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The construction of femininity in Iceland

A thesis submitted for a final examination
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To my parents, Ruth and Rúdólf

ABSTRACT

In this study it is argued that femininity is mediated by historical and cultural factors. I explore how rapid changes in the social structure of Icelandic society have introduced challenges to many cultural constructions. The theoretical framework draws from the work of Michel Foucault, in particular the idea that the individual emerges through the practices and discourses s/he is constituted in, and that these incur power relations. Several entrance points have been selected into the Icelandic culture and its ideas of femininity. One is through a random sample of 209 obituaries, published from 1922 to 1992. The other is through semi-structured interviews with 18 women, aged 16 to 88, conducted in 1992. A discourse analysis reveals two dominant discourses for constituting the "Self", with different implications for men and women respectively. "The discourse of the Chieftain" constructs the "Self" as independent, self-reliant and central. In this discourse, it is argued, the "Self" is a dominantly masculine ideal. In contrast, the "discourse of the Soul" emphasises the individual who puts others before herself, is self-less, obedient, dutiful and loyal. It is argued that these discourses were necessary for maintaining a particular power structure within the pre-modern Icelandic society, and that they portray particular roles as "natural". Changes in modern Icelandic society have caused a rupture in the harmony between these discourses. New discourses have emerged, and women are increasingly putting their own needs and selves before others. The inter and intra-subjective tensions that these changes have incurred are traced. Women´s strategies of resistance that have unfolded in response to dominant ideas are outlined. In their different forms of disciplining sons and daughters, women use their position as mothers to encourage societial changes. Implications of these findings for theories of construction of femininity are discussed.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

1.1. CONSTRUCTIONS AND CONSTRUCTING

Should anyone ever attempt to piece together a collage from all the bits and pieces of knowledge produced about Icelandic women, they would end up with a piece of work rife with contrasts and paradoxes. It would include elements such as the sagas describing their heroines as vengeful and strong-willed, and poetry revelling in the caring and nurturing nature of the mother. It would be a collection of contradictions, as rich and tense as the very culture that enfolds them. By this I am not implying that the Icelandic community is ruled by confusion and chaos. Despite the contradictions we immediately recognise many of the shapes and forms in the collage as either masculine or feminine. Our ideas about masculinity and femininity are a powerful tool for making sense of the world around us where certain images and representations of femininity are preferred over others. As Smith (1988) comments in her discussion about femininity "we just know what we are talking about" (p.37).

This thesis is a contribution to the growing field of study that concerns itself with how representations and images of femininity are culturally and socially mediated, focusing on their impact on women's lives. The concept of "construction" serves as the key to the approach I have adopted for this study. Not only does construction refer to a structure, but also importantly to the act of constructing. Femininity, since it is continually being construed, evades final definition. Yet the fact that we know what we are talking about indicates its ever-presence and importance in our lives.

Women in Iceland, like women elsewhere, are presented with "ideals" of femininity, but negotiate their position in relation to these through whatever resources they have at hand. There is continually a gap between the "ideal" or the cultural "truths" and the lived

experience. It is a gap caused by the very dynamism characterising human relations, a gap that is instrumental in explaining the tensions, joy, pain and the multitude of concepts with which we like to label experience. Rosalind Coward (1984), in her book *Female Desire,* discusses how the dissatisfaction, coupled with the inability to bridge the gap between what we are and what we ought to be, is replaced by desire: "Female dissatisfaction is constantly recast as desire, as desire for something more, as the perfect reworking of what has already gone before - dissatisfaction displaced into desire for the ideal" (p.13). Later on she adds, "Female desire is crucial for our whole social structure" (p.14).

The standpoint taken here will be that women are active and creative in choosing and in moulding themselves in terms of the images presented of femininity. They operate within a cultural framework where the meaning of their actions and experiences is negotiated and sometimes restrained. Feminist analysis is concerned with dismantling and exposing these restraints to make sense of and hopefully improve the condition of women.

Femininity should be an important research topic in social psychology. Although far too slippery to be subsumed under one definition, it plays an important part in our identity and, as I will argue, in our regulation within society. In this respect, although feminists have criticised how femininity has at times worked as a straitjacket on women's experiences, it has also been a resource of pride and joy. Few criticisms hurt more than being accused of not being feminine. Indeed, that "hurt" is sometimes used to put us in our "rightful" place. Feminists in social psychology, as elsewhere, need to be constantly on the alert against femininity being used to tie women to narrow definitions of their nature.

My purpose in writing this thesis was to draw attention to how power is implicated in the construction of femininity and how these affect our identities and experiences of our"selves". We are judged and examined by the absence and presence of certain

qualities, not only by our contemporaries but by serious academic disciplines such as psychology. Feminists have challenged many of the notions guiding research, have deconstructed some of its claims to neutrality, and have argued for the inclusion of the perspectives of women and minority groups. In this sense this thesis is part of the feminist political project that works against attempts to portray women as lacking or inferior by nature, but towards showing how their lack has an origin in thought systems that have a stake in reproducing "truths" of this kind.

The questions that shaped the orientations and conduct of this project reflected the above concerns. My main foci in this respect were:

- In terms of what ideas of femininity are women invited to model themselves?
- What do they invest in them?
- How does this knowledge affect women's understanding of themselves and relation to others?
- How have women resisted the hold the discourses of knowledge in society have on their being?
- How are these ideas used to retain and justify the social structure of the community?

The focus on the relation between power and knowledge has inevitably made me think about the power setting in which this very thesis is produced and constructed. I am, like my respondents, subjugated and empowered by particular disciplinary practices, and the way in which I have juggled my feminist consciousness against the androcentric background of psychology and the social sciences will hopefully be apparent in this thesis. It is with the help of the feminist lenses that I balance myself on the shoulders of the empirical paradigm. Although in this sense, I am writing from "inside" the establishment, I have tried to make this position explicit, acknowledging its limit on my gaze but also the way in which it can enrich it.

1.1.1. Terminology

Although I shall frequently make use of the generic terms "women" and refer to "women's experiences", by no means should this be taken as an indication that all Icelandic women are the "same" or that particular experiences can be taken for granted. The generic terms themselves are the starting point of my analysis and are, as will become clear, historically constituted. Indeed, I shall use my analysis to criticise narrow definitions of womanhood, and the way they marginalise the lives of those who do not measure up to dominant ideas of femininity.

To counteract the individualism of social psychology, where the individual is central to all explanations, there has been a trend to use the concept "subject" instead of "individual". "Individuality" is in this way problematised (Henriques et al. 1984), and attention drawn to how it is an embodied cultural construct, a particular kind of subjectivity. Part of the analysis in this thesis will be concerned with analysing these constructs and placing the individual in relation to the wider social context, as well as analysing the gendered forms "individuality" assumes. I shall here follow in the footsteps of those social psychologists who use subjectivity and subject positions to refer to how a person is subjected or given positions within discourses of knowledge. In other words, subject positions or, more accurately, the discourses of which they are part, contribute to particular kinds of identity, individuality or self-understanding. As Foucault (quoted in Probyn 1993, p. 111) pointed out, we have to make an "historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute and recognise ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking and saying".

A term much used in this thesis is "feminism". Feminism is a coat of many colours and the divisions drawn within feminism reflect the wider divisions within society itself. Feminists speak from different positions because they are located in different positions, and in that sense are Different. We are black, white, with different intellectual

backgrounds and political convictions. This applies even to a society as homogeneous as Iceland. Despite these differences, feminists are united in that their thoughts are on "gender as locus of power relations" (Humm, 1989, p. 107). As Jane Flax (1990, p. 43) phrased it, "the fundamental purpose of feminist theory is to analyze how we think, or do not think, or avoid thinking about gender".

With respect to my own feminist standpoint, it is an integral part of my identity. It is the result of, amongst other things, having been raised in Iceland, and witnessing the turmoil of the seventies, exchanging views and feminist books in my teens with like minded friends, and not having been able to look back since then. My views have developed since my adolescence as my world has expanded, but in short I do not think I can look at social phenomena in any other way except as a feminist. The ideas I have picked from the all-sorts box of feminism and which colour my approach to my research are mainly the ones expressed by feminists appropriating social constructionism for their research, with a special focus on the relation between power and knowledge. As my thesis will portray, I have been inspired by and draw extensively from the works of feminists such as Chris Weedon (1987), Jana Sawicki (1991; 1994), Susan Bordo (1993) and many more.

1.1.2. Overview of thesis

The organisation of this thesis largely follows the classical divisions of: Theory, methodology, analysis and lastly discussion. Here I shall attempt to give some idea about the content of individual chapters and the overall layout of the thesis itself.

The second chapter, "The female subject: issues of power", reflects my exploration of the culture within which social psychology has acquired its shape, and how it has given form to some of its basic assumptions. A question I ask is what part they have played in

shaping the construction and regulation of femininity, and whether feminist research is possible within the social psychology paradigm.

The theoretical framework is inspired by the work of Michel Foucault, in particular his idea that the individual emerges through the practices and discourses in which she or he is constituted. Power penetrates even our most intimate understandings of our "selves" and the way we fashion our "selves" for others. What I draw out of his approach is that we cannot just treat ideas about the individuality of the subject as given, but have to look at the cultural climate from which their form originates and in which they are re-produced. This, as I shall argue, does not mean that Foucault's subjects are passive products of particular discourses, but that the discourses play a part in focussing our vision and tuning our voices in terms of what is deemed worthy to speak about and see, where, how and why. As Probyn (1993) points out, we are dealing with a self that is "constructed within the social formation that it seeks to transform" (p.3).

The reading of Foucault is inspired by feminist "selective" appropriation of his work which at times requires some stretching of the imagination.

It is argued that a Foucauldian-feminist synthesis could be fruitful in overcoming some of the problematic androcentric assumptions guiding work in social psychology and more widely the social sciences.

I have stressed repeatedly how ideas about femininity are embedded and re-worked in the culture itself. A large part of my research for this project consisted in exploring the historical and cultural situations that made it possible for particular ideas to emerge. Chapter three, "Femininity and masculinity in the Icelandic context", reflects this endeavour and shows how many of my analytical insights would not have been possible without inspiration from previous research on Iceland and Icelandic culture. It serves as

a background to some of my later analysis and places it within a wider historical and cultural context. The reader will find many cross references to this chapter in various parts of my thesis.

For the analysis I have selected several entrance points into the culture and its ideas of femininity. The procedures for collecting and analysing the data are outlined in chapter 4, innovatively termed "Methodology". To account for the subject who is always in the process of being defined, the data has a historical dimension, allowing for comparison between generations.

The data corpus consists of interviews with 18 women, focusing on their lives and aspirations, as well as their thoughts about femininity, and 209 obituaries published from 1922 to 1992. The obituaries are remarkable constructions of lives, tailored to fit a conventional narrative. They bear few similarities to obituaries in England and actually have more in common with the speeches given by relatives and friends at the funerals of dead loved ones. They recount the life of the dead person, be it a housewife or member of parliament, and the milestones in the person's life as perceived by the author. The interviews are more fluid and more sensitive to the struggles the women face in making sense of their lives, their pleasures and constraints. They contain more gaps and more opportunities to bring up conflicts, pain, anger and joy. Both kinds of data are of course in a sense "cooked" and "processed", but the interviews have a more "raw" feel to them. Looked at together, they reflect the ruptures and tensions that inevitably are the consort of a society in a rapid change.

Feminists have argued for the importance of "reflexivity" in research and in the methodology chapter I shall reflect on what it means to be an Icelandic woman, investigating Icelandic femininity. In general I question how my personal experience might have informed my analysis but also importantly impeded it.

For the analysis I used a Foucauldian inspired discourse analysis. I looked at discursive themes and the way in which they supplemented or opposed each other. I searched for patterns in repeated tensions and discontinuities in space and time. With regard to breaks or distinctions in terms of space, I focused in particular on how space was differently allocated to men and women respectively, and the social practices involved. I was guided here by my secondary sources that emphasised how, for example, women should be involved with the inside, the domestic, and men with the outside, the non-domestic. In the analysis I tried to tease out the different subject positions offered to women and men and the practices that were allocated to each position. I also focused on anomalies and, in particular, attempts to make them look "normal".

This analysis required more work in looking beyond the text than in looking at every single linguistic nuance. In particular I had to acquaint myself with the social context that the obituaries and my respondents were trying to capture. My analysis consists thus not just of this body of data that I collected, but refers back to my second chapter which in a sense is part of my research and analysis into changes in the social and cultural landscape in Iceland.

Chapter five, "The discourse of the Chieftain", is as much about the construction of masculinity as it is about femininity. I investigate how masculinity has been the "ideal" for individuality, his characteristics, the self-regulation these entail and when, how and whether women manage to fulfil his criteria. The individualism of this discourse, it is argued, rests in notions about the character being born with his dispositions and that his or her position in society depends more on those inborn qualities than outer circumstances. The influence of nationalism in making masculinity the ideal of culture is explored and I will question how this has tied in with the emergence of the public sphere as separate from the domestic one.

Chapter six, "The discourse of the Soul", discusses the idea of the individual who sacrifices his or her soul for others. It is argued that women are more likely than men to be positioned as the good Soul, and that these ideas have been maintained not least by their reference to religion and promises about reward in the after-life. This discourse, along with the discourse of the Chieftain, are seen as instrumental in preserving a particular power structure. It is a power structure that centres around the needs of the head of the household who, in pre-modern society, used to be the independent farmer. I shall explore in particular how the good Soul is encouraged to place her own needs and self as secondary to others. The way in which the home is placed as central to feminine practices, and the idealisation of motherhood as the pinnacle of selfless femininity, are addressed, as well as the regulatory practices these entail.

Chapter seven, "Modern discourses, discursive tensions, and strategies of resistance", explores, as the name implies, resistance to established "truths" and how changes in society have disrupted the harmony between the discourse of the Chieftain and discourse of the Soul. I focus on how this has resulted in tensions between older and younger generations and sometimes tensions for the women themselves, when contrasting truths clash. My focus is on how the women grapple with these dilemmas, by for example finding a scapegoat for societal problems, or by actively taking on some action they perceive to have long term beneficial consequences. Women are thus simultaneously portrayed as active and as constrained by the social situations they find themselves in. A central question is how they use their existing positions to open up and resist some of the discursive restraints on feminine experience and are therefore active participants in defining, expanding and refining the meaning of femininity.

The final chapter is a short one, but attempts to bring the analysis together as well as focusing on the implications of my findings. I put the finishing touches to the thesis by completing the cycle of my research, going back to my original concerns and evaluating how I have gained insight into them. I shall assess how much the theoretical approach

has helped in adding to the understanding of femininity, and whether this understanding paves the way for some changes for the social psychology discipline.

One of the clues to my Icelandic cultural heritage, which potentially could confuse the reader, will be my appropriation of Icelandic names. Only about 10% of Icelanders have surnames; the rest have patronyms and very few have matronyms. My name for example, Annadís G. Rúdólfsdóttir, means that I am the daughter of a man whose first name is Rúdólf, "dóttir" simply translates as daughter. The only person to share my patronym is my sister and the potential few women whose fathers' names are Rúdólf. Had I been a son my patronym would have ended with son. I was in some dilemma as to how to cite Icelandic authors but, in the end, I decided to use the Icelandic way when dealing with Icelandic authors, and the English way when dealing with the rest. It truly always sounds ridiculous to me when I am addressed in terms of my patronym, and I have been informed that many other Icelanders share that feeling. I also think it in step with my own feminist agenda to identify the authors not their fathers. Icelandic authors, therefore, will be listed alphabetically in the bibliography in accordance with their first name. Other "remains" of the Viking heritage, apart from the name system, will be covered more fully in the second chapter.

In this thesis various ingredients have been cooked together, that separately might have been served with different purposes in mind. There are insights sparked off by different theories, sometimes originating from political and academic climates, or on phenomena radically different from Icelandic women and the circumstances in which they lead their lives. They all provide their separate flavours but the final stew and therefore possible indigestion and aftertastes are my responsibility alone.

CHAPTER 2: THE FEMALE SUBJECT: ISSUES OF POWER

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of feminist research and theory is to produce knowledge that can shed a light on, and explain the condition and experience of, women from their perspective and in their terms. In this respect, feminists have attempted to create an "intellectual space" (Aaron and Walby, 1991) to produce a rounded account of what "femininity" means to those defined in relation to it. Ultimately it is hoped that this knowledge can in some ways benefit women, either by representing femininity positively (not by negative comparison to men) or by pointing forwards to how women's situation can be improved.

These are worthy aims but have proved somewhat problematic especially for feminists placed within psychology. Psychology and its daughter discipline social psychology are inspired and produced within a male-orientated intellectual climate, affecting the knowledge produced and re-produced. It is not just that there is a gap in knowledge about women that needs to be filled, but also that the knowledge created is biased in its representation of women and femininity. This has required reading against the grain since institutions responsible for creating knowledge about women have defined them as the "Other" where masculinity is the self-evident reference point. The criteria about what constitutes "legitimate" knowledge serve to confirm the orthodox knowledge and norms already accepted within mainstream (male-stream) psychology, where the ground rules are stacked against women. Indeed, Denmark (1994) goes as far as to refer to a "culture of psychology" (p.329) where awareness of gender leaves much to be desired. This applies as much to perceived conceptions about how psychologists should approach the phenomena they are investigating, as it does to the difficulties women have faced in trying to infiltrate the discipline's institutions and ruling bodies (see Wilkinson, 1991). Considering that androcentric rationale and assumptions are ingrained into the discipline's

structure and output, from introductory text books (Denmark, 1994) to allocation of funding (Wilkinson, 1991), arguing for changes has proved to be difficult.

Feminists have, to a differing degree, taken on the role of the "enfant terrible" in challenging the conventions and expanding the intellectual horizon of social psychology. In this they have been joined by a number of other social psychologists, who think the time is ripe for a more socially and politically conscious discipline. Reading through the literature in this regard, gives an impression of a stately parent dealing with rebellious adolescents promoting new music, fashion and ways of thinking. This analogy gives some comfort in that neither party survives these years unaffected; on the contrary, the ideas of each feed into, and evoke a response from, the other. As a result it can be difficult to discern where one contribution ends and another begins. Despite triggering off occasional doom and gloom lamentations, collisions between disagreeing parties have been productive, and have encouraged some serious reconsiderations of some of the main underpinnings of the discipline. Their differences have stimulated an introspective interest in the cultural and historical determinants of the discipline, as well as provoking questions about research practice. I would argue that, in challenging conformism and drawing attention to knowledge and practices hitherto considered insignificant or outside scientific interest, social psychology can only be enriched.

Broadly this chapter can be divided into two parts. The first part considers the epistemological positioning of the female subject, and includes some speculations about the ontological status of sex and gender. I shall argue, and draw here from a number of other feminists in social psychology (for example, Hollway, 1989; Wilkinson, 1991), that, if the discipline is to be of any use for feminists, it needs to conquer some of its continually reproduced relics from the past. Examples of these relics would be the conceptual divide between the individual and society; the mind and body. The latter part focusses on the relation between power and knowledge and on the question of whether making this more central to analysis can help us transcend the dualisms characterising the

thought and knowledge production of the discipline. Here I shall draw extensively from the way Foucault's model of power (1980; 1981) has been adapted to feminist thought (by, for example, Bordo, 1988; 1993; Sawicki, 1991; 1994; Weedon, 1987).

These thoughts underpin my approach in studying Icelandic femininity and my attempts to account for its constitution in different discourses of knowledge. As I shall argue, a reasonable understanding of femininity requires looking into its grounding and definition in cultural resources and social relations, without losing sight of the differences and struggles involved in asserting a particular kind of identity or self.

2.2. THE BACKGROUND TO MAINSTREAM SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology, the mother discipline of social psychology, has been identified as a product of modernity (e.g. Gergen, 1992), and therefore has been seen as the embodiment of its values and reasoning. Modernity is not just one thing, as the simplistic analogy with the parent might have implied, but has provided the arguments that have dominated Western intellectual traditions until this century. The intellectual fermentation of the sixteenth and seventeenth century contributed greatly to its emergence and provided the models of physical and social reality from which psychology along with other disciplines drew (see Jaggar and Bordo, 1989).

The philosopher René Descartes has long been heralded as the primary thinker behind the modern framework, where God and the Bible, as the source of sovereign truth, were gently replaced by the unitary rational subject. God, according to the Cartesian version, is the one who planted the seed of reason within man. In terms of power and morality he is "the 'super-rational' phenomenon allowing us to see clearly the laws of logic and causality" (Boyne, 1990, p. 43). There are, in other words, traces of God in his man-shaped replicas and, as Reason gradually took the place of religion in the production of "truth", modern man managed, step by step, to reclaim God's voice altogether. One of

the consequences was, as Jaggar and Bordo (1989, p.3) argue, that individual investigators could "utilize their faculties to gain knowledge of the objective structure of reality".

At the time, the notion of one Reason defining the contours and content of thought marked a break with the religious restrictions on academic exercises and, unsurprisingly, this was experienced as a breath of fresh air. As a framework for thinkers, modernity seemed like a way forward from "legitimacy based on theology" (Rosenau, 1992) towards objective knowledge, purified by the clear light of reason and, consequently, considered to be the kind of model that would work for the betterment of all. Strict adherence to the scientific model was seen to guarantee value free, transparent access to the entities, be they of a physical or a social nature, out there in the real world. The tools of the scientific method would be capable of providing an unbiased version of reality. They presented the indisputable "facts" which could serve as the static points of reference against which the truth and falsity of other ideas could be evaluated (Hughes, 1990).

The flip side of the coin, and now I come to why more and more social scientists and feminists are finding the presuppositions of the modern framework indigestible, is that it disguises how its "truths" are a product of a particular cultural and historical atmosphere; how the bedrock, pillars and concrete assumptions of this project are constructions prone to damage and erosion, depending on changes in climate and conditions. The cracks identified in this world-view rest in its original appeal, mainly in the less than modest place of man as a substitute for God and therefore his unproblematic access to truth. One of the consequences has been the questioning of the status of the social researcher as an impartial voyeur and manipulator of variables. Another consequence has been an increased emphasis on exposing the cultural foundations of some of its products, for example, femininity and ideas about female nature. Needless to say, feminists and other rebels in this pursuit have come to realise that, when you choose to divert from and

expose orthodox knowledge and methodology, the step between innovation or change, and the accusation that you are "cheating" or perhaps creating something inherently faulty, is very short.

2.2.1. And God created woman

> Some ideas are not really new but keep having to be affirmed from the ground up, over and over. One of these is the apparently simple idea that women are as intrinsically human as men, that neither women nor men are merely the enlargement of a contact sheet of genetic encoding, biological givens. Experience shapes us, randomness shapes us, the stars and weather, our own accommodations and rebellions, above all, the social order around us (Rich, 1986, introduction).

Rich is frustrated that old ground has to be covered again and again in thoughts about femininity. As feminists have found out the hard way, the simplest ideas are often the hardest to get through because there are other simpler ideas that block their way. I shall trace here how the persisting idea of the unitary and rational individual, privileged in psychology (Venn, 1984), favours masculinity as the norm for individuality. Simone de Beauvoir argued (1986) that masculinity can be read as "humanity par excellence" where femininity is the deviation. In showing how femininity is positioned in relation to the "individual", I want to politicise the way femininity has been represented and produced in psychology and thereby make the legitimacy attached to these representations problematic.

Lloyd (1984) has pointed out how the supposedly neutral ideals of Reason are defined in opposition to the feminine" (p.104). This reflects a tendency in the wider culture which is to define the sexes as opposites. There the valued expressions of individuality and thought are reserved for men. Indeed, the qualities of femininity almost seem to work against individuation. As it turns out, she is too near nature, too disorderly, too emotional, too "much", for her reasoning to come up to scratch. Masculinity, therefore, has exemplified the norm whilst woman as man's antithesis has been constituted, in de Beauvoir's (1986) terms, as the second sex, the "Other", non-man, inferior and

dependent on man. Women, in other words, have constituted the scientific riddles in need of the intervention of the scientist.

The language and terms used by scientists frequently recourse to these underlying assumptions. The scientist and his object take on a clearly gendered form, where he as the possessor of the God's eye takes on the role of the definer, and his object the role of the defined. Setting the relation up in this way already indicates some of the meanings lurking behind the scientific project. As Lloyd (1984) puts it:

> Rational knowledge has been construed as a transcending, transformation or control of natural forces; and the feminine has been associated with what rational knowledge transcends, dominates or simply leaves behind (p.2).

Woman as the problem, the riddle, came so to be seen mainly through the explosive nature of her body. Women bear children, they bleed every month, as well as cleaning and taking care of the bodily products of others. The idea that there is a delicate connection between the female bodily functions and the mind, with the body constantly threatening to take over entirely, is still being re-produced in contemporary cultural imagination. One need not look further than to images of women in the media[1] and, as I have stressed, the practices of science. Women's sexuality, like nature, has been equated with danger, chaos and eruption, in need of control. The mere presence of woman as body is loaded with sexual connotations which, simultaneously, poses danger to men's self-control and begs to be put under their control. In this sense, women are the eternal Cinderellas waiting for the Prince to rescue them. Men, in contrast, have had the fortune to have their "inner beast" addressed in a positive way. Their sexual drives are active in comparison with the usually passive females who have to be careful not to trigger off the male drive. An example of this is the way in which men's biological make-up is correlated with their superior functioning in society. We are proudly

[1]The perceived correlation between the sexually active woman and derangement or loss of judgement has been reproduced in popular contemporary films such as: Basic Instinct, Fatal Attraction, The Last Seduction.

presented with the aggressive achievers or, as in the lame excuses in rape trials, the beast that can be brought to life by irresponsible "sexually provocative" females who, anyway, should know better.

The representation of woman as body has strongly influenced theorising in psychology. Examples of how woman has been conceptualised in terms of her body abound, leading Tavris (1993) to argue that psychology has been bent towards "mismeasuring" woman. This mismeasure has rested in the focus on sexual differences and the subsequent pathologisation of the traits considered to characterise women. In this respect psychology has been instrumental in legitimising theories about "essential" differences in men and women, where women's mentality is conveniently reduced to hormones or brain structures (Ussher, 1989). Pre-menstrual tension has been linked to anxiety and tension on the work front, whereas structural differences in the brain have been used to explain why girls do not do as well in maths at school as boys (Tavris, 1993). Whilst all this has been taking place, theories about the societal implications of the well-documented "grey-itch" are strangely missing; a curious omission considering that hormonal blood levels are episodic in men as well as women (Riessman, 1992).

These gendered assumptions constitute the framework for understanding human nature and knowledge, and thereby the nature of femininity. The scientific, semi-religious mantle in which the social psychologists have liked to drape themselves, has covered the view to the cultural roots of their ideas and theories, sometimes with no small consequences. Biological explanations are seductive in their capability of presenting irreducible essences that can be treated as causes, and have therefore been favoured in the modern climate. Naming a fundamental, unchangeable function that can be anatomically located gives the research results the respectability for which the scientific world craves. The body as an "essence" and experience that can be directly traced to having this "body"

(for example, childbirth, menstruation) comes in handy as both cause and explanation in the analysis of femininity. The conclusions that "feminine" characteristics are the unalterable effects of bodily functions thus are assured.

Psychologists have had problems in coming to terms with their role in actually "constructing" human nature and thereby how, as voices of authority on how human nature should be understood and tamed, they have served important normalising functions. In the name of science and human regulation psychologists have tried to intervene and describe most spheres of human behaviour, classifying and sorting out, coding and placing in hierarchies (Rose, 1989). By defining the abnormal and attempting to "cure" such aberrations as, for example, hysteria and pre-menstrual tension, psychology has not stood outside but has been part of the powerful strategies that seek to control and define femininity. Examples to back up this argument are plentiful. Bowlby's theory of attachment, stating that lack of maternal attention could lead to individual deviance or delinquency, later led to the closure of nurseries in Britain (Wilkinson, 1991). The present attention to women's out-of-control hormones provides a ripe field to express how "normal" women should behave and, even more importantly, how "abnormal" women do behave. On the other hand, questions rarely raised are whom these kinds of ideas serve or who profits from women's regulation. Why indeed, as Tavris (1993) asks, is this emphasis on difference and these particular differences?

To summarise: The hierarchies built on the basis of scientific knowledge place man in the subject position of the agent who defines woman as the object. As Weisstein argues: "psychologists have set about describing the true natures of women with a certainty and a sense of their own infallibility rarely found in the secular world" (1993, p. 195). The difficulties the scientific discourse has had in severing its connections with

religious doctrines, and the emphasis on differences rather than commonalties between masculinity and femininity, rationalised and supported what can only be labelled as male bias in the knowledge produced about femininity.

2.2.2. The individual-society divide, and sex and gender

Within the grand scheme of things, psychology as a scientific discipline has been concerned with man. A frequent criticism levelled against psychology, in this respect, is that it is too individualistic in its orientation and outlook and is thereby reductive since the individual is seen as the natural cause of all social phenomena. In prioritising the individual, psychology diverts explanation away from society to the individual's make-up; biology, traits, information-processing and so on. This is well in tune with the individualistic slant of modern culture in general, which places the individual as central to all social explanations.

Phasing out the bigger social picture encapsulating the subject and thereby many of the important factors that have a hand in shaping our understanding of our "selves" and our experiences as women, fits badly with the feminist project. Very importantly it blinds us to the web of social practices that give the different ways of being, as individuals and as feminine, their meaning. In failing to scrutinise the cultural and historical basis of individuality, the practices of psychology merely function to reproduce the individual, who is their starting point anyway. A further problem is that, since the individual is always pre-given, it has proved difficult to politicise and problematise the products based on those presumptions. It is unfortunate but introspective criticisms seem more often than not focused on the methods used for this reproduction than on the kind of knowledge produced.

Although there is increased awareness of the need to account for the social influences impinging on our being, it has proved difficult to bridge the gap between the individual

and society. Swinging the pendulum too far in the direction of the social has presented its own problems. In locating causes purely in the social sphere, women have been rendered into little more than cogs in a machine, leaving no space for agency. Conceptualising the relationship between individual and society as interactional or complementary also does not suffice. As Henriques et al. (1984) point out, it implies either that the individual is causing the social or the social is causing the individual. The binary approach is retained since society is either the effect of individuals, or individuals the effect of society. One has to pre-exist the other. As a consequence, the balance has tended to tip either towards biologism/individualism or social determinism.

The structuring effects of these binary divisions manifest themselves in the problems feminists have faced with the concept "gender". Gender is a central concept to feminist research and usually is applied to explain how differences between men and women are socially constructed and psychologically experienced. It is an alternative to reducing women to "sex" where femininity is an inevitable biological, natural product. As Simone de Beauvoir argued, "woman" is not "born" but "made".

> Woman is determined not by her hormones or by mysterious instincts, but by the manner in which her body and her relation to the world are modified through the action of others than herself. The abyss that separates the adolescent boy and girl has been deliberately widened between them since earliest childhood; later on, woman could not be other than what she *was made*, and that past was bound to shadow her for life. If we appreciate its influence, we see clearly that her destiny is not predetermined for all eternity (1986, p. 734).

At the time this vision was revolutionary in that it moved away from seeing woman as an "essence" to seeing how our lives and destinies are constructed socially. Simone de Beauvoir's autobiographers have described (Francis and Gontier, 1987) how it was almost a blasphemous statement during an era when women were supposed to be naturally destined to marry and have children.

When linked to the wider political project of feminism, feminists have been divided on whether they should interpret their inferior position in relation to man, as caused by their

biology or as contingent on it (Frith, 1994, p. 43). Gender portrayed as a pure social construct has raised questions such as: now that everything is socially constructed, how can we account for that which is "concrete" and "real"? It has lead feminists to voice the concern (for example, Birke, 1992) that the stress on the body's social nature leaves no scope to account for the tangible experience women have of its functions. Social constructionists, in other words, cannot adequately account "for bodies that bleed, excrete, desire or hurt" (Birke, 1992, p. 71).

To move past this impasse it has been recommended that we conceptualise the relationship between the individual "human beings qua material objects" (Frith, 1994, p. 16), and social as "relational" rather than as interactional or complementary (Henriques et al., 1984), without reducing either side into the other. This relational quality is stressed in the following comment by Henriques et al. (1984):

> The point that we are making is that whilst we should avoid founding a theory of subjectivity on a taken-for-granted biological origin, we cannot construct a position which altogether denies biology any effects. The only way to do this without granting either term of the biology-society couple the status of pregiven categories is to reconceptualize them in such a way that the implicit dualism is dissolved in favour of stressing the relational character of their mutual effects (p. 21).

This observation similarly applies to the relation between sex and gender. In treating those categories as relational, where neither can be reduced to the cause of the other, feminists could take stock in Michel Foucault's (1981) discussion of sexual practices and the body. He gives the body the status of a concrete phenomena but one which gains its significance insofar as it is the subject of social control. Analysing gender looked at from this viewpoint involves looking at an embodied experience with a social significance. As Butler (1987) puts it:

> ..gender is a contemporary way of organising past and future cultural norms, a way of situating oneself in and through these norms, an active style of living one's body in the world (p.131).

The benefits this brings is that the way we experience, taylor and live with our subjectivities and bodies is politicised. Focusing on woman as a mere biological body when explaining femininity gives a poor account of what it means to be a woman in society. It depoliticises femininity in the most political manner possible, through continually reconstituting a particular version of femininity as natural.

In looking at the way in which the subject is historically constituted, as Foucault suggested, we also bring to the fore how normal individuality has been construed as masculine. The individual cannot be left untouched but has to be situated in the historical and cultural context that make the formulation of his qualities possible. The macro and the micro, the social and the individual, live in and change the form of each other. We have to take into account how subjects are constituted within the social fabric and trace the threads of power that run through their very existence and ways of being. That would be the starting point for understanding how and why attitudes to constructs such as femininity and individuality change, affecting the constructs themselves. In the remainder of this chapter I will discuss the power concept and especially the relation between power, knowledge and the subject.

2.3. POWER

The emphasis on how power infiltrates every human relation, including the relation we have to ourselves, calls for a more sophisticated analysis of power than the social psychological project has so far engaged in. Conceptualising power as existing outside the individual recycles the social-individual opposition, which current revisions of psychology have been trying to surmount (Kerfoot and Knights, 1994). It fails to explain how power is exercised through the very process of individuation.

I shall argue here that analysis of power relations could benefit from a critical reading of the Foucauldian (1981) conceptualisation of power as working in and through

discourses. Although frequently positioned as an alternative to Marxist and radical feminist revolutionary theories, which have inspired much feminist analysis of power, it does not reject its insights. Indeed, Bordo (1993) quotes Hanlon Johnson in pointing out how Foucault's ideas about the body, as subjected to disciplinary practices, were partly derived from a Marxist framework. The idea that there are disciplinary measures that target groups so that they are given an inferior status, is useful and has served important political purposes for the feminist movement. Where Foucault diverts from, for example, Marx is that he refuses to give class struggles priority over other kinds of power struggles. He links power to the multiple ways of being and relating to oneself as a subject, and indeed treats individuality as something that emerges from a particular historical and cultural context. This opens up speculations on how the construction of femininity involves the operation of power. The analysis thus potentially acquires the political bite that feminism requires and the political insight that social psychology has been lacking. As Henriques et al. state, Foucault:

> ..provides a starting point where the couple 'individual' and 'society' no longer constrain the questions posed because from the outset both are problematized: both are regarded as effect of a production to be specified rather than as the pregiven objects of the human sciences (1984, p. 100).

To understand how Foucault developed his analysis of power and knowledge and how it could benefit feminist analysis I shall compare his notion of power with the more orthodox modern version which he states is based on a juridicio-discursive model of power. I shall begin by tracing the crudest outline of the modern model of power, but should like to stress that, as a theme running through various feminist formulations of power; radical, Marxist and liberal, it has not been applied religiously but with many variations.

2.3.1. The juridicio-discursive conception of power

The modern conception of power can be traced to the seventeenth century philosopher Hobbes (Clegg, 1989). Hobbes' position was strongly coloured by the political

situation in which he was enmeshed and was, as Foucault has pointed out (1981), centred around the notion of the monarchy or what Foucault coined as the "juridicio-discursive" model of power. According to Foucault, Western monarchies "were constructed as systems of laws, they expressed themselves through theories of law, and they made their mechanisms of power work in the form of law" (p. 87). I shall here draw on Sawicki (1991) in discussing the three central assumptions that Foucault identified in this model.

The first assumption centres around power as a possession which means that its central possessor has to be identified. Through identifying the possessor power is localised, and it is from these localisations that many of the ideological dimensions derive their names, for example patriarchy.

Inherent in this assumption is that power consists of some kind of commodity or wealth that can be contractually exchanged or by rights belongs to a particular group. Being powerful therefore means possessing this commodity, optimally a whole lot of it, and it becomes the means through which power is exerted over other subjects. A fault found with this idea is that a binary division is formed between those who possess power and those who do not. There is a danger that women might be reduced to the state of victimhood where men take up the role of the oppressors. Kerfoot and Knight (1994) comment on how this notion retains the opposition between the social and the individual, remarking on the passive role attributed to women.

> This understanding of power as the property of some to the exclusion of others, and outside of and beyond the individual, sets up a dichotomous relationship between the individual and the social world, between powerful men and powerless women as largely undifferentiated categories and imputes a passivity to all women (p.70).

This brings us to the second assumption which refers to the descending character of power, from the ruler to those ruled or oppressed. Metaphorically speaking, power flows from the central source of its possessor more or less like ripples spread in rings when a stone is thrown into water. Those nearest the centre are the most powerful, with

power gradually diminishing as we reach the margins. A few problems surface when it comes to accounting for power outside this ripple work, mainly regarding how "an entire network of power relations" (Sawicki, 1991, p.23) is obscured. One of the problems this poses for feminist theory is that it becomes difficult to account for power relations between women who, as subjects, take up different positions in different discourses. The model, in other words, has limited potential for explaining what happens at the micro-levels of society; the levels where incidentally most women feel the effects of power, in our relations to ourselves and others and our attitudes to our bodies.

The third assumption refers to the repressive nature of power. Power is instrumental in maintaining order and holding down ideas and persons that rise against those in possession of power. This characteristic leaves its thumbmark on Marx's model of ideology, where one of the reasons the subordinate classes do not resist the power of the bourgeois, is that they have internalised their oppressive ideas and regard them as true, thus their "false consciousness". Political analysis sets out to expose false consciousness contrasting it with authentic truth. As a consequence a way is opened up for oppressed groups to liberate themselves, they can stop living "a lie" and challenge the power forces aiming to impose their ideologies on them. McNay (1992) points out how this again brings up the social-individual divide, since ideas from the outside are imposed on individuals who then have to search in their own hearts for their true, pre-social, authentic consciousness. A further issue at stake here is that one system of "truth" may merely be replacing another, where the lie is corrected with the "truth".

Yet again, the old problem concerning the heterogeneity of women's experience surfaces. Who has the right for example to decide whose consciousness is the most authentic? It is a criticism which finds its echo in the complaints that third world women and black feminists have launched against the way in which Western white women have construed their experiences as the central and authentic ones in feminism. In this respect Narayan (1989) asks whether it might not "be politically counterproductive for non-western

feminists to echo uncritically the themes of western feminist epistemology that seeks to restore the value, cognitive and otherwise, of 'women's experience'" (Narayan, 1989). As the experience of one group is privileged the other is devalued. A tricky question crops up, in respect of whether the experiences and consciousness of those women refusing to identify with any form of feminism is less authentic than the consciousness of feminists.

Another consequence of conceptualising power as oppression from a central source is the implication that power is the result of some sort of conspiracy, where, for example, men gang up against women. This characterises in particular feminist liberal theories of power. Power is reduced almost to individual intentions or to the master-mind of a particular group. In this way much is missing from the analysis, mainly the crucial point of what allows "the baddies", be it men, Margaret Thatcher, or the state, to be the mouthpiece of the truth, the vehicles of power. Merely elevating an individual from an oppressed group to a status of authority does not ensure that the condition of others is improved. A near example is again Margaret Thatcher. Bell hooks (1984) points out how many women have reached their positions of authority through playing by rules that privilege men over women. She in this respect puts her finger on the pulse in identifying that it is the knowledge brought to bear on the situation and produced that matters. Women of course can change the power structure when in positions of authority but their presence there does not ensure that this happens.

The shortcomings of the juridicio-discursive model have inspired some feminists to take stock of Foucault's ideas about disciplinary power, and adapt them to their own purposes.

2.3.2. Disciplinary power

Modern society offers more ways of control than was possible in pre-modern society. Now there are various computerised data banks in operation, the media affects most spheres of our lives and public administration has become more and more complex. Given that Foucault is correct in saying that power is more effective, the more successful it is in hiding its own mechanism (1981, p.86), the means by which our selves are presently policed should be very effective. In this sense, the diffuse ways in which power manages to impregnate our lives can be discerned in the various ways we attempt to regulate ourselves. We are dealing with disciplinary power as opposed to the power of the sovereign. In Foucault's words:

> ..power is not an institution, and not a structure, neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society (Foucault, 1981, p. 93).

The first and crucial diversion from the juridicio-discursive model rests in that power is conceptualised as exercised rather than possessed. A shift therefore occurs from locating power towards analysing how it is used. Our attention is drawn to the construction and effects of "truth", where the proper foci are the mechanisms brought into operation, rather than the intentions of individuals. In asking "whose power", an emphasis is placed on the condition that allows a particular person to be a speaker of the "truth". Power, in this respect, is not owned by anyone but is exercised, not only by those privileged in relation to it, but also by those who choose to react against it.

The notion of power as exercised points to a second distinction, that power is not primarily repressive, but productive. Power produces knowledge, where increasingly more ingenious ways are devised for us to express our individualities. A prime category Foucault (1981) uses to illustrate this argument is sexuality. As sexuality has become the hot spot of disciplinary strategies, more categories of sexual behaviour have been formed. Indeed, as Foucault pinpoints, sexuality has become the core of the self in a number of

mainstream psychological theories. Whereas feminists have mostly concerned themselves with the negative aspects of power, power as productive also forces us to see it as a potentially positive state[2]. Disciplinary strategies are double-edged; beauty practices may for example force the body into certain forms, may even be painful, but may be a way for women to create time for themselves as opposed to attending to the family and others. Women as consumers of fashion pick and choose. Not all images manage to catch on, and new ways of presenting oneself continually have to be thought up.

Foucault's emphasis on power as exercised rather than possessed has raised the concern that it might diffuse the potential for social criticism. If power is not held by anyone, how can feminism as a political force work against it (Ramazonoglu and Holland, 1993)? Bordo (1993) addresses this question and points out that, although power is not held by anyone, "people and groups are positioned differently within it" (p. 191). Butler (1990) adds to this:

> Feminist critique ought to explore the totalizing claims of a masculinist signifying economy, but also remain self-critical with respect to the totalizing gestures of feminism. The effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms (p. 13).

Finding a baddie to shoot down has only short term gains until another one comes to fill his place. Undermining and working against the social conditions that allow particular individuals to exercise power in a negative way, on the other hand, could bring more lasting effects.

The third distinction from the juridicio-discursive model touches on methodology and addresses how power should be analysed. Whereas power has traditionally been analysed in its descending form, Foucault considers that to be insufficient. Power should

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[2] It should be noted that Foucault refused to judge whether power had negative or positive consequences. See 2.4.2.

be analysed in its ascending form, from the bottom up. Instead of taking a purely macro-perspective, analysing how the ripples spread from the centre, Foucault suggests that we analyse power-relations at the micro-levels in society. The focus, in other words, is on the "techniques" of power and how they are "effectively incorporated into the social whole" (Foucault, 1994c, p.39). The micro particulars thus have a macro sweep as Silverman succinctly phrased it (1985, p.87). Metaphors used to describe power catch this change in emphasis but Foucault uses descriptions such as "webs", "networks" and so on. Power spreads and acts in various parts of the network simultaneously, with the consequence that subjects caught in parts of the net are affected by forces not from one source but various sources. Femininity therefore, as informed by power relations, cannot be simple but has to be complex.

In the sense that feminists have seen themselves as reacting to experience, the bottom up analysis has been in use for a long time. The source material has more often than not been identified as interpersonal relations and the activities of everyday life, the technologies of beauty and dieting. The task of feminism has been to challenge patriarchal definitions by continually decoding and exposing them, thereby thwarting and re-defining their operations. Feminists adopting the Foucauldian perspective have in this respect acted against the non-random effects of power and strategies of domination. Their analysis has been geared towards looking at how particular discourses of knowledge restrict and streamline our experiences and, insofar as we adapt our own sense of self and being to particular truths, reproduce them. In this sense power as exercised through institutions, and on behalf of the state, has been challenged and occasionally reversed. There is the glimmer of hope that, if subjects cease to reproduce the knowledge necessary for the circulation of particular "truths", there is very little basis for their existence, and thereby they might be deemed out of circulation.

2.3.3. Discourse and resistance

Foucault's understanding of discourse evolved somewhat from his earliest to his latest writings. In one of his latest works, *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1* (1981), he had distanced himself from the initial influence of the formalist current of structuralism, and emphasised how discourses of knowledge are permeated with power.

> Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another opposing strategy (Foucault, 1981, p. 101-102).

Discourses, in this sense, cover the structured ways of knowing as well as institutionalised practices. Subjects are differently positioned in the discourses, affecting what is said as well as what takes place. Knowledge cannot exist outside of power, all knowledge has some power implications. This does not mean that power can be reduced to knowledge, but that knowledge gives substance to the operation of power. The power relations are what makes knowledge possible and we refer to knowledge when justifying our actions or ways of regulation. Discourses are as Weedon (1987, p. 108) defines them:

> ...ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subject they seek to govern.

Foucault refers to discourse in his later works as "series of discontinuous segments" (1981, p.100). By doing so he is not merely referring to units defined in terms of their linguistic or argumentative characteristics, but ones that are determined and defined by their function. Discourses are, in other words, not least identified by what they do and how they do it. The implication of this is that the focus is directed at how statements get to operate and interact with and against other kinds of statements, rather than into a

piecemeal analysis of their linguistic content. The main question being asked is then: What makes it possible "for certain statements but not others to occur at particular times, places and institutional locations" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 40)?

Heeding Foucault's (1981, p. 102) advice when analysing discourses, we should look firstly at their "tactical productivity". By questioning the effects of the discourses and how power is ensured and coded in knowledge, power is made central to the analysis. Secondly we should focus on what Foucault termed "strategical integration". How do the discourses serve as part of particular power strategies? The strategies always have particular aims, the analysis involves making them explicit.

Weedon (1987) has pointed out the usefulness of this analysis for feminist theory. The means of subordinating women rest in ideas about femininity and in ways of thinking about oneself that are historically specific. By focusing on discourses of knowledge it is possible to chart out the complex power relations that tie ourselves to our identities. The complex power relations also imply the possibility of reversal to, for example, other subject positions. As Foucault claimed (1981, p. 95), where there is power, there is resistance. Resistance is important for the feminist movement since it implies that power can be disrupted. Power in this sense cannot be totalising because there is always something that resists its hold or can cause hiccups in its exercise. When this is no longer the case we do not have power relations but, as Foucault (quoted in Sawicki, 1994) points out, domination which gives no space for turning the power relations around.

2.3.4. Power and the subject

> If I tell the truth about myself, as I am now doing, it is in part that I am constituted as a subject across a number of power relations which are exerted over me and which I exert over others (Foucault, 1994a, p. 129).

Making the discussion of the "Power and the subject" into a subsection of Power is not entirely in tune with Foucault's truth about himself. As he claimed, he was not interested

in producing a theory of Power but in its relation to the question of how we tell the truth about ourselves (Foucault, 1994a, p. 129). By speaking, one is recognising and defining oneself as a subject as well as being recognised and defined as one. We turn ourselves into subjects as Foucault termed it (1990), thereby subjecting ourselves to the rules and regulations of the discourses from which we speak.

Foucault concerned himself in particular with self-knowledge and pointed out how modernity made the "self" into an object of its knowledge. His insights show how, by defining oneself and one's problems, one becomes subjected to discipline. As subjects we are continually being invited to confess our problems in relation to our bodies, to relationships, parenting and I could go on. Feminists have here drawn attention to the gendered manifestations of these disciplinary activities, especially in the way in which they have related to the female self and have marked the female body (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1988).

Disciplinary practices reflect a process of normalisation and are the driving force behind, for example, the portrayal of acceptable femininity in the media. Normality, as Rajchman (1991, p. 104) points out, is "a way of identifying us, and of getting us to identify ourselves in such a way as to make us governable". In this respect, the modern individual has not only become adept at measuring him or herself against the norm but also in correcting his or her own deficiencies. The modern version of the confession, where we are required to speak the truth about ourselves, is instrumental in this process.

> The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, "demands" only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weighs it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation (Foucault, 1981, p. 60).

Through discovering the truth about the self and speaking the truth about ourselves, the self can be controlled and normalised. Woman, as subjected to and objectified by, the

male gaze is given the chance to correct or at least "see" her deficiencies as the "truth" about her is spoken.

Sawicki (1991, p. 10), in her appropriation of Foucault, comments on "how power grips us at the point where our desires and our very sense of the possibilities for self-definition are constituted". It points to the importance of the social practices involved in defining forms of self-relation and their effect on how the self is experienced. The subject through living, continually experiencing and remembering that experience, negotiates his or her identity. Weeks (1985) has in this sense described how the identification of oneself as a homosexual affects the shape of one's life, experience and outlook on the world. Identifying oneself as a feminist has similar connotations. Many women have described how seeing through the lenses of feminism not only changed their experience of the world but gave them a repertoire to express their experiences in a different way.

What is of importance here is what our identity allows us to do, how it is used to express a self. We frequently draw from it when validating our actions and explaining our points of view. My feminist identity has, for example, been imperative in some of my previous actions, such as criticising beauty contests publicly, and refusing to make coffee for everyone else when working as a secretary. In this sense it aligns me with certain ideas but also sets me apart from those who do not identify with them. Here though, as Weeks points out, identity should not be confused with activity. Many people have had experience of, for example, homosexual practices without having a homosexual identity. Many women have battled to make women's position better without identifying themselves as feminists. As Weeks argues, identity refers simultaneously to commonalities with others and differentiation.

> Categorisation and self-categorisation, that is the process of identity-formation, may control, restrict and inhibit but simultaneously they provide 'comfort, security and assuredness' (Weeks, 1985, p. 189, in the last sentence citing Plummer).

The dual nature of identity referring both to Same and Different is reflected in a series of books published in Iceland 1977-1979 (*Móðir mín húsfreyjan*, Gísli Kristjánsson), containing a selection of autobiographies of housewives (their titles translate as *My mother the housewife*). The basis for the books is the Sameness of these women's identities and the degree to which it defines their experience. An attempt is made to homogenise the images presented of them as constituting that of the housewife. Yet at the same time the accounts are many, reflecting how women's differences begin as their similarity ends. Apart from their identity as housewives, they are defined in terms of where they live, the family they come from, skills, and whether they are widowed or married.

We are subjected in terms of our identity and we speak from it, but we are also subjected and we also sometimes have to speak from positions that we would not see as relevant to our identities. It is therefore important to make a distinction between identity, linked with constructions of individuality and the self-relations seen as imperative to this, and subjectivity, which refers to all possible kinds of self-relation. This does not deny the multiple forms of subjectivities we take up, but accepts that we are recognised and addressed as One not Many (Bartky, 1988). To understand the individual who emerges, and the means on offer of expressing a self, we have to look at the forces, the diverse subject positions and the social processes that continually cut through our experiences. Rajchman (1991) explains this beautifully:

> Our "subjectivity" is not an "individuality", an indivisible unit in which we locate our identity; and it is not "particularity" or the exemplification of a common nature. It is not a single thing, and there are as many "subjectivities" as there are accepted forms of self-relation. Each of us can have more than one kind of social being. Thus individual and social being are not opposed to one another as absolute entities, one requiring the dissolution of the other. Instead they are linked together in a common history, the forms of one being able to survive a change in the forms of the other (p. 101)".

In spite of our plural subjectivities, we are required to relate to ourselves, our individuality as a coherent whole. We, for example, distinguish ourselves from the

entities which we do not identify as our selves, and are thus not "selves" (Bartky, 1988). This is necessary for us to reveal the "truth" about ourselves, and to be taken as the Same by others with whom we are dealing. It is in tune with the attitude of modernity that conceives of individuality as autonomous and whole, and thereby encourages that kind of self-relation.

Deleuze (1986, p. 323) noted how we are tied to our individualities, our "self-knowledges" through subjectifications, but how yet they are neither final nor fixed. The identity that is socially constructed is not thereby determined. The discourses used to speak the truth about ourselves can be challenged, and identities developed. Identities are therefore not absolute or closed because they are always in the process of being construed.

To the extent that women are addressed and constituted in terms of gendered subjectivities, they respond from these positions. "We" tend to be seen as women before anything else. As Rosalind Coward (1984) remarked, women are the "defined sex". Power has worked strategically in labelling and defining women and, from the point of resistance, an equally strategic standpoint must be taken. When seen as dangerous and limiting, resistance embodies itself in the name of that limitation and in the name of that danger. Feminists have been engaged in the creative project of making women visible and helping women to make a claim for the validity of their experiences and identity. But that does not mean that we cannot speculate about their basis, and even argue for new ones. Precisely because women have been battling against being silenced, they are knowledgeable both about the oppressive and liberating powers of feminine identity.

2.4. PROBLEMS WITH THE REVISED SUBJECT

Foucault has proved controversial not only because his own writings are quite diverse, but also because different commentators have focused on different aspects of his theory,

resulting in a range of interpretations. Commentators seem though, in general, to be in agreement regarding what are the most problematic aspects of Foucault's theory and I shall discuss some of these concerns in the next few pages.

2.4.1. The agency of the subject

> Foucault's is a world in which things move, rather than people, a world in which subjects become obliterated or, rather, recreated as passive objects, a world in which passivity or refusal represent the only possible choices (Hartsock, 1990, p. 167).

According to Foucault (1994c, p. 36) the individual is an "effect of power", thus, critics claim (for example, Rosenau, 1992), robbed of its active social agency. They point out that this would have substantial drawbacks for feminist analysis since its very object, the female subject, is practically eliminated. Without a stable coherent autonomous self, the conception of political action seems implausible.

Sawicki (1994, p. 354) has addressed this criticism and Foucault's stance against modern humanism.

> Foucault was notorious for his critique of modern humanism. And, as I have indicated, feminist critics of Foucault find in this critique a wholesale rejection of subjectivity and agency. But to focus on the ways in which the subject is in fact constituted, and on the broader social and political forces that determine the parameters and possibilities of rational agency is not to deny agency. It does, however point to its limits.

Foucault's discussion always falls back on the subject who is capable of choice and reflexivity, but points to how she or he is, in that act, engaged with discourses of truth. His focus on the subject's historical constitution shows the limits and possibilities of autonomy; limits that should clearly have been felt by women through the ages. To quote Sawicki again (1994, p. 355), the subject is:

> ..neither autonomous nor enslaved, neither the originator of the discourses and the practices that constitute its experiences nor determined by them.

The activity of thought is continually taking place. As Deleuze (1986) recognises, it is the unthought that is imperative to thought. Thought swallows up the outside that has no form. What is of importance is that which demands to be thought about rather than "innate exercise of faculty" (Deleuze, p.87). We, in other words, have to be careful not to collide the experiencing subject with power relations or discourses. As Foucault argues in his discussion about the experience of sexuality: "experience is understood as the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture" (Foucault, 1986, p.4). Deleuze's (1988, p.82) explanation of the relations between power and the subject is worth quoting in full:

> No doubt power, if we consider it in the abstract, neither sees nor speaks. It is a mole that only knows its way round its network of tunnels, its multiple hole: it 'acts on the basis of innumerable points': it comes from below'. But precisely because it does not itself speak and see, it makes us see and speak.

Foucault is pessimistic that a true self, or a self that can be freed from power, can ever be found. Instead he highlights the importance of recurring critical thinking directed at how we as subjects have been constituted. Subject positions are neither static nor fixed and, insofar as they are conveyed through discourses of knowledge, they can be resisted. Due to the productive nature of power that runs through the discourses this is continually happening. This is a move away from determining the nature of the subject, to seeing it as a "a subject in definition, a subject in the making" (Butler, 1990). The hope and the fuel behind the feminist project rests precisely in this, not indetermining women's nature, nor prescribing a particular kind of autonomy to all, but in "asking what we might become" (Rajchman, 1985, as quoted by Diamond and Quinby, 1988, p. xiv).

2.4.2. Relativism

The disinterest Foucault showed in producing a normative framework against which all other theories and truths could be measured has sparked off the criticism that his analysis is relativistic. All truths are treated as equal; there are no moral "absolutes". A

consideration that surfaces is what he was aiming to do with his work. Gutting (1989) points out that Foucault engaged in revealing the establishment of norms and validity through discourses of truth. He analysed what made these discourses of truth possible. Gutting therefore considers it a major misunderstanding to focus on Foucault's work as the denial of the possibilities of norms and values.

Sandra Harding (1986) has remarked on how relativism appears as an intellectual possibility when the hegemony of the views of dominant groups is being challenged. In a similar vein, Flax (1990) argues that: "Perhaps reality can have "a" structure only from the falsely universalising perspective of the dominant group" (p.49). Harding (1986) adds to this:

> It is worth keeping in mind that the articulation of relativism as an intellectual position emerges historically only as an attempt to dissolve challenges to the legitimacy of purportedly universal beliefs and ways of life. It is an objective problem, or a solution to a problem, only *from the perspective of the dominating groups* (p. 657).

Relativism thus refers to those who take a stance that is different from "the" normative standpoint. Seen in these terms, as an alternative to the androcentric normative criteria saturating research in the social sciences, the idea of relativism becomes an attractive idea for feminists. But does refuting the traditional normative criteria prevent us from making moral judgements? How should we recognise good from bad, right from wrong?

Refusing to take on board a universal theoretical perspective has the advantage of showing how the perspectives the "god" and "goddesses" take up are part of what Foucault termed the "politics of truth". It allows us to capture the dynamic within and between discourses of truth. Furthermore, it reveals how reference points, such as many of the androcentric notions guiding academic work, are part of a historical, social construction. Foucault, in this sense, sets the theoretical reference points in a historical

perspective with all their inter-relational tensions, focusing on what makes them possible, thereby allowing for their questioning. This I consider an important and highly attractive feature for a feminist analysis.

We need, however, to take seriously the criticism against treating all truths as equal. "Truth" has consequences and comes with a price. It must be evaluated or there is no basis for feminism as a political project. In this respect, feminism would in the end definitely divert from Foucault, who did not think it the place of the theorist to suggest action or correct "erroneous" discourses (Foucault, 1991, as quoted by Ransom, 1993). Feminists require some kind of framework that allows them to distinguish between malign and benign forms of power. The question is whether that is possible without succumbing to "moral absolutes".

A view I share with many feminists (e.g. Flax, 1990, Grimshaw, 1993b) is that the evaluation of "truths" as good or bad should be an ongoing process. It involves negotiation and constant re-interpretations. As the researcher is critically involved with his or her project, these kinds of evaluations take place and of course, we take the moral system in which we live and breathe as a starting point. This does not mean that these very systems are beyond criticism, or that they are the Archimedean standpoint, from where we can "correctly" evaluate everything else. Rather, to quote Sawicki (1994) once more:

> My own appropriation of Foucault is one that attempts to bypass some of this normative confusion by presupposing a normative framework that includes concepts such as domination, justice, rights and liberties and regards them as essentially contested concepts (p. 361).

The critique of Reason does not involve, as Ransom (1993) argues against some of the more patronising comments made on feminist projects, the inability to reason or a suggestion that feminists are "against" reason. But it requires that we are continually

reflexive of the basis for some of the judgements that we make, seeing them as grounded in culture and collective agreements rather than as unquestionable, incontestable moral absolutes.

2.5. DISCUSSION

The use of Foucault for the purposes of carrying out feminist research has its advantages as well as disadvantages. Whereas the social sciences have attempted to reveal the "truth" about femininity by phrasing questions so that they already imply the truth, his approach does not succumb to explanations that refer to nature or essence. It underscores how femininity and female nature, as they have emerged from the social sciences are historical constructs not "naturally" determined. Furthermore, by looking at the relation between power and knowledge, the limits imposed on our experience and thereby our senses of our selves are revealed and thereby exposed. Insofar as his approach suggests that femininity is socially constructed, it highlights its potential as a site for change and development.

The main drawback to his approach is the absence of a normative framework to which feminists can refer when evaluating the consequences of social practices. Referring to an absolute moral framework would however betray the purpose of this thesis, as one interested in how truths emerge and how subjects are positioned in relation to them.

These thoughts on the relation between power, knowledge and the subject will colour the remainder of my thesis. As I have taken pains to portray, researchers are themselves constituted in particular discourses of knowledge. These discourses need to be discussed in terms of their gendered assumptions in order to open up an "intellectual space" for feminists in social psychology. Although this project is firmly placed within the framework of the social sciences it approaches it "as a value-constituted and value-constituting enterprise" (Lather, 1992, p. 91). Thereby, it aims to open up discussions

rather than closing them down by presenting final truths. Indeed, it is an attempt to pass on a story that can never fully or finally be told.

CHAPTER 3: FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY IN THE ICELANDIC CONTEXT

3.1. INTRODUCTION

According to the social constructionists, the cultural and historical knowledge on which people draw in forming their view of the world and relating to each other, is important and can shed a light on how constructions of persons or relationships can change over time (Gergen, 1985), and, might I add, across space. This might sound like a statement of the obvious, but the point and purpose of this chapter is to show how the cultural "resources" of the community play a role in supplying individuals with the knowledge to deal with the hassles of everyday life, as well as "subjecting" them to this knowledge. The chapter discusses, furthermore, how our experiences and engagement in social practices inform our identities and our sense of self.

The make-up of the Icelandic community has only started to resemble a modern bourgeois culture in this century and Iceland is still a society in transition. Considering that the changes from a pre-modern to a modern[1] society took place in only a few decades, one wonders if more of the same is in store for Icelanders. The rapid changes that took place at the turn of this century were nothing less than revolutionary and have affected not least Icelandic women, who, for centuries, were tied to their traditional role in society, structured around their domestic responsibilities. Although today women occupy the prestigious roles of president and mayor, it is only in recent decades that they have become notably visible as sources of authority in public. As can be imagined, this has not been without consequences and it has posed practical and moral dilemmas for both women and men and, more widely, for society.

[1]1880 is usually selected as the turning point, when Iceland embarked on the speedy path to modernity, skipping the industrial revolution altogether.

I chose Iceland because it provides a good case study of the subject who is continuously being defined. Furthermore it qualifies as an example of how discourses of knowledge can co-exist, drawing up and/or transforming each others' truths. In this chapter I will look at the grounding and historical context of some of these discursive truths, how "techniques" of the self are, in part, important strategies of power in the community.

It may seem that to trace the culture to the ninth century, as I am about to, is taking the analysis a bit too far. This stems not just from my own quaint interests but actually reflects one of the eccentricities of Icelandic culture; an obsession with the past. The Icelandic practice of retrospection has continued to surprise scholars and has been a frequent point of reference when discussing the Icelandic mentality (e.g. Tomasson, 1980; Hastrup, 1990). As every tourist brochure will bear witness to, Icelanders seem, in general, to suffer from a 1000 year Viking age hangover, and tend to phase out, or conveniently forget, the intervening years between this century and the thirteenth.

The past has served as a source for the idealisation of cultural identity and has been important in giving Icelanders a sense of mythical continuity. As I will touch upon later, the idealised images of heroes and heroines served, for a long time, the purpose of providing people with a measure of "authentic Icelandicness" against which they could compare themselves. It has served as an index of "we" at its best. During times of poverty and humiliation, these images restored pride and gave a sense of collective worth.

Apart from the enjoyment which Icelanders find in the idealised re-constructions of their own past, the past in some respects may have become a burden. Its ever-presence in the guise of tradition and habits could have worked against, and even blocked, "newer" ideas from taking root in the culture. Hastrup (1990) even goes so far as to claim that the willingness of Icelanders to revel in, and compare themselves to, the past was one of the factors that made the transition to modern society so difficult. In this sense the past has been raised as a protective shield against the anxieties an unknown future might bring, but

one that inevitably gives only limited protection. Tomasson (1980) argues:

> In no modern Western society has there been as much obvious continuity with a distant past as in Iceland. But this continuity is rapidly being attenuated by the pressures of the modernization of the society and the internationalization of the culture (p. 194).

The past of Icelanders could boldly be divided into two parts; the glorious and the gloomy; the one that wants to be remembered and dwelt on in a leisurely fashion, and the one that usually is recited in the fast-forward mode. I will here discuss these two parts consecutively, moving from the glorious to the gloomy, and their contribution to the self-image of the Icelander.

History in the official memory has the form of a linear narrative, that glosses over gaps and discontinuities. Women frequently constitute the void. My account suffers from two defects - a lack of information concerning the position of women in pre-modern society, and the distinct disinterest in male-oriented disciplines in social phenomena that do not fall neatly into the narratives of heroes and heroic conquests[2]. As a counter-measure I will devote substantial space at the end of the chapter to a discussion of organised resistance as it has taken shape through the women's movement.

3.2. THE GLORIFIED PAST

Detailed historical records exist about the origin of Iceland as a nation. These records tell of the "official" first settlers, the Vikings from Norway and the Celtic slaves and concubines they had kidnapped on their way to Iceland. The Vikings brought with them the language which, as popular belief would have it, has survived largely intact, as well as the mentality of the old Norse culture.

[2] I exclude here the committed work of many Icelandic feminists, such as Anna Sigurðardóttir, who have contributed greatly to our understanding of the condition of Icelandic women.

The period from the first settlement in 874, until the Icelanders surrendered to the king of Norway in 1262-1264, is generally referred to as the period of the Icelandic Freestate and provides the background to the sagas. The sagas glorify the various conquests made by heroes and heroines in distant countries, as well as recording the disturbances amongst themselves. There are amongst others the hero Gunnar from Hlíðarendi who could jump his own height backwards fully armoured, and the strong-willed heroines Guðrún Ósvífursdóttir and Hallgerður Longlegged.

These characters and many others are vivid in the Icelandic memory, and the sagas and poetry are seen as an integral part of the cultural heritage. Their entertainment value is great and as narratives exploring tensions, love, hate and honour they equal or even surpass many of the soap operas on offer in the modern media. Although in the present day they are considered to be the figment of someone's imagination and are valued as fiction and literature by young Icelanders, their value was much higher amongst the older generations. For older and past generations of Icelanders, the sagas portrayed the lives and conquests of real-life heroes and heroines. Seen in that light, Sigurður G. Magnússon's (1993) description of how the sagas were a preferred reading in pre-modern society, is not surprising. The adventures of ancient heroes, and the way they were treated by the women, were both a refreshing break from the daily toil and served as reminders of what glorious people the ancestors had been.

3.2.1. The construction of the Icelander - the hero mentality

During the fight for independence from Denmark, early this century, it became essential to define the "essence" of the Icelanders and the Icelandic culture (Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir, 1989). Not least was the "past" constructed during these years and merged with the then "present" quest of differentiating what was Icelandic from what was foreign. As Giddens (1991) has argued:

> ..fixity of tradition does not derive from its accumulation of past wisdom rather coordination of the past with the present is achieved through adherence to the normative precepts tradition incorporates (p. 145).

Many poets and scholars during this era took retreat in the "glorious" past of Icelanders. Poems were written to celebrate the exploits of long-deceased heroes and pride was taken in, for example, wearing the national costume that actually first saw the light of day during the early years of this century.

In the vanguard of the academic pursuit of exploring the essence of the Icelandic mentality were Guðmundur Finnbogason (1933; 1943) and Sigurður Nordal (1942). For them the sagas proved to be an important source when portraying the mental make-up, or "character" of Icelanders. Their descriptions of the Icelander highlight his individualistic streak.

> The smallness of the nation has taught it not to value itself in comparison with other nations according to numbers, but according to the accomplishments of its individuals (Guðmundur Finnbogason, 1942, p. 8).

Their writings echo the political climate of the time and show how Icelanders liked to see themselves, as the descendants of the "crème de la crème" of Scandinavian aristocratic families. The heroes of the sagas and the individualism described there portrayed the ideas and characteristics of the "perfect" Icelander. As my analysis will later convey, they constitute the criteria for manly worthiness against which Icelanders still like to measure themselves.

Wax (1969), in an interesting anthropological study of the sagas, compares the Old Norse "character" with the conception of man held by the Trobrianders. Whereas nineteenth century Western man sees the character as "malleable-subject not only to change but to development" (p.119), emphasising how a character can become something else, the Trobrianders, and Wax here quotes Lee:

> ..have no word for become. All objects, including man, are recognized by what they are, not by what they might be like or unlike, or by what

> they might become. "Being is (seen as) a fixed point in a single changeless whole". If an object changes an attribute, it does not become something; rather it loses its identity and is another being.

Wax does not claim that "Northmen ever conceived of "being" in quite the same fixed fashion as the Trobrianders" (p.120), but argues that the Northman is continually trying to assert that he "is" something, rather than "becoming" something. The character is something that is possessed and defended. If a man somehow changes his nature, he is no longer himself. This quality is something both Guðmundur Finnbogason and Sigurður Nordal stress implicitly through their own descriptions and evaluations of him.

Both are concerned with how the Icelanders have come to possess their "heroic qualities" and what they consist of, and here the nationalism of the time is thinly disguised. The descriptions of Guðmundur, in particular, constitute Icelanders as born with their characters, as becomes clear in the very opening lines of his essay on "The Icelanders" (1945):

> Life is always in the making, an unceasing endeavour, a struggle against obstacles. In describing a man or a nation we try to show the character which appears in this struggle, but character is the enduring feature in the endeavour; it is seen in the direction life takes when it gets rid of obstacles, in the form it gives to matter in mastering it, in the expression "it chisels in the visage of the world" (p. 7).

The interplay between nature and nurture is considered, but the emphasis falls on the good qualities that are "..gifts of the strong Norse stock" (Guðmundur Finnbogason, 1943, p. 15). The character in itself not only chisels but is chiselled by the struggle with the hostile forces of nature and work. Guðmundur even describes how the modern Icelanders are the result of natural selection, implying somewhat the "survival of the fittest". Sigurður Nordal (1942) cautions us in making assumptions about the prestige that the first settlers enjoyed in Norway and the dominance of inherited abilities over the forces of culture. As he argues, we come into this world naked, in terms of knowledge, ideals and customs (p.77). He mentions all the same, that the material of the Icelanders was "a good metal whether it had already been more or less formed into a coin" (p. 80).

So, if the substance of the Icelanders is the strong stock of Viking chieftains, what are the ideals that the community strives towards? Guðmundur and Sigurður describe how the ideal in the sagas is what is called the aristocratic ideal, based on the characteristics of kings and chieftains. In this respect, to be a man of honour is important and nowhere are his characteristics more aptly described than in "Hávamál", a book containing advice about the code of conduct for the eleventh century man. Guðmundur (1943) summarises his qualities succinctly:

> The qualities which Hávamál says become a man best are that he is independent, wise, observant, polite, moderate, faithful to friends, glad and cheerful, hospitable, generous, brave and winning thereby a good reputation (p.13).

Wax (1969), in her analysis of the sagas notes how a man's character endures his greatest test when facing the duress of fated events. She observes, furthermore, how great virtue and great suffering are inseparable (p. 139). Guðmundur's and Sigurður's writings imply similar conclusions. When discussing the idea of manly honour and fate, it is a case of man proving himself when facing adverse situations. It provides him with the chance to express his courage and self-control. In this sense the emphasis put on fatalism in the Icelandic hero culture meshes with the idea of man proving his character in this life, since death, as Sigurður (1942) points out, is seen as the end of everything that is worth anything to a man.

The honour of the hero is judged by his contemporaries, and serves as a measure of his manliness. The bloodstained sagas bear witness to this, all insinuations about a lack of manliness must be revenged, for it to be re-instated. Not only is the hero's reputation at stake, but the honour of his whole family. To create the memory of a nobleman, the life of the hero is centred around the task of creating a good reputation; emphasising courage, self control and self-reliance. The logic is simple. If you can not control yourself, you most certainly are not fit to control others. Hávamál describes the numerous ways in

which the hero has to manifest his self-control; he avoids indulgences in eating or drinking and does not display excessive emotions. As Sigurður (1942) points out, we should not confuse the control of emotions with their intensity (p.184).

The old Norse ideal of self-control strikes a chord with the emphasis on self-control amongst the ancient Greeks. In *The History of Sexuality, Vol.3* (1990), Michel Foucault discussed how the Greek notion of freedom required what Deleuze (1986) termed the "affect of self on self" (p. 101). An outside force is internalised and this he argues, was the core of the Greek's aesthetic existence. It was not until the domination of self over self was acquired, requiring one's own submission to an internalised code of conduct, that one could control others.

The focus on the aesthetic existence of the self, Grimshaw (1993b) argues, indicates a shift in Foucault's theory. It is a shift from deconstructing how the self is the effect of discourses, i.e. how practices of self-discipline and self-monitoring are the vehicles of particular discourses or discursive truths, to seeing them as constituting autonomy, with their source in the individual (p. 66). Grimshaw points out how many of the dominant modes of "self-surveillance" are gendered. The power of these practices rests on their not seeming to have any "source" outside the individual. They seem to be wholly self-imposed. I am inclined to agree with Grimshaw that the self-techniques described by Foucault, as used by the Greeks, are disciplinary practices, and would argue that the same applies to the old Norse individualism. Self-control is not only manifested, it is judged and evaluated by contemporaries. Those who do not comply face punishment, ridicule or ostracism. The surveillance of the individual stresses the necessity of positioning the self in a particular way in relation to other selves and here, as I will discuss later, different regulations apply to men and women.

Guðmundur Finnbogason's and Sigurður Nordal's writings contain insightful and interesting speculations about the tension between individualism and communitarianism.

What is best for the individual might not benefit the community and some sort of balance needs to be struck. The problem, Guðmundur claims, rests on the fact that, whilst the hero is the one who excels over other men, no-one wants to acknowledge himself to be inferior to another. Clashes of interest are, in other words, bound to surface. The only solution to this dilemma in the Old Norse community, Guðmundur (1942, p.14) asserts, was "equality" (the Icelandic word is "jafnræði" which more crudely translated means equal rule), "setting its mark on the legislation of the Icelanders and their social life" (p.23). It is the reason why, as Guðmundur claims, Icelanders have always been so slow in recognising the superiority of their contemporaries. To become "primus enter pares", the first amongst equals, important self-regulations must be complied with, or one might risk stepping on too many toes.

Central to the construction of the "Icelander" is what Guðmundur Finnbogason (1942 calls the sentiment of self-regard, and he uses this quality to explain how Icelanders have managed to balance individualism with communitarianism.

> Nothing gives a better idea of the nature of a man than his sentiment of self-regard, the system of those impulses and feelings that are related to a man's idea of himself and what belongs to him. It is the chief part of each man's character and is the ruling factor in determining it. In the sentiment of self-regard there are always two impulses striving for the mastery, the propensities of self-assertion and submission (p.12).

Guðmundur (p. 12) observes how the propensity towards self-assertion characterises the Icelandic settlers. According to Guðmundur, it is self-assertion that develops out of a "feeling of superiority", contrasting with the "feeling of inferiority" that characterises those who are submissive. The same man can express self-assertiveness or submissiveness depending on whom or what he is dealing with (1932, p.28). To put it in a different way, we speak from different positions depending on the social context. What we strive towards, though, is the feeling of superiority and to feel that we need to be placed above others, be admired and respected. The independence of one, as Guðmundur insightfully observes, requires the submission of another, which means that even our most basic ideas of ourselves tie in with power relations. In this sense self-regard, as Guðmundur claims, is "related to a man's idea of himself and what belongs to

him". Considering that Icelandic society was, and still is up to a point, structured around kinship, favouring male figures as the head of the family, the question as to where that leaves women inevitably arises[3].

3.2.2. The status of women

> When they [the sons] arrived they saw that some linen clothes had been laid out on the ground a shirt and a pair of drawers; they were heavily stained with blood. Guðrún said, "These very clothes you see before you here challenge you to avenge your father. I shall not waste many words on this, for there is little hope that you will be moved by mere words if you do not heed such tokens and reminders as these." The brothers were greatly moved by what Guðrún said, but replied that they had been too young to seek revenge and had been leaderless; they said they had not known how to make plans for themselves or for others - "but we have certainly not forgotten our loss." (from Laxdælasaga, 13th century, Guðrún Ósvífursdóttir talks to her sons 12 and 16 years old).

The women in the sagas, in particular the mother in the extract above scolding her sons, most certainly have a way of lingering in memory. Guðrún Ósvífursdóttir, along with other heroines, are portrayed as colourful and forceful characters giving the impression of strength. The independence of the women in the sagas may have been idealised by many authors (see criticism by Gunnar Karlsson, 1986), but what cannot be argued against is that the heroines have a way of transforming their concerns into real action. It is at least no coincidence that the actions and characters of these women were highlighted when women started battling for their rights in Iceland at the end of the last century (Sigríður Dúna Kristmundsdóttir, 1989).

But how can this seemingly powerful position of women in the sagas, that so contrasts with the condition of women elsewhere, be explained? Agnes Arnórsdóttir (1991) points out that perhaps the women in the Freestate had power that was different in kind to the power of men. Mundal (1994) argues that women who goaded their menfolk were acting

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[3]The tradition of giving people patronyms rather than surnames, as mentioned in the first chapter, supports this argument. A child is more usually named after the father than the mother. A woman, furthermore, does not change her patronym even when she marries.

in a female role which gave them real power. She considers the basis for that power to be the belief that children inherit traits from both of their parents, again pointing to the importance of what we are made of. The core of her argument is that women have the right to demand that men fulfil their male role in guarding the honour of the family. The women in the sagas, in other words, have the powerful position of judging the honour of men. They hold up a mirror to the men, reflecting the discrepancy between what they are and the "ideal" masculinity in terms of which they have to fashion themselves. Their ability to do so comes from the right to voice concerns that matter to the family as a whole. Their power, though, is asserted by working behind the scenes, manipulating from a position that does not allow them, for example, to take revenge themselves. The men have to be seen as the instigators of the action taken but, in so doing, are also working in the interest of the women. The men, in other words, are allowed to act as individuals whereas women (have to appear to) act on behalf of the family. Dommasnes (1991) points out how the Icelandic sagas, when mentioning women:

> ...tend to stress their family connections on the one hand and their family loyalty on the other. The popular image of Viking Age woman seems to be that of the ardent protector and, if need arise, avenger of family honour, ..(p. 66).

Women thus have been construed as shareholders in the hero mentality but with a somewhat different role to that of men. This gendered construction is reflected in the writing of Guðmundur Finnbogason and Sigurður Nordal. Guðmundur (1943) notices how the difference between men and women denotes the deepest difference in human nature (p.38). He does not delve much deeper into what that difference comprises, probably because he assumes from his own cultural standpoint that the reader knows perfectly well to what he is referring. At one point, when discussing the noble nature of the Icelanders, he leaps from describing women in the sagas directly to his contemporaries:

> The royal nature is most apparent with women... She is not her husband's mistress, not a servant, she is the housewife that governs everything. That is what it was like during the age of the sagas and that is how it is today? (1933, p. 330).

In the shortened English version of the same text he claims:

> In Iceland women have always been held in high esteem and have often played a prominent role. They have had a great share in the preserving of folklore and literature, have known how to tell a tale and have loved poetry (1943, p. 22).

To qualify these statements Guðmundur (1933) refers to how, for instance, the nouns and adjectives normally used to describe men are also used to describe women; that men settlers probably outnumbered women (therefore, I presume, through being desired or being able to bear children, women had some sort of power). Their good genes and abilities, and their concern for the family's honour gave them power. Some of these arguments have been taken up by feminist scholars when trying to explain why women are portrayed as more vigorous within this ancient culture than, for example, is the case in Christianity. The bottom line, though, is that the culture of heroes seems primarily to apply to men, very simply because it is in the man that the manifestations of the hero are primarily valued. To use Guðmundur Finnbogason's argument against itself, very few nouns and adjectives describing women are seen as particularly positive when used for men. What the sagas describe are women frequently resisting the existing power strategies, using all their cunning and manipulation to change the course of the saga. In this sense they are, as Helga Kress (1994) convincingly argues, strong but not in a powerful position when it comes to deciding about their own future.

3.2.3. Religion and man

The Vikings worshipped the old Norse gods until, officially, the national faith was changed to Christianity in the year 999. Although the conversion was a relatively peaceful and considerate process, it was a step towards changing the structure of society. This change was assured when the Icelanders were subsumed under the rule of the Norwegian king in 1274, and later the Danish one, and gradually had to accept their rule as the divine authority (Hastrup, 1990). Iceland was ruled no longer by an assembly of chieftains but had to obey a foreign sovereign. The laws were permissive in that people

were allowed to worship their gods, but only in secret. The priests still came from the same influential families that previously were the vehicles of authority in heathendom (Lid, 1942), and some nobles actually worshipped both the heathen gods and the new Christian ones. The society thus did not just adopt the new religion: the religious practices themselves adapted to society.

It is interesting to note that the word soul did not exist in the heathen society in Iceland; the word "hugr" (mind) was used to refer to the "unity of man's non material aspects" (Ström, 1973). According to Ström, this basically refers to thought processes and feelings. You could let your thoughts wander, liberate the mind, "hugr", from the body; it could even leave the body and take on a new material being ("að skipta um ham", "hamrammur"). With the conversion to Christianity the word "sál" or soul was invented, which covers the spiritual, the psychical, and the mental, as well as being used in the same way as mind, "hugr". The divine, in other words, was added to the psychic life of Icelanders. Another common concept, widely used within Christianity but unknown in the heathen religion, was "sin". Sigurður Nordal (1942) notes how, in poetry from the eleventh century, the word never occurs. Actions are not judged by God or gods as in Christianity, but by contemporaries. The reward for leading a noble life rests primarily in this life rather than in the next.

In heathendom, gods were more influenced by what you did than by what you thought, and the religion was centred around pleasing the gods so that the god would bless you with wordly possessions or bestow on you luck or certain abilities - like prosperity or the ability to write poetry (Lid, 1942). A whole new disciplinary dimension was invented and introduced with Christianity, i.e. the state of the soul. Considering the differences that were supposed to exist between men and women in terms of the vulnerability of the soul, the onset of Christianity could well have enforced some changes in their condition.

Wax's (1969, p. 152) comment on the difference between the old heathen religion and the Calvinist doctrine could also be applied to the difference from Lutheranism:

> What the Northmen desired above all else was fame, and the poets gave the greatest fame to the man who stood fast against hopeless odds. Fate offered no odds at all, so the man who made his choice and then strove valiantly and unfalteringly against hopeless doom, attained the ultimate pinnacle of fame. In contrast Calvinist doctrine, by allocating all power and virtue to God, reduced man to a mere tool or instrument whose existence had no personal or social significance except that which had been assigned to it by God from all eternity.

Big brother had entered the scene, influencing the significance of such concepts as honour and reputation. Sigurður Nordal (1942, p. 309) notes how the Church gradually became a worldly power in Iceland, which was more than the Icelanders had originally bargained for. Not only had they acquired a soul, it was already spoken for.

In heathendom, the split between gods and humans was not so clear cut as in Christianity. The characters of the gods were, like the Greek gods, full of human blemishes. Þór was quite gullible, verging on being stupid and Loki, the evil force amongst the gods, often managed to trick them. Freyja slipped into bed with the wrong men. Óðinn had to seduce Gunnlöð to be able to steal from her the gift of poetry. Men also, as Sigurður Nordal (1942) comments, were not as easily categorised into good or evil. Man is portrayed as struggling with both, just like the gods and goddesses, whereas in Christianity he is either good or evil in the eyes of God.

The heathen chieftains were not only priests. When they were controlling the ceremonies, they represented the god, became one with the god (Lid, 1942). Rarely, but still occasionally, women were given the role of the priest in the heathen religion (Dommasnes, 1991), implying a somewhat superior status within that religion as compared to Christianity. This theme has found its way into modern Icelandic literature.

One of the best-sellers in 1987 was Gunnlaðarsaga (Svava Jakobsdóttir), about the link between a modern young woman and the mythological Gunnlöð, reminding the reader of the link between women and religious power[4].

With the conversion to heathendom women must have lost their vibrant goddesses. Freyja, Frigg and the rest of them were replaced by the holy trinity and of course the holy, passive, Mary who in no way measured up to the active goddesses, not to mention the warlike valkyries. New standards of conduct and discipline must have been introduced, but just how successfully?

3.3. THE GLOOMY PAST

After the period of the Freestate (874-1274), the structure of the society stayed pretty much the same for 700 years. It was a society of farmers, struggling for their livelihood in the face of unsympathetic nature and isolation. The situation was often bleak and Icelanders liked to revel in the glories and adventures of the heroes from the Freestate. Women moved into "insignifia" when it came to the production of literature and, in general, when the history of Iceland is being recounted, they are hardly considered worthy of a mention.

The general economy was much worse and life often a struggle for survival. There were phases of cold weather and volcanic eruptions. In the seventeenth century, the climate seemed to turn colder, lasting until the twentieth century. These cold years led to "the death of the animals which then led to the death of the people" (Lýður Björnsson, 1973, p. 24). In 1707, 36% of the population died from smallpox. A massive volcanic eruption in 1783 turned out to be catastrophic - the aftermath of the eruption killed

[4]Although I would not argue for a connection between the religious role of women in heathendom and in modernity, it is interesting to note that the ordaining of women to the priesthood happened relatively early and quite peacefully in Iceland, that is in 1974 (Kaplan, 1992).

approximately 20% of the nation. As an example of how miserable was the condition of the Icelandic population, the Danish authorities seriously thought about moving a large part of it to Jylland in Denmark. Table 3.1. gives an overview of the fluctuations in the population in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, portraying just how desperate the situation was.

Table 3.1. Population in Iceland 1703-1823

Year	Population	Year	Population
1703	50,358	1783	48,884
1708	appr.33,000	1786	38,363
1734	43,377	1801	47,852
1751	48,799	1805	46,197
1755	48,298	1811	48,808
1759	42,822	1816	47,691
1778	49,863	1823	50,088

(From Lýður Björnsson, 1973, quoting the Icelandic census).

In general the population hardly ever rose above 50,000; more people would not have been able to subsist from what the land produced (Stefán Ólafsson, 1993).

3.3.1 The role of women

Within this social structure the role of women was fairly well carved out. As the law dictated, men were concerned with the "outside", whereas women were concerned with the "inside". In accordance with this division, women worked on the farms and they were in charge of the running of what took place indoors, or employed as servants to do various types of work on the farm. The work and productions that were placed in the "inside" were important for the whole economy of the farm, which must have given these women some importance. When they owned the farm or were married to the farmer, they furthermore had authority over the workers. In the seventeenth century, 33% of Icelandic households were identified as being entirely run by women (Hastrup, 1990). The qualities of a good housewife, one who is disciplined and obedient, were the images of femininity with which women were presented. Considering that some of these women

also had to run the farm, the characteristics of the woman who was suitably bossy and authoritative must have been valued as well, when the situation demanded.

The society had few distinct classes; there were the educated officials and the priests, but mostly farmers, and those employed on the farms. Even the priests had to support their meagre income with farming (Tomasson, 1980). Individuals, in particular women, were not faced with choices regarding career, but only the opportunity to show their ability in handling their work and duties. A woman could have dreams about the future but her destiny was pretty much beyond her control. Survival depended on discipline, and stubbornness was essential to carry on striving, come what may.

The Icelandic literature illustrates the sense of stigma attached to accepting favours from the community and an immense pressure on individuals to be self-sufficient. Self-sufficiency was judged by how materially well-off the person was, and the farm served as the emblem of that self-reliance. In cases of hardship there was the possibility of communal help reflecting, as Stefán Ólafsson (1989) describes, drawing on Sigurður Nordal, a sense of communitarianism among the Icelanders. The "hreppur", an administrative district to which everyone had to belong, is taken as an example of the Icelandic sense of egalitarianism.

> The "hreppur" was meant to provide the members with collective security in the cases of natural hazards or accidents. Thus it provided for the poor, if relatives failed to do so, and prevented people from falling into poverty with preventive help. The better-off farmers paid tax to make this possible (p. 5).

Even though this was theoretically the case, having to accept food from the community was seen as humiliating, and people tried to avoid it at all costs. In practice, the concern of the community also, too often, left much to be desired. Families were split up and children allocated to farms through methods not unlike human auctions. Many women, due to their poorer economic situation, had to face the cruel fate of seeing their family divided when their husbands died, their children scattered on different farms, where they, in turn, became cheap labour. Inga Huld Hákonardóttir (1992) describes how, in 1805,

an illegitimate child was carried from one "hreppur" to another, all refusing to care for her, until eventually, probably due to this harsh treatment, the child died. These measures certainly treated victims as less than equal, indeed sometimes as less than human.

Guðmundur Hálfdanarsson (1993) claims that, in pre-modern Iceland, working on a farm was not seen as a job, but as part of the natural course of life. It was seen as a necessary phase before, optimally, workers would settle on their own farms. The move was from dependence to independence. During this period of their lives, before shouldering the responsibilities of being farmers, they would master such useful skills as industriousness, discipline and trustworthiness. Their role was thus, as Guðmundur Hálfdanarsson (1993) argues, seen as beyond human will and unchangeable, a biological fact.

By being dependent, one inevitably was put under the control of someone else, and therefore was at least partly subjected to the will of someone else. The law, with its restrictions on where people could live and what they could do work-wise, served to maintain the existing power structure. The language reflects these restrictions. In Icelandic there is the expression "að vera sjálfrar sín", meaning to own oneself, to belong to oneself. Guðmundur Hálfdanarsson (1993, p.47) argues that, despite all claims to independence and self-rule, Icelanders were slow to remove restraints on people's freedom and actually went to great lengths to prevent people from being too free. Such a situation was seen as leading to chaos and dissolution of the whole social structure. Only those who had shown themselves to be "responsible" individuals could be granted the hard-won right of personal freedom and, as can be imagined, reaching that threshold of material respectability was much harder for women than for men. The community of equals, in other words, excluded many men and most women.

3.3.2. Religion

As has been argued, the direction of the course of life in Iceland was usually not a matter of personal control, and religion must have served as a consolation when things were almost unbearably bad. Survival in such an inhospitable environment was problematic. The assurance that people would be rewarded, when they entered God's kingdom, for carrying on with their lives in the true faith of Christ, was probably a comforting thought when things were difficult. This theme especially characterises the Protestant doctrine to which the Icelanders converted in the mid sixteenth century.

The place of the subject in the cosmology of society was still quite static, with an emphasis on "being" rather than "becoming". Frith's (1994, p. 63) description captures succinctly the status of the subject in the pre-modern world view:

> The old world view, which comprised a God-centred universe, based on the "great chain of being", perceived human nature to be a static and unchanging amalgam of traits, wants and desires. Humans were put on earth by God who decreed their characteristics and the hierarchies of social status were similarly ordained from heaven. People were born into their roles and were advised not to try and advance their position beyond their preordained place in the chain, a move that could be construed as going against the will of God, while those who accepted their lot on earth would be rewarded in heaven.

Christianity promises rewards to those who sacrifice themselves for others, or who plainly manage to get on with their difficult lives. Christ carried his cross without complaint and set the example for his believers. This must have translated well to the Icelanders who already saw virtue in suffering, and emphasised dauntlessness and self-control when facing difficulties. Immersing yourself in work, or doing something "worthwhile", seems to have been regarded as an effective coping strategy in an adverse situation, and a way of distancing yourself from the pains and misfortunes of life. The Icelandic literature throughout the centuries is full of examples of how people, when they suffered major misfortunes, carried on with their lives as usual, concealing their emotions from others. Sigurður G. Magnússon (1993) analysing popular culture between 1850

and 1940, in this respect, cites several sources mentioning how people reacted to the death of their children without expressing their grief. Perhaps the thought was that others had enough on their plates without having to deal with other people's pain as well. Furthermore, there cannot have been much scope for privacy and personal sorrows, when sharing a bed and work with others.

3.3.2.1. Surveilling the soul

As indicated above, the "soul" was added to the mentality of Icelanders with the onset of Christianity. In the Western world the purity of the soul is a moral issue and guarding its purity is one of the disciplinary practices of society. The soul was something that could be polluted through the workings of the Devil, and women in particular were portrayed as having to guard against his seductive strategies. Due to the sensitive state of their souls, Christian doctrines argued, women could not reach the same spiritual level as men.

Apart from the Virgin Mary, and even she does not figure that highly in Protestant cultures, Christianity does not give much space to women in its religion. All the same its morality plays a rich part in the popular imagery and control of women in Western culture. The perception of the female body as the gateway of the Devil has affected images of women in the Western world. Women have been degraded or glorified according to how they physically display their sexuality, and a connection made between that display and their mentality. In this respect they have been judged by the absence or presence of their sexuality. It has been the desperate case of having "the head in the clouds and genitals in hell" (Hannes Sigurðsson, 1993).

A popular contrast in Western culture is the one made between the passive, pure, virginal, kind woman, to whom I will refer as the image of the Virgin, and the seductive, often evil, woman who uses the power of her flesh to distract the male from acquiring his

nobler goals in life, i.e. the whore. These images have been instrumental in mystifying and problematising sex and sexual relations. The flesh is weak and it is dangerous.

Since feminist analyses emphasise how women's individualities have been reduced to their sexualities, I will briefly discuss some thoughts on the impact of these cultural representations on Icelandic women.

Many accounts, from this period, complain about the lax morals of Icelanders and their promiscuity, finding them lacking in some essential self-disciplines. This applies as much to the common population as to the official guardians of morality. As spokesmen for chastity, many of the priests and bishops did not set a very convincing example and, during Catholicism, a number of them searched for warmth in beds other than their own. With the Reformation, attitudes to bodily pleasures and pleasures in general changed significantly. Strict laws, usually called the Big Verdict, were enforced in 1564 and remained in force until 1869. Documents from that time show many offences leading to the conviction and punishment of men and women. As their guilt became common knowledge with pregnancy, they had to face up to the Almighty; in the most severe cases the sinners had to pay with their lives.

Þórunn Valdimarsdóttir (1986) has discussed how the content of the leaflets distributed by the Lutheran Church in Iceland emphasised the virtues of hard work, obedience to authorities and chastity before marriage. Women quite literally were told to sacrifice themselves for their husband and family. Inga Huld (1992) argues that, with the Reformation, the contrasts drawn between the sinful Eve, unmarried mothers, and sinless Mary, as embodied in the married housewife, were sharpened. This had catastrophic effects for the condition of unmarried mothers, in particular when the father of their child was married to another woman. Their children were unwelcome and, as Inga Huld describes, their own souls were ridden with guilt.

In spite of these morals, social institutions were set against marriage of the poor. Þórunn Valdimarsdóttir (1986) explains how a clause in the law prevented people from stepping into holy matrimony, unless they had some property. As a consequence, only 3/5 of Icelandic women at the age of 50-54 had married, at the turn of the seventeenth century. Inga Huld describes how, in the year 1900, Iceland had the highest number of unmarried women in the age range 20-49 in Europe, and how only Ireland had more unmarried men. This explains the large number of illegitimate births. In the years between 1830 and 1870, 14.5% of children were born illegitimate, between 1871 and 1900 the percentage went up to 19% (Gísli Á. Gunnlaugsson, 1988).

Apart from pointing out the sinfulness of lusty desires, the disciplining of people's sexualities had an ulterior motive. As a technique it was geared towards preserving the social structure as it was, and it was those who had a vested interest in keeping it intact who worked hardest in enforcing it. Marriage was for those with worldly possessions, the landowners, the independent farmers, not for their cheap labour. Marriage in other words was far more than just the seventh sacrament; it was an economic institution; a contract between two equally worthy individuals who would be able to support each other financially (Gísli Á. Gunnlaugsson, 1988). It could thus be argued that the crime of having children did not merely rest in the contaminating nature of sexuality per se but in being poor. The attitude of a parliamentary member, Inga Huld (1992, p. 256) quotes, reflects this: "People who are not able to care for themselves have no moral right to have children".

We do not see much about sexuality and its control in official documents except where sexual behaviour breaks the law. Folk stories in contrast are ripe with sexual explorations and reveal something of their cultural significance. They portray how the structure of society had a hand in defining those intimate relations, how they possibly could be circumvented, and the rewards and punishment for doing so. Eventful associations between humans and elves, also referred to as the hidden people, feature

prominently in Icelandic folk-tales. The hidden people formed a community just like humans, their farms and churches were part of the landscape, i.e. the rocks and cliffs, and they dressed and behaved like humans. Most of them were better off than mortal men and women, their sheep and cows were fatter and produced better milk than the livestock owned by humans. Some of them were good, the Christians, and some bad, the heathens. If upset, their revenge was terrible. If, on the other hand, humans did them some favours they would be amply rewarded.

These stories were popular and people, genuinely believed in the existence of the hidden people up to the beginning of this century (Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, 1990). Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir (1988) claims that these stories were mostly told by women, thereby perhaps reflecting their hopes, dreams and fears.

Whereas folk-tales from, for example, Norway stress the dangers women encounter outside the realm of culture, Icelandic folk-tales portray women as free and happy when outside the confines of the home (Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir, 1988). Many of the elf-stories tell of sexual encounters between hidden and human people. Furthermore these amorous encounters seem to have a different significance for women, depending on where they take place, i.e. whether they are inside or outside the home.

A recurrent theme, in these folk-tales, is that human men should not deny hidden women sexual favours. They desire sex and they demand it:

> A common motif in accounts of the association between human men and elf women is seen in the story of two men, one older and the other younger, who go to visit two elf women; these offer them good food and make up beds for them beside themselves. The elder man, who is often a priest, does well in his lovemaking but the young man somehow goes astray in his courtship of the younger woman. For this reason he was unlucky for the rest of his life, and the ill-luck ran in his family for a long time." (Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, 1990, p. 121).

Human women also have amorous encounters with hidden men, outside the realm of the farm, resulting in them giving birth to their offspring. These children invariably become

fine members of society, but the mother often dies of a broken heart (exploded with grief), interestingly, on her return to her home or when she, for some reason, confronts her hidden lover again (in the home). Conversely, when human women are approached in their homes by handsome hidden men, they show their worthiness by putting a lid on their desires, turning down their tempting offer and choosing rather to engage in reading the word of God. Their pious behaviour does not go unrewarded: some get a new dress from the grateful wives of the hidden men and in all of its splendour, manage to catch the eye and then marry a well-to-do human farmer (Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir, 1982).

The dealings men have with mythical women assume a grotesque form when having intercourse with troll women. In a presentation on troll women in Icleandic folk stories, Ólína Þorvarðardóttir (1995) noted how these big women could represent female nature as well as women's culture. The troll women in her view, represent independent women who have to be brought under control again. Helga Kress (1994) notes how often troll women tantalise the manhood of men. They live outside the realm of man, thereby representing forces that have to be either conquered or avoided. It is a realm where the rule of men is not automatically valid.

> Some Icelandic folktales of trolls tell of their falling in love with humans. Ogresses are mostly concerned, rather than giants. The trouble was that people lured away by ogresses were generally too small to mate with them. So they were smeared in grease and pulled out to make them longer. These men saved themselves by asking for some rare and distant delicacy, such as shark-flesh twelve years old. While the ogress was getting hold of this, they succeeded in escaping (Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, 1990, p. 119).

The difference between the hidden or troll women and the human women rests not just in inhabiting nature and culture respectively but, importantly, in being independent or not. Here it is interesting to note that the hidden people are not considered to have a "soul" like their human counterparts[5]. The hidden women "own themselves", whereas human

[5]There is no agreement on this. Jón Árnason (1954), who collected Icelandic folktales, cites a poem where hidden people are distinguished from humans by not having a soul; but he himself disagrees, equating soul with mind.

women have God and the head of the household to answer to. Human women are not allowed to search for love in the embrace of hidden men except when they are outside the home. Inside it they have to prove their feminine virtues and loyalty. What these stories reveal are the strictures and restraints the social structure exerted on women's freedom. Because of these restraints the women are in more danger inside the home than if they follow their desires outside it. As Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir (1988) argues, the women are free and happy in the wilderness. Men, conversely, have to be more careful when in the grotesque wilderness. The independence of the women living on the outskirts of society threatens their own independence and masculinity.

3.4. THE CHANGE TO MODERNITY

In the years following 1880, the Icelandic community went through immense changes. The society changed from being rural to being urban, from an agricultural society to a modern, technological, one. The producers increasingly became consumers. Whereas at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Iceland was one of the poorest countries in Europe, it is now one of the wealthiest (Stefán Ólafsson, 1993). Reykjavík today has all the flashy attributes of cosmopolitan capitals: an opera, McDonalds, theatre, university, golf-courses and so on. As the world has progressively become smaller with the advent of modern technology, Iceland has lost its isolation.

Following increased prosperity the population took a great leap forward, doubling and trebling what it had been in earlier centuries. The figures in table 3.2. say more than many words could.

Table 3.2. Population in Iceland from 1870-1994

Year	Population	Year	Population
1870	70,031	1950	144,294
1901	78,641	1970	204,578
1930	108,621	1994	265,000

(Gísli Á. Gunnlaugsson, 1986 from the Icelandic census).

To give an idea of how quickly the society was urbanised, only 3% of Icelanders lived in towns or villages in 1860; in 1890 the proportion had gone up to 12%, and reached 44% in the year 1920 (Gísli Á. Gunnlaugsson, 1986). In 1993, 90% of the population lived in urban areas (Stefán Ólafsson, 1993). Inevitably, these immense migrations must have affected social relations. It is probable that social contact increased significantly, especially for women who had been relatively isolated in their domestic roles. In all likelihood social circles were enlarged, demanding new ways of drawing boundaries, be it between the private space of the individual and the family or between the family and the outside world.

In the early 1880's, 74% of the population subsisted from agriculture (Stefán Ólafsson, 1989, p.5) but, in the nineteenth century, the fishing industry increasingly displaced it. In 1930, it had gone so far that approximately 30% of working Icelanders had a job related to the fishing industry (Stefán Ólafsson, 1993). Since then that proportion has gone down but fishing still accounts for a large proportion of the national income. Its structural impact can be felt still in many villages in rural Iceland, where men work on the trawlers and women in the fish factories. As an example of how important the fish industry was and continues to be, it has been considered perfectly acceptable to close down schools, in some of the smaller villages - so that students could give a hand in fish factories, saving valuable but perishable stock, when needed. As the laureate Nobel prize winner Halldór Laxness claims, life is salted fish.

Understandably, such huge impending changes evoked considerable anxiety at the turn of the century, and the general tendency was to resist their influence. Innovations were viewed with suspicion in general and were seen to undermine some of the fundamental values of society. This fear manifested itself not least in the law which, until the end of the nineteenth century, was primarily aimed at taking care of the needs of farmers (Gísli Á. Gunnlaugsson, 1986). In a rather paranoid manner farmers expected the changes to bring out the worst in individuals, and potentially, to contribute to the collapse of well-established values (Sigurður G. Magnússon, 1993). Sigurður remarks on how, during this transitional phase from a rural to an urban society, those living in the villages were accused of being lazy vagabonds, good for nothing. The general trend was to resist and hold on to old ideals and traditions. In this respect, Sigurður argues, the traditional culture of the farmers did not succumb to the modern values and ways of living but, instead, became a powerful background to that transformation. Changes in outer conditions did not change inner conditions such as ideas and thought very much (Sigurður G. Magnússon, 1993, p. 269). The ideals of the farmers continued to be the ideals of the culture.

According to Sigurður G. Magnússon (1993), one of the values that was carried on into modern society was the Protestant work ethic. The importance placed on work is probably a translation of the value previously placed on obedience and self-sufficiency. In a large scale comparative survey conducted in 1990, comparing the life values of Icelanders and various other nations (Friðrik H. Jónsson & Stefán Ólafsson, 1991), Icelanders stood out in their belief that industriousness led to prosperity in life.

The Old Norse individualism and the religious values that later buttressed it, were nurtured in a society that differs considerably from contemporary Icelandic society. Harvey's (1990) suggestion that we should look at how the basic dimensions of time and space change with the transition to modern society could be useful for an understanding of how these discourses tie in with the structure of society. These dimensions are not

fixed natural concepts but have changed and continue to change with the culture. In this respect their organisations reveal much about the social relations necessary for their production and re-production. Not only are our actions affected, but our attitude towards, and our understanding of, the "self" and our position in the world. As Harvey argues:

> Symbolic orderings of space and time provide a framework for experience through which we learn who or what we are in society (Harvey, 1990, p. 214).

One of the consequences of modernity, Harvey claims, has been that the "progressive monetization of relations in social life" (p. 228) have transformed the qualities of time and space, thus constituting "a new framework for promoting new kinds of social relations" (p. 228). Earlier in the same book he explores this same theme:

> Since modernity is about the experience of progress through modernization, writings on that theme have tended to emphasize temporality, the process of becoming rather than being in space and place (p. 205).

The argument that pre-modern Iceland fostered and emphasised the qualities of Being could be made easily; whether the focus is now shifting to the qualities of Becoming remains to be seen. The structure of society that stressed the quality of Being was the peasant society, where the rhythm of time largely coincided with changes in the seasons, and social relations were more or less contained within the farm and its immediate surroundings. Place in this sense had a strong significance for people's identities, and was central in the spatial grids informing material practices. This emphasis still informs modern society: kin are still identified with the farm from which the family comes, signifying how the past is integral to the present.

The biggest contribution of modern society contrasted with established social practices has probably been the introduction of the consumer; conveying the image of the individual free to choose, thereby exposing the gap between what we are and what we could become. It is the individual who not only does his work because it is part of his/her role in life, but chooses a profession in terms of his personal project towards self-

fulfilment and gratification. In this sense fewer "restraints" are set on the individual who, instead, faces the strain of having to choose between offers and choose the right path through life.

With the onset of modernity, the stabilising of new professions and growing urbanisation, money certainly has become a more important mediator in social relations and people, increasingly, have been able to afford goods beyond the barest necessities (Stefán Ólafsson, 1993). As the farm has lost its status as the centre of production, and people no longer have to survive from what is seasonally produced on the land, the time cycles have changed. People get paid by the hour, shortening the time cycle and disembedding it from the home. The more successful we are the more we get paid. Here though is a gendered subtext; whereas work outside the home successfully transforms time into money, the same is not the case for domestic labour. Insofar as the home remains the responsibility of women and the place where they expend their energy, there is inevitably a gendered gap in income.

This raises the question of whether or not changed circumstances have affected the "natural" allocation of domestic work to women? Statistics reveal a great increase in the proportion of women holding jobs outside the home. In 1980 the percentage of women in the work market was 64%, a remarkable rise from 28% in 1964 (Kaplan, 1992). At the same time statistics show that women are getting paid less for their work than men (Guðbjörg Andrea Jónsdóttir, 1995). The transition to modern culture, coupled with changes in the home as a social institution, have diversified the roles women hold and their social practices. Modern technology has now taken over some of the more time-

consuming tasks that the housewife used to perform and, although there is still much left to be desired[6], men are slowly, but gradually, starting to share some of the domestic responsibilities.

Families in Iceland as well as in other Western societies, are assuming a new form, as marriages increasingly break down. All the same, old habits die hard and the care of the home and the family are still primarily seen to be the responsibility of women. This manifests itself not least in that, with the break up of families, women usually end up being their main supporters. In short, the changes have brought some improvements in the position of women but there still remains much ground to be covered.

Sigrún Júlíusdóttir (1993) made the difficult position of women within modern Iceland her subject in a presentation based on her research on families. One of her conclusions was that the community has lagged behind in facing the changed circumstances of modern families. When compared to other Nordic countries Icelandic women marry younger, they have more children, and shoulder more of the domestic responsibilities. The reason for this discrepancy she considered to rest in the cultural image of the strong woman, the woman who does not complain, and shoulders her responsibilities. These, she argued, are strongly related to the values of self-sufficiency and loyalty, the relics from pre-modern society.

Judging from this research, the community lags behind in responding to changed circumstances both institutionally and in its attitude. One of the more common complaints voiced by married women is that they cannot find day-care facilities for their children. Many single mothers have also found it difficult to make ends meet financially due to the high cost of daily necessities such as food, and their relatively low salaries. Women,

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[6] The result from a survey conducted in 1980, concerned with the division of tasks in the home, showed that women spent 33 hours working in the home, in comparison with the measly 7 hours of men (Quoted from Sigríður Dúna Kristmundsdóttir, 1994).

though, have not taken all of this sitting down. The presence of the Icelandic women's movement is strongly felt in the society and many of the pressing social issues have been actively addressed by them.

3.5. WOMEN AND POLITICS: FEMINISM IN ICELAND

During the fight for independence at the turn of this century, the nation became seriously involved in politics for the first time since the Freestate (Auður Styrkársdóttir, 1982). Throwing off the Danish Crown required well-concerted action and, to this end, the proponents of independence drew on all the strength possible in order to unite the nation in the quest for freedom. Women's support was required, but in a way that would be compatible with the future vision of a liberal democratic society. They thus were addressed from, and their rights as citizens defined in terms of, the role they were supposed to play in the future society.

The political turmoil surrounding the fight for independence was amplified by the immense changes that were taking place in the social structure. In general there was a move away from seeing the order of things as a natural hierarchy produced by divine dictates, towards the liberalist ideas that all individuals were born free and equal[7]. Political institutions were no longer seen as the natural extensions of the king's long arms, but as run on the basis of consent and agreement amongst civilians. In other words, the perceived relation between political institutions and individuals had changed drastically and, considering the improved financial position of the public, the definition of who was an independent, self-reliant individual could be extended. Furthermore, news of the fights women had put up elsewhere in the Western world to gain the right to vote had reached Iceland and in the late 19th century, the first demands for the vote for women in Iceland were voiced.

[7]These ideas corresponded well with pre-modern individualism but challenged the power structure of the old peasant society.

Pateman (1989) has explored how the idea about citizenship in liberal democracy builds on an ideal split between a natural/private sphere, where the family and home are located centrally, and a cultural/public sphere, which provides the realm for communal decision making. Nicholson (1992) has pointed out how these are socially constructed categories and, thereby, that their meaning might be amenable to change with time. In this sense the multiple meanings of the private and the public can best be grasped by the analogy Weinstein draws between public and privateness and the layers in an onion; "just as a layer that is outside one layer will be inside another, so something that is public with regard to one sphere of life may be private in relation to another" (as quoted by Okin, 1991, p.69). The changes that have occurred in Iceland support Young's (1991) claim that these mutually exclusive oppositions "arise from and belong to bourgeois society" (p. 307). Although liberalism depicts the domestic as a naturally private realm, the public and the private were not so clearly differentiated in pre-modern Iceland. In the absence of substantive urban centres, the domestic realm played an important cultural role, whereas the outside, as argued earlier (3.3.2.1), was the wild, the natural[8]. This had important implications for women. As Gísli Pálsson (1993) argues:

> In Icelandic society female muteness did not exist in the sense that women no less than men participated in the discourse of the 'inside', the realm of culture as opposed to nature (p.134).

The onslaught of modernisation, and the emergence of a whole new world of commerce and business on the other hand, served to redefine and sharpen the split between the inside and outside in terms of the natural/private and the cultural/public spheres.

The citizen par excellence, Pateman (1989) claims, is located in the public realm in liberal theories. In her analysis of what constitutes the ideal citizen, she states that:

> In civil life individuals transcend, or leave behind, the particular and ascribed characteristics which distinguish them in the private sphere and appear as unrelated equals. They enter the sphere of individualism -

[8]Although this was the case, Alþing, the Icelandic parliament, was clearly separated from the home in pre-modern society.

> which is also universalism - as bearers of rights (liberties), as owners of property and as citizens (Pateman, 1989, p. 20).

Inspection of the Icelandic law reveals a similar attitude to citizenship. At the turn of the century, this fundamental right was limited to those who had some property, involving only 10% of the nation (Auður Styrkársdóttir, 1982). In the year 1882 unmarried women, and widows in a good financial position of more than 25 years of age, were given the power to vote for their parish council. A condition of their vote, though, was that they were "independent" owners of farms and ruling themselves (Gísli Jónsson, 1977). A number of women, in other words, were capable of "owning" themselves but, as the laws reveal, it was taken for granted that married women were subordinated to their husband's will. These women, as Mcpherson would probably point out (see Sampson, 1993), were not in possession of their own personhood and, therefore, could not exert the right of the citizen to vote.

> Possessive individualism first tells us that in order to vote, one must be free; and second that in order to be free - that is independent from another's will - one must be the owner of oneself. Any conditions thought to impinge upon the individual's personal ownership over himself would infringe on freedom, and thus deny such a person the right to vote (Sampson, 1993, p. 33).

The rationale behind confining the right to vote to "independent" citizens rests in the fact that the will of those subordinated to the master, be they his wife or his servants, becomes conflated with his. Thus their vote would express the master's will, entailing the unfair situation of a single individual having more than one vote (Sampson, 1993).

The separation of the home from the public/cultural sphere set some limitations on those defined in relation to this space, i.e. women. Although women honed some worthy skills in their daily domestic practices, they could not be seen to have developed the skills necessary for fruitful participation in, for example, public decision making. The paradox, in increasingly defining women as detached from the public realm, was not only that actually a large number of women did work outside the home but[9], as Pateman (1989)

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[9]Auður Styrkársdóttir (1982) notes how the national census in 1930 fails to mention

points out, that women reproduce and educate the generation to come. They pass on moral values to future citizens. In the next few pages I will investigate how this has affected women in Iceland.

In 1907 the Women's Rights Society was founded and started campaigning for votes for women and political equality to men (Auður Styrkársdóttir, 1982). Their ideas were grounded in the popular liberalism and they did not question their place within the social structure. Their political crusade was a call for an appreciation of the important moral duty involved in bringing up future citizens, and how women were needed in parliament to ensure that these important social issues were being handled by the experts. Their education from life would inform all their decisions, with their insights complementing rather than fragmenting decision-making processes. As they argued, a parliament without women would be like a home without a woman (Auður Styrkársdóttir, 1982). The cause of the suffragettes was given some impetus by the elevated status ascribed to the mother, within the nationalism of the time. Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir (1994) has analysed, in this respect, how the Icelandic nationalistic movement, which also was inspired by the ideas of liberalism, celebrated the pure good mother bringing the aforementioned paradox well into action. As Inga Dóra argues, the positive attitude towards the mother opened up women's access to the public/political arena, but simultaneously put women in their proper place, the home.

Despite the potential boomerang effect that the rhetoric of the worthiness of the mother might have incurred, all the same the right to vote did problematise women's natural position within the home, and challenged the conceptualisation of public decision making as the natural skill of men. DuBois (quoted in Pateman, 1989) claims, in her analysis of the suffragettes, movement in England, that granting women the right to vote served at

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how married women supported their homes by their work outside the home. They obviously did not fit into pre-defined ideas about who could support whom. Only 31 married women were counted as working in relation to the fish industry, contradicting other documentation.

least as a partial recognition of women as "individuals". Furthermore, very importantly, it questioned the idea that women should be subordinate to their husbands' will. As in England, the possible influx of women into the public sphere provoked discomfort in a number of the Icelandic parliament members. Although the fight for the right to vote was relatively trouble free for Icelandic women, compared to the blood, sweat and tears shed elsewhere in the Western world, some defiant voices were raised. Concerns were expressed about what would happen to families and households if women "abandoned their duties" to become active members in fora more suited to men. Men would not be able to raise children as successfully as women, and women would not be able to make decisions in parliament as well as men (Unnur Karlsdóttir, 1992). There seemed to be some fear that, once women were involved in public decision-making, the traditional division between men and women would be overthrown, jeopardising the welfare of the whole community. There was, in other words, some appreciation that the public life of men was made possible by the women taking care of the tasks in the home. This existential male angst was conquered after some to-ing and fro-ing. The Icelandic parliament granted women the right to vote in 1915, and this was accepted at last as law by the Danish king in 1920.

Gaining the right to vote was one thing, infiltrating the male-dominated political front line was another (Sigríður Dúna Kristmundsdóttir, 1989). The women who attempted to do so found themselves banging their heads against the patriarchal wall, and a number of socially affluent women resorted to forming their own exclusive alliances[10]. In the period between 1908 and 1926, women pressed for seats in municipal councils, with their own slates in Reykjavík and a few other smaller towns. These efforts initially bore good fruit and, in the election to the municipal council in Reykjavík 1908, the Women's Slate got a remarkable 27.6% of the votes. This is a percentage which Auður

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[10]The women on the slates were similar to the Bluestockings in England in that they were upper class and often educated. Furthermore they were often married, or somehow related, to men already in parliament or with high public profile (Auður Styrkársdóttir, 1982).

Styrkársdóttir (1982) claims is unique in the history of women's rights. The argument for women's moral superiority in handling certain issues pulled in the votes. Other elections did not turn out to be such plain sailing and, in 1926, when women formed a slate for election to parliament, they only got 3.5% of all the votes (Kristín Ástgeirsdóttir, 1982). This put an end to other exclusive women's slates for several decades.

From the 1960s onwards, women progressively started to move into the labour market and enter educational institutions. A career outside the home had become a conceivable thought to married women, and education no longer was perceived as something that merely should consolidate women's skills as mothers and carers. Paradoxically though, despite the pouring of women into spheres traditionally seen as masculine, and despite the fact that their contribution was "needed", women saw few signs of their effort being appreciated. Indeed, women occupied the worst paid professions, and their labour outside the home came on top of their domestic duties.

Along with these structural changes, news of the political turmoil experienced by Western countries in the seventies sent shock waves to Iceland and inspired young people to oppose authority and convention. The ideas of the Women's Liberation Movement found their way to Icelandic women and in 1968 the Redstocking Movement had their first meeting. By reference to Socialism and Marxism, women had a model for explaining their subordination and how their exploitation was built into the social system, extending their concerns to sexuality and women's experiences in general. The personal was rendered political, as it was popularly phrased, and many aspects of women's experiences previously not seen as matters for public scrutiny were brought to the surface.

The Redstocking movement became one of the more colourful political movements in Iceland. It was radical at heart and the paper it launched "Forvitin rauð" (meaning "red and curious", a send-up of a series of pornographic movies with similar titles) explored

issues such as abortions on-demand and women's inequality to men in the working market. Women were identified as "oppressed" through their ties to traditional roles that denied them the same material rewards as men, and feminists were stimulated to peel off the layers of cultural significance that had been attached to the female role. A crucial contribution in this sense was that they stripped the domestic space of its "natural" feminine qualities and de-gendered it. It actually became conceivable that men could stay in the kitchen just like women, and women could join the labour-market as the equals of men.

The provocative actions of the Redstockings[11] aimed at attracting media coverage and encouraging discussion but, simultaneously, hit a conservative nerve. Women were not supposed to behave like this and they were berated publicly for their looks, dress sense and lack of femininity. Some scathing voices implied how the Redstocking was fit only for instant "cosmetic cure"[12]. Joining the Redstocking movement was presented as almost forfeiting one's claim to femininity and as rendering oneself as "less" of a woman. Indeed, the phrase Redstocking became almost a synonym for sloppy, scruffy and unfeminine (Herdís Helgadóttir, 1996). These criticisms, which targeted the Redstockings very identity as women, must have hurt, as can be read from, for example, Herdís Helgadóttir's (1996) study of the first Redstockings. Although other factors played a role in the decline of the movement, such as their overt leftist orientation and internal fractioning (Sigríður Dúna Kristmundsdóttir, 1989), it would not surprise me if the portrayal of the Redstocking women as unfeminine and man-hating played a

[11]For example, they crowned a cow as Miss Iceland, to draw attention to how women were being treated as cattle, and had mock auctions of women, to point out how little value was placed on their qualities in society.

[12]Heiðar Jónsson, a male beautician, described the Redstockings as "ugly" in his autobiography (Nanna Rögnvaldsdóttir, 1991), a curious choice of an adjective considering that his wife was one of them.

substantial role in neutralising some of their arguments and bringing on the movement's downfall. As the following quote shows, the stereotype of the aesthetically challenged feminist still lingers on in the popular image:

> A person fighting for equality got her degree from M.H. around '68, has studied sociology, is badly dressed in Communist clothes, has unrealistic opinions and makes ridiculous demands. In fact she doesn't want equality but wants to turn everything inside out and squeeze herself in everywhere (Boys in junior college, aged 16-20, 'Heyrt um jafnréttismál', *Vera*, April, 1993, p. 11).

The contribution of the Redstocking movement was of immense importance in bringing the arguments of the Women's Liberation movement in other countries to Icelandic women. As my analysis will show later, many of their arguments became mainstream in the culture, and still feed some of the strategies of resistance used everyday by Icelandic women[13].

The arguments of the Women's Liberation movement rhymed with women's anger, and the year 1975 saw one of the best concerted actions of female solidarity in Icelandic history, when approximately 90% of all women in Iceland went on strike. All the "invisible", valuable, but underpaid, work done by women suddenly saw the light of day and the societies' institutions were almost paralysed. Their message was loud and clear, they did not want their work to be undervalued either in the labour-market or at home. Most women rallied round to a meeting in the centre of Reykjavik with slogans from the feminist movement. The anger, determination and power expressed that day were clearly perceptible and unforgettable to those who took part in, or witnessed, this action. The slogans from the song sung that day "I dare, I want to, I will", were the legacy left to future generations as the Redstocking Movement started to fizzle out in the late 70s.

[13]This is stated with the reservation that many of my interviewees would never dream of calling themselves Redstockings or feminists.

The next big women's movement was underpinned by rather different ideas. Again the emphasis was on capitalising on normative ideas and developing them, so that they might improve the position of women and make them more visible as part of public decision-making. Whereas the Redstocking movement had stressed women's "oppression", not all women had felt "victimised" by their traditional role in society, nor powerless. The Women's Alliance, founded in 1981, capitalised on this and, in 1987, they won their biggest victory when they won 6 seats out of 63 in parliament. Their agenda in many ways resembled those characterising the early Women's Slates, in their stress on women's valuable experience and the importance of bringing a feminine perspective to resolving political issues (Sigríður Dúna Kristmundsdóttir, 1989). As their policy statement (1987) claims:

> We form our policy from the point of reference of women. We rethink everything and take nothing for granted, not even our own existence as a political entity. In our policy we emphasise the demands of women for equal right on our premises, where women's experiences and our resulting set of values are evaluated equally on their own merits and we reject equality which involves having to mould ourselves to the standards that men set in order to become equal (The Women Alliance Policy Statement, 1987).

Going into politics on woman's "own premises" is further clarified in the policy: " ..we think that it is essential for women to represent and carry out a policy which has its roots in and is nurtured by the experiences and culture of women". The perspective of women, as Sigríður Dúna Kristmundsdóttir (1989) argues, was seen as having been repressed in society, leading to the general undervaluing of women, who, in reality, tend to be stuck with their traditional responsibilities. A big emphasis was placed on the concept "world of experience" as the source from where women could communally work. Women, in other words, were identified as still being responsible for the home, and their participation in politics was explicitly aimed at making the issues relating to these practices more prevalent in political public debates (Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir 1994). According to Sigríður Dúna Kristmundsdóttir (1989), who was one of their first MPs, the Women's Alliance worked from the "notion that women were a separate cultural group with a separate set of values from men". As a reflection of women's shared experience in the home and in caring for others, the "practical housewife" was often

alluded to in their political campaigns. Metaphorical references were made to how the assembly could be perceived as running a household, and, of course, to how they who have the experience of holding the purse strings are the best people to take care of the state's finances (Women's Alliance Policy Statement, 1987). They saw their viewpoint as complementary to that of the men, but just as essential.

In recent years, the Women's Alliance has been criticised for presenting a one-dimensional view of womanhood and thus for working implicitly against women's liberation. Their emphasis on motherhood potentially is seen as ganging up with conservative forces aimed at keeping women in their place in society (Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir, 1991; Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir, 1994). Although women are fighting for their say in communal decision making, their references to generations of home-makers, potentially naturalise the private sphere as feminine. The very split between the public and the private that has such a strong part in upholding the present societal structure, as Pateman (1989) would probably argue, became, in other words, the basis for women's entrance into the public realm.

Despite serious revisions to the agenda of the Alliance and obvious references to women's differences and different aims in life (e.g. interview with Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, 'Kona með vald' in Vera:Tímarit um konur og kvenfrelsi), it looks as if the popularity of the Women's Alliance is on the decline; but certainly not without having left a lasting mark on the political landscape. The more established political parties have been forced to give more attention to so-called "soft" issues, such as lack of day-care centres, care for the elderly and so on. Indeed, now that the political attractiveness of these issues has been established, many of them have spruced up their own agendas, and adopted the ideas of the Women's Alliance to such a degree that they have made them their own.

Although much remains to be done to improve the position of women in Iceland, the future faced by the youngest generation is starkly different from the future prospects of

their grandmothers. This could only have been achieved through the women's movement's relentless search for gaps in the traditional discourses, from where they could present their case for women, or by their direct confrontations to established, cultural "truths". However, there still is need for activity and perhaps the time is ripe for writing a new chapter in the story of the Icelandic women's movement.

3.6. DISCUSSION

It is almost impossible to separate femininity from the highly communal tapestry that gives it its significance. This chapter therefore is an important precedent to my analysis, since it attempts to uncover, at least partially, how the text I am about to analyse is itself constituted. The historical and cultural threads that make up the web of meaning, within which the female subject is embedded, have to be traced for an adequate understanding of, for example, the significance of some of the statements made in the obituaries and the interviews. As I shall continue to argue but shall explore more thoroughly in my analysis, the cultural resources have restrained, as well as made possible, certain ways of relating to oneself. These have involved institutions I have discussed here such as the home, the church, the state, and I could go on.

The developments and changes the Icelanders have faced this century have challenged the inertia in the social structure. This has caused friction and, although it has introduced opportunities for women, who are increasingly starting to make themselves felt in domains previously preserved for men, it has also presented problems which have had to be dealt with both individually and institutionally. The challenge I face in the remainder of this thesis is to explore how this has changed the contours of femininity, and the pains and pleasures it has brought to the women who embody and define it.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Foucault described his ideas as a tool-box, implying how in no way could he foresee their use. Applying tools within the empirical paradigm of social psychology sets some constraints, and this chapter and the analysis chapters that follow reflect the compromises I have had to reach in marrying some of the theoretical ideas to the paradigm.

This chapter is concerned with the "how" in the research; outlining the steps taken in collecting the data, the procedure followed in analysing it, as well as addressing how the research procedure and research output should be evaluated.

4.2. APPROACHES TO THE RESEARCH

Approaches that are feminist and qualitative are often mentioned in the same breath, owing to their similar "attitudes" towards the research process. In this respect, Henwood and Pidgeon (1993) point out how qualitative methods are increasingly being adopted by feminists ".. because they are viewed as being sensitive to women's experiences seen in their own terms, and as empowering women in their efforts to work for change" (p.17). The emphasis in this research, is on how self, identity and ideas about femininity are culturally and socially constituted. It addresses what makes particular kinds of self-relations possible and the normative force of some of our taken for granted ideas about femininity. To investigate these issues the methods chosen have to be sensitive to the minutiae of social relations and yet be able to embrace the complexity of the social dynamics, as well as the broader matrix of power/knowledge within which these relations take place. In this sense the research requires as much attention to detail as it does to

larger recurring patterns. Qualitative research, when alert to "delicate distinctions" (Geertz, 1973) and the contested structures that make it intelligible, is I judged most suitable for this kind of research.

The feminist inspiration comes mainly through adding to the research, a critical framework involving a political standpoint. The focus is aimed at the power relations inherent in social practices, exploring the costs and consequences different "truths" about femininity, including those originating from research, have had for women. Banister et al. (1994) point out how there is no "intrinsically feminist method or methodology" (p.121), but rather a particular orientation towards the phenomena under study. It is an orientation marked by its suspicion of the male bias I discussed in chapter two, and constitutes a critical approach towards the implicit gender blindness in scientific practices.

Although I was affected by previous studies, my wrestle with the data and theory produced a somewhat "home-cultivated", albeit Foucauldian inspired, version of discourse analysis. Discourse shares the difficulties associated with many concepts in the social sciences, such as "motivation" and "ideology" for example, in that it has many different and even conflicting definitions (Fairclough, 1992). Before proceeding to describe my own analysis, I should like to give a rather crude explanation of why I did not adopt the approach to discourse analysis, that is currently one of the more popular in social psychology.

4.2.1. Potter and Wetherell's discourse analysis

Potter and Wetherell's (1987) method reflects the increasing popularity of the social constructionistic strand within social psychology, and is interesting in its attempt to address some of the discipline's dilemmas. As a measure taken to counter individualism and bridge the gap between the individual and the social, the focus is redirected from what happens within individuals to what takes place between them (Gergen, 1985). Here

language and its "performative use" (Gergen, 1985, p.270) plays a pivotal role. In studying the discourses that are in use, the emphasis is on trying to embrace their variability, i.e. the influence of for example, context on peoples' standpoints and positions, thereby acknowledging how the same person can express contrasting viewpoints depending on place and situation. The focus is on language itself, as the field in which meanings are constructed and negotiated, appreciating how it provides a working field, ripe with tensions and double meanings.

Despite these positive features, I judged this version of discourse analysis to be not entirely suitable for the kind of analysis upon which I wanted to embark. I did not think that enough attention was being paid to the strategic importance of discursive practices. Power operates in particular through the knowledge that is generated about selfhood and in the ways we attempt to govern ourselves. This means that it is not sufficient to explore language per se. We also need to focus on the way we position ourselves as particular kinds of subjects through, for example, our actions and demeanour and on the schemes that are devised to ensure that we keep ourselves within the norms.

The Foucauldian inspired understanding that is put into discourses here is that they are productive and restrictive of what statements of knowledge are possible, and as such organise, structure and define knowledge. Power works through these representations and productions of knowledge and truth, constituting the subjects in relation to, and/or as part of, the knowledge generated. It enables us to identify loci of regulations and control, the strategies of power that inflict upon our very understanding of ourselves. The next section of this chapter (in particular, 4.3.1.3.) will explore how I applied this understanding to the data.

4.3. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In this study two different methods of data collection were used, creating different types of data for the analysis. The data corpus consists of a random sample of obituaries published from 1922 to 1992, and interviews with 18 women, aged 16 to 88. When deciding what material to use I had several objectives in mind. First, I wanted my data to reflect the changes to which the community has been subjected in recent decades and, secondly, I wanted it to provide more than one perspective on the discourses on which women are constituted and within which they constitute themselves. Along with the time-dimension, I wanted divergence and variety, material from which I could draw rich meaningful inferences.

Figure 4.1: Characteristics of data corpus

Perspective	Type	Quantity	Time-dimension	Space-dimension
Media	Obituaries	209	1922-1992	Rural/Urban
Individuals	Interviews	17	Age 16-88	Rural/Urban

Figure 4.1. gives a quick overview of the extent and scope of my data corpus and gives some indication of how I tried to tap the time and space dimensions. The extended time period covered by the obituaries and the wide age range of the interviewees made it possible to attain these objectives at least partially. Apart from collecting the material I also made extensive research into previous analyses of the culture, changes in the law, and changes in the economy. In general, I tried to get my hands on everything that somehow was linked to my study. This historical exploration proved very useful. Seen in retrospect, this work was essential for making sense of some the statements and implications of my data and in linking them to the relevant cultural institutions. The chapter written on the history and culture of Iceland reflects this research and I will refer back to it extensively in the actual analysis.

The purpose in spanning such an extended time period with the sample was to get some indication of how changes in society and changes in the way subjects are constituted in discourses have interlinked. The sample of the obituaries automatically included subjects who had lived both in rural and urban areas but, for the interviews, I had to design the sample so that it would cover both. The media and interviews were included to explore different venues in the construction of femininity. I will discuss the characteristics of each sample in more detail on the following pages.

4.3.1. Obituaries

Foucault collected documents or texts for analysis, as he was interested "in what the texts reveal about mechanisms by which power is exercised" (Jupp and Norris, 1993, p.39). Identifying documents as mechanisms brings to the surface their part in normative regulation, as instruments of power.

Collecting documents or texts has several practical benefits. Insofar as they are public, for example newspaper articles, they are easy to access and collect. As ongoing, continuing records of society, they are well suited for studies aiming to collect data with a historical dimension. The documents most usually exist in their original form and have not been tampered with. The method is unobtrusive; collecting the data neither changes their nature nor the aspects on which the researcher is interested in focusing (the repercussions from the analysis are however capable of doing this).

Media articles are examples of public texts and therefore do not raise issues of confidentiality. I wanted articles that somehow would address the lives of "ordinary" people, and this drew my attention to the obituaries.

As a social practice, obituaries and anniversaries (articles about someone's life, published on his or her birthday) in Iceland provide a venue for reconstructing the life of an

individual as well as providing an outlet for the author's grief, respect and/or love. They are remarkable constructions of lives, tailored to fit a strictly conventional narrative. For a researcher they provide good material for exploring the dominant discourses in society and how the deceased is constituted by these. The conventions the author has to follow when arranging the content of the obituary probably pre-defines his output up to a point but, at the same time, space is provided for an intricate analysis of the life of the deceased, full of omissions and struggles. The pain or joy which accompanies particular kinds of subjectivities is mentioned either implicitly or explicitly, sacrifices are rationalised and a way of living idealised. The events that marked the everyday life of the deceased are linked together and turning points identified, all in accordance with the logic and cultural resources of the community.

The tradition of writing obituaries is well established in Iceland. Everyday the largest newspaper in Iceland, Morgunblaðið, devotes substantial space to them, and is consequently sometimes referred to as the "paper of the dead" (Pinson, 1979). As an example, in 1992 the newspapers in the sample were on average 56 pages, on average containing 11.7 obituaries. Similar calculation reveals 8.6 obituaries for 56.1 pages in 1982; 5.3 obituaries for 36 pages in 1972; 1.6 obituaries for 24 pages in 1962; 3.1 obituaries for 14.6 pages in 1952; 1.5 for 8 pages in 1942; 0.7 for 4.3 pages in 1932 and 0.3 for 4 pages in 1922. The "physique" of the obituaries has not changed much throughout this century (Appendix I). They usually carry a photo of the person and provide information about his or her date of birth and death. The obituaries vary in length and are signed, often with the nickname of the author or an indication of the author's relation to the individual, e.g. "dad", "the granddaughters", "friends from work".

The newspaper, *Morgunblaðið*, is distributed in Iceland every morning except Mondays. It has the biggest proportion of readers in Iceland and has been on the market since 1913. A survey conducted by the Social Science Research Institute in the University of Iceland in 1994 revealed that of those who responded to the survey (n= 939 out of 1230, or 76%

response rate), 53.1% said that they read the *Morgunblaðið* every day, 14.1% that they read it often and 12% that they read it sometimes (Karl Sigurðsson, 1994). From these numbers it could be estimated that out of 195,000 Icelanders ranging in age from 18 to 80, 100,000 read it every day. One of the questions included in this survey was whether the respondents read the obituaries. A breakdown of the results reveals the following:

Table 4.1. Do you read obituaries?: Breakdown of results by sex

	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Men	6.2%	21.1%	32.2%	40.4%
Women	17.0%	34.2%	18.8%	30.1%
Whole	11.3%	27.3%	25.9%	35.6%

Table 4.2. Do you read obituaries?: Breakdown of results by age

	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
14-19	1.4%	14.1%	37.3%	47.2%
20-24	2.1%	24.7%	32.0%	41.2%
25-34	4.5%	26.6%	31.2%	37.7%
35-49	14.7%	30.7%	26.3%	28.3%
50-67	18.1%	35.0%	15.3%	31.6%
68-80	32.9%	27.4%	5.5%	34.2%

(The Social Science Research Institute in Iceland, 1994)

I think it likely that these results underestimate the practice of reading obituaries in Iceland. My impression from having lived in Iceland is that the habit of reading obituaries is considered to reveal a rather morbid interest and, as literary achievements go, I do not think they rate very highly in people's minds. Icelanders therefore might not be inclined to acknowledge that they do, now and then, skim quickly over them, as they wait for their coffee to brew at the breakfast table. I strongly suspect that most Icelanders read obituaries when they cover the lives of dead relatives or friends. On various occasions I have come across obituaries written about dead loved ones, amongst friends and relatives, that have been cut out and preserved in photo albums or scrap books.

Halldóra Dröfn Gunnarsdóttir (1988), in a study of obituaries from 1926 to 1986[1], compared the number of obituaries written with the number of deaths recorded. Her conclusion was that more and more individuals are being written about in obituaries. To take an example, in August 1966, 106 people died, of whom 40 (27 men and 13 women), or 38%, had an obituary written about them. In August 1986, 128 people died, of whom 62 (34 men and 28 women), or 48%, had an obituary written about them. These figures confirm that the writing of obituaries is a well established practice in Iceland. The number of obituaries written about each individual also seems to be on the increase. In 1946 the average number of obituaries written about each person was 1.3, in 1966 it was 1.85, increasing in 1986 to 2.82.

Due to the popularity of obituaries, authors that have specialised in the "field" exist. More often than not though, the author is in some way acquainted with the deceased; either through family, work or as a friend. Halldóra (1988) notes in this respect that the authors are increasingly relatives of the person written about; perhaps, she explains, reflecting the increased education of Icelanders and their ability to write publishable articles.

4.3.1.1. Sampling of obituaries

For every ten years (between 1922 and 1992), a random constitutive week was chosen. A representative for every weekday, except Monday when the *Morgunblaðið* is not published, was in other words chosen randomly. To take an example, the sample for 1962 consisted of: Tuesday 29th of May, Wednesday 25th of April, Thursday 14th of June, Friday 10th of August, Saturday 30th of June and Sunday the 18th of March.

[1]She looked at the months August and September, every 20 years, during this time period.

The number of men and women who were the subject of an obituary, over the whole period, were 125 (men, n= 76 or 60.8%; women, n= 49 or 39.2%), and the number of articles 209 (men, n = 123 or 58.8%; women, n = 86 or 41.2%). This means that on average 1.6 obituaries were written about each man whereas, 1.75 obituaries were written about each woman over the whole period. The trend that Halldóra Dröfn Gunnarsdóttir noticed, that more and more obituaries are being written about each individual as we move closer to the present time is confirmed. In 1992, each man got an average of 2.25 obituaries written about him, whereas in 1922 he only got one, and in 1972 he had 1.13. With respect to women the trend is even stronger; in 1992 they got on average 2.92 obituaries written about them, whereas in 1972 they were 1.33. The tables below (4.3. and 4.4.) give a further breakdown of the division of the sample in terms of the year the obituaries were published. The original purpose was to select obituaries only but, due to the similarities between obituaries and anniversaries, the anniversaries that were part of the sample were included. Indeed, the similarities are uncanny, since the anniversaries tend to discuss the life of the person almost as if she or he was dead and portray the strong conventions informing the writing of the articles. There were only 16 anniversaries (women, n=5; men, n=11) or 7.6%, and none were published in 1982 and 1992. Since the majority of the sample is made up of obituaries, I will usually refer to the sample as obituaries.

Table 4.3. Number of deceased people written about: breakdown by sex

	1922	1932	1942	1952	1962	1972	1982	1992
Men	2	3	6	11	6	13	15	20
Women	0	0	3	9	3	12	10	12
Whole	2	3	9	20	9	25	25	32

Table 4.4. Number of obituaries written: breakdown by sex

	1922	1932	1942	1952	1962	1972	1982	1992
Men	2	3	6	12	7	17	31	45
Women	0	0	3	8	3	16	21	35
Whole	2	4	9	19	10	32	52	80

The way in which the sample is divided in terms of the generations the people belong to is more clearly illustrated in table 4.5.

Table 4.5. Constituency of sample in terms of year born (7 dates missing)

	Bef. 1890	1890-1910	1911-1930	1931-1950	1951-1960
Men	14 (50.0%)	33 (67.3%)	18 (69.2%)	6 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)
Women	14 (50.0%)	16 (32.7%)	8 (30.8%)	6 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)
Whole	28 (100%)	49 (100%)	26 (100%)	12 (100%)	2 (100%)

As these tables reveal, members of the so-called turn of the century generation are most frequently portrayed in the obituaries. They constitute 39% of the sample. The youngest person to be written about (9 obituaries, the highest number over the whole sample) was a woman born in 1960. This does not mean that the obituaries include only the reflections of the older generations. Indeed many of the obituaries are written by descendants or younger friends of the deceased, and they bring their own knowledge and attitudes to the obituary.

Icelandic obituaries are not restricted to the coverage of the great deeds of leaders or celebrities, although they are considered worthier of an obituary, but make people from all walks of life their subjects. Bus drivers, housewives, children, can be found there amongst the MPs and pop singers.

The two following tables show the class of men and women as defined by profession. It is based on a classification developed and much used by the Institute of Social Research in Iceland.

Table 4.6. Class as defined by profession of men in the sample

	1922	1932	1942	1952	1962	1972	1982	1992	Total
1	1				1	3	1		6 (8%)
2			2	2	1	6	8	3	22 (29%)
3			1	1			2	3	7 (9%)
4	1		1	2	3	1	2	6	16 (21%)
5		3	2	5	1	3	2	5	21 (28%)
7							1	2	3 (4%)

Class 1: Unskilled labour, 2: Skilled labour, 3: Office and service, 4: Specialists and manufacturers, 5: Farmers and seamen, 7: Missing.

Table 4.7. Class as defined by profession of women in the sample

	1942	1952	1962	1972	1982	1992	Total
1		1		3	2	2	8 (16%)
2							0
3		1		1	1	1	4 (8%)
4	1		1			1	3 (6%)
5	1	3	1	3	1		9 (18%)
6	1	4	1	5	4	6	21 (43%)
7					2	2	4 (8%)

Class 1: Unskilled labour, 2: Skilled labour, 3: Office and service, 4: Specialists and manufacturers, 5: Farmers and seamen, 6: Housewives, 7: Missing.

It could be argued that the occupation of husbands or fathers would have given a clearer idea of the class the women from the older generation belonged to, but then again that information was not always included in the obituaries. Some of the women might never have married or were widowed before they died. Considering furthermore the

homogeneity of the society, class boundaries do not have the same significance in Iceland as they do, for example, in Britain. The best indicator of class in contemporary Iceland probably would be level of education, indirectly included in this categorisation.

Judging from Table 4.7 it can be concluded that the biggest proportion (43%) of the women in the sample are housewives, reflecting the gendered role division of the older generations. Although the women living on farms are usually described as housewives, they are counted separately here.

I found it interesting to look at what relation the authors of the obituaries had to the deceased and whether they changed in terms of gender. The two tables below (4.8. and 4.9.), list these relations.

Table 4.8. Authors of obituaries about men

Relation	Men	Women	Total
Relative/s	4 (6%)	4 (22%)	15 (12%)
In-laws	6 (9%)	5 (28%)	12 (10%)
Friend/s	38 (55%)	8 (44%)	64 (52%)
Friend/work	9 (13%)	1 (6%)	15 (12%)
Authority	7 (10%)	0	7 (6%)
Unclear	5 (7%)	0	10 (8%)
Total	69	18	123

Table 4.9. Authors of obituaries about women

Relation	Men	Women	Total
Relative/s	8 (26%)	6 (19%)	20 (23%)
In-law/s	7 (23%)	4 (13%)	13 (15%)
Friend/s	10 (32%)	19 (59%)	38 (45%)
Friend/work	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	4 (4%)
Authority	1 (3%)	0	4 (4%)
Unclear	4 (13%)	2 (6%)	7 (8%)
Total	31	32	85

The total numbers in the last column (tables 4.8 and 4.9) constitute not just the sum of obituaries written by men and women, but include those written by a group of people or when gender was indeterminate.

As can be seen from these tables the largest proportion of the obituaries are written by friends of the deceased, followed by relatives and then in-laws. Authority refers to figures such as the boss of the deceased, for example, when an MP takes it upon himself (it was always a he in this sample) to write about a person in his constituency. When the MPs defined themselves as friends they were counted as such. In general though the identification of who should be counted as authority is somewhat dubious since it depends on the names I recognised. The category "unclear", I suspect, might include some of the professional obituary writers. As can be seen, they account for only a small proportion of the whole sample.

4.3.1.2. Procedure with obituaries

The articles which constituted the sample were found in the National Library in Iceland and photocopies were ordered. The authorities in the library kindly gave me permission

to have photocopies of the newspapers that were in stock. These photocopies were subsequently numbered and were then ready for analysis.

4.3.1.3. Analysis of obituaries

The initial step towards the analysis was reading through the whole sample and writing down my first impressions. I used a highlighter to mark sentences that I found interesting or to mark cases that were unusual. On the basis of my first run through, I wrote down my observations, and elaborated and added to my research questions.

The second step was to read the obituaries more systematically with particular foci in mind. I started with 1992 where I translated the gist of the obituaries into English. In doing so I wrote down my observations for each obituary separately. The aspects of the obituaries that I focused on are outlined in figure 4.2:

Figure 4.2: Foci in analysis

Main foci	Elaboration	Possible implications
Character descriptions:	- What did they consist of? - Who was doing the describing? - What circumstances, events made these descriptions possible?	Self-regulation. Examination. Self-position.
Use of language:	- Metaphors, analogies, style, poems? - What meaning does it give to the author?	Placement within discourse.
Tensions, ruptures:	- In time (between e.g. generations)? - In space (between e.g. rural/urban)? - Indication of regularities? - Challenge of regularities?	Discourses challenged and/or confirmed.
Regularities:	- Themes, theories, narratives?	Referred to discourse.
Anomalies:	- Who are they? - How are they made normal? - What does the anomaly consist of?	Normalisation. Resistance.
Strategies (Deleuze,1986):	- Ordering in time (subdivisions, programming of action). - Distribution in space (enclosing, controlling, arranging, placing in series). - Composition in space-time (the constitution a productive force).	Power: The regularities imposed on matter.

Character descriptions

Through the descriptions of the social practices in which a person engages and their evaluation, some inferences can be drawn about their surveillance and the disciplinary practices these imply. Insofar as we are observed and evaluated, we are invited to observe and evaluate ourselves.

In accounting for the descriptions of characters, it is important to keep in mind who is doing the describing. An obituary written by the boss of the deceased permits altogether different value judgements than, for example, if a relative or even a child decides to pick up the pen. As Foucault points out (1981), that which is said or concealed, required or forbidden could change according to who is speaking and his/her position of power. Foucault, in other words, identifies how that which is <u>not</u> said could be equally as relevant as that which is included in the text.

These character descriptions also function to position the subject's self in relation to others and itself. A person who is described as being independent has a different relation to others and herself than a person who is described as never having cast her shadow on anyone. By implication the self's position also reveals the importance of others. Whose "needs" are made central and why?

Use of language

Language is used for particular purposes and, at times, "style" of language may be invoked to confirm the legitimacy and knowledge of the author, or simply to lend to what is written a particular "flair". Similarly metaphors, analogies and poems invite us to reflect on issues in particular ways. As an example of how metaphors are used in language, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have discussed how time is metaphorised as "money", "waste" and so on, reflecting the cultural atmosphere of modern society.

Tensions, ruptures

Considering the dynamic nature of discourses, their "truths" are continually being confronted. These occur in particular when "truths" from different discourses clash or when their contextual grounding is brought to the surface. The notion of discontinuity and rupture is an important aspect of Foucault's theory. As he stated: "I have decided to ignore no form of discontinuity, break, threshold, or limit" (Foucault, 1972, p. 31).

Amongst the kinds of discontinuities that can be detected are the ones between different discourses which appear in historical succession, and discontinuities between discourses that coexist (Foucault, 1972). Discontinuity is thus established not least in terms of space and time. Since my data were drawn from a society in a state of rapid change, I suspected that confrontations and struggles, especially in terms of different locations in time and space, would be numerous. Although the time and space dimensions were in this sense teased apart in the analysis, Massey's (1994, p. 261) argument, that these dimensions are the result of interrelations - space is not simply not-time and vice versa - was appreciated.

An example of the relevance of time are the comparisons made between past and present, and the way in which the past or the future is constructed. The obituaries give numerous examples of social phenomena "surviving" time, e.g. reputation, knowledge. Analogies and metaphors, no longer part of the common language, are also used to ground the past in the present. Metaphors used in a text can be illustrative furthermore of the relations and links drawn between events and persons.

With regard to breaks or distinctions in terms of space, I focussed in particular on their gendered allocation and on whether the construction of space served particular discourses of knowledge. I was here guided by my secondary sources that emphasised how, for example, women were considered to be involved with the "inside" and men with the "outside". Although this could have implied some sort of stasis or enclosed world,

Massey's (1994) argument that space is not absolute but relational, was clearly taken on board. Space implies dynamism insofar as it is constituted by the social relations that take place within it and beyond it.

Challenges which produce breaks and distinction can indicate resistance to dominant discourses. To decide whether these had been effective or not, the social field in which they took place was explored.

Regularities

The importance of discontinuities in discourse lies partly in that they point towards the regularities in discourse and, it could be argued, vice versa. In this sense themes, and theories about the order of things, persistently emerge; their objects providing the discourse with its identity. When regularities are being challenged they are being exposed. This springs particularly to the fore when dominant discourses are being resisted.

Narratives are the accepted vehicle for ordering experience sequentially; identifying causes, effects and explanations. They are the stories we encounter in the obituaries either as fragments or as wholes. The emphasis in this analysis was not on narratives per se, but on narratives only insofar as they order discursive truths, or when they shed light on the discourses in the data.

Anomalies

An example of an anomaly would be Hercule Barbin (Foucault's study quoted in Fraser, 1994), the hermaphrodite, who through his/her nature did not fit conventional classifications and therefore was labelled as a problem. In the present case the anomalies were not hermaphrodites, but for example, women who were not able to bear children. The focus in the analysis was on the attempts to make them look normal and fit them in with the rest of society. Other sources of anomalies were those refusing to follow

convention, thereby becoming problematic; this could be discerned for example in descriptions of drunkards, people with mental problems and so on. A point that had to be considered was to what extent these cases were as much a site of resistance as they were of control.

Strategies

I have placed much emphasis on the role of power in constituting the subject. Power, although reproduced in discourses, transcends them. Here power is analysed in particular through its exercise; as strategies where the emphasis is on its exercise and effect. It is a functional analysis where the question posed is: What regularities does it impose on its matter (Deleuze, 1986)? I focused in particular on the ordering effect it had on time and space and how this informed important self-regulations. These might invite examinations, for example, inspections of the home and how it is run, and the implications these carried about how the person in charge of these particular practices is valued. Or they might invite the subject to talk about him or herself in a particular way; confess and thereby present him or herself as a particular kind of subject.

These considerations, or foci, were not in themselves sufficient to establish the strategies of power working through the discourses. The analysis required that I looked at what "allowed" these descriptions and statements to appear. This meant that I had to embrace the wider context of what was happening in Icelandic society at the time these obituaries were published. My knowledge, for example, that Icelanders were fighting for independence from Denmark when the earliest of the obituaries were written, put the nationalism in some of the obituaries into a wider perspective and related them to cultural movements and institutions. The same applies to the changed conditions in the lives of women, involving not least changes in the home, and the social practices allocated to the "inside" and to the "outside".

Taken as a whole, the analysis was generally concerned with mapping tensions in the data and the regularities these implied, the discursive "truths" revealed (often through their contrasts), and the place of the subject in relation to them. On the basis of this mapping I identified the basic discourses, their central objectives and the strategies of power that worked through them.

The analysis proved to be a slow process since it was conducted without the help of a content analysis computer program. This meant that, whenever I had felt an analytical insight, I did not feel it was justifiable unless I went through the whole batch of obituaries again, and occasionally I counted the occurrence of particular descriptions[2]. By now I probably have read the obituaries at least a hundred times and know parts of them by heart. All the same the number of quotations, in the analytic chapters, serve as much to boost my own memory and confidence, as to back up the analysis.

4.3.2. Interviews with 18 Icelandic women

I thought it fitting with my own feminist standpoint to try to actively include women's own views and voices as far as possible. For that purpose, I considered interviews to be the most appropriate research technique. They allow for surprises and explorations of unexpected themes and give the interviewee more control to pursue issues that come up during the interview, than do many other research techniques.

Just how strictly formatted and prescheduled the interviews are varies between studies. In this study the interviews were semi-structured, focusing on particular issues that were explored with the interviewee. This approach has several benefits: It is flexible,

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[2]These are manifestations of my behaviouristic upbringing as an undergraduate. My still lingering "fear of interpretation" was reflected in compulsive checking and double-checking throughout the whole analytical procedure.

interactive and dynamic. Furthermore, it allows the researcher to reach groups that institutions have considered too marginal for public documentation.

The interview is more than a conversation between two people, it takes place in a social situation with carefully constructed roles. Ribbens (1993) quotes Wise, in guarding against making too much of a romantic myth out of the research situation, thereby, in part, referring to the construction of interviews as a particularly feminine situation, where two "equals" exchange information about their private lives. Insofar as two different roles are constructed, one definitely is given more right to "ask" and the other to "respond". The interviews, in other words, imply a particular power structure as are reflected in, for example, the knowledge and expertise ascribed to the researcher. The way in which this takes place influences the kind of data that is collected from the exercise, as well as the attitudes of the researcher (and the interviewee) both to the research process and research output. These issues are succinctly addressed by Ribbens (1989) and I will come back to them later when reflecting on my own role in generating the data for analysis.

The women interviewed provided a different perspective from the obituaries, in that they are in the thick of the everyday hassles of life where they constantly have to negotiate their positions and "interests". The interviews further reflect how, what initially might seem like contradictions, are in fact articulations of how particular views are appropriate for one context but not another.

4.3.2.1. Sampling of interviews

The sample was a convenience sample, but one that from the outset had to fulfil the criteria of including representatives from different generations, as well as from rural and urban Iceland. Again the purpose was to make the data sensitive to changes in time and

space. The size of the sample was somewhat limited by the amount of time I was able to stay in Iceland but was big enough to provide rich material to work from.

Table 4.10. Constitution of sample in terms of age of interviewees

Age range	16-30	31-50	51-70	71-88
Women	6	4	4	4

Table 4.11. Constitution of sample in terms of where interviewees lived

Rural Iceland.	Urban Iceland.
7	11

Rural Iceland here refers mostly to women from a small town in the North of Iceland (inhabitants about 2000). Some of them had lived previously on farms, and in villages in other areas.

The women I interviewed were mostly friends of a friend of a friend, women working with relatives, the friends of a mother of a friend and so on. I thus did not know any of them first hand when I interviewed them. Although this was the case, I do not think the sample was biased towards consisting of women very much like myself. Actually, looking at it retrospectively, I think the reverse was true. These were women who had followed the accepted course of life, except for one of the older women who had neither married nor had children.

4.3.2.2. Procedure with interviews

One of the initial steps was to construct a topic guide (Appendix II). As the name implies, the topic guide served as a kind of framework for the topics that I wanted to cover in the interviews. It ensured that I would have some basis for comparison between interviews, and was helpful in reminding me of the themes I wanted to explore in the interview itself.

Part of the work for the topic guide consisted in going through women's magazines in Iceland. These included both those specifically dedicated to women's issues and those that are more fashion and glamour oriented. Since I had been away from Iceland for a whole year when I conducted the interviews, I needed to update my knowledge about what was happening in the community, as well as arming myself with information which would enable me to respond to potentially contentious topics.

The aim was to select themes likely to reflect discontinuities between different discourses; such as when asking women to compare themselves to their mothers or their daughters. Being an Icelandic woman myself and having been raised in two families, each belonging to a different generation (grandmother born 1913, mother born 1946), many of the topics selected reflected my own knowledge and experience of belonging to this culture.

Parts of the topic guide were tried out informally on 5 women. Having interviewed 5 interviewees, I again re-viewed the topic guide, made some minor alterations and added a few questions.

The order of questions and themes in the topic guide does not necessarily reflect their order in the interview. I wanted the interviews to flow with ease and what was a logical order of themes for one woman did not suit another. No attempt was made to hide the presence of the topic guide from the respondents. To make the interviews seem less

formal, the topic guide I carried with me was hand-written. Although I would not argue that measures of this sort manage to tilt the power away from the interviewer, I do think they work towards making the atmosphere a bit more relaxed and less "technical".

The participants were approached either by telephone or in person and the purpose and procedure of the interview was explained to them. On some occasions I had been assured that they would want to participate by the mediating person, who sometimes had given already a preliminary introduction about what I was like and what I would be asking them. Mostly that consisted of convincing the prospective participant that I was quite harmless and unobtrusive and that I would not ask them about their sex life![3] The participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Only one refused to participate. Before the actual interview took place the interviewee was invited to ask about the research process and how the material would be used.

The fact that my research had been given some publicity in the Icelandic media at the time might or might not have influenced the dynamics within the interviews. I had been invited to give a presentation based on my research on the 85th anniversary of the Women's Rights Society in Iceland (September, 1992) and in connection with this was interviewed on radio and television. I did not get the impression, though, that this had any influence on the relations within the interviews. None of my interviewees mentioned having seen or heard these interviews.

The interviews were either carried out in the participant's home or in a quiet room in my own home in September 1992. On one occasion I conducted an interview in an abandoned office where the interviewee worked and, on another occasion, a small child of the interviewee competed for mine and the mother's attention.

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[3]This is not a reflection of prudishness on behalf of my mediator. The media have contained stories about men masquerading as researchers asking intimate questions about people's sex life.

The interviews lasted for between 30 and 50 minutes depending on the interviewee, and were tape-recorded on a small portable tape-recorder with the consent of the interviewee.

The women were always interviewed alone except for one occasion when I interviewed two elderly sisters together[4]. The interviews, due to the power imbalance between the interviewer and interviewee, do not of course resemble normal discussions. In general, though, apart from one interview with a particularly shy person, the atmosphere was relaxed and my interviewees very co-operative and responsive. I was treated like a guest with great hospitality, offered cakes, sweets and enormous amounts of coffee, as is customary when housewives receive visitors in Iceland.

Although I introduced myself as a social psychologist and explained what my work involved, a few of my respondents seemed to confuse my role with that of a clinical psychologist. On a few occasions they used the opportunity to talk about personal problems, bringing an extra dimension to my topic guide and giving voice to some of the conflicts and anxieties that women in Iceland have to deal with. Even though the need did not arise in these interviews, this made me wonder whether researchers, when possibly getting into emotional waters deeper than they are trained for, should have available addresses of clinically trained consultants.

4.3.2.3. Analysis of interviews

The interviews were transcribed verbatim in Icelandic. Apart from underlining words that were given a special emphasis in the interview, and indicating with a slash (/) when the interviewer and interviewee interrupted each other's speech, no special transcription procedures were followed. Where appropriate I included a description of what the participants were doing, for example, when they stood up to make coffee, and also

[4] Apparently they were quite inseparable and the social situation was such that it would have been quite rude to ask either of them to leave.

indicated when there were disruptions from the environment. The intention had been to note "hearable" silences but unfortunately it only became clear after the data had been collected that the tape-recorder was "voice-driven" and stopped automatically whenever there was a silence.

The interviews were content analysed with the aid of the ATLAS/ti program (Muhr, 1994). ATLAS/ti is a computer program aimed at aiding text interpretation and theory building. Its design allows both top-down and bottom-up analysis, containing functions which make it easy to trace, compare and locate particular segments of the text. Much to my later regret, this program was not yet available when I analysed the obituaries. Without doubt it would have made both the analysis itself and the overview much easier.

The analysis went through the two stages called "textual" and "conceptual" in the handbook (Muhr, 1994) accompanying the program. Although I would claim that the two overlap considerably, these two stages describe the progressive refinement and categorisation that takes place as the analyst becomes more immersed in the data.

The textual level consisted of a careful reading of the interviews. The identification of separate themes or emphases and the labelling of these. The computer program proved to be very helpful at this stage. Breaking the text into separate segments and tagging them with codes (more than one code could be appointed to each segment) was a simple procedure with the use of the mouse, and it proved easy to re-define and add new codes. The program allowed the user to view the codes in context, which I found particularly helpful.

In general, I had the same foci as those described for the analysis of the obituaries, but found it easier to keep a holistic view of the analysis through using ATLAS/ti. Since it was easy to check and double-check my interpretations, I could verify my observations which in turn made me more confident in my analysis.

After my first run through the interviews I ended up with a set of different codes: all in all there were 70. In continuing the analysis, some of the codes were merged and some even deleted, as the first favourable impression of their relevance wore out. I printed out the textual segments referring to some of the codes I had used most frequently, which sparked off some further refinement and ideas as to how the codes should be linked in the second conceptual stage. Appendix III shows the codes I used in the analysis excluding all free-codes, i.e. codes not attached to quotations but useful when building up networks of codes. This is a pretty crude presentation, but it gives some idea of how I approached the data in the first stages of analysis.

The analysis of the codes was primarily qualitative, i.e., the content rather than the frequency of particular codes were the basis of my analysis. As tends to be the case in qualitative research, sometimes one utterance puts a whole lot of other things into perspective. A code might furthermore include segments of text containing both negative and positive evaluations. Their semiotic richness varies, one quotation might take up half a page, whereas another is only one sentence. In the analysis, these codes are put into context and their relevance made clearer. The frequency counts can be helpful, though, in pointing to some trends within the data. Why, for example, did the older women go on and on about work, whereas the younger women were more preoccupied with other things? They also might point to weaknesses in the interviews themselves, insofar as they can indicate the emergence of a particular issue and how well it was covered by some of the respondents. The frequencies of the codes can also point to instances where the coder was not consistent in assigning a particular code. When using ATLAS/ti it is easy to go back to the analysis to check and rectify this.

In the next stage of the analysis the connections between the codes were elaborated upon. The program has a special editing window for this purpose, a graphical screen where it is possible to specify the nature of the relationships between the codes, e.g. whether a particular code could be seen as the cause of another, as inclusive and so on.

4.4. EVALUATION

As well as tracing the steps in empirical research it is customary to use some means to evaluate the research output. The most common concepts used, in this respect, have been "validity" and "reliability". The former refers to how well the research findings fit the phenomena they are trying to describe, whereas the latter refers more to the research tools and how well the research findings can be repeated with them. As such they are concepts originating from the time when positivist thought reigned in the practice of social psychological research, when it was generally believed that, given the right methods, we could measure and adequately describe social psychological phenomena. These concepts do not fit very well with qualitative research where the focus is on meaning and interpretation. Since the theoretical approach constitutes social reality as dynamic and changeable, the issue of whether the results from the study can be reproduced in precisely the same way is simply not the point. At the same time, though, I would not take the standpoint that "anything goes"; the methods are chosen so that they can bridge the gap between theory and data in the best manner possible. To ensure that the research is conducted responsibly, and that the whole of the analysis is not the result of an overactive imagination on behalf of the researcher, I will here outline some of the concerns and measures taken.

4.4.1. Reflexivity

The strong linear narrative structure of a PhD thesis rather disguises the complexity of conducting research, and at times hides its circular nature. Doing research is not just a case of setting up a research agenda with a nicely defined hypothesis, delving into the material, and ultimately churning out impressive looking frequency tables that set matters into their final perspective. On the contrary, as this research has convinced me, it is a complex interaction where the data has the tendency to throw surprises at the researcher,

both because it does not "conform" or because it simply reveals something not at all expected. This sometimes means going back to square one, reading some more about the material and then getting back to the work of analysis and interpretation.

A neat and tidy account of the research process in this sense not only imbues the research process with "mythical" linearity, but glosses over the amount of reflexivity that takes place in the continuing interaction between the researcher and the sources he or she draws upon, be they the theory or the data. The analytical results, very importantly, are not just a reflection of the data but also a "creative" output on behalf of the analyst.

The researcher is both constituted within a discourse and constitutes other subjects in relation to that position. The effect of the researcher therefore on the input and output of the research is considerable as is increasingly being taken into account in social research. Contrary to what has been the case though with positivist science, the emphasis in qualitative research has not been on the impossible task of eliminating that effect, but rather on giving it its rightful place as part of the research itself. As stated in chapter two, science is a value-constituting and value-constituted project: reflexivity requires not least that we think about how the presumptions and background of the researcher contribute to this.

Insofar as the positions from which researchers speak, be they theoretical or personal, incline them to constitute their data sources in a particular way, this needs to be taken into account when evaluating the data. How can the positions of researchers bring additional insights to the analysis or, alternatively, blind them to the political nature of what they are doing? To quote Banister et al. (1993, p. 13):

> Subjectivity is a resource, not a problem, for a theoretically and pragmatically sufficient explanation. When researchers, whether quantitative or qualitative, believe that they are being most objective by keeping a distance between themselves and their objects of study, they are actually producing a subjective account, for a position of distance is still a

> position and it is all the more powerful if it refuses to acknowledge itself to be such.

This is a far cry from the God-complex that I discussed in chapter 2, and the search for the "ultimate truth" that has saturated the presentation of social research. Subjectivity is problematic insofar as researchers do not identify their position as such.

But how far should we take reflexivity? Sometimes I get the impression that this requirement is used as an excuse to indulge in the significance of one's own life. There are no simple answers to how far we should go in outlining our investment in the research. The researcher has to rely on his or her good sense in trying to establish in what way his or her position markedly influences what is seen and what is neglected.

These concerns have marked my account of the research procedure so far, but I have not addressed the issue of how my shifting position as insider or outsider to the social world that my respondents inhabit and the obituaries discuss, has affected the research process. When was I one of "us" and when was I one of "them", and how did it change the way I saw the data? At times this was a source of bewilderment to myself, but in general it could be said that my standpoint varied depending on the issue under discussion. This inspired some thoughts about how the standpoint of the insider or outsider had benefited and hindered the research process.

The position of the insider, which I could claim from having lived in Iceland for 26 years, had a number of benefits. I could draw on the extensive knowledge built up through living in that particular culture when deciding which topics to discuss in the interviews, and could speak the Icelandic language fluently, not just the spoken one, but also the body language. In all probability, this made it easier for the interviewees to accept me and for me to establish a rapport with them. The importance of shared identity is highlighted by Finch (1993) from her own studies, where she concluded "that

assumption of shared experiences facilitates talk" (p.169). Often I recognised the voices of my own relatives and friends in the accounts with which I was presented, enabling me to empathise and respond to their owners in culturally accepted ways.

One of the drawbacks of being an insider rests in the fact that, since I share so many of the cultural assumptions, I do not always question them. This dawned on me when transcribing the data, and I was annoyed with myself for not having followed up important leads. That which originally did not require any explanation to me was forever lost from the data corpus. I had not been "alien" enough to ask the potentially contentious questions without being perceived as "rude", whereas an outsider would be excused for not knowing any better. Ribbens (1989) identifies this as an "overrapport", referring to the reduced ability of the reporter "to reflect on group culture, and to see what is taken for granted".

In many respects I was also an outsider: I habitually engaged in a different social world from that of my interviewees, had different concerns and aims in life, and often did not share their values. This limited our shared experiences but also gave me valuable insight into the material. Living abroad can be a humbling experience and changes your relation to your own culture. Indeed, it creates more than just a physical distance from where you come from. As one's own cultural "truths" are juxtapositioned with alternatives they lose their natural status and are seen in a wider perspective; the wood surrounding the tree is revealed and consequentially the analytical gaze is sharpened. I found that my occasional ability to take the standpoint of the outsider opened up a whole new realm of insights that had previously been closed to me.

The position of the researcher also served to distance me from my interviewees. My status as a "social scientist", and especially the label of the "psychologist", converted me into an "expert" in the eyes of my respondents, granting me a kind of "super" vision. This became clear in the common greeting at the onset of the interviews: "Are you going

to psychoanalyse me?" This question portrays how this "third" eye that was me might have been perceived as something which people required protection from, or adjustment to. The "researcher" label, in other words, instantly converted my gaze into a measuring one and served to detach me from the private world of my interviewees.

Not only do I think that the researcher has to be reflexive of his or her own role in determining the research process and in constructing the interpretation, but the research must, as far as possible, pay due credit to the reflexivity of its participants. Insofar as analysis consists of breaking texts into segments, which then again are broken into further segments, it is easy to lose sight of how a particular response was sparked off. Too often the processes through which particular versions of the truth are negotiated and constructed are ignored. In this sense particular phenomena are reified, and the dynamic social relations that are instrumental in constructing and negotiating them stripped away.

Although there probably does not exist a "right" way to represent the contribution of the participants, the researchers should have the ethical commitment to try and represent them fairly, and to conduct the research in such a way that the participants do not feel exploited and/or misrepresented. What is "fair" is a matter of judgment but, in my opinion, this involves at least making clear the context in which the participants' contribution was made, and which therefore partly gives it its meaning. It can at times though be difficult not to leave an interviewee feeling "exploited" by the research: this applies in particular when the research touches upon contentious issues and the researcher wants to look at them and interpret them in a different way from the participant. The representation of science as "objective and value neutral" within the popular community allows researchers to masquerade as impartial, when in fact they often have strong opinions on the phenomena in question. This applies markedly to feminist research where a strong political stance is commonly taken. Insofar as the "oppressors" are being approached and participate in generating data for the research, many of them end up seeing interpretations of what they said, and did, that they do not agree with. We can never please everyone

but potential feelings of "exploitation" could probably be significantly reduced if the researcher makes it clear that his or her views and subjectivity cannot be divorced from the research setting, and explains the significant part these play in the setup of and output from, the research.

What this brings to the surface is the fact that the interplay between the researcher and what is researched involves a delicate balancing act. A balance must however be struck within which the researcher reflects on his or her relation to the research issues and accepts his or her responsibility in generating the data.

4.4.2. Triangulation

Qualitative research is concerned with exploring the "meaning" of particular social phenomena. Geertz's (1973) discussion of Riley's differentiation between thick and thin descriptions is often cited in this context. According to Geertz, presenting a "thick" description involves interpretive activity, characterised by its attempts to capture the social phenomena in the context that gives them their meaning. The focus is on in-depth understanding, and here Geertz is worth quoting in full:

> It is not against a body of uninterpreted data, radically thinned descriptions, that we must measure the cogency of our explications, but against the power of the scientific imagination to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers. It is not worth it, as Thoreau said, to go round the world to count the cats in Zanzibar (p.16).

The criterion that a "good" study should contain a body of "thick descriptions" contrasts with the standard criteria of "good" in conventional research in social psychology, where the emphasis is on validating the research through, for example, repetition, thereby indicating how "true" or "factual" the research results are. For research aiming to grasp dynamic phenomena subject to change and variation, depending on time and context, this kind of evaluation strategy fits badly and is not conducive to the production of "thick description".

To add to the thickness of the research output, researchers have to aim to collect data that reflect the rich interpretive potential of the phenomena being studied. For this purpose, some social psychologists have relied on the method of "triangulation". The use of this method has changed somewhat from how it was originally conceived, as Flick (1992) has traced. Originally the method of triangulation was proposed by Denzin, who claimed that, by approaching a research hypothesis from a number of reference points and playing each method off against the other, the validity of the research methods could be increased. Due to a number of criticisms from, amongst others, Silverman (quoted in Flick, 1992), who saw this as just one more illustration of the belief that there was some kind of a master reality against which hypotheses had to be measured, Denzin abandoned the idea that triangulation was a strategy of validation in favour of seeing it as a strategy deployed with the aim of "building interpretations not test hypothesis" (quoted in Flick, 1992, p.180). By approaching the phenomena under study from more than one vantage point, the hope is that the breadth and depth of the material collected can be increased.

Successful triangulation incorporates more than one point of view, from more than one source, and encourages the researcher to look at how social phenomena develop and mutate through space and time. In my view these are useful strategies, not only for collecting varied research material, but also for drawing the researcher's attention to new ways of looking at the data. Banister et al. (1994) mention the number of ways in which research can be triangulated; I shall here outline how it applies to my research:

Data triangulation

The data in this study is triangulated in that it is collected from a range of sources differently positioned in relation to the research topic. The interviews include women from different generations as well as women living in rural and urban Iceland. The obituaries are even more varied, tapping into the lives of several generations, from different classes, living in rural and urban Iceland.

Investigator triangulation

I was the only researcher in this study but, because that this is PhD research, the material has to be continually presented to the peer group. In LSE this is a colourful group made up of students of different nationalities carrying out various kind of research using different methods. The feedback, questions and comments from this group have been of great importance in providing different perspectives to the research and analysis.

Method triangulation

The information was collected both from newspapers and interviews, providing different perspectives on the research questions.

Theoretical triangulation

In the research I drew from feminist theories and Foucault's ideas about power. The tensions between the two approaches helped me to see the richness of the material at hand and hence possible contrasting interpretive potentials. Furthermore, considering that feminism is interdisciplinary in nature I was encouraged to look for explanations in disciplines outside social psychology, and to address some of the shortcomings of the traditional social psychological approaches.

Levels of triangulation

Banister et al. stress that the researcher tries to "include different levels of analyses to gain a fuller contextualised picture, one which allows connections to be made between individual and societal explanations" (p.149). My exploration of the history and culture of Iceland was an attempt to make just such a contextualisation. As I have stressed repeatedly I think it is of great importance that the researcher tries to establish the way in which the research material is itself constituted within the wider society.

4.5. DISCUSSION AND OVERVIEW OF ANALYSIS

In this chapter I have traced the path I chose in collecting and analysing my data. In collecting the data the aim has been towards divergence and richness in the hope that they will allow a more powerful analysis. The analyses in turn have been tailored in terms of their relevance to the research questions and the theoretical framework. My success in fulfilling these aims can be evaluated in my next chapters where I present the results from the analysis.

The content of the analyses chapters is organised in terms of discourses, providing the framework from where I describe how women take on and experience the disciplinary burdens inscribed within techniques of self-fashioning. On the basis of my analysis it will be argued that predominantly two discourses of knowledge are appropriated in the data. The discourse of the Chieftain and the discourse of the Soul, as well as discursive "truths" that can be traced to the more modern era. These are identified by their different portrayals of the self, of how the self's relation to the character, and others, is charted. In short, they are identified, in particular, in the way in which they differently constitute the self and contrast different "ways of being", requiring different kinds of social regulations.

CHAPTER 5: THE DISCOURSE OF THE CHIEFTAIN

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is the first in my analysis trilogy and discusses what I have termed the discourse of the Chieftain. I shall address the discourse of the Soul in chapter 6 and the significance placed on the strong character who suppresses herself and fulfils her duty diligently. Chapter 7, in turn, tackles discursive tensions and how they indicate challenges to traditional ideas. To illustrate my analysis I have placed extracts from obituaries and interviews where appropriate in the text. For further information about the subject of the obituaries, each extract is followed with a bracket, for example (F, 99, 1933, 1992). This shorthand indicates that the subject is a woman (M for men), that the obituary is number 99 in the sample, that she was born in 1933 and that the obituary was written in 1992. All names and addresses have been changed. Similarly, extracts from interviews are included when appropriate with pseudonyms for each interviewee along with their age at the time of the interview.

The presence or absence of the discourses in the interviews and obituaries respectively, illustrate to a degree their level of operation. Outlining the features of the discourse of the Chieftain and of the Soul was mainly possible from analysing the obituaries, whereas signs of discursive tensions were more apparent in the interviews. The discourse of the Chieftain is the one more publicly celebrated, but sets criteria that women have found hard to "live up to". As I shall explicate, the presence of women in this discourse is more in the background than at the fore. The discourse of the Soul gives an impression of a more "worn" quality, in the sense that it seems to have had a more active presence in

women's lives. Its regulations have become such an intrinsic part of women's lives, so "obvious", that they have been rendered "invisible" until challenged in a changed cultural climate.

The concept of the "character" or the "person" reacting to experience was predominant in both the interviews and in the obituaries. The kind of character you are prescribes how you relate to your "self" and how you relate to others. Throughout life we take on different roles exposing us to various kinds of duties, some requiring that we assert our "selves", others that we suppress our "selves". I found that references to the disposition of the individual were fairly common, mainly to the make-up of the character. In this sense individualistic explanations of what happens in everyday life seem quite pervasive.

Since the data has a historical dimension, it is possible to map how demarcations of time and space have changed, and consequently how these changes have affected the practices and identities of the people placed in this grid. It makes it possible to see the emergence of separations we take for granted today, for instance the divide between the private and the public. I will here argue that social divisions of space have had a hand in making the Chieftain "ideal" a specifically masculine one. Furthermore, that the stress placed on the ability to possess the self, independence and self-reliance, is intricately linked with social status and gender. The underlying nationalism gives a distinctive flavour to the presentation of the discourse and, as nationalistic moralisations reveal, has had a hand in rationalising and splitting the realms men and women are supposed to master.

The analysis in creating divisions and subdivisions conceals in part the messy world from which the analysis is extracted. The fragmented and dispersed forms the discourses assume, make the analysis more of a strain, but at the same time affirm the complexities of being a woman. Femininity as experienced and as a contribution to our sense of self is grounded in a variety of socially cultivated norms. Women might make them their own, struggle with them or resist them. The images of femininity formulated in different

discourses are various and different in kind. Furthermore, our positions in relation to those take on a welter of appearances that do not all fit smugly into one discursive slot or another. As Rose (1995) has suggested:

> Human beings neither inhabit a homogenous domain of representations of personhood which encompasses all practices and techniques, nor do they merely internalise a certain view of themselves through their immersion in a system of meaning" (p. 6).

Women, in other words, are not allotted "a" position with which they then are stuck for the rest of their lives. Some women might have been more regularly positioned within the discourse of the Soul during their lives, but posthumously erected to the discourse of the Chieftain, or vice versa. Many women might not have fitted into any of these positions and even in doing so might have found them difficult. Despite these words of interpretive caution, the fact that these discursive ideas are so pervasive in my data indicates that they have been important as a source for social regulation. In this sense, I would claim that they have affected the lives of most women in Iceland in some form or another, making their deconstruction a necessary task for feminists.

In tracing and outlining some of the discursive "truths" that have a part in shaping women's relationships to their selves, there is a feminist undercurrent. My hope is that, in profiling the social backdrop to the discursive truths, I will be able to problematise some of the "given" assumptions about the place and nature of femininity.

5.2. BACKGROUND TO THE CHIEFTAIN

The idea of the self that somehow exists in a pure asocial state is a romantic idea. The "Chieftain" with his characteristics did not spring to the fore like Pallas Athena from Zeus' head, but embodies a collection of ideas, nurtured by particular historical circumstances and shaped in the culture. As I shall argue, the focus on the qualities of the Chieftain in my data stems partly from the turmoil at the turn of this century onwards to

1944, when Icelanders where "fighting" (no weapons were brandished, except for sharp words), for their independence from Denmark (see 3.5.).

Nationalism had and has a role in formulating who the Icelander is, his general attitudes and demeanour. These have left their mark on the discourse of the Chieftain and in particular on its moralisation. The constant referral to moral values gives the impression of a "heavy" discourse with strict differentiation between right and wrong and pure and impure. Although individualistic, its concern transcends the individual and receives its impetus from the shared vision of a unitary nation. The discourse of the Chieftain in other words, gets much of its passion and power from the strong Icelandic national identity and plays a part in reproducing it.

Young (1990) notes how the desire for "unity or wholeness in discourse generates borders, dichotomies, and exclusions" (p.301). She goes on to suggest that "the desire for mutual identification in social relations generates exclusions in a similar way" (p. 301). Although formulated in a different context from here, this observation applies to the discourse of the Chieftain. Who are "we" and who are "they" are issues nationalism sets out to define; not just to sift out the impure from the pure, but the dangerous from the safe. The national identity in this sense, despite alienating those who do not belong, has important positive functions for the individuals who do fit in. It delineates an identity she or he can make claims to, explaining in part the passion and emotion we put into defending those demarcations.

The obituaries seem to have been perceived as a good locus for a number of authors to preach to the masses on what authentic Icelandicness should be all about. Doing so is a treasured role invested with the higher moral purposes of "resurrecting" or re-iterating what are "true" Icelandic values. Although strongest in the earliest obituaries, the nationalistic reverberations can still be felt through the strange mixture of lectures on the importance of sustaining old values and the need for progress. This is underpinned by

the expressed anguish and fear at the speed with which things move forward and the concern that something fundamental might be left behind. The message relayed to the reader is that to move forward, we continually have to move back and get in touch with the pure and authentic "core" of Icelandicness. Importantly, some sort of continuity must be established between past and present, since letting go of the past seems to be perceived as equivalent to the dissolution of social order. Losing touch with the roots invites social chaos and puts morality in grave jeopardy. This fear seeps through the obituaries, at times transforming them into a field of moral statements directed especially towards the younger generation.

> Therefore we, who are younger, should thank and respect what the turn of the century generation has done for us, because all our life and existence is based foremost on the industriousness and altruism of this generation (M, 108, 1900, 1982).

Anthropologists in Iceland have pointed out the importance placed on "purity" in the national identity and my analysis supports their arguments. I will here discuss how purity is defined in the obituaries and the way in which the authors monitor themselves to preserve it. I will then move on to discuss the character that emerges from this context and the gendered regulations implied.

5.2.1. Pure Icelandic

Pure Icelandic, as I have already implied, is located in the past. Its importance comes across clearly in the obituaries and is conveyed in particular through the style of writing that the authors adopt. Texts from particular sources or time periods are imitated and used as sources for quotes, poetry and phrases, along with analogies and metaphors. The obituaries, in this respect, abound with metaphors from battle, farming and other social practices that no longer reflect the reality of everyday life for the majority of Icelanders.

This style appropriation is revealed in the way in which some of the authors insist on using rare words and citations from the old Nordic literature. A case in point is the replacement of a word with an older version of it: "early", spelled "snemma" in Icelandic, becomes "snemmendis" (M, 1, 1922, 1992), although never used in everyday language. This style regulation has various functions. It gives the deceased's life story a cultural countenance, even making him a shareholder in the idealised community of the heroes and heroines from the "glorious past". Finally, this style qualifies as an indicator of how "cultured" the author is. In this sense it serves as a revelation of his/her mastery of the Icelandic language and cultural history. It is a style that guides in particular the pen used by men in authority, for example members of parliament.

The "purity" of language is ensured by using words that are "clean" from foreign influence. As Gísli Pálsson (1989) has argued, the preservation of the purity of Icelandic has been a major concern in Iceland. Foreign words and slang with foreign influence are rare in the obituaries, even though at times they might be in more common use in everyday language. On the rare occasions this happens, it is to quote the individual written about who is foreign and awarded the prestigious label "a great friend of Iceland". Once the words "snob" and "humor" appear, but in quotation marks to excuse this usage and make it clear that they are an intrusion, a perversion of the Icelandic language. Coupled with this distinctively Icelandic style, a number of the obituaries quote sayings and phrases that can be traced straight to the sagas and Hávamál.

In the data corpus, this language puritanism takes on its most disturbing form in an obituary about Blomdal, a foreign man who settled in Iceland. As he earned the right to become an Icelandic citizen he had to change his name into an Icelandic one, as the law dictated. The author describes how upset Blomdal was and how his attempts to keep his Icelandic name secret were so successful that it only came to the author's knowledge when Blomdal died.

> Ten years ago Blomdal became an Icelandic citizen and then acquired his Icelandic name Guðjón. Guðjón was a good Icelander but at heart he was always Danish with a strong national identity. His children were all christened Blomdal and it upset him that, when his daughter was confirmed, she was registered as Guðjónsdóttir (M, 137, 1920, 1972).

Guðjón is the Icelandic part of his identity, the part he does not want but is imposed on him through the regulations of society, affecting the way his daughter is registered. The grand finale in this regulation is how his obituary appears posthumously. Having acquired the knowledge of Blomdals' Icelandic name, the author sees it fit to head the obituary with the very name forced on the man.

Insofar as Iceland of the past is construed as a community of peasants, the purest form of Icelandicness is located within rural Iceland. People living in rural Iceland are portrayed as nearer to the source of authentic Icelandicness than those living in the urban areas, especially Reykjavík. The nostalgia for the way things were strikes a chord with Guðmundur Hálfdanarson's (1993) comment on the nineteenth century regarding how the farms were identified with conventional values and established ways of doing things. They were seen to be the origin and source of all that was truly Icelandic, the place were the spirit and language was "purest". In terms of nationalism, he argues, the farmers were seen to preserve the spark for the renaissance of Icelandic culture. The words nation and farmers were considered almost synonymous (p. 51).

This notion of the farmer as the authentic Icelander is most prevalent in the early obituaries (they contain the highest proportion of farmers) and is echoed in some of the newer ones. One obituary from 1972 uses the word "rammíslenskur", "strongly" or "very Icelandic" (F, 139, 1922, 1972) when describing the environment around a farm. Farmers are portrayed as "more" Icelandic than other inhabitants of the island, presumably because they are considered to hold more dearly to the old values. The way they have preserved old Icelandic lifestyle signifies their strength.

> It was as if the adversities, difficulties and sufferings made the qualities of this Icelandic peasant greater. For me she will for a long time be an adorable memory of all the best qualities Icelandic rural people harbour (F, 138, 1895, 1972).

The obituaries highlight the importance of older generations since they preserve knowledge that is in danger of dying with them. Younger generations are encouraged to learn from the older ones, both to appreciate the good life they have now and to prevent valuable "national" knowledge from being lost. The past must have its place in the present. It prevents Icelandic culture from being dissolved and contaminated by external influences, and maintains our touch with our roots. What this distinctly Icelandic knowledge consists of are; stories, poetry, limericks, ways of working and living.

> In discussions with granddad I got to know many of the good people who left their mark on the century that soon is past. The sagas also became alive in his treatment and his description of growing up in difficult circumstances in Firðir became so engraved in my mind that often I thought these were my own memories (M, 34, 1899, 1992).

What is the purest of all pure and most Icelandic of all Icelandic is, however, nature. Its spell affects all those who live in its bosom and has a lasting influence on their character. The obituaries contain nostalgic references to blue, magnificent mountains, clear rivers and the crowning glory of glaciers. Nature, as reflected, for example, in advertisements using nationalism to further their cause, and even the Miss Iceland beauty contest (Annadís G. Rúdólfsdóttir, 1991; 1994a; 1994b) encapsulates the united Icelandic collective mind. Þórunn Valdimarsdóttir (1990) has in this respect pointed out how Icelandic nature is usually metaphorised as a woman: "Men own the land as a woman and love it as they would a woman" (p.293). The purity and "virginity" of nature somehow is able to enchant, or at least nurture your spirit, and bring out the "nature" we share with the landscape.

> The Bakkapeople lived at the roots of the great Glacier and its purity and mightiness moulded them, like other people living there. No-one is untouched from having spent his youth at the roots of the Glacier, this king of mountains, the image of the mighty, beautiful and pure, which must elevate the human soul (F, 155, 1928, 1972).

It is into this landscape that the heroes and heroines, who supposedly embody all the relevant characteristics necessary to relay important cultural values to the community, are introduced.

5.3. THE STRONG CHARACTER IN THE DISCOURSE OF THE CHIEFTAIN

The individual who stares fate in the face and gets on with his life irrespective of what others think, is close to people's heart in Iceland. Various novelists have fitted their fictional characters in his mould with Bjartur from Sumarhús ranking amongst the most famous ones. He is the literary offspring of the Nobel laureate Halldór Laxness (1961), epitomising the everyday hero who stubbornly wants to be his own master and struggles against all odds to let ends meet. "Independence is better than meat" is Bjartur's response to his pregnant wife's food cravings. It is better to starve than to compromise your self-worth. Bjartur is a hero because he believes in something worth fighting for. This "something" is his "self" and the ideal of the "self" that exists independently from others.

The strong character in this discourse reflects the characteristics of the noble-minded, as translated from the sagas. The diagram below (5.1), gives some indication of what separated the strong from the weak.

Figure 5.1:
The strong and weak character in the discourse of the Chieftain

Strong Character	<--- / --->	Experience	---> / <---	Weak Character
Self-reliant Independent		Forced: fate tests resilience		Dependent on others
Stays whole, "strong-bones" True to self		Temptations test substance of character		Untrue to self, inflated self Cracks, broken, half
Broad-minded, can choose wisely		Knowledge		Narrow-minded

The strong characters use experience constructively in their navigation towards a state of independence and, importantly, do not conflate their will with the will of others. Their strength displays itself in particular, in how they preserve their integrity, come rain or shine. The weak character conversely has no chance of becoming a hero. His or her characteristics are the result of a lack of self-rule, s/he gives in to temptations and has a tendency to acquire an inflated opinion of him/herself when things are going well. When things on the other hand do not run the smooth course of what was expected, they collapse, not having the strength and resilience to face dire times.

When describing characters, Icelanders as the obituaries portray, often resort to making metaphorical references to that which is most solid in the environment: the rock. Although experience like wind and rain mould the character, and in that narrow sense develop it, the basic ingredients of the character are always there. It is when cracks start forming in the solid substance that the danger of a "break-down" occurs. Experience potentially has a bad effect when the infrastructure of the characters is not resilient enough, and it is the character's resilience to "bad" and "good" experience that differentiates the strong from the weak. In this way the relationship between the weak character and experience bears a strong likeness to the process by which water finds its way into cracks and holes in cliffs and rocks. It freezes and cracks them up from the inside.

As my earlier discussion suggested, self-rule and the ability to master one's passion are given great significance in descriptions of the characteristics of the great heroes and heroines in the sagas. Self-restraint is exercised to show what one is made of and difficult situations are the optimal conditions to "show off" these dispositions. Within the obituaries the "character" is frequently portrayed as something that can be "schooled" or "shaped", but its fundamental qualities are there from the very beginning. To go back to my earlier metaphor of the rock, the rock is shaped into form by the weather forces, but

its formative ingredients are not altered. Those of the best substance stand tallest and are even able to shield those of lesser quality.

The emphasis that the discourse of the Chieftain places on roots and inheritance, I would argue, is linked with this notion of the character. His dispositions, as the obituaries stress, are inherited from his ancestors. A common feature of the obituaries, in this respect, is an extensive listing of the person's ancestors, where they lived and what they achieved. The rationale seems to be that by knowing your ancestors you know what material you are made of. A metaphor used in this respect for being of good extraction is that of being "cut from a good rock" (af góðu bergi brotinn). For 84 (67%) of the subjects in my obituary sample, kin or parents are mentioned, sometimes with the name of the farm they belonged to, whereas for 29 (23%) of the subjects the family tree is traced even further. This applied equally to men and women. What is inherited is basically the character and a range of abilities, be they dexterity or memory.

> It was now convenient that Sigríður had ample time to read notes and also made use of what she had inherited (ættarfylgja) which was a very good memory for texts (F, 71, 1899, 1992)
>
> He was therefore descended from trusty farmers and from them he inherited his good qualities. He was trustworthy, a strong and a warm personality (M, 80, 1945, 1992).
>
> From this short lineage it can be seen that he is not descended from weaklings. It is true to say that he inherited many things from his fine forefathers. Maybe not least his namesake, Eggert Ólafsson (M, 123, 1852, 1932).

In pre-modern society, kinship had an enormous importance in determining people's social position. The privileged chance of becoming a voice of authority is not however explained by referring to this power structure, but to the individual's disposition. The abilities inherited from the ancestors define people's status more than inherited wealth and social position. Some of the obituaries even mention how it is the very spirit of the Chieftain that is inherited. Despite this, the discourse promotes strong ideas about self-regulation.

5.3.1. Self-control or self-mastery

In her analysis of the character in the Icelandic sagas, Wax (1969) argues that the hero primarily shows his strength by the control he has on his self. In the same vein, the discourse of the Chieftain, stresses above all self-mastery and control brought on by self-reliance and independence.

An excessive display of emotions or passions is frowned upon in the obituaries, since that indicates a lack of self-control.

> Since Olga was by nature a hardy woman who didn't complain, few of her friends realised she was sick until her sickness had become severe. When she knew what would happen, she acknowledged her destiny without anxiety or desperation. She approached death with complete calmness - like every other hard work she had to do. The self mastery (sjálfsvald = self power, control) and strength of will she showed at the end was such that it is doubtful to be found elsewhere (F, 139, 1922, 1972).

The virtues of not erupting emotionally are stressed in the obituaries in that calmness, even-temper, and the diplomatic ability of being good at cooling down the tempers of others (mannasættir) are described as positive qualities. Expressing "needs" would be an example of a self that has spilled over its boundaries. Why public displays of feelings are frowned upon probably rests in that emotionality is contrasted with rationality. By keeping a lid on the emotions it is easier to sort out matters rationally and calmly. Actions are then well reasoned but not acted out impulsively, without any thought to the consequences. This does not mean that the cultural perception of the individual is that he is or should be cold and unfeeling, but rather that he is and should be well balanced and in control.

Another possible explanation is that language might, for some, be considered too public for private emotions. A well-known Icelandic poem, which could be seen as one of the first obituaries, is a dirge composed by the tenth century Viking, Egill Skallagrímsson

(English edition of Egils saga, 1975), "The Wreck of Sons" (Sonatorrek). Egill although eloquent about the effect his sons death had on him, expresses his grief with the words "My tongue leaden with grief lies". A number of the obituaries, mention, how in particular men, although by no means exclusively so, resist expressing their emotions in public. The following extract from an obituary, published in 1952, describes how a seaman reacted to seeing his brother, and all the men on board his boat, drown in a violent storm:

> After that Einar did not want to stay any longer in Westman Islands and moved to the mainland. But never did the author of this article hear him mention these events (M, 189, 1860, 1952).

These traumatic events affect the person, as the authors describe it: "he was never the same again" (M, 81, 1903, 1982). Authors in more recent obituaries expand on this but some, particularly in the older ones, deal with these difficult issues in the same way as the individuals they are writing about. They mention the sad event almost as if in passing: "They had two children who lived", "their daughter died young", "it caused sorrow" and so on. Expressing the deceased's grief seems almost beyond words.

Self-control is even more appreciated when it is known that the character in question is hot-tempered and passionate. It means that even stronger control is exerted to keep matters running smoothly. Outbursts of temper are excused if they are seen as reflecting the character's honesty and sense of righteousness. The strong character must on all occasions be true to his or herself.

> Svavar was an incredibly honest man with great integrity. He had quite a temper so that sometimes it was windy around him, the mild weather was however, never far off (M, 8, 1939, 1992).

The character's temperament takes on the quality of the weather forces, affecting everyone around him or her, explaining perhaps why its control is appreciated.

The very contrast of rationality and emotionality, and their allocation to the public and private respectively, indicate the idea of a hidden depth to the individual's self (see Baumeister, 1986). Emotions in this respect are deeply personal and run deeper than the rational facade of the individual. Baumeister argues that the onset of modernity with its emphasis on individuality drew a stricter demarcation between the personal and the social. It is then that the individual starts demanding privacy in terms of personal space (pp.41-42). However, it is possible that it is not the "need" for privacy that has occurred, but a change in conception of what this personal space should consist of. Pre-modern individuals certainly could not retreat into their own rooms since most of them did not have them. Privacy on the other hand could be ensured by keeping parts of your emotions to yourself, apart from public scrutiny. By guarding one's personal space one furthermore ensured that others' privacy was not intruded into. You make your private emotions the most public when you put them into words for all to hear. Perhaps it equalled exposure, what we today would see as equivalent to being naked in public places.

Whereas the older generations would see emotions as deeply private, except when needed for the loving care of others, and their display certainly not appreciated in this discourse, there still are roundabout ways to express one's emotional dispositions. With men the accepted emotional outlet seems to have been with children; 16 (20%) of the men are in this respect described as having been kind to children. Insofar as children are perceived as too innocent or unformed by social regulations, they are capable of going behind the rational facade, and reach the warm heart that despite all beats there.

5.3.2. The weak character and the self

The control of the self can sometimes go astray, with disastrous effects for the individual concerned. Not being in touch with who you are, and what you are made of, is frowned upon in both the obituaries and the interviews. One woman, metaphorically referred to as

a "delicate flower", was described as having fought many battles with her self, and this was used to imply that she was unstable and unwell (F, 106, 1933, 1982). Another example was Ingólfur:

> Ingólfur is in my mind a good example of a man trying all his life to escape from himself. No one wants to drink like Ingólfur did, no one wants to drink like I did, no one wants to drink themselves to death, but we did all the same (M, 77, 1912, 1992).

A character that loses his or her self, or somehow has not the will to control it, is weak. Ingólfur actually did not want to drink as he did, but his self could not be put under his will. In trying to escape his self, he inevitably ended in the sorry state of trying to find consolation in the bottle.

Blomdal's obituary features here again. His obituary is in many ways unusual, not least, in descriptions of his weak control of his emotions. I would argue that the fact that this individual was foreign allowed these descriptions to appear:

> It was like one of my colleagues said to me, its as if Blomdal possesses some kind of mystery. When Blomdal came to the city to all the noise and clamour, to help us decorate the town-centre for Christmas, I often thought he wasn't feeling very well (M, 61, 1920, 1972).

The obituary goes on to describe how sensitive he was, and how he cried like a child when he was ill. He is described as a child and thereby his masculinity is undermined. The emphasis on his emotions, in turn, feminise him (see chapter 6), and distance him from Icelandic masculinity.

The younger generations are portrayed as more prone to stray from their true selves and some of my respondents discussed the temptations the youngsters faced in this respect. Being young equates being impressionable and less knowledgeable about the world and one's self. Adolescents are in those terms sometimes described as not having hardened (óharðnaður), referring to how the tissue their character is made of is amenable to damage, posing substantial dangers. As my respondents commented when discussing

the newly elected beauty queens, they must have "strong bones". In the extract below, Dóra (19) discusses how experience can shape you "too much", and that she does not consider all that benign. The particular example she refers to is how beauty contests affects the girls in her school who had been participants. Some think "they are the best thing that has happened on earth", whereas others "do not change at all". We continued:

> A: But do you think that this affects the self image of young girls for instance?
>
> D: Yes, they become, I think this has both positive and negative, for them (the beauty queens) this is of course very good.
>
> A: Mm.
>
> D: This shapes their self image. I just hope it doesn't shape it too much, or, I, it is maybe, it is maybe, I don't know.
>
> A: Mm.
>
> D:They at least get a much higher opinion of themselves. But whether it is too much I don't know.
>
> A: Yes.
>
> D: It depends on the person.

Optimally the girls should be strong enough not to let all this attention go to their head. Through holding on to what you are, and just being yourself, you reveal the strength of your character.

5.3.3. Fate, fortune and honour

Considering that characters are tested by their reaction to experience and furthermore, that experience is the "stuff" that life is made of, it played a star role in the interviews and the obituaries. Usually experience was discussed "casually" as that which you come across on day to day basis and which affects your reflexivity. Another notion of experience was experience that was "fated", or somehow predestined. Old Norse mythology explains fate and fortune by referring to the three women who spin our fate on their spinning wheel. Their very names signify present, past and future and their activity is outside the

control of mere mortals. In the obituaries, fate seems to have an integral part in testing the substance of characters, as one of the obituaries puts it: "Gold is tested in fire" (F, 165, 1888, 1972). The character shows his strength by fighting to do what is honourable to the very end, thereby showing his or her glory. Many authors, furthermore, comment on the individual's fortune, indicating that you are born with your fortune, or that it lies outside our control. S/he was fortunate, because of a good spouse, children and so on.

I have already discussed the importance of fate in the Old Norse literature, but it could be argued that the idea of fate is still strong within the Icelandic mentality. The literature reveals this and Icelandic language contains phrases such as "this was not meant to be", "s/he was not fated to die". Not surprisingly this comes across in the obituaries since the subjects described have encountered the one fate that affects everyone, namely to die. Hávamál's wisdom that we cannot avoid our destiny ("enginn má sköpum renna"), often cropped up or references were made to cruel fate. The following extract from one of the obituaries is interesting in that it shows how one of the authors tries to reconcile conflicting views about who has the power to shape our destiny.

> Some believe that men have their destiny made so that they have nothing to say about how their lives turn out. Others are convinced that we have the power to decide about our lives for ourselves and that the will and ability of each person is what most determines. Most of us, I think, have the life opinion that both have something to say about the individual's destiny (M, 126, year of birth missing, 1992).

As in the Old Norse literature, honour is judged by how individuals manage to live by decisions made and shoulder responsibility for their decisions and actions. In this connection the word "dauntlessness" re-occurs, referring to the character who faces life and its fated events without a trace of fear. The old Norse idea of the individual battling for his honour to the very end appears vividly in the obituaries. Death is frequently metaphorised as a battle and the individual described as dignified or graceful when at last losing that battle.

> To be responsible for your own life, to life happy within yourself, to die accepting your destiny (F, 42, 1960, 1992).
>
> Now Anna is gone on a different trip, this time alone. The difficulties she fought with showed even better than before her heroic spirit and dauntlessness (F, 19, 1924, 1992).

The obituaries frequently remind us that loved ones live beyond their death in the memory of others. Indeed, it could be said that the very writing of the obituary is an attempt to establish or confirm the deceased's reputation. The verse from Hávamál that discusses how good reputation lives on, is used to remind the reader of the role of reputation.

> Cattle die and kinsmen die
> thyself eke soon wilt die;
> but fair fame will fade never,
> I ween for him who wins it.
>
> (Hávamál, vs. 76)

Experience, in other words, is not entirely of the individual's making, which fits badly with the modern conception of the individual creating his own destiny (see chapter 7). In a sense it is prescribed but the individual still has the choice, whether to prove his or her worth by reacting in a manner indicating a great character (See Wax, 1969).

5.3.4. Independence and self-reliance

To qualify as a strong character you have to be independent and self-reliant. Indeed, these two qualities imply each other since self-reliance is a pre-condition for independence. The Icelandic word for independence is "sjálfstæði", which translated literally means self standing, the person who stands by herself, is not dependent on or aided by others. What you gain by independence is self-rule. With self-rule you are the master of your self, the author of your opinions and attitudes.

Judging people by what they "own" is a common means of evaluation in Iceland. You make your autonomy clear not least by having your own house or flat. More than half of the obituaries mention the deceased's home, usually indicating whether it was his or her

property. The authors sometimes even go as far as counting the homes that the person owned in his or her lifetime. This happens in particular when the person written about was born poor but managed to gather some wealth. To satisfy the religious morals, I presume, the obituaries include lengthy descriptions of the hard work put into acquiring these possessions. Working hard to gain independence reveals strength of character. No one wants to experience the humiliating condition of being subject to other people's goodwill. This explains the value Icelanders put on material goods, on owning a home and being able to take care of yourself.

5.4. GENDER DIFFERENCES

In my discussion of the nationalism, I already hinted at the different roles allotted to men and women (3.5.). The growing pains accompanying modernity have in part been caused by the increasing separation of the public and the private, and nationalism has played a role in gendering these realms. Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir (1994), notes how the poetic outpour at the turn of this century echoed nationalistic ideas, which clearly stipulated a gendered role division. Women were elevated to the image of the ideal Mother and men played the part of her forceful heroic sons. Goldberg's (1992) discussion of the image of the Mother in nationalism notes in this respect, how representations of women have a bearing on the representation of the relationship between men:

> .. women translated into a trope of ideal femininity, a fantasmatic female that secures male-male arrangements and an all male history (p.63).

Mother superior had a role, in other words, in confirming the gendered separation of the private and the public at the very time that these dimensions, as we recognise them today, were forming in the community. The "natural" allocation of the "outside" mobile domain to men, that increasingly changed into the cultural public one, furthermore had a hand in securing that the most distinguished manifestations of public self-portrayal were

masculine. The family was clearly, as Rubin (1975) has argued elsewhere, seen as a "nation-in-miniature". In the same way that women were given a different role to men within the family, they were given a different role within the nation. In short, the knowledge produced by the discourse of the Chieftain serves to confirm the idealised, gendered role-division in both realms.

5.4.1. The public leader, the Chieftain

In chapter 3, I argued that the ideals stressed by the Old Norse individualism were ultimately masculine and insofar that they are recycled in the discourse of the Chieftain, my analysis supports this statement. Clearly only a few chosen individuals could be the "first amongst equals" and very few women rank amongst those. Whereas 13 men are described either as leaders or Chieftains, only three women are described by reference to Chieftains, and none as a leader. Furthermore, as I am about to argue, the qualities of the leader are primarily masculine.

The leader, as the leaders in the sagas, has to be thoughtful and rational. He is the one who with his wits can anticipate what is going to happen and the reactions of others. During times of change those fare best who are most successful in adapting new ideas and technology to their way of living. The results are tangible and salient, showing everyone the importance of being progressive in thought. The obituaries value the material results of thinking ahead and descriptions of how well for example the farms are run are recurrent. The emphasis placed on education reflects an old value stressed in the Hávamál, where a true Chieftain acquaints himself with other people's ways of doing things to be able to cleverly anticipate their thoughts. An analogy is drawn between people's knowledge and their mind. Again the old wisdom of Hávamál applies where people living in small places are referred to as having small minds.

The authors of the obituaries distinguish between education pursued in school and self-education. Those who educate themselves are seen as having a valued personality characteristic and even as being in some way superior to those educated in school. The search for education, self-education in particular, could have functioned as a form of resistance, for the older generations. Up to this century higher education was reserved for the sons of the Icelandic upper class and secured them positions that preserved their social status. Getting an education denotes the desire to be equal to those privileged in their access to education and books. It also makes the person eligible for being one of the "equals" and able to compete for the role of the leader.

Self-education in connection with intelligence and good memory are consistently mentioned in a positive way, with regard to both men and women, throughout the sample. Both have a role in passing on the knowledge of the past and wanting to know about the past. However, the picture changes quite significantly when education is related to the acquisition of new knowledge and progress in terms of techniques. Judging by the obituaries, men are the self-evident recipients and seekers of knowledge and their education and thoughts are more consistently linked to progress.

Not surprisingly these ideas come across most clearly in obituaries written when the fight for independence from Denmark was at its peak. The progressive characteristic of the (male) individual is linked to the good of the nation.

> His mind was young set on agronomy and early on he was smitten by the thought of making the country more inhabitable. There he took up the deed of his cousin and namesake who died so young (hverfa frá).....Ólafur always stood abreast of the brigade which with brave deeds and belief in the country created a new and better time for Icelandic agronomy (M, 207, 1852, 1932).

> It is always nice to meet old men who have done their day's work, and still have in their old age the undiminished vivacity and strength of the young, and love all liberty and healthy progress. They show better than anything else that there still is strength and substance in Icelanders (M, 207, 1852, 1932).

Although nationalism is at its most fervent in the obituaries from early this century, the belief in "healthy" progress is still a popular theme in the more recent ones. In the following extract a father-in-law is being described. Whilst the mother was a poet, good orator and good writer, the father:

> ..was a good singer, a wrestler during his younger years and the image of authentic masculinity, determined to progress and a leader in every deed (M, 6, 1939, 1992).

What characterised the leader above all is that the will to progress is not a selfish wish to feather his own nest, even when it results in a comfortable home, but benefits the nation or the district where the deceased lived.

> But that's what Stefán was like. He didn't care much for his own well-being, the social matters, the matters of the masses were much more on his mind (M, 34, 1908, 1982).

It is important to show "community spirit" and be willing to help others. A noble spirit can share from his riches, be it mental acuity or practical help. The obituaries of 24 (31,5%) of the men and 9 (18,3%) of the women mention this quality. The men's deeds have a higher cause, they are sparked off by the collective vision of cultivating the people, culture and creating a better future for Icelanders by, for instance, improving matters for farmers or fishermen. Women in contrast contribute to the nation through their nurture of home and hearth, or through their membership in societies collecting money for the sick and needy. The authors identify themselves as being on the receiving end of the deceased's generosity. A noble person cares about the community and not just about him or herself.

Some obituaries describe the joy a man gets out of being in a team with a leader, how he looked out for leader material, but was quite content to be in the background. Remarkably, these obituaries were always written by men, even MPs, who appear to be congratulating the deceased for his good choice in contributing to the author's high social

rank. Interestingly no such speculations are raised about the women. It seems implicit that women, although with noble qualities, were not expected to compete for the leader role.

Descriptions of the characteristics of the Chieftain are simultaneously references to masculinity. An individual who has excellent qualities, is noble and good, is called "drengur góður". This translates literally as "noble boy" but is used in the same way as "gentlemanly". As an expression it is used both for men and women but has a definite gendered feel to it. When faced with difficulties, the individual is described as facing them "manly" (af karlmennsku), a description that does not apply to women.

Men who, for various reasons, were unable to do their job fully are described as having suffered from mental anguish, and as seeing their disability as some sort of retreat. The following extract describes a man as not feeling complete or "whole" because his job had become too difficult for him. This notion of being a "whole man"[1] interestingly again, only appears in descriptions of men. It implies that something is taken from you that makes you less than what you were.

> As earlier Nonni took his duties very seriously and at the same time did not want to carry them without complete abilities (finna sig fullan mann fyrir = be a complete man), therefore he chose to retire at sixty in 1982. But then he had been working for a long time under much additional pressure (M, 1, 1922, 1992).

These duties refer to his role outside the home, in his successful career. To be able to keep up is a matter of honour, and Nonni did not want to be judged by work below the standard he had set himself. An even more dramatic description is of Gunnar (M, 146,

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[1]In the Icelandic language the word "maður", meaning man or person is used both for men and women. It is a shortening of "karlmaður" man and "kvenmaður" woman. "Maður" is used in sentences in the same way as "you" in English. The phrase "you would think" would then be "man would think", and of course, used by both men and women.

1908, 1972), who was the picture of incessant courage until he lost his eye sight and simply "broke down".

To sum up, the ideals of the Chieftain imply forward thinking, rationality and self-reliance and are particularly embodied in the male leader.

5.4.2. Women's private role

Although the Chieftain ideal favours the male elite, I found that many of my female respondents measured themselves against it. It even, as described in 3.5, provided women with the logic they needed to subvert male-male arrangements in the public sphere. Some of the women I interviewed took pains to stress the authority of women, but, as I shall argue, their authority was primarily restricted to their role in the household.

The quality of being progressive is one of the primary qualities of the leader. One of the few examples I could find of a woman described as a forward, progressive thinker in the obituaries was Halla, a woman who neither married nor had children.

> Halla was progressive with a sharp natural intelligence which clearly reflected in her actions and thinking, although fate shaped her a particularly difficult life and she often had to stand in the cold winds of life, facing sickness and losing loved one, as well as poverty, isolation, with no road to her farm. None of this could kill the growth deep in her soul, the joy over progress she saw and was allowed to participate in the last years (F, 165, 1888, 1972).

The obituary later on describes Halla as having actively brought on some progress. Her progressive streak rested in her good sense to make a financial contribution to a society aiming to reform ways to cultivate the land. I have the sneaking suspicion that the obituary was written by someone belonging to this society.

Although the obituary authors do not see women as progressive in thought, their ability to pass on traditional knowledge is cherished. Traditional knowledge plays a big role in

nationalism and ties in with, as Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir (1994) argues, how the Icelandic language is seen as the realm of the Mother. The Icelandic term for language is "móðurmál", language of mother. The mother, she argues, was considered to be responsible for passing on the values of the culture and this proved to be the basis for her idealisation. The mother, in other words, embodies cultural values and memories of the past. She passes on, as Inga Dóra claims, the "pure" cultural knowledge that her sons, the fighters, seek their nurture from.

The obituaries identify the homes as the pillars of the culture, and it is there that women's authority is located (see however 6.4). Homes are described as "cultured", and the cultural activities, that take place there emphasised. An obituary describing the parents of a woman in the sample, describes how:

> The couple were in many ways different, but their strongest characteristics came across most clearly when they were side by side and moulded the diverse and entertaining cultural home, that the home of the doctor was - one of the pillars of Icelandic culture through the centuries (F, 103, 1933, 1982).

My older interviewees identified as role models women who had managed big households, and had been responsible for the well being of the people under their control. These women were in their prime before modernity started separating the home from the social sphere. Sigrún (83), for example, described how she had admired the distinguished housewives in her region. She described them as "big and mighty" women, good at governing the household. The obituaries similarly applauded women for their governing abilities. Women are often described by the adjective "myndarleg" in Icelandic, which usually translates as handsome in the sense of looking wholesome and fit for work. A woman, who is "myndarleg" is, in other words, attractive and efficient. The significance placed on the housewife's image, in turn, becomes an important source for her regulation. As the following extracts show she is examined on the basis of how she governs her home.

> I do remember the order and control on everything there. Everything was well-taken care of and very neat. There the housewife was much to credit (F, 196, 1857, 1942).
>
> Mrs. Pálína was a most suitable support to her husband, a beautiful woman with extraordinary governing abilities and efficient. The home no doubt needed it being big and often with many guests (M, 201, 1857, 1942).
>
> There were usually many people in Skinnastaðir and many things to take care of. Those knowledgeable estimated that the working day of the housewife lasted between 6 o'clock in the morning until midnight (F, 123, 1883, 1972).
>
> She was an industrious woman and took care of a big home with sheer warmth and strength (F, 55, 1924, 1992).

The obituries describe how women can, just like men, inherit the characteristics of the nobleman and importantly pass them on to their children (see 3.2.1). In this respect one obituary described the noble lineage of a woman, another described a woman as having the temperament of a Chieftain. However, whereas men are valued for their leadership qualities, women's value enmesh with the importance of the home as an important cultural breeding place for Icelandic values and the nurturing of future Icelanders (see Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir, 1994). There are appropriate times and places for women to express their independence.

Many of the women I interviewed stressed their independence and saw it as an important feature of their character. When I asked them what kind of image they thought Icelandic women had abroad, some of them defined their image as being that of "independent women", thereby by default identifying themselves as being independent. Halla (50) even described herself as being "too" independent.

> A: Did you have any role models that you respected and wanted to be like, when you were younger?
>
> H: No-o, no, no, nothing like that. I think I was just too independent.
>
> A: Yes?
>
> H: I was just going to be me (laughter).

.....
H: It has always rested within me. I think it is just something you drink with your mothers' milk. Through the generations.

Women did see their authority in the private sphere as valuable, but that authority did not seem to extend to the public realm. A contradiction that came up in the interview with Halla (50), who very much stressed the value of independence, supports this. Early in the interview she discussed how Icelandic women were more independent than foreign women:

H: We even have a different opinion from our husband.

A: Yes, yes.

H: And we don't keep quiet about having another opinion.

Later on when discussing women in politics the story changed somewhat. In the following extract we were discussing a woman minister, Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir:

A:Yes, I've often noticed that she has been labelled as impudent (frekja).

H: That is because she has an opinion, then she is impudent.

A: Mm.

H: And this is precisely what is wrong. A woman can never have an opinion.

A: Yes.

H: It is just not the tradition, this is what is wrong.

The difference here is that in the first instance Halla is discussing a domestic relationship but in the second instance a woman participating in a very public political field. Women are identified as having the right to be authoritarian, but only insofar that they restrict their authority to the domestic realm.

For the women I interviewed, independence meant having your own opinion and doing what you wanted to do, self-rule. It was the question of whether you were in the position to be "yourself", be an "I", as Erla termed it. In this respect, Halla (50) even described women who were not independent as being "gutless" and not willing to fight hard enough. The cause for their lack of independence was clearly located within them as individuals. The following extract is from an obituary written about Anna, a 32 year old woman, and places her firmly in the discourse of the Chieftain.

> Anna was in my opinion, and I think everyone's that knew her, a strong personality, true to herself. It was very important for her to stand on her own feet. Her strength could be felt and seen in her sickness. She did not hide from facts (F, 48, 1960, 1992)

An important factor in this description is probably that Anna was single, educated and lived in her own flat. She furthermore belongs to the generation that reaps the benefits from the battles the older generations fought for equal pay and educational opportunities for women. It is interesting that Anna's home, and the home of another single woman, were described as "palaces" where the owners, presumably, were masters or sovereign. These terms were neither used to describe the homes of men nor married women.

The women I interviewed saw a definite generation gap in how independent women are. In general the younger women have more means to be self-reliant and therefore are more likely to possess their selves than the older generations. The society has changed drastically and as a result many of the values in the discourse of the Chieftain have been turned upside-down. These changes will be addressed in chapter seven.

5.5. DISCUSSION

The construction of "equals" within the discourse of the Chieftain, implies somewhat the community of those who are the "same". Insofar as the outward criteria for qualifying as an "equal" favour the masculine role, women by definition are less than "same". Women

are the "natural" consort of the leader, and as such with noble qualities, but never themselves positioned centrally as the progressive leader. This explains why the Icelandic women's movement has focused on convincing the community that women either are the "same", not "less than same", or "as good", insofar that they are "different". The discourse of the Chieftain celebrates the mentality of the hero and dwells upon his characteristics. It emphasises self-reliance and self-mastery and elaborates how these qualities are brought out in our dealings with everyday events.

Importantly, the characteristics of the strong character, as formulated in this discourse, are simultaneously the characteristics of the individual par excellence. Women are participants in this discourse but, due to the structure of society, are bound to be placed at a disadvantage in relation to men. Their financial position is poorer, which makes self-reliance more difficult. Furthermore, the gendered division between the private and public, has established men as the "natural" knowledge-seekers and the "natural" leaders. This structural handicap is however given little cognisance since excellence is explained by references to the character who inherits his qualities.

These descriptions reveal how power works through self-discipline or self-regulation. The knowledge produced, and re-produced by this discourses, serves to separate the interests and realm of women from men affecting women's options in life. These micro relations, in other words, serve to maintain gender inequality at more macro levels, since power and authority in public institutions are unquestionably connected to masculinity.

Women's experiences are in this sense restrained and streamlined into particular activities. These will feature more prominently in my next chapter, where I discuss how women "naturally" have taken up the role of the "Other".

CHAPTER 6: THE DISCOURSE OF THE SOUL

6.1. INTRODUCTION

In 1967 an Icelandic author, Svava Jakobsdóttir, published a short story about the life of an Icelandic housewife. The story became well known and was selected, with a number of others, as part of the curriculum for primary school students studying Icelandic. The story is striking in its simplicity and very provocative. As the story goes, a housewife always puts herself second to her husband and children. This she manifests in many small ways, such as taking the smallest cutlet for herself when preparing and later sharing a meal with her family. The climax of her altruism, and the shock factor of the story, culminates in the mother allowing her child to cut her brain out for a lesson in biology, admiring her child's precocity and eagerness to learn. Later on she is surprised by how well she functions without it. It turns out that, in her day to day activities, the brain is an unused and therefore an unnecessary organ. As a symbol of her altruism, the brain soaked in formaldehyde is kept in a jar in a prominent place in the living room, later to be joined by her heart which had become too enlarged after the disappearance of the brain. The sting in the tail of the story is the off-hand attitude of her offspring towards her sacrifices. Sadly enough, the mother finds herself alone in her flat most days. Now that the children have flown the nest, they never pay her a visit, finding the sterile smell in the flat too overbearing.

I am not reminiscing on this story to suggest that this was the collective experience of domestic bliss in Iceland. It does though capture a moment in the story of the Icelandic home. In 1967, women still were largely defined by their duties at home, which through the century were becoming more and more privatised and less and less valued. Furthermore, it points to a theme that incidentally comes up again and again in my data, centred around the idea that women should attend to the interests and needs of others

before their own. The story, in its excesses of semiotic meaning, rhymes almost disturbingly with some of the emphases in the discourse of the Soul.

Sampson (1993, p.33), made the observation that for every person that manages to reach what is considered the desired status of being independent and self-reliant, there is an "other" who is in servitude to that person. My attention inevitably goes to the housewife in the story, in relation to her husband and children. The discourse of the Soul, in contrast to Svava's almost dispassionate irony, celebrates the role of the "other" constituting the discourse itself as a kind of a twin, complementary discourse to the discourse of the Chieftain. It points to the human "tragedy" that Guðmundur Finnbogason (1933) spotted in his discussion of individualism in the sagas, namely that "not everyone could be a leader".

In pre-modern time, the Church and the Protestant-Lutheran religion seemed embedded in almost every aspect of life; education, work/home and leisure. The Church, along with farm work and seasonal changes in weather and light, organised people's time; Sunday was, for example, the day for attending church: as well as defining markers in human life span, confirmation transforms children into adults[1]. Since religion affected most spheres of people's lives, so did its disciplinary practices. The discourse of the Soul, in other words, originates from the time religion had the task of establishing "an integrated set of definitions of reality that could serve as a common universe of meaning for the members of the society" (Berger, 1990, p.243). With the onset of modernity, this power has been diffused to a large degree into other discourses and the institutions they operationalise. As Berger (1990) recognises, religion in modern life has become "individualised", it is a matter of choice or of preference "ipso facto lacking in common, binding quality" (p.242). In this sense it has mostly been driven into the sphere of the family and the social relationships closely linked to it. This does not mean that religion has lost its

[1] In this respect, an Icelandic woman in her forties has told me how her whole wardrobe was changed after her confirmation.

social relationships closely linked to it. This does not mean that religion has lost its influence. Despite individualisation, the religious vocabulary and many of its "truths" still circulate and are strong within the Icelandic culture. Considering that women have a strong role in the private sphere, these discursive truths play an important part in their regulation and examination.

The many references that are made to religion and religious truths within the obituaries, hardly come as a surprise. The transition from life to death conventionally brings in religious authorities and provides the chance for reflection about the meaning of life and death in general. The discourses of knowledge, such as science, that have set their mark on modern society have refrained from elaborating any further on the meaning of death, leaving these matters to be explained as they conventionally have been.

It will be argued here that the discourse of the Soul has been a necessary complement to the discourse of the Chieftain and its celebration of the Self, through its other-orientation. Both draw their characteristics from the spells that the ideals of a past world order cast, implicitly supporting social and gendered power imbalance. Not surprisingly, due to the religious undertone of the obituaries, this discourse is widely appropriated, less so in the interviews, but in a very significant, contested way.

The cosmology of the pre-modern society comes across strongly in the fragments of narrative that run through many of the obituaries. I shall here begin my analysis by tracing its characteristics, then look at the way in which the discourse of the Soul constitutes the subject, and the way it proposes that women define and thereby regulate themselves.

6.2. THE NARRATIVE OF LIFE AND DEATH IN THE OBITUARIES

The metaphors used to ground life and death in a cultural context reveal a remarkably consistent narrative throughout the sample. A large proportion of the obituaries use the metaphor of the "journey", dubbing subjects as "travellers" walking "the path of life" with fellow "companions". Although the obituaries may not use all of these metaphors, there usually can be found at least one, indicating the easy fit Icelanders see between their meaning and the life story of the dead person. I will here trace the gist of this metaphorical narrative and the way in which it charts out the relation between subjects, and places them within a cultural context.

6.2.1. The path of life

The journey on the path of life certainly is no picnic. The path is winding and wearisome and sometimes its surface is covered with thorns. The traveller has to surmount the obstacles piled on his or her path, which is no mean task when shouldering heavy burdens. What makes life easier then and even worthwhile, is the thought that our time on earth is limited, it is a "strange journey" on hotel Earth, as one popular poem describes it (Tómas Guðmundsson, 1952), but one that has to end.

Other travellers join us on this journey for longer or shorter times. The spouse is our life's co-traveller, easing our journey and sharing our burden. The old cliché, that the whole is larger than the sum of its parts, applies well to the couple's co-operation on their travels. They are often identified through metonymy as "having the same hand" (samhent), i.e. they worked so well together that they could just as well have shared it. Another common description is of them being two halves that fit perfectly together; their characteristics contrast but complement each other.

> Sigga and Nonni were in many ways opposites and complemented each other. She brought lightness and joy into his serious and responsible life, was quick in making decisions and taking actions when he wanted to

> consider and be careful. Whatever the one lacked, the other seemed to have plentifully (M, 1, 1922, 1992).

The way in which fellow travellers ease the trip is frequently metaphorised as giving provisions (veganesti), nutrition that makes the person stronger for the road. The fellow subjects who are metaphorised in this manner tend to be the parents, grandparents, or older and more mature persons, whom we meet on "our way".

> Although you carry good things with you when you leave home, that is not always enough. It is important to be around good people [samferðafólk = fellow travellers] who care about you and advise you on the winding paths of life (M, 7, 1939, 1992).

The youngsters ease our life, by their lightheartedness; the illumination, rays of sun, they cast on our path. Metaphors from the weather are popular for describing moods of the people surrounding us, reflecting how they affect the traveller on his or her trip.

The burdens are provided by Christ or God and are carried like Christ did the cross; without complaining and without straying from the path he has selected for us. The strength to carry on is received from God. Metaphors do, in connection with this, often refer to whether something was easy or difficult to carry.

> I am not exaggerating when I say that she was in all ways a remarkable woman. She carried heavy burdens all her life, but you could never tell from her. She didn't complain when things were difficult [móti blés = wind blowing against you]. She used to say that God didn't put more on us than we could bear. And my dear Helga could tolerate a lot (F, 15, 1942, 1992).

What the burdens, or yoke, consist of are the responsibilities, such as work, that are shouldered on earth. All difficulties encountered on the life journey can be metaphorised as burdens and they tend to be portrayed in quite fatalistic ways, as something unavoidable, almost preplanned to test the traveller.

When the time allocated on the path of life has reached its end, fellow travellers are left behind. Sometimes then friends and relatives feel that a loved one is going before his or her time is due, which makes them angry and sad. During these moments of disquiet, the obituaries console us. Our anger at having lost our dearest ones is unfounded. The dead have not left us, either they are having the "long rest" or they have just embarked on a different trip and in the end we will join them.

> Once when we asked grandmother about death she said: "You shouldn't cry when I go on to the other side. I will not be far from you and I will always be near you." Death was for her just a short trip to the other side which she discussed with the children in a normal way and as a part of life (F, 31, 1917, 1992).

When we have reached the end of our journey, we are greeted by the "Almighty", carried over to the other world and rewarded for how well we managed to get through life. Death is then often personified, he greets the subjects and takes them, through the "great mist", to the other world: The sunny, warm world where God relieves them of their burdens and eases their pain. There they join the ancestors and family members, who already have a congenial existence in God's world, and that is a joyous occasion.

> Grandmother's home preserves lovely memories from life past when the house was bustling with life and joy. We know that grandfather, whom she always missed, will greet her with the same warmth and love she showed us, when we visited her. That is a consolation in great sorrow (F, 32, 1917, 1992).

Fellow travellers who are still on their life's journey carry on, knowing that they will "when their time comes" join the dead in eternity. They can console themselves with Heaven being a better place than what they have been accustomed to, and how they at last are rid of the pain and suffering that was piled on their path in life.

> We are certain that now Helga is feeling well, rid of the suffering and hardship of this world, and will joyously welcome us when the time comes (F, 12, 1942, 1992).

> It is often difficult to keep the light of life bright and sparkling on this earth of storms. But when the harness of the world breaks and the soul glides [svífa] rid of all pain towards the light of eternity to Him, who

> governs everything, it is some consolation in our sorrows to know that Brynhildur is walking lightfooted and happy the bright road (F, 102, 1933, 1982).

It is noteworthy that this last extract mentions the bright road. It is the bright road as opposed to the more stormy, weatherbeaten path we tread on earth. Interestingly enough, there are no references to Hell or purgatories in the obituaries. It seems that for many an Icelander, life has been enough of a punishment.

> We became silent when we heard that Helga had left this valley of tears we call earth (F, 14, 1942, 1992).

So far I have only drawn out the broadest outline of these narrative fragments I came across in the obituaries. What these outlines reveal though are clear boundaries drawn in space and time, between this world and "the other side", in time, between life and after death.

To cross these boundaries, agents with "super" qualities not enjoyed by us mere mortals, are introduced. The Almighty takes on several forms, is most frequently identified as God but less so as Jesus, the man with the scythe or Death.

6.2.1.1. God, the Almighty

God plays a vital role in the obituaries, being the one who decides about people's burdens, and to an extent at least, marks out their paths. He is the ruler of the "other world" that becomes our home when we die. God is personified to a less extent when his earthly powers are implied, as opposed to when his heavenly powers are described. Considering though the emphasis put on obedience and discipline in worldly life, the qualities are synonymous with those usually linked to the father, the one who keeps order in his house and is responsible for disciplinary action. In contrast, his qualities in Heaven are comparable to the ones often identified in the mother, taking the child in his arms, soothing and so on. In general the "child" is rewarded for its previous persistence. In one of the obituaries a poem is cited where this analogy is explored more fully. The

tender heart of the mother, the poem says, is like a picture of God himself (F, 17, 1917, 1992). God, as portrayed thus, seems to merge feminine and masculine characteristics, and to be one that can divide his abilities when required. Bearing in mind that Protestant-Lutheran religion does not worship the Virgin Mary, elevating the heart and love of the mother to the state of God serves to idealise motherhood. Yet, it is clear that in our earthly existence it is discipline that counts and love, as I will argue later, manifests itself most splendidly in sacrifice. The motherly warm embrace that awaits us in Heaven perhaps explains the appeal of these ideas to men and women. Death completes the circle in more than one way. We return to the consoling, relieving embrace we were born into.

The importance of these super agents is attenuated in that they make it possible in a sense to "survive" death, even allowing the dead to mantle some of their super-qualities. The dead are portrayed as watching the living, being near them, and even waiting for them.

> I know that my dear grandmother is in the arms of the Lord and that she keeps an eye on us (F, 55, 1924, 1992).

During apparent times of rupture and discontinuity, such as when a loved one passes away, these agents give a sense of coherence and continuation. We do not cease to exist, just change our whereabouts.

6.3. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STRONG SOUL

As I discussed in the historical chapter, the concept "soul" was only added to the Icelandic vocabulary, and subsequently to the Icelandic mentality, with the conversion to Christianity. Religion thus serves as an important subtext in its definition. Here it will be argued that, with respect to the subject, the state of the soul has attracted most of the disciplinary measures within the religious discourse. The Soul qualifies simultaneously as its object and product.

The discourse of the Soul shares many of the characteristics of the discourse of the Chieftain, and again the concern is with what makes the character strong and from where this strength is drawn. At times it is difficult to tell one discourse from the other; both emphasise duties, dauntlessness, and so on. Their differences rest in their contrasting productions and how they place the subject's self in relation to others.

Figure 6.1. The strong and the weak character, in the discourse of the Soul

Strong character	Weak character
Gives; Grateful	Receives; Ungrateful
Self-sacrifice	Selfish
Obedient, works hard; Loyal	Lazy; Unreliable
Puts herself second	Puts herself first
Shuns attention	Craves attention
Succumbs to God's will	Disobeys God's will

As was discussed earlier, the notion of carrying one's burden without complaining is given much emphasis in the obituaries. This is underscored with religious references such as how Christ carried his cross, and how God does not make us suffer more than we can bear. Suffering is portrayed as having an ulterior purpose, testing "the strength of the soul".

Within the obituaries those possessing "a great Soul" are the ones who put other "selves" before their "self", and even suffer for others. The great Soul individuals are humble, meek, do their duty without complaining, sacrifice "themselves", give to others without expecting anything in return, and do not like to draw attention to them "selves". I will discuss this in more detail in the following pages.

> In 1976 Helga and Mikki divorced. This was a great shock to her. This shock [brotsjó = breach] as others she faced with dauntlessness. Her incredible strength of soul was one of her main characteristics (F, 16, 1942, 1992).

6.3.1. The good Soul

The description frequently used to capture the characteristics of the Soul is that she is good. The kindness again resembles the qualities of the mother, she does indeed provide the milk of human kindness.

> Þóra has most of the qualities that characterise a good woman and a mother. She is loving but still unaffected, calm but with a cheerful disposition. She is emotional and attentive to everything that happens around her. She feels with those who are suffering and is eager to give a helping hand when necessary. Everything that is beautiful in each individual's disposition makes her very happy (F, 193, 1882, 1952).

> Ingunn was one of those rare women of good quality who do their work quietly and humbly in society. They take in their gentle mothers' hands, the life that surrounds them, put love in honorary place and nurture the best qualities in the people around them. They tolerate everything and their understanding and goodwill knows no limits. Ingunn was that kind of woman (F, 118, 1891, 1982).

The discourse highlights how strength is required for goodness. Furthermore, that individuals blessed with this quality radiate with it so that others can warm themselves from their glow. Interestingly 49% (24) of the women are described in terms of "warmth", in contrast with 19.7% (15) of the men. In a research I conducted in 1990 (Annadís G. Rúdólfsdóttir, 1991; 1994a;1994b) on the social representations of the Miss Iceland beauty contest, the concept "inner beauty" came up frequently, referring to these very qualities. Inner beauty referred to inner goodness or kindness and was seen to affect the contestants' overall external appearance. The optimal representatives of the contest were described as harbouring this inner beauty. In an obituary I came across in late 1994, I found these ideas reproduced, a daughter described her mother as having had so much inner beauty that she could have been a beauty queen.

These notions of inner beauty and the good Soul point to the value of purity. The women are so good that they are almost not of this world. Their goodness borders on being naive in that they avert their eyes from anything except the good qualities in other people. They are more ruled by their hearts than their heads. As one of the poems cited in the obituaries states: "The mother's bosom that could forgive everything" (F, 18, 1942, 1992). The description of the mother certainly bears a striking resemblance to the one usually reserved for the Virgin Mary, who is pure and suckles her son to her breast.

The mother-son relationship comes up in four of the obituaries and in these interestingly, the love of the son for the mother is indicative of his own warm, kind heart and loyalty. The Protestant emphasis on honouring your mother and father in these instances takes on a special significance for mother and son.

> The feelings he had for his mother whom he loved very much, can best be seen in that he visited her grave in the churchyard in Suðurgata for decades and stayed there for a while. When he himself, because of his bad health, could not go, he asked someone else to go in his place, at least during the festive seasons (M, 108, 1900, 1982).

> It has often been said that men who are good to their mothers, also are noble and warm to their fellow-men, this I think my acquaintance with Ásmundur proves (M, 97, 1925, 1982).

Interestingly, mother-daughter relationships were never described in these terms in the obituaries, possibly due to mother and daughter being positioned similarly within the discourse by the author. In this respect, one of the obituaries (F, 13, 1943, 1992) describes mother and daughter as friends, where the daughter looked after her ill mother. Another obituary about the same mother-daughter couple, does draw on the virtue of honouring your mother and father, but does not idealise the mother; the author even mentions how the relationship might have been difficult for the daughter. Collier (1974) has discussed how, in societies where positions of overt prestige and authority can only be held by men, women gain power through their control of the son. The umbilical cord remains unsevered in the sense that the son values the mother and her family more than his wife, he regularly visits her, even after her death. The mother in turn, like the Virgin

Mary, devotes herself to her son, even sacrificing herself for him (Collier, 1974, p.92). The mother's position in wider society, where indeed, through their masculinity, sons are more valued than daughters, bears testimony to this.

6.3.2. Sacrifing the self and taking second place

In heathen society sacrifices to the gods were rewarded with the gift of poetry, victories in battle and so on. Within the Christian pre-modern society no such worldly rewards were expected for sacrifices, instead they were seen as spiritual, as a credit with God (and of course a gesture of piety to approving fellow travellers). The poem of Tómas Guðmundsson "Hotel Earth", popularly sung with great melancholy on various social occasions in Iceland, touches upon this issue. Death is there and in one of the obituaries (M, 146, 1908, 1992) metaphorised as a bill collector. As we leave he hands us a bill charging us for everything we "borrowed" from life, and that premonition, as the poem points out, gives us cold shivers. The way in which we react to difficulties determines whether we are in debit or credit on our "soul balance" with God.

The notion of sacrifices is emphasised more in the earlier obituaries and there the joy of being able to do things for others is often expressed. The opportunity to sacrifice yourself for others is even counted as fortunate in some of them.

> She was helpless and very sick when the couple Birna and Rúnar Guðmundsson visited her and took her to their home, there they sacrificed themselves for her, with exceptional care and love the last months that she lived. The friends of the deceased thank them and know that the repayment is in the words of Christ: What you do for one of my smallest brothers, that you have done for me (F, 177, 1865, 1952).

> She was so fortunate that it was always she who gave (F, 86, 1912, 1962).

The idea of self-sacrifice also came up frequently in the interviews, but then usually to illustrate differences between the younger and the older generations. Younger women did

not see themselves as sacrificing their "selves", but some mentioned how motherhood made them take second place in relation to their children. They considered motherhood to incur some responsibilities you could not shrug off.

6.3.3. Suppressing the self

A strong theme within the obituaries was that you should not draw attention to your"self". Drawing attention to your "self" and your "needs" is incompatible with having a great soul. This in itself is an act of humility and an appreciation that there are other individuals more worthy of attention. An obituary written in the form of a poem describes a woman as never having cast her shadow on anyone (F, 185, 1906, 1952). The sun presumably was left for others to bathe in and it is implied that she was content to live and breathe in the shadows of others. Most Icelanders recognise these shaded selves, they have been celebrated in poems and often characterise the actions of women from the older generations. The good Soul is valued for not wanting to intrude on others and for never expecting anything for herself, but being infinitely grateful for everything done for her. The following extract, where a woman writes about an old friend of hers in hospital, indicates this.

> Often a long time passed between visits, but Dóra always smiled and was as grateful (F, 96, 1895, 1982).

The lengths to which the good Soul goes, so as not to inconvenience others, reached its climax, however, where a woman was described as timing her own death so that it would not interfere with her daughter's work.

> It was also in accordance with her spirit to say goodbye to this world when everyone had a day off, so all of those dearest to her could be near and no-one would have to be interrupted at work. She also waited to the day when her daughter's work-load had diminished so that she would not have too many inconveniences (F, 15, 1942, 1992).

6.3.4. The will of God

The suffering and difficulties the good Soul shoulders, are not described as being brought on by the individual, but as beyond our control, designed by the Almighty. The more obstacles encountered in life, the more painful sickness, the more emphasis is put on the strength of the Soul and the more the person is seen to deserve the good life waiting on the "other side". The Soul, like the Self, suffers from that which is destined, brought on by a mightier being, but importantly only reaps the benefits when she is safely tucked in God's embrace. The Soul looks to God and religion for strength, whereas the Self relies on itself. The will that matters is not the will of the individual but God's will. The autonomy of those positioned within the discourse of the Soul is, in other words, discounted and discouraged; rather they should bow their heads to the will of others.

Fate came up in some of my interviews and was then explicitly linked with the future in terms of finding a husband. Mostly fate had to do with the idea that there was a "right" one out there somewhere for everyone, an idea probably reinforced by modern love stories, but also the idea that marriage reflects the normal course of life. As Hrefna (16) explained to me; "you just have to find him, and not everyone manages to do that". Fate came up twice as premonitions about husbands. Erla (59) mentioned a premonition she had regarding her husband before she got involved with him.

> E: It was so strange that somehow when I got acquainted with this man, when I saw him, then I knew he would be in my home as an old man.
>
> A: Yes.
>
> E: An old man but I didn't suspect then immediately that we would get married.
>
> A: No but this is some sort of...
>
> E: It was something that I saw.
>
> A: Yes.
>
> E: That he would live, would stay with me.

A similar, but not as clear cut instance, came up in my interview with Elísabet (47), who told me how she had got the man she had always wanted, her husband turned out to be just like she had visualised him. Hafrún (53), in another context when discussing beauty queens, remarked how some girls might have been destined to become beauty queens. Perhaps she was reflecting on how their "inner beauty" certainly must have been a gift from God.

6.3.5. Material wealth

As I described earlier, the discourse of the Chieftain places great emphasis on self-sufficiency, explaining the lengthy descriptions given of people's homes and belongings. As can be imagined, this does not fit very well with religious ideas, where you are supposed to "give" and not flaunt yourself by showing off your belongings. Simultaneously though the strong Soul does not want to be a bother to anyone and would, like the strong Self, rather starve than ask for anything. At times the obituaries take on a moralistic tone; we are reminded that material wealth is not synonymous with wealth accumulated with God. God's children have to be wary that material gains do not distract them from what really matters. They have to be careful not to lose their souls in material fortune or lose sight of the narrow path. Vanity and ostentation certainly looks out of place in God's faithful disciples.

> "Be loyal till you die and I will give you the crown of life" is wisely written in a clever book, and there they are not referring to the power crown of human ostentation and vanity, but the glowing halo, that the memory of a noble person [góður drengur] encircles around her head in the minds of those that have the hearts to understand and appreciate. It was wealth like this that Pála (as she was always called) in Bakki gathered in life. ....Worldly wealth did not distract her nor did it bring on her downfall (F, 138, 1895, 1972).

6.3.6. Duty and obedience

The discourse of the Soul places great emphasis on obedience and the worthiness of individuals who are loyal and dependable. This ties in with the pre-modern emphasis on worldly duties allocated by God. It also explains why many women and men did not see fit to question their position. Their duties very simply were part of the grand scheme of things and portrayed how things should be.

The dutiful Soul, does not think about herself, but values most getting her work done, quietly and without bothering anyone. Just to show how capable she is in this respect, the obituaries are full of little anecdotes about how the individual defied all reason by his or her diligence. People were stumbling about on one leg, nearly collapsing with pain, but never giving in. The power of the spirit, and concern for others, overcomes the weakness of the flesh. Illness and difficulties are no excuse for letting your work suffer. Other people depend on you getting your work done and it is downright immoral to let them down. This links in with the Protestant work-ethic and is amply described in the Icelandic obituaries. As an indication of its importance, 57% (72) of the subjects were described as industrious or efficient at work, with only minor difference between men and women, 59% (45) of the men got this epigraph and 55% (27) of the women. People work until death relieves them of their duties.

> For years Edda had to fight a difficult illness [að stríða], but she never gave in, and worked until the last. Edda was one of those everyday heroes that stood while it was possible (F, 20, 1938, 1992).
>
> Mother's motto [einkunnarorð] was to work, and she was in Landsbankinn as soon as her health allowed and also sometimes when her health didn't allow it. Then mother often went to work out of mere stubbornness and, at the end, only a few days before she died (F, 21, 1938, 1992).
>
> Although his leg was disabled, it did not prevent him from doing his job, and it was adorable what he managed to do (M, 24, 1911, 1992).

When I asked my respondents about the virtues drummed into them when growing up, many of them mentioned "being conscientious" and the older women emphasised mastering the specific chores that were seen as their duty. In this respect, and as the obituaries stress, it was very important that the individual could be depended on in work, and that the quality of the work was good. The importance of duty and of altruism is passed on from one generation to another:

> Mum taught us brothers the value of work and of the importance of doing your job conscientiously whether it took place in school or in work life (M, 21, 1938, 1992).

The inspection of how individuals were seen to be fulfilling their duty was, in other words, one of the main disciplinary practices deployed in society. Insofar as these duties were gendered they, furthermore, implied different regulations for men and women.

As I have discussed, women's duties, as defined through social practice and for a long time by the Law, were centred around the inside, the domestic. The obituaries, and some of my older respondents, indulged in lengthy descriptions of these duties.

6.3.6.1. The duties of women

To get your ultimate reward, with God, as comes across in the obituaries, you have to fulfil your duties, not break the chain in the scheme of things. In the interviews, older respondents pointed out how you very simply did not question your duties. Halla (50) referred to the love of the mother as a "sacred duty". Sigrún (83) discussed how when she was young she did not particularly think about her "duties", she just carried them out. It never entered her mind, for example, to let her son do the dishes. The point was not that she thought it was somehow wrong, it just never had occurred to her that he should be doing this, and she remarked on how "strange" she found it at first, seeing men doing the dishes. I shall come back to the importance of the "unthought" in my next chapter.

Although I quite specifically asked whether there was some sort of a "natural", "essential" difference between men and women, my respondents almost invariably re-acted by talking about duties, who should do what and what would be fair in this respect. Ágústa (29), for example, started off by saying that men and women were different, only to move on immediately to talk about what they do. The gendered differences thus seemed more or less constituted in different duties.

> A: Do you think that there is anything else that forms this particular world of experience? That is unique [disruption in tape].
>
> Á: Yes doubtless, but I am against making men and women the same.
>
> A: Yes?
>
> Á: I don't think that is right.
>
> A: Yes.
>
> Á: And I don't see anything wrong with that, although, though, I was saying, I don't know how to describe it. No, I think it is good that women are feminine and men are masculine.
>
> A: Yes.
>
> Á: And I think it is all right when a man and woman live together, that the woman is in charge of the domestic chores, if she likes it.

When I asked Sigrún (83) how she was raised, she immediately went into a lengthy description of the traditional tasks of the farm woman: taking care of the animals, knitting and so on. It was their "preparation for life" as Kristín (88) pointed out. Anna's (84) response to my question about differences between Icelandic and foreign women, was that a German woman she knew had the same domestic chores as the Icelandic women.

When I asked Kristín (88) and Anna (84), two sisters I interviewed jointly, whether they thought the reason boys were given education rather than girls when they were young, was that people had believed that men and women were in their nature somehow different, they replied:

> K: They (the men) were just supposed to be the providers.
>
> A: Yes.

K: It was the provision.

A: Yes.

An: It has always been thought that it would be better to let men rule than women.

A: Yes.

An: It is still like that. And they (the men) persist in believing this.

For them it was just as simple as that, men and women had to fulfil their respective duties and obligations. Erla's (59) account of her disappointment at not being allowed to have an education echoed this. She was even considered impudent to think about acquiring an education when she had brothers. The idea that she would do anything apart from marrying and raising a family did not seem to have occurred to her father.

E: And they had to study, I would anyway marry quickly and then that would not serve any purpose.

In this sense the lives of the women from the older generations were fairly pre-structured, what you "did" had to serve an overall purpose fitting with your role in life. Women's desires to do things out of kilter with their traditional role were hard to fulfil. Unless a purpose could be spelled out, their education would be a waste of time, money and effort. Erla discussed this in connection with her wanting to get a job outside the home, but then finding herself with an ill husband.

E: But it was the same, it did not serve any purpose to think about this.

Although the women from the younger generation find themselves in a vastly different position from their mothers and grandmothers, Sigga (33) echoing Sigrún (83) earlier, had observed how people considered it strange to see men taking on the domestic chores and women having careers outside the home. This she observed in particular with older generations, those past forty. Here, in other words, we come across some generational differences and I will explore their implications more fully in chapter 7.

6.3.6. Who has a strong Soul?

The emphasis that the authors of the obituaries place on loyalty and approval from supervisors or customers, is interesting. The bosses even sometimes show their appreciation by writing obituaries where they can with authority and gratitude praise the work and loyalty of the deceased. Other authors, particularly when writing about men, note the approval of supervisors. The obvious explanation that comes to mind here is that the majority of women carried out their duties in the home, but also that the authors might have been subjected to the same disciplinary measures as the deceased. The way in which loyalty is highlighted comes across clearly in the following extracts:

> It could be mentioned that the Electricity Company gave him a gold watch on his seventieth birthday, but he was well known for his loyalty to his job (M, 22, 1904, 1992).

> Nonni was only sixteen when he started working for the Útvegsbanki in 1938, and showed the bank the loyalty and determination to work there for 44 years or until 1982 (M, 1, 1922, 1992).

Along with the home and family, the authors of the obituaries dedicate much of their discussion to the individual's work and what she or he was like at work. People are described as having integrity, being honest, predictable and reliable. It is in other words very important that the individual is someone who can be depended upon and who is trustworthy.

The discourse of the Soul is conservative in the sense that it is organised around the logic that is essential in maintaining the social structure characterising pre-modern society. This is reflected in the idea of the Soul and her selfless relation to others, which is more salient when subjects are positioned so that they are under the authority of others, for example at work. Due to the relatively better position men have in the social hierarchy, women are more often than men described as these selfless, strong souled individuals, with their loyalties to others rather than themselves. Explicit mentions of self-sacrifice and/or desire to keep the self in the shade, come up in this respect as descriptive of 14

women (28.6%) as compared with 7 men (9.2%). The numerous more subtle references to the discourse of the Soul indicate that the discourse is even more pervasive.

The authors of the obituaries stressing the extreme qualities of the good Soul, are more likely to be men than women. Of the 14 articles, the gender of 11 of their authors could be established. Out of these 9 were men, which is interesting since I could only count 32 male authors of obituaries about women over the whole sample. Women do not however monopolise the position of the strong Soul. Men are also positioned in this discourse, in particular when depicted as having spent their life serving others. Here the gender of the authors was not as clear cut. Importantly though, two of the articles were written by some sort of authority figures. One was written by an MP and the other by a man representing the board of a society the deceased had belonged to.

6.4. THE HOME

Women are firmly linked to the home in both the obituaries and the interviews. I shall argue here that the social practices that took place there, defined their relation and duties to others. Considering that the discourse of the Soul depicts the home as the field where women carry out their social practices, asking what they were supposed to do there is well in order.

6.4.1. Home as work

Describing the routines within the home as "work", is a recurrent theme in the obituaries throughout the decades, but is strongest amongst the older generations. The phrases, she has done a "good day's work", "she was a great housewife", are frequently used to summarise the life of the dead and the reader is meant to know immediately what the "good work" comprised.

Large families are valued and women who have had many children are credited with having worked hard. The number of children and grandchildren are, in this respect, counted and serve almost as indices of what the women have achieved.

> In Hamravegur the working day of Olga must often have been long. Her family was big, 5 children and the husband often away at sea. She had many things to attend to as was the case of many a fisherman's wife during this time. Life's comforts were different during this time, the washing for all the family had to be done in the night for example, because of a lack of water (F, 57, 1924, 1992).

> Their 4 children, 12 grandchildren and 8 great grandchildren were her joy the last 25 years (F, 31, 1992).

The work in the home, was something that the older women I interviewed, in particular, took pride in. Apart from production on the farm, they raised their children, and two women in their eighties very proudly showed me photos of their children and grandchildren. They are what you leave behind, as Anna (84) stated.

The significance of having a husband and children can best be seen in that the authors of the obituaries mention if women could not make these claims to worthy womanhood. Insofar as childless, unmarried women stray from normality, the attempts of the obituary authors to give the impression that they were normal, despite lacking the basic ingredient, are interesting. Women who did not have children are described as having loved the children of <u>other</u> people very much or that children were extremely fond of them. It is only in one of the older obituaries that not having children is linked to the ability of a couple to gather some wealth (F, 185, 1870, 1952). In the second extract below it is noteworthy that the author wants to emphasise that the woman in question <u>did</u> work, although she did not have to take care of a family.

> Edda did not marry but had two sons (F, 20, 1938, 1992).

> Guðrún therefore had enough to do during her life, although she did not raise a family had neither a husband nor children (F, 72, 1888, 1992).

> The marriage between Dóra and Guðmundur was very prosperous although they did not have children (F, 96, 1895, 1982).

Not surprisingly the woman as the home-maker is given credit for how guests are treated and the feast table stands as a metaphor of her hospitality. That there is ample to eat and to drink is the hallmark of the good housekeeper. In this respect Dagný Kristjánsdóttir (1995) has related the giving of food in Icelandic novels to the struggle between men and women. Whereas men own the food, women give it away. Discussions of homes in the obituaries frequently bring up the hostess's hospitality. Satiating the hunger of others is her responsibility, her work. It crystallises the sharing, caring part of her femininity. One could imagine that women's resistance to men might have worked through these means and, indeed, the interests of men and women do not always coincide. In discussions of the home, women's hospitality is mentioned for 30.6 % (15) of them, contrasting with 17.1% (13) of the men. This is a striking difference particularly when we bear in mind that the hospitality in the obituaries of the men is often attributed to their spouse's efforts.

6.4.2. Taking care of others' needs

The practices in the home have increasingly been geared towards making the home a private, personal sphere for the family. Privacy, Susan Moller Okin (1991) argues, has several meanings. It can refer to the space where intimate relations are developed with others; a space where individuals can temporarily shed their roles; and find time to develop their minds (p. 90). These functions have all been given a great emphasis as Baumeister (1986) has stressed, in connection with the development of individuality. These concerns are to be found in the discourse of the Soul where the responsibilities women have in caring for and making possible the privacy of others are elaborated upon. The epigraph "she made a good home for her husband and children" is a clichéed description from the obituaries. Women's caring for others is important when their character is judged in the obituaries, and it is portrayed as intrinsic to their own regulation of themselves. Women are described as having placed great value and pride in their home, and as going to great lengths in trying to make everyone who lived there feel

comfortable. They put the care of the home and other family members before their own indulgences.

> Grandmother was a good actress, she acted for many years with the acting company in Ísafjörður, often the lead role. I remember how proud I was of her. The home though never suffered because she always got up very early (F, 39, 1909, 1992).

Metaphorical references are frequently made to the kind, warm heart of the mother, as I discussed earlier, and how its warmth filled the home. In 22.4% (16) of the obituaries about women, the warm, cosy and congenial atmosphere of the home is mentioned, in contrast with 6.5% (5) of the men. When the authors of the obituaries wish to make a particularly strong reference to how nice a home was, they mention how they felt like part of the family once they were within its confines.

> The attractive and cultural atmosphere of the home, was of course due to all of the family but primarily it was though, in this home as in other homes, due to the housewife, who created such a feeling that every guest who walked in through the door felt as if he was at home (F, 142, 1886, 1972).
>
> It was therefore always a particular pleasure for me when I visited the couple on Klapparstígur 17. There I was always welcomed with a warm fireplace, the open embrace of the couple [húsbændur] and the housewife's laden feast table (M, 35, 1992).

The atmosphere of the home is frequently metaphorised in terms of weather: warm and bright, indicating how it provides a shelter from the capricious weather outside. It is here that the family gathers together and is taken care of. As the extract above showed, there was a great emphasis on creating a congenial atmosphere, making home a haven for the expression of emotions and feelings. In this sense the work of the housewife was necessary in creating a space were members of the family and visitors could relax and, as Okin phrased it earlier, "shed their roles".

> Her caring for her home, the well-being of her children and husband never ceased (F, 57, 1924, 1992).
>
> Although my parents moved to Kaplaskjólsvegur with us their daughters, Verkó was always the centre of existence. The playground was beside it

> so it was shorter to run when something was wrong or when the stomach was empty. Big Anna was my soother, she kissed away the tears and bandaged the numerous wounds that accompany the play of youth (F, 31, 1917, 1992).

The home is important in the obituaries of men as well. As with women, it is the place where they enjoy being with their family and entertaining guests, and they play an important role in making the home a safe haven for all the others. Descriptions of how they liked to potter around in the garden, their tidiness, and how they were dab hands at fixing, mending and building, often occur. Authors frequently mention how the family was what gave men greatest joy and occupied their minds most of all. When the wife is mentioned, the home is often mentioned subsequently, as well as their family. The nurturing qualities of the home were, however, most clearly linked to the efforts of the housewife, and the husband enjoyed her efforts like everyone else.

Just how important the home is for intimate relations can be seen in that it is used as an indicator of how well suited the couple who live there are for each other. The home, in other words, stands as a symbol of the couple's relationship.

> They worked incredibly well together [samhent = same hand], the neatness and smartness outdoors and indoors is a good example, and they have rightly received rewards for their surroundings and Kárastígur 16, which they built during their first years together (M, 65, 1925, 1992).

When the couple is described the emphasis is on the housewife's domesticity, whereas men are frequently described as having had a good collection of books, and how they enjoyed reading and studying in the home. The men develop their minds whilst the housewife creates a pleasant atmosphere for them to do so.

6.4.3. The misfits

Femininity, as articulated by my interviewees and in the obituaries, reaches its pinnacle in motherhood and the housewife. These in turn have a place in the fabric of the

community, the home. In its privacy the heart rules, whereas the public is the domain of the mind. As Svava in her short story noted, the housewife did not need her brain, the heart with its instincts could resume its place.

Jacqueline Rose has pointed out how "most women do not painlessly slip into their roles as women, if indeed they do at all" (1983, p. 9). Sometimes this pain slipped through in both the interviews and the obituaries. Femininity is a source of angst as well as fulfilment, or why else would women be so relieved to disappear to the "other world"? The narrower the definitions are of femininity, the harder it is to "live" it. The very statement "I am happy with my lot" frequently made in the interviews, by women conforming to "normal" femininity, in itself implies the possibilities of a different course of life. It seemed, as I am about to discuss in chapter 7, that sometimes the female role had closed the door on opportunities to learn and to expand the mind.

Considering the emphasis on children in the cultural definition of femininity, not having, or being unable to bear children must have been a source of considerable pain for some women. Here I had to read between the lines. As I interviewed two elderly sisters, I had made a note in my transcript of an awkward silence from one of them who had neither married nor had children, as her sister very proudly showed me photos of her children and grandchildren. Most distressing however was an obituary discussing the difficult "fate" of a childless, married woman. Mental illness and possibly suicide can be inferred from the descriptions of her "battle" in life (F, 105, 1933, 1992).

6.5. DISCUSSION

The Soul and duty are closely inter-connected. Within pre-modern society women assumed well defined duties. Failing to do so amounted to blasphemy and could bring on serious moral indignation. Their duties were to others and to God. Since the direction of

the path of life is not their choice, but one that is determined by higher authorities, it followed that neither fate nor duties in life should be questioned.

Due to the structure of society, the older women in particular, are more likely to find themselves in the discourse of the Soul than the discourse of the Chieftain. The natural link that the community seems to perceive between women and the care of the home, makes it more difficult for them to portray their excellence publicly.

Looking at the two discourses together it thus seems that individuality is central in depictions of masculinity, whereas femininity always implies a self that gels with the needs of others, be it the "man" (husband) or the "child". As Dimen (1989) argues, "masculinity" points to the kind of adult man who is responsible for himself. Femininity, on the other hand, implies responsibility for others. Considering the negative way in which self-elevation is valued within the discourse of the Soul, these discursive truths, coupled with economic standards, conspire cumulatively to sustain the widespread (particularly feminine) epidemic within Iceland, which is "to suffer in silence".

CHAPTER 7: MODERN DISCOURSES, DISCURSIVE TENSIONS AND STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE

7.1. INTRODUCTION

The discourses of the Chieftain and the Soul were pushed into the foreground by a society that differed from contemporary society in terms of structure and social practices. The onset of modernity not only introduced new ideas, but presented needs and desires hitherto unknown. In general, modernity has made claims on individuals that they have neither encountered nor dealt with before.

Whereas women's expectations of their future have changed substantially, they still shoulder many of the same responsibilities as their mothers and grandmothers, such as care of the young and the home, causing tensions between conflicting discursive truths. The established ways of doing things and thinking about them are not always amenable to modern society, emphasising choice and self-fulfilment. The sharp institutional division between private and public responsibilities stands in stark contrast with how individuals, especially women, have had to juggle their responsibilities and conscience. This pertains in particular to mothers, who culturally have become the embodiment of selflessness and care of others but, in the course of their own lives might want to further their careers and leave their mark on public life. The different images of femininity, against which women are measured, carry their distinctive baggage and inscriptions of social values. For many women, they do not mix psychologically and certainly not economically. In finding a balance in their life, and carving a niche for themselves, these women are pioneers and have, as Rowbotham (1993) claims, "stumbled into uncharted historical territory" (p.207).

The changes in the meaning of individuality that have followed in the wake of modernity have captured the imagination of many social theorists. Most agree on the diversity of

contemporary culture, but point out how it highlights individuality and "inner" experience. In this connection Baumeister (1986), reflecting on American society, argues how: "Individuality has become a "right" rather than duty or achievement" (p.147). We want personal fulfilment, and strive to "create our own destiny", but we also see individuality as our "birthright". We are inundated by "choices", or, at least that is how we would like to see it, but before making these choices we face the task of finding out who we really are (p.148). In a similar vein, Giddens (1989) claims: "We have no choice but to choose". Since individual wants and needs guide choice, these need to be recognised and pinpointed and for that we are not short of help from outside forces. The media and the consumer culture have played a significant role in working towards creating and then exposing the gap between who we "are" and who we could "become". Money, seen from this perspective, becomes the currency for salvation and the liberator of our individuality. In Harvey's (1990) words, it buys ".. liberty that can be deployed to develop ourselves as free-thinking individuals without reference to others" (p.103). It enables us to do what we want to do irrespective of others. Simultaneously, experts offer their services in helping us find our "real" selves, incurring search and even therapy. We take these measures to gain personally, but in the face of an underlying collective interest, since the monitoring of the private part of our self ensures our functional orderliness in wider society. Rose (1989, p. 3) captures these changes succinctly in the following quote:

> Our thought worlds have been reconstructed, our ways of thinking about and talking about our personal feelings, our secret hopes, our ambitions and disappointments. Our techniques for managing our emotions have been reshaped. Our very sense of ourselves has been revolutionized. We have become intensely subjective beings.

In tune with the emphases on the voyage inwards, the manner of self-orientation stressed in modern society is even more individualistic than was the case in pre-modern society, causing numerous dilemmas for individuals and for society. Paradoxically, as we are becoming more dependent on the social whole, in terms of providing us with life's

necessities, the emphasis is on cultivating an individuality or creating a position in life that ensures its separateness or, more correctly, gives the illusion of independence from the wider community.

Iceland has not missed out on these developments. Various seeds have been planted through, for example, increased exposure to other cultures, but they have been left to sprout in a ground already saturated with older values. Bearing this in mind, I looked for signs of modern culture in the way subjects related to themselves both in the obituaries and in the interviews. The changes I detected were more subtle than striking, and were most likely to be found in the interviews with the youngest women or the comments women from the older generations made about them.

I shall begin this chapter with a cursory sketch of some of the shifts in emphases from pre-modern to modern society. From there I shall move on to discuss more fully their implications in outlining the discursive conflicts accompanying a changed cultural climate. Last but not least, I shall discuss how women have resisted dominant ideas and tried to have a hand in shaping the future constitution of femininity.

7.2. THE MODERN INDIVIDUAL

My older interviewees frequently commented on how much society had changed in their lifetime. Similar observations were made by younger women, when comparing their lives with the lives of their foremothers. The changes amounted to no less than "magic" as Hildur's (58) grandfather had put it. These have not only affected people's material circumstances but, as I argued earlier, have had repercussions both on how we relate to others and ourselves.

7.2.1. Rationality - emotionality

Giddens (1991) has suggested that in modern society "personality" has replaced the earlier Enlightenment's natural "character". This ties in with the increasing emphasis on formulating what the self's depth consists of, for self-understanding. As he argues:

> Personality differentiates between people and suggests that their behaviour is clue to their inner selves; in personality development, feelings rather than rational control of action are what matters in the formation of self-identity (p. 171).

In the interviews personality and character were discussed fairly intermittently, one being able to replace the other without much being lost in meaning. Whereas the discourse of the Chieftain had stressed particularly rational control, and the control of reason over emotions, this is not necessarily seen as healthy in modern society. As a change of emphasis it is interesting since the realm of the emotions has traditionally been allocated to women.

Feelings are linked to the idea of the character in an interesting way in the Icelandic language, revealing in part how people make sense of them. It is quite common to refer to characters or personalities as being either "light" (léttur) or "heavy" (þungur), pointing there to the individual's temperament, as well as implying that our emotional responses are ingrained in the character. The individual with a "light" disposition is not weighed down by his or her feelings, whereas the individual with the "heavy" disposition is. The reference to characters, on the other hand, as being either "open" or "closed", indicate how we relate emotionally to others, and has increasingly found its way into the vocabulary of the younger people. One of my younger respondents, Dóra (19), described her ideal man as "open", explaining how she wanted him to be able to tell her how much he cared about her. The ones who are "open" reveal their feelings and thoughts but do not bottle them up inside. Both Laufey (28) and Hafrún (53) described men as being more "closed" than women in this respect. Ágústa (29) struck the same chord:

Á: I think women are, ye-es, I think their feelings are not buried as deep or something.

A: Yes.

Á: But then again it can vary a lot between individuals.

A: Yes.

Á: There are some men who are emotional, but I think they are somehow harder in relation to it (laughter).

A: Yes.

Á: Or different. Yes different.

As I discussed in the chapter on the discourse of the Soul, displays of emotionality have been deemed more acceptable from women than men, in the context of motherhood. The role of emotionality within the context of the discourse of the Soul is not, though, the same as within the individualism of modern society. Whereas emotionality in the discourse of the Soul is considered necessary for the nurturing and caring of children and the home, in modern discourses it is construed as signifying that a person is in touch with his or her core individuality and therefore able to have relationships. Men are here seen to be somewhat at a loss and this has recently been the source of some concern in the media, both in Iceland and Britain. Men's emotional life has been described as requiring "expert" intervention and, as Foucault (1990) would probably have read from this situation, regulation. Modernity, in other words, stresses how emotions have to be accessible and "reasonably" understood, for a "healthy" personal balance. As the individual's self colonises more and more public space for his or her personal autonomy, the intensity of the relation to self is increased. The emphasis placed on care and attention to one's self has never been greater.

7.2.2. To sacrifice or to "be" oneself

The younger women explicitly talked about prioritising their own needs and wishes. Hrefna (16) replied, when I asked her whether she thought her womanhood would

require any sacrifices: "No, no. I do what I want to and no-one can stop me." The importance of ruling one's self and experience came across clearly in the following rather amusing dialogue, when Hrefna informed me that her parents just had to come to terms with how she had to "own" her own experiences, including those inflicted on her by her adolescent hormones.

> H: But why can't I have my own experience that I can share with my children?
>
> A: Mm.
>
> H: I have to get it (the experience) myself. I can't run to mum and dad and say (changes her voice mockingly): "Mum and dad what should I do?" They are (inaudible). I have to own my own experience myself.
>
> A: Decide about your life?
>
> H: Yes of course you are deciding about your life when you are sharing your experience with your children.
>
> A: Mm.
>
> H: And then you have to have gone through something yourself.
>
> A: Yes, exactly.
>
> H: You just have to be allowed to go through your own hormonal period in peace.

What is implicit in this dialogue is the value placed on being exposed to experience in order to be better equipped to take on the world. Sólveig (16) struck the same chord as Hrefna, when she metaphorically described difficulties as big hills you have to climb and experience for your own good. The younger women thirst for experiences of a varied kind. They see it as making them more adept at making decisions, to choose for themselves.

Erla (59) expressed some very positive thoughts towards younger women and the changes she could see in their position, in contrast to what she had experienced. Indeed, her daughter's claim to independence, seemed to have contributed to her own self-esteem and pride in her work, and she often quoted her. Modern young women, she said with some relish, say "I with a capital I". It is no longer part of their duty to put others before

their own "needs" and aspirations. Self-sacrifices do not really wash well with the youngest generations.

Younger women were also identified as being less afraid to take the initiative, for example in sexual relations. They, no less than the young men, call up their object of desire and some of them have few qualms about making their feelings for them explicit. Here though there were individual differences. Dóra (19), for example, claimed she was herself too shy to take the first step. Perhaps, she explained, out of fear of rejection.

Women who had reached middle age were less adamant about putting themselves first. Halla (50) phrased it interestingly as "daring to be oneself". The choice of words signifies somehow that putting oneself first is not always the accepted practice in the community, and that one has to draw on inner strength to assert one's individuality. Despite this cautionary attitude, the interviews revealed how women from older generations, who had been steered into the traditional female role, had chosen to take advantage of the changed atmosphere in society. Some attended evening classes to improve their education and increase their range of choices.

7.2.3. From the dutiful to the desiring subject

Modern discourses of individuality stress how choices have to harmonise with our inner desires. This has been transferred to motherhood in particular. Elísabet (45) when discussing modern women, motherhood and careers claimed: "you have to choose, you have to choose". Vilborg (47), when comparing her experience of motherhood to that of her 28 year old daughter, said:

> V: She is, now she wants this. This is something she really wanted to do and she enjoys it in a different way to how I did when I was 16.

Vilborg described how motherhood was her daughter's choice and how it incurred the fulfilment of what she "wanted", whereas she had earlier described her own experience in terms of fulfilment of "duties". This entails a change in subject position from the dutiful to the desiring subject, where desire emanates from within, but duties are imposed from the outside. Insofar as motherhood is the fulfilment of an inner need, it constitutes therefore a "natural" choice.

7.3. DISCURSIVE TENSIONS

As can be imagined, the different discursive truths did not always mix and different subject positions were inconsistent. Most of the time we manage to work through these and give the impression of smoothness, which is the hallmark of the unitary individual. However, the discursive incompatibilities are never far behind and surfaced in particular in the complaints one generation lodged against another, as well as in the telltale signs of unease that the respondents displayed about their own positions. Women's attitudes towards the home were also surprisingly ambivalent, considering that the discourses of the Chieftain and the Soul describe it as the proper locus for women's practices and activities. The younger women in particular expressed wishes to transcend its boundaries.

7.3.1. The ambivalent status of the home

Deleuze (1986, p.71) notes how power relations are determined not least by distribution in space and ordering in time. This draws our attention to how social practices are enclosed and controlled and how time is divided and ordered. For privacy you do not only need space for yourself, you also need time to attend to yourself. As I have already argued, young Icelandic women expect to be able to put their own needs first and be independent. This requires freedom from the demands of others, which the subject position offered to them in the discourse of the Soul does not allow. Insofar as the home is marked as particularly feminine, some tensions inevitably arise about the part it should

play in the women's lives. I have already discussed how women ensure the privacy and comfort of others in the home. A question that arises in this climate of individualism, is how are their own needs for privacy and independence catered for?

Okin (1991) cites Virginia Woolf's desire for a room of her own, to reflect on the need for privacy to develop mental abilities. To be somewhere in peace with your own thoughts and studies is necessary. The importance of developing mental abilities came out strongly in the interviews with women but, interestingly, especially with the younger ones, the home was conceptualised as standing in their way.

To understand why being in the modern home is seen as restrictive, I think it is important to know that the women conceptualised their thoughts as limited by the size of their "world". The world you inhabit restricts your experience and thereby your knowledge. A word the women chose repeatedly when describing their optimal relation to the world, was the Icelandic word "víðsýni", literally meaning the ability to see far, but used to refer to the scope of one's knowledge. Judging from the interviews, staying in the home restricts your view. In this sense, Vilborg (47) pointed out how the home had tied her to a smaller world and how the turning point in her life was when she started working outside the home "because it made her world bigger". Hildur (58) in the following account, draws out how what is in your world defines what you think about and the changes that have occurred between generations of women.

> H: ... It has of course become different now from the time I was raising my children, then they were the only thing you thought about.
>
> A: Yes.
>
> H: only the children and the home.

The same ideas, in somewhat more elaborate wording, came up in the obituaries.

> The home was Birna's world, her children her life. In this world love and kindness reigned (F, 153, 1908, 1972).

An interesting word in Icelandic, used to describe mental abilities is "heimskur", generally meaning stupid, but originally referring to those whose knowledge is narrowed by the very fact that they are always at home (heima = at home). The Icelandic proverb "a child raised at home is stupid" (heimskt er heimaalið barn), states this more directly. This stands in stark contrast to the glorification of the work that takes place at home in both the discourse of the Chieftain and the Soul.

The home is seen as the pinnacle of privacy and it is to the realm of the home women retreat when they have children. This posed some dilemma for the younger women since, insofar as it is seen as constituting a rather small world, it could possibly give them an inferior position in society. Although the practices in the home can be a source of pleasure contributing to a sense of pride and achievement, the women described the home as potentially isolating them and narrowing their "world", thereby rendering them less equipped to deal with the world outside it.

Despite emphasis on putting one's self first, motherhood and its responsibilities, my interviewees argued, had changed their own relation to the world (for example, Elísabet 45, Laufey 28, Sigga 33). In this respect, Sigga (33) discussed how motherhood changed the way she thought about things. When asked whether it influenced her attitude to life she replied:

> S: It changes a lot. Yes it does. You start thinking in a different way.
>
> A: Yes.
>
> S: You know, you take second place.

The younger women in particular had ambivalent feelings towards the home and I noted, when discussing motherhood and domestic duties, that some of the women from the younger generation (Laufey, 28; Katrín, 25) were inclined to talk about their friends as "thinking about nothing else".

K: You know, I know many who are convinced that their role is to stay in the home and think about the children.

A: Yes.

K: And they never think that they could do something else.

A: No.

K: These are just women my age.

Although motherhood, due to the structure of society in this sense, calls for selflessness on behalf of mothers, becoming a mother was by no means construed as a negative event in the women's lives. Not getting out of the home's boundaries on the other hand was. When and under what condition women went into the home seemed to matter. Sigga's (33) account of motherhood contrasted with the obituaries and some of the accounts of the older women, in that it was construed more as "a phase in her life", than "her life". She emphasised how she had already travelled, educated herself and as she put it, "done everything", by the time she had her child.

One of the drawbacks to being situated primarily in the home was that within it women felt dependent on others. Moving away from the home, or spending time away from the home, working or studying, was repeatedly identified as a move from dependence to independence. In this sense you would be removing yourself from the influence of parents or partner, the danger being that they, instead of "you", were making your decisions, deciding about your opinion and so on. You had to get away from them to develop your sense of autonomy. Katrín (25) identified in this connection how going to college was a turning point in her life. When probed why, she responded:

K: I felt, then I at first started thinking more about things, forming my own opinions.

A: Yes?

K: Just by starting to learn.

A: Yes.

K: And struggling to get away from the parents (here referring to their influence).

Later on in the interview she elaborated more on this in relation to how she would raise a daughter. She said that, in raising her, she would try to ensure that she formed her own opinions instead of reflecting those of her parents. Hrefna and Sólveig, both 16 and living with their parents, struck the same chord, stressing how they wanted to be independent and decide for themselves instead of taking orders from their parents.

Women from the older generations who had primarily been housewives seemed more dependent on their husbands. In this respect, Elísabet (45) noted how, when she become a widow, she found herself in the difficult situation of never having taken care of the home's finances, affecting her ability to take care of herself and be independent. As she said herself, having to take care of these things made her more "impudent" in relation to other people.

In accounting for who had most authority in the home, when push came to shove, it seemed that with the older generations, it was the word of the husband that contained most of the authority. Vilborg (47) implicitly referred to this when she especially made a note of how in her marriage she did not have to ask for her husband's permission to participate in a hobby outside the home. Laufey (28), furthermore, discussed how her mother did not want to re-marry now that she was divorced from her domineering husband and really was enjoying her sense of freedom.

Figure 7.1. The transition from dependency to independence

Dependency	-->	Independence
Home/ Parents	-->	School/education
Home/ Partner	-->	Work/skills

Women's autonomy and individuality is, in other words, nurtured outside the home. Moving from dependency to independence and the state of being narrowminded to

broadminded, requires a spatial transition from the home to the world outside it. This contrasts with how the home has been idealised as the natural realm for women's social relations, where they learn the necessary skills to function in society.

7.3.2. Inter-subjective tensions

The changes that have ocurred with new ideas about how the self should be located in relation to others, puts strain on the relationship between different generations. The obituaries were ripe with moralisation directed at younger generations where the dominant themes were "materialism" and "selfishness". The following extract more or less displays the form these moralisations took. It should be noted that it was, I am inclined to say "of course", written by a man.

> The stamina was great and the sense of duty clear, - and the women during that time did not consider it appropriate to avoid responsibility, even though it brought on some difficulties.... We who know it (the mentality) think that manhood and noblemindedness have somewhat diminished so that now it is almost considered better to accept than to give (F, 184, 1862, 1952).

The authors of the obituaries lamented how the values of the discourse of the Soul, such as putting others before the self, is fast belonging to a generation of the past. Indeed, sometimes, the concept "generation gap" is used to refer to just this. The so-called "turn of the century" generation was frequently compared to the younger generation, with the latter found wanting.

> It became her lot, like that of so many Icelanders in those days to have to start working for daily needs as soon as they were able to be of use to anyone. Then the adolescents were not pampered like today (F, 163, 1902, 1992).

> I really don't know which time period he would rate more highly, because he thinks, not without reason, that prosperity and happiness are not proportionately more now than before, when compared to the fuss and amount of money (M, 91, 1892, 1962).

The difficulties that the turn of the century generation encountered are seen to have made them into a sturdier breed, harbouring more of the desired values than younger

generations, who have enjoyed an easier lifestyle. In this sense they are portrayed as having feathered the nests of the younger generation with their altruism and hard work, which the latter, in tune with their alleged selfishness, do not appear to appreciate.

Similar themes came up in the interviews. Those of the older women, who had followed the course of female tradition, and taken care of their homes and children, expressed concern and even anger at younger women, who had different perceptions of themselves and their role in life. Descriptions such as "selfish" or "demanding" often cropped up, whereas younger women used the term "narrowminded" to describe their mothers, relating to my earlier discussion about the link between the size of one's world and one's mentality. These frictions took on their strongest and most emotional form in the relationships between mothers and daughters.

Halla (50) discussed how modern society has nurtured materialism. The young people, she claimed, have been raised to "demand". Not only do they demand material things, young women "demand" that their partners help out with the domestic chores. In that sense Hafrún (53) did not think the younger women were quite fair. Their strong sense of right, she argued, sometimes leads them into being too hard on their boyfriends or husbands. Instead of having the domestic chores over and done with, the lovebirds argue about them to no avail. She said:

> H: And this can often cause... Look, the young women today, it is such a dominant thought with them that they are the equals of men.
>
> A: Mm.
>
> H: And I think that should come without questioning.
>
> A: Mm.
>
> H: But this has to be worked through in some other way.

The main culprits were here identified as educated women, as they were more likely to be unreasonable towards their men. Although she considered herself to be a firm supporter of equality, she argued that women have to be fair. If the man works more outside the

home, then the woman should not expect him to do as much in the home as she, who is there all day. She also saw educated women as more likely to make material demands. Hafrún (53) spoke about her resentment: "How am I who have no education to support you while you are learning?"

The younger women, in turn, expressed anger at being expected to be as selfless as their mothers. Laufey (28) discussed the tension between her mother and herself as resulting from their different opinions regarding how women should behave with their partners. Her mother, she said, thought she should "sacrifice herself".

> L: And she has different attitudes to life than I do now, for example. She thinks it is all right that I sacrifice myself, as it is termed.
>
> A: Yes.
>
> L: She doesn't think it is unfair, because that is what she did herself. And she often says to me, I did this myself.

When I asked Hafrún (53) about the differences she felt there were between herself and her daughter, she again brought up the willingness to sacrifice yourself. Katrín (25) identified the situation of women from her mother's generation as having been "miserable":

> K: Yes, and you know. I think they thought it came without saying that they should be at home and, think about it, you didn't <u>even</u> get paid for it.

Here Katrín's (25) anger is not so much directed towards her foremothers as towards the social context which made them accept their roles unquestioningly. Nonetheless, considering her overall emphasis on how you have to stand up for yourself, she seemed to be finding it difficult to understand why they did not rebel or perhaps feel the same anger she did. It is for her as for many of the younger women that the absence of their mothers' selves, or women from their mothers' generation, seems to have created a huge presence in their lives, and put the mothers in a relatively powerful position in relation to their daughters. Insofar as the mothers juxtapose themselves to their daughters, who are in similar social situations, their self-denial undermines their daughters' self-assertion.

The mothers casts themselves as the good subjects, "holier than thou", whereas the daughters struggling in the same role, but in a different way, by definition have to be selfish, demanding. What has to be kept in mind here is that the older mothers take their position, not only against the backdrop of cultural values, where they have themselves followed convention, but in defence of their own identity, explaining their passionate and emotional responses. Their attitudes figure culturally as the morally sound ones, but have a part in creating a feeling of general unease and even guilt among the younger women.

7.3.3. Intra-subjective tensions

The rigid narratives in the obituaries do not provide much space for revealing intra-subjective tensions, although the authors (see 6.4.5.) sometimes infer how the difficulties the deceased encountered, in his or her life, might have taxed them. The interviews, conversely, although conducted along the line of polite conventions the social sciences dictate, reveal more about the mixed feelings women have towards contrasting social expectations.

As could be seen in my account of the tensions, in particular between mothers and daughters, passion and anger often festered in the background. Together with the women's articulation and awareness of the power relations they found themselves immersed in everyday, there is also the reassurance of convention they have so far survived in. Some of them seemed to fear what might happen if that was taken away from them. An overall message with respect to changes, especially from older women, was that we need to tread carefully.

In judging how these discourses have taxed the women psychologically, I again, as when inferring about the "misfits" in the discourse of the Soul, had to read between the lines. After all, as the discourse of the Soul commands, "thou shalt not complain". A question I therefore had to ask myself, when conducting the analysis, was how the subjects could

get their frustration across to me, yet present a seamless social facade in the interview? I looked for signs of anger, irritation and confusion, as well as paying attention to the gaps I was invited to fill in my respondents' accounts. In this respect, the jokes and satirical stances the women took were particularly interesting. There was humour but also social irony in the responses I got to my questions. As such they served as a channel for my respondents to get across their own anger and frustration with the way things are. I shall on the following pages trace the cost some of these contradictions had for the women and then proceed to cover how women used their sense of humour to get their anger across.

7.3.3.1. Living with contradictions

It is difficult to express a passion for something or dwell on the charm of a particular situation, when you are trying to get across your dissatisfaction with the larger social structure that embeds it. In this respect, Grimshaw (1993a) has pointed out how an image might have an "allure" to us, even though we are aware of its place within an ideological system that is oppressive to women. Walkerdine (as quoted in Probyn, 1993) calls for a reflexivity of this on behalf of the researcher; we need to account for "positive recognition", referring to how sometimes we come across images and events which have a positive pull. We have invested in them emotionally, as Weedon (1987) termed it. It could be argued similarly that sometimes we make a "negative recognition", when, for example, we come across an image which we are supposed to like, but our gut-feeling is negative. Jaggar (1989) refers to such feelings as "outlaw emotions", our feelings then stray from what is expected of us, or are socially inappropriate.

What this means is that our heartstrings are being pulled at, from different directions. In the most extreme cases this results in a tug of war with important psychological consequences for the subject. The positivities consist of having our feminine identity confirmed, for example, when men find us attractive or when children see their mothers as the omnipotent centre of the universe. The negativities consist of, for example, not

finding some of the accepted social practices pleasurable; not wanting to be the object of someone's gaze, or the mother's guilt when she resents putting her child's need before her own. These all feature in our day to day experiences, due not least to the conflicting messages we are given about what particular images should mean to us.

In my data I found that most of these conflicts were centred around the role and place of the mother and housewife. Most women in their twenties have been raised seeing their mothers in the role of the traditional housewife[1], but have themselves been exposed to the idea that women can have a life beyond the confines of the home. Their attitude towards it is thus simultaneously seeing it as a potential "trap", and as a place containing various pleasurable events in their relationships with child and spouse. My respondents who were mothers, be it the result of "choice" or an unplanned turn of events, identified motherhood as having constituted a major turning point in their lives because of the changes it brought on (see 7.3.1). This strikes a chord with Oakley's (1993) argument that, motherhood, as construed in Western society, demands the entire restructuring of one's personality, the needs of the child have to take priority even when they clash with the needs of the mother. There is thus a paradox in that motherhood, construed in Western society as being brought about by an inner need, involves putting others' needs first. Insofar as it is a "selfish" choice, the responsibility is yours, the community has no duty towards you. Rowbotham (1993) described this viewpoint as: "you've made your bed, now lie in it". Yet, motherhood, as the obituaries bear witness to, is idealised as part of, and even the prerequisite to, respectable femininity in the community.

It is probable that the very inconsistencies in what is publicly expected and privately aspired for, accounted for the very angry positions daughters took, in relation to their mothers. Their view of their mothers fed in with their own view of themselves. The home signifies as much the fulfilment of important desires, as the place where autonomy

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[1]According to Kaplan (1992) women constituted 29% of the workforce in the 1970s, but by 1980 the percentage had risen to 65%.

and independence might have to be compromised. At the time I conducted the interviews, Katrín (25) was expecting her first child. An articulate, thoughtful woman, she had strong opinions on how you need to learn to stand on your own two feet, stressing repeatedly the value of independence. In the aftermath of having her child, her worst fears seem to have materialised. She is psychologically trapped within the confines of the home, and has been diagnosed with agoraphobia[2]. Erla (59), who had been a housewife all her adult life, expressed sentiments of stifling confinement in the home. She metaphorically described how when she felt too restricted, she had to go to the balcony for a breath of fresh air. Her account contained a number of references to lost opportunities due to her feminine duties, as well as pride and pleasure in her identity as a woman.

7.3.3.2. Humour as a social critique

I mentioned earlier how I found myself looking for the incomplete and the implied in the analysis. It did not matter whether I was interviewing an 88 year old woman or a bolshie 16 year old, all were skilled in what Haraway (1991) has termed "serious play". Humour, irony and sarcasm were deployed to account for the tense meeting points of incompatible or impossible situations. It was a playful act of exposure through subversions and ridicule, where the joker was able to put things into fresh perspective, allowing for scathing remarks in a position that supposedly is not serious.

Some of the jokes were directed explicitly at men, for example, when two elderly sisters, Anna (84) and Kristín (88) made a comment on how men persistently believed they were the best ones to rule. They were implying that perhaps women were of a different opinion. What I found most interesting, though, was how sarcastic women were about

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[2]Bordo (1993, p. 176) cites Brodsky and Hare-Mustin on how more than 80% of agoraphobics are women. She argues: "Agoraphobia, too, which often develops shortly after marriage, clearly functions in many cases as a way to cement dependency and attachment in the face of unacceptable stirrings of dissatisfaction and restlessness".

their own situation, or the condition of women in general. Elín (84) told me how "rest" for women in pre-modern society, consisted of repairing the torn clothes of men. Hildur (58), reflecting on the dreams of her youth, made fun of herself for believing that they ever could come true. Her jokes expressed her sentiment of "how could I have been so stupid ..", but also her regret at not having had the chance to realise her dreams.

Erla (59) laughingly retold a joke that was a favourite with her daughter. Since both she and her partner were busy building their career, neither of them had much time available for domestic tasks and this could pose some practical difficulties, if they decided to have a child. Her daughter's joke was that both her and her partner needed a wife to take care of these matters. She could become pregnant but would need the wife to look after the baby for her. The joke sums up the difficulties and dilemmas women face in combining motherhood with a career. She had bought into the idea of finding fulfilment through having a child, but also that of being successful in her job. To take care of the child she would have to resort to the same measures as society at large, get a wife; the joke of course being that she as a woman should be one.

On a more positive note: Although unpleasant for the subject, tensions often provide the incentive to move on. As Jaggar (1989) explained, outlaw emotions can inspire us to rise against convention. Insofar as our gut reactions to what is happening around us are unpleasant, they provoke us to work towards a change in the situations towards something that might "feel more right".

7.4. RESISTANCE

The ability to transform the unthought into thought has been the impetus behind the women's movement and the prerogative for the unfolding of resistance. Everyday

practices have been problematised in tune with the feminists' slogan that "the personal is political". The habitual, unnoteworthy and marginal has been made central and drawn women into the act of resisting.

Experience intersects with reflexivity and limits on experience restrain our thoughts. Major restrictions on thought are, as I have already argued, time and space. Habits, traditions the "obvious" have to be questioned. There has to be space and time for new practices and different ideas that alter or throw a new light on how we have previously thought about, and even "experienced", certain events or traditions. Distribution of space can restrict practices likely to increase our knowledge of the rest of the world, and time can be ordered so that new experiences cannot be fitted in. It limits what we can see, where and when, and what we can say. Insofar as these limits tie in with the construction of femininity, I am inclined to agree with Probyn's (1993, p. 3) argument that: "gender must be represented as processes that cut through experience". The feminist resistance, in this respect, through transforming the "unsaid" into "said", has been instrumental in opening up whole new vistas of experiences for women, influencing the development of femininity.

> Thought thinks its own history (the past), but in order to free itself from what it thinks (the present) and be able finally to 'think otherwise' (the future) (Deleuze, 1986, p. 119).

I could, at times, detect some discursive tensions, or what could be termed "resistance to resistance". Some of my respondents, for example, Gunnlaug (38), Hafrún (53), and Halla (50), found themselves having mixed feelings about the women's movements, considering them to go "too far" in their quest for equality, even demanding privilege. For the youngest respondents the issue had a different dimension. Sólveig (16) could not really see that there was all that much to fight for, since for her equality between men and women was so self-evidently already established. The resistance to the feminist messages themselves show, more than anything else, how their "truths" do not stand outside power.

In Iceland, feminist ideas frequently conflict with dominant definitions of femininity and its regulation. Insofar as many of the women agreed with traditional ideas, they did not identify themselves as part of the feminist resistance. Nonetheless, despite their compliance with convention, most of them had reflected on, and were perceptive of, the general power situation in which they were embedded and, indeed, took up some of the discursive spaces that the feminist movement had carved out, to resist from. Most of the women referred to at least some of the strategies of resistance that I am going to outline below.

Different schools of feminism have left their mark on the women's movement in Iceland and politicised various aspects of women's lives, but their effects with respect to my respondents could most clearly be felt in how what used to be a clear dividing line between the roles of men and women, had been blurred and problematised. The women were less likely to allocate power to institutions, such as parliament, despite it often coming up as a criteria for how much women have achieved, than in terms of social relations, in particular as they were experienced in the home.

The idea that women have been oppressed by men annoyed some of the women, and they saw that viewpoint as rather limited. Although Laufey (28) clearly identified spheres where men have been privileged over women, with regard to pay and so on, she did not subscribe to the viewpoint that women were passive victims of men. Vilborg (47) took this point even further and claimed to know of many examples where it actually was the other way around.

> V: I know many examples of that and through the centuries we know that women have often controlled what happened in the world.
>
> A: Mm.
>
> V: Although the man might have been, and they used the men to exert themselves.

Katrín (25) pointed out how women had always had power, citing the sagas. She, as Vilborg (47) when describing how men were ruled by women, described this power as from behind the scenes, where women operate through the man.

The practice of "remote-controlling" the man, described by my interviewees, is exemplary of women finding themselves in situations not of their own making, doing their best to take charge of their own circumstances. These manipulations could bring on some possible short-term gains, but are not very effective in the long-run since they more or less reproduce the power relations already existing. They qualify more as tactics than as strategies, which De Certeau (quoted in Probyn, 1993) defines as the art of the weak, "a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus" (p.87). For a more effective strategy, in the long-run, women have tried to change the system from within, using their existing discursive positions to encourage a re-evaluation of their identity, as well as using their role as mothers to rear their children in a way that makes them fit for a more egalitarian society.

7.4.1. Not "just" a housewife, domestic tasks as "important work"

Since one of the prime references to identity is what you "do", it is important to "do" something that is culturally respected and even considered prestigious. The glorification of the housewife and her work in the obituaries, comes for most women a bit too late. The work put into home-making and domestic chores has not, as my respondents argued, been valued sufficiently amongst the living. In this respect, Erla (59), discussed how much was left to be desired in having the work of the housewife respected in earlier decades and how inevitably the first question women used to be asked was "what does your husband do?" Again jokes, such as referring to oneself as BH (mocking BA, BSc and so on) meaning just a housewife in Icelandic (bara húsmóðir), have worked to

ridicule the low worth assigned to the role of the housewife. To make the housewife visible, women have called for a recognition of an identity as housewives in their own right as opposed to being the wife of so and so.

In calling for a separate and worthwhile identity as housewives, women have deployed what Foucault called "reverse" discourse (1976, p. 101). Reverse discourse refers to how individuals use the vocabulary, legitimation and definitions they are discursively subjected to, to speak on their own behalf. The strategy has had some success and Erla (59) described how furious it made her when she was referred to as "just a housewife" or when her work was not appreciated. Considering, however, that the woman who is "just a housewife" is becoming a scarcer breed, without her tasks disappearing, a change in identity benefits only a limited number of women. Domestic tasks take up a large chunk of women's time and they have found themselves having to strike a delicate balance between the responsibilities in the home and outside of it. Many of the women I interviewed took a stance against the blind eye that is turned to women's work, rendering it invisible, and pointed out how men had to be made aware of the time and effort that goes into running the home[3]. It is "important work" and, insofar as women no longer define themselves entirely in terms of the home, and even have an identity separate from that of the housewife, the responsibility for that work needs to be shared. Ruddick (1994) has discussed the merits this strategy has with respect to mothering. Mothering, as she argues, is and should be seen as a thoughtful project.

> When mothering is construed as work, rather than an "identity" or fixed biological or legal relationship, people can be seen to engage in mothering with different expense of time at various periods in their lives and in various and often changing sexual and social circumstances (p. 35).

Although domestic chores have been successfully defined as work, motherhood did have "natural" feminine connotations for my interviewees. The youngest women saw children

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[3]I can't help but think that the glorification of the work of the housewives in the obituaries, might stem partly from the fact that their work became visible, indeed piled up, once they no longer were there to carry out their "duties".

as part of their future and, apart from one, all of the women I interviewed who were past their twenties had children. Mothering, in this respect, is seen as part of the "natural" feminine destiny and features strongly in the feminine identity.

7.4.2. Equality through education: Disciplining the daughters

One of the positive things that have followed in the wake of modernity is that women now have access to education. An obituary writer reflected on the changes that have taken place since the deceased's youth:

> It was not usual during those years that adolescents from the rural areas could carry on studying, though that was rather boys than girls in tune with the spirit of the time. Then girls were not considered to have much use for education, but that they should rather think about children and home (M, 22, 1904, 1992).

Education was for many of the women synonymous with "choice". Hildur (58) observed, in discussing the situation in a small village in Iceland, how women could only extend their choice, beyond working as housewives or in fish factories, through education. Ágústa (29), when asked about pressure to have children in rural Iceland responded that she had heard that in some villages, if girls did not leave to have an education, they settled down and had children.

The opportunity to have an education is something only the youngest generation has been raised to see as their unquestioned right. Elísabet (45), when asked whether her daughter had similar attitudes to life as she, firmly replied: "no". Her daughter's first thought was to study, not like for her, "the children and the home". In a similar vein, Gunnlaug (38) discussed how now it is seen as self-evident that you carry on studying after primary school, as it was earlier to quit. A number of the older women expressed disappointment that they had not been able to have an education, and Dóra (19) and Sólveig (16) commented on how their mothers wanted them to study because they had not been able to themselves.

Katrín (25) was of the opinion that going to college had made her more independent in forming her own opinions. Later, when asked what she would emphasise if raising a daughter, she expressed how she would be more disappointed if her daughter did not study than her son.

K: Yes also so that they won't be oppressed.

A: Yes.

K: Then I think that girls, that there is a need for them to go to school.

A: Yes.

K: And (inaudible).

A: Yes.

K: and be a bit independent.

A: Yes.

K: The boys (inaudible) are so much more assertive.

Mothers, in other words, were up in arms safeguarding the future of their daughters, wanting to rear them to a higher station in life through education. Although they allowed themselves the occasional worry about how education could lead to selfishness and materialism, they wanted it for their daughters. This links in with my previous discussion about having access to a big "world". Knowledge opens up doors to opportunities, and opportunities are what the mothers want for their daughters.

7.4.3. Disciplining the sons

Rosaldo (1974, p. 41) observed that "the most egalitarian societies are not those in which male and female are opposed or even competitors, but those in which men value and participate in the domestic life of the home". Women's resistance has gained force, not least by re-defining the duties in the home from being exclusively feminine to being a shared responsibility.

The redefinition of domestic tasks as important work has helped pave the way in demanding for that load to be shared. My data reflected this change, and the idea of equality between men and women came across strongly in relation to sharing domestic chores. The resistance of women here definitely took on the most concrete form in that mothers described how they made their sons participate in domestic tasks equally with their daughters. In their opinion sons and daughters should have to endure the same disciplinary strategies. By raising children to take it for granted that they have to share all responsibility, we would have equality not just in theory but in practice. The mothers thus see themselves as having an active role in improving the future position of women. Hildur (58) who has raised 7 children expressed this:

> A: Did you raise the boys somehow differently to the girls?
>
> H: No. Just the same as the girls. I made them clean and cook. I taught them that.
>
> A: Yes.
>
> H: And also the girls.
>
> A: Yes.
>
> H: This was divided between them and therefore they can cook today.
>
> A: They (the boys) can take care of themselves?
>
> H: Yes perfectly.
>
> A: And do that?
>
> H: I thought, of course, of course they were sometimes complaining about this, they thought this was just women's work.
>
> A: And you didn't listen to them?
>
> H: No, I didn't listen to them, because I have never thought that there was something that the women should necessarily do, and that men should necessarily do.
>
> A: Yes.
>
> H: I think it is just possible to have equality.

Ágústa (29) reflected on how unfair she had thought it as a child that her friend had to do

the dishes when her brothers could just play.

> Á: I thought this was unfair that they had to always, they (the girls) always had to do this but not them (the boys). But I think that I would now try and divide this up a bit. I think it should be a matter of course that people let their sons be just as responsible for the domestic chores as they grow older, as the girls.
>
> A: Mm.
>
> Á: Because of course, that is how equality is created.

Exposing boys to domestic chores came across as very important and a number of the women, in particular the younger ones, described it as a considerable handicap and very bad for wives or girlfriends when partners did not shoulder some of the tasks. In a sense, mothers, in teaching their sons to take care of the home, are preparing their sons as best they can for their future partners. Laufey (28) and Ágústa (29), in this respect, had strong opinions on how men should not be allowed to get away with not doing the domestic tasks. They should be house-trained by their mothers or they would see the work as something that "just happens automatically", neither appreciating its true value nor the amount of time it takes. The young women, in turn, pass this message on to their male contemporaries. Dóra (19), in describing the bantering between the boys and girls in her school, described how the boys jokingly tried to test how far they could go in voicing traditional values. One of the ways in which the boys tried to tease the girls was by suggesting that women should stay at home. This she said usually had the intended effect of enraging the girls who quickly shut them up by replying that they would never get themselves a "decent woman" if they acted like this.

Disciplining the sons in this way was obviously not something the women from the oldest generations had been acquainted to in their youth. Anna (84) sarcastically remarked how it had always been seen as more acceptable that women helped out with "men's" chores, "only the boring ones though", whereas now it has become acceptable and even desirable that men take part in "women's" chores. Indeed, describing these tasks as women's chores is no longer seen as appropriate. Both Hafrún (53) and Erla

(59) noted how these changes have resulted in a different, more positive relationship between fathers and their children.

> E: I think that they, they get to know their children and wives in a different way, from, say. Like Einar, (her husband) he only got to know his children when they were more or less grown up.
>
> A: Was that not the habit?
>
> E: No, it was like that everywhere, and it never would have occurred to him to do domestic tasks.
>
> A: No.
>
> E: So I think this turns out differently today.
>
> A: Yes, do you think this is a positive development?
>
> E: Yes, I think so. I very much enjoy seeing how well my sons bond with their children.
>
> A: Yes.
>
> E: And understand their needs just without noticing, like us mums used to before. The kids don't have to say everything outright.

Men's increasing participation in domestic chores reflects acceptance of the ideas upheld by the women's movements, on their behalf. Domestic tasks are no longer the exclusive zone of women and, as a result, vacuum cleaning and changing nappies should not inflict irrepairable damage on their masculinity. In doing so their world has changed alongside the women's. Fathers have more emotional contact with their children and operate on a more equal ground to the mothers. Indeed, bearing in mind the emphasis modern society places on being in tune with your emotions this, could result in happier, more emotionally fulfilled individuals.

7.5. DISCUSSION

I find myself in agreement with those authors of obituaries who claimed that times and morals are changing. They are, but in a more subtle way than they could have imagined and not necessarily in a way that brings on the destruction of the social structure. The halo of the worthy good Soul has started to melt over the heads of the younger women,

who consider independence and autonomy as part of their birthright, but find themselves having to make compromises as they have children. The subjective and the political intersect; insofar as women's wage levels are lower than men's, it is more "natural" that they retreat into the home as the family grows in size. As a result they put a halt on their career and endanger their economical independence.

The agency of women becomes particularly visible as they struggle to move the cultural signposts marking out how and where to lead their lives. They are no mere slaves to discursive dictates and are well able to point out which aspects of their feminine experience they treasure and which they dislike. Some of them even harbour thoughts about leaving, at least temporarily, the very site where femininity and the feminine self is located. Tackling the fear of the unknown, they leave the safe haven of their home to have an education, travel; in general they venture forth to gain experience. Pratt (1992) described the benefits of this strategy:

> So I gain truth when I expand my constricted eye, an eye that has only let in what I have been taught to see. But there have been other constrictions: the clutch of fear around my heart when I must deal with the *fact* of folks who exist, with their own lives, in other places besides the narrow circle I was raised in.... To be caught within the narrow circle of the self is not just a fearful thing, it is a lonely thing (p. 326 and 327).

It is not always necessary, let alone possible, to leave the home, and women have used their position within the home to bring on changes from the inside. In this they have showed the vision to use their position now to bring on changes later.

What counteracts ventures to transcend being the "second sex", is that modern individualism may, in part, serve to translate older ways of disciplining the self into a vocabulary that is more pleasing to the present climate of self-actualisation. The discourses of knowledge that reinforce gendered divisions and the institutions they operate are, in other words, not being sufficiently challenged. As the needs of the self are placed centrally, causes of what happens in society and "feminine destinies" are reduced to individual intentions. The change in vocabulary simply means that now women are

supposedly doing for themselves what they did out of sacred duty to God before; their previously sacred duties have, in other words, become "natural" choices. The snag, of course, is that, insofar as they are working in their own self-interest and their lives are merely the unfolding of their individual choices, the community has no responsibility towards them. Indeed, women who want to expand their world and experience find they have limited access to resources that allow them, for example, to combine career with motherhood. The overall message is that you can become whatever you want, but yet you have to do certain things to qualify for normal femininity. The decision not to have children, I argue, would not figure as a choice but as an abnormality. As I myself can testify, there is limited understanding on offer when women, due to career or other reasons, decide to postpone or even not have children at all. It is ironic, but it was strongly conveyed to me when writing this thesis, that it provided a major obstacle to my own feminine destiny of becoming a mother (other more minor obstacles, by Icelandic standards, are that I am single and penniless). To protect my "feminine integrity" I, in the end, started to refer metaphorically to this piece of work as a child that I had to carry, admittedly through a prolonged pregnancy. Only in that way could I put it across, even to women of my own age, that I did not really see the two as compatible. Femininity in other words, as this "thesis" bears witness to in more ways than one, sets a limit and puts its mark on experience.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

8.1. INTRODUCTION

> It is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.
> (Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider).

Feminists frequently complain about how difficult it has been for women to make their voice heard in Western culture. I suspect my own irritability with the incomplete and distortive attention given to women comes across in this thesis. Although I benefit from the work of older generations of feminists, who have broken the ice in drawing attention to the void around the question of women and femininity, the work I have conducted for this thesis often merely reminds me of all the work that remains to be done. In this respect, it continually amazes me that grappling with something as familiar as femininity should feel like such a pioneering study. The production of this knowledge has certainly not involved the simple act of "adding" to what exists, but has called for the deconstruction of and reading against many of the existing theories and knowledge. Hopefully, I have managed to make some noise in and out of the silence.

In this chapter I shall outline some of the theoretical implications of this study. The concepts of power and knowledge, which have been central to my approach, are addressed, and their theoretical and practical usefulness evaluated.

In stalking out the feminine territory and mapping out feminine characteristics, it has become clear to me that the personal is by and large political. Why this is so should become clearer when I draw together some of the threads of my earlier chapters, and trace how the articulation of the self and its relation with others imply gendered forms of regulation. I shall argue that it is in particular along the line of gender that images and

truths are homogenised, and that it is therefore necessary for social psychology to attend to gender in its theories. In the last section, I shall address one of the more ambitious concepts in feminist theory, “emancipation” and ask whether it is possible to find any kind of emancipatory themes in Foucault's work.

8.2. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

In chapter 2, I discussed the difficulties women have faced in conducting feminist research in social psychology. I concluded that adopting feminist concerns could only extend and enrich the discipline, yet that before this could happen the androcentric baggage that contemporary research practices and theory carry with them, would have to be unpacked. As I am now able to view in retrospect the work I have conducted, I want to present a few thoughts; firstly, about the feminist potential of Foucault's work and secondly, how these foci could improve and benefit theorisations of femininity in social psychology.

8.2.1. The feminist potential of Foucault's work

It should be clear by now that my appreciation and appropriation of Michel Foucault's ideas has not been ascetic in kind where the search has been for the pure meaning of his ideas. On the contrary, I have taken pains to stress the diverse ways in which theorists have chosen to read and use his work. I have furthermore argued that he must be read in particular ways to be of value for feminist critique. Foucault's speculations are thus not seen as a mere addition to the thoughts of a line of Father figures, whose law should be followed to a tee, but as those of an inquisitive brother placed with us in the playpen. There the interchange is productive and has several implications, which feminists can take further or bend, as they frequently do, to their own objectives.

In this work I have mainly drawn from Foucault's ideas about the relation between power and knowledge. Silverman (1985, p. 70) argues that Foucault's theory allows us to transcend the micro:macro dichotomies, and therefore by implication the opposition between individual and society. This is essential because feminist analysis requires a critical stance which neither robs women of their agency nor reduces our feminine "destinies" to individual intentions.

Foucault's insistence that power permeates all human relations has led to the criticism that "power is everywhere, and so ultimately nowhere" (Hartsock, 1990, p. 170). A popular argument levelled against Foucault in this sense, is that his approach to power is too "micro" and not sufficiently attentive to the systematic ways in which power can organise itself. Some of this can be taken to heart; Foucault frequently stressed that power operates at micro levels where it impinges on our bodies and sense of self. As I discussed in chapter 2, he also did not see it as part of his task to recommend potential ways of strategically opposing power. The feminist project of "emancipation", where the position of women within existing social framework is changed by transforming it (Humm, 1995, p.77), there departs from him.

Despite these ciriticisms, I myself have found that his insights invite attention to macro regulatory structures, rather than dismissing them. Indeed, I think that the beauty of a feminist-Foucauldian synthesis rests precisely in its forcing us to look at how the mundane aspects characterising our everyday life, the things we do without giving them a second thought, can play a part in our normalisation. It directs our attention to the importance our own self-regulation have for strategies that transcend our individual existence. In this sense, Foucault's thoughts on power and knowledge, as applied to this thesis, have been more or less in tune with Susan Bordo's (1993) adaptation of his thoughts to the feminist agenda. Bordo in her discussion of power asks for our appreciation of how:

> .. these forces are not random or haphazard, but configure to assume particular historical forms, within which certain groups and ideologies do

> have dominance. Dominance here, however, is sustained not by decree or design "from above" (as sovereign power is exercised) but through multiple processes, of different origin and scattered location," regulating the most intimate and minute elements of the construction of space, time, desire, embodiment (pp. 26-27).

Foucault's approach clearly recognises forces that are pervasive and structuring in our lives; institutions often have become channels for the exercise of power, and discursive images and truths often are clearly homogenic. Simultaneously, his approach allows us to ask difficult questions such as why and how women reproduce knowledge which plays a part in legitimising their inferior position. In contrast with Hartsock's argument, I would therefore argue that accepting that power could be everywhere does not have to strip feminists of their ability to pinpoint some of the more systematic operations of power. Recognising that power is potentially everywhere is merely the necessary starting point.

In this thesis I have been documenting the changing faces of femininity in time and place and their different meanings to and for women. I have in particular attempted to unravel the dominant representations of femininity and show their strategic importance in preserving a particular kind of society. On the basis of my analysis, I thus claim that this kind of approach is conducive to a strong feminist analysis. Firstly, because it places the subject within the power/knowledge matrices which play a role in how we relate to ourselves. Explanations thus neither locate causes within the individual nor reduce the subject to a passive receiver of discursive dictates. Secondly, because a feminist-Foucauldian synthesis asks us to be continuously on the alert about where we are speaking from and reflexive of the conditions and the basis for the authority that allow us to make certain statements and value judgements. It therefore counteracts attempts to regulate women through narrow definitions of femininity. I would like to elaborate some more on these points on the next few pages, since they have the potential to change the way we theorise femininity.

8.2.2. Reformulating femininity

The feminist-Foucauldian synthesis presents a fresh approach to the study of femininity. I shall here isolate a few examples of how it benefits theorisations of femininity.

Firstly, femininity, despite its strong regulatory role, is not seen as a simple construct but as complex and even contradictory. Femininity is neither static nor unified but is amenable to changes. Attempts to explain femininity by reducing it to biology or universal cultural determinants are therefore counteracted and problematised. In this sense this thesis moves beyond traditional psychological accounts which "treat gender as an independent variable" (Prince, 1993, p.39). It is strongly emphasised that constructions of femininity are not etched in stone but on the contrary, historically and culturally constituted.

My second point is that by stressing the complicated nature of femininity, women are given space to resist the normalising powers of social psychology. Whereas homogeneous images and knowledge give little space for resistance and reflexivity, complex images and knowledge do so. This applies as much to knowledge produced by the discourses of social psychology, as it does to everyday knowledge. Homogeneity is a great normalising force and is prone to silencing knowledge which strays from its definitions and image. This is why feminist interpretations of images and knowledge are necessary. Insofar as they have required reading against the grain they have acted against the normalising appeal of psychology. They open up a space for seeing things differently and for challenging conventional ways of knowing.

I have stressed that it is in our everyday lives that power is at its most effective. As my interviews confirm, women speak from different experiental bases which affect their dialogues with images and discursive "truths" about womanhood. The discursive images and truths enmesh with the women's lives depending on circumstances, ability and even

chance. Sometimes they rhyme well with the women's lives and circumstances; sometimes they rhyme poorly and are capable of inflicting pain and tension. As Bordo (1993) argues, we have to be aware that there often are "contradictory relations between image and practice, between rhetoric and reality" (p.184). These contradictions could prove to be a rich source from which to theorise and could enlarge the scope of social psychology in a fruitful way.

Finally, I want to stress that we have to appreciate how femininity is a resource in women's self-presentation and in this sense has both positive and negative meaning to women. This is in tune with Foucault's argument that power is primarily productive not repressive. It has been well established by feminists that femininity has been a resource for the community, and an exploited resource, for that matter. But femininity has also been a resource for women in terms of knowledge and identity. As my previous analysis supports, it is a source for claims of knowledge as well as claims for changes. In this respect, Smith (1988) points out how what she terms "discourses of femininity" are a source for women to create themselves, thus counteracting accounts of femininity which stress women's victimisation. Although Smith emphasises the active role of women in the construction of femininity, she points out how the images and truths about femininity exist despite them and therefore cannot be reduced to the ideas and thoughts of individuals.

These abstractions stand in stark contrast to male-stream discussions of femininity in social psychology. It highlights how women are always in the process of defining their femininity and individuality, yet places them within the bigger social perspective which, as I have argued, streamlines the meanings of these constructs in terms of, for example, gender and social positions. It deals with the discourses of knowledge that transcend women's lives but do not leave them untouched. Indeed, because the macro is invested in the micro, and vice versa - the personal is as political as the political is personal. In the

next part of this chapter I shall draw together some of the main arguments of this thesis and speculate on the relation between the personal and the political.

8.3. THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL

"The personal is political" was one of the main slogans of radical feminism, stressing as Humm (1989, p. 204) points out, the "psychological basis of patriarchal oppression". I think the meaning of this slogan can be extended to cover the "politics of being", drawing attention to the complex relation between what we consider to be most authentically personal and the operation of power. To support this I shall start by outlining how self-regulation has been constructed in terms of gender in Iceland. I shall then proceed to address how the traditional construction of femininity is one of quasi-individuality. It turns out that the community as a whole has a large investment in women's desires, hopes and beliefs. Similarly, if these change the community is bound to be affected.

I have stressed repeatedly that there is no single way to define femininity and women's experiences of embodying the female. Yet that, despite differences, there are preferred cultural interpretations of what authentic femininity and proper womanhood should consist of. A necessary concern is who is discursively positioned as an authoritative source on what authentic femininity means and what strategic purposes these definitions serve. In this respect a few useful questions crop up, for example, in what name does the disciplining of women's selves take place? Which explanations are given preference when accounting for women's lives and practices and what possible explanations are left out? I shall begin by tracing how constructions of femininity have played a role in ordering women's experiences in my data through, for example, locating femininity in the home.

8.3.1. The private realm of emotions versus the public realm of reason

A summary of some of the main findings from the previous chapters indicates the following: Masculinity has from the turn of this century been increasingly constituted in the public realm, the mind providing the masculine voice with the clarity of reason. Femininity, in contrast, as defined from its traditional duties of home and hearth, has been constituted in the private realm, where the feminine heart produces a scrambled voice of emotions. The location of femininity in the private home, furthermore, serves to block vision to wider public issues. This construction has in the last decades been under re-definition as women have increasingly tried to gain a foothold in the labour market. A powerful split divides femininity as expressed through self-less motherhood from the self-oriented modern individual. This split, I would furthermore argue, is primarily responsible for the frictions and tensions women experience regarding issues of subjectivity and power. It supports Thurer's (1994) argument that "motherhood versus personal ambition represents the heart of the feminine dilemma" (p.287).

Although the analysis showed a number of commonalities between men and women, it pinpointed particularly gendered forms of self-regulation, which are amenable to changes as society changes. The most remarkable of these was how people have been encouraged either to exert or to withdraw the self. Here gender and social status intersect. In the discourse of the Soul, those in the servitude of others, particularly women but also men, are encouraged to be submissive and not hog the limelight for themselves. They should keep quiet about their needs and most definitely never complain. Rather, they are encouraged to focus their energy on doing what "has to be done" as diligently, quietly and dutifully as possible.

In chapter 7, I discussed how women have increasingly been encouraged to cultivate their individualities and how the territorial division between men and women is becoming more and more blurred. Self-confidence and self-assertion have become important issues for

women, and young women no longer accept that they have to take second place. Contemporary society presents more options for women to shape their lives, and the power to do so is discursively located within them, rather than with God. Young modern women are encouraged to take control of their lives, but to do so by disciplining themselves, become their own Creators. There is, in short, a great emphasis on self-management in this day and age, requiring attention to such various aspects of our self-presentation as our expression of emotions and our bodily demeanour. Foucault directs our attention at the labour we direct towards managing our selves and the power of these routines when it comes to organising our lives and relations to others. What was missing from his account was the gendered form these self-regulations take, a void feminists have attempted to fill. In this respect, feminists have mostly focussed on the different ways in which men and women discipline their bodies (for example, Bartky, 1991; Bordo, 1993) but I would also like to point out the strong gendered connotations of the disciplining and construction of emotions. A realm usually classified as personal and beyond power.

As traditional female duties have become more and more located within the "private sphere", the focus has increasingly been directed to their emotional value, and on domestic femininity as an emotional resource for others. The important value and the central place that was given to the "heart" in the discourse of the Soul calls for closer scrutiny.

Jaggar (1989) has noted how modern culture has construed emotions and reason as opposed to each other, rather than as mutually constitutive. Although it is widely considered beneficial to be in tune with your emotions, this atunedness is incompatible with, for example, the mastering of reason. The heart, detached from the brain, has an innocent vulnerability about it, requiring the protection of a stronger being. Yet it has "intuitive" qualities which elude the brain. It perceives and responds to all things vulnerable and is able to register social phenomena that are fuzzy and blurred, precisely in their fuzzy and blurred form. These qualities in turn counteract the ability to reason in a

linear progressive manner. The symbolic enlargement of the housewife's heart in Svava Jakobsdóttir's short story (see 6.1), that followed the surgical removal of her unused brain bears witness to the role that has been given to the heart in the construction of femininity. Feminine practices, in particular motherhood, whether they are undertaken by the dutiful subject of pre-modern time or the desiring subject of modern time, have been portrayed as a "natural" extension of women's emotional disposition. The difference rests in that, whereas in the past their practices served the higher purpose of pleasing God, they now are undertaken to please oneself.

I have myself always found the one-sided nostalgic descriptions of the emotionality and self-sacrifices of the housewife, in particular the mother, rather amazing. Undoubtedly, many women have formed strong emotional ties with their children and I am certainly not trying to devalue the joy and pleasures these emotional attachment carry with them. Nevertheless, we should ask ourselves why descriptions of mothers, who are so central to constructions of femininity, do not address all the other skills motherhood requires. What about their resourcefulness in organising their children's time, or alertness to details such as when being able to remember where every single sock in the house is? Reasoning with a three year old, as those who have tried it can testify to, does require considerable skill and power of persuasion. Construing the practices of women primarily in terms of emotionality is a normalising function, and I would argue that it pays due credit neither to the complexity, nor to the scope, of work undertaken by mothers.

Strategically, women are described as emotional, in the name of the wellbeing of children and the family. In public speeches these practices, along with the idealised nuclear family, become the cornerstone of society. But emotionality has a further function which is to distinguish femininity from masculinity. This has important repercussions since masculinity, as I have argued, has been the cultural ideal of normal, mature individuality. Importantly, it therefore devalues femininity in relation to the ideal of individuality. In

this sense, as Jaggar (1989) argues, the way that the practices of women have been defined as being steered and governed by the heart is a myth with an ideological function:

> Feminist theorists have pointed out that the western tradition has not seen everyone as equally emotional. Instead, reason has been associated with members of dominant political, social, and cultural groups and emotion with members of subordinate groups. Prominent among those subordinate groups in our society are people of color, except for supposedly "inscrutable orientals", and women (p. 157).

Insofar as emotions have been seen to interfere with reason, they have justified the place assigned to women in the community.

The disciplinary power of the image of the emotional housewife can be seen in how it divides normal femininity from abnormal. As a "natural" feature of the feminine, it could render those women who are emotionally inexpressive, "suspect as not being real women" (Jaggar, 1989, p.157). The various female apparitions, despised and/or resented in Western popular culture reveal how the community has its way of punishing those women who are out of step with their heartbeat. Elaborate portrayals of women's "underhand", cunning ways to further their own cause, not only function as depictions of the negative side of women's nature, but as descriptions of their cost to the community.[1] What is implicitly conveyed is that when women get into a position to use their brain, they use it to hurt others. They are selfish, in contrast with the good Soul, described in the Icelandic obituaries, who reaches her claim to worthiness through self-sacrifice, where everybody else's welfare is assured before her own.

The gendered connotations of this dichotomy not only inflict heartache on women, but also on men. Jaggar points out how, insofar as men are taught to suppress their emotions, they paradoxically are put at the mercy of those emotions. Since they have not been taught to identify what they are feeling, they are prone to being more "rigid" or

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[1] Again films such as Dangerous Liaisons and Fatal Attraction support this. Women exert their power through manipulation. A number of films also explore how "hard" businesswomen discover their softer side when stranded with a baby, for example Baby Boom.

"insensitive" (p.158). Men, in other words, have been encouraged to compartmentalise their emotions and treat them as detached from everything that is reasonable.

What is at fault here are not emotionality and self-sacrifice per se, but the construction of empathy and caring as hampering our reasoning processes. From a feminist perspective it is worrisome, because it construes it as natural for women to "give" and for men to "take". The construction of the selfless mother, who attends to everyone's needs before her own, clashes forcefully with the modern emphasis on self-actualisation, where self-regulation is about working hard to fulfil one's individual potential. Much of this conflict is manifested in the relationship between generations, in particular in tensions between mothers and daughters. Before addressing how these discursive incompatibilities might lead to resistance, I want to address how the construction of femininity as quasi-individuality has been necessary for maintaining social institutions such as the welfare state.

8.3.2. Women's quasi-individuality and the welfare state

Individuals from pre-modern society acquired their independence, at least in part, because the good Soul relinquished her own needs and dedicated her energy to the "individual's" needs and status. It is questionable, as I have already stressed, to what extent the self-sacrificing Souls could even claim to be mature fully-developed individuals. The rigidness of pre-modern social structure, where the law actively prohibited people to marry and choose their own profession, kept both men and women in a perpetual state of dependency. Modern society has seen the disappearance of many of these prohibitions but still conceptualises the "work" necessary for sustaining independence in gendered terms. As techniques of power this work has an economic advantage and political utility (Foucault, 1994c) and is the backbone to public institutions such as the welfare state. One of the paradoxes of femininity in this respect is that, at the same time that it is used to assign lower value to women's individuality, it makes society in its present form

possible. The Icelandic welfare state, as Guðrún Jónsdóttir ('Velferðin öryggisnet, ekki jöfnunartæki', 1989) argues, has been organised around an idealised vision of the nuclear family, with its familiar role division between the male breadwinner and female housewife. This is most certainly in accord with Rosalind Coward's (1984) observation, quoted in the introduction to this thesis, that female desire is necessary for the whole social structure.

As I have argued, the version of individuality seen as having the best fit with a public role has been the one produced by the discourse of the Chieftain. Although much weight is given to the idea of the leader being chosen from a group of equals, it seemed apparent that certain requirements had to be fulfilled to qualify as an "equal". The equals, as the obituaries bear witness to, were likely to be other men in a good social position. The state of independent individuality is achieved mostly through financial independence, and here the gendered subtext of self-regulation starts to have serious political repercussions. Iceland, it seems, is not so different from many other countries, where some men, and I repeat men, are more equal than others.

Pateman (1989, p. 192), in her analysis of the British welfare state, has argued that whereas women, like men, strive for independence and thereby full citizenship, that very ideal is for them, full of contradictions and paradoxes. The paradox, she points out, rests in the fact that whereas women have been conceived as the dependants of men, located in the private sphere, their contribution to the welfare state has been "welfare". Her insight, I think, applies to Icelandic women as much as British. As I have taken pains to stress, women care for others. This care does not only take place in the home but also outside it. Women have increasingly entered the labour market, where they have filled the "caring professions", nursing, cleaning and looking after children. These positions in turn have been severely underpaid in the community which means that women are more likely to be dependent on other resources, in particular, those provided by the welfare state. Pateman argues, how the emphasis on public spending has always gone "hand in hand with praise

for loving care within families; that is with an attempt to obtain even more unpaid welfare from house(wives)" (p. 192). Indeed, proposed cuts in public spending in Iceland have, for example, been through closing down hospital departments and reducing institutional care. No prizes are offered for guessing correctly who is supposed to shoulder the care of those thrown out of these institutions.

As times are changing and work and independence have become more and more important to women's identity, the dilemma Pateman calls Wollstonecraft's[2] dilemma has become increasingly apparent. The problem is that the welfare state, grounded in the patriarchal ideal of the division between the private and the public, allows only two routes towards citizenship, which are mutually incompatible. I would here like to quote Pateman at some length:

> The patriarchal understanding of citizenship means that the two demands are incompatible because it allows two alternatives only: either women become (like) men, and so full citizens; or they continue at women's work, which is of no value for citizenship. Moreover within a patriarchal welfare state neither demand can be met. To demand that citizenship as it now exists, should be fully extended to women accepts the patriarchal meaning of 'citizen', which is constructed from men's attributes, capacities and activities. Women cannot be full citizens in the present meaning of the term; at best, citizenship can be extended to women only as lesser men. At the same time, within the patriarchal welfare state, to demand proper social recognition and support for women's responsibilities is to condemn women to less than full citizenship and to continued incorporation into public life as 'women'; that is, as members of another sphere who cannot, therefore, earn the respect of fellow (male) citizens (p.197).

Changes in the welfare state in Iceland, through for example increased emphasis on privatisation, reflect the increasing individualism of modern society, where individual freedom means freedom from the system. This of course has a nice ring to it for men who, in any case, as Pateman points out, have ensured their independence by their freedom <u>from</u> providing welfare. It has a different ring for women, who are more likely to have to depend on communal resources to be able to participate in the labour market, and thus, as financially independent individuals, may perhaps make claim to worthy

[2] Mary Wollstonecraft was one of the first British feminist theorists with liberalist views. She argued for equal rights and equal opportunities for women (Humm, 1989).

citizenship. As I have taken pains to argue the ways in which we are offered to understand and express our individualities are loaded with political connotations.

8.3.3. The possibility of resistance

I would like to underline the importance of placing oneself in the gap between normalising truths and everyday practices. For the women I interviewed, there were no particularly easy solutions to the dilemmas that their lives presented. They had plenty to say about their lives and had frequently found themselves in situations which challenged the conventional ways of seeing and thinking about things. They compared themselves to men, they compared themselves to each other and sometimes a poor fit encouraged them to search for new explanations and acquaint themselves with new discourses of knowledge. It illustrates forcefully how we have to pay attention to the analytics of power in the construction of identity. We also, I would argue, have to pay attention to the possibility of resistance to existing discourses of truth. Indeed, we might see new forms of subjectivity promoted in the future. These might undermine the political usefulness of present macro organisations and call for their re-construction.

A failure on behalf of the community to address changed circumstances and desires of women could in the long run have unforeseen consequences. The way women deal with their lives affects the community as a whole. In this respect it is quite possible that unless the community tries harder to saddle its share of the care responsibilities, women may make life-decisions that enable them to circumvent some of the pressures brought on them.. One possibility is that Icelandic women, who at present have 2.17 children on average in their lifetime (Landshagir: Statistical Yearbook of Iceland, 1996), could like women in some other Western countries, decide to have fewer children or remain childless.

A more positive consequence would be if feminist politicians could redefine these responsibilities, so that they become shared responsibilities and not just women's issues. There are signs that this might be happening in Iceland. The mayor of Reykjavík, who has a clear feminist agenda, has often declared that she is dedicated to changing these issues. It remains now to be seen if she and her team get the support needed to change the internal structure of the city's institutions so that women can become equal not just in theory but also in practice.

8.4 EMANCIPATION

> We want to be caught and held securely in an idealized mother's gaze; we ask her to assure us that someone is really still there, to protect us and catch us when we fall. Finitude, evil, death: all can be transcended in the re-birth of the holy, innocent child/mother. We promise to be good daughters if mother won't abandon us. But whose voice can we really hear? An echo, a delusion, a fantasy of childhood always already past and yet disabling us still (Flax, 1993, p. 154).

My data certainly was not short of descriptions of the utopian society. These ideas were covered in chapter 6, where I discussed the idea of the "other world" as revealed through obituaries, and argued that whereas "this world" is characterised by the strict rule of the father, the "other world" or heaven, is ruled by the mother. Warmth, love, sunshine, laughter, consolation from all sorrows, relief from all pain, characterises the heavenly existence. An eternal existence in a warm embrace, and no more responsibilities to weigh us down. Indeed, I think these descriptions would have been "a gift from heaven" to all psychoanalysts through their implicit yearning for big omnipotent Mum. Although the descriptions of heaven are appealing I am not going to delve into them. This vision is deemed to be an eternal utopia, since it constitutes all of its subjects as innocent from practising power and the utopia itself as beyond power. Besides, these descriptions do not articulate "how" we can be emancipated except through dying. Appealing as they are I shall refocus the attention to our worldly existence, characterised, as the obituaries seemed to imply, by the rule of the father.

Emancipation has in feminism implied that the all-seeing, all-knowing Father Supreme should be dethroned, or at least cut down to a manageable size. By implication, this means that the nature of his rule has to be defined, and the grip he has on our being, analysed. Although the theoretical position adopted here is that there is no person that embodies this power, this does not mean compliance with current situation. We should bear in mind that in practice emancipation, has a double meaning. It can refer to the condition we want to move towards, as well as the condition we want to move or be liberated from. It is with the latter conceptualisation, liberation from a situation that Foucault's thought can be put to some use. He, as I have already argued, did not want to formulate what characterises an emancipated self. My own view is in tune with Rajchman's (1991) thoughts on Foucault's conception of freedom, that it is "not a state one achieves once and for all, but a condition of an "undefined work" of thought, action, and self-invention" (p. 111). The self is, as Probyn (1993) points out, caught up in its discursive reality. We are like the spider, entangled in our own web and looking bewildered and out of place when we are not within it. But that does not mean that the patterns in the web can not be changed or that it can not be stretched to areas hitherto beyond our reach.

I have explored how ways of relating to one's self have changed, and it leaves me optimistic that they still could change. Emancipation, in other words, could refer to the ability to shake off some of the restraints presently influencing our thoughts, so that we become able to explore new ways of looking at ourselves, desiring and relating to others. Before that can happen, however, we have to engage in the critical project of looking at how our selves are constituted. By this I do not mean that I want to participate in the trend characterising modern society which is to locate all causes and seek all explanations within the individual self. Feminism that does this, has in my view, lost touch with the critical project of challenging power. The modern emphasis on the self could very well work as an entrapment if we fail to challenge how we are being held in ourselves, and lose our view of the wider society. Rather, there is a need to tear down many of the

psychological and social barriers that stand between women and different life choices, to think up new possibilities of speaking and hearing. We need to think about how the personal is political.

Gilles Deleuze (1986) argued that the driving force behind thought is the unthought. One of the aims of feminist theory has been to read against dominant truths and inspire new thoughts in women. In this respect, for a work to be truly progressive it must not collude with the dominant representations of femininity, but, in charting their content and outline, problematise their one-dimensionality and show their inherent contradictions. This also includes reflexivity of the potential power the researcher has to homogenise and simplify. To quote Probyn (1993):

> ..against and in the midst of speaking a tired self, we need to use our imaginations, strike a pose for other positions and instil feminisms with attitude. We need to keep moving and to keep speaking our selves in ways that encourage other movements, that will recreate alternative positions (p. 172).

There still is a lot of "unthought" that needs to be tapped and perhaps that is where the seeds to a brighter future lie, to think, as Foucault pointed out, what we might become.

APPENDIX I: An example of an obituary

Note: This obituary was not part of the sample.

Minning:

Þorsteinsína Gísladóttir

Sína Gísladóttir, eins og hún var í daglegu tali nefnd, er nú oll. Með henni er gengin góð kona, er engan átti sér óvildarmann og aldrei lagði illt orð til nokkurs manns.

Sína var fædd 5. maí 1897 á Brunngili í Bitrufirði, Strandasýslu, og lést 2. maí síðastliðinn. Foreldrar hennar voru Helga Bjorg Þorsteinsdóttur og Gísli Jónsson, bóndi. Systkinin voru sex. Hún ólst upp við oll algeng sveitastorf. Árið 1917 fór hún til náms til Reykjavíkur að læra karlmannafatasaum á saumastofu Andrésar Andréssonar klæðskerameistara. Þar lágu saman leiðir hennar og Axels Skúlasonar klæðskera og gengu þau í hjónaband 1. ágúst 1925. Það var mikið gæfuspor, því vart var hægt að hugsa sér samhentari hjón. Stóð sambúð þeirra í tæp 55 ár, en Axel lést 1980.

Þeim varð þriggja barna auðið. Þau eru: Áslaug, Ólafur er lést í Srí Lanka-flugslysinu í nóvember 1978 og Ólafía. Þær starfa báðar í Landsbanka Íslands.

Þessar línur eru ekki settar á blað til að rekja æviferil hennar frekar, aðeins til að færa henni þakkir fyrir allt það sem hún gerði fyrir mig, því oft var eins og ég væri fjórða barnið hennar. Það var ekki sjaldan að leitað var til Sínu, ef eitthvað þurfti að sauma eða laga. Stóð aldrei á hjálp. Sína var einstaklega lagin í hondunum og eru ekki fáar flíkur sem fóru frá henni til að gleðja aðra.

Sína verður jarðsungin mánudaginn 10. maí. Guð blessi minningu hennar.

Ragnhildur Elíasdóttir

APPENDIX II: Topic guide used in interviews

- What were the main turning points in your life? /Why?
- How have they shaped your attitude to life?

- How were you raised?
- Any particular virtues emphasised? /Why?
- What kind of future were you prepared for?

- Did you have any particular role models? /Why?

- What do you think about women in the media? / Why?

- Did/do you have any Prince Charming?
- What qualities did/does he have? /Why?

- Do the same rules apply to men and women in relationships?

- How would/did you raise your own children? /Why?
- What kind of future did/would you prepare them for?

- How do you compare to your mother/daughter? /Why?
- Would you want similar kind of life as she? /Why?

- Do we need Women's liberation? /Why?
- What should it consist of?

- What is your view on the Women's Alliance?/Why?

- Do women have acess to a different "world of experience" to men? /What is it like?

- What has femininity meant for you?

- Are women in their nature different to men?/How?

- Are Icelandic women different in their nature to other women? /How?

- Is there a difference between women living in rural and urban Iceland?/Why?

APPENDIX III: Frequency of codes for different age groups

	16-30	31-50	51-70	71-88[1]
Accept my lot	0	9	4	2
Aspirations	7	2	9	3
Assertive	5	4	6	4
Beauty contests	11	2	4	0
Caring	5	2	1	0
Confidence	10	3	16	1
Conformity	4	1	2	2
Culture change	4	2	16	25
Diligence	1	3	5	11
Education	11	6	17	9
Equality	14	6	13	3
Fastidious	3	1	7	1
Fate	3	1	3	2
Feelings	14	3	4	6
Foreign-Icelandic	8	4	5	6
Gender diff: work	10	5	11	15
Gender diff:natural	7	4	1	2
Gender inequality	6	2	7	7
Generation gap	7	6	17	7
Good manners	1	0	1	4
Governing abilities	0	1	2	2
Honourable	4	0	1	2
Humour	14	2	6	7
Ideals	3	4	5	5
Importance of family	3	7	4	3
Independence	10	2	10	6
Individual differences	5	6	3	4
Initiative	7	3	5	1
Knowledgeable	4	2	4	2
Living standard	1	1	5	12
Looks-mentality	10	0	3	0
Maturity	1	2	5	0
Motherhood	10	9	5	2
Of course!	3	0	2	5
Opportunities	7	4	5	10
Personal aesthetics	4	3	3	5
Personal regret	1	6	4	3
Protection-freedom	4	2	0	1
Resistance politics	8	5	7	4
Respect	2	1	6	1
Rural-urban	7	4	5	3
Sacrifice	5	2	4	0
Self image	5	2	5	0
Self-denial	2	2	3	3
Sexuality	14	3	10	3
Shaping self	16	3	3	4
Strong bones	1	1	2	1
Submission	8	2	6	1
Temptations	1	0	3	0
To be yourself	6	0	6	1
Trustworthy	3	1	1	5
Unthought	2	7	10	13
Use of resources	1	1	7	6
Women influence	5	4	7	2
Work	3	1	3	20
TOTAL:	311	159	309	247

[1] There were 6 women aged 16-30, 4 in all other age groups. Two sisters were interviewed together in age group 71-88.

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