens is the first time you get an answer it is not acceptable but after awhile, it becomes acceptable.

I like Debra but really there are no things about Debra that I dislike except that, to me it seems there’re things about me that she dislikes and that’s the only thing really which bothers me.

Debra. I talked to him some about it when specific issues have come up. Most of the time I have not said anything until later after I have thought about it, I explained to him how I felt....

Gary. Debra and I have only been married for a year and we do a lot of things that dating people do. We do not know each other that well yet. We are not the good friends that we want to become and we even occasionally dislike each other.

Right now we spend a lot of time together but, it is light social time visiting friends and those kinds of things and it is sort of like something we schedule together, we are busy doing this and that, we are going together but there’s no, that friendship, that heart part of that sort of life is not in there yet. There are other extenuating things that
are covering that up. Aside from the fact that we are new together but I hope that we'll actually spend time together and do it because we want to but right now this is not the case. Our relation is still surperificial.

**Debra.** The biggest gap for me is trying to deal with this loss of the romantic sort of lover kind of situation that I am missing that I feel is lacking right now. Other aspects of the relationship are great. I see it as a transitional period for me right now.

**Gary.** I think that Debra had very high expectations of what marriage should be. We talked about it. She said that she wanted a more traditional romantic reaction from me than what she got. From the very little she knew about me, she expected that and I consider myself to be a romantic person but the way I manifest it does not communicate that to her. This is maybe a typical female-male difference. There are also specific things about me that she wants to change. I think that she has been very disappointed about me that I did not meet her dream in that romantic way particularly and also in other mundane ways.

If you look at the division of gender in our household, you would find that there are a lot of things that fit the traditional division of labor and some that don't. For example, when we cook in the house during the week, it is generally me and when we do dishes, it is generally me rather than Debra. However, Debra does the laundry. I have been doing the shopping. We have decided our division of labor according to our schedules.

Here there aren't a lot of traditionally male things that I do or Debra does. Say fixing the house you hire someone to do it. When something is wrong with the car, someone else does it. So, those traditional male things are not available to either one of us.

We don't communicate as much as we should but we communicate far more than my parents but not as much as we need to. My parents never talked about those in front of us but I suspect that they did not talk as much as Debra and I talk but quite frankly Debra and I don't talk as much as we should. We put off and avoid talking about major issues.

**Debra.** We've only been married a year and earlier he would go out on the weekends much more. Although I liked time alone, I felt bad, I felt rejected... And, if he is going to go, he goes less and when he does go, he says, you know, Debra I was thinking about doing this, how do you feel about it, do you have studies anyway, that sort of thing. He seems much more interested in checking in with me how we are going to pack our time together.

He's really made an effort because I've made it clear to him how I am feeling and it took me a while to do that because initially, I'd assumed that if he loved me, he would behave in such and such a way because in my mind that is how you demonstrate love and when he did not do those things, he was demonstrated to me that he did not love me. And so, we had a lot to turn around and that's what we're working on now.
Gary. What has happened is that at the same time that those activities might have become a problem with my relationship with Debra because drinking would have been a problem with her because of her personal history, golf and squash might have become a problem because of the time they take away from the family, because of the people I might have been doing it with but in fact those things have kind of gone away not only because Debra would not have liked me to hang out at bars or to spend too much time playing squash or golf but also they diminished because the things that made them special for me changed about the same time.

*Representation/Vision of the Other*

Gary. Debra says that men are on top so they don’t have to talk about their emotions. Basically, men don’t talk about things. They would just do it. I feel that I am more open today than twenty years ago....... Debra has much more a right to say or decide what happens in my family than my mother did. So in this view I am different from them.

Debra. And I remember thinking to myself about my first husband, well he’s a slob, he’s irresponsible but those are minor problems considering the other things that are good about this person and so. And never once did I consider that he was an alcoholic. I mean when I looked at spending my life with him, I said those are the two things he’s not: he does not take care of the house and he’s irresponsible but he’s intelligent and he’s kind and we like to do these things together and he’ll make a good parent. They were still true but I did not realize at the time that he was an alcoholic. I should have, I mean it was very apparent. He drank every night, vast volumes of alcohol every night and it never even occurred to me until we’d been married for about a year and we’d already lived three years prior to that.

I think before it was more of a co-dependence, a union more than an interest to developing a partnership. I don’t feel in this marriage the pressures of a traditional marriage. It’s very nice.

In reality I think that perception, that dream (The American Dream) did not really acknowledge my own spirit.

Gary. My marriage just out of college was probably the last part of myself trying to fill my parents’ and society’s expectations on me which were not suitable to me because since that time what I’ve done is what’s more suitable to me, to travel, to identify my own spirit and be outside the United States and, Debra and I actually did not meet until I already felt very comfortable with myself and had gotten rid of that old ideal.

Debra. It has been my own evolution, more so probably than anybody else, particularly with my first husband because he was not traditional about his expectations about taking care of the house but he never took care of the house so, he left it all to me. My second husband was very domestic in terms of keeping things
clean and all that kind of stuff and I think that most of the expectations again I put all on myself.

Gary. .....although I think she hoped that I think she wanted support in her role as parent with Alison because Alison is a very strong minded individual and very smart ...

Debra. Gary is quite diplomatic about Alison. He usually talks to me about it first because it concerns something that happens in Alison’s life. He’s very observant about what is going on with her and thinks about it a lot. He takes his role seriously. He also recognizes that he’s coming in late and that he’s not the biological parent and all these other things. I think he’s handled it extremely well, really, really admirably well.

Gary. For me I don’t have a clear picture of what friendship means as Debra does.

I believe that’s what Debra wants too. I think that at this point Debra wants more of a loving relationship and perhaps more of a traditional loving relationship than I do.

If someone asked her with whom she could be very honest then I think that she would say that there are a lot of things about me that she does not like, that are surprising to her and that there are lots of things about me that she does not like that are not surprising to her and which we talked about before we were married because I had anticipated some of the areas of conflicts before we got married and I tried to explain that some of those things are part of me which would not be easy to give up.

Debra. He expects friendship, I think. He expects a sexual relationship. He expects mutual respect. So, there are some things that he expects. But you know, the role I am to play, I don’t think he cares that much. He was really great when I first arrived not pressuring me. He felt that we had enough money that if I did not work, we’ll be alright. But he understands about my working and knows that it is very important to me.

Gary. So, I think that she likes me most of the time but there’s not a lot of depth in it now and, frankly that’s the way I feel about Debra too.

Debra. I don’t have a clue of what he expects from me in the marriage and it’s part of what we are trying to work out.

Gary. I think that my perception is that that there are many things about me that she would like to change and she may not be able to like me the way she wants to like me unless she can change them and the reverse of that for me is that I want to keep myself as much as possible.

Debra. At first I thought he really did want some people to take care of and that’s why Alison and I really fit that image for him that was a need that he had in his life but he seems supportive of my needs to do other things and to have a lot of independence and he certainly does not mind that I am working as far as I can tell. He says he does not.
Gary. I look at women in a more equal manner today and I don’t put them on a pedestal anymore. You incorporate that into your being and you think of that as the way to think of a woman. That’s what you did.

Debra. I feel cared for by him to some degree.

Gary. I think that things become bothersome to Debra. More because she does not know me very well, she was in a situation which made her very insecure here and she was afraid. I think that this was going to be an example of how different I was going to be than she imagined me to be.

Debra. My second marriage, I really was taken care of a lot although I continued to work and I certainly did a lot domestically but so did my husband. He really did make me feel taken care of. He would do things like if I was going to go to a conference for a couple of days, he would take the car, make sure that the air was in the tires, that the oil had been changed, you know he took care of things like that because he wanted me to be safe. That kind of care made me feel extremely loved.

Gary is not like that. He does not think of these kinds of things. If I were to launch off in the middle of the night some place, he would not ask me how I was going to get there, was I going to be ok and so, in a way, it’s a freedom, in another way, I feel bad about that. I feel unloved because I don’t feel like he has any commitment to my well-being.

Gary. Actually the way I feel about that is that there are certain things about the way Debra lives her life, her own life that my perception is that she wants me to live that way.

Debra. I felt rejected like it was not important to him to have time with me and now, he seems much more concerned about having time together.

I think that if a major decision such as moving from here had to be made, we would definitely talk about that and decide what would be best for both. I can see with Gary, we would even separate if that was the best alternative. If he needed to go and do that for a year while I finished up here for a year or something like that, I can imagine us coming up with all kinds of options and that’s one of the things I really appreciate about the relationship with this. It is not threatening to look at all those different options. He said before that when we leave Egypt, he sees as a possibility that I’ll be the person taking us to somewhere new, that I will find a job that takes us to a new place. I think that he would sort of like to kick back and let me lead the way and then, he would find work when we arrive and I am quite honestly not sure of how well I would handle that. On the other hand if I had to go away and leave him with Alison, he would take the role reversal very well and it would not be a problem.

Gary. If Debra found a job some place and that was the best thing for us to do, we agreed that was the best thing for us to do would be to go there because of her work, then I would certainly do that. And I would suffer probably, could suffer the way Debra has struggled here for example with insecurity, not having a job, that period of
transition would happen to me also and my feeling is that it is no more right for that to happen to Debra than to happen to me. Well, it would be a threat to me but not a threat from Debra. It would be a threat in this respect that I would be worried to loose my own self-respect and that influences our relationship so there would be those effects but it would not be something I would feel is Debra’s fault for example but I would worry of what would happen to me because I have seen it happen to Debra and I have seen it happen to other people. I don’t think it would happen less or more to me than it would her.

**Choices**

**Situational**

**Gary.** I think I feel the provider role in myself.

**Debra.** My first marriage I took care of everything. I mean it was just a repeat of my mother’s situation. I took care of the house. I did everything, made all the money, paid all the bills and paid everything.

**Gary.** From a work standpoint, I feel a lot like my father. I get a lot of self-esteem and value from doing a good job.

**Debra.** No, I have not done artwork much not even as a hobbie although I keep thinking I will someday. I don’t really miss it. It is a nice idea and I keep thinking I’d like to do it like I’d like to take a water color class but if I took some kind of a class that would carve out the time for me I would probably do it but my life has always been busy enough with so many other things.

**Gary.** When I first did go to university I was following my father’s sort of view for me. He thought that I should be an engineer and I had shown some skills in chemistry skills so he suggested that I should be a chemical engineer. I wanted to go to school so I did that.

Frankly the changes I have made are because of the expectations that Debra has. Personally, I don’t think that there was anything wrong with the way I was living before except that when you live in a family, your time and your attention has to change, I mean I appreciate that part but, there are certain things about the way I used to live that I don’t think necessarily won’t fit with the marriage but they won’t fit with my marriage so, there are some things which I have given up which I don’t think I needed to give up necessarily except that they were things that Debra expected.

... these things diminished because what made them special for me changed about the same time. So it is difficult for me to really tell how I would feel given the situation where I wanted to play more golf or I wanted to play more squash, or wanted to go drinking with the boys, it is hard to tell because those things happened simultaneously and complemented each other. I have not thought about this that much but I have thought about it and my feeling is that those things which could have become a
problem down the road a few years when we become closer friends won’t be a problem.

But there was a period when my friend Don was still here and he was playing a lot of golf when I did not, I felt I gave up my chance to play golf so there was some of that and from there, I get the feeling that things could have been worse than they were.

Actually marriage itself (and Debra and I tend to disagree with this), the contract of marriage, the public acknowledgement to me is not necessary. It is not anything that I object to, it is just that it was not necessary for me. And partly because of Debra’s coming of course but also because Debra wanted that at least that what she said to me. She and I have recently talked about that and what I remember from when we were talking about getting married is different from what she remembers.

Conclusions

My Construction of Reality: The Existential Self

Gary. “...but I have always been more of a wanderer, a black sheep than any of the rest of the family and my father and mother in particular..... they think of me as different from them not in a negative way but not in a superior way. They just say I am different”.

The split is expressed in being “a black sheep” because “different from them” and fulfilling a particular role to please his family needs who are now Debra and Alison.

He is very much aware of his individual self and wants to hold on to it and as he voices,

“I tried to explain that some of those things are part of me which would not be easy to give up...Personally, I don’t think that there was anything wrong with the way I was living before...”.

because it is him and, “I want to keep myself as much as possible”.
He is caught between fulfilling a certain role within his family and therefore making compromises, "I find myself occasionally supporting Debra because I want to support her not necessarily because I agree",

"Squash is the same way, I love squash and I learned to play squash basically and I played a lot more before with my friend Bill. When he left, I sort of liked to play squash but he's not there so, just playing with someone else is ok but it's not the same so, if I don't play it is not a big deal as before it may have been".

"And there are other things. For example, take some things I used to do with my life when I was single, I used to spend a lot of time drinking in bars. I can't do that as much as I used to. You know, it is not something that I would choose to do by myself. I used to do it because I thought I might meet someone or I would go with someone whom I enjoy".

To keep his individual self his important,

"I have parts of my life, my personal life that are different from Debra's that are important to me but, those examples for example are related more to the people involved than they are to the actual activity itself and my life with Debra and Alison is very important too. You know those things worked together. It has been pretty fortunate actually I think".

"I mean I am living a different life than I was living before and I have given up some things, my life has changed but I do different things for the most part I like. So far they have made me happy. And I have the feeling that it will become better".

"I would not change anything I have done. I feel very good about what I have done".

"Friendship has always been something that I am always trying to define like what's love since I was a child but, I think I would characterize it as, a friend of mine would be someone with whom I enjoy spending time and with whom, with very few exceptions, don't feel a need to withhold what I want to say, how I feel about something and that I won't be judged, don't expect to be agreed with but I do expect that that person will not judge me within certain limits of course".

He's adjusting his life according to the expectations of the Other,
“Of course, there are times when I miss the perceived freedom that I had and I miss the actual activities that I did and some of the friends for example or acquaintances where I used to spend time with that I don’t anymore....”

The Other here goes beyond the dimension of the realm of the family to encompass society as a whole, “Part of it is that it does not fit being a father and a husband and part of it is that those people are not really acceptable to Debra and Alison”. The first part is quite acceptable, the second part I think is only partly acceptable but, I make my own decisions and in the end I feel quite satisfied”.

“Those two forces were operating in opposite directions sort of to complement each other and if they had sort of struck each other more directly, it could have been more of a problem but, as it turned out, it was ok”.

In face of the demands of societal pressures and the duty to fulfill accordingly the expected role of a parent, a wish to play a bigger role in it is expressed,

“I don’t have a very father role towards Alison. I would like to have a bigger role. She is already seventeen. Probably she is not going to have another father at this point. She and I talk. I get a little bit of a chance to do fatherly advice and maybe I will also when she goes to university but we are pretty good friends I think. She and I are actually a lot more alike than Debra and I are. You know personal habits. We are more accepting of each other”.

It is no longer a duty to be a parent but a choice. His closeness to Alison reinforces the demand for the existential self to be accepted, “we are more accepting of each other.”

“I wished that I had a longer history with Alison so I could act as father. I am more of a friend”. Here, however, the duty of the parent reoccurs and we are not sure what is really voiced, the existential or the social construct of being a father.
"I don’t have the same kinds of choices today but I am as satisfied, quite often more satisfied with the choices I have now than with the ones I had before”. It is quite often a struggle between adjusting to fit the needs of the Other while realizing that our choices become different. To be “often more satisfied” with the present choices may also be a reflection of adjusting to another’s reality without totally realizing that it is not at all what we wanted and as Gary voices.

“They are my choices although they are some I made which I did not anticipate for example and giving up the way I used to live for example was difficult on an item by item basis but I don’t think of them, I don’t feel to be restricted now. In other words, even though my life has changed, I am living differently than I did when I was single but I don’t feel that I am restricted because the changes have been made voluntarily even though they were difficult when they happen”.

The last part of the quote above as well as “Giving up the way I used to live” reinforce the questioning, the doubting at times of taking on something which may not be me. In “the changes have been made voluntarily even though they were difficult when they happen”, there is a further split between the “voluntary” implying my own choice and the recognition that, “even though they were difficult when they happen”, because holding on to his self is very real in Gary.

“What I see about golf and other part of my life, activities like that is that there’re things that I really enjoy a lot and become more important to me in relationship to the other people who are in my life”.

“I enjoyed playing golf with Don and although there are still people here who play golf and who I can play with regularly, playing golf with those people is not the same as playing with Don”.

“... there is something in me, there is a spirit to the game there is something about it”.

“It’s like those activities have an innate value for me and there’s a potential there for that to become important but when it lies dormant, it’s still there, it’s something I still love to do but I love it a lot more if I can do it with someone I enjoy doing it with rather than doing it".
Debra. “Occasionally I stayed out later but I felt like I had quite a bit of freedom really and mostly, I felt like nobody cared one way or the other that’s the bottom line. Lot of the time, we did not think it was important so if anything I felt more ignored than rather overseen to an extreme”.

The longing for being protected and cared for which for her embody the feeling of love from the Other is mostly voiced when referring to her adolescence.

“I did not ask and they did not offer. I did go to school for a long long time but it was all by my own”.

The split that Debra conveys throughout the interview is her desire from an early age to make it on her own and her feeling of rejection by the Other expressed in her own questioning and doubting of the Other,

“It was not a matter of needing him to do these things. It’s not that. I can do for myself. I can take care of myself. It’s a matter of feeling like he cares and like he wants to help and I feel that I would like to do that for him in his life as well and it’s harder because I think he expects to be treated in the same way as he is treating me and that, he does not expect me to take care of him at all. In a way it is a deficit for me also because now I feel like I’m not doing anything for him and that makes me feel less invested in the relationship. It’s an expression of love for me so, it makes the relationship less loving”.

“I’m still not convinced that he loves me and I’m not sure where that’s going to go. I am convinced now, it is more clear to me that my view of how you demonstrate love is not necessarily someone else’s and consequently, he could be demonstrating love all the time and I am not seeing it”.

Love, control and freedoom intertwine and there is somewhat of a confusion of how love is expressed, almost a fear of it, of letting go when one is in love because of the fear to loose her own freedoom,

“I have always had a space. I think that in the last ten years, I really have come into my own so that I feel pretty secure in terms of who I am and what I am capable of”.

and the fear to loose love because of who she is,

“I must be very independent. Well, I sure hope that this not a threat to him because I don’t want to deal with that”,

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even though,

"I feel pretty free in the marriage. You have to commit a certain time and energy to have a successful relationship and so, that in itself is restrictive, keeps you from doing other things but it was a conscious choice and when I think about that, I feel it is time well-spent. I feel that I have more choices today. Because in a way I think that I have more freedom now than I did as a single person and that was partly because as a single person, first of all, I had to carry the burden of everything along. I did not have anybody else to share and lean on"

...searching to eventually reach the fine medium of being taken care of while at the same time remaining free and independent.

The feeling of rejection that she experienced as a teenager is very much part of that individual self that she is trying to define in voicing that, "The biggest gap for me is trying to deal with this loss of romantic sort of lover kind of situation that I am missing that I feel is lacking right now" and the need to achieve a successful career which validates the social construct,

"Working validates me and it was part of the experiment to come to Egypt knowing I was coming without a job and that it may be, it was possible that I would not work at all, that I would just go to school. It was challenging to me emotionally but I felt it was an important challenge to face because I find myself defining myself by my work too much, giving that too much value, not seeing value in myself just strictly as a human being, not stopping long enough to take a breath and see who I am. Just very busy trying to accomplish. I think I have a need to prove a lot to myself and I have very high expectations of myself".

The split is also seen in wanting to be in control while at the same time not wanting to be responsible for the Other,

"I have this constant battle in myself about those kinds of things. I don't want somebody else controlling me but at the same time, I don't want to have to be responsible for him. I don't want to be financially responsible for him and I don't want to come home everyday and see him lying on the sofa with a book. I am not going to respect that. I know I won't. I tried to do it for a few months and I would have a hard time respecting that. I feel that people have a responsibility to take care of themselves. I try to teach Alison that".
This is an interesting point which almost comes into contrast with her earlier quote expressing her wish to care for the Other feeling that, “In a way it is a deficit for me also because now I feel like I’m not doing anything for him and that makes me feel less invested in the relationship”. Again the social construct and the existential come into friction.

She is caught between the duty to perform in the household because feeling guilty if this is not done,

“But let’s just say, there is some huge mess in the middle of the living-room, it does not matter whose mess it is, why it is there, anything, I am going to feel personally responsible for that. I feel that they come and they think, she does not take very good care of her home. She does not take very good care of her home. Now this is a problem, I think I have much more so than it’s one that’s coming at me externally”,

and holding on to her self without having to face rejection, “Because in the past the independence seems to carry a price that if I tried to be independent, then, I would have to face a certain amount of rejection or anger or something else”.

However in trying to find the harmony between the two selves, the job plays an important function because it is from it that she derives strength.

“The two things I did not want to be was a nurse or a teacher because they were girls’ jobs and I did not want girl’s jobs. From the very beginning I was sensitive to those issues and I did not want to be restrained or constrained by any kind of labels. The society at large treated those kind of things less than important and anything that was dominated by women to me meant that the men did thought they were too good to do that and therefore, I was too good to do that work as well. I think perhaps that was my view of things”.
She wants more from her work than what an ordinary job can give her because it gives her not only power and recognition but also it adresses her individual self because she is looking beyond the realm of simply the job,

“What’s important to me is that I feel the way that I spend my time is valuable not only to myself as an individual, my own growth and learning process but also to my world. And that’s why this particular job that I have does not feel meaningful because I don’t feel that it is the kind of work that affects people around me as much as I would like to”.

A further split is therefore experienced in both the major issues of her life, career and marriage. She is aware of the frictions of the split, “It is this dichotomy all the time. I am always struggling, a lot is my own internal struggle but the gift is that I am seeing it now and I am greatful for that”.

.... and reassesses them as she is entering a third marriage, “‘It is an internal process as well. I am trying to reassess how I define myself, by what virtues I value myself. I am taking another look at them”.

because,

“Marriage is an issue in my life. It seems to be important and yet, lately, I have been wondering why.”
Couple #4

Researcher’s Reflections

Lissa.” My perception of marriage has changed over the years. A long time, way way back when we were having trouble in the Boston years, I discovered that you cannot live through the other person. There is no way the other person can make you happy. And that was like one of those epiphanies, those moments in life where you kind of see everything clearly and you decide from then on, “Well, if I can’t be happy, nobody can make me happy. I have to make me happy.” Before it was kind of Barbie and Ken kind of stuff. Come on Ken, let’s get married and have a good life from now on. We’ll have that big house in the suburbs...... A perfect marriage? A friend of mine once told me that the perfect marriage would be to have his own house in the same plot of land and there would be a little tunnel connecting it. When I think about that it makes sense......”

Robert: ”I think that marriage is basically what I expected. I don’t feel that, “Oh my gosh this is a lot different than what I thought of being married”. It is not. It is very much what I expected and it’s very much like what I saw my parents had. I’m very comfortable in that. I don’t wish I was not married or that I had taken another path and remained single. My life is pretty much matching the go with the flow, the American style, what my parents had, no dramatic revelations or regrets”.

I met Lissa almost eight years ago in the streets shopping. Because we had daughters of similar ages we introduced each other and exchanged phone numbers. I had many soulful conversations with Lissa especially when I came back to Egypt alone to study. I lived above their flat.

I had met Robert many times on campus when I was running but I believe that I got to know him better during the interview.

Childhood Memories

Siblings

Lissa. I was the second of four. I have an older brother who is two years older. We came in two every two years, then there’s myself, my sister, and then my little brother.

Robert. I have a brother. He’s eleven months younger than I am. I’m the oldest.
Lissa. We were latch-key kids, pretty much the first ones on the block. It did not really bother me. Dad had taught me how to clean the house. The only thing that was bad I think is that I had far more responsibilities than my children do. I was responsible for making dinner. Brothers were treated like mini-kings which is really kind of surprising given how Mom was so liberated herself. Actually, my dad helped more than my brothers ever did but my brothers were sickly as children and this may have contributed to their lack of ability around the house. For sure, there was a gender difference.

Robert. When it had to do about decisions about me and my brother, it seemed like my mother would make the decisions more than my father. My father stayed away. Whenever we had to ask for something, it seemed that we had to ask my mother and she was the one who made the decisions. The big decisions were left to us almost.

Lissa. You could not just be a regular old person with a job. All of a sudden you had to find yourself a wonderful occupation because you were this intelligent person that normal occupation were too dull for you because you were too special. It did not matter, boy or girl.

Robert. I don’t remember being told where I was going to go to school. I remember discussing those things with my parents but I don’t ever remember them making those decisions for me. I remember I made the decisions when it came to those things and they were supportive of those decisions.

Lissa. My older brother wanted to be a helicopter pilot but he had crummy eyes. He wanted to join the army or something but my mother absolutely refused. This is the time of Vietnam... So, he did not go. He buckled under the parental pressures. So, he became a mechanical engineer just like Dad. Then he decided that’s not it and went back to law school and became a lawyer, makes lots of money but still wishes he was a helicopter pilot. So there.

My sister went on to get her masters in Sociology and Urban Planning and she is working as an office manager around her two boys right now. It was her choice She kind of liked education and did not really want to put her big feet in the old world.

The other brother got a bachelor’s in History and I think he joined the army by his choice as an officer and hated it once he was there. He found out that the military is full of idiots....Then he has kind of fallen into professional jobs. He certainly has not lived up to his potential. He was the brightest in the family, went to school for the gifted, etc...Don’t detect any grief in my voice when I say that.

Sending the kids away to college was not standard in my family. Actually, I was the only one who went away to college. I paid for half of it and my parents paid for half. At the same time my younger brother was attending the school for the gifted which the tuition was just as high as my college tuition. So, I don’t know if they were strapped for cash. And my older brother was also in college.
Lissa. My parents were a little unusual. My father was quite a little bit older than my mother. She was nineteen and he was thirty eight. Considering the fact that he had a younger brain and she had an older brain...

Robert. My dad never really gave me much direction. I would talk to my mom about those things. He was a role model in other ways. Not necessarily in terms of career although he was an engineer. Maybe it had something to do with it. I was not really interested in his work. I never went to his office or anything like that. My brother is a civil engineer too.

Lissa. My mother slowly worked on her bachelors, finished that, went back to work full-time back to dental hygienist when I was about eleven. And she did that with a vengeance. It was the seventies, go, go boots, the whole bit, blonde hair wigs, lovers, etc. Poor Dad! Luckily Dad had lots of good hobbies. She got through that phase and she went back to school for her masters and she decided to do Sociology and Management. She did that relatively quickly and then, went on to her doctorate and got that. Pretty good mom!

Robert. My father worked for IBM for forty years. He stayed with them for forty years. He also got a masters degree in Mathematics during his working time.

Lissa. My mother may have been working when she was just married then stopped working, went to suburbia and started having children. By the time my little brother popped around, she’d already done the suburban mom thing. She was ready to try new things.

Robert. My Mom is a nurse and when I was younger she worked in a hospital as a nurse and then, when I was in elementary school or later, she was a nurse at a community college in my town. She practiced nursing. The community college had a nurse on call and she stayed there. After that, she quit and became a nurse practitioner. She went on another degree in nurse practitioner and she worked for a family practice in my town until she retired last year. She worked all the time, my father worked all the time when I was growing up.

Lissa. I remember her going through her guitar phase and Peter, Paul and Mary phase when she had a guitar on the front step, trying to learn how to play. She went through the bridge phase, she went through the volunteer phase. Now, as an older person I can kind of appreciate all these phases but at the time... She went through the cute little frock phase and that really did not pan out very well.

Robert. Inside the house, I think that the work was shared very much. In fact, my father did more the cooking than my mother in general. My mother was not a good cook and I never thought she paid much attention to that kind of stuff, to the domestic side of a woman. She was more of a career lady.

Lissa. My father would have never minded if my mother had worked. No, in fact he wanted her to become more independent, I don’t know if it was some kind of weird
thing but he always felt that she should be able to support herself because he was so much older than her and worried about her that if he should die young, she should be able to take care of herself. So, she decided to go back to night school.

**Robert.** *I never felt that my father had control of thing.* It was pretty fair, pretty even although my mother took more of a role in the kid rearing stuff. I also thought that it was quite an equal deal. I don’t think that she came home to a second job because my father helped a lot.

**Lissa.** When my mother finished the doctorate, Dad died. He had cancer for two years.... Life should have been good and sweet, brother was graduating from high school and college, college and dad’s gone. Self-fulfilling prophecy. As soon as she finished the education, he was out of the picture. Weird!

**Robert.** When my mom was working we had a maid coming once a week, Lucille for years to clean the house real good and that was the only thing that was done. Even making the beds in the morning, my mother did that.

**Lissa.** My mother did more of the advising and the nurturing of me and my brother. As a teenager, I was closer to her. My father went to work everyday and came back from work. Yes, he did a lot of stuff for us but he never communicated those things to us. It was mainly my mother. Mostly she was there when we were home.

I would say that my parents’ marriage was pretty darn liberal. My mom put her whole heart and soul to the work she did as a housemaker when we were younger. She was a great mom. But you could tell the focus had shifted. The house became our responsibility. Actually, my dad taught me how to clean it and he oversought because my mother worked on the weekend.

**Robert.** For that day and age, it was more of a liberal marriage because my mother was a working woman as far back as I can remember and that’s back in the early sixties and she always worked and she made a lot of the decisions for us.

We did our childhood thing and Mom and Dad managed the house. They did all the cooking and the cleaning and we never even did the dishes or were forced to do the dishes or anything. They shared everything pretty much equally I have to say. My father cleaned.

**Lissa.** My father never said very much, he was very observant. He was less of a person for directing than my mother. *My mother was one of these people who always wanted to direct the show.* Control, I guess. But my dad no.

**Robert.** My father did not mind that my mother was working. My father is open-minded.

Although my mother was a provider, I also feel she was the strict one. I remember being slapped a few times by my mother probably deserving and my father, in my whole life, never touched me, never hit me, nothing. But he was standing aside, maybe he had his role and maybe I’m doing the same thing. I don’t think that it was
like, “Ok, Dad sits back and he does not say anything until the big decision and what he says goes, no, not like that.”

No, my dad did not spend much time with me. He was in the house, then we talked, we communicated. It was dad and he was there. I was in Little League and he would take me to the games. Would he show up for practices, him and mom, both? No. Would they show up for the games? Yeah, when they could. I did not feel wanting of anything but did he take me to throw catch? No. Now that I look back, I see it. I’m acting much like father acted. I still think I’m a good father but I feel I could be a better father in terms of doing more things.

Aspirations-Expectations

Education/Work

**Lissa.** I went to college.... I had a care-free life. For aspirations for my family, everybody of course with that education flowing around was expected to do well in life. You were expected to go to college and finish and there were certain occupations that were really kind of frowned upon as being too pedestrian. For example, a nurse. That was “Yuk, what would anyone want to do that?” It was probably mostly my mother. It must have been all that seventies stuff. Teacher, yuk, teachers were bad even though she was a teacher herself she said, “Those who can’t do teach.” Ok, nice thoughts, thanks Mom!

**Robert.** I never remembered my parents pushing for education. I never remembered them say, “You will go to college.” I always just assumed I would do it.

**Lissa.** Originally, I guess I wanted to be a marine biologist but kind of fell off that track when my parents thought that going away to school to Florida was too far away. They wanted to keep me closer for the first few years. I lived in New York state, Buffalo, the suburbs and I went to school instead in up state New York near the Canadian border. Buffalo was bad I thought but they did not even have snow days in that place.

**Robert.** I did not know what I wanted to do. I did not go in the engineering the first two years at the community college. It was a liberal arts education and during that time my mom knew the counselors at the community college very well. Because I was confused about what I wanted to do, she initiated some testing to see my interests, what orientation I might have to try to help direct me but my parents never told me you should do this or you should do that.

**Lissa.** I went and started photography, something that, at the time, I really wanted to do but unfortunately, *I picked out the wrong school*. It turned out that the photography department was smaller than in my high school. I could never get into any photography classes because they made you do all sorts of stupid things first like paint and draw and shit like that and I can’t do either of those things. So, I was basically
having a really good time, partying and discovering some pretty interesting things
about life. I think I was pretty sheltered before that.

Robert. The first two years of college I went to the community college my mother
worked at because I was not exactly sure of what I wanted to do and because my
grades were not that good. Getting out of high school I was not really serious about
schooling. Then after two years there, I decided to leave and I went to a university
about an hour and a half from home. I stayed there one semester and barely went to
class and drank, smoked pot and had a great time. I decided I was not going to stay
there because I knew I was not ready for that. So, I went back home and I worked for
six months in a couple of factories and things and then I went back to the community
college for one more year and completed an associate in engineering. Then I went
away to school, to Clarkson University which was way up state New York and my
brother was there a year before me so he was there my year at the community college.

Lissa. I wanted to go to FIT in New York. It’s a fashion institute of technology. It’s
where you really learn how to be a photographer. And it probably would have been
good....

Robert. After the liberal arts education, I was confused still for a while. I did not
know what I wanted to do at that time still. Yes, I did have some interest. I used to
work summers mostly outside and I liked to work outside and I liked working with
my hands. I house painted a lot and roofing and siding and things like that and
construction jobs odds and ends. So, I had a vision that it was more of that outside
type of work but I was not exactly sure.

One day, I decided maybe I tried this program called civil technology. This was after
the liberal arts degree, the associate degree and I went to the civil technology which is
more like surveying, it’s outdoor work but it is less than an engineer. I went to this
initiation in the auditorium. I stayed there for an hour and I was not feeling right, still
not right. I was still searching. And I went back to my mother’s office and I was
telling her, this is not right. And she said, “Fine, we’ll find something”. I went to the
men’s room. This is interesting.

I went to the men’s room and I was standing at the urinal and in walked Mr. Foster.
He stood next to the urinal with me and he asked me what I was doing there today
because it was in the middle of the summer and I told him I went to the civil
technology deal and I did not feel right. And he started talking to me about, “What do
you want to do? What do you like?” “Civil technology, I like that stuff sort of but
I’m not really into, I think I want a little more out of it.” So, he said, “It sounds like
you want civil engineering so why don’t you come up to my office. So, we went to his
office and he showed me the program of civil engineering, what they do. We talked
about civil engineering and I decided then to sign up for civil engineering. I signed up
for the civil engineering program at that community college which was only a two
year deal and because I had enough credits, I finished in one year the associate degree
in civil and I went to finish it at the four year school. It was a weary fate.

Lissa. Yes, I wanted to go back to school but basically it was directionless.
I went back to school. Today I’m doing correspondence courses in biology and again it’s because it’s going to give me a lot of choices. In typical me fashion, I have not chosen an occupation yet so I am just on a pathway instead.

Now, I also would not mind a masters in genetic counseling. That I think I can do overseas. I can also do a masters in education. That, I can do overseas. I can also do physician assistant program. That, I can only do in the States.

Robert. I’m very happy the way my career is going. Of course, I’m concerned about what’s going to happen. I want to move up.

Marriage

Robert. I’m very comfortable with marriage. I think I’m that type. I don’t think I’m the type that would be very good without being married. My friends I remember betting with my friends and they said I would be the first one married and Steve my friend bet me that if he was not married by such and such a year, I’d pay him fifty bucks a year. He is still not married and I owe him about five hundred bucks. I guess everyone thought that of me too, that I was the marrying type. I was not a wild crazy guy really, kind of boring.

Lissa. Yes, I guess I thought about getting married. But, I got cold feet. I decided that I really did not want to get married that life was just too much fun and my mother made me get married. She said that it was too late to stop everything now and that I had to get married. So, anyway I got married. I was really having second thoughts. I have pictures walking down the aisle. Just as I walked down the aisle, my dad said to me, “Now remember this, you know you really don’t have to do this.”

Robert. I did not think much about marriage. I assumed without much thought that I would get married and have kids. I did not think about it much. I just figured it would happen eventually. I was not looking for any girl to get married to or anything like that. It would happen.

Lissa. I guess I thought I loved Robert and why not. And you kind of think, well she dropped out of school and she latched on to him to get married because she did not know what else to do. I don’t know how true that is.

Robert. When I look back on it I was not too thoughtful. I did not think much about those things. When I first met her I had no immediate intentions of getting married. We dated for about a year before we got engaged and we met in the last semester of my senior year there. She was in a school next door in the same town.

Lissa. I don’t know how much I pushed to get married because I wanted to get out of my parents’ house. When I looked back, I don’t know my motivations so clearly. What I do know is that a year before I met Robert, I met a guy who was looking for that, for someone. He was looking for some way out of school. He was looking for that and I sensed it and I did not get involved with him and the very next girl he dated,
she got pregnant. He got his excuse to leave school. He had to get married and to get a job. So, I don’t know how much I was looking for the same thing that he was. I would say no. Because if I was, I would have done what he did. I would have ended up with him, in some shack somewhere in up state New York with all bunch of little babies running around.

**Robert.** I think I remember going home from Cleveland in the fall to my parents’ house and talking to my mother outside in the fall because she was cleaning up the yard. I remember talking to her about Lissa and thinking that I was getting pretty serious about her. My family did not put any pressure on me. Absolutely not, never. It was totally my decision. Then, we got married.

I was still immature. I did not think that maturely. I thought get married and live together.

**Lissa.** My marriage ended up being more traditional than I would have liked and that was because Robert was a civil engineer and the company he was working for built things which meant we moved. So, the day after we got married, we ended up moving to up state New York, back in that area again.

**Robert.** If I look back on my marriage, I guess I’d have to say it’s very much like my parents’ relationship.

**Lissa.** But the real and whole reason for being married is to have kids and I’d never do it again. And he has actually asked me to marry him again. He wants to renew our vows and I looked at him and said, “Come on, you know that I’d never get married again. I’d married you once. Why the hell would I do it again?” Which is true for me and I have no need to renew my marriage vows because to me it would like ok... doing it again for another twenty years. Why would I do it?

**Robert.** I did not have a lot of preconceived notions about what marriage should be, what she should be doing and what I should be doing. I think it naturally went into the fact that I was working and I worked and if she had worked it would not have bothered me a bit. I did not force it on her, we never discussed it. “I got a job, ok.”

**Lissa.** I’ve always had to kind of keep my views to myself because he does not believe them which is one of them, that I’d never get married again. I’ve said that to him and it shocks him, “Oh come on, you’d get married again. If I died, you’d get married again.” No, I would not. I’d live with him.

**Robert.** I think that marriage is basically what I expected. I don’t feel that, “Oh my gosh this is a lot different than what I thought of being married”. It is not. It is very much what I expected and it’s very much like what I saw my parents had. I’m very comfortable in that. I don’t wish I was not married or that I had taken another path and remained single.

**Lissa.** A perfect marriage? A friend of mine tells me that the perfect marriage would be to have his own house in the same plot of land and there would be a little tunnel connecting it. When I think about that it makes sense.....
Conflicts

Resolving Differences

**Lissa.** While Chris was a baby and we were still in Virginia, he was exploring different areas, went to talk to people and decided that he wanted to go to graduate school, Cornell. I won’t tell you that it was easy because it was not. I guess I was a little, “Well, gosh.”

We ended up living with his parents for the summer which is horrible for me and his parents and Robert decided to leave Chris and I at his house because the school he wanted to go to was an hour away and he would live there during the week and come home on weekends but I did not like it. I did not want to do it. And I actually had gone home to visit my mother and she was furious too. She encouraged me let’s say, strongly, to not do that for good reasons. If you’re apart it’s harder to get back together again for a lot of different reasons. So, we ended up moving into an apartment in Ithaca and all together.

We were dirt poor and we did not want to rely on Robert’s parents, took out a loan for school but we had no money and the worst part was that we had bought a car when Chris was a baby and we had not intending that Robert was going to be leaving his job. So, we still had that car payment and we did not have enough money to make the car payment and go to school.

So, the agreement with Robert’s parents was that they would pick up the car payment while he was in school. And there was the bad part. Every month, we’d go every couple of weekends to see them so they were only an hour away, I had to ask them for the check. Not Robert. Because I was now the father-mother.

Robert was totally free from responsibilities so he could do this, do the program in one year. And I was the father-mother, bill payer, etc...What kind of decisions are there to make when you have no money?

**Robert.** I guess there is a definition of role in the house in the sense that I get up in the morning, I do my own thing to get ready for me to go to work and, I walk out the door. She gets up in the morning, makes the kids’ lunch and attend to the kids.

**Lissa.** The responsibilities were shifting again and it was tough reacclimating our relationship to going from no control, Robert wanted no control to suddenly wanting all control because we had done a huge shift because I was again mommy with a small child, no say in anything. Back here it was Robert making money again and making a lot more than I ever made.

I would say whoever earns the money in our house has had the say and I don’t know how true this is for every relationship. I’m looking forward to the day I earn my own money.
Robert. When she’s here I say to myself but she’s doing such a good job, she’s so good with them, she’s so patient, she’s supportive and she’s all the things I think she should be outside of a few things that I kind of maybe feel that I step back and feel that she’s doing a better job. In the long run, her ways will make them a better person because I think that part of what make a good adult is the fact that they are good parents and that their parents were open, were good with them, were patient, were understanding, listened to them, were calm with them. She has more of that maybe than I do.

Lissa. We’ve reversed the roles before but this does not really works because I can’t earn the amount of money that he can. I can’t at this point but I think I can but not at this point because I don’t have the background in education which denies me opportunities. Sort of like a black man in downtown Chicago....That kind of stuff. I can see his point of view. “I sympathize Brother!”

But if one day I earned that kind of money, it would be ok with him and it would be really cool with me. I don’t think that his role would feel threatened. I think he would really like it but I will say that I have had trouble getting him to realize that it’s our money that’s sitting in the bank because he slipped plenty of times, “My money, my cds....” And this pisses me off and I say to him, “Excuse-me? But you know you would not be earning that money if I was not at home doing everything else to enable you to earn that money without stresses.”

Robert. I enjoy when she goes for a short period of time and when she is not there and I’m number one. She’s not around and I’m the one the kids come to and I’m the one the kids need. It develops a little bit of communication there and bonding that we normally don’t have when she’s around.

Lissa. I was working but he still wanted the whole control. We were working and we were saving for a house. I’d say one thing which has always gotten Robert and I through the rough spots and there were plenty of times where I said, “This is just not working. I don’t want to do this anymore.”

I had very big doubts whether our marriage would survive in Boston, the first year in Boston when we were in the hobbies. I said, “Goddamn it no way! I just sent this guy through his masters program and I’m going to stick for some of the gravy.

I’ve been through all the rotten years but one cannot tell these things to Robert. He does not think on deeper, darker grounds. He only wants to know the good stuff so, I just made a commitment that I was not going to give up and that the role of a single parent really sucked. Oh sure, I was stuck.

Robert. I think that when I was home in the States, then, I had two days off. What was I doing on Saturday and Sunday? I was mowing the lawn and I was cleaning the cars. It’s something that’s always there that thought but on second thought, I don’t do anything about it. It’s like smoking I want to change that too and I want to quit smoking and I don’t do it that much. It’s like you know you should quit and I know I should spend more time with the kids because this is the years. When they leave it’s over man but I guess I don’t make enough of an effort to resolve that problem.
Lissa. So, when you think about it, when I was working, he had to watch the kids. When I had to go to the hospital in the morning, I had to watch the kids. When I went to night school, he had to watch the kids. And he also had to watch the kids at night because again with my kids in mind, I went to school in the mornings and I did my hospital rotations when I had to, that I could not be flexible about. But I would try to be home, try to pick up Jessie from preschool, spend the afternoon with the kids and I had evening courses. It was after dinner, so, I would do all that but he would have to do all the nighttime thing. And then, on the weekends, I worked a double shift at a nursing home in the evenings from 3 till 11 or 3 till 12 to pay for the baby-sitter for the week.

There was a lot of partnership. It was not easy.

Lissa. Robert’s company offered him the chance to come to Egypt two years and he said, “This is too good of an opportunity to pass up.” It was a common decision and for two years, there was no problem. I had a five year leave of absence from my nursing school. My nursing professors wanted me to come back and finish and the time, seven years later, we’re still here. Robert switched jobs in the meantime, never ended up going back to the company that we came here with.

Well, the nursing thing I was disappointed not to finish something I was really close and I’d worked very hard for. I had sacrificed a lot to do that. I mean time with my children, time with me too. We talked about it. He understood but I don’t know how much he understood because now he makes lots of money and he’s definitely looking forward to my finishing again because I’m going to be able to pay for the kids’ college tuition without making too much of a dent into the savings account. It’s still there. I don’t know how much, “Well, she’ll become a better person for it. I don’t know how much of that is left.”

Any major decisions other than I’m going fishing, we both do. And he has respect for my opinion but....

My work, my study is invisible isn’t it because I am doing it during the day when no one else is around. It’s invisible. They can’t see me doing it so I’m thinking I should be doing it more often when they’re around and not be so accommodating to them.

Robert. “Lately with Chris. having all his kid friends and everything, sometimes, I’ll go in the bedroom on Friday, shut the door and turn on the computer even to play around”.

Lissa. No, I feel that there is no support in terms of what I do everyday because he does not ask about my daily activities. We’re not communicating right now except on several decibels higher, “You’re not letting me study right now...” But if you saw Robert lately, you would probably understand why I have not made more an issue out of it. And also, the study is not as hard as I’m making it to be. I’ve already gone through a lot of it and it helps that I got good grades in it. You know I can do it. And it is hard but not as much time consuming as it could be.
Robert. Sometimes, I might handle things a little bit too harshly, more strict because I have a feeling that kids need to have some control and if there’s a big difference between me and Lissa, I feel she’s a little too free and not maybe strict enough. For example, I think sometimes Chris is out of control. He goes all over the place. He’s never home. He’s always out of the house. “Did he practice piano today, no. Did he do his homework, well, I think so, he says he did. Did he or did he not? I mean are you checking this? Maybe I feel, I don’t have the time. You’re home with him, you need to keep control of this.” Maybe it’s not very good but that’s the truth. Probably this comes because of my own upbringing.

Lissa. I’ve already sent one course back because it was not possible to do it here and rather than being responsible for dropping a course and having a negative image in my husband’s mind, I realized that, ok, I used my wits in my marriage a little bit more than most people. I gave him the course book and I said, “Robert, I think that I’m missing something right now. I don’t see how I can do this course if I’m being asked to town maps and town plans from places I cannot get to. Now, if I had said, “Robert, I’m dropping the course”, I would have had a real problem, he would have been on my case. “Why are you dropping? You need this course...” Instead, I gave him the book and said, “Would you look at this and let me know if you think I can do it. I just don’t think the materials are here.” He looked at it and said, “No, you can’t do it. send it back.” Ok, no confrontation. If I had said that I could not do it, it would not have been, no questions asked.

I always felt that I maybe sneaky around, manipulate him really a little bit more than he probably know he’s being manipulated to get whatever I want in the end. My mother always said I was good at that.

Robert. Why I tell the kids this a little bit because I can’t bother about it but also I think she is going to have a better decision. Very often if I say “ya” and then she brings up something else that I should not have given them the agreement and so, she’s more aware of the whole situation. So, they come to me and ask me something and I don’t know the whole situation. She’s much more active as my mother was.

Lissa. Our last argument was about money, money again. The great friction. I knew I spent a lot in Florida. Our vacation was very expensive. We spent a lot of money but you can’t not spend money when you’ve got two adults size children, one small size. You’ve got to buy them clothes. We went to Luxembourg, Brussels, Germany, we stayed at the beach house with his parents, we paid for some of that and I have to pay my way when I am in Florida.

I was guiltless because I did not spend more than I had to for a change. So, I could actually say to him when he pouted over the bills like he did last week that we’d spent too much money...I looked at him in the eye and said, “The total is..... does it make you feel better?” Don’t talk to me, You’re not even sorry.” And I said, “No, I’m not sorry and I laughed.” And of course, the very bad thing to do when somebody else is pretty upset about spending money, “You know, I would feel guilty if I’d spend more than I should have but I did not and this is how much things cost” and he accepted. Ok, done! and I walked away whereas a couple of years ago, I may have said, “I’m
really sorry, I spent too much money. I won’t do it again.” But it’s also his kids and they need stuff. I don’t buy it here and that’s how much it costs.

Robert. We’re trying to spend more time together. We’re making an effort to sit and close the door on the patio or something every day and just talk for a few minutes. If there’s something we need to talk about, we try to make sure that the kids, “Get out of here, we’re talking.”

Lissa. Sometimes he pouts, why is she speaking up? Why does not she go along with me? He’s the kind of guy, luckily maybe it takes a little while but it finally sinks in to whatever may have some kind of sense to it or maybe, he understands. I don’t give a shit anymore whatever the argument is.

I guess I just ask to be acknowledged and appreciated and unfortunately because I like to hear it ever so often, it’s probably not often enough you know, just pat me on the head, “Good work, good work, good girl.”

**Representation/Vision of the Other**

Robert. We got married on a Saturday and on Sunday, we moved way up state New York where I had a nine months project and we lived way out of nowhere. I would go in the morning at six, a guy would pick me up and I would not come home until seven or eight. After work at five or six, we’d go to the bar and I’d sit there with him and drink until whatever and come home to Lissa. She’s sitting there in the house all day with nothing to do. It was unfair. Towards the end I realized it but during the time, in the beginning, I was not really thinking that way. I was not mature enough to understand.

Lissa. Then, we got married. I had a car and it was cool. I could go to the grocery store.....Independence!

I ended up in the shack anyway because Robert worked and that was really pretty shitty. He dumped me off in this crappy little town where the main street was a dead-end into the thousand islands of St Lawrence’s river. I mean for Godsake, Abby Hoperleen was hiding away a mile away in an island in the middle of the river and nobody ever knew that he was there, so where the hell was I. Robert was working on a construction site about an hour away and he would leave at six in the morning and come home at eight o’clock at night. Basically, he slept at our house.

So, there I was, newly married, just twenty-two, dumped up in a dead-end town. This was not my view of what my married life was going to be like.

No, we did not want kids then. It was a little too early.

Robert. I did not have much concern for the fact that maybe she was a little lonely or something like this in this town. I did not expect her and in the beginning I remember, she’d get up and made me breakfast. I did not expect that. I was hoping she would make my lunch for me but she never did and it was nothing that bothered me too
much because my mother never made lunches for us. We’d always buy the lunches because she was a working lady.

Lissa. In Boston there was not enough money to go around. So, I decided, “Ok, I am going to go back to school.” He was loving it. Robert has always wanted me to make a lot of money and never at all looked at it as a threat to his role. I fact, he thought that it would increase our bank book. He liked it. His mom always worked, she went back to work when he was in elementary school and he saw my mom working. He always was afraid that because I guess his old girl-friend’s mother was a stay at home mom who watched soap and became very narrow minded, that could happen to me.

He did not want to be married to somebody with a narrow little skull. He was very supportive about my going back to school and this was actually a good period in our marriage because I was going to school but I had an early morning hospital. Some rotations, I had to be there at six in the morning. So, all of a sudden Robert had to make breakfast and get the kids up for school and had a glimmer, “Oh, that’s what she’s been doing all this time. It’s not just fun and games”.

This is what he wanted for me too. I had just got inducted in the Honour Society. Now you can imagine going back into my background. I had left college. Now, I am doing incredibly well. I had a 4.00 average, inducted in the Honour Society, I had two nursing practicum and two classes left to go to get my nursing degree.

He supported it whole heartedly. No, he did not resent that role of more of a parent. He was always a good parent but I’d say more of a role. He was very good at it and he is a very nurturing kind of guy and because there was always that possibility that one day I would be pulling in the bucks and he was always very supportive about it. That what he wanted.

Robert. When I think about Lissa studying and having a goal, that’s good because when the kids go, there’ll be a large hole and she would hopefully fill that void with a career. I hope for it because I don’t want her to sit at home and not do anything because I think women like that are not interesting and they become petty. I had a girl friend in high school for four years from tenth grade on and her mother never worked. I always kind of got the feeling her mother was worried about all kind of stuff she should not be. My mom was not petty like that. I see it here. All these women have nothing to do and if they were in the States working, they probably would be different but they have a lot of time on their hands.

Lissa. Now, we are at the point where I have a new-born baby in my arm and that’s at the hospital, my husband tells me who is now very unhappy in his job that he wants to go back to school to be a doctor. This is not the thing that you tell a new-born mother. He was very unhappy and we decided that he needed to go back to school and get a higher degree than what he had.

My life was hell when Robert was not happy. If one of you is really unhappy, it’s always been my feeling that ok, we’re married and it’s my job to support whatever what I can do to make the other person happy. Sure, we talked a lot at the time and we had a good communication level on it.
But the only thing bad about it is I don’t really like the way that he did it. Robert tends to make decisions a little rushly and not to think them through so logically where I would have done it a little differently. Maybe I would have worked a little longer, saved up a little money, put it aside instead of jumping from one side to the other.

Robert was totally free from responsibilities so he could do this, do the program in one year.

I felt like ok, here I am. I’m jumping from one thing to the other and Robert would do stupid things like park the car on a no parking area and get a parking ticket when we had no money. So, you can imagine the frustration level there.

He was a student again without any responsibility except for he was still a good dad and he would pick up Chris and I and take us driving around the back roads and watch him.

Robert. Lissa worked as a waitress maybe in a little restaurant. No, I did not mind if she worked. If it’d kept her busy, I think maybe that was what we thought about. I don’t believe we discussed this what our life was going to be as a married couple. We just went along. We want to have children at this age, we want to raise them this way. We never discussed this and we still do not discuss it. we just sort of go.

Lissa. Life was unsure to say the least and I remember at one point just saying, “Look I can’t take this anymore. I’m going back to my parents’ house for the weekend. You have to get rid of the coakroaches in this place or I’m not coming back”. Because everywhere you look, there’d be a coakroach.

It was not my dream idea of an apartment but it was just what we could afford. It had two burners for the stove, a refrigerator underneath the stove and a little sink on the side. Does this sound familiar to you? Have you lived in crappy places? We had just enough room for a baby. But luckily it’s Boston and actually, we had quite a good time walking around in the weekends as a family. But stress level was high I would say.

After a while, I worked at a grocery store and I really hated it because it was so demeaning. The managers who work at grocery store are real assholes. They tell grown women, “Sweep the floor and do it good.” I lasted about a month.

After that wonderful year in Boston, we decided to move out to the suburbs where we got another one bedroom apartment because that’s all we could afford. Chris slept with us in his little cot and I worked again for a temporary job, paying people. That was the best damn payroll you could ever think of. They had to have two people to replace me.

Robert was involved in taking care of the kids to a certain degree but at the same time, they had asked him to be a construction supervisor of all the people in the construction staff for his engineering firm as well as being an engineer. He was really
quite busy and he was also recruited overtime because you got paid overtime at that
time in his company. They were consultants and any overtime he made really helped
our family because we were still running in the negative every single month.

Robert. Sometimes Lissa points out to me that she thinks that I should spend more
time with the kids.

Lissa. He does not help around the house neither do the kids and they need to get
wack up on the side of their head for that one. Jessie comes in this morning telling me
that she does not have any clothes she’d like to wear. “You’re not doing the wash.”
And I raised my head from the pillow and said, “Jessie, your clothes are piled down
on the floor. You’re not just picking them up and putting them away”. This is my own
children doing this to me.

Robert. Sometimes I would like more time with Lisa and we try to make that effort
lately. We went to Amsterdam by ourselves. She was talking last week going to a
hotel for one night, a day and a half, sit by the pool or by ourselves. On occasion, I
feel it’s choking but it’s not a big concern. I’m quite happy with the kids around.

Lissa. I would think that the difference between married and being in a marriage
relationship would be a view of an eighteen year old of marriage which is being
married, prince charming, it’s everything, all that connotates into a little word,
mother, oh, it looks so good.

Robert. Everyone says friendship is important because friendship, of course but are
we friends? Yes, we are friends but when I think of friends I think of maybe Lissa
and Judie or her and some of her other close friend that she’s had in the past. Am I
her friend? I think yes, to some degree. We’re more partners.

Lissa. But being in a marriage relationship is real life, all the crappy stuff, the day to
day stuff that you have to put up with and realizing that, “Ok, that person’s not
perfect, that person is not going to make me happy but I made a commitment to this
and actually, you can substitute Robert with any person in the universe and you’re
still going to have things in the relationship which are going to be the same and
you’re still not going to want to pick up his clothes up on the floor, you’re still going
to get mad at him because he’s used up all the toilet paper and it’s three feet away and
you really need it. Stuff like that.

Robert. Partnership is important. Sharing a life together, helping each other through,
bouncing back with problems, raising the kids. It’s more of a partnership. Friendship,
sort of but not specifically. Loyalty is important, I mean fidelity, faithfulness is
important because I feel once that’s broken then that is a very difficult thing to gain
back and the trust, would it ever really get back. Once that very important thing is
broken, it’s something that’s lost forever. So, it is partnership, loyalty, friendship
somewhat. And companionship throughout life.

Lissa. I feel valued in the relationship. I know he loves me and appreciates me for
several of my characteristics and despises me for others.
But I really feel that Robert supports me. I don’t think he wants me to be independent but he does want me to be something larger than someone I would call with narrow views which I could not be anyway.

**Robert.** I think a woman is more interesting to me who is out there doing her own thing, I will not be threatened if she becomes the vice president of some company. In fact, I would hope that she would.

**Lissa.** No, he does not want me to be independent. I would say no. You’ve picked up on that one rather quickly.

**Robert.** The only thing I am fearful of is that she will find some freedom that she has never felt. Right now she’s quite isolated from other men in that sense. She was going to be a nurse once and I remember thinking, maybe she’ll go out there and meet some hot shot doctor. Right now, you’re both (you and Lissa) quite isolated and you’re not out there. Once you get out there, things can happen and I’m a little concerned. I’m not saying, “Don’t do it!” no, I’m not saying that but certainly I think about it. It could change her such as she sees other things. She might look at me differently, a concern that she might say, “This guy is boring. I met this guy at work who’s dynamic, different than me, different in a way that she kind of like.” You never know.

**Lissa.** Robert has more choices than I do. He can just get up and go and I have always admired people like that and I guess I have to say that maybe I account for others too much and I would like to be a person who can make more choices for herself. Robert does whatever Robert wants. If Robert wanted to go fishing tomorrow, Robert would take time off and he would go. And I would say, ok, fine.

I do think that he would go on a boat for six months. I think that if it is important to him, he would go but he would be able to go because I would be saying, “Go” whereas if I was going on a boat for six months, I think he would be going, “That’s good but gee, I’m really going to miss you.” There are going to be invisible little strings preventing me from going on a boat.....

**Robert.** What’s happened is that when we first got here, we met a lot of people. We were going to parties. Lissa was going to this and that. We met a lot of people. She was doing things by herself. For example, we were very good friends with Judie and Chris who were here. Sometimes, I have feelings that she was spending a lot of times with Judie and not just Judie but other friends who had been here. There was craft night every Monday night and she’d go to craft night. Sometimes, I felt a little second place. And then when the Whitakers left and when her immediate close friends have gone, I’ve said this on a e-mail to Judie that it has been kind of nice because not only she does not have anyone else but it’s kind of only me to some degree and we have been talking more than ever before in that respect, in that same kind of light.

**Lissa.** No, I feel that there is no support in terms of what I do everyday because he does not ask about my daily activities.
I don’t know how much he’s able to see who I am, I’ve always been interested. Do you ever know what anybody else is really for you? I don’t think he knows because I don’t think he’s a reflective person that much.

**Robert.** I would never prevent her from having a career but I can see that sure once that time comes, I’m going to probably at times feel that maybe I’m taking second place to the career. But she has every right to think that feeling towards me. But I hope that it is a balancing act that can be worked out and I’m sure it will be worked out not without periodic feelings of second place.

**Lissa.** But there’s that tug, me wanting to share it. I’m in more control over it. I just want to share and the other person wanting all of it.

If you give someone everything that you are, you give them total control over yourself and they’ll gobble it up and take it and keep it and never give it back but little bits. But I don’t think that Robert would say, “She thinks that she’s aloof so she has more control on our relationship....

**Robert.** I have a little reservation about that, when the kids are gone and it’s two again. I don’t know what it’s going to be like. Scary is not maybe the word, concerned is more. I’m concerned about what we are going to do with ourselves, how we will begin to react with ourselves when the kids are not there. Right now the life downstairs is full. The kids are there, they are running around, they are talking, our minds are going with them but when they’re gone and they’re out of the house, how we’ll react towards each other is a concern sure.

**Lissa.** I’d like to hear whether he feels he’s the backbone of the family. I think it’s split. I’d like to know the answer to that one. That will be an indicator to me of how much respect and confidence he has in me. I think Robert would like to say that he’s the backbone of the family but I think if he thought about it, he’d say that we really share and we do.

**Robert.** I’m not the backbone of this family. I feel she is. I’m the provider of money and the food and the housing but again the kids look to her for the moral and the nurturing and she is very good at it. I still believe that the decision making is hers and quite often I’ll tell the kids, “Go and ask your mother.” And I think that now you’re bringing this up, I’m very much moved into my father’s role and I guess I did not think about it but it progressed into that situation.

**Lissa.** I think Robert takes all of life’s good things, accepts them and would not question unless there was a problem in life. There’re people like that. He sees himself as a happy guy, good dad, loving his family.

**Robert.** To some degree as all men, the family has had some degree of suffering because of my career. It depends how far I move up in this career.
Choices

Situational

Lissa. The first year was pretty screwed up. Also it was pretty hard because my parents did not give me any money to go away to school. I worked over the summer and whatever I had earned, I had to buy books with. So, naturally the first week of school, by the time I had gotten done with buying the clothes I needed for school, I spent everything I had earned on my books and they gave me ten dollars a month for phone bills from then on. Well, it does not cut it. So, I was continually trying to find ways to earn money and worked washing dishes before school. The second year, I worked in a bar.

So, I’m sure they were strapped for cash but there was a difference because if you lived at home you got taken care of but since I chose not to live at home, I got kicked out in the big bad world and, “Ok, make your way, we’ll pay for half, that’s it” which I think it’s kind of setting you up for failure because there’s not enough support. Was it too much to ask? Twenty bucks a month would have been fine!

Of course, working became more alluring because it was instant gratification. To make money, you could kind of see a little glimmer there of the real life instead of this totally unaplicable stuff that I was learning at school and was unhappy about.

So, I started my path on trying to find an honourable way of getting out of college. I tried everything. I applied for the Peace Corps, no, bad time. But you needed a four year degree. They would not take me. I tried a couple of other things I can’t remember now, anything to get out of college.

So, I dropped out of school after two years and moved back home. I went to work. I was intending on registering at home or doing something. Actually, I don’t even know what I was intending of doing at this point. Oh, I know. I applied to work as a stewardess. I got accepted at NorthWest Orient...and the same day, I got accepted to go to stewardess school, Robert asked me to marry him. Well, I picked Robert. I guess I kind of said that I would not mind being a mom now.

.....my mother made me get married. She said that it was too late to stop everything now and that I had to get married. So, anyway I got married. I was really having second thoughts.

I got a job in a bank because I had not finished my education so certain career paths were not open to me. I started a correspondance course interestingly enough in business and dropped out rather quickly because it was really rather boring.

I went back to work to support them and I did not make very much money. I worked as a bank teller. The first few days, I was very sad because there goes my little fantasy of being a mommy at home with a baby but that’s ok because I originally wanted to work anyway. We had a baby-sitter. Actually we had two....
Robert would pick up Chris when he got out of class and played a few hours with him. But when I got home, I really felt burdened because here I was, trying to feed a family, pay rent, do whatever. I was working as a bank teller. I used to bounce checks which was a very bad thing to do, to bounce checks when you’re a bank teller and they would always demand why. Why are you bouncing checks? And I would always say, “Because you’re not paying me enough money. I’m the sole supporter of my family and we don’t have enough to eat. There you go. That’s easy.”

When I came home, it was again I who made dinner and I who took care of Chris, etc. That was my responsibility so Robert could study. For one year.

Then, the dynamics shifted again. Of course, it is the recession. The year before there are only eight people graduated out of the program and they are snapped up half way through their year of Masters program by companies. So, there’s the recession and we’re in bad luck, no one is hiring. And, the best we could do was getting a temporary job with a company in Boston. So, we left most of our possessions in Robert’s parents basement and took a cockroach ridden flat in Beacon Hill in Boston where we had a bedroom that was smaller than our bathroom just big enough to put the crib in. Robert and I slept on the floor for a good month or two months until we could afford to buy a sleeper sofa.

The dream, that the thing too, I’ve always had tossed up in my face during our marriage, “Well, you always have the opportunity to go back to school.” And my answer was, “When?” When did I have the opportunity? When we were moving or when I could snatch a few months in one place, then another, when we decided to put him back to school? What I always felt lacking is the total support I gave Robert. It does not seem that it is following its return. Gee, I’ve really had a sucking marriage.

So, we are back in Boston years, we’ve finally bought a house and I’ve stopped working again because by that time, after I had Jessie, I stopped working because it did not pay for daycare. Chris’s daycare was two hundred dollars which was most of my salary and another child, it just was not getting on. I did not have the level of education to earn enough money to keep working.

I thought nursing would suit me because also it’s mobile, it has a lot of flexibility. I could work around my children, you could work a double shift on the weekends and you could have off during the week to stay at home because I was still trying to play off the kids, my commitment to my children and my commitment to myself and earning money to better our life.

I’m kind of putting it off until I have more of an ability to choose because my options are going to be limited by my family situation.

Robert. But if I had been a bachelor, I would have considered that position (president of a company). I probably would have. Because when there is a family there are constraints. I mean yes, of course, decisions are made around the family but I have not been to that position yet that I could become the president of that company if I worked eight hours a week. It’s never gotten that far. In terms that I have not gone after it.
Lissa. Unfortunately, it was brought to my attention that I could not work at CAC without that little piece of paper. So, although, I don’t feel any brighter, any smarter or anything else society makes me do it too.

Robert. As a bachelor, I would have worked more hours. I would have been a workaholic right now. I’ve always been home at the end of the night from the beginning. No, it’s not a regret. No, I’ve always put in long hours. In the States, I’ve generally gone in early but why, because I wanted to be home on time and because, I enjoy being at home. If I were a bachelor, no one would be there so I would spend more time. I could have been higher in my career but I don’t regret it.

Conclusions

My Construction of Reality: The Existential Self

Lissa. “And maybe I should go to their room and say, “Get out of the bedroom and let me study because I want to” instead of saying, “Oh I can do this when you’re not around.” But I am accommodating again. It’s very evil to me now. But at least I know I’m doing it. I mean it’s evil to me. It’s not good for them in a way too because they think it’s effortless on my part. But Robert works six days a week. He has an incredible stress level and again, I guess I’m being supportive by making my life easier by making his life easier”.

The split that Lissa expresses is between having options from which to choose but not taking the right choice because of circumstances.

Therefore, the split that she voices in the interview is between the choices that she has and as she states, “For me options are limitless” and the choices she feels she does not have, “I feel that we have choices. We have the money to do it. I also feel I have no choice”. It is a continuous pull between “having the choice” and “taking that choice”, “If I really felt like a stay at home mom who did not have choices, I would not be very happy but I don’t feel that way” and yet, throughout the interview there is a continuous split between the choices which are there, but limiting to Lissa, and the choices she would like to have. This refers back to Sartre’s definition of
existentialism, discussed earlier in the text, which stresses that quite often we do not make our own choices and find and manipulate excuses for not taking them.

On the one hand Lissa is in search of the right career,

“And always in the back of my mind I was trying to find an occupation that would suit me. I had been through everything from garage mechanic to nuclear physicist. I’ve always tried out certain jobs in my head and I can’t seem to find one that fits me, that I would really like doing”.

“When my third child was a year old, I said, “Ok, now I’ve decided that there’s an occupation I would not mind doing”. I decided, ok, there is something that I can do and that is, I can be a nurse and I think that it was one of those and I don’t know how many people feel it but because she made such a difference out of the three deliveries. I realized what a difference one person could make and I decided that I would not mind being that person for somebody else because I knew the difference between somebody who was good at their jobs and somebody who really sulked at it”.

On the other hand, she is struggling to find a career which has to fit into the needs of her family,

“I think I’m going to have to do a masters in one of several areas. I’m kind of putting it off until I have more of an ability to choose because my options are going to be limited by my family situation. For example, once I get my BS I can go and do a masters in nursing and go back to the nursing but at a degree level which is good. But I can’t do that masters in the nursing program unless we’re in the States”.

Throughout the interview, Lissa’s use of words such as, “My mother made me get married”, when “I decided that I really did not want to get married.”, or “Robert made me get a station wagon and I was pissed about that”, or “And then on Sundays, Robert would let me go to the library,” emphasize further the dichotomy of choice and the hopelessness that the events have put upon her.
Also,

"...but my parents thought that I had done enough damage in a small school town where I went and to let me loose in New York would have been dangerous to say the least, that they would never hear from me, that I would end up dead. They should not have done that. I should have gone to Florida in the first place to do what I wanted to do. So, I learned an important lesson, you can't direct your children too much. And unfortunately, at the time I was not strong enough of an individual to say, "Ok, bye now, I'm going anyway."

She acknowledges the fact that she could take the choice that she wants but,

"I have choices. But it's a really a hard question to answer when you have children because all my choices since I've had children and been married to Robert, it has been out of consideration to them. But if you want to be honest, it's firstly to the children. I always know that whatever I want to do, Robert would support me and I'm only hemmed in by myself.....I'm hemmed in from my lack of being able to say no, I don't want to do that”.

“All I have to do is want it and do it and my family will follow but I have this giant guilt trip that my children are very good at laying on me and I am very good at falling into and I'm very good at not doing”.

There is also an urgency in finding the right career to be more than the average,

“I always was trying to think of something to do. what am I going to do? What am I going to do? I have to be more than what I am because I am not enough. Probably it was because of my mom because all the way back, I still have not finished. There's always this need to be something. I don't know who I want to prove it to anymore or what”.

The split is further emphasized between voicing the urgency of the social construct to be part of society and belonging as a working subject and the individual self acknowledging that it is not so urgent because ultimately what is important is
what she really wants to be for her self regardless of the external pressures put upon
her,

"Again, once the kids are out of school, I’m not a person who’s going to say ok, I’m finished with my school which is what my husband wants me to be, finish with school and earn money and that’s it, no more education. For me options are limitless. I don’t need to set myself in a certain area and say, ok, I’m going to work for twenty-five years. If I don’t like it I’ll change it again".

"No, kids you cannot see mom right now, I need to do this. I can do it but I have constant guilt to do it and I just read a quote a little while ago, it was a philosophical quote and it said, "A woman has as many choices as she wants." Well, that’s very true”.

and the recognition that we are at fault for not taking our own choices,

"We do it to ourselves. We have the choices and we don’t take them and who’s to say whether it’s right or it’s wrong? But I really feel that D. supports me. I don’t think he wants me to be independent but he does want me to be something larger than someone I would call with narrow views which I could not be anyway.

While the existentialist voices that “the options are limitless”, and that,

"But it is no longer the question of a career. It’s mute. I don’t wish for a career anymore”.

The social construct still interferes,

"Basically, I want to be fulfilled by working from 9 to 5 at a job I can come home to and forget, have the weekends free, nice time off and be paid for it so I can send my kids to college”.

It is a constant battle between her individual self and her constructed self,

"Actually, this is haunting me and I really want to bring that up with my daughters because I don’t want them to be as choiceless as I was and education gives you choices. That’s clean and simple. And I will say that even though I had my two younger kids while my eldest was in school, I was still working. I was still trying to find some way of remaining, of having some autonomy I guess you would say. I was doing piece work at home and baby-sitting other children. Piece work. You know this cottage industry. There was a woman who lived about an hour away. She had a factory and she decorated Oshkosh overalls and sweatshirts with all kinds of designs...and she had people doing the sewing of those pieces in their homes. Then she’d take them back to the factory....Then she’d shipped them off to boutiques in New York and charge one hundred and
fifty dollars and people like Diana Ross’s children would wear them which is true. I got paid by the piece and I could do thirty or forty pieces at home with the kids and go up once a week to get new stuff and get paid and everything else. It was under the table and it was great. It took me a while to learn how to do it well. I remember when I first learned, I used to throw the stuff out the window because I was so frustrated”.

“Even back when I was a nurse, I really wanted to be a doctor. I could not stand being a nurse for several reasons, one of which was I was just as intelligent as any doctor. I felt that I was more than capable to do the job but a nurse fit my family life-style better, a quicker gains, less education, less work, less playing off the family role and I knew I did not have seven years to kiss my family good-bye and then come back to them in seven years. Ok, six months does not seem a lot but it is. Could I leave my girls? I have not done it yet. But this goes back to you’re limited to your own choices. If I don’t choose to do it I’m not going to know and I’m limiting myself. You see, I admire you because you’re not limiting yourself as much. I’m sure you must have more guilt than I do. There must be some kind of payback there”.

“And what’s my own stuff? Moving into my own house and have my own garden and no men. That’s not possible. I have this relationship. Here’s an example: if I wanted to go back and be that marine biologist that I wanted to be at eighteen before I turned to photography, how feasible is that really? Can I? Can I do it? If I’m working on the biology degree now and that’s still an open possibility. But let’s say I want to get a job and I have to be on a boat for six months, can I do it? Is my family going to let me do it? I know you’re faced with these questions now”.

“I guess everything I thought I wanted I revolt against in some way and one of those major ways to rebel was to become an overseas person and change our life so drastically, get away from all that”.

Not being able to have control over her life, the split is experienced first, in the search of a career, then of a new life where the “not so typical” is sought after,

“The decision to come to Egypt was spurred a lot because we had that house in the suburbs and I kinds of hated it. We sort of had it with three kids. And by the way I had the third kid to mix up the numbers. We had two children, a boy and a girl and life looked really sweet. And we had a white pickett fence. Well, I decided it was too perfect and rather than get a dog we had another kid, that way we would not be so typical”.

“Independent to me means able and free to make my own choices. But of course when you’re married you can’t. You can to a degree but you always have to weight them to what your partner can put up with and won’t put with”.
"I’m glad I got married but I have no need to repeat it. I’d rather have a relationship than having a married relationship with anybody ever again but as long as I’m still in this one, it’s ok. I’m not going to change it. I have no need to throw my wild oats in the air and leave my family and try to establish some separate life or even a life with just my kids. I love Robert and I’m willing to stay married….. I’m yearning for independence at some point in my life”.

For Lissa, the existential self means more than achieving the American dream,

“A little while ago I had another epiphany, maybe I think about life a little bit more than Robert does but life was getting good. We have money in the bank for the first time ever. We no longer have the same worries we had when we were living in Arlington trying to raise our family. We’ve been expats for almost seven years and I would say finally we had everything we were trying to attain or we could have it, it’s within our grasp like the three healthy kids, the pets I always wanted, maybe I would want a dog but it’s too high up above the ground, maybe a nicer house some day but the thought of pulling it for the next twenty years is a… forget that. There’s money in the bank to do whatever we want and we’ve travelled. But now, I had a hard time convincing Robert that we should have a little more fun. It would be ok to take a trip or two and to get your eyes off that growing bank balance. There’s got to be more than that. We have to be here for more of a reason than just accumulating cash. Because frankly life sucks sometimes and living in Egypt as a woman really."

And a realization that “I” can make “more” happen in taking my choices,

"I feel that we have choices. We have the money to do it. I also feel I have no choice. That I am still married and I have kids to raise and I can’t even walk to school where I raise my eyes off the pavement and not have some guy look at me with a lure on his face. I hate that about Egypt, the attitude towards women. I don’t like that at all and I don’t want to stay here and raise my daughters as they mature. I want to get them into a healthier atmosphere and me too. I’m tired of it”,

although disconnecting from the “should” is still difficult,

"Chris would love to stay here for another two years and I know I could do it and I know I probably should do it but I don’t know if we have the time and the contract that allows us to do that and if I can remain sane and do it”.

despite the fact that,

"I’m finding myself taking myself out of situations where before I would have jumped in more heartedly. I’m finding myself ok I can’t face that walk to school and have those look at my legs so I stay in my house. I think that’s pitiful. I realize I’m doing it so it’s ok but I don’t know if I can do it another two years even for my son’s happiness. I don’t know if I’m going to be that self-deprecating".
In every sentence the split between the existentialist and the constructed self is present in Lissa’s interview,

“Especially after today, I can put it all again together. It’s going back to, Who am I, what am I. I’m an educated person but I already knew that”.

Even though she “can put it together”, the societal construct of “the educated person” comes in stronger.

And although “as far as marriage goes, my personal choices are set”, they are nevertheless “boundaries” and, “Their boundaries of my personal choices are formed by my family and my husband. Now, if they had not been around, I would have been a journalist, free-lance photographer in Bosnia some place with the bad hair. Like that journalist on CNN. Very intense. I would have jumped into that. Or I would have been that person who is scuba-diving on that marine biology boat somewhere looking inside of some dark fish. National Geographic, Jacques Cousteau thing”.

Therefore when always caught between “should” and “could”, the self cannot be easily expressed although Lissa expresses throughout friendship,

“Where I find mostly me, it’s easy. Getting back to marriage I realize too that as much as I love Robert, there are certain facets of his personality that don’t mesh with mine and I’ve had to find friendships outside of my marriage. Now society says, I should have friendships with women and that male friendships are not allowed”.

“But if you want to know. When I am most myself or accepted for myself, it’s when I talk to my friend on e-mail or we communicate. We read books, we’ll say this or that about it. Of course, that’s also bounded by any kind of tension or expectations that go beyond a normal friendship. He accepts my crookie sense of humor or whatever truth I see in life, he also shares. Exactly, I can free myself and it helps because his wife who is also my good friend is exactly like Robert. So, we can share quite a bit in our relationships with each other because we see so much of our spouse in the other person. Only, the sexes are changed. So, it’s kind of weird but he always said that if I was a guy, it would be fantastic and if he was a woman it would be great because we share so many common views. When the kids go off to school at nine o’clock in the morning and I pull out my my book and I’m reading it, I’ll mark my page and tell it to my friend later. That’s mostly me”.
Whereas at the beginning of the interview, Lissa voiced that she was looking for a career or something that she "can" do and at times emphasized but rather sarcastically on things she has been able to do,

"Every crummy job I have ever had I have always tried to do the absolutely best I could even when I was that crummy cashier at the grocery store I always had the highest number of groceries before I threw my belt without the least amount of errors. Give me any crappy job, I'll do it".

because she has not found the career, the work or whatever which can reinforce her self, at the end of the interview, the individual or existential self only speaks because she has come to realize that,

"A last eye opener on my relationship which has given me a leverage of freedom that I never had before was my ability to walk away from marriage if I so choose and knowing that even if I have not completed my education, I will. I am a strong person, I can survive and I don't need the other person to live".

"I'm happy to be with the other person but I don't need it. And that has given me internal strength I would say to just say, "Ok, well. If you feel that way, no, I don't agree with you." And that has brought some friction in our marriage because I am no longer quite as afraid to say, "No, I'm not going to go along with whatever you say, I don't want to do that".

"And even though there are conflicts, I feel better, I feel stronger, I feel more awake, a me. It took a long time to feel that way. It's been happening in stages and now, I'm me so much that I'm ok. It's ok to be alone with me. If life does not go well with my marriage partner and we have too many conflicts, I don't have a problem walking away. That gives you strength from that marriage too. A certain aloofness always makes you feel more powerful. Aloofness like I'm not giving you everything I am".

Robert. "I have been very lucky in many many ways and I enjoy and I said this many years ago with my old company, I have never been burdened with getting up in the morning and gone. I have to go to work. I have always gotten up and gone with no problem, not thinking I wish I could stay home, take care of the kids or do this or that".

On one hand, a certain level of contentment is felt "I have been very lucky in many ways and I enjoyed it and I said this many years ago with my old company, I
have never been burdened with getting up in the morning and gone...”, but then the abrupt declaration of “I have to go to work” almost confuses the happiness and joy of the moment.

Even if work is a pleasant activity for the individual who does not feel burdened by his role, “No, my role as the provider does not bother me”, the pressure of the “I have to” is nevertheless powerfully conveyed where a sense of freedom and the obligation intertwine. The split is expressed in this dichotomy.

Robert’s struggle is between family and work. The split is emphasized when he aspires to progress in his career, “I want to progress in my career to more interesting more responsibilities, more money” and his longing to have played a more nurturing role towards his children,

"It does feel nice when I’m alone with the kids. The girls come to me, they pay attention to me and Chris is off on his own most of the time. It’s more with the girls, it’s this, “mommy, mommy, mommy” but, it’s nice when it’s “daddy, daddy, daddy”, it feels good.....”

Although he feels that, “My life is pretty much matching the go with the flow, the American style, what my parents had, no dramatic revelations or regrets”, and that he does not have any desire to change anything.

“At this point in my life, I would not change anything. I don’t have those desires to rock the boat. Of course, I see a woman who maybe attractive, attractive personality but I don’t pursue it pass that step and I try not to even allow it to get beyond that”.

the existential being and the social construct once more are at opposite ends, one asking what it could have been,
“Sometimes, I think it would be more interesting if you had more partners in life because every person has their own facet. I mean by that that Lissa and I are very comfortable together but sometimes you think that you have been together for so long and you are going to be together for so long, what have you missed in another woman? What could another woman have brought you that Lissa did not? And we’re here once and you think, fidelity is important but it may be interesting to know what else is there”.

and the other reasoning,

“But I balance that in the long run, they may have been interesting but in the long run, it may be more satisfying to stay with one person because you grow with them and to have those things that you might not have otherwise”.

He reinforces all the goodness in his life,

“I don’t have expectations for the future but hopes. All I want particularly since living here and maybe because I’m getting older, I have realized how lucky I am in my life. I realize that my kids are healthy and I have a good relationship with my wife. I think we’re both reasonably content. Obviously, there are days. And my parents are still alive”.

“There are so many things I see good in my life. I like my job”.

Yet, all the fears of the unknown which our existentialist self embodies speak,

“I really feel like when is it coming? When is the big bomb coming? I’m worried in the future, the only thing I think is to try to grow old. I don’t want to die young. I want to be around when the kids grow up. I want to be there. I want to see grand-children. I hope I don’t die young. I hope the kids remain healthy. I hope I outlive Lissa. I am not looking forward to the day when my parents die. Those are the things when I think of the future”.

Because ultimately the social construct cannot find answers to those fears so we can only hope,

“I hope we are together forever until we die”.

There is a further dichotomy in Robert’s longing to have played a more nurturing role with his children,
"It would have been nice to have had a little bit more. I see some fathers sometimes. They take their kids to the school and they play ball. They take their kids to school to swing on the swings. Everytime I see them, they bring their kids and I say, "Why don't I do that?"

The voice of the social construct says,

"I think maybe this is what I am thinking and I should have spent more time with them. Why didn’t I? I don’t spend enough time, there’s no doubt. Why don’t I do it?..."

The "want" becomes the "should",

Even though,

"I enjoy when she goes for a short period of time and when she is not there and I’m number one. She’s not around and I’m the one the kids come to and I’m the one the kids need. It develops a little bit of communication there and bonding that we normally don’t have when she’s around",

And yet,

"What I worry about is when I grow older and I look back that maybe I should have taken a more nurturing role. Lissa is more reasonable I think than I am when it comes to them."

This is further reinforced by a somewhat feeling of guilt,

"Last night Jessie went to that dance and I wanted to be sure that I was there waiting for her when she got out being her dad and that kind of stuff. Well, that was a little effort but today, what am I doing, sitting in the house playing on the computer. I could have taken them to school. I’m conscious of it but I don’t go the next step to resolve it enough."

And the split is further expressed in the struggle between family and work,

"When I’m at work, I’m Robert at work. I’m a little different than when I am at home. I am more quiet at home. At work, I’m more dynamic. At home, I’m quite quiet down there in the house playing on the computer. I’m content."

Even though "I am content", he would nevertheless have liked to have been more of a nurturer or "should" have been and, while he does not really aspire to anything bigger, "If I had been a bachelor, I would have considered that position...because when there is a family there are constraints", and even though, "I
have no regrets”, “I don’t feel that more responsibilities will cause friction with the family, it depends, not really, if you let it it will”. There is a continuous friction between what has been and what could have been, I could become the president of that company if I worked eight hours a week. It’s never gotten that far. In terms that I have not gone after it”, and a continuous reassurance in “I’m content”, “I feel lucky” that things are alright. What is not clear is what side of the self is acknowledged when “I have not gone after it” is voiced. There is almost a longing to go after it while at the same time a conscious refrain from it.

This confusion is further acknowledged by Robert who points out a pattern that is seen in, “I have not gone after it”, “I should have taken a more nurturing role” and also,

“When I was running before, I felt like it was kind of like my thing that I did it, turn on the music, put on the earphone and went around the track. That was not anybody but me and that was kind of nice. That was for me, that was not for work. It was not anything to do with dad except the only thing I thought of in that respect is that if the kids saw dad getting a lot of exercise, it would promote a healthier attitude in them. I did not follow up on that and yes, I do miss it. I do miss it. It’s another one of those things I guess I miss it and I wish I could get back on to it but I am not doing anything to change that. See the pattern?”

The wish to nurture is further diminished by “It was not anything to do with dad...” and the enjoyment that the work gives him which he does not equate with being an obligation is blurred by “…that was not for work”. As the existential and the social construct live side by side, we do not have a clear view of what our life is. This is clearly expressed in this interview.
Couple #5

Researcher’s Reflections

Florence. “Today, I feel that my mother was not right because there are other ways to consider the relation. I do not feel that because I am not earning any money, I am not working. I work in the well-being of our couple, in the well-being of my children. This is a form of work. It all depends what we mean by work”.

Yannick. “My childhood was simple. I was raised in a little provincial town in the Dordogne. I was born in my parents’ home and two years later my brother was born in the same bed. We grew up in Dordogne”.

I met Florence a year ago at the school where our sons were going. We shared some mutual interests, a love for the same country and a deeper love for an art. For Florence, this is painting. She talked with great passion about it. She seemed fascinated by the world of painters which had become her retreat, her world.

I met Yannick one evening as they invited us for dinner. But it is not really until the interviews that I uncovered both of their pasts.

Childhood Memories

siblings

Florence. I have a younger brother. I am the eldest. We are five years and a half apart.

Yannick. I only had one brother who is now deceased. This happened 18 years ago.

Florence. My brother was much freer. In fact it was so different that it had nothing to do with my upbringing because it was so different.

Yannick. My brother was a regional champion in swimming.
Florence. I was not allowed to go out. It was the same for my sister. The situation was also different because my mother at the time had someone and we had an apartment in Paris but she lived in the suburbs and she was going back there every night. She would come to Paris to work in the apartment because it was also used for business purposes but she would go back every night. My sister was about 16 or 17, my brother was 2 and half years younger but they did whatever they wanted. They were free.

Yannick. My brother was doing technical studies. We were so different. I was very close to him. I was calm and reasonable and I wanted a career. He wanted to get into moto racing, something he did.

Florence. In the home I was the one in charge. There were me, my sister and my brother. He was the last one, the youngest, he was the boy. He could do everything because he was the boy. He would help sometimes. We each took turn at the dishes. My mother raised us that way. So, he had responsibilities.

Yannick. My parents taught me to take care of myself and so, I left for England.

Florence. My mother never considered pushing me to study. However she pushed both my sister and brother. My brother did two years in medical school but as he excelled in failing, he went to a private school and became an optician.

My sister passed her baccalaureate and decided she wanted to be a chemist so she went to a private school to study chemistry but mid-way, she realized that it would not lead anywhere and that to work into a lab was not something she liked so, she quit. She joined the family company and works with my mother. She stayed.

When I was 18, my brother was only 13 so there was no question of who was going to help her in the business. Later on, no, she never asked him to help.

Role Models

Florence. My parents were divorced and had been since I was thirteen so I lived alone with my mother and brother. He was very small and I don’t even think that he remembers his father. There are no memories for him not like for me.

Yannick. My parents’ marriage was traditional. My mother is someone who is very strong, who likes to be in charge, to be in control. She totally invested herself in us, her children but as soon as we gave her some space, she helped my father in the business. My father took over my grand-father’s business. As my grand-parents got older, my mother invested herself in the business with my father. But this was also subject to conflict and this is something I would never do with Florence because I saw that there are too many problems.

Florence. My mother planned everything for me. She arranged my outings, people I saw. I did not have any friends. I was not allowed to have friends at home.
Yannick. My mother did not work while we were growing up. She took care primarily of the home and of us.

Florence. I don’t remember my mother playing with me. It’s terrible! And I cannot remember how my father was with my mother. I don’t recall any tenderness between them. Maybe there were not the kind of people who demonstrated this but even though, somewhere, sometimes, one sees that their parents love each other and I cannot remember. Don’t I want to? I don’t see it.

The business started during my grand-mother’s time. She had an embroidery workshop. Then, my mother took over. When she came back from the Antilles, she took up again her previous activity and naturally, started up another business.

My mother always raised me with the thought that “to work is freedom” and that a woman who did not work meant submission. So, I was raised with this idea.

Yannick. There was the image of success in the businessman but also that I could do what he could do.

Florence. My mother had always dreamed to be a doctor. She had to stop her studies because her mother became paralyzed so she did not pursue what she would have liked to do. So, she put into her head that one day, her son would become a doctor. But she never considered my sister to be a doctor. But this is the way I see it and you know how we can see and how things are in reality. But she was ready to realize her dream and I am not sure how my brother saw that.

Yannick. In England I saw what I did not want to do, be with all these workers and take tea breaks twice a day and to talk in this little room. It was not interesting. But there were other options. So I left for France.

So, for me it was a sabbatical year and I have read this in many writers, to find myself. Because I was a little lost. So, it was to find myself and to give myself motivation.

Florence. My mother’s work was to earn money. She does not know how to occupy herself differently. She earns money. For people, this is what work is, how much you make. This was contributing to her idea of the independent woman. Her upbringing is in there too, in her own life, her mother has always worked. Mom must have started to work at 14.

My mother was like that. There was a time where she used her weak side. She was alone. Poor mom, she could not cope. She would manipulate us terribly.
Aspirations-Expectations

Education/Work

Yannick. My parents did not encourage us that much. In fact, it was a bit difficult for them to see me go.

Florence. My mother never considered pushing me to study.

Yannick. My parents never pushed us to continue our studies.

Florence. I wanted to do something in the arts. I wanted to be a decorator but no one pushed me or encouraged me. My mother of course wanted me to join the company. She was trying to recreate exactly what her mother had done not in the same conditions because it was hard. My grand mother raised my mother alone. My grand father died before my mother was born. My grand father was Jewish.

Yannick. Very young, very early, I wanted to travel. For example, with my parents if I passed 5th grade and went on to 6th grade, I would go to England. So, I passed, I was 11 years old and I went to England. It was so such a fabulous experience that I still remember it very vividly. I was there for three weeks. It was the first time I was taking the plane, my grand mother brought me to Paris to take the plane. For a little child who had never gone out of his village it was really something.

Florence. How could I have a dream when you have divorced parents? One day my father asked me in the street, “Who do you love most? You will have to choose between Mommy or Daddy.” Wait a minute, your dreams then become...but, I had the dream that I would succeed. One day everything would be perfect.

Yannick. Initially, I wanted to understand the social hierarchy and at the time, this was the village doctor, someone who represents something such as the mayor of the village for example who was also a veterinarian. So, I was leaning towards medicine. After my baccalaureate I went to spend one night at the hospital with a cousin who was an intern there. I was so happy with the white coat on, the doctor’s tag and so on. I was 19 years old, I was with all the doctors. This was cool. But then, I realized the horrid life that they lead. I will remember all my life this 13 year old girl who came in with a crushed leg due to a motocycle accident at 2 am. The following morning, at 6 o’clock, there were all these young doctors, all the interns were laughing at the first page of the newspaper. There was a gathering of Mongolian people at Lourdes and they were giving all the details about the diseases and how Mongolian love sex and have so many children and they were laughing out of their minds. Later on of course, one understands things better. But I came out with a feeling of total feeling that it was not my thing.

Florence. Since I never saw my mother not working, I did not consider myself not working.

Yannick. I was calm and reasonable and I wanted a career.
Florence. Painting came in the States. I started a B.A in Art History. Then, I met a German Art teacher......I always wanted to draw. I always drew. In my mother's business, I was the one who drew the patterns. So, this has always been part of my life. I have always played with it. I have always thought that one day, I'm going to paint. One day, I will decide I will paint. I started to draw in the States. I took classes. It was part of the curriculum. But in fact, quite quickly I realized that what interested me was painting and drawing. Anything else, I dropped it in the end.

Yannick. I told my parents that I wanted to go to business school. My parents gave me three months. They were wondering what I wanted to do and Paris with school fees, the flat and so on, ok, but three months. I was very motivated so it went well. Afterwards I just had enough to finish. I found myself at the end of three years in Paris thinking that many people had the same diploma that I had and this is when I left for the States to do an MBA.

I did not even try to find a job. I just saw that the diploma I had would not be sufficient to do what I wanted to do and that had to continue right away.

So I left there for three months and this was a test to see whether I could keep up. I realized that I could keep up and as soon as I finished school in France, I went back there. It was my choice.

I'd like in the future to have a bigger project to manage. There is always this search of reaching my limits but I will not trade my family for it. I see in certain work what my colleagues do I would not do it. I would do it differently if I had to impede on my family. I would find another way to do it. It is not constraining but it is an equilibrium. If tomorrow I went back to Paris and I was offered a super interesting job but where I would have to travel six months of the year, I would say no. That, I'll accept it in ten years when my sons will no longer need me and that I could leave with Florence. I see it totally like that. I'd love it. And this is something which could very well be. But not now. Now my sons need me more than the company.

Marriage

Yannick. I did not want to duplicate first the relationship that my parents have together because it is not a relation which suited me and also I had learned a lot with my American wife. We spent seven years in all together and she was someone who was particularly interesting, intelligent and who had great qualities but who was not made to live with me, that’s it. So I learned a lot from this. And we did all these American things together like TM and so on which make you reflect on yourself, on what you really want to do and this helped to shape me. Certainly, I did not want to duplicate this little thing, this bourgeois type of life but my parents are not really bourgeois, it is this pattern that you find a lot. A very traditional pattern with the husband in his slippers and so on and I could not see myself in this.
Florence. In my head all was going to be perfect. The ideal husband. He was going to be handsome, rich and intelligent. He was going to have all the best qualities. He was going to be perfect.

Yannick. I never thought about marriage or children. I did not imagine it.

Florence. No, I did not have an idea of what my life was going to be like with him. I did not have any ideas about these things. At the time, it was important for me to get married because I thought that I would be protected and that I would be loved. I wanted to be loved. I wanted to love.

Yannick. With respect to the vision of a family and marriage, I never thought at all about it because I found myself at 25 going back to the States because I had a girlfriend there with whom I had kind of lived without really living with but whom I enjoyed who was thirteen years older than I was. So, I went back there and we got married, she had three children and I really thought that it could really work because she was very francophone, she came from New Orleans, she had studied in Switzerland, she spoke French and so there were many points. In the end, there was a cultural difference which was too big that it could never work, that I cannot believe it could work. I’m not sure that it can work and in your case, I wish you all the best but I believe that it may work better between a French woman and an American man. The American woman is “impossible”! They are “out of control!” I think that as much as all men, French and American, we are people who are relatively simple and we need to please, to bring satisfaction and to make people happy, the American woman has so much frustration in her although she had already gone through her revolution phase. So with her, we separated progressively because we went on different paths. She was very active professionally because she owned restaurants and two jazz clubs in Dallas. So, I was learning to be an accountant so we did not see each other much. I don’t believe that she regretted our separation. You know for Americans when you do your taxes, you get your net worth and the net worth that we spent together was multiplied by five while we were together. So, I left with my suitcase. But really, we separated because we had diverged in different directions and so it was almost a mutual decision.

Florence. I had an idea about love. I was fascinated by love. So, as a teenager, the idea to have a love affair meant the best to me. I loved love. I don’t think that I was capable to love someone. But I loved love without seeing what it represented, without seeing that in the end love is someone.

Even though, I had a negative image in my family where love had broken, I had a positive image of love. I read a lot. I was about 15 at the time. My parents got divorced when I was 13 but they really started fighting when I was 10. I did not see anything before that. I don’t remember that in my childhood but I think that consciously I blocked many things.

Yannick. I do not think that we can have a vision of marriage and children. For me, I had never considered it.
Florence. My vision of love was so idealized. I saw myself as well as someone perfect. And I am not perfect. I saw myself as the perfect woman who would never complain, who would be a perfect mother who would never scream at her kids. I would never hit them. I would be perfect.

Yannick. I did not see anything really and this is something that Florence and I built.

Florence. Honestly, I think that I married my first husband to get away from the family grip. But this was part of the dream. He was tall, blond, blue eyed. He was coming back from Tahiti. Tahiti made me dream. America and Tahiti.

Yannick. There’s one thing that I realized though after my first marriage and that is, that I was made to be married. I believe in the strength of a decision, of commitment in the American sense and that is, I could have cheated on her many times when it was going well between us but I never did because it was not part of my thinking. So, I had this commitment. It was transparent and it made me think that I was made to be married.

So I realized with her that I was made to be married. We separated after five years and after five years of separation from exactly our wedding day, I had girl friends once more but I was not looking for her. It was a need to be with someone and share things. There is even one girl who got too close but I was not made for that even though I knew that in the end this was what I wanted. And it is at this time that very quickly I abused everything and met all the girls I had not met while I was married and very quickly I met Florence six months after I had separated from my wife.

Florence. Yes, I saw myself within the view of the wife and mother. I always wanted children, at least at the time.

Yannick. We made the decision with Florence to get married to have children and I had no vision of what it was going to be like. Yes, absolutely, we made the decision to get married to have children. This was part of the scheme. I could not see myself having children without being married. This was the scheme for both. If I was going to marry her, we would have children, absolutely. But I did not have the notion of the family and even though I had the model from my own family, it was not an example which I wanted to copy. I did not want to duplicate it only in terms of what I would offer to my children. For the longest time since Nicolas was born, it was a preoccupation for me to know whether I was able to give him as much as what my parents had given me. With respect to material comfort because all I ever wanted as a kid I had. I wanted motobikes, vacations and my parents always managed to give it to me. I wanted to study and they give it all to me. I’m convinced that it took a lot out of them.

Florence. I do have the vision in my mind that when we are old, we’ll be in a big house and I’ll have my art studio. He likes computers so he’s always with the computer. So, we’ll navigate in that house with all of this, painting and the computers. I have this vision and this is very harmonious in my mind. This vision is much more real than what I had before when I was young. This is much clear.
Yannick. “Le futur, il ne s’envisage pas il se prepare”. St Exupery said that. The future is planned. I believe a lot in planning. I believe a lot also in planning things so I plan with Florence and we talk about the place where we’ll live one day. Portuguese maybe. It’s a good idea. It’s near the sea and the sun and it’s still in Europe with laws that we are familiar with. It is near an airport so we can see the kids often. So, this is how we are preparing the future.

Florence. My vision of marriage has always been very powerful. It went beyond getting married because the focus for me was to be on the couple, how is was going to be shaped, how we were going to shape it together. I feel protected. And I think he also feels protected.

Conflicts

Resolving Differences

Florence. In my marriage, when I want something, I say it. I cannot manipulate. I voice it very strongly. With respect to the decision-making, we both make the decisions. We discuss it. For example in the choice of schools for the children. This is in terms of the major decisions but not the everyday ones. If Nicolas, for example, wants to do judo, then I’ll discuss it with Yannick. But if Nicolas says that in the afternoon he wants to go to his friend, then I’m not going to call Yannick to ask him.

We have similar views on how to raise the children. And we did not discuss those views prior to having the children. They just happened.

Yannick. For me it was not hard to leave the States because I had been there for a very long time. First of all, I had not gone there to stay there. This, I realized. I did not see myself staying there. Secondly, professionally it was a very difficult time for me, we had problems so, I had a lot of pressure. My parents were also experiencing a turn in their own life and they needed my support. They had sold the business and my father was retiring. So, it was difficult. I am the only son. To see Nicolas once a year was not... So, the return to France was only logical.

Florence. There are major decisions that he took in the past that I had difficulty to accept. When we left the States, I was in mourning. I did not want to leave but he wanted to leave. I did not want to go back to France and I had a very hard time overcoming this. I went through a period of mourning. It lasted almost two years. And this made us further apart.

Yannick. With all the financial constraints, we wanted another child and financially it would have been very hard over there because of the way it was going. My parents needed support and I was starting to ask myself why I was struggling with the Americans while the French were waiting for me. So, I went back to France, went to three job interviews and had three offers. I returned in August and started to work for Citroen in November. August, I came back, September I had the interviews, November 1st I was starting to work. I don’t think I could have done better. So, the
conditions were interesting and they kept their promise because I started to work for them to travel. It was logical for me but it was more difficult for Florence.

**Florence.** We did not discuss it because he did not want to hear about it. All those problems came back when we realized that Nicolas refused to learn in school. And we started the road to psychology and psychiatry. So, for two years in France it was a very hard transition. This made me grow but I don’t think for me he realized how much it disturbed me.

**Yannick.** My own evolution was more linear whereas she really took control of herself and said, I start over. And I took her away from her world to make her dive again into something that she did not want and had decided to forever get away from. There were big conflicts then but more for her than for me. No, we spoke very rarely of these conflicts. I knew that it was difficult for her. I was not very receptive because at the time I was also starting with a new firm where they were asking a lot from me. So, I had many things and I know that she had to take a lot upon herself because of the situation.

**Florence.** He did not understand why I was so unhappy that Nicolas was not learning. All of first grade, Nicolas did not learn how to read. We then realized that he was dyslexic. But I don’t know if he really is.

I told him later, that with respect to our couple I never felt so alone. I was home. I did not work. I did not have any major interest except for the children whereas, in the States, I worked. And when I stopped working, the baby was born. It was the first one and I was so bored that I took up studying again. I could not stand to be home. Yannick pushed me to go back. He understands very well. He was not disappointed when I told him I was bored. I talked to him. He saw it, I was crying.

In France, there was this difficult period where I found myself... but, first of all, we had come back following a bankruptcy. We had lost it all. Not in terms of investing money in the sense that we got taken to the cleaners. No, it was not like that. We got taken by French people. Yannick got taken. He’s a certified CPA. So, he worked for an accounting agency when I met him and he was the accountant of the shop I managed. He was our accountant. This is how I met him. He met a French guy who asked him to work with him and when Nicolas was born, overnight, he threw him out. He promised him gold. So, Yannick borrowed money and started a business and he met a French guy who became his partner to sale “des systemes de lecture d’inventaire”. So Yannick brought his knowledge of American business and the guy provided the “systeme”. It was a new system in France. A guy had established this computer programming that was being introduced on the French market. Yannick said ok. He borrowed money and he started. Then the guy sold his business without telling us anything. He never sent the rest of the material. So, we found ourselves in California with a house, a baby, cars and Yannick was not sleeping anymore. We thought we would be soon in the streets. So, he started to send letters to find a job and to start all over. And then, his parents told him, “You know it’s the EEC now, it’s great, you have to come back. It is going to be great.”
But I was telling myself that it was not going to be great and I did not want to go back. So despite all the failures, I still wanted to stay there. I wanted to stay. I also felt that as a couple we were more protected over there. I had never had a wonderful story in France.

Yannick. She is not going to let me do things which are mediocre to her and I accept her comments. Of course, sometimes it is more or less constraining with certain constraints that I accept less but in the end, I know that her request is reasonable and if it is not, then I tell her, I explode and we discuss it more openly.

Florence. I pushed to the point of telling him ....we had many financial problems and so, in order to humiliate him, I was telling him that I would go and clean houses. The worst is when he said, “Well, if you’re not capable to do anything else, then go and do it.” I could not answer because he had really cornered me. He did not feel humiliated one bit when I thought he would. My gosh, his wife! Cleaning other people’s toilets! Well, no, it did not work! I never told him that I was trying to humiliate him. But I think that I could tell him that. I did tell him that I was jealous but he understood because he told me so. When I was able to verbalize it, he said, “Do you realize that you are a walking bomb? You go to sleep angry. You wake up angry.”

He was more asking, “What’s wrong with her?” He could not understand why I was so angry. No, I did not tell him I was angry because quite often, I did not know I was angry. I started fights for anything, discussion not necessarily fights. I used to do the same thing to him as I did to my mother when I was fifteen and that was to try to get him angry. I thought I could push him, push him to the point of anger but he never became angry. He never gets angry. He’s not somebody who gets angry. So, he looked for solutions. He would tell me, “I want so much for you to be happy.”

Yannick. I believe that what we have managed to build is more solid because we did not build it on a false idea. And I think of this now with you because I am talking about it but I never actually talked to Florence about it. We are going to talk about this because it is interesting. So, I believe that we have managed to build ourselves in France because there it was nice. We were in France, near her family, we were in Paris, we were close to everything that she had left. And she had managed to build her self over there. So, our return was beneficial because she would have always lived running away from something. And she saw that it was not necessary for her to escape. That one can find oneself in the same place being totally different. So, I think that this is important. I’m not sure that she has realized this. This is why I am going to discuss it with her.

Florence. When they are not around, I paint during the weekends but when they are around I cannot paint. Sometimes, I can but many times when I have said to him that I was going to paint and he said, “Ok, no problem, I look after the kids”, he’s there in the house and I am upstairs. He answers the phone, give them a snack and he leaves me alone.

Once we are alone, we start up discussions which are sometimes quite...The other day for example, we started talking about death and separation.
**Florence.** The daily life with small children not when they get older, it's different but when you have babies and you are there among the diapers, the bottles, there's nothing else. He could not do it. Not him in any case. I think that they (men) have such a guided role that they are taught that they have to go out to earn money. Very young, boys are taught this. In fact, we are responsible for this. We are the first ones who are responsible for them. ... well, tomorrow, I could decide to raise my sons in telling them that, "You know, you'll meet a woman who will have a very good situation and you'll stay home and raise your children." I can very well decide to raise them with this view. But I don't do it.

**Yannick.** But you know we have done many things together and she has realized many things. You know that for the longest time she had complexes because she had not continue her studies and things like that and the fact that she took classes at Dallas University and that she was able to keep up with the classes and getting very good grades, I think that allowed her to realize many things. But this I also think that was important, the fact that we came back through France and that we left again because what best suits us for now is to live abroad. ... But she had started from conflicts.

**Florence.** There's something which profoundly shocked me in a discussion I was having once with my father-in-law. He said that he raised his sons telling them all the time, "I don't care what will happen with women. People will just have to put their chicks away when I'll let my cocks loose" For me this was the upmost case of hatred for women.

Sometimes I ask myself how his son, my husband could have become what he is now. This is Yannick's father who still has this attitude. This is how he sees things. He raised his sons like that. He only had sons like us, two sons and he raised them with this view.

Yannick is caught between. He cannot avoid when Nicolas cries to tell him, "Stop being girlish" or something like that and this drives me nuts. I tell him in front of Nicolas not to say that, "Women are more courageous than men." I see myself struggling to assert "me". My sons do not at all respect that image. They are future machos. And I don't understand why. For a very long time, it made me very angry and it still does sometimes. My son said to me once that the corkscrew belongs to daddy and that the vacuum-cleaner was mine. If dad is not around I am not allowed to drink wine. "What, you are drinking dad's wine? The wine is Daddy's." I don't know why they come out with this.

I tell myself that sometimes we must have a certain behavior in which he reads this. He interprets our behavior in this manner. Because it is true that he has very rarely seen his father use the vacuum and when we have wine, the bottle gets opened by Yannick. So, he sees a role.
My marriage is traditional. There is a difference with my in-laws. With them it is the man who orders.

**Yannick.** My marriage is not like her parents or my parents. It has no name.

*I would say that each has their space and each struggles also to keep it.*

I don’t think that one exists without the other which is that Yannick is also the father of the children. Yannick is Florence’s husband, this makes a whole. I cannot say that this will change, it is part of it. In my work although I am totally disconnected from this, there is a continuity. I make a difference between work and home... but sometimes you can see what is happening in others. You see some people who are like little dogs with their family and so on and then, you hear them swear at meetings, put their hands up, chicks’s butts and stuff like that.

**Florence.** Despite his vision of a traditional woman at home, he did not mind that I did this and was not home and that someone else was taking care of the kids. He has also always defended me in front of his parents. Always. He has always supported what I was doing for myself.

**Yannick.** I love this stimulation when I get out of work to be abroad. For us, the first move was really France and the second is now because we had met and built something in the States. We had created our own reality over there. I was not at all anticipating to go back to France because of having strong roots there, even though one idealizes about them but really when you find yourself pinned to the wall, it is not so glorious, the family, the cousins and all. There are many problems, many don’ts, it’s not so beautiful but I felt good, I still feel good. There were no major conflicts.

**Florence.** When we first got back to France and Yannick started travelling right away, I was very jealous of his career. I could not stand that he could leave in the morning and forget us. The minute he was leaving, we did not exist anymore. And I was jealous of all the things he was doing, all the people he was seeing, all the interesting things he was doing because I thought that the things I was doing were not interesting.

**Yannick.** We were very close together because we were alone over there (in the States) and automatically there are things which have pushed us to go abroad again in order to recreate this little priviledged cocoon, this is why we are making the most of it here. When we go back to France we have so many obligations that we do not have here at all. So the cocoon feels more powerful here. And this comes from when we were over there.

**Florence.** He would have given me anything. Everything I said, he said yes. When I said I was going to take the Cambridge Proficiency, he said, “Yes, there’s no problem”. On the contrary, at the time, I remember I had told him that I had taken the application and said that it was too difficult and that I was going to take the first level. And he said, “What do you loose? Go and do the highest level right away. If you don’t succeed the first time, you’ll see but shoot for the highest first.”
Yannick. As much as I try to support her in her search whatever it is, the painting she does or whatever she wants to do, I want to be totally supportive so that we can construct one another and help each other to go towards something mature. So, our marriage evolves in that sense.

Florence. When I say that he did not have any problems in our relationship, he only had one fear and that was that he may not be able to provide financially for us. He did not want me to work for money. This is something that he has never really wanted. There is that side of him I am sure. He has never said no but he gives such a description of the situation which is so negative, “Yap, that’s it. You’re going to have to get up at six in the morning, you will have to run for the metro.” He never said, “Go for it. You’ll find a great job and you’ll love it!” No, he never said that. He does not want to see me work.

Yannick. It was logical for me but it was more difficult for Florence. First of all Florence had fallen in love with the States and secondly, she had constructed her own reality in the States. This is how I see it myself. She left from a situation in France which she no longer liked to go to the States and to recreate herself. The biggest energy that you can get is when you move like that because no one knows you and you can totally reconstruct yourself. So, she went over there to totally reconstruct herself and she even went further because she found another husband and had a child. She had reached such a state of equilibrium (and she was working) which was much more important and different from mine.

Florence. He looked after the children too. No, he would not have vacuumed or done things like that but he helped me with the children. He played with them so I could study. In the evenings, we would finish quickly to eat and he would put everything away and the kids to bed. I would go upstairs to the office and worked. For me this was it. There was support. If he was there he contributed largely but of course, I made sure that the groceries were done and all those things were done. He would have done it if I had asked but he cannot stand doing it. I don’t know why but he cannot stand shopping. I think it is a personal issue rather than “I am a man, I don’t do groceries.” He was one time a bachelor, lived alone and did his groceries.

Yannick. For me the fact that Florence paints means that she brings to the household in the same manner as I bring my money when I work, she also brings something to it. I am also very happy that she hangs her paintings up because they are ours because she did them and this is also ours and that it gives her a balance. She feels better when she does it and so if she is better, we are all better. This is part of the song.

Florence. You know I have a real problem to believe people who say that they do all these things for you. There is something else which leads them to do it. It is not possible otherwise. Sure, it may not have always been fun what he did but when a man usually talks about his work, he always tries to make you cry. He gives all the negative aspects. I’m not talking about the man who does factory work. I speak about the ones who have responsibilities, who weigh things out and who have an influence on things.
Yannick. No, I’m not looking forward to the time the children will leave. It will be a continuity. The two of us will try to construct ourselves.

Florence. I don’t think that he has always been happy in his work and at one time, I do think that he was bored. Maybe his reaction reflects his own unhappiness at times. Probably, it is possible. I think that sometimes he has envied me to stay home and although I have never asked him, I think somewhere he did envy me. He has often talked about role-reversal because he has said sharply to me, “Go and do what I am doing!”

I don’t think that men have other aspirations, I just think that they are not brave enough to acknowledge the fact that, “Hey, this is great, I’m having a good time!” “I have fun and I am super happy to get away from this house where children are screaming.” For Yannick at least. You know he has no activities outside the home. He does not play tennis, he does not draw. He’s learning Arabic but this is linked to his work. Some men come back on Friday night and on Saturday morning, they take their golf club and they go for four or five hours to play golf. To me, this is an escape. This is an escape vis-a-vis the relationship, the family if he does it systematically every Saturday morning and on Sunday. My brother is like that. He spends all of his weekends golfing. He’s married and my sister-in-law waits at home. If you ask my brother whether his girls like a particular thing, he does not know. He never knows anything but Yannick does because he spends time with his family.

If he wanted to paint on the weekends, I’m not sure of how I would feel. I’ve never asked myself this question. It’s true that he has no hobbie. He does not mind. He says that during his spare time he enjoys his family. He does not like it very much when I say I’m not going to the hash. He goes with the children and many times I’ve said to him to go alone. He’s not very enthusiastic and says he prefers to stay home. I tell him, fine, I’m not going anyway.

Yannick. My marriage has evolved in the sense that we have built it in moving because in going back to France, we had to both “digest” France and now we can go somewhere else. So, this is positive. I don’t think that we need that I can be closer or less close to Florence. I think that it is not an issue of closeness. We keep on evolving together. For example the strength that I find in Florence is that we stimulate each other in the things which are the best, which are good.

Florence. There is a last thing that you have to know of how we have seen our relationship from the very beginning. For us, it was to bring out from each other what there is best in each of us because some people are very good at bringing out in others the good side while others bring out the worst side.

As with Yannick, we have always said that we bring out the best in each other. He knows that I have a very high image of him because of the way he sees things, of his values and he thinks of that. Now, there have been moments that when I was angry, it was not bringing the best out of me. But in the end, he has always helped me find what there is best in me. Like when I said I wanted to humiliate him. If I had succeeded, I would have tried to recreate that. There are women who spend their time at it, humiliating their husbands.
What is important is the respect in the relationship and I feel that my marriage today is stronger than when it started. We value each other and we complete one another well. I have my own identity and I am fascinated by the admiration he has for me. I don’t think that I have the same admiration for him. But I feel his, it is whole and it gives me support. It brings me a lot, it validates me. Of course, he’s also someone I admire a lot. I don’t know why he admires me so much. I ask myself at times but I can’t understand it.

**Yannick.** So, it tells us that basically with Florence we are simple, uncomplicated. You see how people complicate their own lives with so many stories. But for me I don’t even think about this. For example when I see Florence’s sister’s relationship with her guy and that they each accept such relation he as much as she, to me, it is strange and you have so many people who live so bizarrely. Maybe you can call it traditional or what but they continuously have power relations where one dominates and the other is dominated.

**Florence.** Today, when we talk about a “traditional couple”, there is a pejorative connotation to it. But “traditional” to me is not pejorative at all. For me tradition is what shapes the world, our culture, our past. Tradition is the backbone. If there is no tradition what is left then?

My marriage is traditional but open. I guess that it can be redefined because within our relationship, the roles are not absolute. You do this and I do this. No. It’s open and it can change. If tomorrow my husband discovered that I’m a great artist and that I will earn millions, he will stay home and tell me to go to my studio and paint! He would be very happy. Yes, I think he would do it. I would love to be able to.

Today, when I look back, I feel that our relationship is much stronger. Not to have had money despite the fact that we had a very good situation when we first met because both of us had good salaries, we were yuppies, vacationing, traveling, going out, Nicolas was born and over night we had to be very careful. And for me, I had had all these years before I left my mother and I had left her because of conflicts.

**Yannick.** If she started a career out of painting tomorrow, it would be a new experience for us to start on because I know that it is an aspiration without being one for her, so, if she has an opportunity, she must do it. What I mean is that it is not vital, she is not an artist today. Vital in the sense of a need to paint, a need to be recognized by people. Of course, it would be nice and she is asking herself all these questions if she can sell and so on. She also sees clearly that she is not going to sacrifice the children for her work. I think that Florence paints and has time to dedicate to it, to think and to talk about it and we talk about it a lot together. Sometimes I come back and I say I have to go upstairs quickly to see a new painting. ..........

**Florence.** If tomorrow I had a work which would allow me to support my family and that Yannick wants to stay home, why not, I don’t have a problem with that. Actually, he says he would agree to this very much. And I say to him, “You could not do it.” Why could not he do it? Because I don’t think a man is capable to live with this daily repetition which is part of the everyday life at home.
Yannick. We’ve talked about role reversal. I told her that I would be ready to stay home with the children and she tells me that I could not do it. I would do it very differently but I would manage. She realizes that I don’t have the same patience as she does but I am convinced that I would do it differently but I would do it equally. So, this is feasible. But this is very theoretical. I have found myself a niche with my company which she is not going to find tomorrow. Unless something extraordinary is going to come and admire her stuff and at that point I’ll hand over the brushes.

Florence. The backbone of the family is never the man but always the woman. She holds everything. She is the one who joins the threads together in her hands and who brings them which leads to the harmony of the family. She can do it all or she can destroy it all. She is the key. A woman chooses the friends of the couple. Do you know many couples where the woman does not say or choose the friends? I don’t know many. Our friends are people I brought. I see other couples around me and I notice that it is the woman who decides who come or who does not come. “Ah, no those I don’t want them!” What is the poor husband going to say? It is her who holds the threads.

Women are much stronger than we think. The power of the weak. Don’t you know that the weak are the most powerful? We are the strong ones. We raise the children. We make choices for them. I often wondered how Hitler’s mother raised him. He had a mother. How was this little boy raised. One day he became Hitler. So, it is we who raise them. Can you imagine the power we have!

Yannick. I cannot say clearly that there is no definite role. There is a definite role because I am the provider in the sense that I bring but Florence’s role is truly to take care of the kids as she does it as priority. However this priority is not exclusive which means that I try to do my own part with the kids when I am around that is, we share responsibilities. I don’t take any decision until we talk about it. We take all decisions together. I don’t decide where we go on vacation, I don’t decide on the rent of the house, all of this. I bought a motobike recently, I asked her advice and she was nice not to say no and then even if she does not want it, I did not take the decision alone.

Florence. I believe that mothers often place boys in a superior position to girls.....

It is so that my boys should be conscious of the fact that a little girl apart from physical differences, is someone who is a partner who is important, someone to respect.....and I am aware of what I say such as, “Don’t cry like a girl.”

Yannick understood how I felt about his father’s remark and he agreed with my feelings when I told him that it was “monstruous”. He does not believe in this....that one should not use a girl and that a human being is to be respected......

My boys will still have a traditional picture of the family where mom waited for them outside the school....but they also have the image of mom with an identity. She paints. Yannick tells them not to bother me when I paint. My space is respected. They respect what I do and what I love but it did not happen overnight. I struggled and I had to voice myself vis-a-vis Yannick. I did tell him very angrily, “Do you realize that
I am fighting to survive in front of you.” He was not aware of it and thinks it was extreme when I reached that point. He thinks that I am a passionate, with extreme reactions. Now, I am going to use the excuse of, “I am an artist!!” But for him, this is extreme. There is no half but extremes. It took him a very long time to understand. I had to go get into rages but eventually he understood. I guess he thought about it. Yes, in our conversations it came out.

When you hear what happens everywhere, all around and you come home knowing that he is there. You experience the feeling that nothing can happen to you. This is what Yannick gives me at all time. When he’s around, I don’t lock the doors but when he’s not around, I do. This sounds crazy because anyone can still come in and then, what could he do? He’s sleeping anyway. But the feeling is stronger. He’s here and I feel that nothing can happen to me. It’s like a talisman. I have never asked him how he felt about it although he knows how I feel.

When he’s away on a trip I feel unstable. It’s true. At the same time, he calls me even from France twice a day. He’s there. *I feel unstable because it’s empty*. It’s not even a matter of physical emptiness but it is *to expect* in the evenings even if we do not greet each other *that he’s here*. So, imagine when I think that he could disappear what it does to me. Sometimes, when we have not said good-bye in a nice way even argued a little to tell myself, what if it was the last time? Can you imagine? This really.

The feeling is not the same when I am away from my painting. I don’t feel empty when I leave although this time it did create a problem for me. Before it was not quite such a problem but during these three weeks, several times I felt, there is a problem, I have to do something about it.

**Choices**

*Situational*

**Yannick.** I remember in my childhood the relation I had with my parents and I had a lot of love for my parents and I felt that my real limits were when I was about to displease them so even if I did stupid things when I was young, I always acknowledged the fact that it was going to be troublesome for them.

**Florence.** To a large extent, my first marriage was a way of saying that I had enough. I am not allowed to do what I want, therefore I am getting married. So, my first marriage meant just that. I was nineteen and a half. I got married only for that, to escape my mother’s grip because I could not take it anymore.

**Yannick.** I don’t think that I acted so that I would please them but I never trespassed the boundaries which they may not have liked. It was natural from my part though and not a struggle or conflicts. When I was younger, I was part of a rugby club where we drank a lot. It was accepted to drink. I was 14 or 15. We would really get sick. And then, when we reached 17 and 18 it was even worse but nevertheless this was something that was acceptable even though today I feel that I was not very smart to do it and I would not want my sons to do it. *But it was acceptable socially* and by the
parents but I never touched drugs. That was something that was not acceptable. So, we have to say that it was due to the pressure of the social milieu. But I felt my parents’ love and I had no intention to betray them.

**Florence.** It was 1981, Mitterrand had become elected, our enterprise was going very badly. We had to lay off ten people so I had to tell people. I remember I cried when I told the girls that we could not pay them. But the years before that, I was earning a lot of money. My sister and I had our own business. My mother had started another one and I had money. I was used to that. I travelled. I had self confidence, I was a professional. And then, all this came to an end. I found myself with Nicolas without any money. Yannick did not know what was going to happen. This has brought us closer together.

In fact I kept on thinking that it was better in the States but he took the opposite decision. “I want to go, I cannot stay any longer.” No, he would not have left without me. I had to do something. He could not find any work. We could not have continued like that unless we wanted to end up in prison for debts which was also a possibility. So, we left for France five years ago.

We moved back to France and at first, we lived with my in-laws. Then we lived in Arcachon. Yannick found work very quickly with Citroen. Six months later, we had a second child. I had then stopped everything and was not doing anything. I felt very lonely, not valued at all. Him, he was going out. He saw people. I did not see anyone.

Yannick took it very well. He understands about this. I took the children to daycare. Nicholas was going to school and the other he was about three months went to daycare during the time I was giving conversation classes in English. Then, I gave classes for which I got a salary at Nicolas’s school which was a private school. At the same time, I had decided to take the Cambridge Proficiency and I studied, studied. I had a cleaning lady who came twice a week and I arrange for her to look after my children during the lunch hours so I could give my classes during lunch hours. I juggled a lot.

**Yannick.** Now, I do take choices according to my family. And if there are conflicts in my work I actively search for another way. It is not just for the family, it is also for me as well. I am very conscious of it.

**Florence.** I don’t think it is as important for a woman to create as it is for a man. I don’t feel that women are ready to sacrifice family and children. So, there are few. **Margot does not talk about sacrifice because she did not want it therefore there was nothing to sacrifice.** She said she neither wanted to have a relationship nor she wanted children.

Men do not have to sacrifice things in many ways because even in the traditional normal, they are not expected to take care of the everyday in the house.
Conclusions

My Construction of Reality: The Existential Self

Florence. “When he speaks of his own dream of women (and his mother says it too about him), he wanted a woman at home raising the kids. He wanted a woman who would be waiting for the kids at home with bread and jam, with cuddles and chocolate”.

The example of Florence represents for me the “Feminine Mystique”. Despite the efforts to become such and fulfill her husband’s dream of the woman, she struggles with the feminine mystique,

“The daily routine is something which can be despairing if you don’t know how to deal with it, if you do not have vast amounts of things which interest you for you”.

“I said to him what do you want to do between the diapers, there’s no interest. So, I took up studying again. This was in the States. I stopped working over there and I started to study”.

Also searching for the something else which will validate her, will make her feel more human,

“On the professional level, I felt I did not exist. Even as a mother, I was not fulfilled. Yes, when the baby was tiny, I had satisfaction but as soon as they were no longer the little baby I was breastfeeding, it was finished. So, after a few months, I felt I was no longer existing”.

“Afterwards, I gave English courses and I did many things. I took care of an association. Afterwards, I started to work again. I wanted to work for myself. This validated me. I worked benevolently so I was not paid. It was strictly for me. I existed, it was my choice. I had another interest besides the house”.

“Yannick travelled a lot throughout France so quite often, he was not there. So, I juggled between my work and the children and I was very fulfilled. I was happy. Yannick’s traveling did not bother me that much.”
Florence’s struggle throughout the interview is to harmonize the feminine mystique with being able to fulfill herself through work or an activity which will be interesting taking her away from the boredom of the housewife’s daily life,

“I could have never stayed home. This was not possible. I would have had to create something, to be in contact with people. I thought at one point of giving American cooking classes in my kitchen, just to have this existence outside of the children, the husband, just for me so that the people would not just see Nicolas’ and Benjamin’s mother and Yannick’s wife”.

There is a further split expressed in her reflections on women who have careers which for her is not really possible,

“When I think of women artists, I believe it is tied to birth. That we carry the children. It goes beyond biology and this is why women who do not have children can create. It appears that to a certain extent, it is one or the other. This is how I see it. When men talk to you about arts, it comes from the guts. Where do children come from? It is a popular image but it really speaks. They express themselves differently and this is why they can succeed because they can forget the rest”.

except in rare cases and it is done in the name of “sacrifice”,

“Career women sacrifice their children, their husband for their career. Yes, in some cases it works very well but this is because the other one accepts to take on the mother’s role. Somewhere, it has to be this way”.

The questioning further emphasizes the feminine mystique,

“I don’t know whether in the case of role-reversal women would see the role of musician and painter as important. I don’t know why women do not become great artists or musicians, why they do not get fully involved in politics like some men do. In the States maybe. But are the feminists feminine? Have not they lost something?”

and the split that she experiences in wanting to do something else and arguing that it is not really possible to fully do it while being married,

“Margot could have never thought of herself as a painter if she had been married. She says that there is no room for it. And, no, she never married. But I had to mention some exceptions to her because she claimed that one could not become a great artist being married. Her story is powerful. This is disturbing in any case. Not that I have the arrogance to become Matisse or Picasso. She says
that rare are those who have succeeded to have a balanced relationship while at the same time being a great artist. Their partner had to sacrifice themselves for them. They had to sacrifice their own personality. People like Renoir. His wife totally dedicated her life to her husband. We have friends who are painters. He’s a painter and she used to be a painter. She went to Beaux Arts. One day she said to us, “Painting is not vital to me but it is to him.” So she takes care of everything else. Yes, she made her choice. But at the beginning she must have suffered. *She made the choice to stay in the dark in order for her husband to fully express himself*. So, he’s rid of any worries, of the everyday. There’s only his painting*.

Her belief in not being able to dedicate herself to something which bring out her self by listening to and reading about famous painters,

“I listen and this is only when I hear people like Margot or Leila that I then realize that somewhere if you really want to become, you have to give yourself completely to it and I cannot do that*.

“For now, if I took the choice of painting, it would be very selfish. One cannot live like that. One cannot build on destruction. This is what Gauguin did. He struggled himself with destruction whereas Margot she has had the courage to tell herself from the beginning what was important to her, it’s one or the other. I’m not going to not build something next to it because this what I want to do and I am going to put all my energy into it. This is also a form of courage. She neither lied to herself nor to anyone else*.

*Sometimes, I have asked myself and in the end, this is a lack of courage. I went very far thinking about Gauguin who sacrificed his situation, his family. So, I have asked myself, that if somewhere deep down I was sure I had some talent I would not sacrifice it all. And the answer is “No”. I made my own response. I could not make the sacrifice..”

What is not clear is what “sacrifice” means for Florence. Does she have a definition or is that definition caught in the Other’s?

“I don’t think he understands someone like Margot. For him, to sacrifice children it is something, it is something”.

But the existential self cannot resist,

“For me I don’t know. I still ask the question and I have asked it many times. I have to be honest. That’s for sure. I told Yannick and he knows I have asked this question to myself. He says nothing. He does not respond to it... “... But at the same time, I tell myself that if I was 20 and discovered painting, would I
have made the choice to get married. And at that point, I think that the answer is no. I don’t think I would have gotten married”.

“I don’t think I would have gotten married if I had discovered painting at 20. I don’t think that the two are compatible because the time that you have to dedicate to painting is not compatible with a husband, with children if you really want to become a painter, if it is not just a hobbie”,

and the realization that the choices were there but she did not see them,

“At the time I did not really see that I had choices. I did not see them”.

“When you think about it, women do not become famous artists, very rarely. Do you know many women who have written many symphonies? Why not? Because all of our creation comes from out of it, our guts. They did not have the choice”.

“There is a problem when a woman cannot choose. This is where the problem is when she cannot choose. When they cannot be at peace with themselves. I went through many long years when I was constantly at war against everything, against society, against life, against myself, especially against myself”.

So, in order to harmonize our various struggles, we try to convince ourself that this is good and she redefines her own image,

“Now, when I look back on all of this, I feel that I was not completely right and that I exaggerated because it is not uninteresting to take care of one’s own children. Honestly, I think that I was trying to exercise my power in the relationship. A control so that I could say that I was also capable to do something and that not only he could do”.

Is it a power image or just a longing to just be “me”?

“Now, we are going for two weeks. The same will happen and so many people to see. This time I will take some painting. I did last time but could not paint. I neither had the space nor the time. I did not have a corner to myself. You know painting, it is very selfish. You have to have your own corner”.

“I don’t feel that when I want my space it is really selfish but it “absorbs” us. You cannot do otherwise but shut yourself to others. Or, you cannot concentrate. It is like writing...”.

“Today, I see myself married and mother of, it is a very traditional picture. But somewhere, I am me. Even though before I felt that I could not just be the wife of and the mother of, today I can be both and somewhere I feel that I can also be me. This has surely something to do with the partner I have and also the problems I have managed to solve in my mind”.
“My space is respected....”

Although she feels “I am me”, the vision is diminished by the boundaries of “the problems I have managed to solve in my mind.”

The split is continuously felt throughout the interview, a strong desire to find one’s own self through wanting to disconnect at times from both, the role of mother and wife and from the professional whom she misses sometimes and rejects at other times when she reflects on her own mother,

“My mother’s work was to earn money. She does not know how to occupy herself differently. She earns money. For people, this is what work is, how much you make. This was contributing to her idea of the independent woman”, but, she says:

“Today, I feel that my mother was not right because there are other ways to consider the relation. I do not feel that because I am not earning any money, I am not working. I work in the well-being of our couple, in the well-being of my children. This is a form of work. It all depends what we mean by work”.

and,

“Do I regret not to have discovered painting at 20? My life would have been different. Do I regret? No, not really. No, because I would not have wanted not to have known what I love, Yannick, the kids”.

Even though she strongly advocates tradition,

“Today, when we talk about a “traditional couple”, there is a pejorative connotation to it. But “traditional” to me is not pejorative at all. For me tradition is what shapes the world, our culture, our past. Tradition is the backbone. If there is no tradition what is left then ?”.

there is also a desire to change it,

“No, I don’t raise my boys as “males” by societal definition. first of all, I made them understand that a girl is someone just like them. I don’t want them to
make any difference between a girl and a boy. From an early age, I always told them that it is good to have feelings and to cry. *One respects a woman*.

“We have a choice though. We don’t have to raise boys that way because he is a boy. Sometimes I tell my son that it is not because he has a penis that he cannot do these things. So, he looks at me with disgust. This is what happened last week when I asked him to take out the garbage and when I said that to him, he laughed, “Yes”, but he took the garbage out”.

“Today, I paint a lot and this is an activity where I feel totally fulfilled. Yannick understands it. My children accept it too. They are happy and proud of it. When I gave English classes, the eldest because the youngest was then a baby, was happy. If their mother does something, they are proud. I think honestly’.

“...but they also have the image of mom with an identity. She paints”.

A final split for Florence is between two loves. She talked earlier in the interview of what love represented for her. The split is also expressed within love itself, between her husband and the unbearable thought of losing him,

“What I am terribly afraid of is to tell myself that he could leave before me. I think of it often and this would be a devastating thing. I don’t think that painting could substitute for him. I don’t believe so because I did not encounter painting before. In fact, it is really him who gave me the means to do it, to express myself. And therefore I am thankful for that. He pushed me and encouraged me to do it so I don’t know how it could have been before”.

and the struggle she experiences between loving him and fulfilling her duties as mother and wife which she knows he expects from his vision of the traditional woman but which are not enough to her,

“I was raging all the time. I was mad at him but also mad at myself. I was mad at me because I *could not find the proper equilibrium* within the relationship, in the house with the children. I *felt stuck* but also there was also something that I always knew and that is, I loved him. This was absolute. I never said to myself that, “Gee, this guy bugs me, I ’m fed up with him, I am going to leave him.” No, I knew I loved him so I knew that I had to find a solution and that solution was not for him to find it but for me. He did not have a problem. I had the problem”,

and the love of painting.
“Painting is more than a hobby for me though. It is me, my being. I suppress everything around me for it. I would not trade it for another thing”.

She expresses her feeling of love powerfully,

“Yannick was not there and painting was not there. I told Yannick, this is terrible. I could not paint, nor draw and added to that, there’s always noise with the parents and the children. My territory. I could not recreate it”.

**Yannick.** “I always had this search to find out why and how things work which is not totally satisfactory to me and which I’m starting to understand more and more about life but it’s true, it’s about humanity. *You can wrap yourself with so many illusions when you put a distance between yourself and certain events but when you realize the true reality and the thing is so human really. What I mean by reality is for example how decisions are made but all decisions. At the level of work but also at the level of governments, all the big decisions. But it is so basic, so emotional, stupidly human and at this level, I am starting to get to the end of my research*”.

Yannick’s interest is to understand the reasons things are done such way at the level of the system mainly. This interest has been part of his past as he started his journey into the complicated and pressured life of businessman.

“When I came back that summer from England I spent a great deal of time with the marketing representative. At the end, I was part of it...and I thought that this was interesting. In addition, I had the image of the businessman who was a friend of my mother for a very long time. He’s a guy who really succeeded, who retired lately”.

From a young age, he is attracted to the life of the powerful,

“Since I was a child, there was something that motivated me and this was that I was curious about understanding what was happening at the highest level, of how people function. For me it is a whole mystery”.

“He was the director of four factories. So, he had succeeded. And I had seen him as a businessman in England and I thought I would really like that. This I wanted to do”.

“After my baccalaureate I went to spend one night at the hospital with a cousin who was an intern there. I was so happy with the white coat on, the doctor’s tag and so on. I was 19 years old, I was with all the doctors. This was cool”.
He is caught between his fascination for the powerful and yet, a recognition that this kind of life is not necessary because,

“My family is greatly more important than my work. There is no doubt about this. I can tomorrow let go of what I am doing for my family and for a financial level which would be about the same. It would be ridiculous because it is an interesting work and bearable. I will never be a millionaire but each month it comes. So, it is easy. I would not gamble anymore”,

while a past fear not to have been able to assume the provider’s role,

“I had a great fear when Nicolas was born, a panic and I kept on reassuring myself that if the worst of jerks could make it, I would also make it. But I could not really see how I could make it as a father and be responsible for all of this. This was a turn for me. It was a total turn in my life because everything changes, life style, all when you have a child. But this is fabulous memories, all of it, Florence’s pregnancy and the birth. These are very strong memories”.

Therefore the split experienced here is to harmonize the past and the present and to find the right middle ground in which the self can be expressed.

His longing of the past represented by a land of opportunity in which he met a different social strata is obvious,

“In Texas when you go to a party you meet someone and she says, “I’m in real estate, I buy.” You see the difference immediately. This one she says, “I buy.” This is extraordinary. This is Texas. I had an education over there! And Texas in seventy nine, it was delirious. All the parties they had in the ranches and so on. I was young. All the doors were open to me. I was at the University of Dallas, a Catholic university, very wealthy, very private. I knew many people. I was going everywhere. I met dazzling people. Often they have an intelligence which is superior. So this helps to position one self. I’m not talking about the ones who have stumbled on a project and who became rich overnight because anyway they fall back down fast”.

“Of course, you have the guys who work in the offices for architects but I always had this search to how it works, how things function. Not how a building function although it may happen if one day I have the means to draw a house I’d like. This is a style within the same life style. I always try to understand how this functions. It was great for me to meet important people. It is fun to see
them. *This excites me in order to understand how they function and how they can be deconstructed. People who have power, is to be able to deconstruct them and see how they function*. 

For him the rich people, the ones who are born into that strata “*Often they have an intelligence which is superior.*” His existential self is expressed in the fascination he has about that kind of world and furthermore, in the excitement to be accepted in that milieu.

This is further reinforced by the love he carries for the profession of architecture,

“Architecture is something I love and I have many books at home. I would have loved to do this. I discovered this in the States, I was about 30. I discovered it through a friend who was an architect and you know the MidWest is very rich in architecture. The West is crazy, the East is very conservative, the MidWest is fabulous. You look at Dallas, Houston, Chicago, it is extraordinary. I discovered many things. I saw the explosion in Dallas. I saw the construction of Dallas City Hall. There is the Theater Center by Frank Loyd Wright. You have many buildings. It’s fabulous in Dallas. Then you go to Fort Worth next to it, it is the same. There is a completely new town which was built. So, I discovered that”.

Yet, he did not give himself a chance to access it because from the beginning he felt that it was unattainable,

“It was too late for me to go into it because I had already started to build something else. It was late for me to start then. Secondly, it was as I saw it in the United States, a profession of the rich, I am not rich.

because,

“People who really have fun in architecture are people who have the means. Of course, there are schools but my friend who was architect came from such background that when he needed to start something his grand-mother gave him a check for two million dollars in order to start a building. He was 30, he was having fun. This is not a negligeable sum”.

This epitomizes the existential side of our self which desires but also feels that it is not possible to have because it belongs to a fantasy world. In this case Yannick expresses it.
Even though he feels that he's always been independent,

"From very early on I have always been very independent and I have always taken care of myself, I always worked during my vacation even though my parents helped me a lot, I worked. I would buy a motocycle and my grandmother would put half as much as I would",

"I was an intern in college and the last year I had my own room. I had my independence",

he looks at the events in his career as being fateful,

"I had been lucky because I had known the boss but I had also been lucky to climb up the ladder very quickly in the company. And it was only a stage"....."

Also during my second and third year, they required a stage and I feel that I was very lucky”.

"I was lucky” is also stated regarding his childhood,

"I feel very lucky because every vacation, I would take two months to go to the shore near Nice. I would go one month with my grand mother and one month with my parents. I was very close to my maternal grand-mother. She was very beautiful and had lovers. Yes, she eventually got married. My father's father died when my father was 6 or 7 months. So, she was a young mother in Dordogne with a grand-father who was landowner, mayor of the village and so on and she react against that. She did not want to be under the grand-father's control and she started to work for the post-office. She became inspector. So at the young age of 22 or 23 she started to work and climbed the ladder. She remarried 17 years after her husband's death. She was somebody who was very independent, who knew many people and who had fought a lot to gain her own independence”.

Again a lot of admiration and fascination are felt towards his grand-mother who is someone who has “power” and “beauty” and there is again a certain pride and excitement to have been part of her life,

".....So, going away with her was very nice because she was very cheerful, very pretty and so on. No, I don’t really think that she had much influence upon my life....."
It is not quite clear why he feels that she did have any influence upon his life. Is it because of a disappointment not to have belonged to the rich and powerful as he has described them?

Even though, he feels comfortable in his role as a provider today,

“My role as a provider is not a burden....

it is not very clear whether he is fulfilled by it,

“not because I like my work, I will always find work. I am totally confident in my own ability to provide for my family”.

“My family is greatly more important than my work. There is no doubt about this. I can tomorrow let go of what I am doing for my family and for a financial level which would be about the same. It would be ridiculous because it is an interesting work and bearable. I will never be a millionaire but each month it comes. So, it is easy. I would not gamble anymore”.

This is further reinforced by his conveying his happiness when they are happy,

“I work for myself and to make myself happy because what makes me happy is when it makes them happy. So, I work for myself even though I work for them. Ok, it is a vicious circle and it is certain that I am not going to take a little job and when I have problems because I have had some in the past and C. is the fourth co, I am working for, I make sure that I am the one who decides when and how to leave. I plan it before”.

A manipulation of the situational and the existential choice is expressed with regard to the Other, here represented by the family as a whole. This embodies the feeling that Yannick conveys throughout the interview, a duty to please his family (from an earlier age doing what is acceptable by his parents) and do what is suitable to make his family (his wife and children) happy and a wish to reconcile with old feelings and with his old self,

“Money is not a brake for me and I am starting to reconcile myself with money as well in the sense that it is not an end because I know I can earn some to provide for myself now I have to have a little more to provide for my family but
it is not absolute. Some people who are very rich are total jerks whom I have no respect for. So, this is not a criteria. It does not remain a criteria”.

“No, there are no things that I would have liked to do or redo. Yes, wait a minute, like everyone, there are details where I feel I totally missed. They are simple things which make you ill-at-ease at the moment because you were out of place but there’s nothing really big. Yes, I have missed occasions in business but this is part of business. I have taken decisions which could have had a fundamental influence but would it really have changed my life. These decisions are taken regularly and now there are less important ......It is less decisive”.

as well as to find some time for himself to practice golf,

“I am asking myself right now an important question and this is whether I’m going to play golf or not”.

There is a delicate balance between wanting to do it and fearing so because of obligations,

“I am afraid it will take too much time and I’m not sure that I want to do it. If the family was not around, sure I would do it”,

once again struggling between the situational and the existential,

“So, I think I’ll try to combine, to go and practice in the morning before work in order reach a good level but I don’t see myself spending Saturday morning or all of Saturday playing golf”.

The friction between the past and the present is continuously present and the split makes it difficult to disconnect from what was,

“When I was younger I played golf in Paris and now, there’s a possibility to play at this near by facility where I have many friends and cousins who play and it will be fun to do when we go back to France on vacation but I don’t see myself spending weekends playing”.

There is a continuous struggle and the two forces are continuously at play,

“So, I’ll have to fragment it during the week so that I can acquire a certain level. I know that this is something I’ll do when the boys will be gone and I will do it as much as possible with Florence. It suits me though because there’s a lot
of walking but it is time consuming. It takes three or four hours. I don’t have three or four hours just for me during the weekends”.

“I don’t do it because I want to do other things with them. Even if it to watch them play. I want to be with them, make myself available. I feel good there. I am very conscious at how fast time goes. My childhood went by very fast and that it will go fast for them. I don’t want to miss. In five or six years they’ll need us less and in twelve, it will be over”.

There is also a struggle to come to some form of reconciliation where both past and present harmonize,

“What validates me the most at this time and I think like many parents is my relation with my sons. I am very proud of Florence and that she is my wife. My work yes but because I have somewhat of a status here in a big firm but I am conscious that this is not just that because it is the firm which gives me those little honours. This is not necessary and quite often I tell Florence that it bores me to be invited around. It’s not my thing. I don’t have to dominate. I just need to finish what I am doing. I am very much goal oriented, objectives I important to me as well as the manner to reach them. This is important”.

“Until I got married, I had many girl friends, it was natural and I believe that there is a special time for every thing in life. We cannot mix everything. There are many things I did while I was young which I would not do again. There is a time for everything otherwise it lacks maturity and we do not evolve which means that we have not learned anything. I always construct myself, at all times. And I am very curious to know where I am going but I try to construct my Self”.

“I feel that I make things happen...... I predict a lot beforehand. I try to anticipate to the maximum and like everyone else I take slaps in the face”.

“I read, this is a way for me to escape to be really in my book which I share with Florence. Not all. I like to watch motobike racing and rugby on television. I have just bought a bike and I am going to spend some time working on it and taking it for rides”.

“I don’t pass on any message to my sons. Not to push them of course is a message but wait, I also make them understand that everything has a price. You have to know what you want. When Nicolas tells me that he wants to be a forester and have a Ferrari, he has to be explained that he’ll have to make a choice at one point. This is it. You influence them anyway unconsciously. Benjamin wants to be an architect. Near my night table right now, I have books by Frank Loyd Wright because I love architecture”.
Chapter 4

CONCLUSIONS

Universalism: Looking at Gender Parallels

We all deal with in our everyday problematic with Friedan’s “schizophrenic split”, or what I have simply called in my conclusion after each interview “the split”. This split is experienced in all the couples I have interviewed. In Pierre’s case it is the struggle between family and work were the struggle is experienced through the challenges of the role of the family provider and longing to be a couple once more; Marie’s split is between a sense of belonging and being accepted while finding her own space; Clare’s split is being oppressed by family duties as a caretaker and wanting to have a career; Ramsey’s split is to be caught between two families while longing to take control of his life; Debra’s split is wanting to nurture and be nurtured and yet, fearing to loose control; Gary’s split caught between a new role of husband and father and searching for the right balance to be accepted and to remain self; Lissa’s split is between feeling of “being stuck” and fearing to take her own choices; Robert’s split is between work and regret not to have been a better nurturer for his children; Florence’s split is between fulfilling the duty of the wife and mother and the soul of an artist; and, Yannick’s split is trying to close the gap between past and present, where the present still speaks of past discoveries while wishing at the present to find time to practice a hobbie and juggle with family responsibilities.
However different the schizophrenic split is expressed by each of us, it is nevertheless present in all of us. We all experience at one time or another in our life a constant pull between the “should” and the “want”.

When I address the universality of the split, I am looking at two main aspects:

- we all address it and that,
- it is neither gender nor cultural bound.

While underlining in this thesis what the schizophrenic split is, I have tried to convey to my readers just that, that we always have to face it. In giving an elaborate analysis of what I have interpreted as the split through the words of my informants, I have also brought out in my conclusion of each interview that the split has mainly two parts. But this may be further divided in two and I have expressed this when I say that there is a “further split”. However there is always a side which addresses the situational, the choices that we have made because of circumstances and a side which addresses the existential, the choices that we would like to make because we know that they bring out our real self, but have not usually done so because of life circumstances and societal obligations.

The parallels that I emphasize in the next section reinforce my argument on universalism that the split that we experience between situational and existential is neither bound by gender nor by culture. If we look at certain aspects of people’s lives as I have during my interviews, we can then approach the issue of gender a step further. It means that rather than looking at the differences between genders, we look
at their parallels. For example, the issues that I have treated such as **Childhood Memories, Aspirations-Expectations, Conflicts** in the marriage and **Choices** do not pertain to a particular gender. By contrast, if I had chosen such issues to debate as **Childbirth and Delivery** or **Menopause**, this would have taken a different tone because these particular issues are gender bound. This is also the reason why I have said in Chapter Two that Biology only accounts for human differences.

Therefore, we have more flexibility to look at gender through its parallels and to recognize that as we are approaching the 20th century, a post-post modern society, we have to change our perception of gender in order to harmonize the world.

The factors common to all individuals in this study are that they share a common educational and social background as well as living a life as expatriates, (except for Ramsey) at the time of the interview.

**Childhood Memories**

When relating their childhood memories most individuals did not see gender differences with their siblings while growing up, except in the case of Florence who acknowledges a great difference between herself and her brother.

All individuals had a role model growing up, either their father, their mother, their grand mother or a friend who made an impact on their future. However, most of them said that they did not follow into the footsteps of their mother or father in terms of a career. In recalling their relationship with either their mother or father, each
informant compared their current situation to the parent’s situation when the informant was growing up.

When voicing their dissatisfactions throughout their young adulthood, all individuals tended to blame their situation on the influence that a parent had had on them. Most informants did not convey strong feelings of nurturance by their parents except for Yannick who voiced that it was difficult for his parents to see him leave and for Ramsey whose parental control was quite high. Clare, Debra and Florence felt rejected or neglected by at least one parent. Except in the case of Florence who felt that she was treated differently from her siblings, Debra and Clare’s siblings were treated equally. Lissa felt that she was not given a fair share and refers to herself and her brothers as “Latch key kids”. Gary, Pierre and Marie did not have strong feelings on the subject.

**Aspirations-Expectations**

When the question was asked of their aspirations-expectations in life, most answered in relation to what their parents had encouraged them to do. For six individuals, their parents did not play a part in their decision to go to college or to choose a particular career. For four, the parents had an impact on their education or/and career. Pierre was encouraged to pursue a technical education, Lissa felt that she had to do something because of the academic background of her family, Florence’s mother wanted her to work in the family business and Ramsey’s path to a career was chosen by his father.
In the section on marriage, most informants had the traditional successful image of marriage prior to getting married but did not really look for it. They felt that it would just come, except for Florence who was searching for love and looked for her ideal in her first husband. Ramsey was more concerned to have a career and Yannick saw the image of being married with children after his first marriage had failed.

All informants compared their own marriage with that of their parents and all of them said that they did not want to have a similar relationship with their spouse although Ramsey saw in his own marriage some similarities with that of his parents and Robert felt that he had become more like his father. All individuals felt that their marriage was less traditional than their parents. Friendship, partnership and a strong desire to remain one’s self are the common factors found throughout the interviews when discussing conflicts in the marriage.

Romantic love, nurturing and feeling protected were the most important things that all informants felt were needed in the marriage.

**Conflicts**

Two individuals, Ramsey and Florence, felt very strongly that they were the “backbone” of the family. Ramsey felt that his role as a financial provider defined the backbone of the family while Florence felt that women are the backbone. The other individuals felt that the Other was the backbone.
In each case power control is an issue. Each wants to assert their control in the marriage and has felt at some point or another during the marriage that the Other did not understand them.

The need for acceptance of who they are by the Other was voiced by most informants.

The issue of independence was an important aspect mentioned repeatedly. For all individuals to have some independence within the marriage is crucial for the self to be expressed. One aspect of independence expressed by my informants is in “wanting one’s space”: in order to study in Lissa’s case or to paint in Florence’s, to play golf in Yannick’s, for Robert to only have to take care of himself in the morning, for Ramsey to have control of his life, for Clare to spend time at the gym, for Debra to provide for herself, for Gary to remain himself while undertaking the role of parent and spouse, for Pierre to get a break from the provider’s role and for Marie to find her space with friends and horses.

Independence also had the connotation of “different” for most of my informants. A sense of being different when “I have always been independent” is strongly conveyed during most of the interviews. A sense of power and pride if also experienced.

Strong expectations from the Other are expressed by all individuals during each interview on both the emotional and the physical level.
Not being understood, not feeling supported, not being accepted as they are were very much voiced in all interviews.

Missing the romantic aspect of love was expressed by most informants.

A lack of communication in the marriage was voiced by all informants.

**Choices**

All informants saw that they had choices at one point in their lives but voiced that they did not take them at the time because of circumstances. Therefore, each interviewee took a somewhat different route than was expected at first. The educational path was for all the turning point to choose a particular career or to realize that it was not suitable. For most individuals succeeding in a career or in education has not been achieved because of circumstances, except for Gary.

Even though all informants voiced that, “they do not regret anything and would not change anything in their life”, they have aspirations which do not match their present life.

Although after each interview, the existential self was brought out in the concluding section of *My Construction of Reality: The Existential Self*, it is important to bring out the common points already drawn in the previous sections but which further reinforce the concept of the existential self. The power relation
continues to exist in the struggle to find the self and the dichotomy between "being independent" and "belonging" is felt in each individual and goes back to Lee’s interpretation of the community.

In the interviews, this is expressed through a powerful description of love as in Debra’s case, or in Florence’s feeling that “I” no longer existed. For Robert, it is through the regret of not having nurtured enough and Pierre’s longing for he and Marie to become a couple again or Gary’s expression of the spiritual part of the relationship. It is also Clare’s feeling of sadness that she can manage by herself and Ramsey’s longing to take care of his family without his father’s control. It is expressed in Yannick’s powerful discovery of architecture and Lissa’s sacrifice for her children.

When asked where they felt mostly themselves, most of my informants answered “reading”. Isn’t reading a tool which help us to escape into the existential?

In the themes I have addressed, the “I” symbolizes both the societal construct and the existential self. Vis-a-vis the Other, the “I” is continuously present, judging, fearing, empowering while at the same time loving, longing and needing, whether this is with respect to the role-model, the father, the mother or the spouse. Throughout the interviews the split is experienced and tried to be reasoned between what happened in life and what I would have liked to see happen and ultimately what I adjusted to.
Constructing Gender: A Matter of Representation

Thus, as men and as women we can affect society and be affected through the action of other individuals in that society. Thus, despite societal pressures and in spite of the “schizophrenic split” that we experience at times in our lives, “a woman as well as a man has the power to choose and to make her own heaven and hell” (Friedan, 1965, p.12) which means that individuals have the right to be and the choice to become. In other words, man and woman primarily exist which means that human existence is given to us, we do not choose to be born, we are born. From the beginning of their existence and before everything else, “man” and “woman” move forward towards a future of which they are both aware. How their future proceeds is up to them. Is this gender bound or do we as Sartre argues make too many excuses for not being able to do the things we wish to do because, “Circumstances have been against me, I was worthy to be something much better than I have been” (Sartre as quoted in Kaufmann, 1963, p.300). Are the boundaries of gender our excuses at time for not pursuing what we want?

In existentialist thinking there is no ideal because one has the choice to become. The freedom to choose is actually what is enforced upon us from the beginning of our existence and because of it we are not really entitled to make excuses for what should be and is not. I wish to pursue this philosophy in further defining the gender mystique. Our expectations, our dreams in life are by definition created by society and not necessarily what we wish to be but what we have “chosen” to be. This was evident in my informants’ stories. To reflect with them on their own life stories only brought out the other choices that they could have also made and that
the circumstances which prevented them from not making a particular choice were only because they chose not to choose them. Quite often, it was because of the unknown and the feared. But it was also because of perhaps more complicated consequences that they would have to face and were not prepared to do at this particular time in their lives.

When we feel that we are “stuck” because of circumstances and we cannot move forward, we have to ask the question, whether we are bringing on those circumstances because of certain choices we make. Those choices in turn influence others, particularly the individuals with whom we share our lives.

In my attempt to demystify gender - that is to do away with the theoretical concept of man and woman and accept only the simple biological fact of our differences - the gender mystique reflects on and brings together the concept of “man is” with the transitional or schizophrenic split that we experience in our life when we are questioning our world and reflecting on who we truly are. It brings the definition of man and woman into a different light. Are we “man” and “woman” or do our choices in life lead us to be man and woman? What does “I am a man/woman” mean? In responding we have to look at “I” in relation to the “Other” because,

“The Other is indispensable to my existence, and equally so to any knowledge I can have of myself. Under these conditions, the intimate discovery of myself is at the same time the revelation of the other as a freedom which confronts mine, and which cannot think or will without doing so either for or against me” (Sartre, as quoted in Kaufmann, 1963, p. 303).
This is in a world of confrontation and challenges that “gender” finds itself because the more I interact with the Other the more I get to know myself. The more I know myself, the more I have to decide what I am and what the Other is.

Yet, when we look at the everyday relations that we have with our surrounding world, we come to realize that the norms of our interactions are on the one hand primarily public and institutional ones and, on the other hand, private and non-institutional. In the first instance, “Our relation to the other is governed by the norms of formal equality and reciprocity: each is entitled to expect and to assume from us what we can expect and assume from him or her” ((Benhabib, 1992, p. 159) while in the second case,

“Our relation to the other is governed by the norms of equity and complementary reciprocity: each is entitled to expect and to assume from the other forms of behavior through which the other feels recognized and confirmed as a concrete, individual being with specific needs, talents and capacities” (Ibid).

Benhabib differentiates between two Others with which we interact in our lives interchangeably though from a different standpoint. In the standpoint towards a generalized Other, I assume that this Other is like me, that is, he/she has concrete needs and desires and as such shares a commonality with me. By contrast, in the standpoint towards a concrete Other, the focus shifts to my own unique concrete history and identity which constitute my being a unique individual. Marriage, more than any relationship, can bring out the dichotomy between the generalized and the concrete Other because interchangeably the Other (in this case, our spouse) becomes one or the other and reverts again.
Benhabib argues that taking the perspective of the generalized Other implies categories such as right, obligation and entitlement which are in turn associated with feelings of respect, duty and worthiness, addressing the more public/political image of ourselves which society has mostly defined while concrete Other implies responsibility, bonding and sharing which are associated with feelings of love, care, sympathy and solidarity addressing the more personal/private side of us. In interpreting these categories while referring at the same time to the oppression of women and the dichotomy of gender, we are only looking through one lens and not letting the “generalized Other” interact with the “concrete Other”. These interpretations have become labels and paradigms of our times that we have been able to identify as the causes of gender disharmony while yet incapable of resolving and changing them because, even though we have defined them as such, they are not gender bound.

For example, in his argument on incest prohibition, Derrida claims that this prohibition is universal and that “everything universal in man relates to the natural order and is characterized by spontaneity, and that everything subject to a norm is cultural and is both relative and particular.........It constitutes a rule, but a rule which, alone among all the social rules, possess at the same time a universal character” (Derrida, 1974, p. 86). The problem I have with his argument is that this prohibition is constructed politically and cannot fit in with the natural order as referred to the human species. “Natural” implies innate or inborn and what is innate in the human being is evidently universal but has to disconnect from the political. While Derrida argues that this prohibition is of a natural order because it no longer fits into the traditional conceptualization but rather is taken for granted, he goes on by saying that “the whole
philosophical conceptualization, which is systematic with the nature/culture opposition, is designed to leave in the domain of the unthinkable the very thing that makes this conceptualization possible: the origin of the prohibition of incest.” (Ibid).

The origin of the interpretation of gender (and therefore the dichotomy of gender) is also a universal concept. Even in the varied examples of simple societies in the context of which anthropologists have emphasized the powerful role of women or the role of men as being what we have universally referred to as “women’s role”, the dichotomy is present. Reversal does not change anything. But can we call it “natural”? So, we have to be cautious when we universalize in that we have to distinguish between what is politically constructed and what relates to the natural order of man or to what Benhabib refers to as interactive universalism in which ‘the plurality of modes of being human, and differences among humans, without endorsing all these pluralities and differences as morally and politically valid” (Benhabib, 1992, p. 153) are acknowledged.

Once more, I emphasize that we have to look beyond a “female culture” and beyond “patriarchy”. We should first focus on a more fundamental theme away from the political lens. It is as if we had drawn a pyramid and at its summit was the political Institution then going down various levels or stages according to the structural levels that an individual goes through before reaching the bottom of the pyramid where a man and a woman are standing symbolizing a union (See Figure). The structural levels are, for example, the things or the events we go through in our lives depending on the environment in which we live. One level could be a career,
another, becoming a parent... which is how gender relations have so far been interpreted, with the Institution on top looking over their actions (1).

But let's approach the pyramid from a different angle and start the analysis of gender from the union of a man and a woman seen at the bottom of the pyramid in the figure. They are for now far away from the Institution (2) and its control so we can get a better grasp of the everyday problematique in their real life. In becoming a bricoleur, we are taking a serious risk because we are questioning and challenging already established paradigms just as when we make choices in our lives we are challenging that which is tabooed. The concept of *bricolage* is *universal*. So, is the concept of *choice*. What we do with it is *cultural*, but within the *cultural*, we still have a *choice*.

Before we continue, we need to first reconcile both sides and close the negative gap which has been at the root of feminism and agree that both genders have
to be equally involved in this enterprise and that the dichotomies culture/nature, superior/inferior, strong/weak if indeed recognized as such become no longer a threat and that there is a space between these poles which increases the potential for gender discourse and as Porter points out ‘admitting that space between men and feminism destabilizes in a helpful way the static structure of the opposition itself’ (Porter, 1992, p. 5).

“The essential problem of feminism was and remains men, the terms of the antagonism are in constant flux as feminisms themselves divide and evolve and the bearers of masculinity become increasingly cognizant of its margins. To insist on rigid dichotomies is to deny the import of these changes and to thwart the liberatory impulse from which they stem” (ibid).

The main problem therefore is not one of empirical study but rather one of representation and I believe that for now it is more difficult for men themselves to come to grips with the increasing re-evaluation of gender and the eventual disappearance of the dichotomy eradicating at the same time their role as “heroes”.

As women are continuing their struggle against patriarchy, they realize that the space for communication and a new beginning is indeed present. Through their increasing confidence and power they have at the same time redefined men’s role and men in the struggle have lost their own power which has led today to this confusion of self and identity and has made men to even question, “What is a man supposed to do?”.

**Men’s Oppression : A New Beginning**

Men are currently going through a transitional phase throughout the world but it is most evident in the West where a current men’s movement is emerging. The literature labeled as men’s studies, the homosexual movement as well as a redefinition of
manhood promoting men's emotions are evidences of this movement. In reading the vast literature already in vogue, it may even remind the reader of the feminist movement of the sixties. There is a definite parallel here as men are voicing their anger and concerns against women. In *Silent Sons*, Ackerman introduces the stereotypic characteristics of men as real consequences of a dysfunctional upbringing. Therefore, some of the attributes associated with maleness and taken for granted such as the “aggressive”, “independent”, “withdrawn”, “workaholic” male have been badly interpreted and represented and serious misconceptions of what males are have occurred. Ackerman asserts that there are definite causes for these stereotypic symptoms and that “Regardless of outward appearances, most silent sons represent paradoxes. This does not mean that silent sons are totally out of balance. In fact, they often appear to others as if they “have it all together”. (Ackerman, 1994, p.17). Therefore “man’s” pain and suffering have to be recognized and addressed and “man” also has to come out of his silence.

For women, who have been going through this transitional phase for the last few decades, this may be amusing. But in order for the gap to be filled and “the relational nuances” (Porter, 1992, p. 4) understood, men have to live a men’s movement in order to understand what women have been through because if women’s roles have changed and are continuously changing, men have looked at it as a challenge, as a provocation without any space for dialogue because feminists have not given them the chance to discourse on equal grounds. My main argument against feminists, and especially radical feminists, is that in condemning men they have assumed that they know men when women’s knowledge of men is indeed very
limited. This is because women have never questioned men’s role as such but always with regard to their own role, to their own oppression and to their own interest because they have lived in a relation “to the socially constructed masculinity that has its base in men’s relative public power”. In the feminist struggle, women have merely tried to reverse the roles but “with a quick reverse of gender, we can see it as the mainstay of the patriarchal ideology” (Segal; Porter, 1992, p. 37). Thus, nothing has changed. It is still a political struggle between two opposing forces in order to gain power and the problem of power, like space is learning to share it” (Spurling; Porter, 1992, p. 54).

Feminist writings have therefore only been based on representations of the male by society and what feminists have defined remains based on yet further assumptions. But many women may argue against me in pointing out the violence that is directly directed at them by men.

Although this issue is of tremendous importance and indeed part of the gender discourse I also argue that it does not stop here but that there is a further dilemma addressing a much broader issue which is with respect to the universal malaise that is experienced today by most living beings on the planet because of capitalism. The violence addressed towards women is therefore not limited to the war of genders but is a direct consequence of the capitalist turmoil and furthermore a projection onto women of the pain and hardship that it creates because women have been the ones who have come out of their homes to work in order not only to liberate themselves in becoming a part of society’s workforce but also because the capitalist institution has required them to do so in order to fulfill its needs. The struggle that women go through daily in breaking the cultural barriers and going out to work to survive financially is
observed globally. They defy the traditional boundaries of a rigid society which forbids women to work in order to feed their children. This is no longer an issue of liberation but of survival. So once again the genders are facing a bigger oppressor: surviving in the capitalist fashion.

Thus, the need for men's studies is real in order to correct the bias which has been created by feminism because if we are in the next century to determine as individuals to fill in the gap between genders, we should start by knowing one another, listening to the Other's voice in order to hear what he has to say about his own self. It is interesting that marriage counselors have succeeded in helping marriage partners to stay together based on the simple teaching of the art of communication. This has definitely not even begun in the theoretical dialectics of gender. The approach should be undertaken not just at the level of the academia but also in any type of research which addresses gender. This includes development research done for example in the areas of health and reproductive issues, decision-making in the household and so on so that we can eventually better understand the dialectics of gender on the one hand and, on the other hand stand on firmer ground in order to be able to construct a gender discourse in which human relations is the agenda.

The difference between the male and female movements is that women wanted their image changed from the bored housewife specifically to becoming a functional being who had the rights of recognition by society. So, circumstances were such that the feminist struggle was imperative whereas in terms of the male, it is voluntary up to a point because men have always been recognized as "leaders" of the
world and thus as functional beings but what is currently happening in terms of re-evaluating the male’s role is being forced by the events of the time which are redefining the place of gender within society. So, on the one hand men are forced to confront their changing role and recognize that society’s representation of the “powerful hero” is fading, while on the other hand, they are given the unique opportunity and place to voice their frustration and react against the image that society has created for them. Many may agree with me that while the gay movement is part of the wider picture of gender, it is also a voluntary reaction by the male against the "macho" image and the “baggage” that goes with it. An opposition is created within the movement just as it was created during the women’s movement: the feminist struggled against the housewife dilemma while at the same time wanting to hang on to that role which created several branches within the movement as well as conflicts between feminist theorists. In parallel the male is reacting against the male’s stereotypic image and the homosexual movement needs to be addressed with this perspective.

The alteration of the traditional and stereotypic image of the male is also what he (and I am only supposing) wants to hang on to because it is the image of a hero. The men's movement has risen out of men's own awareness of the decline of the hero and a questioning of his patriarchal value by society in general. The violence experienced is also part of the movement as the male tries to hang on to his old image and through his physical force tries to revive that image upon society. Because society has always encouraged men to empower as they are losing this empowerment, their struggle is harder and the binary opposition within the men's movement is more
powerful than it was in the women’s movement. While the feminist movement of the
sixties advocated a new beginning, it is not quite clear what the men’s movement of
the nineties advocates, a return to the old or a new beginning. It may therefore be
quite appropriate at this point for feminists to inquire, “What do men want?”

The male stereotyped as a provider, care-taker, and protector has been forced
to convey the image of an almost desensitized being because society has denied his
feelings as a human. The old tradition which tells a crying son, that "a boy should not
cry" still lives on. That he is a "sissy", "a girl", has further reinforced the image of the
"strong" male who is not supposed to show his feelings and therefore, can by no
means acknowledge that things are wrong in his life. In the present world where the
trend has turned towards spirituality and as Madonna expresses it clearly in one of her
latest songs, "Express yourself, don't repress yourself" coupled with the media who
continuously nag males with negative terms attributed to their ego, men are asked to
reveal themselves, physically and emotionally. As a result, they are increasingly
confused of what roles they should play. Up to now, society gave them little choice
and suddenly, they are confronted with very problematic issues.

As I mentioned earlier, the increasing demand that capitalism has made on
society throughout the world is no longer emphasizing the male in his long term
traditional role as sole provider. The system is cruel because it stresses the many
shortcomings of being a man that, he is a drug addict, an alcoholic, a pervert, a
murderer, a gay, a failure and so on and while trying to boost his masculinity through
his body by encouraging him to pump iron after work (that is if he has work) in order
to exhibit his maleness or exposing him in strip shows. The system humiliates him and ridicules him in making him feel inadequate in whatever role he may take. The system does not speak of the depression, the alienation, the feelings of guilt, the real sense of failure that a man experiences during the process of a lifetime. Furthermore, just as the system does not help the woman in her various roles as mother and full time worker, the system fails to support the man. While pressuring him to fulfill his macho role, at the same time it kills the American dream of any hope of succeeding. It seems that what both genders have experienced so far in terms of oppression has seen many similarities. Even though today the patriarchal system still prevails, it is important to analyze the kind of patriarch we are addressing: the common citizen or the system itself? Has capitalism reached such a level of oppression upon all of us that we have come to share a similar and common oppression and, for once, have become "equal"?

In redefining gender roles and in looking at the role of the male in particular, we should closely look at the relationship of the genders versus the system and in doing so manipulate “the space” that there is between men and feminism. Can we join forces against the system and step down from the rigid positions to which we confine ourselves in order to exist and live? If we take this approach the dichotomy still survives, but as I elaborated earlier on the symbolic representation of the pyramid it introduces a space which potentially creates a further distance from the system. The hierarchical levels of the pyramid suggest that as we progress towards its top, the concept of hierarchy comes into action as we ascend but each level implies equality and thus as “man” and “woman” are represented together on the first level, we cannot
attribute the “inferior/superior” dichotomy. Therefore, as women have voiced their own self through the expression of the feminist movements, men have to be able to speak in their own manner. They have to go through that struggle of conflicting emotions and frustrations in order to start the discourse so that eventually the questions of the past and the present of “What do women want?” and “What do men want?” will only be discoursed as “what does the individual want?”. The following introduces major aspects which have led to the men’s movement and to their voicing of emotions and frustrations.

During his seminar on “Deconstructing Masculinity” given at the American University in Cairo in the spring of 1996, Robert Fernea argues that the Vietnam War and the economy are the main causes behind the picture of the "miserable man" and that the defeated picture of the American pioneer and so-called hero upon his return from Vietnam was indeed gloom. Not only had he been defeated but also he had been betrayed by his own country. He was welcomed home with anti-military and war demonstrations and was called a murderer. Even the system no longer supported him. But it is important to remember that while these anti-war movements were going on, America and the West in general were tired of what had been and were looking for change. At the same time, the feminist movement was growing and women were rebelling. Fernea does not stress the impact of that movement on the present situation in which "male" has become the focus.

Throughout feminist literature not only has the man been stereotyped as oppressor, male chauvinist and macho to say the least but also, feminists have been
trying to deconstruct his masculinity in discoursing for example on the phallus and re-evaluating Freud, Lacan for the French feminists in particular, and emphasizing "woman", her "femininity", "her body", "feminine writing" and so on. In their attempt to redefine the role of the woman, they have attempted to put the man down (and justly I must say at times) while giving him little chance to justify himself. Have many men been asked whether they like their role as provider, whether it is easy or whether they would prefer to be at home with their kids raising them or even working part time? As mentioned previously, men have no choice in this respect and the few who dare make that choice are looked down on by society because they are breaking rules and challenging societal values. A man who stays home is not a man but early feminist studies who have depicted much anger and resentment against men have as I pointed out earlier in this chapter assumed rather than based their writings on facts. Women have often taken for granted the fact that because the role of male has always been seen away from home, he would never have considered changing that role so he was simply never asked. I also would like to point out how women themselves have ridiculed men in so-called "women's roles" and thereby, have not encouraged men to take over those roles rendering them rather inadequate when fulfilling them.

In response to women's studies, men's studies are increasingly growing in the United States and I welcome the path that these studies are taking, that is in the footstep of the ones done on women. Men studies are starting to look at what it is to be "male" rather than take him as the point of departure. As I said earlier in the text, if we are to pursue gender studies in academia as it is increasingly the case, we have to know what both genders are about and, not just in terms of their biological and
societal roles as they have existed through cultural traditions but also in terms of humans with a common destiny that is of birth, life and death shaped by our individual experiences as people and not so much as gender. Once we can achieve this kind of approach to life, then we can reconstruct gender.

The Construction of Reality: Towards a Sociology for Gender

As more studies are undertaken on the changing role of gender in the Middle East for example, "The abstract concept ‘the Muslim Middle-Eastern woman’ has been replaced "by empirical specificity of historical time and cultural place as well as social class" (Nelson; Sullivan, 1991, p. 136) while most importantly it suggests for both cases, "alternative paradigms by which to understand women's experiences within the context of concrete social realities" (Ibid).

"If anthropology tries to see everything and everywhere, then does it have a distinctive focus? As was suggested earlier, that focus is culture. This is not to say that anthropology is exclusively preoccupied with culture; it is very much concerned with what some might term the "harsh reality" of the material world as well. But anthropological studies are distinctive in attempting to connect this material world to cultural meanings" (Peacock, 1986, p. 10).

So, in undertaking the anthropological quest, we have insisted as Smith stresses "on a method that examined women's local spaces and that women themselves could learn from one another directly" (Smith, 1987, p. 215). However, while we "also insisted on an analysis that anchored those experiences in the political, economic, and social processes that shaped them "(Ibid), we also failed to include other aspects beyond that
anchorage because as Smith states, "The methods we knew would only do the kind of job we were trying to get away from; they would only turn women into objects and produce their lives in abstraction" (Ibid). As she points out, "Women's experiences and concerns" and I shall add men's as well, "in their everyday lives were not independent of determinations in relations beyond them" (Ibid). Smith's "sociology for women" comes out of that experience. She points out that,

It attempted to rethink the epistemology of sociology so that we could have a sociology that would write its texts the other way round. That is what I have tried to work through. It is a strategy that takes as central that women should speak from themselves and their experience and that the communities of their oppression are to be discovered in a discourse that can expand their grasp of their experience and the power of their speech by disclosing the relations organizing their oppression" (Ibid).

But my question to her is that, if indeed the old patterns have only served to reinforce the perception of women as being objects, in looking at women's lives only even through a different angle, are we not objectifying men's lives in the same manner that we are arguing against the very method which has served to objectify women? My point here is that if anthropology's goal is to look at relations holistically, to a great extent feminism has failed to do so in analyzing one gender over the other. Therefore a formulation of the kind of sociology which Smith proposes (which I feel extremely valid and valuable) in approaching women's issues with a more holistic view (but, nevertheless for women only), will have to be applied to men with similar points to be addressed in an effort to uncover the relations which make men themselves victims of oppression. These relations will have to be analyzed vis-à-vis the system and then, somehow be deconstructed politically so that men's position will be able to relate to a more concrete reality vis-à-vis women.
This is the reason why, in this thesis, I have approached the genders looking at their parallels rather than at their differences. In representing gender from this different, and in bringing out the individual self, I have argued that there is a possibility of dialogue between genders so that the dichotomies of gender can no longer be asserted as they have been by the system. In looking at the lives of individuals and in bringing out their common parallels, I have furthered my position in confirming that the gender discourse is a matter of representation and that we do not have to abide by the past traditions in order to realize that within gender, the most important element is the human. This is "genderless" or rather it pertains to the class of gender which does not have dichotomies.

As such, this perspective will also have to be extended globally once the sociology of women and men will have been widely accepted and adapted to cultural and religious diversities while at the same time distancing itself from the political institution. The process may finally be achieved or at least taken on a new path towards a new direction for research when the gap between men and women is filled and the concepts of "patriarchy" and "feminism" are no longer oppositions in the discourse of gender but are rather the basic blocks from which a sociology for gender is formulated.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


