

**The construction of identity within a
context of parental alcoholism**

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Abstract

This research is concerned with the construction of identity with regards to female children of alcoholics studying at Rand Afrikaans University (RAU). Available literature on this topic suggests that the context of parental alcoholism is not conducive to the healthy construction of identity, particularly with regards to self-esteem and the ability to create strong, trusting relationships in later life. It seems that it is during the young adult years, namely between the ages of 18 and 25, that concerns surrounding one's identity begin to emerge.

The study was conducted from a qualitative perspective, namely social constructionism, in which meaning making is unique to each individual and the construction of identity is impacted on by one's context, culture, history and language. Focus groups were conducted on a sample of female, students at RAU who were socialised within the context of parental alcoholism. This sample represented the ethnic ratio of RAU students during 2003. The focus group sessions were videotaped with the informed consent of the participants. Five focus groups were conducted for a duration of one hour each. The sessions were transcribed after which a discourse analysis was executed.

The results of the study suggest that the construction of identity is impacted on by a context of parental alcoholism. It seems that female students experience a great sense of responsibility towards others to the extent of taking on a parental function and denying their own needs. In addition to this, a common thread, which seemed to weave itself through the stories of the participants, was that of struggling with intimate relationships, in particular, trusting others appeared especially difficult and painful.

Keywords: qualitative research; social constructionism; discourse analysis; focus groups; construction of identity; alcoholism, parental alcoholism; females; young adults; ethnic ratio.

Opsomming

Hierdie navorsingstudie verken die identiteitsvorming van jong vroue wat uit alkoholisgesinne kom en tans aan die Randse Afrikaanse Unversiteit (RAU) studeer. Beskikbare literatuur oor hierdie onderwerp suggereer dat die konteks van ouerlike alkoholisme nie bydraend is tot gesonde identiteitsvorming nie, veral met betrekking tot 'n gevoel van eiewaarde en die vermoë om later 'n standvastige vertrouensverhouding te vorm. Teorie dui daarop dat kommer rakende identiteitsvorming in die jong volwasse jare (18 tot 25 jaar) ontstaan.

Hierdie studie is onderneem vanuit 'n kwalitatiewe perspektief, naamlik sosiale konstruksionisme. Volgens die teorie word die rol wat individuele betekenisgewing in identiteitsvorming speel, as uniek in konteks, kultuur, historiese agtergrond en taal beskou. Fokusgroepe is saamgestel uit 'n streekproef vroulike studente van RAU, wat binne die konteks van ouerlike alkoholisme gesosialiseer is. Hierdie steekproef is verteenwoordigend van die etniese verhoudingsgetal van RAU studente gedurende 2003. Vyf fokusgroepe, waarvan die sessies elk 'n uur geduur het, is onderneem. Die fokusgroepe sessies is op videoband opgeneem met die ingeligde toestemming van die deelnemers, waarna dit getranskribeer en 'n diskoersanalise uitgevoer is.

Die bevindinge van die studie dui daarop dat die konteks van ouerlike alkoholisme 'n invloed op identiteitsvorming het. Dit blyk dat vroulike studente grotendeels 'n gevoel van verantwoordelikheid teenoor ander beleef, tot so 'n mate dat hul ouerlike verantwoordelikhede oorneem en hul hul eie behoeftes ontken. 'n Algemene tema wat verder in die stories van die deelnemers verweef is, is die konflik wat in intieme verhoudings ervaar word, meer spesifiek die inspanning en moeisaamheid om ander te vertrou.

Sleutelwoorde: kwalitatiewe navorsing; sosiale konstruksionisme; diskoersanalise; fokusgroepe; identiteitsvorming; alkoholisme; alkoholisgesinne; vroue; jongvolwassene; etnies ratio

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. PROBLEM

This introductory chapter will provide a brief overview of the existing research that has been performed on the impact parental alcoholism has on the children concerned. In addition to this, the methods of research will be explored as well as the social issues surrounding this phenomenon. Chapter 1 will further state the research question and the aims of the study.

1.1.1. Literature

It is evident to me, through the research that I have performed concerning this particular topic, that there seems to be a lack of information with regards to alcoholism in the communities of South Africa. And therefore a lack of research conducted around the influence the grip of alcohol has on the family and ultimately the construction of individual identities by the children concerned. In this section I would like to describe the information that is available.

There appears to be ample information concerning the influence of alcohol in American families particularly with regards to whether adult children of parents who misuse alcohol stand the risk of early onset of alcoholism themselves (Carey, Griffin & Hastings, 1994; Frank, 1983; Hussong, Curran & Chassin, 1998; Pandina & Johnson, 1990; Sher et.al., 1991; Woititz, 1990;).

In addition to this, the stress factors that adult children of alcoholics may experience as opposed to adult children who have not been exposed to alcoholism in their families have also been widely researched (Dulfano, 1992;

Frank, 1983; Hinz, 1990; Sher et al., 1991; Wilson, 1982). In a study performed by Fischer & Kittleson (2000), it was found that parental alcoholism seems to contribute to significant stress in college students.

The chaos that is prevalent in many alcoholic families, its instability and the lack of adequate role models seems in itself enough for the unhealthy socialisation of the child (Wilson, 1982). In order to cope emotionally and physically in these alcoholic homes, children learn to fulfil certain roles. It seems that included in these roles are the “family hero, scapegoat, lost child, or mascot” (Dulfano, 1992, Karola, 1998). Forrest (in Dulfano, 1992) proposes what he terms a “role slippage” which refers to moving from one role to another. He suggests that role reversal occurs frequently in the family creating havoc in terms of self-identity.

With regards to adult daughters of alcoholics, there appears to be an abundance of literature concerning the influence that the experience of an alcoholic father can have on the adult daughters’ choice of spouse (Carey, Griffin & Hastings, 1994; Karola, 1998; Orford and Harwin, 1982; Schuckit & Tipp, 1994). These studies seem to confirm that it is probable that these daughters often result in being married to men who are problem drinkers (Carey, Griffin and Hastings, 1994). Once again these studies are often based on the American traditions and therefore do not take into account the possible differences surrounding discourses in relation to the communities of South Africa.

In addition to the previously stated information collected with regards to female adolescents of alcoholics, it seems that this sector of society is also more susceptible to pregnancy risk as the frequency at which this group has unprotected sex appears higher than female adolescents who have no history of alcohol misuse in their families (Chandy et al., 1994).

There is a vast amount of information concerning the genetic and environmental factors related to the onset of alcoholism in adult children of alcoholics (Frank, 1983; Hepworth and Larsen, 1993).

Research with regards to the genetic factors related to the onset of alcoholism in adult children of alcoholics encompasses the elements concerning the study of relatives, twin studies, foster children, half-siblings and adopted children. The environmental influence consists of factors such as parental loss, social disruption and antisocial behaviour, and child-rearing patterns (Frank, 1983; Reich et al., 1988; Tubman, 1991). Hepworth and Larson (1993) state that family histories of alcoholic patients indicate that roughly 80% to 85% have had an alcoholic parent or grandparent and therefore, strongly suggest that genetic factors may play a larger role than was previously thought in the onset of alcoholism. They also propose that other studies of children that were born to alcoholic parents but raised in another environment by different caregivers also indicated genetic vulnerability to alcoholism.

It seems that over the years, increasing emphasis has been placed on the alcoholic in context, compared to the alcoholic as a single unit. It has become evident, with regards to this new perspective, that the alcoholic is part of a significant social system, responding to the environment even as it responds to him or her (Griffin, 1998). We now accept that alcoholic behaviour is a product of factors. They include the medical aspects of alcoholism, the psychological components of addiction, and the personal deficits. But the picture is wider now. It is more complex, but it is also more accurate (Dulfano, 1992).

Thus, it seems that the interpersonal transactions of alcoholic and spouse, parent, child, and sibling are now part of the “problem-saturated story”. It appears that recognizing the entire context, with regards to the alcoholic client, allows for essential preventative work concerning the significant others within that context (Dulfano, 1992).

These significant others may include the spouses, children, parents, and colleagues of the alcoholic. More specifically, they include the battered wives whose husbands have a low tolerance level and act impulsively as well as the

children who grow up in families whose functioning is warped by the incapacity of one parent (Dulfano, 1992; Orford and Harwin, 1982). In particular, the significant others involve the individuals who try to compensate for the alcoholic's poor performance and behaviour.

Due to the belief that alcoholism is a chronic disease that typically takes ten to fifteen years to develop (Dulfano, 1992), the children of this subsystem may never have known the benefits of adequate parenting. This in itself may possibly have an influence on the construction of identities of these children (Lang, Pelham, Atkeson and Murphy, 1999).

Growing up with non-responsive, unaffectionate, distant parents can be just as damaging as being socialised by a parent whose emotions are unpredictable and overbearing (Tubman, 1991). It is evident that the non-alcoholic members of these families have in prior years gone unrecognised and therefore, have been left to their own devices in coming to terms with an abusive husband or father. Dulfano (1992) suggests that it is no wonder that alcoholism seems to "run in families" as their own needs are unattended in the drive to treat the individual alcoholic.

Woititz (1990) and Hughes (1977) propose that children of alcoholic parents have lower self-esteem than those who do not come from homes where alcohol is abused. The reason for this may be due to the fact that self-esteem seems to be based on the amount of respectful, accepting and concerned treatment from significant others (Woititz, 1990). However, a home, which is predominantly characterised by disrespect and aggressive behaviour, may breed the opposite. Therefore, a child who grows up in such an environment may suffer from low self-esteem and other emotional problems (Wilson, 1982).

Christensen and Bilenberg (1999) propose that recent research has shown that parental alcohol problems are related to a greater risk of behavioural and emotional problems in children. It has been documented that, compared to normative control groups, children of alcoholics have more externalising

problems (conduct disorder, hyperactivity, impulsivity), internalising problems (depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, eating disorders and psychosomatic reactions), more social and interpersonal problems, more problems in school and lower scores on measures of cognitive achievement (Kuperman, 1999; Chandy et al., 1994; Hughes, 1977; Moos and Billings, 1982; Werner, 1986; Murphy et al., 1991).

A study performed by Jennison (2001) suggests that children model parental use of alcohol as a coping mechanism. Jennison suggests that this social learning model reinforces the idea that same-sex modelling (mother-daughter, father-son) has an important and possibly greater effect on alcoholism than opposite-sex modelling. In the same breathe, Jennison states that maternal alcoholism increases the risk of alcohol dependence in female offspring and therefore, female children of alcoholics may be more affected by parental alcoholism if their mothers were alcoholic.

Christensen and Bilenberg (1999) challenge the above hypothesis and suggest that the gender of the alcoholic parent is unrelated to the frequency of psychopathology in adult children of alcoholics. Rather, children of both alcoholic mothers and fathers show more signs of dysfunctional behaviour than children of non-alcoholic parents. However, a study by Steinhausen, Gobel and Nelser (in Christensen and Bilenberg, 1999), indicates that the type of symptom the offspring of parents who struggle with the grips of alcoholism appears to be related to the gender of the alcoholic parent. They found that paternal alcoholism tends to correlate with acting-out behaviour, and maternal alcoholism seems to correlate with emotional disorders. Both types of disorders occurred with the same frequency amongst the offspring of two alcoholic parents.

Findings by Christensen and Bilenberg (1999) indicate that daughters are far more affected by living with an alcoholic parent than sons. Other studies have shown positive relations between the child's feelings of responsibility about the family and psychosocial adjustment problems in adult children of alcoholics (Christensen and Bilenberg, 1999). On the basis of these results,

researchers such as Claire and Genest; Moos and Billings; and Steinglass (in Christensen and Bilenberg, 1999) explain the higher risk status of daughters by an expectation of daughters being more involved in family problems than sons. Since a child has no chance of success in managing and controlling an often chaotic family situation. It is possible that feelings of responsibility for the family that is saturated with alcohol related problems can only lead to feelings of disbelief and failure resulting in the construction of a negative self-concept.

With regards to the above information, it is evident that a diverse mixture of research concerning parental struggles with alcohol has been performed as well as the impact of this social phenomenon on the children concerned. The information suggests that the issues surrounding parental alcoholism are very serious and therefore may be seen as being a social problem within society. However, research concerning the construction of identities of females in South Africa within the context of parental alcoholism appears to require attention.

1.1.2. Social Issue

Alcoholism has become such a big part of the South African community that more and more institutions have to be opened in order to accommodate these people and guide them towards some kind of relief. Examples of some of the places in which people struggling with the grips of alcohol can turn to for recovery include: SANCA, Staanvas, Phoenix House, Tough Love and Alcoholics Anonymous. Many of the afore-mentioned places offer family counselling, spouse counselling and counselling for the children involved. This suggests that there is a great need in our society for help in this area (Delagey, 2002).

It is apparent from research performed by the Foundation for Alcohol Related Research that not only does parental alcoholism impact the child's emotional development, but also the physical development of the unborn foetus.

Statistics concerning the prevalence of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome in particular areas in South Africa indicate that alcoholism is indeed a social problem. The prevalence of this syndrome in De Aar is 103/1000 and in Upington 52/1000. Alcohol is a way of life in these areas, a means of economic survival for many and a relief from very harsh conditions. Most domestic violence and crime are alcohol related. HIV/AIDS also complicate the issues, as it seems that people who are high risk for HIV/AIDS are also high risk for alcohol and other substance abuse problems (L. Fourie, personal communication, October 29; 2003).

After a discussion with a social worker at SANCA National, it seems that over 80% of the children that inhabit orphanages in South Africa, are not due to deceased parents, but rather they are the children of alcoholic parents. These children have been removed from their homes because their parents cannot provide for them financially or emotionally. These children are often the victims of parental abuse and neglect (J. Shoppley, personal communication, 30 October, 2003).

Working at the Student Services Bureau at RAU, I am faced daily with students, both male and female, who are struggling to come to terms with their parents' addiction to alcohol. These students are confused, overwhelmed by emotion and ready to explode with anger. This social issue affects these adult children of alcoholics not only in their academic careers, as home life is not always conducive to quiet study, but also in their relationships. These students complain of the lack of trust they have in other people and their unwillingness to take their 'masks' off in front of people and accept support from others in their suffering. These students suffer alone in silence, often following in their parents' footsteps of creating a pattern of unsatisfying relationships and possibly even adopting the modelled coping mechanism of alcohol abuse.

1.2. QUESTION

“How has identity in general and female identity specifically been constructed within a context of parental alcoholism?”

1.3. RESEARCH

1.3.1. Existing Research

It seems that past and current research is mostly concerned with scientific methods of obtaining information. By this, I mean that the methods seem to be quantitative in nature. The researchers appear to be interested in pre and post-test results with regards to the impact parental alcoholism has on adult children of alcoholics.

An example of such a study in which quantitative results were obtained is a study performed by Jennison (2001). This particular research study used a number of already formulated questionnaires in order to obtain valid information. The Parental alcoholism-drinking association was analysed using three continuous variables at the alcohol consumption interval level. Alcohol measures included past-month alcohol frequency and past-month quantity of alcohol consumed per drinking occasion estimates. Included in these tests was a 13-item subscale used to measure cohesion in communication. The questions assessed both positive and negative marital communication interactions. It seems that the questions were based on a selective subset of the Dyadic Cohesion and Dyadic Consensus subscales from the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS). The DAS is one of two scales that appear to be most frequently used to measure an individual's adjustment to dyadic relationships, both marital and non-marital. Other subscales used were the Marital Communication Scale (MCS), which assessed how often the couple discussed something, laughed together, talked about personal troubles, and engaged in arguments about various issues.

Other studies have used methods of analysis that include T-tests and chi-square comparisons to identify changes that took place over a 3 year period with regards to the risk of heavy alcohol abuse among adolescent children of alcoholic parents (Hussong, Curran & Chassin, 1998). Kuperman (1999) used the Generalised Estimating Equation (GEE) technique to analyse data in terms of statistical analysis.

A frequently used instrument of measurement in terms of the onset of Alcoholism appears to be the DSM-IV-R Diagnostic Scale. This scale requires a person struggling with alcohol dependence to meet the following 6 dependence criteria: built up a tolerance for alcohol; used alcohol more often than intended; wanted to cut down or tried, but found they couldn't; had a month or more in the past year when spent a great deal of time getting the alcohol, using alcohol or getting over its effects; alcohol reduced important activities; alcohol caused emotional and/or health problems (Kaplan & Sadock, 1998).

Gallant (1998) utilized the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-III-R Axis II disorders (SCID-II questionnaire) in order to understand the association of personality characteristics with parenting problems among alcoholic couples. In addition to this, the Semi-Structured Assessment for the Genetics of Alcoholism (SSAGA) has been utilized for research purposes (Kuperman, 1999).

It is evident from the afore-mentioned examples of studies performed with regards to parental alcoholism that the chosen methods consist of a variety of quantitative methods. These methods are scientific in nature and thus may not allow for personal narratives and realities concerning parental alcoholism.

Although we are living in, what has been termed a Post-modern world (Kvale, 1992), the nature of research still seems to heavily rely on scientific methods, which seems contradictory to what is apparently being attempted to achieve in a Post-modern world. The participants' voices are not being heard through

these quantitative processes and thus their realities are being reduced to and defined by measurable criteria.

Most of the above-mentioned studies have been performed in America; other prominent research seems to have taken place in European Countries and in the United Kingdom (Dulfano, 1992; Fischer & Kittleson, 2000; Frank, 1983; Karola, 1998; Orford and Harwin, 1982; Potter-Effron & Potter-Effron, 1998; Schwab, Stevenson & Ice, 1993; Woititz, 1990). Due to the fact that most research on this particular topic seems to have taken place in the Northern Hemisphere, the cultures which have been represented include an over sampling of Hispanics, and African American women. With this in mind, it seems that not enough cultures are being taken into account where statistics concerning the construction of identity of adult daughters of alcoholics are measured.

It seems that the quantitative methods of sampling and analysis of data has left research with a gap in the literature. Included in this gap is a lack of attention concerning the notion that culture, history and language informs our identities and thus needs to be taken into account when performing such research (McNamee, 1996).

1.3.2. Current Research

The similarities between this study and current research is the investigation of the impact parental alcoholism has on the construction of identity of the child and the ways in which the child is required to cope with their circumstances. Much of the current research is centred on the female child of the alcoholic and the impact that these circumstances have on the decisions the female child makes in adolescence (Chandy et al., 1994) and adulthood, especially relating to their choice of spouse. As has been previously discussed, the most common research methodologies are those concerned with quantitative measurements (Fisher & Kittleson, 2000; Jennison, 2001; Kuperman, 1999).

However, in this study, the participant is encouraged to narrate their own stories and explore their own construction of identity or identities as opposed to having to answer a questionnaire and being told by an expert what their identity is. Thus, qualitative research methods have been utilised.

As I have mentioned previously, the majority of the research that is available on the topic of children of alcoholics appears to fall within the context of modernism. It is thus, focussed on one truth or identity that can be measured using a battery of tests. It is based on personality theories and absolute truths. In contrast, this study differs in the sense that its main focus is rather on the construction of multiple identities and cannot be measured (Kvale 1992).

In summary, current research is more quantitative as opposed to the qualitative slant of this study. This study is mainly concerned with the identities of South African females as opposed to the current research, which seems to be mainly concerned with American and European adult children of alcoholics. South Africa is a multicultural nation and therefore, the study will allow for diverse experiences in terms of culture, history and language.

1.4. GOAL

1.4.1. General Goal

To try and understand how identity in general and female identity specifically has been constructed within a context of parental alcoholism from a social constructionist epistemology

1.4.2. Specific Goals

The specific goals of this research project are:

- To describe the epistemology and methodology of this research project.
- To do the research project from the described epistemology and methodology.
- To write a research report based on the results of the research project.

Chapter 2: Epistemology

In this section I would like to briefly address the research position that I shall be adopting within this research project, namely social constructionism.

2.1. Identity

2.1.1. Individual Identity

In order to understand identity as seen by the post-modern school of thought of social constructionism, perhaps it would be beneficial to begin at the concept of identity as understood by modernist theorists.

Modernism is based on absolute truths containing objective and rational answers (McNamee and Gergen, 1996). In addition to this, Gergen (2001) states that there are three ingredients in the modernist worldview that are fundamental; they include individual knowledge, the objective world and language as the carrier of truth.

For modernists, identity is something that is cognitive, psychic, neurological or biological (Capara and Van Heck, 1992). Therefore, identity is conceptualised as an entity and there are essential characteristics that comprise the self. It has clear standards of evaluation and is measurable. Modernists rely on the individual as the primary organising principle of society (McNamee and Gergen, 1996).

Kvale (1992, p.34) implies that “in modernity, the person is an object for a universal will, or for general laws of history and nature. Or the person is

overburdened; man has become the centre of the world, the individual self-feeling being the cornerstone of modern thought, a self stretched out between what it is and what it ought to be “.

In our attempts to be unique in our identity, modernism requires that we “fit” in with everyone else. There are standards against which identity is measured; these standards decide whether we are “normal” or “abnormal”, “successful” or a “failure”. If we do not meet the requirements of being judged as being “normal”, then with scientific treatment and medical procedures, such as observation, medication and laboratory tests, we can strive towards “fitting-in” with society and living a life in which we are accepted (McNamee and Gergen, 1996).

Examples of personality theorists that see identity as “within” the person are for example Freud, Jung and Adler (Engler, 1999; Pervin & John, 1997). There are also personality theories that see identity as located “within” the person, for example Psychodynamic Theory, Cognitive-Behaviour Theory and Existential-Humanistic Theory (Engler, 1999; Pervin & John, 1997).

Due to the belief that identity can be measured, certain personality tests have been constructed which are governed by norms and tables. These tests provide researchers with a tool in which to quantify the concept of personality. Examples of these tests include the Jung Personality Questionnaire (JPQ), based on the work of Carl Jung (Engler, 1999), and the Catell’s 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF), based on the work of Raymond Catell (Pervin & John, 1997). These tests indicate that identity exists within an individual

In summary, the concept of identity with regards to modernism, dictates that individuals are self-contained and all that is important is that which is contained within that individual (Sampson, 1993). The individual is only allowed one identity to which he must adhere to in order to make a success of himself (Capara and Van Heck, 1992). Essentially, modernism can be seen as the scientific study of objects or things (McNamee and Gergen, 1996).

2.1.2. Relational Identity

In contrast to modernism, post-modernism, and specifically social constructionism, understands that the essence of a person's identity or selfhood is a central aspect of their culture and the interaction with others within that culture (Josselson & Lieblich, 1995; Newman & Holzman, 1996).

There are four main ideas linked to social constructionism. Firstly, identity is socially constructed, secondly, identities are constituted through language, thirdly, identities are organized and maintained through narrative, and finally, there are no essential truths (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Thus, identity is socially constructed and immersed in interactional patterns. Lather (1992) promotes the idea that we live in webs of multiple representations of class, race, gender, language and social relations. She also suggests that meanings may vary even within one individual.

Identity can thus be interpreted as the result of relationships rather than, as the modernist theorists suggest, a requirement for relationships to be constructed (McNamee, 1996). Conversations between people impact the identities that people afford themselves and are afforded to them. This allows for multiple identities (Rosenberg, 1997). It can be understood that multiple identities are as a result of the multiple conversations that take place between people everyday (Powell, n.d./2003).

Burr (1995) proposes that instead of fixed, single and unified selves, we could possibly see ourselves as being fragmented with a multiplicity of prospective selves that may not inevitably be consistent with each other, but are experienced as equally real.

What is important is what transpires between people and not what happens individually within (McNamee, 1996). That which transpires between people exists within a social context. Lax (1996) suggests that we define who we are in interaction with others' perceived understandings of us. Social context

impacts the meanings that are attached to the conversation and ultimately impact the construction of our identities.

Thus, the world in which we live may impact the way we construct our sense of self. Meanings emerge only at the moment the other person in the conversation responds to the original action. Thus, identity can be seen as possessing dialogic qualities (Josselson & Lieblich, 1998; Shotter & Katz, 1996). Dialogism is a social process; it is central to the understanding of our worlds. Shotter (1999) proposes that the dialogical construction of our relations both to each other and the otherness around us begins to emerge as soon as a second human being reacts to the activities of the first.

Language plays a significant part in the way we interpret and attach meaning to actions. Thus, the rhetoric is central to the idea of social constructionism. McNamee and Gergen (1996, p.191) propose that “post-modernism is marked by a focus on language-that is a focus on people interacting with one another in the construction of their worlds”. This emphasis on language seems to be in contrast to the modernist’s concern with “things”.

Each person brings with them a set of statements or beliefs that define them in a sense. These can be termed discourses. Discourses are those actions, beliefs or set of statements that dictate to us how we should act, who we should be, and what we should believe in (Freedman & Combs, 1996). These discourses are often culturally bound. Therefore, the culture to which we hold membership holds the power to define our identities. Burr (1995) implies that we construct our identity on the existing cultural discourses and we draw upon these in our conversations with others.

I have indicated that modernists and post-modernists view identity differently. In this research project I shall be working from a social constructionist position, which falls within post-modernism, which sees identity as socially constructed. I shall look at identity and embodiment, identity and history, identity and discourse, as well as identity and environment.

2.2. Identity & Embodiment

Embodiment concerns that which makes up the body. Our bodies consist of the material requirements, which provide for subjectivity, thoughts, ideas, emotions and language (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). Our bodies provide the shell for the afore-mentioned constructs to develop and exist. Shotter (1995) proposes that as living, embodied beings, it is impossible not be receptive to the world around us. Therefore, we understand that we constantly respond to our surroundings directly and instantaneously in a living way.

We, as human beings, experience and make sense of things through our bodies. The interpretation of experiences through our bodies impacts the construction of our identities. Our bodies encompass our personal, social life histories. It is through these personal and social histories that discourses are experienced and identity is constructed (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999).

Embodiment impacts our identities as our bodies house the experiences and events to which meaning was attached. These meanings ultimately create our identities.

2.3. Identity & History

The constructing of identity in the present is shaped by a person's lived past and imagined future. Lerner (1998, p. 557) suggests that in some ways, "the future is already here as it bears the mark of the past and disrupts the presence of the present".

We give meanings to our past experiences or events. These experiences or events are linked together in order to create a base from which we understand our past. The act in which these events are given meaning impacts on our present identity. Gergen (1994) suggests that the conditions by which we attain an understanding of the world and ourselves are social artefacts, products of historically and culturally positioned transactions between people.

Our pasts have an impact on our understanding of the present and assist us in anticipating the future. This reality may be perceived as being predetermined in terms of both the present and the future. According to Larner (1998) not only do we live our forward understanding backwards but we also tend to live out backwards understanding forwards. Therefore, he suggests that our identities are both retrospective and prospective.

Historical discourses, that being statements, practices and beliefs, within a given culture can be passed down from generation to generation and result in being internalised by the current generation (McNamee, 1996). Thus, the discourses have the power to set limitations or rules to which the individual feels they must adhere to in order to remain part of the given culture. Historical discourses help us to construct our identities. The power of history helps to maintain the dominant discourses in a given culture or society. Gergen (1992) implies that we appreciate the world as not being a product of how the world necessarily is, but as the product of documented history.

A history that is saturated with events that have been given negative meanings, for example the context of parental alcoholism or abuse, impacts the identity that we create for ourselves. It is difficult to create a new reality or identity when there are continual experiences that confirm our perceived identities (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). These events become the chain of narrated events that ultimately make up who we are. The language that we choose to describe these events holds the power to impact our identities. Therefore, in a sense the language we use over time creates our reality thus impacting our identities (Budwig, 1995).

The relationships that took place in our personal histories and our interpretation of them affect the way that we approach relationships in our present and will continue to do so in our futures (Love, 1994). Identities are created in conversation, which always take place within a given culture and have the potential to be historically situated. It is via personal and social histories that discourses are experienced and identity is constructed. In the

context of the other, our life history is reinterpreted and overstated so that we constantly recreate or rather, reconstruct our lives instead of remembering our histories (Nightingale & Cromby 1999).

Post-modernist thinking understands language to be a system on its own. It goes beyond the individual as such and draws on pre-existing language systems with rules and regulations. This pre-existing system, which is established on historical ideals, channels the meaning within a particular context (Shotter, 1994).

2.4. Identity and Discourses

2.4.1. Definition of Discourse

Discourses can be defined as a system of statements, practices and institutional structures that share common values (Freedman & Combs, 1996). A discourse reflects prevailing structures of social and power relationships. These social and power relationships exist within the context of culture (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). Discourses grow from the language used within a culture; therefore, to participate in the use of language is to participate in a way of life or tradition while adhering to certain discourses (Gergen & Gergen, 1997).

Edwards & Potter (1992) understand discourse to be central to everyday life. Therefore, most social activity involves or is directly conducted through discourse. Even when an activity is non-verbal, for example embodiment, physical actions and their settings, its meaning is often generally understood through the partaker's discourse (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

Gergen (1998) suggests that identity is an outflow of discourse. He continues by proposing that in our contacts with others and narrations, we attain a sense of being individuals with certain qualities and self-reference abilities.

2.4.2. Dominant and Alternative Discourses

Dominant Discourses are those set of statements to which everyone measures their lives by within a given culture, thus defining their identities and realities through a dominant discourse (Soal & Kottler, 1996). The power and materiality of a culture maintain dominant discourses (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999).

Dominant discourses impact the way in which a person narrates their life and ultimately gives existence to their identities and by their very nature allow only certain phenomena attention and voice (Gilbert, Walker, McKinney & Snell, 1999). These prescriptions of dominant discourses govern our actions, our thoughts and our gestures thus creating our reality.

Alternative discourses are those discourses that are resistant to the dominant discourses. By choosing to live a life that resists the dominant discourses and adopts an alternative discourse assists us in the creation of a new identity. Alternative discourses often create a preferred way of living and interacting with others. Hardy & Palmer (1998) suggest that discourses can be employed by people to create change. Therefore, their actions are not totally determined by wider discursive structures.

2.4.3. Discourse and Power

Dominant Discourses are significantly more powerful than alternative discourses as those who hold supremacy generally prescribe them to society. Foucault (1975) and Gergen (2000) suggest that power is related to narrative, so that various forms of discourse have the power to impact the language of a society and therefore, potentially create social change. Gergen (2001) compliments the afore-mentioned idea by suggesting that if the individual mind obtains knowledge of the world, and our means of passing on the

content of the mind to others is through language, then language becomes the bearer of truth. Thus, indicating the power of language and discourse.

Richer (1992, p.111) draws on Foucault's understanding of power as written in his book "Discipline and Punishment". Foucault implies that "power and knowledge directly imply one another; there is not any power relation without the correlative constitution of some field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations". The hiddenness of power in knowledge may prove successful through the maintenance of dominant discourses.

Gergen (2001) understands that Foucault must be given special mention when discussing power, as Foucault, states that matters of description cannot be separated from issues of power. Thus, he proposes that discourses have the potential to create social change. Potter (1997) validates this idea by implying that power plays an influential role in the social making of meanings.

In conclusion, discourses possess the power to reproduce and transform institutional structures (Hardy & Palmer, 1998) and construct versions of the world (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

2.4.4. Discourse, Knowledge and Practices

A given culture prescribes to its members a set of rules in which to abide by. They can be seen as knowledges and practices. Knowledges and practices are thus the products of history, culture and discourse. As social actors, we are constantly adjusting to the interpretive context in which we find ourselves and create our conversation and actions in order to fit that context (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Nightingale & Cromby, 1999).

Dominant discourses prescribe different knowledges and practices to that of alternative discourses. Dominant discourses are produced to do particular things in interaction. Therefore, they prescribe the behaviour of inner life, local

circumstances, history, broader social groups and structures (Edwards & Potter, 1992). An example of a dominant discourse that may be passed on through the generations is the belief and practice that men are the breadwinners and the women should stay at home and raise the children. This is a discourse that seems to be becoming less predominant in the Western society.

An alternative discourse is being formed, in which both parents need to work in order to bring in the money and the children are raised by child-minders. Therefore, in traditional marriages, men know or internalise certain discourses, which ultimately lead to a particular practice or behaviour. It seems that allowing alternative knowledges and practices to filter into a given culture leads to new behaviours (Hardy & Palmer, 1998).

2.4.5. Discourse and Deconstruction

Deconstruction is basically the process of dismantling or dissecting. It keeps us from being rigid in our identities. Lovlie (1992, p.122) describes deconstruction, as being a “hybrid between ‘destruction’ and ‘construction’, conveying the idea that old and obsolete concepts have to be demolished for new ones to be erected. Gergen (1998) understands deconstruction to mean the disentanglement of an established idea. Its original meanings become warped, subtle and eventually endangered by conflicting ideas.

It seems that a person’s identity is made up of a number of entities, all which help to create a perception of self. An example of these identities includes that of mother, friend, wife, and sister. All of these identities create a whole person. They deconstruct each other allowing for multiple identities (Kvale, 1992). Discourses inform our identities and influence how these identities are integrated into one’s being since there are certain knowledges and practices that dictate how a mother or friend should behave. Thus, discourses afford us a variety of identities, which have the potential to deconstruct each other.

2.5. Identity and Environment

It seems that different environments afford us with different identities. An example of this may be a young woman who is a daughter at home but an employer at the work place and a student at a tertiary institution. Gergen (1991, 1994) implies that identity is created by means in which a person is identified, treated, talked about in a variety of specific contexts. We, thus, live out different identities in different contexts.

Our identities are informed by the constructs around us. The structures in which we live and the places we visit contribute to the way in which we perceive our selves. A house, which is dominated by an inebriated parent, comes to represent the experiences and events that once transpired for a child that was raised in such an environment. The discourses, knowledges and practices that were prescribed in that house inform the child's identity. Gergen (1991, 1996) confirms this by proposing that we have multiple selves who are composed within cultural, contextual and language boundaries.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. When?

The study was performed in the year 2003. This is due to a number of reasons: It is the year in which I, the researcher have been completing my internship for Masters in Counselling Psychology, at the Student Services Bureau at RAU. During this year I had access to audio-visual equipment as well as to the participants of the study, namely female students at RAU.

The elections in 1994 represented “freedom for all” and “freedom of speech”. It is almost 10 years since this historical event in which the term “rainbow nation” was practically implemented into the political arena of South Africa. Never before were South Africans allowed to voice their opinions without drastic consequences. Due to the fact that a decade has almost past, it seems significant that freedom of speech is becoming a reality in the lives of young adult woman who were perhaps the most silenced portion of the population according to Chapter 2 (Act 108 of 1996) of the constitution (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). One can liken the hearing of South Africa’s once oppressed people, with regards to the 1994 elections, to that of the voices of adult daughters of alcoholics. They too have been oppressed and silenced by a more domineering and powerful force leaving them with what seems to be a skewed sense of self.

South Africa’s rainbow nation is represented by this study as all the participants come from diverse racial groups and religious backgrounds. I wish to provide these participants with an opportunity to express and explore their experiences surrounding this social phenomenon that seems to be so rampant in the families of South Africa.

We are currently living in an era that is leaning towards a post-modern understanding of reality. Absolute truths have been demolished and people are encouraged to create their own realities and identities based on the interpretations of their own experiences. Based on this statement, the timing of this study allows for this calibre of research. It has become evident that society has moved away from a modernist perspective of reality and embraced a post-modern perspective. This also allows for a shift in the manner in which information is acquired. Modernist research has often been based on quantitative scales and methodologies (Capara & Van Heck, 1992; Kvale, 1992), studies that incorporate dialogue and the analysis of discourses falls under the afore-mentioned post-modern era.

3.2. Where?

I have favoured RAU as the institution at which this research will be based because RAU is an academic community. RAU, as an academic community possesses its own set of discourses and meaning of truth. The research took place at the Student Services Bureau that is situated on the RAU campus. This allowed for easy access by the participants of the study as most of them were residing in the residences on the RAU campus. Those who lived at home and travelled to the university were on campus for a sufficient amount of time and therefore found it convenient to attend the focus groups at the Student Services Bureau.

Due to the fact that the study was focussed specifically at students at RAU, it seems only obvious that the research should take place at the university from which the participants were selected. This possibly added to the comfort of the participants, as they were familiar with the surroundings. This is an important aspect of the study as the nature of this research may be regarded, as being personal in nature and thus the comfort and ease of the participants was essential. The Student Services Bureau offers the luxury of audiovisual equipment, which was necessary for this study.

3.3. Who?

The participants of the study include three important components, each playing an intricate part. The first component is myself, therefore, my experience of the study and my own personal identity concerning parental struggles with alcohol. I aim to use my own experiences as a reference and include discourses or narratives that are prevalent in my own life in the study. Therefore, the awareness of my own construction of identity will be kept in mind.

The second component is the literature that is already available on the topic of parental struggles with alcohol, the experiences of daughters of the aforementioned parents, the grips of alcohol in the communities of South Africa and the theoretical position of social constructionism. I have devoted a chapter to the research that has already been performed with regards to the abovementioned topics and include it in my discussion.

The final element is the identities of the participants that took part in the focus groups. They were selected according to the participants' own interpretation of their life experiences. Memos (shown in appendix A), both verbal and written, were sent out to my colleagues at the Student Services Bureau as a request for them to refer clients to me who met the aforementioned criteria. Confidentiality was ensured and the prospective participants were made aware of the opportunity available to them to be part of a focus group for research purposes and consent forms (shown in appendix B) were issued. The students wished to volunteer their experiences and time to the research. My aim was to supply these students with the opportunity to have their voices heard.

There were six participants that took part in the focus groups. The participants included:

- A Bulgarian woman who is 19 years old and is studying 1st year, BA (Politics and Economics);
- A Black South African woman who is 20 years old and is studying 3rd year, BCom (Investment Management);
- A Coloured South African Woman who is 20 years old and is studying 3rd year, BA (Sports Psychology);
- A woman of Portuguese heritage who is 21 years old and is studying 3rd year, BA (Journalism);
- A Black woman from Botswana who is 18 years old and is studying 1st year, BCom (Sports Management); and finally,
- An Afrikaans, White, South African woman who is 22 years old and is studying 3rd year, BCom (Informatics).

It seems that the above ratios, in terms of the multiracial diversity of the participants involved in the study, correlate strongly with the gender and population statistics of RAU for the year 2003. Out of the total number of females who are enrolled for undergraduate studies for this year, that being 6948, 4607 are of White heritage, 1333 belong to the Black population of South Africa and 321 are Coloured (R. Geris, personal communication, 05 November, 2003). Three of the five participants in the study were White, two were Black and one was Coloured. Thus, the participants of the study represent the multicultural ratio of females studying at RAU during the year 2003.

Although I am not a student at RAU, I was included in the spectrum of participants. I was an additional white, female participant of 25 years of age and English speaking.

3.4. What?

My choice of method for this specific research study was that of Focus Groups. A focus group assists in the soliciting of information from individuals in the field. According to Morgan (1988) focus groups involve the explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group.

Nassar-McMillan and Borders (1990) suggest that Focus Groups were used as far back as World War II, it seems that this method of data collection was used in the assessment of public response to wartime propaganda. Since then, this method has been widely performed in the Marketing Research field as a way to solicit customer feedback on products and services.

Focus groups may be used to confirm existing information known about a topic or may be designed to provide new insights by approaching the topic from a new perspective. Vos (1998, p.314) explains a focus group interview as being “conducted as an open conversation on a specific topic in which each participant may make comments, ask questions of other participants or respond to comments by others, including the moderator”.

Focus groups do exactly what the name implies - focus. That implies that they have focuses and clear agendas. Their aim is to facilitate the natural, spontaneous discussion of events or experiences by the participants (Vos, 1998).

3.4.1. Advantages of Focus Groups

The advantages of focus groups are centred on the idea that focus group interviews versus individual interviews can be likened to those of group counselling or discussions as opposed to individual ones. An obvious outcome of the focus group is that the type of information gathered differs to

that of individual sessions and may require less time (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995). In addition to the afore-mentioned advantages, the group dynamic allows for more creativity, providing for a greater range of thought, ideas and experiences (Morgan, 1988). Bless & Higson-Smith (1995) postulate that the research method of focus groups provides access to participants' interaction on topics that are either difficult to observe or rare in occurrence.

It seems that focus groups permit an environment in which the researchers are able to observe the interaction between the group members. This can provide valuable insights regarding the topic being researched. Stewart and Shamdasani (in Nassar-McMillan and Borders, 1990), suggest that focus groups are suitable for acquiring information, producing research hypotheses, creating new ideas or concepts, identifying difficulties with services or programs, providing terminology appropriate for research, and explaining experimental results.

In addition to this, focus groups can enhance quantitative or other qualitative techniques, or they can be used as an independent technique resulting in constructive information. Perhaps the most significant advantage of the utilisation of focus groups is that there are no definite rules, which ultimately allows researchers to adapt them to meet their needs.

3.4.2. Disadvantages of Focus Groups

Disadvantages of focus groups may include elements whereby the environment in which the data is captured is not one that elicits natural interactions. Focus group data are limited to interaction in discussion groups, which is mainly limited to verbal behaviour (Vos, 1998). The nature of focus groups necessitates that they are created and managed. The degree of management depends greatly on the researcher's goal with regards to the information gained from the group discussions (Nassar-McMillan & Borders, 1990).

3.4.3. How the Focus Groups were used

With regards to the research topic at hand, “The Construction of identities within the context of parental alcoholism”, this type of study lends itself to the use of focus groups. More specifically, the term, which may be more appropriate in the description of the method of data capturing, could be that of “narrative focus group”.

Thus, my primary idea was to understand the participants’ narratives surrounding their own construction of identity within the context of parental alcoholism. This approach allowed me to collect more narratives and identities, which ultimately led to more creative and intimate discussions. The focus groups were utilised as forums whereby the participants had the opportunity to voice their experiences and concerns in the presence of other individuals whose construction of identity was also impacted by the context of parental alcoholism. The participants may not previously have had the opportunity to be in touch with or to articulate their identities, feelings, attitudes and opinions with regards to the afore-mentioned topic. The format of the focus group ultimately offered a discussion forum for the participants to add to and reflect on comments made by each other.

The following is an outline of the structure of the focus groups and the topic that was covered. Included are the times and dates on which the groups took place.

Interview 1: Establish rapport, discuss the goal of the study and gain consent from each participant. Date: 04/08/03, Time: 9am to 10am.

Interview 2: Constructing identity within a context of parental alcoholism. Date: 11/08/03, Time 9am to 10am.

Interview 3: Constructing identity within the context of parental alcoholism. Date: 15/08/03, Time: 8am to 9am.

Interview 4: Constructing identity within the context of parental alcoholism. Date: 18/08/03, Time: 9am to 10am.

Interview 5: Reflection of the last four focus group sessions. Date: 22/09/03, Time 8am to 9am.

3.4.4. Discourse Analysis

Following the collection of the data in the form of focus groups, a discourse analysis was used in order for the data to encompass meaning. Discourse analysis refers to a method of analysis that is used to analyse naturally occurring text and conversations (Willig, 2001).

Burr (1995) states that discourse analysis rests on the assumption that language constructs versions of the world. He continues to imply that in itself, discourse analysis is concerned with the examination of the text, to reveal the discourses that are operating within it or the linguistic and rhetorical devices that are used to construct various objects, or events. Therefore, within this methodological approach, language becomes the focus of interest, and attention is rewarded to the structuring effects of language, with the emphasis on the creation and restraint of meaning (Burman & Parker, 1993).

According to Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999) discourse analysts understand the task of research to be an interpretive and productive, not a descriptive, practice. He continues by suggesting that rather than describing and explaining the world, discourse analysis aims to account for how particular views of the world become unchanging and pass as truth.

Discourse analysis requires the researcher to alter the way in which language is generally perceived and to ask questions surrounding a particular use of language. Willig (2001) proposes that discourse analysts argue that when people state a belief or convey an opinion, they are taking part in a conversation that has an intention. Thus, in order to understand and make sense of what people say, the social context in which they speak needs to be taken into consideration.

Simply stated, the researcher asks herself not what the text is saying but rather what the text is doing. The crux of the adoption of discourse analysis is to understand the nature of discourse and the role it plays in everyday life within the context of a given culture (Potter, 1997)

According to Potter (1997), one disadvantage of discourse analysis lies within the fact that it is much more complex to make obvious and reliable conclusions regarding the limitations of particular repertoires outside unnatural institutional settings.

3.5. How?

Social constructionism is a qualitative research position, which ultimately provides the participants of the study with a platform from which to construct their own identities. They did this using their cultural and historical experiences to define them without the limitations of tests and the restrictions of norm tables (McNamee, 1996). Lieblich, Tuval-Maschiach and Zilber (1998) confirm this idea by stating that this type of research differs considerably from its positivistic equivalent in its fundamental ideas that there is neither a distinct, absolute truth in human reality nor one exact reading or analysis of a text.

This paradigm allows the participants to be experts on their own identities as opposed to becoming another statistic and placing them in a box, thus silencing them with the use of psychometric tests (Gergen & Gergen, 1997). Rather, social constructionism provides the participants with a voice, freeing them from the strongholds of oppression in a similar way in which the 1994 elections provided South Africa's people to voice their opinions.

According to Gergen and Gergen (1997) more traditional research methods, as those favoured by modernists, tend to favour an ideology of individualism, scientific procedures and absolute truths. This automatically places the researcher in a position of authority and the participants into submission.

It seems, according to Lieblich, Tuval-Maschiach and Zilber (1998) that one of the clearest methods for learning about the inner world of people is through verbal accounts and stories offered by individual narrators about their lives

and their experienced reality. In other words, they suggest that narratives provide us with access to people's identity. This is ultimately the goal of my research, to understand the construction of identity within the context of parental alcoholism through the use of narratives.

The freedom from limitations creates an opportunity for the participants to feel empowered in such a way as to allow for the construction of a new identity, thus breaking free from a problem-saturated story. Social constructionism ultimately allows for the generation of multiplicity as opposed to singularity (Burr, 1995). In contrast to research based on modernist epistemologies, social constructionism is sensitive towards cultural values and beliefs.

According to Potter (1997) reliability and validity are not so clearly separated in discourse analysis. He suggests that there are 4 very important considerations that are relevant to this method of interpretation which make it both valid and reliable. They include deviant-case analysis, participant's understanding, coherence and reader's evaluation.

A final way in which this method of research will enhance the quality of the research is due to the fact that the researcher can access not only the individual identity of and its systems of meaning but also the teller's cultural and social world (Lieblich, Tuval-Maschiach and Zilber, 1998). This is an important aspect of this research as one's identity is created through relationship as has been previously stated.

3.6. Relevance

It seems as though a great amount of research has been performed surrounding alcoholism. However, there seems to be a lack of information concerning the experiences of adult daughters who have grown up with parents who misused alcohol in a South African context. These daughters don't appear to have been given the opportunity to have their voices heard. I

believe that alcoholism and related issues are rampant in the communities of South Africa and thus require attention in terms of research.

RAU is an internationally recognised university and the graduates of this specific university have high standards to maintain. As was discussed briefly in the onset of this proposal, students are South Africa's future in terms of its economy and the parents to the future children of our country. Therefore, these students have an important role to play in the maintenance of our society, its morals and its potential discourses. Due to this importance, I feel that this study will be valuable to the understanding of the effects that parental relationships with alcohol will have on the construction of these student's identities and ultimately the influence it may have on South Africa as a whole.

Research is required in order to make sense of the discourses that surround this event with regards to this particular gender. A study such as this may assist therapists in the future when working with adult daughters of alcoholics from South African communities, especially those clients whose frame of reference is in the context of an academic community. This is specifically in terms of the influence that a parent's struggle with alcoholism may have had on the construction of their identities.

3.7. Ethics: Research vs. Therapy

The aim of this study was based on the methods of research as opposed to therapeutic methods. Therefore, the stance taken towards the study was concerned with the gathering of information within the context of research as opposed to the resolving of personal issues

With regards to ethics, the participants were asked to sign a letter of consent (see attached appendix B), which included the confidentiality of the information that was obtained as well as agreement to the use of audio-visual equipment. In addition to this, the participants were offered the option of personal counselling in the case of initially repressed issues being exposed

during the focus group sessions that they were unable to process on their own. They had the choice of any counsellor at the Student Services Bureau at RAU. In addition to personal counselling, group therapy was offered to all the participants in the event that they felt more comfortable in a group setting. Three of the participants did return for group therapy where topics we had previously touched on in the focus groups were explored in more depth. Other students were also welcomed. During these sessions audio-visual equipment was not utilized as it was regarded as therapy as opposed to research.

Chapter 4: Results

The participants of this study were asked to supply a pseudonym to identify themselves so as to ensure confidentiality. Therefore, the following names have been used to protect the privacy of the participants.

4.1. Person 1: “Zoë” (A coloured South African Woman who is 20 years old and is studying 3rd year, BA Sports Psychology)

4.1.1 Zoë the “mother”

It appears from the analysis of the focus group data, that parental alcoholism influenced the construction of Zoë's identity, in that she primarily became the mother in their household. She states:

- 1 The scary thing about it is there is a lot of responsibility with taking up a role of the mother,
- 2 the strength of the house, the pillar,
- 3 because that's what the mother is, is the pillar
- 4 and a lot of the time most people lean on me,
- 5 and I allow it
- 6 but it's kind of a burden for me because sometimes I don't want it.
- 7 It brought a lot of emptiness into my life where I didn't know my mom.
- 8 I didn't know who she was at the end.
- 9 I was like, who are you?
- 10 You're not my mother anymore.
- 11 I'm the one looking after you, you know.
- 12 Where I need someone looking after me
- 13 and everyday I was still like I wish someone was looking after me because I need someone to look after me.
- 14 I don't want to look after other people but I know it's my instinct.
- 15 The first thing therefore I do is to think how can I help.

Zoë states that she took up the role of the mother, which entailed a lot of responsibility, and taking up a lot of responsibility is a scary thing (line 1). The role of mother also entails being the strong one in the house (line 2). Zoë uses the metaphor of a pillar to elaborate on what being strong means to her (line 2 & 3). She goes further and describes being strong as allowing others to lean on her (line 4). The leaning of others on her is a personal choice (line 5), but also a burden that she doesn't always want (line 6). Not knowing her mother brought emptiness into her life (line 7, 8, 9, 10) and Zoë goes on to express that while she was looking after her mother (line 11), she had the need that someone would look out for her (line 12 & 13). It seems to be her instinct to look after other people and help them (line 14 & 15).

The following extract implies that Zoë struggled to distinguish between her own identity and that of her mother.

- 1 I still loved her very much and I would do anything to protect her, you know.
- 2 I didn't want anything to happen to her.
- 3 Nothing, if anything had to happen to my mom, I would die.
- 4 It was almost like our personalities were interlinked; it's just not your personality and this person's personality.
- 5 It's actually one personality
- 6 Because its part of who you are and that's why we do it.
- 7 It's you.

It seems as though Zoë experienced her identity as being intertwined with that of her mother (line 4). Zoë continues to express that the reason why she took on the responsibility of being a pillar, or the mother in the household, is because she loved her mother (line 1, 2 & 6).

It would therefore seem that parental alcoholism influenced the construction of Zoë's identity in that she became the mother in their household. It would seem as if the motherhood discourse informed the construction of Zoë's identity. To Zoë, the mother identity entails being strong, responsible and helping others. Responsibility is a scary thing to her, while being a pillar, the strong one, is a personal choice, and at times a burden. She instinctively helps other people,

which in my opinion indicates a very fixed way of relating to others. Furthermore she also states that while being a mother to her mother, she had always wished that there was someone that would mother her.

4.1.2. Zoë the “man”

The identity of Zoë was not just constructed as that of a mother, but also as that of a man. She states:

- 1 Well, if most people would know me, know I'm a tomboy.
- 2 I'm very butch.
- 3 I do weights.
- 4 It's left me to act more like a guy because I've found that to be a more respectable role.
- 5 I hate being a woman at times.
- 6 I prefer being a strong woman, strong identity, you know.
- 7 That's my control, that's why I need to be in control.
- 8 It's because when I saw my mom, I saw weakness and I didn't want to be that.
- 9 I don't want to be that weakness that she showed.
- 10 So, not to be that, I became the man.
- 11 The man of the house.
- 12 You know, so I kind of cut off my 'woman nature' or 'feminine nature'
- 13 and I've explored more into my masculine side, which is much bigger than my feminine side.
- 14 I only wear jeans and tracksuit pants and big t-shirts.
- 15 That's why my job suits me, it's a masculine job, it's not really a feminine job.
- 16 I mean, you have to pick up heavy weights, it's very masculine.
- 17 That's why I'm such a strong character,
- 18 I always stand out.
- 19 If I had to be in a whole group of people, I'd be the one standing out
- 20 because I will take charge and I'll be 'we'll do it this way, let's get together guys!'
- 21 You know, when there's rugby, sport, anything, I'm there
- 22 because it's not a weak thing.
- 23 It's left me to think that women are weak.
- 24 They're the weaker sex; they can't handle it if a man leaves them.
- 25 They can't handle little things.
- 26 It's left me to have this perception of woman as if I'm going to be a woman, I can't be a normal woman.
- 27 I need to be an extra special, a super-hero woman
- 28 because a normal woman is just weak and that's not me.

Another dominant discourse, which has informed Zoë's identity, appears to be that of a man. In order to protect herself from the apparent downfalls of being a woman, including being weak (line 8, 9, 22), Zoë seems to have constructed an additional identity for herself. This identity is based on the discourse of a man. Thus, Zoë believes that society dictates that men are butch (line 2) and have a more respectable role in society (line 4). It seems that men have strong characters (line 17) and always stand out (line 18) this seems to be a very important quality for Zoë. Being all these things seems to allow Zoë to feel in control (line 7). Zoë states that the clothes she wears and her job reinforce the identity that she has tried to create for herself, the clothes being jeans, tracksuit pants and big t-shirts (line 14). In addition to this, it seems that Zoë's hobbies of watching sport, rugby in particular (line 21), fall into the discourse of being a man.

It would therefore seem that parental alcoholism has impacted the construction of Zoë's identity in more than one way. In order to protect herself from falling into the same trap that her mother appears to have fallen into, that of being weak, Zoë created another dominant identity for herself of man. Zoë's ideal male identity portrays that of strength, being in control, being respected and having a strong character. Both dominant discourses, of being the mother and being a man, leave Zoë feeling that she needs to be responsible and in control. The practices of being a mother and being a man seem to result in Zoë experiencing a sense of power that she otherwise feels that she lacks.

4.1.3. Zoë the "child"

It would seem that Zoë has created an alternative identity for herself, that being a child, in order to relieve herself of some of the responsibility she has taken on. She states:

1 Okay, I'll go first again.

- 2 I think the context changes because when I'm at home, I'm the mom.
- 3 Well, I don't have any kids!
- 4 But, you know, I take that role of I'm the breadwinner in the house at the moment.
- 5 I clean; I cook most of the time.
- 6 I try to; I work at night so I don't cook at all.
- 7 So that's the context there.
- 8 On campus, I'm more like "man lets live for the moment".
- 9 Be a child.
- 10 Um, because I missed a lot of that, I missed a lot of my childhood.
- 11 From the age of 10, 10 years old, I grew up.
- 12 I wasn't a kid anymore,
- 13 so what I try to do all the time is to go back.
- 14 I always fight to go back into my childhood,
- 15 to be a child all over again because I missed that,
- 16 so basically what I do on campus is I play a lot.
- 17 My academics suffer sometimes.
- 18 So that's what I am on campus.
- 19 Yes, I still am, I still have the mother figure role on campus sometimes, where people come to me and seek advice, or whatever!
- 20 Because they see me as that sometimes.
- 21 But a lot of the time they see me as just a normal friend who wants who just wants to have fun.
- 22 So in the context of campus and home it's not completely different but there is a switch of personality
- 23 because here I can be free.
- 24 I don't have all that that I had at home.
- 25 Nobody, no real responsibilities here.
- 26 I don't have to look after anyone here,
- 27 but at home I have to look after my sister, my grandmother.
- 28 I don't have a choice.

It seems that Zoë's construction of identity is impacted by the context in which she finds herself. At home she fulfils the actions of a mother (line 2), whereas on campus the construction of her identity predominantly resembles that of a child (line 16), this is maybe due to the fact that she feels the ability to be free (line 23) as she feels as though she has no responsibilities (line 25) and is allowed to play (line 16). Zoë's construction of identity at home is impacted on by the discourse of motherhood. As was suggested previously, at home a mother is expected to clean and cook (line 5) as well as look after people (line 26). It does seem, however, that Zoë is not completely free of her mother identity on campus. She sometimes finds herself living out the practices of being a mother on campus, such as giving advice (line 19).

It seems to me that the construction of an alternative identity provides Zoë with the opportunity to deconstruct the dominant discourses that have impacted her identity. The identity of child deconstructs her identity of being a mother and a man and thus allows her freedom to feel free of responsibility. It seems that the one identity deconstructs the other; however, Zoë never appears to be engulfed completely by one identity. There are always traces of the other identities. Perhaps the context in which identity is constructed is something that the theory of social constructionism can consider focussing more attention on.

4.1.4. Zoë's relationship with alcohol

Zoë appears to have constructed her identity around alcohol. Thus, she seems to have given alcohol and alcoholism the power to define her.

- 1 I think it's because we take responsibility for it.
- 2 It's not, we own it.
- 3 It's not the alcoholic who owns being an alcoholic.
- 4 We, as the kids, we own it.
- 5 Our friends don't see it as her father being the alcoholic,
- 6 It's almost as though she's an alcoholic, she lives in that, you know.
- 7 So, it's almost like it's you, it's not actually the person.

- 8 **So, it creates your identity?**
- 9 **The alcoholism defines who you are, even though you aren't the one that's drinking?**

- 10 Exactly.

It seems that the presence of alcohol was so strong in Zoë's household that it was awarded its own identity and it played a large role in the relationship between Zoë and her mother as well as Zoë and society. Zoë implies that in fact just by association, the child is the family member that is termed the 'alcoholic' (line 6). Zoë reinforces this idea by stating that it is the children that

take the responsibility for the alcoholic (line 1). It seems that the acquisition of responsibility is enough to impact the identity of the child involved. Thus, owning the responsibility makes the child an alcoholic (line 3 & 4).

The following text implies that living in a household that is characterised by alcoholism has assisted Zoë in creating a mask for herself. She states:

- 1 I think so. Yeah definitely, I don't really think it's about everyone else.
- 2 I think it's about you.
- 3 Um, you're afraid of yourself,
- 4 you're afraid that you're going to lose control.
- 5 I don't think people really care if you do, you know.
- 6 They do it. But I think it's a fear inside us.
- 7 It's a fear that I have, that if I loose it can I get up from here?
- 8 Can I still be the same?
- 9 Can I still be Zoë?
- 10 Am I still Zoë if I do loose it?
- 11 You know, and I think that's my fear, what is my identity going to be if I loose all that?
- 12 If I loose this mask?
- 13 You know, I think that's my fear.

Taking away the mask that has impacted the way in which people see Zoë as well as the construction of her own identity seems to be threatening (line 11 & 12). The mask, which was once her protection against hurt, seems to have come to define who she is. By taking away that mask might imply that Zoë would have to reconstruct her identity (line 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12).

The above transcription is significant as it allows us as psychologists to gain insight into the process of altering a client's identity in order for them to create a new narrative and perhaps a unique outcome. However, there are consequences to this process, as it seems to leave the individual feeling very lost and vulnerable. In some sense, the client is asking that we understand that breaking down an identity needs to be done as gradually as it is created.

Throughout her story, Zoë clung firmly to the metaphors which can be found in a nuclear family, that of mother, father and child. Perhaps this speaks

volumes in terms of the impact that her family had on the construction of her identity as well as the relationship between alcohol and her family. It is worth exploring the narratives around family roles, particularly when one family member does not perform according to their prescribed role. What seems to be the outcome? Is it perhaps possible that we are forced to alter our identity in order to create a reality for ourselves that seems closer to society's idea of 'normalcy'?

4.2. Person 2: "Jessica" (A Bulgarian woman who is 19 years old and is studying 1st year, BA Politics and Economics)

4.2.1. Jessica the "pillar"

It seems as though the metaphor that can best be used to describe Jessica's constructed identity is that of "pillar". She states that:

- 1 It was horrible, I felt like a pillar because my mom was going like mad,
- 2 She was so angry with my dad,
- 3 There was nothing he could do and my sister doesn't understand.
- 4 So I sort of had to explain it all to her and she saw my mom was in a bad mood.
- 5 My sister would say "why is she being like this?"
- 6 I would help her understand that she's angry and then my mom would - she can't talk to my sister - so my mom would talk to me about all her problems,
- 7 I just felt like I had to be calm-at all times.
- 8 I just had to be sort of like focussed or the whole place would fall apart.

In the same way that Zoë felt she had to provide for the family, Jessica describes herself as being the person who kept the peace and emotionally supported others. In particular, Jessica states how she had to explain her parents' behaviour to her sister (line 4) and be the one that her mother came to in order to off load her feelings (line 6). Jessica seems to describe herself as having to remain calm and focussed to prevent her family from falling apart (lines 7 & 8). These qualities appear to symbolize those of a pillar. Therefore,

Jessica's identity appears to have been informed by the knowledges and practices of a pillar.

It seems that Jessica not only created a pillar identity for herself at home, but also at university. Consider the following extract:

- 1 **It sounds as though you were the one holding everything together.**
- 2 That's what it felt like.
- 3 **Do you feel that it's the same in society as well as in your household?**
- 4 Mm, I find that I listen to people's problems a lot.
- 5 I prefer listening to people rather than telling them about myself.
- 6 I hate talking about myself to people.
- 7 Especially my problems and it takes a lot for me to trust someone in order for me to tell them this.
- 8 And usually I'm the one listening most of the time.
- 9 That's why I think I'm a pillar.

In the case of Jessica, the context in which she found herself in did not seem to impact the way in which she saw herself and behaved. She states that she prefers to be the one who is listening to others problems and thus supporting them (line 8) rather than telling people about her own life and experiences (line 6).

It seems that the following text reinforces the idea that Jessica sees herself as being the pillar in all contexts. She states:

- 1 And it was my front also and I always used to take on the motherly role.
- 2 I've just been thinking about it, most of the friends that I've had, in my high school years,
- 3 I was always there to listen, I always listened and I could never, ever say what was going on with me personally.
- 4 I'd say what I'd done at the weekend,
- 5 What I think about the homework or the teacher or the extra work, or whatever.
- 6 But never, ever, ever say what I was feeling and I used to feel evil because I was playing these games with people and it felt wrong.

Thus, it seems clear to me that even though it was not necessarily what Jessica was feeling, she would still be the listener (line 3) as this is what a mother did. Mothers are supposed to listen to their children's problems, provide for their needs and sacrifice their own... The text suggests that Jessica's idea of how a pillar should behave was well formed in her mind. Jessica goes on to describe her actions as having to be kind, supportive and gentle (line 2). These are the knowledges and practices that belong to the role of how society expects a mother to conduct herself. It seems that it is these particular knowledges and practices that have impacted the construction of Jessica's identity.

Therefore, it seems that Jessica's identity has been constructed around the family dynamics that she finds herself amidst. It appears that the dynamics leave her feeling as though she needs to present herself as a pillar in order to prevent chaos. This identity has perhaps become so ingrained in her being, or one may say her embodiment, that she carries it with her wherever she goes. Social constructionism may even consider her to be stuck in this identity. Her identity has been constructed around the discourse of being a pillar, which is Jessica's behaviour concerning listening and supporting others by her calm and focussed exterior. These behaviours seem to reinforce the responsible identity she strives to portray.

The following extract permits me to believe that Jessica is aware that she is stuck in this particular story of always being the pillar:

- 1 Another thing I took away with me last week is that I think it is so sad that we are such strong people; you know what I'm saying?
- 2 We take so much responsibility for other people's actions and I just thought it was really sad,
- 3 How other people, we allow them to hurt us like that.

It seems that Jessica acknowledges the often difficult consequences of taking on other people's problems (line 2 & 3) yet she appears to find it difficult to get herself out of this dominant story which seems to inform her identity. Perhaps with therapy, she would be given the opportunity to explore other parts of her identity that have been denied existence.

It seems from the following text that Jessica's dominant story of being the pillar is informed or at least impacted on by the culture to which she belongs.

She states:

- 1 In my culture the men drink excessively and its sort of the more you can drink and the more you can handle your alcohol the better man you are.
- 2 And in my family when my dad is sober we don't talk about it at all,
- 3 and we just hope and pray that silently when he goes out he won't drink and we pray and um,
- 4 when he's out with his friends and stuff, its sort of...the women just speak about it behind their husband's back, you know.
- 5 But we don't talk about it in front of them.
- 6 It just seems that it's not our place to say anything because my dad brings in the money.
- 7 He keeps the family going.
- 8 We're not supposed to challenge him and stuff like that.

- 9 **So the status that your dad holds in the family makes it impossible in a way to speak about it to him?**

- 10 Ja, it just feels like even if you say something he won't even make the effort to listen to what you're saying
- 11 Because of my position in the family and his position in the family.
- 12 I just feel like he'll turn a deaf ear.

The way in which I understand the construction of Jessica's identity revolves around the discourses that seem prevalent in her culture (line 1 & 6) which seem to have been internalised by her family. Jessica's lived experience seems to coincide with the way in which she portrays herself. She is very timid, extremely soft spoken and incredibly kind and generous. I feel that the experiences she has had to endure and the identity that she has constructed

has left her with very little self-confidence. According to the above text, self-confidence, or at least a voice, is not what Jessica's culture prescribes to women (line 6, 8 & 11).

Therefore, it seems that according to the discourses surrounding men and woman have aided Jessica in the belief that man is the authority figure and no woman should challenge him (line 8). Perhaps this particular discourse has contributed to the identity that Jessica has created as it fits in well with what is expected of her in her culture. To challenge this discourse and create a unique outcome by standing up against her father or even considering her own needs before other people's needs may be a huge step for Jessica in terms of her identity as a person, but first and foremost a woman.

4.2.2. Jessica lost without an identity

Due to the possibility that Jessica's one and only identity seems to be so deeply entrenched in her very existence, the following extract depicts what it does to someone when the identity that they have created for themselves is taken away from them and ultimately rejected (it seems significant to convey that this particular story did not seem to fit in with the context into which the conversation had fallen. The other participants appeared at a loss as to how to respond to what Jessica had said, in addition to this, Jessica seemed extremely embarrassed after she had told the story):

- 1 I want to tell you guys something about what happened to me.
- 2 One time in high school, I think I was very upset about something and I didn't want to let it show, not to let anyone see what was happening.
- 3 Someone was upset in my class and I really wanted to take the focus out of me and into that other person and to figure out what was going on.
- 4 And somebody said "you know, you're just a fake, you don't really care about other people".
- 5 And that really hurt me because they didn't understand what I was doing.
- 6 So that's my story, but it was really horrible!
- 7 Wow...

It seems that Jessica was left with a sense of not knowing who she is if her dominant identity of being caring and a pillar is taken away from her. It appears as though it was very difficult for her motivations to have been misunderstood (line 5). It seems that being called a fake (line 4) was hurtful for Jessica as the way in which she had behaved was all that she knew.

At a later stage during the session, Jessica referred back to her story of what happened at school. The following is an extract of the conversation:

- 1 I thought I had to be this perfect person; I have to be happy all of the time.
- 2 I have to be kind, supportive, gentle, waddawaddawadda...!
- 3 And that's when this guy said 'no, you're a fake'. You don't really care!
- 4 And it hurt me because I'm trying so hard
- 5 And I mean come on, you know
- 6 All this effort that I'm putting into it and it's not acknowledged.

The fact that Jessica considered it to be an effort (line 6) to live up to the identity that she had constructed for herself, tells me that there are other parts to her that she has possibly not allowed to come to the fore but is still aware of them. It is these other parts that could be explored in therapy.

The context in which Jessica was socialised, that being a home drenched with the taste of alcohol as well as the Bulgarian culture, seem to have played an important part in the construction of her identity. It appears that the relationships between the family members were both limited to the boundaries of alcohol as well as to the unpredictability of alcoholism. In conjunction with the social factors that were impacted by this phenomenon, such as marital discord and the apparent reversal of roles, it seems that the Bulgarian culture and more specifically, the discourses that characterize this culture confined Jessica to her constructed identity of being a pillar.

In the event that Jessica did return for individual therapy, it would be interesting to explore the different identities that she may eventually construct within different contexts.

4.3. Person 3: “Juanita” (An Afrikaans, South African woman who is 22 years old and is studying 3rd year, BCom Informatics)

4.3.1. Juanita the “control freak”

It appears from the analysis of the data obtained from the focus group sessions that Juanita displays characteristics pertaining to that of a control-freak. She states:

- 1 Yes, and what happens too is also the control thing,
- 2 I think I must be the best I can be in everything.
- 3 I must prove to the world that I can still be a whole, a complete person.
- 4 Even though there is a problem in the house.
- 5 And I never, very rarely, it’s a funny thing, I very rarely invite friends over
- 6 because I’m scared that what if my dad loses control and they see him like that?
- 7 How am I going to explain it to them?
- 8 So I tend to close myself off in a little barrier
- 9 where I think okay it’s me, myself and I need to bridge this gap.
- 10 I’m having a real battle with that,
- 11 But I feel that if I can make my stand up in society
- 12 or if I can prove to people that I’m successful and dynamic
- 13 and that I’m a happy person
- 14 then maybe they’ll never see through this barrier in front of me
- 15 and see the cracks that there really are.
- 16 I never tell anyone that my father is an alcoholic.
- 17 But I don’t invite friends to my house very often because I don’t want
- 18 them to find out
- 19 and what’s happened is that it has made me a very lonely person.
- 20 I don’t have very many friends.
- 21 But it’s because I hold back.
- 22 I don’t want to, they’re not allowed to see it
- 23 because what would they think of me?

According to the above extract, it seems that Juanita has learned to portray herself as being in perfect control even when her world is falling apart (lines 1 to 4). It appears that she has mastered this mask, which has become her identity; to such a degree that few people would believe otherwise. It may be that in order to ensure that no one sees through this mask she withdraws from people creating a reality for herself that is empty of people who know and understand her (line 5 and 8).

Juanita continues by stating that she needs to make a stand in society and be successful and dynamic in everything she does (lines 12 & 13). If she can accomplish this, then she believes that others won't be able to see the real her (lines 14 & 15). It seems that Juanita is very concerned about what other people might think of her and her family if they find out the truth. In order to prevent this, Juanita appears to have isolated herself and her family from others (line 17) and she implies that as a result of this behaviour, she has become a lonely person (line 18). This could be seen as Juanita's way of controlling the amount of information that people may know about her family.

It would therefore seem that parental alcoholism influenced the construction of Juanita's identity in such a way that she appears to have developed characteristics similar to that of a control-freak. It appears that the discourse of always being perfect and in control informed the construction of her identity. It seems that Juanita understands the discourse of being in control as meaning that she needs to be the best she can be, successful and dynamic, in order to be a complete person. It also appears that Juanita feels that it is better to withdraw from society in the event that others realise that she is not the perfect, controlled person that she portrays herself as being. The thought of this happening seems very threatening to Juanita as perhaps it will require her to face her own truth as it stands today.

It seems important to note that at two different stages during our conversation in the focus groups, Juanita confirmed the importance of being in control to the other participants. She stated:

Extract 1

- 1 Well, I try to leave my personal life at home when I go to work.
- 2 At work I'll never, I'll try; I don't really know how to explain it.
- 3 But I'm, when I'm working I'm doing my work and I'm doing my thing my way.
- 4 But I'll never let it simmer through at work that there are problems at home.
- 5 I try to be very neutral at work.
- 6 I'll never take my personal problems, be it friend problems or parent problems.
- 7 I'll never take them to work with me.
- 8 It'll interfere and I can't allow that.

Extract 2

- 1 I've told you guys earlier too, I've got this perfectionist stripe in me
- 2 because I want everything to be right.
- 3 I want people to see that I can manage whatever comes my way.
- 4 And that is something I take to work with me and because we're in imports and exports you have to make paper work
- 5 and whatever and it needs to be exactly right for it to go through customs
- 6 and sometimes we have a huge battle to get all the necessary import information.
- 7 And I get so agitated because we've got, we're the liaison team,
- 8 and then what happens is we need to go to the Logistics manager who must give us the information.
- 9 But she's very, very slow and it seems to me you have to ask her this 4.5 times or 6 times before you get a reaction.
- 10 And I get extremely agitated because I want the stuff and I want it now
- 11 because I want to finish it in time and I want to be in control
- 12 and I think that's a large part of my identity that will be very difficult for me to shake.

It appears that Juanita is very aware of her need to always be in control (lines 11 and 12). Perhaps with therapeutic interventions, she will be willing to explore where this need arises from. The fact that she often feels agitated (lines 7 and 10) implies that not being in control is very threatening to her and therefore, to take this part of her identity away from her may have severe implications.

4.3.2. Juanita the “saviour”

The second identity that Juanita seems to have constructed for herself is that of saviour. Consider the following text:

- 1 But when he’s in a drunken state it feels to me what can I do to make this stop?
- 2 What can I do and I’ve tried so many times but what happens is, you can’t talk to him when he’s drunk.
- 3 You absolutely can’t talk to him, he just puts a little window up in front and you can’t break through.
- 4 Because I’ve asked him so many times “why do you do this to us? We can be so happy but you keep on just falling back into the same hole”
- 5 He can never give me an explanation.
- 6 All he ever says is, “I don’t know”.
- 7 And then it makes me feel like why can’t I get through to him?
- 8 Why can’t I make that breakthrough?

It seems that Juanita's alternative identity is constructed around the discourse of being a saviour. It seems obvious to me that Juanita feels that it is her responsibility to save her father, this may have contributed to the identity she has created for herself (lines 1, 2, 7 and 8). According to Juanita, being a saviour entails making somebody stop the behaviour that is detrimental to them (line 1) and getting through to someone so that they can see that they are harming themselves and those around them (line 7 & 8).

Juanita appears to feel responsible for the recovery of her father from his alcohol problem. It may be possible that she feels the need to save him as no-one else will, particularly not himself. It is ironic; however, that Juanita describes her father as putting up a window when she tries to talk to him (line 3) as she seems to do the same thing in front of others. In order to protect her secret from discovery she seems to shut herself off from the world.

The following extract displays Juanita's need to help other people in general and not just her father. She states:

- 1 If I see someone is hurt or someone has a problem,
- 2 I'll always go out of my way and find out what is wrong.
- 3 And I think it's the same as like you said,
- 4 we want to take the focus off ourselves,
- 5 by helping other people.
- 6 And my mom always says to me, 'you take on too much of other people's
burdens, don't make it your own'.
- 7 But it feels good when you can help other people.

It appears that displaying the characteristics of a saviour are not only limited to the boundary of Juanita's household. Instead, it seems that Juanita always wants to help someone who is hurt or has a problem (lines 1 & 2). Lines 3 & 4 suggest that Juanita has given some consideration as to why she always feels the need to help others, she implies that it may be to take the focus off of herself (line 4). It seems that the role of being a saviour is very well internalised in Juanita's identity, even though at times she may consider it to be a burden (line 6). Helping others can possibly be seen as a means to feeling good about herself (line 7).

Therefore, it would seem that parental alcoholism has impacted the construction of Juanita's identity in that she not only feels that she needs to be in control all the time, but also that she seems to possess a deep need to save others from pain and hurt. It does seem that the discourse of being a saviour has contributed to the construction of her identity as well as that of being a control-freak. In the same way that Zoë and Jessica seemed to instinctively help others, so does Juanita!

4.3.3. Juanita's relationship with silence

It seems that silence plays an enormous role in Juanita's family. She states:

- 1 I think because even me and my mom we try, the family knows about the
problem.
- 2 My mom doesn't have a very understanding family.

- 3 They go out and they'll just, they'll immediately make it a juicy story
- 4 And tell everyone that this family has this scandal and whatever.
- 5 So, in our household, silence is not a very big part of it because
- 6 I talk to my dad about it and I talk to my mom about it and we talk amongst each other,
- 7 But we never go outside the boundary of our household.
- 8 So silence plays a very, very big role.

The above text suggests that Juanita's family is protected from the outside world through the use of silence (line 3 & 4) as if the truth had to be known by others then it would result in juicy stories. It appears that Juanita feels that her extended family cannot be trusted with the information of her father's alcohol problem as they do not understand (line 2). Juanita seems to realise that there is a boundary surrounding their household that is maintained through the discourse of silence (lines 7 & 8).

It seems that the boundary between family and society is very much intact with regards to Juanita's family. It is almost as if they carry this secret that is sacred to their family. I sense that perhaps it is this boundary, which has been socially constructed by the family as a whole, which has impacted the identity that Juanita affords herself. It is one of being in control as to what people know and don't know about her. It seems to allow her to feel safe and protected from people who may judge her by the family she was born into.

It seems as though the silence is used both to protect the family's name as well as the reputation of Juanita's father. It may be possible that the discourse of silence has infiltrated Juanita's private life in such a way that it contributes to her embodiment. By this, I am implying that she may find it difficult to break free from a reality constructed by the social relationships in her family that is limited to silence and fear and create a new reality for herself that allows others into her lived experience.

In reflection of Juanita's story concerning her identity, it seems fitting to piece together the possible reasons as to why she may feel this incredible need to remain in control of every aspect of her life. As I understand it, alcohol is the avenue to losing control. It may be that Juanita feels that the unpredictability

of her family life, in relation to alcohol, leaves her feeling completely out of control. In order to regain a sense of control and certainty, she appears to overcompensate and take charge of all areas of her life that have the potential to become chaotic. Chaos may be associated with her father, his drinking patterns and the relationships between the family members.

Therefore, Juanita's identity, with regards to having to be in control may have been socially constructed through the relationships in the family that are impacted by the unpredictability of alcohol. Juanita's relationship with silence seems to have the potential to keep her stuck in her story of being in control.

It seems that alcohol has become a family member in Juanita's life; this particular family member takes away her identity leaving her feeling helpless. Juanita once described herself as feeling "moedeloos" as she had tried everything to save her father from his illness but seemed to have reaped no rewards. Saving somebody from themselves may help to reinstall the feeling of control in Juanita's life. Thus the identities of being a "saviour" and a "control freak" seem to deconstruct each other as well as assemble each other.

4.4. Person 4: "Vuyelwa" (A woman from Botswana who is 18 years old and is studying 1st year, BCom Sports Management).

It seems important to note that Vuyelwa is the granddaughter of an affluent family in Botswana. They are of African descent; however, Vuyelwa's upbringing seems to have followed more of a western perspective as opposed to traditional values and practices.

4.4.1. Vuyelwa the "perfect daughter"

Vuyelwa's identity seems to be dominated by the discourse of being a perfect daughter to her father. Consider the following extract:

- 1 Definitely, I know exactly what you mean. You have to be perfect.
- 2 You can't just be 100% perfect, you have to be 120% perfect,
- 3 If you're not then you know there's something wrong.
- 4 If they actually saw what life was like at home then they wouldn't think you're as good as you really are, you know.
- 5 So you have to prove a point now, and be more than, more than, better than everyone else.
- 6 Because for me, for me it's like I could never find anything about me that made my dad happy.
- 7 There was nothing like, he could say that would be nice he was never there, he was never ever there.
- 8 So, I thought, maybe if I'm the most perfect person in the entire world then maybe he'd see something.

It seems that Vuyelwa's only way of getting her father's attention was if she was perfect (line 8). In addition to being perfect at home, it appears that Vuyelwa found the need to portray herself as being perfect to others as well so as to prevent people from finding out the truth about her family and who she really was (line 4).

It is evident in the following transcription that being the perfect daughter for a father who was never there becomes a burden for her. This can be seen as the beginning of an alternative identity. This alternative identity will be expanded on in following paragraphs.

- 1 I keep trying and trying to make this stand in society to make yourself better than everyone else, to try forgetting about it.
- 2 But there's no point, well I've given up basically, because he's never there.
- 3 So, you know, you can't please someone who isn't looking.
- 4 If you can't get their attention in the first place then what's the point of trying?
- 5 So, trying to work on the thing of doing it for myself now,
- 6 to stop trying to please my dad.
- 7 To try make myself happy now.

It seems that Vuyelwa has decided that trying to please her dad all the time isn't worth the effort she's been placing into it (lines 2 to 4). She continues by

stating that she can't please her father when he is never there to appreciate her perfect behaviour (line 3 & 4).

The following text reinforces the idea that Vuyelwa's identity at home is centred on the discourse of perfection. She states:

- 1 For me, I've got a younger brother.
- 2 My mom went to school, and boys they've got soccer matches on Saturday mornings and swimming galas and that but none of my parents were ever there for him.
- 3 I'm the one who had to go there on the sidelines and be there for my little brother.
- 4 My dad wouldn't go and how would I explain to a 12 year old that your dad is drunk at home. He can't come to see you.
- 5 You know, that he doesn't have a dad.

It appears that by taking on the role of the parents, if they could not fulfil their duties, is what Vuyelwa regarded as being admirable (lines 3 and 4). It may even be that she believed that by fulfilling these duties, her father would recognise what a responsible person she was and give her the credit and recognition where she felt it was due. It also seems that Vuyelwa wanted to protect her brother from the pain of rejection that she perhaps felt while she was growing up (line 4).

The discourse of perfection appears to have infiltrated into her everyday life. Even though she is 100's of kilometres away from her father and other family in Botswana, she seems to carry this perfect identity with her. It seems that parental alcoholism has influenced the construction of Vuyelwa's identity in the sense that she has learned that the only way she could get recognition and acceptance from her father was if she displayed perfect behaviour. The discourse of being perfect seems to have become her dominant identity in most spheres of life.

4.4.2. Vuyelwa the “rebel”

It seems that Vuyelwa finds her release from being perfect all the time when she is at university. This is depicted in the following extract.

- 1 We had an interesting situation on Friday because I do drink,
- 2 I do and my friends and I on a Friday afternoon, we get a couple of beers and sit down there at the Hagen Das
- 3 And this is something that I do, without thinking, every single Friday afternoon
- 4 And I ran into Zoë.
- 5 And she’s like, “no, put that down!” and I was like afterwards, I was like – no, no.
- 6 I ignored her, brushed her off and then afterwards, I was like wait – isn’t this the way my dad started?
- 7 And that was like the one thing I took home with me.

It seems that Vuyelwa was acting against her perfect self even to the point that she was not thinking (line 3) about the drinking that she did every week with friends at RAU (lines 1 & 2). This may possibly be seen as a way to release herself from the domination of a so-called perfect family. It also seems significant that the group dynamics were transported from the sessions to everyday life! Once again, Zoë was fulfilling the knowledges and practices of a mother...

Vuyelwa can almost be identified as being the rebel when she is surrounded by her friends from RAU. She drinks every Friday afternoon, which seems to be contradictory to her perfect, responsible behaviour at home in Botswana. Her dominant identity of always being perfect appears to be occasionally overshadowed by her more rebellious side to the extent that she requires someone else to point out her irresponsible behaviour. Thus, the discourse of being a rebel deconstructs that of being the perfect daughter. In a sense, being a rebel releases Vuyelwa from pressure placed on her by her family as well as others who expect her to be perfect.

4.4.3. Vuyelwa's relationship with "perfectionism"

It seems that the theme of perfectionism is strongly related to Vuyelwa's family in Botswana. She states:

- 1 You don't talk about it at all.
- 2 It would be bad for the family.
- 3 It would reflect bad on the family's name
- 4 which means it would reflect badly on every single member in the family because my whole family lives in the same town.
- 5 So you don't talk about it.
- 6 Because you only reflect the good things, you don't talk about...
- 7 You see, funerals as well, is another big thing.
- 8 In my family if somebody dies, of say breast cancer, or something, you're not told.
- 9 You're just told they died, you know.
- 10 Because, or if they died of Aids or something you know.
- 11 You don't talk about it.
- 12 You don't say "okay they died of Aids" because that's a bad impression on the family so you don't talk about it.
- 13 So silence is a big thing, silence about everything.

It seems that the discourse of being perfect has been passed down from one generation to the next in Vuyelwa's family. The way that I understand her family in terms of the social hierarchy in Botswana is that her family name carries a lot of status due to their wealth as a family. It seems that Vuyelwa's grandfather is responsible for this wealth. However, her father grew up in Soweto and seems to have inherited the wealth after marrying Vuyelwa's mother. It appears that with this afforded status comes the burden of being in the spotlight and judged accordingly. Vuyelwa has learned over the years that silence is the best way to uphold their status, by silence I mean that if anything happens in the family, it is best not to talk about it as it may reflect badly on the family name. By maintaining the discourse of silence, the mask of perfection is preserved.

4.4.4. Vuyelwa's mask

Perhaps it is significant that Vuyelwa suggested that you only reflect the good things and not the bad things in her family. It seems that her family and the practices that seem prevalent in the family have contributed to the social construction of her mask. Vuyelwa seemed busy during both the focus groups and group therapy sessions to discover what mask she was wearing in front of people in order to protect herself. One may even say that she was preoccupied with the process of discovering her mask. Consider the following extract:

- 1 They all say, "Ah wow, you're such a good person" and all the rest of it and I'm like "okay, cool! If you say so, if you think that I'm that, then cool."
- 2 They don't know me; they know the face I put on for other people.
- 3 They don't know who I am, it's just, sometimes it's uncomfortable because I want to tell them like, "no, not really",
- 4 But then again I don't want to tell them because I like that they appreciate the face that I'm putting on.
- 5 I've just been working on getting the face that I put on and me to be the same person.
- 6 But right now, it's just a little bit too difficult so I'll kind of work on that slowly.
- 7 The front I put on is a strong person.
- 8 Of course, you know, she has to look good for other people.
- 9 But me, myself, I'm not really like that
- 10 I want to agree with them because that's the face I put on.
- 11 But if they knew for real what happens when I go to bed at night or when I finally get back to my flat and I'm myself,
- 12 then they wouldn't think the same way that they did when they saw me 2 days ago or whatever!
- 13 I've just, I've just never been able to let people in and I don't know why.
- 14 But I just don't want anybody getting too close to me.
- 15 I'd rather just put a barrier here, and let them come,
- 16 they can talk to my barrier.
- 17 My barrier is nice.
- 18 My barrier is strong, my barrier is cool.
- 19 But me, ja, I don't want anybody too close.

It seems that the dominant mask that Vuyelwa wears is that pertaining to the discourse of perfection and strength (line 1 & 7). It seems that others are not

aware that she wears this mask (line 2). It seems that Vuyelwa would rather other people not know what goes on in her mind when she is alone at night in her bed (line 11), the prospect of them knowing seems to be threatening as she implies that they wouldn't recognise her (line 12). Vuyelwa confirms this by stating that she prefers to hide behind the barrier she has created for herself as this may be a form of protection (lines 14 to 19).

Perhaps one of the reasons that Vuyelwa finds it difficult to take her mask off in front of others and allow them to see the real her is due to the example that her family created for her in terms of only allowing people to see what is good and not what is bad. Therefore, we seem to have come full circle as Vuyelwa may have learned to place on her perfect mask by being socialised in a so-called perfect family! Perhaps one of the main practices in Vuyelwa's family was based on the premise that you are only accepted if what you have to say is good and of a high status. Thus, Vuyelwa's identity seems to have been constructed and maintained around the discourse of perfection.

4.4.5. Vuyelwa the western traditionalist

We, as researchers need to keep in mind Vuyelwa's heritage and the impact it has had on the construction of her identity. Vuyelwa is a black woman who has been raised in affluent white schools. The following is a snippet of the type of challenges she has encountered due to the contrast she finds herself in. She states:

- 1 In my family it is the same thing.
- 2 The father is the breadwinner.
- 3 You do not challenge him.
- 4 But things have been changing because now that I've been away from home and with that I come back with all these different ideas.
- 5 I've been in private white schools my entire life so I don't have a traditional black family upbringing.
- 6 So I'm challenging my dad, you know.
- 7 I answer him back and all the rest of it.
- 8 You're not supposed to do that.

- 9 But, I do that anyway.
- 10 So that's a clash of roles. Because nobody else in my family does, I'm like the only one.
- 11 My mother, she's also like me, she's crazy.
- 12 So she challenges my dad all the time as well.
- 13 It's changing type of thing, because she talks about it more often now.
- 14 She talks about it with us.
- 15 As far as the subordinate daughter thing is concerned, it's the same in my family.

The above transcription suggests that Vuyelwa is struggling to find a middle ground between what she is exposed to at school, that being a different culture and therefore, alternative knowledges and practices as opposed to what is expected of her at home (lines 4 & 5). Vuyelwa implies that at school she has been taught to challenge knowledge, but when she goes home to her family in Botswana and attempts to put into practice what she has learned at school, she gets into trouble (lines 6 to 9). Even though Vuyelwa has been socialised in an environment that encourages women to reach their full potential, at home she is still the subordinate daughter (line 15).

The different contexts in which she finds herself may impact the construction of her identity as each demand different identities and ways of behaving. Vuyelwa's conversations seem riddled with contradictions. The above example depicts this as in line 10 she suggests that she is the only member of the family to challenge her father, however, in line 12 she contradicts herself by saying that her mother also challenges his authority. The theme of the conversation seems to fall within the lines of standing up against authority and perhaps even dominant discourses, but the final thought in line 15 leaves the listener of the conversation confused as Vuyelwa divulges that in fact she is a subordinate daughter. Once again the alternative identities of being a perfect daughter (subordinate daughter) and challenging her father (being a rebel) seem to contradict each other as do the colours white and black. Perhaps the reader is left wondering whether Vuyelwa feels just as confused about her identity as she sounds to the reader or listener! It seems that the only way that she is able to bridge these two identities is to wear a mask of perfection...

It seems as though Vuyelwa is confronted with many identities that ultimately construct who she is, her actions, her feelings and her beliefs. The aforementioned identities include the perfect daughter, being a rebel and wearing a mask. Perhaps it can be depicted that Vuyelwa is still in the process of discovering and creating an identity for herself that affords her the opportunity to realise her full potential and discard the mask.

4.5. Person 5: “Zingiwe” (A black South African woman who is 20 years old and is studying 3rd year, BCom Investment Management).

In introducing Zingiwe, it seems important that I illustrate her family situation. Zingiwe’s mother is the breadwinner in the family; her father is the parent who struggles with the iron grip of alcoholism. Zingiwe stays in residence at the university and goes home over holidays.

4.5.1. Zingiwe the “parent”

It seems that Zingiwe’s actions depict the socially correct way of how a parent should behave. Thus, Zingiwe seems to have primarily become the parent in the household. She states:

- 1 I hurt because it hurts my mom a lot and it hurts my sister a lot,
- 2 like a whole lot.
- 3 Sometimes she’ll call me and she’ll ask me why, when am I’m going to
come home
- 4 because she’s sick of this.
- 5 When I’m home we can just carry on with our lives and kind of forget
what’s going on
- 6 and ja, he drinks like every day and the thing is, I think it’s better for me.

This first extract suggests that Zingiwe plays some type of mediator role in the family. The fact that she implies that when she comes home they can all live

their lives and carry on (line 5) indicates that perhaps Zingiwe feels that she brings with her some type of normalcy or sanity when she returns home from university. The following text may confirm this idea:

- 1 I feel like I have to be there for my sister because I know my mom is strong
- 2 and every now and again she breaks and I'm there for her when she breaks.
- 3 I speak to her everyday.
- 4 She tells me about work stuff, she doesn't tell my dad about what's happening at work because she's just, they end up arguing about something.
- 5 So she calls me to tell me what's been happening at work, what's been happening where and stuff like that.
- 6 When I get home, I know more about what's going on in my mom's life than anyone else and I know more,
- 7 I'm like the one they tell at my house and I don't why.

In this particular extract, it almost seems as though Zingiwe has become her mom's confidant in a way that perhaps her father once was to her mother (lines 1 to 4). It seems obvious to me that the relationship between Zingiwe's parents has impacted the way in which she sees herself, as her mother leans on her for support (line 5). In particular, it seems that Zingiwe has taken on the role of a parent in the sense that she is the one that the other family members come to for support and to confide in (line 7).

The next extract portrays how Zingiwe may be considered as being the parent to both her mother and father. She states:

- 1 **It sounds as though your family, they lean on you a lot. They need your support?**
- 2 Ja, cause at home, I'm the one who's closest to my dad.
- 3 When all else fails, I'm the one who talks to my dad, you know.
- 4 He sort of listens to me.
- 5 He doesn't get on with my sister very much.
- 6 They have fights, like conflicting, because my sister can't take it.
- 7 She can't take it, she just breaks down and I'm scared for her because she drinks and she's only 16.

Zingiwe paints a picture of her being the responsible person in the family who has the power to keep the family together (line 3). In lines 6 and 7, Zingiwe repeats her idea that her sister can't take her father's drinking but she can. In addition to this, Zingiwe appears to be the one who is worried about her sister's drinking habits in the same way that a parent would worry about their child (line 7).

The knowledges and practices that society has prescribed to the role of parent seem to be considerably well internalised by Zingiwe. Consider the following extract:

1 How is it for you to be the one they tell everything to?

- 2 I don't know, I don't know. It's just-I'm fine with it,
- 3 It's not like a burden.
- 4 Like I feel someday, you know what; I really don't want to know.
- 5 Although sometimes I really don't want to know what's going on at my
mother's work
- 6 because they have so many things going wrong.
- 7 Sometimes I get confused what's going on, but if its stress she's releasing
then its fine.
- 8 I'm glad she's doing it because I know she won't tell anyone else.
- 9 She's very...she likes to deal with things by herself.
- 10 But she'll tell me and I'm happy she's telling somebody and letting it go
- 11 Because I know once she's spoken about it then its fine.
- 12 Then she's okay.
- 13 But if she keeps quite about it, then it...

Zingiwe states that being a parent is not a burden to her (line 3) although sometimes she feels that she would rather not know what was going on all the time (line 5). It sounds to me as though Zingiwe is happy as long as her mother expresses her feelings (line 8). In the same way that a parent or a husband would be relieved that their child or wife, respectively, was able to tell them what was on their mind instead of bottling it all up and exploding at a later stage.

It seems that parental alcoholism has impacted Zingiwe's identity in the sense that she appears to have taken over her father's role of parent as well as act as confidant and caregiver to both her mother and sister. To Zingiwe being a parent entails being responsible, caring, and strong and helping others even if it means that she must sacrifice her own needs. I wonder if the needs of the other family members haven't impacted the construction of her identity where if no one else can endure her father's drinking, then she'll have to. Thus, Zingiwe's dominant identity appears to be that of "parent".

4.5.2. Zingiwe the "feminist"

The identity of Zingiwe was not only constructed as that of parent but also as that of feminist. She states:

- 1 'Don't call me, don't', and he just kept quite and he's like okay
- 2 and I said a whole lot of things to him and every time I told him,
- 3 every time I reached a boundary and I told him where to get off.
- 4 I felt bad afterwards because I thought I was being too harsh on him and my friends would say 'you're being too harsh'.
- 5 I thought, 'you know what guys, if I'm harsh it's fine'.
- 6 It makes me; it makes everybody else know what I'm willing to take and what I'm not willing to take.
- 7 If he's not fine with it then he can go and find someone else who is very nice and very much willing, you know, to deal with everything.

Zingiwe seems to imply with this particular text that she will not allow people to use and abuse her (line 6 & 7). It seems that she would rather lose someone than be treated badly (line 7). Zingiwe states that she is comfortable being harsh with someone as then they know where she stands (line 4, 5 & 6). This seems to be very important to her.

Zingiwe's alternative identity seems to be based on the implication of seeing the pain and hardship that her mother seems to have endured. Zingiwe portrays herself as being a very strong woman with strong ideals. She is well spoken, well dressed and streetwise. Zingiwe knows what methods are

required for people to take her seriously and she seems to not settle for anything that does not meet her standards. Thus, her identity may have been constructed around feminist ideals of standing up to the dominant discourse of men being in authority and women being seen as subordinate.

It seems that Zingiwe has made a stand against being taken advantage of. The following extract adds to the idea that Zingiwe is very much her own person and thus independent:

- 1 I just always, and to the point that I do not fantasise about my wedding because I do not want a wedding.
- 2 I don't want to.
- 3 I'd rather not have it and I don't think of how many kids or the picket fence
- 4 because I'm just not interested.
- 5 I got to the point where my friends say 'you're going to be the first to get married',
- 6 you know because the boyfriend I went out with proposed marriage like 4 times.
- 7 And I told him, 'never dude, find someone else!
- 8 Because I'm just not up for it'.

Zingiwe seems to have denied herself the joy of fantasising about her wedding (line1) or wanting to get married and have a family (lines 1 to 4). She goes on to explain that she refused to marry her boyfriend four times as she was not interested in the concept of marriage (lines 6 to 8).

It seems that Zingiwe's alternative identity of perhaps behaving like a feminist (independent and self-sufficient without the help of men) protects her from having to experience pain and disappointment in the same way that her mother has. Her strong and autonomous exterior may be used as an effective tool of keeping people, especially men who have the potential to harm, away from her.

4.5.3. Zingiwe's cultural discourses

The fact that her mother earns the money and looks after her husband seems contradictory to the norms prescribed by Zingiwe's culture. Perhaps the following extract will illustrate her own ideas on these discourses:

- 1 We talk about everything and maybe like, like my family knew, all of my family knows about my dad.
- 2 Even my gran, before she passed away, she knew.
- 3 She'd always talk to my dad whenever she could and sometimes she'd shout at him, you know, for stuff like that.
- 4 Ja, so I don't even know how it works in other families.
- 5 Like I didn't even know it was so silent with you guys in your families.
- 6 Because in my house we talk about it, whenever.
- 7 If you bump into him, 'are you sober' or whatever.
- 8 It's very much spoken about.
- 9 So, I can't even know how it works in other families.
- 10 But I know that if the dad is the breadwinner, you can't tell him anything.
- 11 That works with even in domestic violence and stuff like that.
- 12 Women stay there because he is the breadwinner and you can't tell him anything about it.
- 13 So I think because of the role switching in my house, it's very much different and culturally, that's like-'how can you even be allowing your wife to be taking care of you?'

Zingiwe explains how her grandmother used to shout at her father (line3) and how her mother is the breadwinner, which seems contradictory to their cultural beliefs (line 13). She goes on to describe how often women are kept in the subordinate position through domestic violence and prescriptions enforced by society (line 10 & 11).

It seems that having witnessed the dominant women in her life, that being her grandmother and her mother, stand up against the dominant discourse of men being in authority, allowed Zingiwe to create her own identity based on her own values and beliefs.

4.5.4. Zingiwe's identify in different contexts

It seems that at university, Zingiwe has the ability to create a new identity for herself in a different context, one which is perhaps more care-free but due to the constant telephone calls from home, she struggles to make this new identity a reality. She states:

- 1 I was just thinking, I don't really live a very different life at home.
- 2 But it's just that there you know, your dad is there and you get to see him.
- 3 But when I'm here I get to hear about it on the phone.
- 4 But I don't, it doesn't, because you know what they look like when they're drunk.
- 5 It's like you're there because you can see it when they're telling you on the phone that he did this and you're like 'ah, not again!'
- 6 Or, you know, something like that and I know then my sister is not doing too good because she usually calls me
- 7 and she'll call me, therefore she'll want to tell me what's been going on and my mom will rather not tell me.

Zingiwe describes how her actions are still informed by the discourse of being a parent even though she is miles away from her family. She does this by still being the person the other family members confide in (line 3) and worrying about her sister's well being (line 6). Zingiwe continues by explaining that although you are not there to see what is going on physically, it is still easy to imagine (line 5).

It seems that no matter where Zingiwe is, her identity remains that of a parent as her family still rely on her heavily. As I understand it, Zingiwe cannot escape the identity of parent or pillar even when she is miles away from home. Technology has ensured that she is fully updated on all the happenings of the family.

Zingiwe illustrates the positive effect of breaking the discourse of silence. She states:

- 1 Actually, it's quite the same.
- 2 I think because I talk about it so much.
- 3 My friends at home know and my friends here know so I don't have to change personalities much.
- 4 It's just when I'm at home I just, I see my dad.
- 5 It's not much different.

It seems that Zingiwe's ability to talk openly about her family to friends has allowed her to be congruent in terms of her identity at home and at university (line 1). She goes on to say that the only difference between being at home and at RAU is that at home she sees her father and the effect it has on her mother and sister (line 4).

In addition to the above idea, it appears possible that the lack of silence in the family that the female members have created has allowed Zingiwe to allow other people into the boundaries of the family, almost blurring them. She doesn't seem to feel the need to wear a mask in order to protect herself and her family from the judgement of the outside world.

As we have seen from the previous extracts, which I will not duplicate, Zingiwe's behaviour, morals and feelings revolve around being someone people can lean on. This is especially true in her family, where both her parents seem to lean on her as opposed to leaning on each other for support. In addition to her parents, Zingiwe comforts her sister in times of hardship.

It seems that with placing so much attention on other's feelings benefits Zingiwe in the sense that she doesn't have time to think about her own needs or her own feelings. Her socially constructed identity of being a parent or pillar means that she can sacrifice her own needs or desires to help others without feeling threatened by the intensity of her own emotions. In addition, Zingiwe's alternative identity that of being a feminist means that she isn't required to show her feelings to other people. She can easily push them away if she feels uncomfortable and rely on her strong will and determination to protect her from more pain.

In defence against the identities that Zingwe has created, she has managed to continue to stand up against the dominant discourse in her culture, which prescribes that males are in authority and females are subordinate. Her constructed identities assist her in maintaining the freedom of speech over the ever-present theme of silence, which seems to run deep in families who are defined by alcohol.

4.6. Person 6: “Fatima” (A woman of Portuguese heritage who is 21 years old and is studying 3rd year, BA Journalism).

Fatima attended our first focus group session but unfortunately did not return after that. A number of the other participants bumped into her on campus and it seemed that she had got the times and dates mixed up and therefore did not make it. However, after trying to contact her to ensure she had the correct details, I began to realise that Fatima was not ready to divulge this part of her life to strangers as she did not answer my call or reply to my message. In order to guarantee that Fatima did not think I or the other group members were upset that she did not attend the other sessions, I wrote her a letter thanking her for her participation, emphasising the fact that it was on a voluntary basis and thus she had every right to change her mind. I wished her the best for her future and sent the letter to her postal address.

Allow me to share with you my thoughts as to why she may not have been emotionally ready to share her account of parental alcoholism. But first, consider the following extract:

- 1 Well, from an early age I was very ashamed like I was so embarrassed.
- 2 I couldn't go to school.
- 3 I had this thing in my head where I couldn't let anyone find out how life really was for me
- 4 and how my father used to abuse my mother and things like that.
- 5 I'd be scared to walk outside the house in case the neighbours saw me
- 6 And they knew what was happening.
- 7 I bottle everything up inside,
- 8 I'll never ever let anyone know my problems or my feelings.

- 9 But I'll, I'll listen to their problems and things.
- 10 I can't say that I love my father.
- 11 Maybe because of recent circumstances.
- 12 The thing is, I'm not afraid of drinking myself.
- 13 I do drink a lot myself but it never crosses my mind, or maybe I don't give it enough thought,
- 14 Thinking that I may fall into the same trap.
- 15 But ja, that's all I've got to say.

Fatima's mother had passed away from a heart attack approximately six months prior to the focus group sessions. It seemed that she had blamed her father (who was the parent with the alcohol problem) for her ill health as he had divorced her many years ago and left her with nothing. The previous extract suggests that that Fatima was feeling intense anger towards her father (line 10) and possibly needed to deal with that as well as the death of her mother before she could talk about her own identity.

It is evident that Fatima was struggling to come to terms with her grief and anger towards her father. Her body language confirmed this as she sat very huddled onto the couch, almost burrowing herself into its perceived safety. Lines 7 and 8 seem to be a warning that she won't allow herself to open up to anyone, which possibly included the members of the focus group.

Fatima describes herself as feeling embarrassed and ashamed by the happenings that went on in her household (lines 1 to 6), it appears that she is still holding onto that sense of shame as she still feels the need to bottle everything up and her body language reflects that of a lack of confidence. It may be possible that her identity has been constructed around these feelings of embarrassment, creating a reality that is cut off from others in both her family and university life.

It seems unfair for me to comment any further on Fatima's identity or story as it would not be able to be told in its entirety. It would seem as though I portray myself as being the expert on this topic, which is against the aim of this study. Therefore, the construction of Fatima's identity may be left to the imaginations of the reader.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1. Findings of the study

Through an analysis of the information gathered during the focus group sessions, this study has attempted to contribute to the understanding of the construction of identity with regards to growing up in a household where one or both parents suffer from the grips of alcoholism. It seems that ideas have been generated as to the types of identities that are formed in the situations previously mentioned.

This study has contributed to the understanding of social reality for the adult females who grew up in alcoholic households. It is apparent that each participant's social reality is being re-evaluated and thus reconstructed according her social environments or contexts in which they find themselves. Each participant possesses a personal narrative, which contributes to the identity they afford to themselves and that is afforded to them when in relationship.

It seems that the question that arises from this study concerns what is happening to the sense of identity in an environment that is strewn with unpredictability, neglect, abuse and tension. If one were to return to the previous metaphor of the democratic elections that took place in 1994, it appears that South Africa's sense of identity was reconstructed after this historical event to some extent. However, many people still suffered from racism, which resulted in neglect and abuse. Many aspects of South Africa's rainbow nation are still being mended and thus our identity is still under reconstruction.

It seems that this is true for the participants of this study as well as they seem to be in a constant process of re-evaluating their identities and creating new realities for themselves. Just as the people of South Africa have the potential

to change their own realities into preferred realities, so do the participants of the study. In a manner of speaking, they hold the key to their own future. South Africa seemed stuck in it's story of apartheid and racism for many generations, however, through the creation of alternate discourses and by overthrowing the social norms and standards, South Africa seems on it's way to creating a preferred reality that displays freedom for all. So too are the participants of this study who display signs of unique outcomes that will free them from the stronghold of chaos.

This study has enabled information to be generated that is not only related to the construction of identity with the context of parental alcoholism, but also the impact that this process may have on the formation of relationships, both romantic and platonic, as well as the highlighted themes that seem prevalent within these households which may contribute to the formation of an identity or identities. It seems that there are a multitude of links that can be made between the dynamics of a household that is characterised by alcoholism and the actions, emotions and thoughts that belong to the children who are socialised in these households. Unfortunately, the magnitude of this study does not allow for the diverse analysis of the afore-mentioned phenomena.

Six different stories were obtained through this study. Each participant entered the focus group sessions with their own set of standards and unique experiences. However, when comparing the six stories, it is evident that there are definite similarities between them. The most obvious similarity appears to be the theme of responsibility. Each participant seems to take on the responsibilities of the family, particularly the responsibilities of the mother, in an attempt to create an environment conducive to suit their required needs. Over and above this theme, each participant seems to be wearing a mask portraying an identity that exudes responsibility, strength, power and control. It appears though, that these masks are used as a means of protection from hurt, which may result from taking off the mask and being vulnerable to people by allowing their emotions to show.

In addition to this, it appears that being perceived as someone who is in control of her life and successful in all areas is very important to the participants. Another common element seems to be that sacrificing one's own needs in order to help others who are in difficult situations. These are only a few of the discourses that seem to inform the construction of identity with regards to the context of parental alcoholism

Although these particular themes seem to be a commonality between the participants, there are also many differences. It seems that the differences become evident in the fact that each participant has the potential to create a different identity within the context of parental alcoholism. Perhaps the culture, past experiences and dominant discourses allow for these differences.

5.2. Recommendations and limitations of the study

It is recommended that the results of this study be used in academic communities where a multitude of people who fit the criteria for participants of this study will be located. These results could assist psychologists who may encounter such clients in terms of the construction of their identity and the impact this may have on other areas of their lives that may concern family and romantic relationships, among other contexts.

The participation of this study was voluntary, however, it may be to the researcher's benefit, in the case of participants who are not present at all the focus groups, to ensure that a document is signed that binds the participants to the attendance of the entire span of the research. In other words, it seems necessary that all the participants are present at each session so as to protect the study from a changing dynamic within the group, which may have the potential to alter the final results of the study.

Other recommendations include the length of the study. Perhaps an increase in the amount of focus group sessions will allow for the further generation of

information with regards to this topic. The time for each session could also be reconsidered as often ideas had to be left unattended due to the shortage of time.

In a positive light, the number of participants provided the opportunity for both an in-depth discussion of a particular theme as well as each voice to be heard without being drowned out by too many declarations. The diversity of the group, with regards to the different races and cultural backgrounds, provided information that represented a large group of people and that was relevant to the people living in South Africa, particularly those studying at RAU.

Although the theory of social constructionism complimented this study as it allowed for qualitative research as opposed to quantitative research, other epistemologies could also be used in such a study. They may include Phenomenological Theory, which is based on Carl Rogers' idea that each individual perceives the world in a unique way. He suggested that these perceptions make up an individual's phenomenal field. It seems that Rogers attempted to perceive the world as it appears to individuals by understanding behaviour which is seen through their eyes and with the psychological meaning it has for them (Pervin & John, 1997).

Alternative methodologies could also have been employed which may have introduced a new element to the study. These methodologies could include the writing of stories or the filling out of open-ended questionnaires. However, it would be important to be faithful to the quantitative style of research as this allows for the diversity of participants and the unique experiences. In other words, quantitative research does not have the potential to silence the participants as that would be against the goal of the study.

It seems obvious that further research is required on the topic pertaining to this study. As was stated in Chapter 1, alcoholism is a rampant problem in South African communities. Children are faced with this exact reality day in and day out. It seems only obvious that the continual experience of parental alcoholism must have an impact on the construction of identity.

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Appendix A

Attention Counsellors!

My topic for my MA thesis is concerned with the construction of identities of female students at RAU who have been exposed to parental alcoholism.

This is a request for you to please keep this in mind if you happen to see a client who correlates with the above mentioned criteria. If you are fortunate enough to counsel this type of client, please could you offer her the opportunity to be part of a focus group for research purposes.

Perhaps you can gain their permission with regards to giving me access to their telephone numbers or refer them to me at the Bureau. (489 3625/ 082 850 5137/ bas@rau.ac.za)

Kind regards

Bridget

Appendix B

Information Sheet

&

Consent Form

Name

Date

Thank you for your cooperation and participation in this project

Information Sheet

I am a Masters Counselling Psychology student currently doing my internship at the Student Services Bureau at RAU as the last part of my qualification. I am doing research on the construction of identities of female students at RAU who have experienced the effects of living with parents who are battling with the stronghold of alcohol. The study will benefit you indirectly by helping psychologists to understand the construction of identity of female students at RAU who have experienced parental alcoholism.

The process of the research will involve focus groups once a week over five consecutive weeks. Each group will last for approximately one hour. You are free to ask questions about the group and to contact me at the Student Services Bureau on 489 3625.

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you are not forced to participate. Your identity will be protected as neither your name nor address will be included in the study.

In order not to change the meaning and to keep the natural flow of the discussions, a video camera will be used. After the recordings, I will keep the tapes in a safe place under lock and key. Sections of the tape will then be copied word for word onto paper. Thereafter, the tapes will be destroyed.

Consent Form:

I have read the provided information sheet and voluntarily decide to be a participant in this particular research project concerning the construction of identities of female students at RAU who have experienced events relating to parental alcoholism.

Participant's signature.....

Date.....

I have explained this study to the above participant and have ensured that she fully understood before signing this consent form.

Researcher's signature.....

Date.....