

**SATISFACTION IN LONG-TERM HETEROSEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS:
AN EXPLORATION OF DISCOURSE AND LIVED EXPERIENCE**

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Abstract

‘Relationship Satisfaction’ is highly valued within the socio-political language of modern coupledness, and its perceived absence is understood as anxiety-provoking and may prompt partners to self-refer to couples therapy. The psychological literature on the topic is vast, but tends to focus on asserting intra-psychological explanations as a way of ‘objectively knowing’ and ‘improving’ couples’ attempts at ‘doing’ satisfying relating. The present thesis expands the empirical work on relationship satisfaction by drawing on social constructionism and phenomenology to highlight the ways in which the taken-for-granted assumptions of popular discourse shape the possibilities for ‘being satisfied’ within heterosexual relationships.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven couples therapists from Relate and were analysed using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) in order to expose the role and power of therapy in the construction of ‘satisfying relating’. Furthermore, thirteen interviews were conducted with ‘lay people’ who self-identified as being in a ‘long-term heterosexual’ relationship. The transcripts were analysed twice using a novel ‘twin focus’ approach which included FDA and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to map the complex relations between the private-subjective, the interpersonal, and the social life worlds of ‘satisfied’ partners.

Commonalities between the two FDAs are presented and theorised in terms of the discursive cycle of knowledge. This suggests that certain ways of thinking about, and ‘doing’ relationship satisfaction are sustained and recycled through the prescriptions of therapy, yet therapists have limited awareness of their role in this discursive norm-setting mechanism. However, variations are also presented which suggest there is multiplicity and resistance which is not captured by the theoretical account of the ‘cycle’. The IPA presents relationship satisfaction in terms of a range of experiential depths and qualities which signify in ways that sometimes elude talk. This ‘richness’ is missing from the mainstream literature and cannot be captured by a focus on discourse alone. Finally, insights from all three analyses shed light on relationship satisfaction as a fluid *relational process* which is always-already enmeshed in broader discursive frameworks, and which is experienced as the dissolving of partners’ lifeworld boundaries. The benefits of these re-conceptualisations are presented for academic psychology and the practice of couples therapy.

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For my sister Sarah

&

For my friend Raj

1.

Introduction to the thesis

1.1 An outline of my research purposes, aims, and key terms

This qualitative research is about the phenomenon of *satisfaction* in long-term, heterosexual relationships. By ‘heterosexual’ I mean the types of relationship that are typically considered as involving ‘husbands-and-wives’ or ‘girlfriends-and-boyfriends’, that is, relationships that are often described as ‘more than friendships’, but I make no assumptions, or prescriptions as to the role that sex or marriage plays in these relationships. Similarly, I do not specify a period of time which constitutes ‘long-term’, but rather, I allow the participants to decide whether or not they identify their relationship as ‘long-term’. Moreover, when I first started this research (and I now recognise this was a huge assumption) I anticipated that when people spoke of relationship satisfaction, dissatisfaction would implicitly be part of their narrative. The meanings of the two are dialectically intertwined (Erbert & Duck, 1997), and I believed it made sense to anticipate a *meaningful* relationship satisfaction which was not distinct from the discourses and preoccupations of relationship dissatisfaction. I rejected the distinction of relationship satisfaction and dissatisfaction as dichotomous cognitive-emotional *states*, because I believed this approach was limited in what it could tell us about the topic. Therefore, in this thesis I use ‘*satisfaction*’ as a ‘catch-all’ term, which incorporates the various different meanings and processes that are associated with it in the literature - including being satisfied, not being satisfied, being dissatisfied, and not being dissatisfied¹.

The purpose of this project was twofold. Firstly, I wanted to challenge the types of mainstream² research that attempted to define and predict relationship satisfaction and, in doing so, advance our conceptual and theoretical understandings of the topic by presenting a twofold re-conceptualisation of relationship satisfaction as (i) a social construction; and (ii) as a subjective phenomenological experience. I was not interested

¹ I only distinguished between these terms if I was recounting literature or participants’ accounts in which a distinction was produced.

² By “mainstream” I refer to research which takes a realist, positivist, essentialist approach to research and knowledge. That is, universal truths exist about the world independent of the socio-historical context, and these truths are ‘discovered’ through the research process.

in trying to delineate and *fix* the meaning of ‘relationship satisfaction’, but rather, I wanted to ask how it was possible for relationships to be talked about as satisfying; what characterised the lived experience of a satisfying relationship; and in what ways did relationship satisfaction function as a *meaningful* intersubjective relational process? In order to achieve these aims I conducted in-depth interviews with members of the general public (i.e. ‘lay’ people) about the topic of relationship satisfaction and analysed the resulting transcripts twice, using a novel twin theoretical perspective which was informed both by ‘macro’ (i.e. Foucauldian) social constructionism and by interpretative phenomenology.

The second purpose of this research was to make recommendations for the field of couple therapy in order to improve the quality of care that couples receive when they experience their relationship as dissatisfying and seek therapeutic help. Therefore, I hoped to demonstrate the role of couple therapy in the norm-setting mechanisms which permitted certain ways of being relationally satisfied whilst closing down alternatives. To address this purpose I interviewed couple therapists from Relate³ about their understandings of relationship satisfaction, and analysed the transcripts from a Foucauldian perspective. I then looked for areas of commonality, overlap, and variation between the lay and professional ‘expert’ understandings to see the ways in which the practice of couple therapy challenged or reinforced commonly-held assumptions in order to highlight if the relationally dissatisfied subject was rendered ‘problematic’ and ‘pathologised’.

In the following sections of this chapter I will fully outline my thesis, but firstly I wish to reflect and offer a little explanation as to why I chose to research the topic in the ways outlined above.

³ ‘Relate’ are the largest provider of couples and sex therapy in the UK.

1.2 A reflexive account of my research decisions

1.2.1 Encountering social constructionism and phenomenology - Questioning my previous certainty

My interest in the topic of relationship satisfaction stemmed from taking an elective module - ‘The Psychology of Close Relationships’ – at the University of East London in 2006. When I started the module I thought I had a fairly clear idea of what constituted an intimate, heterosexual relationship and, therefore, what relationship satisfaction was “all about” - what it referred to, and how it was managed by intimate partners. I saw relationships as being something that two individuals had freely chosen to be *in* (like a vessel of some kind) in order to fulfil certain innate needs or desires such as intimacy, personal support, and to feel accepted and validated for whom they are. Having previously completed a degree in biochemistry I thought that whilst some of these needs were applicable to both men and women, there were some well-established gender differences. For example, men *normally* needed more sex, whereas women *normally* needed more comfort and support, and were *normally* better when it came to talking about feelings because they were innately more *emotional* than men. I also thought that relational partners were free to choose how they behaved and acted out their intimate life, that is, how they *did* their relationships, and that doing *good communication* was the key to a *good, satisfying relationship*. Having talked extensively with my friends about relationships over the years, it appeared that these views were fairly common (and I still find it easy to ‘default’ back to them). Having also researched the mainstream academic literature on relationship satisfaction I can confirm that these ideas are highly prevalent there too (See Chapter 2 for a detailed literature review). However, over the course of completing the Psychology of Close Relationships module, the module leader (and now my Director of Studies), Dr. Aneta Tunariu, introduced me to two theoretical frameworks - social constructionism and phenomenology - which led me to question my hitherto taken-for-granted assumptions about intimate relationships.

1.2.2 The Social Construction of Relationships: From essential absolutes to fluid constructions

The beliefs I held about relationships (as outlined above) were based upon a realist, essentialist view of the world and the knowledge that we have about it. That is, the belief that universal truths about the world existed and that through a process of

experimental research we could discover and know these truths. Mainstream research underpinned by this realist experimental framework regards language as a transparent medium, passively describing our thoughts and emotions and therefore conceptualises the psychological ‘self’ (including its ‘personality’ and experience) as existing independently and predating the words used to describe it. From this perspective relationship satisfaction is usually researched with self-reporting structured questionnaire approaches, which essentialise the concept as a relatively invariable state originating from the individuals in the relationship. When I first started studying the psychology of close relationships I had no reason to doubt this approach. However, I did begin to question it when I encountered social constructionism.

Social constructionism argues that our knowledge about any phenomena, including ‘relationship satisfaction’, is not waiting to be discovered in the form of universal absolutes; rather, it is constructed through language and is specific to a given time and place. In this way, it challenges essentialist theoretical frameworks and argues that our concepts do not exist independently of language, but are made possible through its use (Burr, 2003). Thus, the personal world is social (Milardo & Wellman, 1992; Unger & Crawford, 1996), and relationships do not simply reflect innate biological predispositions, but also the ways in which a society construes itself and reacts to larger social forces (Gergen, 2009). I found these ideas particularly surprising when I first encountered them because I had always considered ‘intimate relationships’ to represent our most inner, private worlds - distinct from, and ‘unsullied’ by the world around us. Encountering social constructionism allowed me to appreciate that the knowledge about relationship satisfaction that is ‘revealed’ by realist experimental research is always-already embedded in broader social systems of thought that are historically and culturally located (Gergen, 1978; Rose, 1989; Foucault, 1990; Danziger, 1994; Richards, 1996). Research informed by these ideas shifted from attempting to ‘reveal’ underlying psychological constructs and states to focusing on the use of language. This is why I became interested in exploring the ways in which relationship satisfaction was talked into being.

Broadly speaking, there are two forms of social constructionist theory and research (although this distinction should not be drawn too literally): ‘micro’ social constructionism, which informs Discursive Psychology and focuses on peoples’ situated

language use in their interactions (e.g. Shotter, 1993; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Billig, 1991); and ‘macro’ social constructionism which draws heavily on the work of Michel Foucault and explores the broader linguistic and social structures available in a given place and time (e.g. Foucault 1972, 1977, 1978; Parker, 1999; Willig 1997, 1999a; Rose 1989, 1990; Hollway, 1989; Kitzinger, 1989; Ussher, 2000). Both approaches are concerned with mapping the ways in which phenomena are constructed through ‘discourse’. However, whilst discursive psychologists refer to discourse as the situated inter-subjective use of language-in-interaction, macro social constructionism conceptualises ‘discourse’ as a linguistic framework (the set of statements, representations, meanings, metaphors, images, practices etc.) which has the power to produce a particular version of a phenomenon, and which makes possible certain ways of acting and experiencing (e.g. Henriques *et al.*, 1984; Willig, 1999a; Parker, 1999). When people use language this is not a manifestation of some private, internal, essence (e.g. their ‘personality’ or ‘attitude’), but rather the mobilisation of the discourses available in their culture at that time and so the meaning of their talk stems from this discursive context (Harre and Gillet, 1994). In this way, discourses function as conceptual frames of reference available to a linguistic community in an historical time, against which speech is interpreted and objects and events come into *meaningful* existence through their representation in discourse (Burr, 2003). It is this latter theoretical conception that informed my research and, unless indicated otherwise, it is what I am referring to when I speak of ‘discourse’ in my thesis.

Foucault (1988) argued that discourses not only produce the objects of our knowledge, but also govern *how* a topic can be talked and reasoned about (Hall, 2009). Discourses dictate the ways in which ideas are put into practice, thereby regulating (privileging and marginalising) certain forms of conduct (Hall, 2001). In this way, discourses and the knowledges they produce are intimately tied up with power and Foucault was fundamentally concerned with this relationship (Burr, 2003). According to Foucault (1972) some discourses (depending on the historical time and culture) come to be accepted as the ‘common sense’ or ‘true’ way of understanding a phenomenon, and these ‘privilege’ certain (acceptable) ways of acting and being, whilst marginalising (or pathologising) alternatives. As briefly outlined in my assumptions above (see also Chapter 2), in terms of coupledness, factors that have been identified as important for relationship satisfaction include the fulfilment of innate needs, and a sense of being

supported, known, and accepted through a process of mutual care. Adopting a social constructionist perspective, I now argue that the importance and *value* of these concepts lies in the fact that they have become the ‘normal prescriptions’ for satisfying relationships in Western culture in the early 21st Century. These constructions permit and make possible certain kinds of intimate relationships and privilege/warrant personal satisfaction in ‘modern’⁴ long-term intimate relationships in certain ways, whilst pathologising alternatives. In this way, they regulate how we behave and how we come to know each other and ourselves, and thus, from a Foucauldian perspective discourses are intimately tied to power relations. As Foucault (1977) stated:

“There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (p.27)

Foucault conceived of ‘power’ functioning not as a repressive force, but through the internalisation of discursive norms and prescriptions, such that individuals ‘police themselves’ through self-surveillance and monitor and shape their behaviour according to prevailing standards of normality. For example, he argued that the 19th and 20th Centuries saw the rise of several institutional and cultural discourses (e.g. industrialisation, and the rise of psychology) which produced the individualised ‘modern’, Western subject, who is understood as ‘containing’ personality traits, beliefs, attitudes, and who can freely choose to act upon these (Rose, 1989). This ‘disciplinary power’ is all the more potent because it is freely subjected to, thereby masking its mechanisms in the form of the ‘common sense’ choice (Foucault, 1977).

However, because multiple discourses can surround any given phenomenon, power is not uni-directional. Each discourse offers alternative constructions with different possibilities for action. Therefore, dominant discourses are continually subject to resistance and contestation. Foucault saw power and resistance functioning in dialectical opposition, each defined in the light of the other; the implicit power in one discourse only discernible via the implicit resistance in another discourse (Hall, 2009). Therefore, for each one of us, there are a myriad of discourses continually inter-weaving to produce our identities and subjectivities in certain ways (e.g. in terms of gender, age, sexuality, socio economic status). As a result, the process by which we are continually

⁴ Defined as post ‘sexual revolution’ (circa 1960s-1980s) couple relationships

constituted and re-constituted is ridden with tension and conflict as we attempt to negotiate the positions that are made available to us through discourse.

The media play a huge part in this norm-setting mechanism, and the dominant ideas about relationships that we take for granted can be seen everywhere – magazines, TV, films, adverts, advice columns, music and literature (Hawkes, 1996). In a similar way, researchers who study relationships and relationship satisfaction are also inundated with these same cultural messages. They are not *outside* of, or immune to, the influence of the social world. We are born into a shared system of meanings, which are always-already prescribing the ways in which we can, and *should*, understand and experience the world. As Cushman (1991) argued, culture not only delineates the topics which ‘warrant’ further study, but also the ways in which the topics *should* be ‘properly’ studied, including outlining the types of data, and the processes of data collection and analyses that are *valid*. Thus, the dominant mainstream psychology is reproduced and reinforced by culture because psychology’s predictions and findings appear to be necessarily correct from the outset. Therefore researchers may consistently ‘find’ support for the common sense view because, as ‘experts’, they are actually part of the norm setting mechanism which constructs our dominant understandings about relationships in the first place (Duck, 2011). In this way the discourses of social science filter into, and are recycled in, everyday life (Billig *et al.*, 1988; Rose, 1989); thereby shaping the ways in which partners’ understand and experience relationship satisfaction.

Against this background I subscribe to the Foucauldian perspective that the practice of psychology, and its prescriptions for ‘mental health and well-being’, function as a form of social control by compelling individuals to engage in self-reflection (self-surveillance) and to *talk* (confess) all problems away (e.g. Ingleby, 1985; Rose, 1985). In addition to psychological research the other ‘psy’ technologies, such as the practices of *psychiatry* and *psychotherapy*, also function as crucial components of the norm-setting mechanism (Rose, 1989). For example, Kleinplatz (2001) has outlined how dominant understandings of relationship satisfaction can manifest in professional therapeutic contexts, whereby taken-for-granted social norms are recycled as if they were neutral categories. In this way, professional and lay understandings can cyclically reinforce dominant ideas of how partners ‘should’ live (Nicholson, 1993). This complexity highlighted the need for grounded, contextualised research on relationship satisfaction.

Informed by social constructionist and Foucauldian theoretical perspectives I argued that mainstream research did not appreciate that the private and public worlds were intertwined and imbricated, and therefore the broader social and linguistic context in which partners' understood and evaluated their relationship satisfaction was largely ignored (e.g. Rose, 1989; Duck, 2011). Therefore I proposed to advance the theoretical and conceptual understandings of relationship satisfaction by exploring both couple therapists' and lay peoples' talk about relationship satisfaction to see how the concept was constructed through discourse, how these conceptions shaped the possibilities for being satisfied and for doing satisfying relationships, and to see how these professional and lay understandings functioned within the broader social norm-setting mechanisms. In order to achieve this I interviewed lay people and couple therapists about their understandings of relationship satisfaction and then analysed their talk using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. I chose to look at these datasets rather than, for example, analysing the relational self-help literature, because I also had an interest in exploring the lived experience of relationship satisfaction. This leads me onto the second theoretical framework which informs my thesis – phenomenology.

1.2.3 Phenomenology: Exploring the Subjective Lived Experience of Relationship Satisfaction

As mentioned earlier, whilst taking the 'Psychology of Relationships' module I was introduced not only to social constructionist theory, but also to phenomenological ideas. Broadly speaking phenomenologists share a concern with the experience of 'being human' and exploring what it is like. The first theorist of phenomenology – Edmund Husserl – was interested in how individuals experienced their conscious awareness of phenomena, and coined the term 'intentionality' to describe the way in which experience or consciousness is *always* experience or consciousness *of something*. He famously urged phenomenologists to 'go back to the things themselves'. That is, to analyse the experiential content of our consciousness *before* we have assimilated that content into our pre-existing systems of meaning⁵ (Husserl, 1927, as cited in Smith *et al.*, 2009). Thus, for Husserl, doing phenomenology involved 'bracketing' our take-for-granted assumptions about the world, in order to focus on our perception of it. In

⁵ A theoretical call that was challenged by many (including Husserl's student Martin Heidegger) as impossible.

contrast, Husserl's student, Martin Heidegger (1962/1927, as cited in Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), argued that it was not possible to 'get outside' of our interpretative frameworks, and saw phenomenology as a *hermeneutic*, that is, *interpretative* endeavour. Heidegger's interest lay in the ontological question of human existence and the way in which the world appeared to us and was made meaningful through our actions and relationships. He used the term 'Dasein' ('there-being') to describe the way in which human experience was uniquely *situated* because we are 'thrown into' a pre-existing world of people, objects, language, and culture. These features of our world afforded the embodied, intentional actor a range of experiential possibilities, which were grounded physically (i.e. what was possible) and intersubjectively (i.e. what was meaningful). Thus, human *being-in-the-world* was always temporal, perspectival, and in-relation-to something.

Similar to Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty (1962, as cited in Smith *et al.*, 2009) emphasised the interpretative and situated characteristics of experience, but where Heidegger focused on the *worldliness* of existence, Merleau-Ponty emphasised our *embodied* relationship to the world and how this gives primacy to our individually situated experience. His interest in embodiment and subjectivity are particularly pertinent to interpersonal relationships, with Merleau-Ponty (1945, as cited in Langdrige, 2007) describing them as a "double being". He argued that our perception of the 'other' begins from our embodied perspective, and therefore our relationships always start from a position of difference. Consequently, even though we can observe and empathise with the 'other', we can never fully share or understand their experience because it arises from their own unique, embodied position in the world. Intentionality is therefore always personal to the body-subject. The importance of relating-to-others to our experience of *being* human was also highlighted by Jean-Paul Sartre (1956/1943, as cited in Smith *et al.*, 2009) who extended Heidegger's project of existential phenomenology. Sartre emphasised human *being*, not as a pre-existing static entity, but rather a continuous process of *becoming* in which human consciousness is *action-oriented*. We are engaged in projects in the world and these projects inevitably involve encounters with others who are engaged in projects of their own. Thus, Sartre argued that our

perceptions of the world are primarily shaped by the presence of others⁶ and our engagement with projects in the world is contingent upon the presence or absence of other people and our relationships to them.

When I encountered these ideas I found them refreshing as I had often felt that the dominant, questionnaire approaches to researching relationships missed out on the richness and variation that characterised *my own* and, I presumed, other peoples' experiences of intimate relationships. As noted by Gergen & Walter (1998):

“Because of the traditions of writing inherited from the professional past, we often find it necessary to adopt and employ discourses that seem strangely alien to the experiences that brought us into the field. The languages often seem abstract, dispassionate and convoluted – required more for purposes of professional acceptability than by the vicissitudes of life itself. [...] Because of the demands of our traditions of representation, our attempts to communicate about relationships often seem drained of vitality – stiff, passive and disengaged” (p.110-111).

Phenomenology allowed me to appreciate that ‘experience’ was a complex meaning-making process, which involved a continually developing intentional process that was unique to our situated and embodied relationship to the world. This is what first led me to want to look at the lived experience of relationship satisfaction. However, as my understanding of social constructionism and phenomenology developed, I realised that phenomenology could also address a limitation of solely conceptualising relationship satisfaction in discursive terms: a limitation stemming from the ways in which subjectivity and experience are discursively theorised.

From a social constructionist approach, the traditional view of a unitary, self-contained, pre-social individual was replaced by a socially produced, continually changing, and fragmented ‘self’. The ‘self’ no longer resided in the brain, but was an effect of language, discursively produced. We are not the result of some inner, essential nature, but rather, our identities arise from the linguistic and discursive structures in which we are embedded. In order to explain how identity and subjectivity are produced some social constructionist scholars employed the concept of ‘subject positions’ (Gergen,

⁶ He illustrated this point with two examples in a section called ‘The Look’ in his book ‘Being and Nothingness’ (1956/1943). In the first, he wrote about walking in a park and becoming aware of another person who consequently took ‘centre stage’ in Sartre’s perceptions – he could no longer experience the park for himself, in its own terms, due to the presence of the other. In the second example he described being caught secretly looking through a keyhole, and his subsequent feelings of guilt and shame only making sense within this interpersonal context; his self-consciousness only becoming apparent as he realised he was the object of another’s gaze.

2009; Harre, 1986). Subject positions are made available to us through discourses when they address us as particular kinds of people (as partner, lover, husband, wife etc.). At any given time multiple discourses position people in different, often conflicting, ways and our option is to either accept these positions or try to resist them. For example, in relation to my thesis, discourses (as cultural formulations) about satisfying relationships construct their subjects as certain types of people and not others (e.g. good enough partner, ‘normal’, ‘abnormal’), and open up subject positions which cannot be avoided (e.g., ‘the care taker of my partner’s needs’). Once one accepts, or is unable to resist a particular subject position, they are “locked into the system of rights, speaking rights and obligations that are carried with that position” (Burr, 2003, p.111). We then come to understand and experience ourselves in the (potentially empowering or oppressive) terms that are made available through occupying a subject position. As Willig (1999) stated “individuals are constrained by available discourses because discursive positions pre-exist the individual whose sense of “self” (subjectivity) and range of experience are circumscribed by available discourses” (p114). However, some social theorists still argued that this does not adequately address the issue of our subjectivity (e.g. Burr, 2003; Cosgrove, 2000; Willig, 2001; 2007; 2011) and I agreed with them.

Social constructionism dissolves the essentialist, humanistic self, but it does not provide an alternative account which offers its explanatory function (e.g. Parker, 1999; Burr, 2003), e.g. *why* do people choose to accept or resist certain subject positions? This has left an “empty person”⁷, yet we feel as though we have a ‘personality’ and experience emotions, motives and desires. Furthermore, researchers drawing on ideas from multiculturalism and feminism criticised the lack of attention to embodiment, and highlighted that even though experiences could be socially deconstructed they continued to have a ‘*real*’ felt actuality for the individuals in the relationships. For example, demonstrating the socially constructed quality of concepts such as ‘gender’

⁷ In his later works Foucault (1984; 1986) began to outline a theory of oppositional agency based on an ‘ethics of the self’ which operated through individuals’ ongoing self-critique and experimentation via “an historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them” (p.50). As McNay (2009) states: “This relation to self is in no sense a recovery of authentic experience or an assertion of genuine identity, rather it is a luminal process which seeks to explore ways of being beyond the already known. It is anti-experiential and an anti-subjectivist creation; an experimentation with the possibility of going beyond what seems natural or inevitable in the self” (p.67). However, McNay (2009) also pointed out that Foucault’s “later response of an ethics of the self seems to fall back into [the state domination vs individual autonomy] dualisms and thus fails to convincingly answer the problem” of individual agency (p.74).

and 'race' did not preclude the very *real* experience of oppression experienced by women and ethnic minorities. From a social constructionist perspective the body was understood as a discursive 'text', but this offered little more than a reframing of the traditional mind-body dualism; except, now, bodily experience was explained not as an effect of the mind, but as an effect of discourse. As Grosz (1994) pointed out:

[...] in feminist terms at least, it is problematic to see the body as a blank, passive page, a neutral "medium" or signifier for the inscription of a text [...] one and the same message, inscribed on a female or male body, does not always or even usually mean the same thing or result in the same text' (p156).

In dealing with this, feminist scholars frequently turned to the work of Foucault who demonstrated the way in which our bodies, particularly our sexualities and gender, are shaped by the disciplinary power inherent in wider processes of political and economic control. However, as argued by Burr (1999), even when the intention was to reclaim the 'material body' and validate participants' accounts of their embodied experience (e.g. Ussher, 1997) a Foucauldian approach still privileged the power of discourse to produce and give meaning to bodily experience, and gave us little understanding about the different ways in which individuals engaged with discourse.

Informed by these critiques, I took the position that more could be explored about the subjective richness of experiencing oneself as a dis/satisfied partner, beyond the reifying role of language or the tyranny of discourse, to allow a closer look into the 'humanness' of experiencing these phenomena. There are further nuances and dimensions of psychological experience, say of experiencing satisfaction in one's intimate relationship, that are difficult to articulate and as Willig (2007) noted, "seem to involve [one's] entire being, in a pre-reflective kind of way [and] seem to be about more than the use of language" (p.210). For example, our sexual experiences offer ways in which one body 'knows' another body that are difficult to express in thought or language, and in this way can be regarded as 'extra-discursive' (Burr, 1999). Similarly, existential theorists (e.g. Ratcliffe, 2010) have recently focused on the embodied quality of our 'feelings' and argue that we experience certain 'existential feelings', understood through embodied metaphors (e.g. feeling weighed down, or light on our feet), which demarcate what is intentionally possible for us. That is, our 'existential feelings' shape

the ways in which we come to experience the world, and we make sense of these experiences primarily in terms of our embodied being-in-the-world.

Works such as this emphasised that whilst the embodied quality of experience could never be fully captured, it should not be overlooked either. In Radley's (1995) words, the 'body eludes discourse, not because of its physicality per se, but because it signifies in ways that discourse cannot adequately embrace' (p12). Radley argued that the body was not confined to its discursive production and suggested that phenomenology could offer a way of conceptualising the body-as-meaningful, without resorting to cognitive explanations, or seeing it as simply a product of discourse. Like social constructionism, phenomenology shares the postmodern critique of knowledge claims based on 'objective reality' (Gavey, 1997), and they both reject the notion that relationship satisfaction exists a-priori and can be known through objective measurement. However, phenomenology views *experience*, including embodied experience as the foundation from which meaning is constructed, and appreciates "[...] the radically experiential nature of 'reality' [...] to recognise that 'reality' is not primarily mental or material but rather experiential" (Cosgrove, 2000, p.255). Drawing on these ideas, my thesis contended that a phenomenon continued to exist even after its social constructedness had been demonstrated. In other words, even though relationship satisfaction was constructed through discourse, there continued to be a subjectively felt *actuality* to individuals' experiences, and therefore discourse alone was limited in what it could tell us about this subjectivity. In response to this limitation I proposed that phenomenology could offer a possible way of 'reclaiming' subjectivity and experience from the 'tyranny' of discourse.

This led me to the second aim of the thesis which was to conduct a twin focus analysis on lay people's talk in order to map the ways in which relationship satisfaction was constructed and policed through discourse, *and* also to map the ways in which participants made sense of their subjective experience of relationship satisfaction. Several researchers have explored alternatives or extensions to discursive work, which allowed for the study of embodiment and subjectivity (e.g. Hollway & Jefferson, 2000;

Radley & Taylor, 2003; Gillies *et al.*, 2005; Willig, 2011)⁸, but in this thesis I proposed that Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith *et al.*, 2009) could offer a potent way forward. Therefore, the second aim of the thesis was operationalised by analysing a single data set (of lay peoples' talk) using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and then using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). Whilst, FDA permitted something important to be said about the contours of experiences that might be made available, or limited, by certain discourses and subject positions, it could not (and did not aim to) have anything to say about the phenomenologically grounded awareness of an encounter (Willig, 2001; 2007). In contrast, IPA focused on the felt *actuality* of relationship satisfaction experienced by participants in a given context and time.

In this way, my thesis contended there was much to be gained from exploring both the social constructedness and the phenomenology of relationship satisfaction as this allowed me to shine two different, yet potentially complementary analytical lights on the topic (Colahan, Tunariu & Dell, 2012 – See Appendix A). Furthermore, I argued that this approach could address the mainstream limitation of conceptualising relationship satisfaction in terms of partners' individualised, psychological capacities and thereby shed light on relationship satisfaction as a *relational* phenomenon.

1.2.4 Relationship Satisfaction as a relational process

In Western culture, the fundamental, indivisible unit of the socio-economic order is conceptualised in terms of the 'individual' (Willig, 2012). Thus, it is very difficult to think, research, and write about close relationships without reference to these terms. In the mainstream psychological literature, dominant interpretations of what it means to be relationally satisfied are characterised by an individualistic orientation – even when couched within ostensibly 'relational' theories (e.g. intimacy as an interpersonal process emphasises the individual capacities of partners to do intimacy in satisfying ways). However, I argue that this position has failed to appreciate relationship satisfaction as a *relational* process, and I agree with Gergen & Walter (1998) that a relational process is a necessary condition for discourses of individualism:

⁸ Hollway & Jefferson (2000) drew on psychoanalysis; Radley and Taylor (2003) used photographs that participants had taken to prompt and facilitate discussions; Gillies *et al* (2005) asked participants to paint pictures to visually represent embodied experience; Willig (2011) drew on phenomenological approaches.

“[...] an ontological prior; it is out of relationship that we develop (or not) a discourse of individual actors (with private minds and emotions), and come to agreements about what actors do (or do not) possess in the way of a psychological interior.” (p.113).

In an attempt to theorise individual functioning as inseparable from social process, several researchers (e.g. Shotter, 1993; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Erbert & Duck, 1997) have drawn on Bakhtin’s (1981) proposal that personal life is dialectically constituted. Bakhtin (1981, 1986) conceptualised relationships as a phenomenon of *relating*, encapsulated by the following propositions: (1) Relating is ongoing and not static; (2) It is a transactional, interpersonal process of managing contradictions; (3) The process involves goals and rules which refer to the past, present and (planned or imagined) future of the relationship (e.g. Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Brehm; 1992; Harvey & Pauwels, 1999); (4) It is contextual and this context, like the relating, is always on-going and fluid. Thus, the way in which partners engage with themselves *and* each other is dynamic, already ongoing, and always shaped by what each of them does. In line with this, I argued that relationship satisfaction is always discursively mediated and indebted to the norms of the local (lay, self-help and to some extent professional / therapeutic) culture. It also always involves a series of fluid, already-ongoing, transactional interpersonal processes between self-and-self, self-and-other, and other-to-self. In arriving at this conceptual framing I adopted the position that both social constructionism and phenomenology could shed light on this relational view.

Both social constructionism and the relational view appreciated the ways in which linguistic resources and practices were intertwined with, and part of both ‘being’ and ‘doing’ intimate relationships. Moreover, the relational view included criticality, and could compliment social constructionism because it accepted that a relationship was relative, contextual, changeable, and subject to the linguistic resources and social practices that dominate at a given time. Gergen & Walter (1998) described this as “individual epistemology [being] abandoned in favour of social epistemology” (p.113; see also Gergen 1994). Similarly, existential phenomenology (see Chapter 2, Section 2.8, page 44 for a detailed discussion of these ideas) highlighted that relational processes, and the subsequent experiences of relationship satisfaction, were shaped by partners’ capacities to experience themselves and their partners as agentic subjects, to avoid objectifying each other, and to take responsibility and ownership for their engagement with the world and their ways-of-relating. Therefore, I proposed that a

further theoretical benefit of adopting social constructionism and phenomenology was that both theoretical positions were inherently relational and could therefore shed light on relationship satisfaction as a *relational process*.

1.3 A brief recap

I appreciate that I have just outlined several different theoretical perspectives which underpinned my thesis, and so it may be helpful at this point to clarify and summarise what I wanted to achieve: Due to the limitations of existing research on relationship satisfaction this research explored the concept from (i) a social constructionist perspective and (ii) a phenomenological perspective. In addition to these, it explored the role of couple-therapy as part of the norm-setting mechanism surrounding relationship satisfaction. Now this presented me, as a researcher, with a challenge because these approaches did not seamlessly fit together in terms of epistemology. To address this challenge I proposed a solution (see also Chapter 3) based on methodological pluralism, which I referred to as an ‘and/and’ approach to research. It functioned as the overarching theme of my thesis, and is illustrated with a short anecdote:

An ex-colleague of mine often referred to me as ‘a qualitative person’ which always struck me as a limiting way of viewing the world. My first degree was in Biochemistry, and I did not forget or reject everything I learned simply because I encountered and appreciated the role of language, context, history, and culture in the ways knowledges were produced. I had even heard ‘qualitative colleagues’ refer to each other as ‘Phenomenology people’ or ‘Discourse people’. I believed both approaches *could* offer insights, so why should I have had to choose either one or the other? I did not want to ‘declare my allegiance’ to a specific epistemological/methodological camp. This anecdote was not meant as a political statement to lay bare some perceived underlying prejudices - I use it to simply illustrate a tendency to see the world in terms of Cartesian dichotomies. I could appreciate the attraction in their conceptual simplicity – partners in an intimate relationship were either ‘satisfied’ or ‘dissatisfied’, ‘non-distressed’ or ‘distressed’, ‘doing it right’ or ‘doing it wrong’. However, my thesis rested upon a move away from dichotomies – in terms of how I understood my topic of interest, relationship satisfaction (as outlined in my opening paragraph), *and* also how I planned

to research it. So I shifted from an ‘either/or’ dichotomous approach to research to what I called an ‘and/and’ approach.

1.4 The ‘and/and’ approach

The theoretical call for using ‘mixed-methods’ is not new, with scholars outlining the benefits of mixed qualitative methods (e.g. Coyle, 2010; Gergen, 1999; Frost, 2009, Willig, 2012a), and others highlighting the benefits of mixing quantitative and qualitative methods (e.g. Tunariu & Reavey, 2003, Yardley & Bishop, 2008). It is a theoretical call that I subscribed to in this research, however it had to be rigorously managed because my different analytical aims were based upon different epistemological foundations. I understood that I could not simply mix-and-match as I pleased without careful consideration (e.g. Chamberlain, 2012); after all, my thesis had to demonstrate epistemological coherence. However, as Willig (2012a) notes: “[...] in recent years qualitative psychologists have begun to question the assumption that due to the presence of epistemological difference between qualitative methodologies researchers are compelled to choose between them, and methodological pluralism has emerged as another option” (p.159).⁹ Similarly, I believed that different approaches could *co-exist* – that I could ‘wear’ different sets of epistemological/theoretical lenses to view, and learn about, relationship satisfaction in different ways. I did not propose to wear these different sets of lenses at the same time, but I proposed that it was perfectly fine, even *beneficial*, to employ these different sets of lenses one-at-a-time. I felt that I could take off one set of theoretical lenses, ‘freeze’ that particular view (theoretical conception), and then ‘free myself’ by wearing a different set of lenses and gaining an alternative insight. This position reflected Holstein and Gubrium (2000) who argued that instead of trying to theoretically integrate different perspectives, “qualitative researchers should engage in a process of *shifting between perspectives* as they move through a cycle of interrogation of the data, *temporarily deferring one perspective* only to return to it again a little later” (Willig, 2012, p.161, emphasis added).¹⁰

I would, in effect, straddle the different epistemological positions associated with my different perspectives (See Chapter 3 for further outline of my epistemological position).

⁹ For example, Langdrige (2007) uses a range of different narrative approaches in his Critical Narrative Analysis; Frost (2009) has also used a range of narrative methodologies on a single dataset.

¹⁰ However, whilst Holstein and Gubrium (2000) used a metaphor of shifting gears, I used the metaphor of wearing different lenses.

In doing so, I stood by the claim that there was no single ‘truth’ regarding relationship satisfaction, and thus my aim was to simply remain curious and open, and to shift the way in which relationship satisfaction had so far been conceptualised. Therefore, I adopted the two conceptual lenses outlined above in order to map contextual features of relationship satisfaction, which had not been fully appreciated within the literature in order to achieve a different possible way of understanding the process called ‘relationship satisfaction’. In doing this, the thesis proposed an ‘and-and’ (as opposed to an ‘either-or’) approach in terms of epistemological considerations and theory development and proposed that social constructionism and phenomenology could coexist in the one thesis.

This ‘binocular’ approach (see also for example, Langdrige, 2007) required tolerance of overlap, uncertainty, and possibly contradiction between the different conceptual lenses. To allow the full unfolding of one analytic journey at a time I had to temporarily suspend my other conceptual interests, but I took the position that both analytic interests continued to exist in parallel, and I did not devalue or ‘dissolve’ either one in favour of the other. To achieve this in an empirical research project required epistemological reflexivity (Willig, 2012b) so that I maintained transparency and clarity in my approach to the methodologies. In this way, the and/and approach required a deliberate, yet ‘relaxed’ awareness, as well as ownership and accountability, of the position I took (See Chapter 3 for full discussion).

To summarise, in the above sections I started by reflecting on the taken-for-granted assumptions I held about relationships prior to my PhD, and how my views were changed when I was introduced to social constructionism and phenomenology. Social constructionism demonstrated the role of language in rendering ‘relationship satisfaction’ thinkable, knowable, and possible, and highlighted the way in which ‘expert’ professional understandings of a concept could come to inform, and be mobilised in everyday ‘lay’ talk. This led to the *first aim* of the thesis; to use Foucauldian Discourse Analysis to map the ways in which relationship satisfaction was constructed in couple therapists’ and lay peoples’ talk, and to look for overlap and variation. Following this, I outlined the way in which phenomenology could address a limitation of mainstream research, which could not be addressed by solely looking at discourse; that subjectivity, embodiment, and experience were not adequately addressed,

and this led to the *second aim* (and the ‘and/and’ proposal) of the research: That social constructionism and phenomenology could co-exist, and this was operationalised by the twin-focus-analysis of IPA and FDA on lay peoples’ talk. Finally, as a continuation of the ‘*and-and*’ philosophy of the thesis, I also advocated that both social constructionism and existential phenomenology could shed light on a relational view of relationship satisfaction.

Having presented the topic, aims, and theoretical foundations of this research project, I now present a chapter-by-chapter outline of the rest of my thesis and the argument I will develop.

1.5 Outline and Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 – Literature Review of Relationship Satisfaction

The objective of the next chapter is to present and critically discuss the psychological and couple therapy literatures on relationship satisfaction through the ‘twin lenses’ (i.e. ‘and/and’ approach) of social constructionism and phenomenology. Part 1 deconstructs the ways in which psychological and therapeutic research has endeavoured to produce relationship satisfaction as a singular, fixed, and ultimately knowable state. It broadly outlines the dominant social psychological theories which account for the ‘psychological architecture’ of relationship satisfaction including, amongst others: attachment, social exchange, intimacy, conflict and communication management, and the subsequent satisfactions and subjectivities associated with these theories. The critique is contextualised by the socio-historical conceptual condition of knowing relational satisfaction through the Western pre-occupation with personal need fulfilment. In line with the ‘and/and’ approach proposed as the conceptual backdrop to my thesis, the chapter then ‘theoretically breaks’ and Part 2 explores potential phenomenological characteristics of relationship satisfaction by turning to existential works and phenomenological research into intimacy. These ideas are not deconstructed (in the same way as Part 1 of the chapter), and this is one example of where I have to ‘freeze’ one analytical interest, in order to gain insight from the other.

Chapter 3 - Research questions, methodology and methods

Chapter 3 reflexively outlines the way in which the ‘and/and’ philosophy of the thesis was operationalised and translated in order to address the aims of the thesis, whilst maintaining both epistemological and methodological coherence. The three empirical studies are outlined along with their associated research questions beginning with the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of professional, couple therapists’ talk, before moving onto the twin-focus-analysis of lay-peoples’ talk whereby an FDA and an IPA were conducted on a single data set. Information concerning the participants, the data collection process, and the ethical procedures are also included. The epistemological position of the thesis is fully explicated, and the chapter proceeds to reflexively describe the analytical procedures that were undertaken to produce the IPA (Smith *et al.*, 2009) and FDA (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008), and also outlines the pragmatic difficulties of undertaking the twin-focus-analysis, and the practical steps I employed to navigate these (see also Colahan, Tunairu and Dell, 2012, in Appendix A). Here the emphasis is on the potential complementarity of the interpretations from the different methodological approaches, not on their seamless and unproblematic integration. Given that Chapter 3 is highly reflexive it is primarily written in the first person.

Chapter 4 – Couple therapists’ constructions of relationship satisfaction

A key premise of Chapter 4 is that the institution of couple therapy is a crucial component of the social, norm-setting mechanism with regards to what constitutes satisfying and dissatisfying (or distressed) intimate relating (e.g., Weeks, 2002; Szasz, 1990, Tiefer, 1995; Kleinplatz, 2001). This study explores couple therapists’ productions of relationship satisfaction and the associated power that operates through these productions in order to critically interrogate the contribution that couple therapy makes to the “cycle of knowledge” (Nicholson, 1993) with respect to ‘satisfying relating’. An FDA (informed by Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008) of seven couple-therapists who work for Relate is presented. Research questions that guide the study include: How is relationship satisfaction and dissatisfaction conceived by couple therapists? What constitutes a therapeutic goal or success with regards to relationship dissatisfaction? Are there tensions between the therapists’ positions and their clients’ positions? The FDA presented here illustrates the ways in which relationship dissatisfaction is rendered problematic across the couple therapists’ talk. These constructions enable certain dissatisfied subject positions for clients, and warrant the

prescription of satisfying technologies-of-self which operate at the level of inter-subjective *relational* practices. These practices are put forward as relational ‘skills’ that need to be taken up and invested in by dissatisfied clients in order for them to be repositioned as satisfied, but they are mobilised and promoted uncritically, and there is a risk that they could be taken up and recycled dogmatically.

Chapter 5 – Laypeople’s constructions of relationship satisfaction

Chapter 5 presents an FDA interpretative reading of the transcripts from semi-structured interviews with twelve lay people (members of the general population) who were each in long-term relationships, but not with each other (i.e. the study did not use dyadic data). The analytic aim is to map out lay peoples’ discursive constructions of satisfaction in their intimate long-term relationships, the social practices warranted by these, the subject positions made available, and the implications for power of these productions. This also allows for an exploration of the overlap between these constructions and the couple therapists’ accounts in Study 1. In addition, the analysis of Study 2 also focuses on the discursive resources being mobilised and the range of “subject positions” thus opened, which allows links to be drawn with Study 3 (IPA of lay talk). Research questions which guide Study 2 include: How do lay people talk about relationship satisfaction? What broader cultural discourses get mobilised? When does it make sense for participants to talk about relationship satisfaction in a certain way? What subject-positions are made available and what modes of being satisfied do these enable? Again, extracts from the interviews are provided to illustrate two discursive constructions of relationship satisfaction. The FDA produced two dominant constructions of relationship satisfaction, and these make available different ‘modes of subjectification’ which operate through intersubjective practices to sustain a range of satisfied and dissatisfied ‘versions of self’.

Chapter 6 – Laypeople’s experiences of relationship satisfaction

Chapter 6 presents, discusses and illustrates the dominant master themes generated by the IPA of the same transcripts (interviews with twelve members of the general population) that were analysed using FDA in Chapter 5. Research questions that guide the study include: How do participants experience satisfaction in their relationships? How do participants know when they are satisfied? How do participants manage tensions and contradictions arising through their descriptions and observations?

Extracts from the interviews are presented to illustrate three Master Themes which present relationship satisfaction as a fluid ongoing *relational process* with a range of phenomenological depths and qualities that signify in ways (e.g. affective and embodied ways) that sometimes elude talk. In this way, the IPA presents a richness that is missing from the mainstream literature, and which cannot be captured by a focus on discourse alone.

Chapter 7 – Conclusions and Discussions

This chapter brings together the interpretations from the three empirical analyses in relation to the thesis' research questions. All analyses are re-introduced back into the literature and their conceptual implications are outlined in terms of the 'and/and' focus on discourse and phenomenology. Commonalities are presented between the two FDAs and discussed in light of the discursive cycle of knowledge. In addition, points of overlap are presented between the lay FDA and IPA. Finally, all three analyses shed light on the fluid relational quality of relationship satisfaction. This 're-telling' of the story of relationship satisfaction in relation to the thesis' aims and rationale demonstrates the thesis's original contribution to knowledge. Furthermore, the chapter evaluates the 'and/and' approach to undertaking a research project using the criteria for evaluating qualitative research as outlined by Yardley (2008) and Willig (2012b). It reflexively considers potential avenues for future research, both in terms of the topic and also the 'and/and' approach and the associated ethical implications. The chapter ends with a personal reflection on the process of completing this thesis.

2.

Literature Review of Relationship Satisfaction

This chapter critically reviews the ways in which Relationship Satisfaction has been constructed in the vast mainstream psychological, and couple therapy literatures. These knowledges have laid the conditions for a privileged, gendered, *psychologised* relationship satisfaction, which is contextualised by the socio-historical conceptual condition of knowing relationship satisfaction through a Western pre-occupation with individual choice and personal need fulfilment. This has produced a conflicted satisfied subject who is simultaneously governed by an ethic of self-fulfilment, and an ethic of partner-fulfilment which warrants gender-specific relational practices. The second and smaller part of the chapter ‘breaks’ (theoretically speaking) from a focus on mapping the discursive constructions of relationship satisfaction, and turns towards an examination of its phenomenology. This is an instance of the *and/and* approach to the research and, therefore, the ideas presented in this section - from phenomenology and existentialism - are taken at ‘face value’, as opposed to being critically reviewed¹¹. Therefore, there is a ‘tonal’ shift between the two parts of the chapter. The reason for adopting this approach is that Part 1 critically evaluates existing mainstream psychological and therapeutic research on Relationship Satisfaction and problematizes it from a Foucauldian point of view, which is pertinent to Studies One and Two (the FDA of couple therapists and lay people respectively). In contrast, in Part 2, I am not reviewing or deconstructing literature on the topic of Relationship Satisfaction itself, but rather I am presenting phenomenological and existential research in preparation for Study Three (the IPA of lay talk). Whilst I accept that the existential literature is socially constructed I am presenting it here as a framework within which to locate and expand my IPA study.

¹¹ This does not equate to my uncritical acceptance of *all* existentialist thinking; rather, my purpose (in line with the *and/and* philosophy of the thesis) is to draw on specific theoretical strands which I believe can shed light on the topic of relationship satisfaction: as a *subjective lived experience*, and as a *relational* process.

Part 1

2.1 The privileging of relational satisfaction: A satisfaction of health & wellbeing

The mainstream psychological research discursively privileges relationship satisfaction as a cognitive-affective state which is *vital* for psychological and physical health and well-being (e.g., Cohen, 1988; Gurung, Sarason & Sarason, 2001; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996; Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999) and which insulates individuals from challenging life events (e.g., Coan, Schaefer, & Davidson, 2006; Treboux, Crowell, & Waters, 2004).

In contrast, relationship dissatisfaction has been rendered problematic vis-à-vis its cyclically-reinforcing association to a number of negative physical and emotional effects (Sprenkle, 2012) including: increased risk of destructive conflict patterns (Gottman, 1998), suppression of the immune system (Kielcot-Glaser, Malarkey, Chee, Newton, Cacioppo, Mao & Glaser, 1993); increased production of stress hormones, chronic illness (Kiecolt-Glaser, Bane, Glaser, and Malarkey, 2003; Shields *et al.*, 2012); anxiety, loneliness (Beach, Jouriles, & O’leary, 1985; Sadava & Matejic, 1987), and depression (Beach and Whisman, 2012; Weissman, 1987; Whisman & Bruce, 1999) with its associated symptomology of sadness, irritability, and diminished sexual interest (Beach, 2001).

As a result, the relationally dissatisfied subject has been diagnostically positioned as being likely to have poorer psychological and physical health, and less able to function socially with their friends and families, or at work (Clements, Cordova, Markman, & Laurenceau, 1997; Flora & Segrin, 2000; Whisman and Uebelacker, 2006). In this way, relationship dissatisfaction is rendered problematic beyond the couple-dyad as it is constructed as a state that is also detrimental to individuals’ broader relational networks and also to their economic capacity¹².

Furthermore, relationally dissatisfied subjects are positioned as more likely to break-up, and research has constructed the experience of ending a relationship as being amongst the most *psychologically* problematic, stressful and life-changing events faced by individuals (Miller & Rahe, 1997) and their families (e.g., Reiss & Rusbult, 2005).

¹² For example, it has been estimated that 11 million employees take sick leave each year due to problems with their couple relationships and this costs the UK taxpayer £13bn, and the broader economy £15bn (Black and Frost, 2011).

Moreover, relationship dissolution has been rendered *economically* problematic vis-à-vis its cost to the UK economy (estimated as £44bn in 2012; The Relationships Foundation, 2013). In these economic constructions relationship dissatisfaction represents a problem for broader society, and this has warranted Government intervention. For example, in 2011 the British Coalition Government committed £30 million for the period 2012-15 (Department for Education, 2013) to fund trials of relationship support interventions in an effort to pre-emptively satisfy relationships deemed to be at risk of ‘dysfunctional’ relating. Thus, relationship dissatisfaction is rendered problematic in current academic, public and therapeutic discourses both in-and-of-itself, and also through its construction as a precursor to relationship dissolution with its economic implications. Therefore, achieving and maintaining relationship satisfaction has attained a privileged status in contemporary Western neo-liberal culture. This privileging discursively operates through the dominant psychological explanation of relationship satisfaction as a state of individual need fulfilment.

2.2 Contemporary Western Relationship Satisfaction: The fulfilment of partners’ innate needs

“[R]elationship satisfaction always reduces to whether needs are being satisfied or not”
(Shaver & Hazan, 1984, as cited in Hazan & Shaver, 2004, p165)

“[Relationship satisfaction involves] one’s position in the relationship, a partner’s meeting of one’s needs, and level of contentment with one’s relationship” (Hendrick, 1988, as cited in Emmers-Sommer, 2004, p.402)

The above extracts exemplify the dominant construction of relationship satisfaction in the mainstream social psychological literature as a cognitive-affective evaluation of the extent to which partners’ needs are fulfilled within the context of their relationship (e.g. Le & Agnew, 2001; Patrick, Knee, Canevello & Lonsbary, 2007; VanderDrift & Agnew, 2012). Social psychologists long proposed that people possessed a variety of innate, gendered, psychological needs, which varied in strength between individuals (Murray, 1938, as cited in Prager & Buhrmester, 1998) (see Appendix B for details of these ‘innate’ needs). These needs, it was argued, *had* to be fulfilled if partners’ were to avoid serious consequences. As Prager and Buhrmester (1998) argued:

“What distinguishes needs conceptually from wants or desires are the deficit states (e.g. hunger and loneliness) that can result from unfulfilled needs. These states of deprivation [...] may therefore account for the close linkages found [...] between need fulfilment and psychological well-being.” (p.466)

It is these “deficit states” that render relationship dissatisfaction problematic and privilege relationship satisfaction in the mainstream psychological literature. In this way, psychological knowledges have functioned (and continue to function) as parts of broader regulatory regimes of governance, which have the power to position individuals as satisfied or pathologically dissatisfied (Foucault, 1972). However, these knowledges have been constructed against a backdrop of Western cultural norms, values and practices (including, for example, religious and economic discourses) about what is important and appropriate in terms of doing satisfying relationships. Therefore, it is important to highlight the discursive contexts in which psychological knowledges about relationship satisfaction and dissatisfaction have been produced; contexts which have privileged the couple relationship and individual personal choice and fulfilment.

2.3 The rise of relationally satisfying, individual need-fulfilment: A brief history of how relationship satisfaction became an imperative

2.3.1 From the Anglo-Saxons to the Sexual Revolution: Satisfying obligations

Prior to the 17th Century ‘intimate coupledness’ as it is currently understood did not exist in any *meaningful* way. The Anglo-Saxons and early British tribes viewed marriage as a tool for strategic diplomacy, and means of building peaceful trading relationships. By the 11th Century, and with the increasing social differentiation of wealth, marriage became a means for parents to advance their own wealth and power by marrying their children into families of higher status. Daughters, who were seen as the property of their fathers, were sold into marriage to husbands whom their father thought suitable enough. By the late 16th Century, religious institutions had begun to exercise increasing power over marriage, with the Catholic Church proclaiming marriage to be one of God’s seven sacraments (Coontz, 2005); one in which women were compelled before God to obey their husbands. These examples illustrate the dominance of patriarchy and the gendered inequalities that have run throughout the history of intimate heterosexual relationships and, many would argue, continue today (See Section 2.3.2). Therefore, far from being a demonstration of freely chosen love and commitment between two individuals, for

much of history marriage was a combination of religious obligation and a parental concern of economic advancement. 'Relationship satisfaction', if it was even considered by the individuals in the relationship, represented something drastically different to the contemporary focus on personal fulfilment. Reflecting instead parental economic gain and enactment of religious dogma, and was likely experienced in terms of partners' fulfilling their obligations to family and church.

Once married, husbands and wives lived out their marriage in a communal physical space in front of family and acquaintances with, at most, a curtain of some kind dividing the 'home' space, and behind which they would engage in 'private' activities as 'a couple', including sexual activity. It was only later, from the 17th century onwards, that a historically specific sense of the private 'home' laid the condition for couple intimacy and ideas of boundaries, seclusion, containment and security. The 'home' became a particular thing, acquired ontological status and came into meaningful existence. It created a fundamental division between the 'public' and the 'private'. Privacy became privileged, and the seeds were sown for doing coupledness and intimate monogamy - which was understood as satisfying and secure - whilst other types of relating became equated with the 'public' realm. This ever-increasing stratification of relational-life continued into the 19th Century, whereby the discourses of marriage produced a 'sexualization of love', which kept 'meaningful' sex in the home and between married partners (Seidman, 1991). This was the site for satisfying relationships and sexual exclusivity became the marker of what made the couple-dyad 'unique' and 'special'.

With the rise of the industrial society from the 19th Century onwards, the couple was seen as the foundation of the family and was understood as being the ideal social unit to meet the demands and requirements of modern industrial society. Thus, the family - built upon a stable marriage - became the signifier for the moral health of society, and the lynchpin of civilisation, social order and cohesion (Weeks, 2007). Marriage was privileged as the normal and essential space for 'satisfying' relating. A space which, feminists subsequently argued, structured relationships, intimate life, and identities along heteronormative lines (Rich, 1985; Richardson, 1996), and privileged the interests of men and undermined women's autonomy (Rosa, 1994; Robinson, 1997) (See section 2.3.2 for further discussion).

In the wake of the social upheaval of World War II, from the 1940's onwards new forms of relating began to emerge supposedly based on greater equality, choice and mutual satisfaction (Weeks, 2007). The concept of the 'companionate marriage' based on greater equality and sharing had emerged as an ideal in the post-war years (Finch & Mansfield, 1991), with some studies suggesting it reflected a broader egalitarian social *progress* within the context of intimate life (e.g. Bott, 1957; Rosser and Harris, 1965; Gorer, 1971; Young and Willmott, 1975, all as cited in Gillies, 2003). Similarly, Hollway (1984) argued that from the post-war years onwards, there was a shift from the dominant 'To have and to hold' discourse, which privileged marriage and 'respectable' monogamy, to what she termed the 'Permissive' discourse, which normalised sexual liberation and free choice. One of the most significant drivers of this 'sexual revolution' came about with the introduction of the pill in the 1970's and the subsequent decoupling of sex and reproduction which, for the first time, gave women (and men) unprecedented control over their bodies and fertility (McLaren, 1999; Cook, 2005).

In light of social changes such as these, the couple-relationship came to be constructed as a *personal* relationship (rather than a warranted *social* institution) in which there were higher expectations for *satisfying*, companionate interactions, and a recognition that satisfaction was not inherent, but had to be cultivated and sustained (e.g. Askham, 1984). Thus, the *quality* of relationships became a paramount concern for partners and theorists (Jamieson, 1999) and, overtime, a view of 'the couple' was fostered which privileged mutually fulfilling, satisfying relationships. This was theorised as reflecting a shift in the Western social order towards a 'reflexive modernity' – driven by the process of post-industrialisation; in particular, the breakdown of traditional frameworks, and the individualisation of social life (Gillies, 2003).

The processes of detraditionalisation, it was argued, gave rise to a diversity and plurality of social meanings which resulted in a constant shifting of the meanings and practices that produced intimate life. As a result, it was argued that individuals were now compelled to engage in a conscious process of biographical construction, and to reflexively 'create themselves' through their daily choices and decisions (e.g. Giddens, 1991; 1992; Weeks, 2007). From this 'transformative' perspective, Giddens (1991) proposed that a new type of 'pure relationship' had emerged, supposedly based on

choice and equality, entered into for its own sake, contingent on partners' experiencing sufficient satisfaction, and maintained through mutual self-disclosure.

Generally speaking, the detraditionalisation thesis offered an optimistic view of the impact of social changes on intimate relationships and partners; seeing progress as having led to new possibilities for fulfilling relationships based on mutual satisfaction and trust, instead of contractual obligation. For example, Plummer (1995) saw the potential for new forms of emancipation, and Weeks (2007) argued that we were seeing the growth of equality and respect in couple relationships, and acceptance of alternatives – a view of 'confluent' intimacy (e.g. Pahl, 2000; Giddens, 1991, 1992). Partners were positioned as 'free' to generate their own relationship rules with many forms of satisfying relationships being lived and expressed. These perspectives constructed a satisfying ethic of self-determination in which partners' choice, agency, and actively earned trust functioned as the cornerstones of satisfying relating. However, the notion that satisfying relating had become a site of negotiation - contingent on partners' self-direction was hotly debated, with many questioning the supposed satisfactions of equality and freedom posited by the contemporary notion of the choice relationship (e.g. Elliot and Lemert, 2006; Gillies, 2003). These challenges arose on two broad fronts: the first was based on feminist theoretical works which drew attention to, and challenged, the supposed innate role of gender in intimate life, and the second challenge was based on a deconstruction of the commercial notions of 'free choice' which had come to permeate modern coupledness. Each is discussed in the following sections.

2.3.2 Enduring inequality – A pragmatic satisfaction of managing ingrained gender roles

Against the background of the 'sexual revolution', feminist works began to emerge in the 1970s which re-theorised the normative dimensions of couple relationships, including what it meant to be satisfied, as forms of knowledge through which gendered power inequalities operated and persisted. From this perspective, relationships and their associated satisfactions were understood as discursive practices; satisfying processes that partners *did*, rather than structures they were *in* (Finch and Mason, 1993; Morgan, 1996; 1999), and these processes frequently pivoted around gendered roles and injunctions which empowered men over women (Jackson & Scott, 2004). The

‘autonomous rational man’ and the ‘relational emotional woman’ were deconstructed as social prescriptions (rather than scientific descriptions of natural, innate tendencies), which were rooted in broader post industrial revolution economic assumptions about the roles of men and women in the workplace and the home (Hare-Mustin, 1978). Thus, for feminists, concepts such as ‘relationship satisfaction’ were understood not as inevitable dyadic interactions shaped by partners’ gendered emotional and behavioural tendencies, but rather as representing socially ‘permitted’ (either implicitly or explicitly) ways of *doing* gender and satisfying relationships. Feminists argued that discourses of female ‘life success’ constructed heterosexual romance and coupledness as the principle goal for women (Greer, 2007), with the ‘summit’ of heterosexual coupledness and, in particular, marriage being the point where their stories ‘ended’ (Gilbert & Walker, 1999). Such narratives afforded women limited agency or subjectivity outside of heterosexual coupledness, and therefore they were understood as ‘innately’ more relational¹³, in *need* of greater intimacy and closeness, and therefore in a paradoxical position of less power in terms of the communicating dyad.

In challenging the democratisation thesis feminists questioned the extent to which traditions had been shed over time (Heelas *et al.*, 1996), and argued that relationship satisfaction was still intertwined with traditional roles and values. For example, relationship satisfaction was theorised in the mainstream literature as intrinsically gendered. Men and women were positioned as having different underlying needs and consequently driven by these needs to relate in pre-determined, gender-specific ways. These constructions continued to privilege and empower men because they presented women’s relationship satisfaction as depending on their partners’ behaviour to a greater extent than men’s satisfaction (which was constructed as more independent of their partners’ actions) (e.g. Kessler, Werner-Wilson, Cook & Berger, 2000). Moreover, many feminists pointed to the continued significance placed on relational roles and obligations, and ingrained power relations and identities in prescriptions of satisfying relating (e.g. Gillies *et al.*, 2001; Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003). For example, Jackson and Scott (2004) argued that whilst there may have been some shifts in the ways in which couples *do* heterosexuality, these shifts were by no means necessarily underpinned by egalitarianism or mutual self-disclosure. Whilst the discourses of

¹³ This construction of women as innately more relational is repeatedly mobilised across the mainstream psychological literature and I will flag it, as and when it appears.

‘disclosing intimacy’ resonated publicly, they offered selective partial accounts, which masked the complexity and contradictions of couples’ lived experience of satisfying relationships. For example, Jamieson (1999) found little evidence of either individualisation or democratisation operating in satisfying relationships. Rather, satisfaction appeared to rest on partners’ ability to negotiate the gendered division of relational labour (e.g. Robinson, 1997), and couples appeared to be mobilising a *pragmatic* relationship satisfaction far removed from the satisfaction of mutual self-disclosure, choice and need fulfilment (see also Weeks *et al.*, 2001).

The discourses of democratisation constructed a private egalitarian satisfaction that was independent from broader social inequalities and constraints, and which obscured the significance of gendered power relations and the relationship between discursive structures and intersubjective dynamics. From a feminist perspective the foundations of satisfying monogamous coupledness (exclusivity and possession) were understood as simultaneously impairing both partners’ individual autonomies, as well as depleting wider social relationships (e.g. Firestone, 1970) because the individualistic expectation of monogamous coupledness compelled partners to build their satisfying relationships around each other, with each individual representing ‘half-of-a-pair’. In this way, feminists claimed that attention was drawn away from broader political and social struggles by a focus on privatised, monogamous coupledness because it had become the “yardstick by which we measure the rest of our emotions” (Comer, 1974, p.219). This discursive privileging of the couple relationship led to a concomitant emphasis on partners making the ‘right’ choices in their intimate lives, yet this ‘free’ choice was challenged as an illusory upshot of broader processes of commercialisation that had permeated and produced contemporary intimate life.

2.3.3 The illusion of choice? A manipulated relationship satisfaction

Whilst it was generally agreed that individuals had become less constrained in their choice than previous decades (Weeks, 2007), several theorists (e.g. Hawkes, 1996, 2004; Hochschild, 2003a, 2003b) argued that the satisfying ‘freedom to choose’ was an illusion; made possible through the opportunities opened up by new forms of consumption in late modernity. Under neo-liberalism, individual autonomy and self-responsibilisation were discursively theorised as forms of regulation, not freedom (Foucault, 1979; see also Weeks 2005), which morally compelled individuals to become

“entrepreneurs of themselves, shaping their own lives [and relationship satisfactions] through the choices they [made] among the forms of life available to them” (Rose, 1999, p230). However, this “elaborate and sophisticated form of subjectivity / subjectification [did] not [...] lead to the abandonment of governance; rather it substitute[d] self-governance as the principal form of social regulation” (Weeks, 2007, p.130). Hence, the relationally satisfied subject was ‘forced to be free’ (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Rose, 1999; Smart and Neale, 1999), yet this autonomous isolation brought with it an anxiety about making the ‘right’ lifestyle choices.

Relationship satisfaction represented something that partners had an *individual moral right* to receive and an *individual moral duty* to give. In this way, as Foucault (1977) outlined in his account of ethical subjectivities, the satisfied subject was produced through their *actions* and this compelled modern partners to pay close attention to their own and each other’s performance as *satisfying* relational partners and legitimised them making demands of each other that would not be made in, for example, friendships (Jackson & Scott, 2004; Weeks, 2007). Therefore, some theorists argued that, through the individualised ethic of self-interest and choice, late capitalism and its associated economic rationality had corrupted couple-relationships such that relationship satisfaction represented a ‘symptom’ of a self-obsessed consumer culture (Hawkes, 1996; Hochschild, 2003a). The authority of individualised choice had become ‘internalised’ by the subject, sanctioning particular ways of being-satisfied and doing satisfying-relating. Contemporary partners (and particularly women e.g. McNay, 2000) were simultaneously compelled to live their own lives, whilst also taking care of each other’s wellbeing, leading to conflicting satisfactions of autonomy and co-dependence – each supposedly vital to the individuals in a relationship. Thus, satisfaction in modern coupledness was simultaneously produced by two ‘ideal’ narratives: the first being heterosexual romance, with its gendered practices, subject positions and power imbalances; and the second being one of non-gendered equality, and mutual reciprocity (Crawford, 2004). Both narratives came to be reflected in the ‘type’ of relational research conducted by psychologists.

2.3.4 The continuing privileging of relationship satisfaction

Despite theoretical challenges such as those outlined in sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3, couple-relationships remain *the* discursively privileged relational site (e.g. Perlman, 2007;

Weeks, 2007). The pervading view in contemporary Western culture is that everyone wants to be, and *should* be, in a couple relationship (e.g. Choi and Bird, 2003), such that they represent the relationships that “matter most, to most people” (Hinde, 1997, p.XX¹⁴). Commensurately, this privileging of the couple-dyad has privileged relationship satisfaction as a hetero-cultural imperative, and normative discourses maintain and reproduce central ‘satisfying’ values of individual free choice and mutual need fulfilment. As a consequence, the success of relationships has increasingly been evaluated in terms of partners’ sense of personal fulfilment and emotional satisfaction, and their ability to manage intimacy to facilitate their ‘development’ as a couple *and* as two individuals (e.g. Cherline, 2004; Giddens, 1992). Because relationship satisfaction came to be privileged as “an important, complex and multiple-determined aspect of intimate romantic relationships” (Meeks, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1998, p.768), identifying variables which predicted relationship satisfaction, and shaped inter-subjective interactions for the better, became a longstanding goal of relationship researchers (Charania & Ickes, 2007; Lebow *et al.*, 2012).

2.4: The Psychological Quest to Define and Categorise Relationship Satisfaction and the Satisfied Subject

During the 1960s and 70s, prevailing heteronormative models of the family and marriage focused on elucidating the governing norms of gendered roles and duties, and obligations of reciprocity (Gillies, 2003). Such debates around the structure and function of marriage were underpinned by an implicit ideology that promoted and sanctioned certain ways of doing ‘satisfying’ relationships. However, in the 1980’s academic work shifted its focus away from relationship structures and functions, and turned to couples’ interpersonal interactions (Finch and Morgan, 1991) in order to theorise and understand relationship quality and satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction was often used synonymously with other relational constructs e.g. relational or marital ‘quality’ (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987), ‘adjustment’ (Long & Andrews, 1990), ‘well-being’ (Acitelli, 1992), ‘functioning’ (Honeycutt & Godwin, 1986), or ‘success’ (Glenn, 1990). However, attempts were made in the literature to distinguish between the different terms. For example, it was argued that whilst ‘adjustment’ referred to relationship behaviours, satisfaction referred to people’s subjective feelings about their

¹⁴ Quote is taken from the Preface of Hinde (1997) in which the page numbers are in Roman numerals

relationship (Hendrick, 2004) and represented “a subjective evaluation by each relational partner of the quality, or happiness level, within an intimate relationship” (Erbert & Duck, 1997, p. 194). In this way relationship satisfaction became one of the most frequently researched topics in the field of close relationships (Fincham, Beach & Kemp Fincham, 1997) and was discursively privileged in the academic literature as “a central construct, both in the field of basic relationship research and in the marital treatment literature, serving as a cornerstone for [...] understanding [...] how relationships and marriages work” (Funk & Rogge, 2007, p.572).

This new ‘science of relationships’ aimed to discover the ‘laws’ of intimate relationships and their inevitable consequences for better relationship functionality and intervention (e.g. Kelley et al, 1983; Berscheid, 1999), and this period saw a concurrent rise in the uptake of couple therapy. Critical theorists such as Burns (2000) highlighted the economic power of such knowledges because, along with discourses of romanticism, they helped to sustain traditional, heteronormative relational structures (such as marriage) in which women stayed at home and worked for free. The mainstream search for, and focus on, generalizable ‘laws’ led to a consensus that the best way to operationalise and gather data on relationship satisfaction was through self-report scales (Funk & Rogge, 2007); a psychometric approach that continues to dominate the mainstream literature today. Most of the psychometric scales required participants to provide subjective evaluations of their relationships, with a typical item being: “How satisfied are you with your relationship?” However, a central and ongoing dispute arose, based on competing constructions of relationship satisfaction as an evaluation of the *whole* relationship versus an evaluation of specific aspects of the relationship.

Those who favoured a conception of relationship satisfaction as an evaluation of *specific* components argued that global measures “did not provide much information beyond the fact that a couple is distressed” (Fowers, 1990, p.370) and could not lead researchers to the sources of satisfaction (Drigotas and Rusbult, 1992). This theoretical approach had the most impact on the ways in which satisfaction came to be operationalised, and it underpins the three most widely used measures of relational satisfaction: the Dyadic-Adjustment Scale (DAS, Spanier, 1976); the Marital Adjustment Scale (MAT, Locke & Wallace, 1959); and the Marital Satisfaction

Inventory (MSI, Snyder, 1979)¹⁵. In contrast, those who explicitly favoured a global conception of relationship satisfaction argued that it was “likely to represent the final common pathway through which marital maladjustment is expressed” (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987a, p.800; Jacobson, 1985), and Crosby (1991) claimed that this view of marital satisfaction was the most ‘accurate’ and ‘useful’ from the perspective of clinical practice¹⁶.

However, in spite of the specific-vs-global debate, the prevailing view in the mainstream literature was that the “psychometric foundation [was] reasonably solid” (Gottman & Levenson, 1984, p.71). This was based on the fact that the scores on the different measures were highly intercorrelated, and differences in item content were statistically relatively unimportant (e.g., Heyman *et al.*, 1994), with Gottman (1979) claiming that “different operations designed to measure marital satisfaction converge[d] and formed one dimension” (p.5). This theoretical position was (and continues to be) underpinned by realist, essentialist assumptions which constructed ‘relationship satisfaction’ and the ‘satisfied subject’ as objects which could be defined, measured, and *known* through the process of experimental research.

In particular relationship satisfaction tended to be treated as the dependent variable – a state or consequence of the relationship and on rarer occasions as the independent variable, usually as a way of assessing broader appraisals of life satisfaction (Glenn, 1990). Researchers generally attempted to determine the level of satisfaction at Time 1 in relation to some other variable (Duck, 1994)¹⁷. This meant that satisfaction was used

¹⁵ The Dyadic-Adjustment Scale (DAS, Spanier, 1976) has 32-items and became the most widely cited measure; designed to distinguish between married and divorced spouses, it was extensively used in the marital treatment literature (Christensen *et al.*, 2004). The second most used measure of relationship satisfaction was the 15-item MAT and, like the DAS, was developed to distinguish between ‘distressed’ and ‘well-adjusted’ relationships (Funk & Rogge, 2007), and the two scales had significant overlap with 12 items nearly identical. Moving on, the MSI included 280 items (Fincham *et al.*, 1997), but has been used far less than the other two measures.

¹⁶ This viewpoint gave rise to measures such as the Quality of Marriage Index (QMI, Norton, 1983), the 7-item Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS, Hendrick, 1988) and the 3-item Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS, Schumm *et al.*, 1986). However, these scales were used far less than the DAS and MAT. In response to these ‘difficulties’ in ‘objectively quantifying’ relationship satisfaction, Funk and Rogge (2007) conducted a detailed analysis of the eight most popular measures of relationship satisfaction and subsequently developed the Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI).

¹⁷ Researchers incrementally included or excluded “variables” that might potentially influence satisfaction in close relationships (E.g. leisure activity patterns (Holman & Jacquart, 1988; Smith, Snyder, Trull, & Monsma, 1988), household division of labour (Benin & Agnostelli, 1988; Sutor, 1991; Yogev & Brett, 1985), family life and/or child care issues (Blair, 1993; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1987), employment and work related issues (Blair, 1993; Rotheram & Weiner, 1983; Vannoy & Philliber, 1992), and gender roles and expectations (Fowers, 1991; Langis, Sabourin,

as a focal point for understanding relational issues based on representations of interaction that projected a completely static characterisation onto the relationship (and partners) on the basis of one snap-shot measurement, and assumed that change over time could ultimately be predicted, traced, and generally understood (Duck, 1994). Furthermore, the individual psyche of respondents was seen as the source of behaviour and action in relational interaction, and therefore the satisfied subject of social psychology was seen to *possess* satisfaction.

However, these assumptions failed to appreciate the ongoing and fluid *relational* nature of relating, and the fact that relational change might not necessarily follow stable or predictable patterns. Psychological research has been dominated and arguably limited by a duality of self-other in which individual experience, or ‘personality’, is separate and distinct from social influence. This position does not appreciate the ways in which communicative interaction between self and other creates conditions of relationship satisfaction and dissatisfaction (e.g. Shotter, 1989). Partners make communicative choices based on their unique history together, but these choices serve to alter, and make possible or constrain, future interactions. Therefore, as Baxter (1994, p.26) argued, the self is not a fixed unitary entity, but an ongoing “fluid process of becoming” in which dimensions of self are constructed and reconstructed through time. What happens in a relationship is not owned by one person or the other, but is a product of the relational system which is constituted in and through discursive processes. In particular, the broader socio-historical conditions in which the relationship is situated, and the everyday talk that occurs within the relational context (Duck, 1994; 2011).

Thus, the knowledge that was supposedly *revealed* by psychometric scales was always, already located in a social reality that was determined by systems of thought that were culturally and historically specific (Gergen, 1978; Rose, 1990; Foucault, 1990; Danzinger, 1994; Richards, 1996). The fact that the very term ‘satisfaction’ was typically used to classify the status of relationships in light of an ideal or standard, and to also scientifically categorise and differentiate satisfied or non-distressed couples (who were somehow ‘doing it right’) from dissatisfied or distressed couples (Erbert &

Lussier, & Mathieu, 1994; Lye & Biblarz, 1991; Rotheram & Weiner, 1983), and therefore a very fragmented picture of what influenced satisfaction and dissatisfaction was presented.

Duck, 1997), meant that what was being looked for, and how results were interpreted, was not independent from the social order. The whole research process, from the very beginning, was shaped by a-priori, hetero-romanticised beliefs, expectations, and practices, which pivoted around ideations of relationship satisfaction as integral to partners' health and well-being (Finn, 2012, Fletcher, 2008).

The psychological knowledges produced through this 'top-down' approach to understanding relationship satisfaction constructed relationship satisfaction and dissatisfaction as an either-or duality, which failed to appreciate their dynamic *interplay*, or how each fed into the other¹⁸. This dualistic construction privileged the 'ideal' relationship and 'positivity' as a relational goal (Duck and Erbert, 1997). In this way, psychological systems of knowledge and power constituted, sustained and governed individuals at the level of the personal (Rose, 1996), and ethically compelled couples to function in a state of satisfied mutual fulfilment. This governance came to operate through the dominant psychological theories of relationship satisfaction, because "all major relationship theories contribute [...] by defining an overarching need or set of needs that motivate interpersonal behaviour" (VanderDrift & Agnew, 2012, p.229). In particular, two theoretical strands now dominate mainstream psychological productions of relationship satisfaction: Attachment Theory and Interdependence Theory. These psychological knowledges present different underlying needs, and produce two conflicting discursive constructions of relationship satisfaction: '*A satisfaction of support and acceptance*' and '*A satisfaction of economic utility*'. These are critically discussed in the following sections (2.5.1 and 2.5.2) of the chapter.

¹⁸ Some researchers attempted to operationalise relationship satisfaction in such a way that dissatisfaction (or 'negative emotions and interactions') was also given equal concern. For example, Karney & Bradbury (1997) developed the 15-item Semantic Differential (SMD), which assessed satisfaction along 6-point scales between adjective pairs (e.g., *good-bad*, *enjoyable-miserable*). Furthermore, Fincham *et al.*, (1997) suggested that marital evaluations should be seen as involving two dimensions – Positive marital quality (PMQ) and Negative marital quality (NMQ). Instead of a distressed vs non-distressed dichotomy of marital quality, this constructed a four-category typology – Happy (High PMQ, low NMQ), Distressed (Low PMQ, High NMQ), Indifferent (low on both), and ambivalent (high on both). They argued that this approach had links to previous research that had explored both positive and negative dimensions of relating (e.g. Rollins & Feldman, 1970; Gilford & Bengston, 1979; Marini, 1976; Johnson, White, Edwards, and Booth, 1986), and which suggested that satisfaction and dissatisfaction in personal relationships were not polar opposites. However, these approaches still rested upon the problematic assumptions that relationship satisfaction, and the satisfied subject could be measured and known.

2.5 The Dominant Theoretical Accounts of Relationship Satisfaction

2.5.1 An Attachment Satisfaction of Support and Acceptance

Attachment theory is one of the dominant approaches within the mainstream literature which attempts to explain how partners interact, how relationships function, and how this shapes relationship satisfaction. Stemming from Bowlby's 1930s psychodynamic research, our relational needs and experience of satisfaction, came to be theorised as being determined by the way in which we relate to our primary care giver (usually our mother) during infancy and childhood (Bowlby, 1969; 1978). Bowlby theorised that children possess an evolved biological mechanism to seek proximity to their care giver in order to foster a sense of safety and security. Care-giver availability and responsiveness were consequently seen to foster emotional stability in children, whilst separation was believed to promote delinquency. For Bowlby, healthy mother-child attachment ensured the wellbeing and positive adjustment of both child and parent in a responsively affectionate, permanent and exclusive dyadic relationship, thereby producing a 'potential danger' in women's shifting social roles at that time (Finn, 2012; Rose, 1996). Once again, such knowledges functioned to reinforce traditional gender injunctions in which women's social roles were defined in terms of their roles in dyadic relationships i.e. as 'housewife' and 'mother'.

Underlying Bowlby's approach were the theoretical constructs of the *safe haven* and the *secure base*. 'Good' mothering was understood as providing a 'safe haven' of comfort and support in the face of potential threat, and also acting as a 'secure base' from which to go out and explore the world, safe in the knowledge that one could return to this location of stability and certainty when necessary. Bowlby theorised that the extent to which individuals' needs for security and comfort were met during infancy shaped their "*internal working models*" of attachment relationships. These models contained beliefs about the self and others: whether or not the self was worthy of care and attention, and whether or not others were responsive and emotionally available when needed. Once formed, it was argued that these working models were relatively stable, operated automatically and unconsciously (Shaver, Collins & Clark, 1996; Collins & Read, 1994), and continued to influence how individuals expressed and regulated their relationships into and throughout adulthood (Bowlby, 1988; Bretherton, 1985, 1987).

Bowlby's project for a psychology of attachment was based on the model of the natural sciences, which continued what Toulmin and Leary (1985) called the "cult of empiricism". Underpinned by positivistic presuppositions, it sought to provide a 'universal' explanation of an ahistorical *psychologised* subjectivity. Following this line of reason, in 1978, Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall proposed that there were three types of 'attachment style' – 'secure', 'insecure avoidant' and 'insecure ambivalent'. In 1987, Hazan and Shaver published (what would become) a seminal paper in which they conceptualised romantic love as an attachment process, and this cemented the role of attachment theory in the literature on close relationships. This work was extended by Bartholomew & Horowitz in 1991 who made the distinction between four adult attachment styles: 'secure', 'fearful', 'preoccupied', and 'dismissing'. Each conceptualised via individual differences along two underlying dimensions: *anxiety* and *avoidance* (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991, Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999; Fraley & Waller, 1998). Again, these dimensions were understood in terms of individuals' 'cognitive' working-models-of-self and working-models-of-others-respectively. Thus, over time, 'attachment theory' and its associated typologies of 'attachment styles' was extended from the mother-child dyad to encompass 'affectional bonds' in *all* close relationships.

This laid the discursive grounds for a 'satisfying' diagnostic categorisation of the relational subject according to their cognitive attachment architecture; one in which a 'secure psychology' was clearly privileged as the foundation of 'satisfying' relating (e.g., Barse, 2004; Shaver & Hazan, 1993, Collins & Read, 1990; Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Hammond & Fletcher, 1991; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Pistole, 1989), because 'secure individuals' were positioned as possessing "the general characteristics and interpersonal skills necessary for the development and maintenance of intimate relationships with others" (Collins & Feeney, 2004, p.174)¹⁹. Simultaneously and in contrast, attachment discourse also produced a dissatisfied *and* dissatisfying 'insecure' subject who perceived others as unreliable, inconsistent, and non-committal, and was therefore either ambivalent towards others, or pre-occupied by anxious thoughts of abandonment and being unloved (e.g. Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney, J. A., & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

¹⁹ I argue that this dominant production of the satisfied subject possessing a satisfying cognitive architecture and associated satisfying relational skills is mobilised repeatedly throughout the psychological literature.

These knowledges exemplified Foucault's normalising process in action, and in this way the 'insecure' subject was made to be a 'pathological subject', whose capacity to cause relationship dissatisfaction was greater even than the 'secure' subject's capacity to cause satisfaction (Feeney, 2002).

However, this construction contained within it a paradoxical, *contradicted* satisfied subjectivity. On the one hand, an individual's capacity to experience relationship satisfaction was represented in terms of their intra-psychic, innate, and relatively stable attachment style. Yet at the same time the subject was also positioned in-*relation* to others, and this produced a malleable 'attached subjectivity', which could be shaped by the attachment style and behaviours of the relational partner (e.g. Kane, Jaremka, Guichard, Ford, Collins, & Feeney, 2007). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the relationally-secure partner was positioned as a source of satisfaction for their partner because they were represented as being skilled at interpreting nonverbal behaviours and feelings (Noller & Feeney, J.A., 1994) and being more sensitive and responsive to needs, whilst avoiding engaging in excessive care or displaying negativity (e.g. Collins & Feeney, B.C., 2000; Feeney, J.A., 1996; Kuncze & Shaver, 1994). Again, this remobilised the dominant construction of satisfaction as need fulfilment attained through 'positive' interaction. In contrast, the 'insecure partner' was positioned as a source of reduced satisfaction for their partner, and this was frequently along gendered lines. For example, being in a relationship with an 'insecure partner' was constructed as more detrimental to women's satisfaction than men's (Frazier, Byer, Fischer, Wright, and DeBord, 1996; Collins et al.; 2002), although other researchers presented the opposite pattern (e.g. Banse, 2004; Feeney 1994; Collins & Read, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). Thus 'attachment styles' theorised relationally-satisfied subjectivity in an abstract decontextualised timeless space wherein the relational-subject was constant, self-contained, unified (Morawski, 1994), and independent from social or historical circumstances and always-already problematised.

However, instead of seeing the core attachment concepts of the *safe haven*, *secure base* and *internal working models* as natural components of relating, I argue that they are products of already dominant discourses constructing satisfying childhood and parenting as sites of stability and certainty. Thus, the discourse of attachment did not unproblematically *describe* relationships and relationship satisfactions, but rather

actively *prescribed* them and the nature of psychological and relational dissatisfactions. Cleary (1999) argued that in light of the Western ‘cult of individualism’, “attachment theory strikes an intuitively solid note with us in that it reflects back to us our own cultural assumptions about the nature of the psyche” (p.34). In this way, through its extension to all close relationships and the elucidation of ‘attachment styles’, doing the affectional bond ‘correctly’ became an effective form of governance, not only for mothers, but for everyone (Rose, 1990). (Due to word count restrictions, please see Appendix C for further discussion).

However, research has brought into question the ‘inevitable’ need for secure attachment with individuals’ self-classifying themselves across ‘secure’ and ‘insecure’ types (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998; Feeney, 1999). For example, Finn (2012, p.612) has argued that this “erraticism” in attachment styles “can be seen as a function of the cultural division between the private and public subjectivities of modernity that involves both autonomy and dependence” which gives rise to competing standards for attaining self and relational satisfactions (see also Cancian, 1987; Giddens, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). So, individuals must fulfil their own needs in order to be satisfied, yet this can only be achieved in relation to another in an ongoing dialectical process of negotiation and compromise. This tension between satisfactions of the ‘self’ versus satisfactions of the ‘relational’ emerges to a greater extent in the second dominant construction of relationship satisfaction, which is informed by a social exchange theoretical perspective of cost-benefit analysis: ‘relationship satisfaction as economic utility’.

2.5.2 A Satisfaction of Economic Utility and Investment

In the late 1950s, American social psychologists developed an interactional perspective to account for and explain marital longevity which, given the perceived social ‘threats’ of ‘free love’ and the increasing divorce rate of the early 1960’s, had become an issue of heightened political and socio-economic importance (Finn, 2012). Having noticed that unhappy relationships often endured, researchers turned towards the new paradigm of Interdependence Theory, which theorised partners’ inter-subjective interactions as pivoting around their perceived costs and benefits; an economic discourse that is now highly prevalent in the West (e.g. Burr, 2003; Willig & dew Valor, 1999, as cited in Smtih, 2008). Rather than the unconscious, emotional satisfactions of support and

acceptance made possible by relational ‘safe havens’, researchers turned to the conscious satisfactions of economic utility and cost-benefit analysis.

Today, Interdependence Theory has become the most prominent theoretical perspective in the psychology of close relationships and, along with attachment theory, strongly influences the practice of couple therapy (Johnson & Lebow, 2000) (See Section 2.7.1 and 2.7.2). It has been argued that this dominance was facilitated by “the emergent neo-liberal political emphasis on economic and personal freedoms that [were] to be attained by individual autonomy, enterprise and choice” (Finn, 2012, p.613). Interdependence Theory stemmed from Social Exchange Theories (SET), which drew on evolutionary theory²⁰ to argue that the exchange of rewards and punishments underpinned all social interactions. Kelley (1983) proposed that for a relationship to remain satisfying, the perceived overall benefits obtained from being in the relationship needed to consistently outweigh any associated costs for *both* partners, relative to their internal expectations and also their available alternatives (conceptualised as the ‘comparison level’) (Rusbult, Arriaga, and Agnew, 2001), although some have argued that ‘actual’ outcomes were always stronger predictors of relationship satisfaction than outcomes relative to comparison levels (e.g. Dainton, 2000; Morrow & O’Sullivan, 1998; Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986; Ruvolo & Veroff, 1997; Sternberg & Barnes, 1985). Regardless, the focus of satisfaction remained on a cost-benefit analysis of relational outcomes. (Due to word count restrictions, please see Appendix D for further discussion).

This conceptual move away from the internal working models of attachment theory to a focus on conscious, rational, economic exchange, opened a discursive space in which partners’ commitment (measured as a conscious decision to stay together) could form the basis from which to assess and manage, or ‘work at’, their relationship satisfaction by employing the maintenance behaviours outlined by psychological ‘experts’ (See sections 2.6 and 2.7). However, there was a tension in this notion of the committed potentially-satisfied subject, free to assess and choose, yet still compelled to pursue

²⁰ From an evolutionary psychological perspective, intimate partners were constructed as having an innate biological need to pass on their genes, and consequently they also had a need to feel certain of their partner’s fidelity (for men to ensure paternity, and for women to ensure the provision of resources) (e.g. Shackelford and Buss, 1997). As such, individuals were ‘hard-wired’ by evolution to constantly monitor and evaluate the reproductive costs and benefits of their relationship. Thus, from this theoretical perspective, relationship satisfaction came to be understood as a ‘warning system’, whereby being dissatisfied suggested that individuals were at risk of incurring reproductive costs within the context of their relationship (Shackelford & Buss, 1997).

culturally-sanctioned relational conduct (Finn & Malson, 2008; Finn, 2012, Lawes, 1999). The satisfied-subject, in the process of ‘working at’ their relationship, was positioned as serving autonomous, self-interest, whilst simultaneously occupying a position of *doing* co-dependency and unconditional care.

It has been suggested that this tension led to the rise of ‘cool’ emotional strategies (Heath and Potter, 2005) because contemporary partners felt easily disposable, simultaneously eager to relate and yearning for a connection, but wary and cautious of being related to (Elliot and Lemert, 2006). Hochschild (2003a,b) argued that this ‘commercialising’ of all intimate life impeded altruistic and caring tendencies, set back the early feminist hope for a more equal society, and that the individualism which characterised modern relationships was leading to the dissolution of the human bond:

“The commercial spirit of intimate life is made up of images that prepare the way for a paradigm of distrust. [...] The heroic acts a self can perform, in this view, are to detach, to leave, and to depend on and need others less. [...] The ideal self doesn’t need much, and what it does need it can get for itself. Added to the idea of a curtailed “me” is the idea of a curtailed “you”. So a no-needs me relates to a no-needs you, and a paradigm of caution is stationed between us” (p. 24)

This presented a striking counterpoint to the attachment oriented view of relationship satisfaction as mutual fulfilment of acceptance and support. Private life was constituted as both a source of comfort and pleasures, but also a region for emotional isolation, with the modern ‘satisfied’ subject simultaneously positioned as achieving satisfaction and need fulfilment through relating, whilst also compelled to remain distant and isolated; the self-satisfying, autonomous individual. Thus, the dominance of social exchange theory and attachment theory discursively produced a *conflicted* satisfied-subject who was compelled by *conflicting* obligations towards self and other. The two discursive frameworks, however, converged in the way in which they both produced a satisfied-subject who was morally obliged to be aware of, and fulfil, their partner’s innate needs. Thus, psychological notions of what it meant to trust one’s partner and be trusted by them became paramount in mainstream constructions of relationship satisfaction (Charania & Ickes, 2007, Wieselquist *et al.*, 1999), and this shall be discussed in the following section.

2.5.3 The trusting, satisfied subject

Originating from exchange theories, ‘trust’ (like satisfaction) was conceptualised in psychology as a measurable attitude or disposition of the individual (e.g. 1980; Rempel, Holmes & Zanna, 1985; Boon, 1994), and the following essential components of trust were theorised:

“(1) predictability, or belief that the partner’s behaviour is consistent; (2) dependability, or belief that the partner can be counted on to be honest and reliable; and (3) faith, or conviction that the partner is intrinsically motivated to be caring – belief that the partner’s motives go beyond instrumental bases for benevolence” (Rusbult, Arriaga, and Agnew, 2001, p.376)

Conceptualised in this way, satisfied partners were constructed as *knowing* they could rely on each other to consistently and predictably meet each other’s needs, and engage in pro-relationship acts (Holmes & Rempel, 1989). Congruent with this, research presented trust as being associated with satisfaction via open communication and the voicing of needs (Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Rusbult & Zembrodt, 1983) and promoted, and was promoted by, self-disclosure and the development of intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 1988). In Foucauldian terms, the dyadic trust that was necessary for a satisfying monogamous relationship operated as a policing technology. Both partners were aware of and had trust in (if only implicitly) their own and each other’s moral obligation to consistently work towards mutual need fulfilment. Thus, individuals’ knowledge of the trust that their partners had in them functioned as a form of self-surveillance (Foucault, 1986, 1990) and warranted the enactment of appropriate, satisfying inter-subjective behaviours. Therefore the accepted, dominant psychological knowledges served as forms of governance, and produced normative standards, which occluded other possibilities (e.g. Wetherell, 1995; Rose, 1990; Hollway, 1989) and produced the satisfied-subject who was compelled to be relationally skilled, whilst the *unskilled* subject was at risk of *doing* dissatisfying relating.

Conceptualising interpersonal skills deficits as potential risk factors became well established in the mainstream psychological literature (Lawrence *et al.*, 2008), because “partners often differ[ed] in their willingness and ability to support one another’s needs and to provide the type of support that promote[d] one another’s welfare and relationship satisfaction” (Kane, Jaremka, Guichard, Ford, Collins & Feeney, 2007, p.536). This ‘*difference*’ in partner’s ‘*willingness*’ or ‘*ability*’ to perform relational

skills vis-à-vis need fulfilment provided the discursive conditions of possibility for relational subjects to be positioned as satisfied or dissatisfied. The emphasis on relational skills was exemplified by Lawrence *et al.*, (2008) who reviewed the literature on close relationships across multiple disciplines (including social and clinical psychology, family studies, sociology, and communication studies) and identified five types of dyadic behaviour that were theorised as producing long-term marital satisfaction: *Emotional closeness and intimacy*; *Interspousal support*; *Communication and conflict management*; *Sensuality and sexuality*; and *Decision making and relational control* (due to word count restrictions, please see Appendix E for a detailed review of the literature that enables these five categories).

2.6 Mastering the satisfying relational skills – the turn to therapy

Taken together, the psychologisation of relationally satisfying skills privileged ‘positive’ dyadic interactions characterised by psychological notions of closeness, intimacy and mutual *knowing*, and have come to reflect the ‘transformative’ position outlined in Section 2.3.1. The ‘ideal’ satisfying couple relationship has been constructed as characterised by equality, reciprocity and ‘free choice’ (Allan, 2008; Cherlin, 2004; Giddens, 1992; Weeks, 2013). Relationships are understood as being entered into for what they can bring to both individuals and pivot around mutual self-disclosure, openness, trust and equality, and a willingness to negotiate with each other. However, once the ideal relationship became privileged, ‘positive’ satisfying interaction became teleologically important (Erbert & Duck, 1997), and constructions of relationship satisfaction were based on a rigid premise of closeness, bonding, and togetherness, as opposed to an ongoing process that also involved negativity, conflict, and dissatisfaction²¹. However, if the basic ideological foundations of each partner in an intimate relationship were predicated on the ideal relationship, then attaining that ideal became an impossible task because it was inevitable that tensions and contradictions

²¹ Researchers such as Gottman (1993) recognised the need for ‘negative’ interactions between couples, but, again, this constructed partners’ interactions in terms of simple, positive-negative, either/or dualities, and missed the complexity and dynamic interplay of *relating*. Notions of what it means to have satisfying relationships are constructed and reconstructed through the ongoing dialogue with others – a process, that requires both unity and division, agreement and opposition (Erbert & Duck, 1997).

would emerge between what Rawlins (1983) has described as the dialectic of the ideal and the real²².

Thus, Rose (1990) argued that the psychologisation of intimate life has produced a neuroticisation of social intercourse, whereby individuals' interpersonal relationships constituted key functional elements in their personal happiness and social efficacy, such that all manner of social problems (whether frustration in the home or workplace, or dissatisfaction with a partner) came to be understood as caused by an inability to relate effectively to others. However, help was at hand via professional technologies, which constructed psychological 'defects' and 'inabilities' as 'treatable' if individuals acquired the knowledge and skills that were made available through psychology and its associated practises of psychotherapy. As Hillman (1975) argued, whilst the ancients turned to mythology, we turned to the 'psy-technologies' of psychotherapy and psychiatry (Rose, 1990), which function as expert *authorising* technologies that normalise the *satisfied* subject and the *practices* of the satisfying relationship.

2.7: Couple Therapy: Recycling the Confessional Satisfaction of Mutual Understanding & Acceptance

Couple therapy²³ has steadily grown in recognition and acceptance over the last 30 years (Christensen, Baucom, Atkins & Yi, 2010), yet it still remains a stigmatised practice for the 'pathologised couple'. Lebow *et al.* (2012) claim that many couples who would benefit from therapy do not seek it out (see also Markman & Rhoades, 2012), whilst of those who do, many frequently do not engage with it for a beneficial length of time²⁴. In spite of this, couples who find themselves experiencing relationship problems increasingly refer themselves for couple-therapy to address dissatisfying relationships (e.g., Crowe & Ridley, 2008; Lebow *et al.*, 2012). This is reflected in the fact that, in Britain alone, Relate (commonly regarded as established experts of intimate

²² This dialectic referred to the tension that *friends* experienced when trying to manage the opposing forces of the cultural expectations and ideals of 'friendships' and the 'actual reality' of those relationships. I argue that the same dialectical tension operates in productions of intimate coupledness too.

²³ The term 'couple therapy' replaced the more limiting, and historically located 'marital therapy' during the Family Therapy Movement, although the two are often used interchangeably in the therapy literature.

²⁴ In particular, research has suggested that husbands are more reticent to engage in therapy, but when they do, their levels of satisfaction increase faster than their wives' (Doss, Atkins, & Christensen, 2003). Thus, men's engagement in the therapeutic process is presented as the strongest predictor of therapeutic success, because women are positioned as being prepared to engage more readily with all forms of therapy (Lebow *et al.*, 2012; see also Knobloch-Fedders *et al.*, 2004).

and close relationships) provide over 220,000 hours of couple therapy to over 150,000 people a year, and current dominant discourses present Couple Therapy as a technology that ‘quantifiably works’²⁵.

Gurman & Fraenkel (2002, p199) stated that couple therapy was “long on history, but short on tradition”. From the 1930s to the early 1960s, clergy or social workers provided atheoretical instruction on how to make marriage work (Broderick & Schrader, 1981), emphasising couples’ legal and social obligations, along with the ‘inherent values’ of family life. Thus, relationship satisfaction was understood in terms of partners’ moral obligations to family, church, and state (See also Section 2.2.2). ‘Therapy’ was short-term, *explicitly* prescriptive, and rarely conducted with both partners present. In fact, it was not until the end of the 1960s that seeing the couple together became the preferred format (Olson, 1970) signalling the recognition (at least implicitly) that relationship satisfaction involved intersubjective processes that could be perceived and experienced by each partner in different ways.

By the mid 1960’s psychoanalysis and psychodynamic approaches had been adopted, and the therapist-as-rational-expert searched for the relational “truth” by deciphering partners’ irrational perceptions. Here, relationship dissatisfactions were constructed in terms of repressed un-articulated desires. This positioned and empowered the therapist as the key agent of change, with no recognition of the potential for couple-led progression (Dicks, 2011). However, Psychoanalytic couple therapy was soon overtaken by the rise of the Family Therapy Movement (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002), and the work of family therapists dominated relational therapy until the mid-1980s when ‘couple therapy’ as a distinct entity began to re-assert itself through new therapeutic practices.

2.7.1 The Satisfying Social Exchange Practice of Integrative Behavioural Couple Therapy

By the mid-1980s couple therapy established itself with the emergence of Behavioural Marital Therapy (BMT) (Jacobson & Margolin, 1979; Jacobson & Martin, 1976), which

²⁵ For example, Shadish and Baldwin (2003) produced a meta-analysis of six earlier meta-analyses, and reported an effect size of 0.84 for couple therapy – this presented a couple receiving therapy as having ‘better’ outcomes than 84% of couples not receiving therapy.

compelled partners to explicitly identify and enact satisfying behaviour changes according to structured agreements (Halford, 1998). Supposedly based on Jackson's (1965) concept of the martial 'quid-pro-quo', which emphasised the need for partners to acknowledge the (*unarticulated*) 'ground rules' within their relationship, BMT actually represented a fundamental misconception of the concept as an equitable economic exchange (Gurman & Knudson, 1978; Segraves, 1982; Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002). Thus, BMT produced a relationship satisfaction of economic utility, which mirrored broader theoretical developments in Social Exchange Theory.

The *satisfying* practices and regimens prescribed by BMT also privileged 'positive' interactions, and focussed on 'improving' partners' inter-subjective skills, because unresolved conflict discursively signified relationship dissatisfaction. Hence, the therapist's authorising role was to teach satisfying communication and problem-solving skills. Later, BMT introduced a disciplinary 'self-regulation phase' (Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 1994) in which individuals were compelled to reflect on and alter their own behaviour to be in line with what was deemed 'normal' mutually satisfying behaviour; a self-policing practice made all the more potent by its representation as a form of personal 'empowerment'. However, the focus of BMT remained on couples developing better communication and problem solving strategies as the underlying mechanisms for any therapeutic successes (e.g. Shadish & Baldwin, 2005). As it evolved, BMT came to resemble Integrative Behavioural Couple Therapy (IBCT) (Christensen *et al.*, 1995; Jacobson & Christensen, 1996; Christensen & Jacobson, 2000); a "third wave" behavioural approach, which went beyond the typical cognitive-behavioural strategies, and emphasised partners' mutual private emotions, mindfulness and acceptance. Today, IBCT is one of the dominant forms of couple therapy, and it is constructed as a satisfying practice via its capacity to improve communication, change behaviour around target problems, and promote acceptance of target problems (e.g. Doss, Thum, Sevier, Atkins, and Christensen, 2005; Sevier *et al.*, 2008). However, it is a practice which does not question the conditions of possibility through which relational 'problems' are rendered thinkable and knowable, and therefore sustains dominant constructions of what it means to be in, and do, satisfying relationships. This recycling of psychological knowledges that construct relationship satisfaction is also evident in the other dominant form of couple therapy: the humanistic, Emotion Focussed Therapy.

2.7.2 The Satisfying Attachment Practice of Emotion Focussed Therapy

At the same time that BMT was emerging (based on social exchange), the rise of attachment theory also led to the development of Emotion Focussed Therapy (Greenberg & Johnson, 1986, 1988; Johnson, 1986, 1996; Johnson & Greenberg, 1995). Taking an attachment perspective towards adult relationships (e.g. Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), EFT constructed therapeutic success in terms of partners' abilities to express their attachment needs and be more responsive to each other's needs (Johnson & Zuccarini, 2010).

Furthermore, EFT drew on humanistic concepts that valued emotion as a vehicle of change and 'self-actualisation'. These assumptions owed much to the work of Satir (1978 as cited in Gurman and Fraenkel) whose work on partners' psychological health had theorised relational dissatisfaction as the result of restricted intimacy and individual growth. Thus, underpinned by humanistic assumptions of attachment, EFT recycled the satisfaction of mutual support and acceptance. From this perspective, treating relational distress required the therapist to help partners access and express unacknowledged feelings and mutually accept each other's relational needs and emotional experience (Johnson, 1999). The therapist functioned rather like a confessor, and represented a model of 'good' communication, highlighting unspoken relational rules and fostering emotional expression.

This focus on partners' cognitive capacities to relate in a satisfying intimate way was also explored by Murray Bowen whose constructs and terminology came to pervade the modern practice of multi-generational therapy more than any other theoretical approach (Gurman and Fraenkel, 2002). Bowen believed that all psychological problems had *relational* causes, and introduced the concept of differentiation *within* self and *from* others, with the former a prerequisite for the latter. Poor differentiation was theorised as leading to defensiveness, discounting of one's partner, and conflict whilst adequate differentiation allowed simultaneous autonomy (via self-validation) and intimacy in both the 'relational' (Schnarch, 1991) and 'sexual' realms (Lobitz & Lobitz, 1996). From this perspective the therapist functioned as a detached 'coach' and their focus was on elucidating the facets of each partner's inner 'self' that prevented them from intimate relating; a mode of satisfying subjectification that still privileged the practice of mutual intimacy. Thus, a fixed and knowable 'satisfied' subject was produced and rendered

governable through the internalisation of the practices of intimacy, which compelled partners to be ‘open’ and ‘honest’. In this way, the institution of therapy left no space for ‘silence’ in the satisfied relationship.

Today, EFT research still produces a satisfaction of interpersonal skills, and warrants emotional self-disclosure as the underlying satisfying regime, with the implication that couples who reveal vulnerable emotions to each other in therapy improve significantly on measures of relationship satisfaction (Meneses and Greenberg, 2011). This privileging of ‘emotional expression’ as the route to relationship satisfaction is also evident in other less widely practiced therapies (e.g Coping Oriented Couples Therapy), which teach partners to self-disclose concerns, provide reciprocal support, and refine this via mutual feedback (Bodenmann *et al.*, 2008). However, this focus on emotional expression was to be challenged by other theorists who focussed on the role of power dynamics in producing the dissatisfied subject.

2.7.3 The Therapeutic Acknowledgment of the Role of Power in Relationship Satisfaction

Theorists had focused on the role of ‘traditional’ (not productive) power and control in producing dissatisfied couples (e.g. Haley, 1964), and problems were understood to arise when a couple’s localised power structures were too rigid or not explicit enough. However, it was also believed that the manifest ‘problems’ actually served functions within the dyad, and therefore resistance to change was inevitable. From this perspective, planned, pragmatic present-focussed interventions were designed to facilitate partners’ acknowledgment and articulation of power structures in order to disrupt their problematic behaviour (Gurman and Fraenkel, 2002). Whilst this work saw an explicit acknowledgment of the impact of power in relationships, inequality was still understood as localised; a property of the dissatisfied couple that was under their ‘control’ and could potentially be changed for the better. However, the focus on relational power and control was to come to the forefront of several theoretical and therapeutic movements which were to highlight the inherent social-embeddedness of power inequalities in all relationships, and also in the practices of couple therapy. These theoretical movements included feminism and multiculturalism and are discussed in the following section.

2.7.4 Power, Feminism & Multiculturalism Challenges to Couple Therapy

From the late 1970s to mid-1980s, the fundamental assumptions of couple and family therapy were challenged on several theoretical fronts. Feminist therapists outlined how satisfying relationships were enacted and understood according to historically and culturally embedded beliefs concerning who, and what, men and women *should* be and do. In this way, gender was inextricably tied up with power (defined in terms of oppression, not production), and delineated individuals' capacities for action and subjective experience (e.g. Goldner; 1985a,b, 1988; Hare-Mustin, 1978, 1987; James & McIntyre, 1983, 1989; James & MacKinnon, 1990; Avis, 1988, 1989; Libow, Raskin, & Caust, 1982; Walters, Carter, Papp, & Silverstein, 1988). Thus, the two partners were likely to have systematically different experiences of their relationship due to prescribed relational expectations and differential access to power (Walters *et al.*, 1988). In terms of the therapeutic process, feminists demonstrated that it was frequently guided by normative gendered assumptions. For example, the 'paternalistic' hierarchical position of the therapist and the un/intended reinforcement of gendered roles as a solution to relational problems (Hare-Mustin, 1978). Furthermore, Goldner (1985b) referred to women's paradoxical position in couple therapy because they were positioned as responsible for both the emotional monitoring and management of the couple. Women were seen as the initiator of therapy as well as the nurturer of their partner's continued therapeutic engagement.

Along with the emergence of feminist theory, multiculturalism also highlighted the impact of both partners' race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, social class, and age etc. in producing normative prescriptions about how they should do satisfying, intimate relationships. Furthermore, depending on how these 'characteristics' were valued (i.e. privileged or oppressed) within the broader social context, they positioned and shaped the subjective experience of individuals in different ways. Thus, theorists (e.g. Falicov, 1995) argued that it was important for the therapeutic practice to take account of these contextual features, and this might involve the couple taking the role of 'experts' to inform the therapist about their specific cultural context, thereby destabilising the authorising power of the therapist-as-expert.

The emergence of these critical works highlighted the way in which relational theories and therapeutic practices did not inherently *emerge* from relationships, but were

constructed, and that this construction took place within a broader political, economic, and moral context (Goldner, 1985; Hare-mustin, 1978; Walters *et al.*, 1988). Thus, feminist and multicultural theories challenged therapists to acknowledge the impact of broader social forces on the couple by calling into question the ‘essential’ nature of ‘demographic traits’ such as ‘gender’, ‘race’, and ‘social class’, and also the psychological constructs such as ‘attachment styles’ and ‘intimacy’. Instead, these constructs were shown to be historically and culturally located, and *productive* of individuals and relationship satisfaction (rather than descriptive of some underlying characteristics), and laid bare the crucial role of couple therapy in either recycling or challenging these taken-for-granted productions.

Over the past few decades this type of critical research has impacted significantly on the practice of couple and family therapy (e.g. Watzlawick, 1984; Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Hoffman, 1990; Epston & White, 1992; Fraenkel, 1997). There has been a move away from observation and mechanistic interventions (Hoffman, 1990) based on generalising theoretical accounts, in favour of a focus on the unique experiences and meaning making of the couple (e.g. Fraenkel, 1995; Freedman & Combs, 1996a,b, 2000; Neal, Zimmerman, & Dickerson, 1999; Zimmerman and Dickerson, 1993a,b, 1994). The therapist’s position has shifted from ‘expert’ to ‘collaborator’ who, with the couple, explores the meanings they produce about their relational problems, and how their language limits or constrains them (e.g. Hudson & O’Hanlon, 1992; Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1994). However, some theorists (e.g. Tiefer, 1988, 2002) suggest that a lack of awareness of this role has remained in the practice of couple therapy. Thus, whilst feminists acknowledged that facilitating clients’ clarity from the subjective position of each client was beneficial (rather than prescribing what partners should do) they argued that therapists should accept the impossibility of moral neutrality. Instead, they should work to increase awareness of normative prescriptions and decrease the possibility of indirectly colluding with client-held ideological positions, and recycling gendered relational discourses that pathologised partners and limited what was possible in terms of doing satisfying relationships.

However, despite these critical shifts, and notwithstanding a few notable exceptions (e.g. Boyd-Franklin, Kelly, & Durham, 2008; Chambers, 2008; Falicov, 2003), research into couple therapy has remained largely focussed on white, heterosexual North Americans

and Europeans (Sprenkle, 2012). Thus, whilst the couple therapy literature highlights a need to ‘address culture’ in research, it also acknowledges that culture-specific methods are lacking from the couple therapy literature, and very few studies are even demographically balanced (Lebow *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, mainstream couple therapy research is still endeavouring to uncover universal laws, independent of socio-historical conditions that govern relationships and the practice of therapy. The dominant assumption appears to be that different models of couple therapy work, not because of unique characteristics specific to each type, but rather because of underlying shared factors.

2.7.5 The ‘Underlying Laws’ of Successful Couple Therapy

There have been several attempts to elucidate the underlying principles governing *all* forms of *successful* couple therapy. This has been exemplified by Lebow *et al.*, (2012), who have argued that effective couple therapy needs to address (directly or indirectly) universal, “transcendent aspects of relationships such as attachment, exchanges, skill building, attributions, biology, and personal histories” (p.158). One prominent set has been offered by Christensen (2010, cited in Lebow *et al.*, 2012), who presented five transcending principles of successful couple therapy which included:

“(a) dyadic conceptualization challenging the individual orientation view that partners tend to manifest, (b) modifying emotion-driven maladaptive behaviour by finding constructive ways to deal with emotions, (c) eliciting avoided, emotion-based, private behaviour so that this behaviour becomes public to the partners, making them aware of each other’s internal experience, (d) fostering productive communication, attending to both problems in speaking and listening, and (e) emphasizing strengths and positive behaviours” (p.157).

Thus, the authorising knowledges of couple therapy continue to privilege a construction of relationship satisfaction as the enactment of ‘correct’ interpersonal behaviours, which are dependent on partners possessing suitably satisfying cognitive-architectures that facilitate mutual confession and self-surveillance. From this perspective of ‘underlying principles’, therapeutic approaches that lack direct empirical evidence, but which share many common features with EFT, TBCT and IBCT are constructed as potentially beneficial ‘by proxy’. Such examples include ‘integrative problem-centred therapy’ (Pinsoff, 2005), ‘sound marital house therapy’ (Gottman, 2008), and ‘affective-reconstructive therapy’ (Snyder & Mitchell, 2008). The ‘general laws’ of couple therapy were mirrored in the work of Chenail, St. George, Wulff, Duffy, Wilson-Scott

& Tomm (2012) who conducted a qualitative meta-synthesis of clients' conceptions of couple therapy. Five themes emerged as representing successful couple therapy:

“(a) clients' commitment to change, motivation, and inner strength; (b) clients' recognition of therapists' efforts to cultivate hope, to enhance expectations, and to provide opportunities to change; (c) clients' appreciation of the relationship or alliance they have with their therapists; (d) clients' preconceptions and expectations for their therapy's usefulness; and (e) clients' acknowledgement of their treatment process and outcomes and identification of their relationships between in-therapy actions and out-of-therapy change” (Chenail *et al.*, 2012, p.256).

Missing from this list is an acknowledgement of the multiplicity and fluidity of meaning in the therapeutic space. There is no appreciation by mainstream researchers, therapists, and clients of the operation of broader social scripts in the construction and privileging of certain modes of 'satisfying' relating. These discourses also prescribe, warrant and operate through specific therapeutic practices. The intertwining of professional and lay understandings of therapy illustrates the ways in which the discursive technology of couple therapy, along with the psychological knowledges 'discovered' by mainstream research, function as key components of the norm-setting mechanism that shapes the accepted norms and moralities surrounding relationship satisfaction (Ussher and Baker, 1993), and informs and recycles the taken-for-granted everyday 'common sense' prescriptions concerning how satisfying relationships *should* be done (Nicholson, 1993). Individuals are positioned within diagnostic categories, but these 'psychological conditions' are not just 'personal events'. They are inherently social too (Crawford & Unger, 2004) and imbricated with broader social and political power. Thus, psychological discourses do not unproblematically *describe* relationships and relationship satisfactions, they actively *prescribe* the nature of our psychological and relational satisfactions, as well as the ways in which the practice of therapy conceives of and attempts to address relational problems. The pedagogic regimes of the therapeutic technologies extol the need for individual partners to “do their part” and work on themselves in order to increase the likelihood of their relationship being “healthy” and “happy” (Markman & Rhoades 2012, p.195). Thus, the 'emancipatory' couple therapies are forms of regulation themselves, 'distracting people from engaging with the wider social issues in favour of an inward turn to the self' (Furedi, 2004 p203) - a turn to a confessional self that must confess to every other self (Elliot and Lemert, 2006; Plummer, 1995, 2003) in order to achieve mutual fulfilment of innate needs and relationship satisfaction.

In line with the and/or philosophy of the thesis I now ‘break’ theoretically from the critical deconstruction of relationship satisfaction in the psychological and therapeutic literatures and turn, instead, to explore possible facets of its phenomenology.

Part 2

2.8 The Phenomenology of Relationship Satisfaction

Whilst relationship satisfaction has been constructed as “a subjective evaluation by each relational partner of the quality, or happiness level, within an intimate relationship” (Erbert & Duck, 1997, p. 194), I have found no research exploring the phenomenological richness of this lived experience. However, as indicated in the above extract, the primary ‘phenomenological’ characteristic of relationship satisfaction that *is* articulated in the mainstream literature is predominantly that of ‘happiness’. Psychological research has long argued that relationship satisfaction predicts happiness to a greater extent than other types of satisfaction (e.g., Glenn & Weaver, 1981), and this line of reasoning has formed the basis of some of the most persuasive arguments for researching relationship satisfaction. This was exemplified by Hinde (1997) who stated that research on satisfaction in close inter-personal relationships was highly valuable “not just as an intellectual enterprise, but because of its potential impact on human happiness” (p. xvii).

Dating back to antiquity, the quest for happiness was argued to be ‘universal’. Plato believed that everyone desired happiness, and Aristotle concluded that every other goal in life (e.g. wealth, power, health) was valued because of its capacity to make individuals happy, and the “right to pursue happiness” was famously enshrined in the American Declaration of Independence as an inalienable *right* of man (sic) (Silberman, 1985). Solomon (1993) argued that experiencing emotions, such as ‘happiness’, provided ‘the meaning of life’ because they allowed individuals to judge the favourability of actual or possible states of affairs, and therefore provided grounds for action. This ‘meaning of life’ was a framework of value and significance grounded in *lived experience* (as opposed to being relative to some extra-experiential standpoint) and therefore, from the mainstream perspective, relationship satisfaction has provided the same framework of meaning and grounds for action as happiness. This experiential link

also extended to the ways in which individuals were advised to achieve happiness and relationship satisfaction. For example, McGill (1967, as cited in Silberman, 1985) outlined the following guidelines for achieving happiness:

“[...] by rational thinking and the development of propitious human relationships; by cultivating love and goodness; exercising autonomy of will and purposeful intelligent behaviour; by engaging in creative activity; by stoic fulfillment, limitation, or elimination of desires; by avoidance of painful affects, wishes, and aspirations; [...] by self-realisation, self-actualisation, self-expansion; by developing to the whole and ideal man (*sic*) [...]” (Silberman, 1985, p.458).

These practices for the attainment of happiness came to be reflected in contemporary productions of relationship satisfaction; especially the privileging of happiness as an ‘ideal’, and the notions of exercising autonomy, holding ‘realistic’ expectations and engaging in humanistic processes of self-realisation, and self-actualisation. Furthermore, similar to the dominant construction of relationship satisfaction as need fulfilment, Silberman (1985) argued that ‘happiness’ came from the satisfaction of needs. Thus, the phenomenological link between relationship satisfaction and happiness became well established in the contemporary psychological literature such that the two were often presented as *affectively* synonymous.

However, other theoretical work has suggested that the two were not conceptually or phenomenologically interchangeable. For example, Michalos (1980) stated that different (i.e. phenomenologically distinct) ‘types’ of satisfaction could be distinguished on the basis of *different* affective characteristics. He referred to McKennell’s (1978, as cited in Michalos, 1980) work which suggested the following four ‘types’ of satisfaction could be experienced: 1) A ‘Satisfaction of Achievement’ characterised by feelings of satisfaction and happiness; 2) A ‘Satisfaction of Resignation’ characterised by feelings of satisfaction and unhappiness (akin to the ‘resigned commitment’ implicit in interdependence theory See Section 2.5.2); 3) A ‘Satisfaction of Aspiration’ in which individuals were dissatisfied but happy; 4) and a ‘Satisfaction of Frustration’ experienced as dissatisfying and unhappy. Conceptual work such as this suggested that the experiential relationship between satisfaction and happiness was more complex than a simple one-to-one approximation. Whilst such work permitted a certain multiplicity of meaning in the experiences of satisfaction, it still conceived of satisfaction in terms of rigid, static experiential categories in which partners were ‘located’, rather than as a fluid, ongoing experiential process.

One way in which this experiential variety was accounted for was by theorising ‘happiness’ as an *emotion*, and satisfaction as a *mood* (e.g. Solomon, 1993; Goldie, 2002) - an *experiential* distinction that was too simplistic. The traditional conception of emotions was that they were *intentional*²⁶ states with *specific* objects, whilst moods were understood as intentional states with *generalised* objects (e.g. Solomon, 1993; Goldie, 2002). From this view happiness was understood as an intentional emotion with a *specific* object, whereas relationship satisfaction was experienced as a *generalised, intentional mood*. This mirrored the mainstream psychological conception of satisfaction as a ‘global’ evaluation of one’s relationship (see section 2.4). In contrast, the mainstream accounts that conceptualised satisfaction in terms of *specific* relational evaluations implicitly maintained the phenomenological conception of relationship satisfaction as an *intentionally specific emotion* (akin to happiness). Given the ongoing (and unresolved) ‘global satisfaction-vs-specific satisfaction’ arguments in the literature, it appeared that the ‘experiential framework of meaning’ of relationship satisfaction was richer, more nuanced, and more fluid than traditional ‘emotion-mood’ dichotomies allowed for. This phenomenological richness of certain feelings (such as satisfaction) was considered further in Ratcliffe’s (2010) account of ‘existential feelings’.

Ratcliffe (2005; 2010) agreed with Solomon’s (1993) position that experience and thought were structured by a felt sense of *belonging to a meaningful world that mattered*. However, he argued that there was a phenomenological difference between a sense of the ‘world-experienced-as-meaningful’ and the experience of emotions and/or moods, which he saw as being experienced *in* the world. Ratcliffe (2005, 2010) drew on Heidegger’s theoretical work on the ontological capacities of human-being and argued that a sense of participating in a ‘world-as-meaningful’ was neither an intentional state, collection of intentional states, or a generalised intentional state. Instead, it was a *pre-intentional* background to these states, which shaped the range of intentional emotions that could conceivably be experienced. He called these pre-intentional backgrounds ‘existential feelings’ and argued that they were ‘phenomenologically deeper’ than emotions. This mirrored one of Heidegger’s earlier claims regarding the ontological capacities of human-being; that individuals *always* find

²⁶ I adopt a phenomenological conception of intentionality, which takes intentionality to be the *directedness* of *experience*, as opposed to conceiving of it as a non-phenomenological ‘aboutness’ of some object or situation. For me, the phenomenology of emotion is inextricable from the intentionality of emotion.

themselves in a particular state of mind, or mood, from which they take a position in the world, yet which, for the most part, they largely ignore. From this perspective, existential feelings such as relationship satisfaction were a phenomenologically deeper, pre-intentional state that made possible certain intentionally-specific emotions (such as happiness) and intentionally-generalised moods. Ratcliffe illustrated this phenomenological depth by drawing on Heidegger's (1962, 1995) work on the different experiential levels of boredom.

Heidegger had distinguished between three levels of boredom: 1) being 'bored by'; 2) being 'bored with', and 3) being 'boring for one'. When 'bored by' a given 'thing', that 'thing' had failed to interest an individual, but their boredom was experienced within a space of other possibilities which they might not find boring (e.g. waiting for a train, but having a book to read, or shops to look in). When 'bored with' a situation, the possibility of their not being bored was absent in advance, and the whole situation was experienced through their sense of boredom – the individual was, experientially speaking, *in* the boredom (e.g. waiting for a train at a quiet station with no alternative sources of interest). However, the individual could still conceive of other situations in which *they* might not be bored; the sense of boredom was not *all*-encompassing. This was the key difference between being 'bored with' and the deepest experience - being 'boring for one'. Here, when 'boring for one', the sense that there was any alternative way of being-in-the-world was absent from the individual's experience; their entire world was experienced through their boredom^{27,28}. For Ratcliffe, the traditional understanding of emotions, such as happiness, reflected experiences at the level of 'bored by', whilst the pre-intentional existential feelings equated to the deeper experiential levels of 'bored with' and 'boring for one', and this reflected the phenomenological quality of feelings such as satisfaction. This depth meant that existential feelings, such as relationship satisfaction, could be phenomenologically inconspicuous, and reflect what Strasser (1977) called:

²⁷ Perhaps a more conceptually accessible example of an experience this deep is depression. It is not a case that depressed individuals temporarily feel a 'little out of sorts' – the sense that they could once more be happy is experientially inconceivable to them.

²⁸ Ratcliffe (2010) proposed a further experiential level – 'personal boredom' – which he situated between 'bored with' and 'boring for one'. Here, the experience of boredom encompassed *all* aspects of the individual's own life, and therefore was experienced as deeper than 'bored with', but it was still only experienced as their *own* boredom and therefore was not as phenomenologically deep as 'boring for one'.

“[...] the attunements to which we pay no heed, we least observe – they attune us in such a way that we feel as though there is no attunement there at all, as though we were not attuned in any way at all – these attunements are the most powerful” (p68).

Given their phenomenological depth, Ratcliffe proposed that we come to ‘know’ and experience existential feelings through our bodily feelings. He distinguished between bodily feelings in which the body was the exclusive object of the experience, and bodily feelings *through* which other phenomena were perceived (i.e. where the body functioned as the *agent* of perception, as opposed to the *object* of it). It was this latter conception that Ratcliffe associated with existential feelings. Therefore, a theoretical account of ‘relationship-satisfaction-as-an-existential-feeling’ would suggest that relationship satisfaction might be experienced primarily through partners’ embodied being-in-the-world.

Whilst no research has been conducted to explore this, there are parallels with phenomenological research exploring narratives of ‘intimacy’ in coupledness (e.g. Helgeson *et al.*, 1987; Register and Henley, 1992). Register and Henley’s (1992) research on the phenomenology of intimacy presented themes of intimate embodiment, which suggested that there were aspects of experiencing intimacy that were unarticulated, and involved a qualitative experiential shift in the perception of sight and tactility; such that participants felt that they experienced their most intimate moments through a mutual look or touch, rather than through articulating their experiential worlds to each other. In fact, verbal self-disclosure was largely absent from the participants’ experiential accounts; a particularly pertinent theme given the overwhelming focus on communication skills and mutual self-disclosure as the ‘vehicle’ for intimate satisfying relationships (see also Jamieson, 1999). Instead, participants spoke about their awareness of their embodiment changing – e.g. ‘noticing’ butterflies in their stomachs. Thus, Register and Henley’s account suggested that the process of intimate relating involved partners’ embodied sensations qualitatively changing, and their *awareness* of their embodied engagement in the world increasing. Furthermore, participants described intimacy as the removal or merging of experiential boundaries (both physical and psychological) along a spectrum from a “crack in the boundary to the full removal of it” (Register and Henley, 1992, p.474). This ‘disruption’ of partners’ life-worlds was experienced either via the breaking of one life-world into another, or by allowing / permitting one life-world into the other, or a combination of both. This was

experienced in a range of ways, including as a union and the loss of personal isolation; as a transformation and creation of something new; and, contrastingly, as potentially threatening and intrusive.

The phenomenological tension of this autonomy-connection dialectic had been well explored in existential theoretical works, and was summed up by the philosopher John MacQuarrie (1972) who stated that “[...] no polarity of human existence is more deeply pervasive of our being than the polarity between the privacy and community of existence” (p.103). From an existential perspective, existence is understood in terms of individuals engaging in ongoing, situated sense-making ‘life projects’ through which the world acquires meaning. These ‘projects’ are not understood as a ‘set of plans’ presented by some ‘antecedent self’. Rather, they represent already embedded modes of engagement or *being-in-the-world* that, in a sense, also ‘reveal’ individuals to themselves. This is because the ways in which an individual engages in their life reflects their ontological capacity to reflect on their state of mind, understand their present and future possibilities, and make sense of these potentialities through the act of discourse (van Deurzen, 2009). However, because individuals are not alone in the world they are also ‘revealed’ in the projects of others, and therefore their ontological sense of self became a function not only of their own plans, but also a consequence of relating, or ‘being-for-others’ (Sartre, 1957). In his seminal 1923 work *I and Thou*, Martin Buber (2008) outlined how relating to others was a fundamental constituent of existence because the very use of the word “I” implicitly recognised “Thou”, from which “I” distinguished itself. As Macquarrie (1972) stated “[p]rior to either ‘I’ or ‘Thou’, taken separately, is ‘I-Thou’, the social or communal reality which makes selfhood and individual personality possible”. Thus, from this perspective, couple relationships are acknowledged as phenomenological sites of ontological tension in which partners “live in each other’s subjective contexts of meaning” (Schutz, 1970, p.167).

The suggestion that intimate relationships are a site of experiential, dialectical-tension has been well explored by radical phenomenologists (e.g. Laing and Esterson, 1970; Laing, 1971) who challenged idealised conceptions of the family and coupledness. On the one hand, relationships could be experienced as sites of ontological security with partners maintaining a sense of themselves as autonomous secure *beings* capable of

relating to each other (as one human being to another) in a potentially satisfying way - what existentialists referred to as *being-with-others*. Alternatively, relationships could be experienced as sites of ontological *insecurity*, in which individuals could feel *dependent* on their partners for their sense of being and therefore threatened with the loss of their identity. Trapped between two poles, one of complete *engulfment* by their partner versus one of complete *isolation* from their partner, and unable to experience a third satisfying possibility of experiencing relating as an ongoing, fluid dialectic of autonomy-and-connection (Laing, 1971).

The role of relational dialectics in shaping relationship satisfaction was further explored in later mainstream psychological works (e.g. Erbert and Duck, 1997), which illustrated a good (albeit atypical) example of mainstream theoretical work which took a *relational* view of relating (i.e. relating as an ongoing fluid process). Three ‘supra-dialectics’ were regularly presented in research on dyadic interactions including: autonomy-connection (e.g. Baxter & Simon, 1993), stability-change, and openness-closedness (Baxter, 1993; Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Erbert, 2000). Some research argued that managing the dialectical processes of autonomy-connection and openness-closedness was most important for the experience of couple satisfaction (Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Erbert, 2000). This research suggested that the phenomenology of relationship satisfaction would involve both poles of each dialectic, the experience of each pole only *meaningful* in light of the other (e.g., Bakan, 1966; Blatt & Blass, 1996; Gilligan, 1982; Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Again, this implied that satisfying relating was characterised by a far more varied and contingent phenomenology than the mainstream focus on ‘positive interactions and feelings’ allowed for. Instead, the phenomenology of relationship satisfaction involved the ongoing negotiation of dialectical contradictions faced by two individuals when they came together and related, such that they could engage in a mutually *authentic* ‘being-with-others’²⁹, as opposed to an *inauthentic* ‘being-for-others’.

Heidegger’s concept of ‘authenticity’ was central to existentialist thinking. Whilst ‘science’ was governed by norms of ‘truth’; and ‘morality’ was governed by norms of

²⁹ This position was echoed in the relational concept of ‘differentiation’ whereby better-differentiated partners, it was argued, could experience more intimate connection before they felt controlled or as if they were losing themselves in their relationship (Bowen, 1974; Lobitz & Lobitz, 1996).

‘good’ and ‘right’; ‘existentialism’ was understood as being governed by norms of ‘authenticity’. Authenticity referred to a condition of self-making whereby an individual actively committed to their various ‘life projects’ as opposed to simply ‘occupying’ them. For Heidegger, this involved the ontological capacity to understand one’s being-in-the-world through a process of reflection, self-reflection, and openness to the future in order to grasp the possibilities available (and unavailable) and experience one’s life as *meaningful*. Thus, an authentic life did not refer to a complete, ‘discovered’, pre-given ‘whole’, but rather, reflected an individual’s ability to construct a life-narrative of integrity, in which they experienced themselves as the agentic author of their own life story, rather than being dictated to by the world (e.g. Nehamas, 2007; Ricoeur, 1992). In this way, authenticity did not distinguish between ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ life narratives but, rather, represented a condition of self-making in which the individual ‘succeeded’ in ‘making themselves’ rather than being a function of the roles they found themselves in. Whilst the inauthentic individual merely occupied their role, the authentic individual had *committed* to ways of being and acting, and had actively taken up the ethics of that role.

Prager and Roberts (2004) argued that an explication of the nature of intimate relating between two selves should include phenomenological experience and the notion of an “authentic” self. Buber (2008) had elaborated on the ways in which individuals were able to relate by distinguishing between *authentic* ‘I-Thou’ and *inauthentic* ‘I-it’ relating (both in terms of relating to oneself, and also to another). This involved processes experienced at three relational levels (i) self-relating-to-self; (ii) self-relating-to-other; and (iii) self-perceiving-other-relating-to-self.

If individuals related to themselves as an ‘it’ then they experienced themselves as an *object* that contained emotions and needs and, in doing so, absolved themselves of subjective responsibility and agency; the consequence of which, was that they looked to another individual to take care of them. Similarly, if an individual related to their partner as an ‘it’, they engaged in a process of depersonalisation which objectified their partner and disregarded them as an agentic subject possessing their own needs and feelings. In effect, the individual made their partner an object solely for their own projects and, in this way, negated any relational obligation they had to be responsive to their partner’s needs and feelings. The partner would, phenomenologically speaking, be

displaced from the subject-position from which they experienced their world (and relationship) as meaningful. That is, they would experience a feeling of dissatisfying ‘alienation’ from their own life-projects, and their subjectivity draining away because (through being objectified) they would experience themselves in terms of the other individual’s projects.

In contrast to this existentially dissatisfying ‘it’ relating, if individuals related to themselves as an ‘I’ then they took up a committed, authentic position which acknowledged their own agency, needs, and restrictions, and took responsibility and ownership of these in a *deliberate* way. Similarly, if an individual experienced their partner as a ‘thou’ then they saw their partner as a subject with agency and their own unique needs and desires, and this mode of relating allowed for openness and flexibility. Bakan (1966) referred to this as a “communion” between self-and-other, an *authentic* way of relating as subjects committed to the life-project of their *relationship*, and the existentially satisfying experience of being-*with*-each-other. Thus, Buber (2008) highlighted the benefits of a habit of satisfying awareness of self and other characterised by the mutual acknowledgement that the relationship involved two subjects, and two subjective realities coming together and then moving apart in an ongoing, authentic, dialectical process.

Thus, ‘authenticity’ provided and recognised a sense of agency in terms of individuals having the ability to make (potentially) satisfying choices in their lives and relationships. Whilst existence had many pre-existing constraints (what Heidegger referred to as ‘facticity’) individuals were theorised as having the ability to co-constitute their world and experience³⁰. However, this ‘freedom’ was not a humanistic account based on idealised notions of choice³¹. The experience of ‘freely’ and authentically committing to a project was always historically and culturally situated, and shaped by the possibilities available in a given time and place. As Heidegger claimed, we are ‘thrown

³⁰ This is in contrast to Sartre’s radical ‘transcendent’ freedom in which he argued that whilst social and historical ‘possibilities’ existed, they never fully determined choice.

³¹ Heidegger’s philosophy was not the basis for enthusiastic humanism. In fact, as outlined by van Deuzen-Smith (2002) some of “the human potential movement is based on a simplistic interpretation of Heideggerian and Sartrean notions taken to their most absurd degree of self-assertiveness and voluntarism. Heidegger did not intend such a humanistic stance and he continuously pointed out that people were merely channels of being. His account was a concrete counterbalance to idealistic notions of freedom and choice” (p.42)

into the world', not a historical, social, or political void. From this perspective, facticity meant that our choices and commitments were always contextualised within broader social and political struggles; they fitted into pre-existing frameworks of meanings, norms and practices that were largely unquestioned, and which functioned as a form of collective identity. In this way, for Heidegger, discourse was the 'house of being', as it was the means by which individuals made sense of the world and their place in it.

Given this, an 'authentic existence' could not negate the broader socio-historical and political aspects of that existence. Social relations took place within institutions which privileged and denoted power to certain ways-of-being, and therefore not all 'life projects' were equally powerful, agentic, or achievable. This was famously illustrated in the seminal work, *The Second Sex*, in which Simone de Beauvoir (2012) demonstrated that social norms were male-defined, and therefore women occupied a historical and institutional site which 'objectified' them. Thus, for women, all life-projects were constrained by a gendered institutional 'look' which defined them as 'the other', as "not man" but "woman". In contrast, men were not subjected to the same governance, and therefore they experienced themselves as 'human', as 'normal' subjectivity. Thus the experience of being-with-others and the process of engaging in a satisfying authentic-way-of-being did (and does) not take place on equal terms for everyone. In this way, Heideggerian notions of facticity somewhat complimented the Foucauldian concern with discursive power. However, despite an appreciation of the socio-historical context, existentialist accounts of being and subjectivity conceived of them as *articulated* and grasped through discourse, not *produced* through discourse. That is, from an existential perspective, existence *preceded* discourse. Thus, by drawing on ideas from existentialism (such as 'authenticity') researchers (myself included) turned to what social constructionism would call 'grand narratives'. From a reflexive point, this is where I have to turn to my 'and/and' approach to the thesis. It is one aspect where I cannot seamlessly and unproblematically make social constructionism and existential phenomenology compatible, and that is why this chapter needed to be presented in two separate parts.

In conclusion, no research has been conducted exploring the lived-experience of relationship satisfaction. Whilst traditionally associated with feelings of happiness, I have drawn on existential theoretical works on 'moods', and the ontological and

dialectical processes of relating, and phenomenological research on intimacy, to suggest that the lived-experience of relationship satisfaction is more nuanced and complex than has so far been outlined in the psychological academic literature. Furthermore, this experience is inextricably tied up with dominant, institutionalised discourses which are available in a given time and place. Therefore, this thesis contends that it is beneficial to explore both the lived experience *and* the discursive framework through which relationship satisfaction comes to have meaning. The way in which this theoretical call is operationalised is the focus of the next chapter.

3.

Research questions, methodology and methods

This purpose of this Chapter is to fully articulate the epistemological and methodological decisions taken in the research³². It will then outline the methods that were used to operationalise the aims of the research, and the decisions taken at each stage of the process to ensure the research was rigorous, epistemologically valid, and ethical. It is crucial that a researcher explicitly articulates their “frame of reference and their (personal, theoretical, emotional, conceptual) investments in the research” (Willig, 2012a, p.41). These will, in some way, have shaped the interpretation of the data, for example what was considered important to ask in the interview and to pay attention to in the interpretative process, and what ‘felt’ important to present as their interpretation. In line with this theoretical call, this chapter is extremely reflexive and therefore I have chosen to write in the first-person to illustrate *my* experience of conducting the research, and to take ownership of the interpretative decisions that I made (with guidance from my supervisors) during this process. The chapter begins by reiterating the aims of the research³³.

3.1 A Re-cap of the Research Aims

The research had two overarching aims:

- (i) to explore the ways in which relationships satisfaction was constructed by lay people *and* couple therapists, and the ways in which these productions overlapped or varied;
- (ii) to map the phenomenological, subjective experience of lay satisfaction, as part of a twin-focus-analysis that attempted to bridge the material-discursive dichotomy

Both aims involved theory generation in terms of re-theorising relationship satisfaction as a socially constructed phenomenon and as an experiential phenomenon. However,

³² A methodological paper – Colahan, Tunariu and Dell (2012) - outlining the twin focus analysis was peer reviewed and published last year and forms the basis of the sections of this chapter which refer to the twin focus analysis. The paper can be found in Appendix A.

³³ This Chapter is heavily influenced by the theoretical work presented in Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009) and Willig (2012a) and both texts are referenced extensively.

the second aim also involved methodological pluralism (e.g. Frost *et al.*, 2010) in terms of using two different qualitative methodologies to analyse a single dataset in order to shine two distinct, but complimentary, ‘analytical lights’ on the topic, whilst not violating the epistemological assumptions of either approach.

3.2 Operationalising the research aims

The research aims were translated into three empirical studies:

Study 1

Study one used Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) to explore seven Relate couple therapists’ talk about relationship satisfaction and the issues facing clients’ who presented with relationship dissatisfaction. Findings from this study, along with those from Study 2 addressed the first aim of the thesis. Research questions for Study 1 included:

- a) How was relationship satisfaction and dissatisfaction constructed by couple therapists?
- b) How were these constructions deployed by couple therapists to understand their clients’ who presented with relationship dissatisfaction?
- c) What were the implications of these constructions for intimate partners’ actions, practices, subjectivities, and associated power relations?

Study 2

Study Two was a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of twelve lay-people’s talk about relationship satisfaction. It formed the first half of the twin focus analysis and explored lay constructions of relationship satisfaction. The analysis from this study, along with the analyses from Studies One and Two, informed the first and second aims of the thesis respectively. Research questions included:

- a) How was the notion of relationship satisfaction constructed in everyday commonsense understandings about long-term heterosexual relationships?
- b) How were these constructions used by lay people to understand their intimate relationships as satisfying or dissatisfying?
- c) What were the implications of these constructions for intimate partners’ actions, practices, subjectivities, and associated power relations?

- d) Were there areas of overlap between lay and professional understandings of relationship satisfaction?

Study 3

Study Three utilised Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in order to map the ways in which twelve lay-people, that is, men and women from the general population, understood their subjective experiences of relationship satisfaction. This study formed the second half of the twin-focus-analysis on lay experience *and* discourse, and the analysis informed the second aim of the thesis. Research questions included:

- a) How did lay people come to know they were experiencing relationship satisfaction and / or dissatisfaction?
- b) What characterised these experiences, and how were they understood?
- c) Did any contextual features (e.g. gender) qualify these experiences?

3.2.1 Reflecting on why I chose these methodologies

Chamberlain (2012) recently cautioned qualitative researchers from taking an ‘off the peg’ approach when considering methodologies as he argued that this could lead to tautological rationales for adopting different approaches, and prevent researchers from fully engaging in the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological assumptions underpinning their research. In my case, I initially chose FDA and IPA because these methodologies seemed appropriate for addressing the research aims. However, my knowledge of them was extremely superficial when I started planning this research. Prior to conducting this PhD I had only conducted one qualitative study³⁴ and I had no experience of using either FDA or IPA. Therefore, on reflection, my mindset towards qualitative research back then was very much ‘off-the-peg’, and I approached both methodologies as if they were simply suitable ‘tools for the job’. However, in the process of undertaking this research I had to engage (struggle) with the underlying principles and assumptions of both approaches for two reasons. Firstly, on a pragmatic level, I needed to ensure that I understood them and could apply them in a way that was appropriate (i.e. in line with their underlying principles) and which allowed me to adequately address the research aims. Secondly, because I was taking a pluralistic approach to the research on lay people’s talk, I had to reflect on the epistemological *and*

³⁴ A small, 1500 word, abridged grounded theory case study for my Psychology Graduate Diploma at the University of East London.

practical implications of this decision on a deeper level. In terms of epistemology, I had to consider and articulate an epistemological position which would allow me to accommodate both methodologies with different epistemological assumptions in a way that was coherent at the thesis level (see Section 3.3). In terms of practical decisions, I had to consider how I would operationalise my pluralistic approach at each stage of the research process from preparing for data collection, to collecting the data, analysing it, and then presenting my interpretations (see Section 3.5). Thus, in the process of undertaking this research, I shifted from an ‘off-the-peg’ attitude towards methodology to a position of critical engagement, which has subsequently made me a more reflexive and ethical researcher, and one who is more aware of and comfortable with the claims and limitations of their research.

3.3 A pluralistic approach: negotiating the epistemological challenge of the twin-focus-analysis

Delineated by distinct analytic foci, FDA and IPA were able to shed light on the topic of relationship satisfaction in different ways and this was the purpose of the twin analytic focus. It had the benefit of allowing the exploration of the interplay between language, culture and experience. However, this presented me with an epistemological challenge because the two methodologies rested upon different epistemological assumptions. Whilst IPA and FDA both “concern themselves with the role of meanings, collective meaning (patterns of commonality), and individualised meaning (patterns of variability) in constituting subjective realities, they do so in different ways” (Colahan *et al.*, 2012, p.49). They theorise language in different ways, and therefore make different assumptions about what the data represent, what the role of the participant and the researcher are, and the types of knowledge that are produced by the analyses.

“FDA has a stronger and more direct empirical commitment to social constructionism than IPA typically has (Smith *et al.*, 2009). FDA represents the speaker’s narratives and associated realities as constructed through discourse, and seeks to map dominant patterns of collectively shared meanings deeply indebted to a local culture” (Colahan *et al.*, 2012, p.49). Thus, rather than conceiving of the respondent as giving voice to their inner experiential reality, FDA investigates and understands subjective experience through discursive concepts (Harper, 2012). The “role of the researcher is to draw attention to the constructed nature of social reality and to trace the specific ways in

which particular phenomena are constructed through discourse and to reflect upon the consequences of this for those who are affected [i.e. positioned as ‘partner’, ‘lover’, ‘satisfied’, ‘dissatisfied’ etc.] by these social constructions” (Willig, 2012a, p.71). In this way, the discourse analyses of narratives about relationship satisfaction involved a critical mapping of the “bodies-of-knowledge that *constitute* [relationship satisfaction] in a wider cultural environment [that] might be accessed” (Larkin, 2006, p.109). That is, my role as the researcher required me to produce knowledge “about the processes by which particular kinds of ‘knowledge’ and ‘understandings’ [of relationship satisfaction] are produced” (Willig, 2012a, p.112).

In contrast, IPA as a methodology attempts to map the experiential life-worlds of the respondents and explicate their meanings as they signify to the participants. In the process of conducting an IPA, the researcher attempts to gain insight into the respondents’ psychological life-worlds by engaging in a “double hermeneutic” (Smith, 1996). Therefore “IPA knowledge-claims are provisional, relative and always a contextualised function of the researcher’s interpretations of the participants’ own interpretations as they reflect and try to make sense of their experiences within research settings” (Colahan *et al.*, 2012, p.50). The participants’ use of language in the interview setting is therefore understood as part of the experience itself, and the researcher pays close attention to the nuances and emphases of meaning that the respondent produces through their use of language. In this way, “IPA draws more on ideas from the symbolic interactionism of George Meade³⁵ and aims to articulate themes representing the speakers as individuals with hermeneutic agency and, importantly, with individualised, psychological life-worlds” Colahan *et al.*, 2012, p.49-50). As Cosgrove (2000) notes:

“A phenomenological approach to subjectivity also offers an alternative to traditional theories that rely on asocial conceptions of the individual, but it is an alternative that *privileges* a conception of agency. Especially insofar as it is indebted to existentialist philosophy, it emphasizes the importance of the individual’s lived world and interpersonal realm in the construction of identity; it stresses the importance of the structural unity of (or mutual relationship among) experience, body and environment, which is referred to being-in-the-world.” (p.258)

³⁵ For Meade “Individual selves and mental processes arise in a social context, and the content of thought and selfhood is to be understood in the light of the meanings which are available within the culture in which the person is immersed. [However] Having developed the capacity for mind and self as a result of interaction, the individual is then able, relatively autonomously – albeit in a continuing social context – to develop selfhood and personal tendencies of thought. [...] People are constructed *and are also* constructors.” (Ashworth, 2008, p.17-18)

Thus, in an IPA the respondent assumes the role of an autobiographer, and the language they use to describe their experience is seen to provide a means of access to allow the researcher to interpret their experience. However, this does not mean that IPA views language as a purely representational medium. IPA principles are sympathetic to social constructionism in that there is an appreciation that participants' narratives are always-already situated within, and therefore shaped, limited and enabled, by language and practices (Smith *et al.*, 2009). As Willig (2012a) states:

“Although socio-economic structures and socio-cultural practices condition [...] configurations of the self, it is language that captures them and allows us to internalize them, thus structuring our subjectivities in particular ways. It seems that language [...] constitutes ‘the home’ within which we ‘dwell’ (Heidegger, 1993, p217) and which makes us who we are.” (p.64)

However, IPA does not have the same critical, deconstructive aims as FDA, and is therefore subscribes to a less singular empirical translation of social constructionism.

The way in which I chose to navigate these contrasting epistemological commitments within my thesis was by adopting a position which moved away from the more relativistic (radical) forms of social constructionism, and echoed theoretical work (e.g. Cosgrove, 2000) which recast the ‘discursive subject – agentic subject’ dichotomy. I argued that whilst individuals are not free to use language as they wish (to transcend discourse), they are also not completely determined through discourse. Drawing on Cosgrove (2000) who cited Butler (1995), I viewed agency not as a personal attribute, but a space of possibilities made available through discourse – a “horizon of agency” (p.137) within the discursive domain in which individuals have the capacity to inter-subjectively shape and co-produce meaning – to negotiate signification and engage in re-signification.

In this way, “the linguistic and social fabric of any given community acts as a framework for potentially individualised productions of meanings and offers socially valued formulations, which, when taken up are subject to becoming taken-for-granted “habits of thought” (Parker & Shotter, 1990). However, in turn, such psychologically generated habits of thought contribute to, or challenge, the very system where they were created (namely to the system of dominant discourses, associated practices, gendered

injunctions, and so on)” (Colahan *et al.*, p.50). Thus, social and physical arrangements can be involved in providing the conditions-of-possibility for the emergence of discourses without determining them, as Willig (1999) puts it, “[c]onditions of life, as experienced by the individual through discourses, provide reasons for the individual’s actions. It follows that from a non-relativist social constructionist point of view, meanings are afforded by discourses, accommodated by social structures and changed by human actors” (p.44).

Thus, I did not claim that there is an unambiguous one-to-one matching between language and experience. I acknowledged that the experience of relationship satisfaction or dissatisfaction was always grounded within prevailing cultural understandings about intimate relationships, and these were always-already prescribing. However, a series of distinct structural conditions-of-possibility³⁶ were also required for ‘relationship satisfaction’ to possibly unfold in meaning and experience in certain ways³⁷. Therefore, I also took the position that individuals have some agentic capacity (within a limited range of discursive and structural possibilities), and that their experience of relationship satisfaction would not become less *real* to them once its social construction had been established through theory (e.g., Ussher, 1997; Tunariu, 2003; Walkerdine, 1986).

Whilst this epistemological position allowed me to ‘straddle’ the epistemological demands of both FDA and IPA at the thesis level, I also wanted to theoretically demonstrate that the insights produced by the two analyses could be presented in a complementary way which would “serve both sets of analytic foci (IPA and FDA), as well as the thesis’ overall research questions” (Colahan *et al.*, 2012, p.51). In order to meet this challenge I drew on current discussions on the role of hermeneutic theory in qualitative research (e.g. Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008; Willig, 2012a).

³⁶ Including, for example, material (embodied), intersubjective (relating to someone as a partner), cognitive (inchoate anxiety which an individual is attempting to articulate), or social (linguistic access to certain communal views but not others) conditions (e.g., Harré, 1998)

³⁷ This position shares some common epistemological ideas with critical realism (e.g. Willig, 1998; 1999). Critical realism theorises “a structural reality to the world [...] which in some way underpins, generates or ‘affords’ our ways of understanding and talking about it” (Burr, 2003, p.96)

3.4 Hermeneutics – The turn to interpretation in Qualitative Research

Hermeneutics refers to the process of interpretation. Whilst the original focus was on the interpretation of biblical texts, hermeneutic theory broadened to encompass a much wider range of texts. Today, social theorists have argued that hermeneutic theory is at the heart of the qualitative research process (e.g. Rennie, 2007; Willig, 2012a) and that this ‘turn to interpretation’ can offer much to contemporary psychology (Smith, 2007). Ricoeur (1970 cited in Langdridge, 2007) outlined two broad interpretative positions: the hermeneutics of empathy, and the hermeneutics of suspicion.

The hermeneutics of empathy is an interpretative process which takes place from *within* the phenomenon as it manifestly presents itself. Therefore, a hermeneutics of empathy remains grounded in the data, and places extensive restrictions on the extent to which it draws on theoretical concepts from ‘outside’ of the text. Thus, an empathic interpretation is concerned with ‘amplifying’ meaning instead of re-constructing it through alternative theoretical concepts. An empathic interpretation *does* seek to move beyond description, but it seeks to ‘add’ by clarifying and elucidating meaning that is implicit in the material³⁸. In contrast to the hermeneutics of empathy, the hermeneutics of suspicion traditionally referred to an interpretative process which attempted to ‘reveal’ the hidden or ‘true’ meanings within a text. However, in social research, the hermeneutics of suspicion came to refer to the *interrogation* of a text via a theoretical framework from *outside* of the text. Based on a more critical view of language and the role of the speaker/author, the hermeneutics of suspicion assume that what is encountered are “surface level manifestations of underlying processes and structures that generate them” (Willig, 2012a, p.13) and therefore draws on external theoretical perspectives to deconstruct the social-structure of talk (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Thus, a hermeneutics of suspicion presents ‘deeper’ explanatory interpretations, “informed by a set of given concepts whose usefulness and validity are presupposed” (Willig, 2012a, p.12). Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) articulate this as the injection of “critical social

³⁸ This does not mean that the interpretation offers a ‘truer’ or ‘more real’ meaning than what is manifestly present, rather, it attempts to: “[...] *shed light on that which is foregrounded by illuminating the background against which it is set. It is a question of pointing to parts of the picture (perhaps less obvious, somewhat obscured ones) as opposed to introducing entirely new ideas or concepts into it*” (Willig, 2012a, p14). Therefore, the empathic interpreter: “[...] *attempts to illuminate that which presents itself by paying special attention to its features and qualities, by making connections between them and by noticing patterns and relationships. Looking at the material from different angles, zooming in an out, foregrounding different parts of the whole as well as moving between a focus on parts and a focus on the whole [...]*” (Willig, 2012a, p.13).

theory into the hermeneutical circle to facilitate an understanding of the hidden structures and tacit cultural dynamics that insidiously inscribe social meanings and values” (p.288). With the upshot that “[w]hat seems natural and self-evident should be problematised via insight (the hermeneutics of suspicion) and critique” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p.167). In this way, the hermeneutics of suspicion shares common aspects with Foucault’s work which, inspired by Nietzsche’s genealogical method, attempted to “search for the shameful, fragmented origin behind societal phenomena, whose origins have become mythologised, with the passing of time, as noble rationality and unambiguous clarity” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p.130)³⁹.

IPA is *explicitly* hermeneutic and primarily operates within a hermeneutics of empathy. It focuses on the content of participants’ talk and aims to reconstruct the speaker/author’s experience in their own terms. Whilst phenomenology is concerned with the whole spectrum of experience from pre-reflective to reflective, it is important for the IPA researcher to make a distinction between spontaneous “intuitive reflections” and “formal, or phenomenological reflection”. The latter is a necessary condition required of both the participant and the researcher during the process of conducting an IPA. The process of reflection is not a simple binary and Smith *et al.*, (2009) argued that there are different layers of reflection that we engage in. They illustrated the breadth in the following way:

“Layers of reflection

- 1) ‘Pre-reflective reflexivity’. Sartre argues that even in the most immediate flow experience, there is a minimal level of awareness, as we are ‘conscious of being conscious’ (1956/1943: 11). Walking down the country lane, I have this minimal level of awareness which does not interfere with the flow of experience and would not even be registered by me as awareness.
- 2) ‘The reflective “glancing at” a pre-reflective experience’. This involves intuitive, undirected reflection on the pre-reflective, as when we engage in daydreams, imagination and memory. Walking in the lane, I become aware of the warmth of the sun on my left shoulder and am reminded of swimming in the Mediterranean the year before.
- 3) Attentive reflection on the pre-reflective. My leg starts to ache and I begin to wonder what is wrong. Is this a recurrence of the injury I had three months ago, which meant I had to stop running, and led to many painful sessions with the physiotherapist? If so, what does it mean is happening to my body and does it have implications for other aspects of my life? ‘Experience’ becomes ‘an experience’ of importance as it is registered as significant and requiring attention.
- 4) ‘Deliberate controlled reflection’. This is phenomenological reflection. Later on in my office, I decide to reflect on the morning’s events. I deliberately mentally replay the sequence of events and conduct a formal analysis of the content of my pre-reflective reflections on those events. My analysis represents a phenomenological reflection on my spontaneous reflection on what has happened to me.” (Smith *et al.*, 2009, p.189)

³⁹ This paragraph is adapted from Colahan *et al.*, (2012) p.52.

The process of conducting an IPA involves *two* people – the participant *and* the researcher - and it is the *researcher* who attempts to enter into the *participant's* reflective cycle, and facilitate additional experiential reflections. As they have gone through life the participant will, of their own volition, have reflected on their significant experiences in ways that are represented by layers 2 and 3 above. Subsequently, when they are interviewed, they will convey some of this previous reflection to the researcher (typically it is 'layer 3' material which forms the content for an IPA). However, the researcher will also be attempting to trigger and facilitate new reflections on the topic; some of these reflections will, again, be at layers 2-3 and be relatively unselfconscious, but some will represent a more conscious, active reflective engagement i.e. the type of phenomenological reflection outlined in layer 4. So it is the researcher's role during the interview to draw the participant's awareness to their previously unselfconscious reflection, such that it becomes the focus of their new conscious reflection. In this way, the transcript of the participant's talk represents a record of their layered reflections, and the researcher then subsequently engages in their *own* consciously reflective (i.e. layer 4) phenomenological analysis of the participant's talk. This is what is meant when IPA theorists speak of the researcher engaging in a 'double hermeneutic'. In other words, the researcher, in conducting the IPA, is attempting to make *empathic* phenomenological sense (layer 4) of the participant's attempts to make sense (layers 3 and 4) of their own life experiences.

However, "Smith *et al.*, (2009) state that IPA can take a centre-ground position in relation to the hermeneutics of empathy and suspicion (see also Smith, 2004; Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006) as long as the focus remains on elucidating the meaning of experience. This does not involve adopting the critical, deconstructive aim of the hermeneutics of suspicion; but rather, incorporating what Smith *et al.*, (2009) called a hermeneutics of 'questioning'. So whilst the IPA researcher wants to empathise with the participant's experience, and to 'put themselves in their shoes', they also want to examine the experience from other angles and ponder the meaning-making of the participant. The IPA research process starts with a hermeneutics of empathy, but may become more questioning. However, this questioning is always driven by the content of the text itself, rather than an external theoretical framework" (Colahan *et al.*, 2012, p.51). For example, I chose to incorporate ideas from existentialism into my IPA, but the analysis did not *start* with these theories. I introduced them later on (See Section

3.6.3) in an effort to offer a deeper interpretation of *what* my participants' were experiencing (See Chapter 6), not an explanation of *why* they described their experiences in the way that they did. Of course, I cannot unproblematically lay claim to having conducted a theory-free IPA. The theoretical foundations of IPA draw on the works of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2.3), but the process itself began with an acceptance of the participants' accounts as they signified to them. Thus, whilst IPA may involve a hermeneutics of questioning, it is clearly a different interpretative process to Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

In contrast to IPA, I argue that FDA involves a hermeneutics of suspicion – *not* because it claims to reveal a hidden 'truth', but because it interrogates the data with an external theoretical framework in order to demonstrate the workings of discourse. As Willig (2012a) states: "[...] there is interpretation in discourse analysis [...] because discourse analysis is based on a particular interpretation of the meaning of language itself, of its function and its position in human experience and action. In discourse analytic research, therefore, interpretation enters the picture at a very early stage [...]" (p.39). Through the hermeneutics of suspicion, FDA looks beyond participants' subjective meaning-making to consider the social structures through which, and for which, their meaning-making is made possible. FDA can provide a sceptical, critical view of the broader social context, and prevent the researcher from falling into the trap of culturally-shared 'common-sense' meanings (Tunariu & Reavey, 2007).

Ricoeur (1996) argued that a combination of both hermeneutic positions was necessary to produce satisfactory insight into a phenomenon. He argued that a dialectic of empathy-and-suspicion, between understanding-and-explanation encompassed the process of interpretation. This call was mirrored by others recently who also favoured incorporating both hermeneutics of empathy and suspicion (see Langdrige, 2007; Rennie, 2007). Smith *et al.*, (2009) have argued that "it makes sense to present the two readings separately so that the reader can see the different analytic leverage [that] is going on" (p.106). The twin focus analysis presented here represented a way of operationalising both of these theoretical calls. FDA provided an interpretation that was more 'top-down', interrogating the text via theoretically-driven categories of meaning. In contrast, the IPA provided an interpretation that was more 'bottom-up', thoroughly

exploring the text in its own terms first of all, and only later did it incorporate other theoretical ideas in order to facilitate the understanding of the text.

3.5 Procedure⁴⁰

Given the fact that I subscribe to the theoretical position that all qualitative research involves interpretation, it was important to note that interpretation did not simply start with the analyses of the transcripts - it played a role at every stage of the research process (Willig, 2012a). It was important for me to reflect on how this influenced the decisions I made when conducting the research, and I discuss my experiences and decisions throughout the procedural section of the chapter.

One other point to note is that whilst I made the decision to present the studies in this thesis in the order of (i) FDA of Therapists > (ii) FDA of Lay People > (iii) IPA of Lay People, I actually conducted the studies in the opposite order. I discuss these decisions in more detail in sections 3.6.1 and 3.7, but for clarity I wish to flag that the procedural section is written in a way which reflects the order in which I conducted the research.

3.5.1 Obtaining Ethical Consent to Conduct the Interviews⁴¹

Obtaining ethical clearance involved separate processes for the Lay People (Studies Two and Three) and for the Couple Therapists (Study One).

Lay People

Obtaining ethical clearance to interview the lay people for Studies Two and Three required the preparation and submission of ethical documents to the University of East London ethics committee. These included: An information sheet outlining the background and purpose of the research (see Appendix F), and how I planned to

⁴⁰ Please note, due to word count restrictions, the detailed discussions of several procedural stages have been moved to the Appendices. These points will be flagged in the text.

⁴¹ Reflexive Note: At the time when I completed the ethics procedures outlined in Section 3.5.1, I did not fully appreciate or consider the role of ethics in the qualitative research process beyond the data collection stage. However, as my understanding of qualitative research grew and I conducted the analyses, I began to appreciate the importance of reflecting on the ethical implications of the interpretations I was producing, and the power relations between me and the participants. My role as a researcher gave me power to position my respondents and author their accounts in ways that they might not recognise or indeed agree with. I discuss these ethical points in more detail in section 3.5.4 and throughout section 3.6, but wish to flag that this was one way in which I was changed by the research process; I began to engage with the ethical process at all stages and at a level which went beyond simply getting permission to conduct my research.

conduct the interview process in an ethical way (see Section 3.5.4 for further discussion); a consent form for the participants to take part in the interview process (see Appendix G); and a consent form for the participants agreeing for their interview transcripts to be used in the research (see Appendix G). These documents outlined participants' right to withdraw, and that confidentiality would be assured. Following submission minor amendments were suggested by the UEL ethics committee. These comments were actioned and the documents were re-submitted and accepted by the Ethics committee (See Appendix I⁴²).

Couple Therapists

Obtaining ethical clearance to interview the couple therapists for Study One required the completion of a two stage process. The first stage involved meeting the ethical requirements of the UEL ethics committee, and the second stage was meeting the ethical requirements of the Relate institute research ethics committee. For the first stage, the same ethical documents were prepared as outlined above for the Lay People and approved by the UEL ethics committee (see Appendices G & H). For the second stage, these documents were sent to the Relate research ethics committee along with a copy of the interview schedule, and an additional Relate-specific ethics form, which outlined the purpose of the research in detail and also indicated that Relate would *not* have ownership or any claim to the research data or 'findings'. Once these documents had been accepted by the ethics committee (see Appendix J), the Director of the Relate Institute forwarded the details of my research to the managers of the London Relate centres. The managers from these centres forwarded the details of my research to their therapists, and those willing to take part contacted me directly.

3.5.2 The Interview Schedules

Lay People

As with any qualitative work, the epistemological position and theoretical framework adopted influenced the formulation of the interview questions (as well as the interview style – see Section 3.5.4). Seeing that I was simultaneously adopting two different interpretative positions (one of empathy and one of suspicion) for the lay people, the interview schedule needed to be designed in a way such that it would permit the

⁴² The Ethical Clearance in Appendix E applied to all studies

collection of data that were suitable for both IPA and FDA. Therefore, the selection of questions for the lay interviews was based upon my commitment to remain open and curious towards the participants' experiences (in order to collect the rich phenomenological accounts necessary for IPA (e.g. Smith *et al.*, 2009), whilst also eliciting productions of relationship satisfaction as a discursive construct. Moreover, I had to be careful that I did not include leading questions which might reflect my own taken-for-granted intellectual and personal assumptions (see Section 3.5.4). Thus, the set of questions devised to guide, but not to restrict, the interview conversations featured open-ended questions which tried to tap into the analytic foci of both FDA and IPA. For example questions such as '*What do you understand by the term relationship satisfaction?*' were followed by '*How do you know when you're satisfied? What does it feel like?*' (See Appendix K for full details of the interview schedule). The aim was to encourage as much narrative, as much reflection as possible, and to prompt the participants to describe their internal life-world (for IPA), whilst noting points of tension in their accounts (particularly useful for FDA).

Couple Therapists

Similar to the lay people, an interview schedule was developed for the couple therapists, consisting of open-ended questions which were used as a guide to facilitate conversation, rather than to dictate it. However, in the case of the therapists' talk, I was only conducting an FDA and therefore, in some ways, I found designing the interview schedule for therapists less complex. The questions all focussed on relationship satisfaction and dissatisfaction as concepts, and I did not include any questions designed to elicit phenomenological descriptions. The participants were initially asked how they would describe the notion of relationship satisfaction, and what it meant to be in a satisfying relationship. Next they were asked how relationship dissatisfaction got presented within the therapeutic context, and what constituted a therapeutic goal in relation to dissatisfaction. Lastly they were asked whether any tensions arose between their professional and personal views, or between their views and those of their clients (See Appendix L).

3.5.3 The Participants

Lay People

Thirteen⁴³ members of the general population agreed to be interviewed about their understandings and experiences of relationship satisfaction. The participants, eight women and five men, aged between 23 and 41 years (with a mean age of 31 years) responded to an advert inviting people who were in a 'long-term, heterosexual relationship' to talk about their views on relationship satisfaction. The adverts were placed around the University of East London Stratford Campus, and also emailed to friends and colleagues who, in turn, forwarded them to their acquaintances. All of the respondents were based around London. Eleven were white British, one was mixed-race (British and Nigerian), and one was Bosnian. Their professions included office workers, solicitors, teachers, students, project managers, researchers, and housewives. At the time of the interviews they all self-identified as being in long-term, heterosexual relationships, which ranged from one to twelve years. Eight of them shared a home with their partner and five lived with friends in shared accommodation. In addition, whilst they all had experiences of relationship dissatisfaction and relationship dissolution, at the time of the interviews all of them considered themselves to be in relationships that were satisfying.

Couple Therapists

Seven Relate couple therapists agreed to be interviewed about their understandings of relationship satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The participants, all women, aged between 44 and 66 (with a mean age of 55 years) responded to an advert circulated to the London Relate Centres inviting couple therapists to talk about their views on relationship satisfaction. All of the respondents were based around London, and all seven were white British. They had been providing therapy from between 2.5 to 20 years (with a mean average of 11 years). Most of the therapists' practice of couple therapy was informed by a mix of therapeutic models, and they incorporated theoretical ideas from psychodynamics, cognitive-behavioural therapy, and systemic therapy.

⁴³ Although thirteen interviews were conducted, the audio recording of one of them was corrupted and so I could not transcribe it. Therefore, the FDA and IPA were conducted on the remaining twelve interviews.

3.5.4 Conducting the interviews

Whilst interview schedules had been designed for both the lay people and couple therapists, the aim was to capture the richness and complexity of participants' meaning making and so the schedule was used as a guide to facilitate conversation, rather than to dictate it. The questions were not always asked in the same sequence, and additional lines of thought or questions were pursued as they arose.

Lay people

After the participants indicated they were interested in taking part they were sent a detailed information sheet by email outlining the purpose of the research and the interview process (see Appendix F). If they subsequently agreed to take part in the research a convenient time and place was scheduled for an interview. The interviews all took place between December 2008 and May 2009 in the participants' homes, except for one, which took place on the UEL Stratford Campus, and they lasted between 45 minutes and one and a half hours.

Before each interview the participants were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix G) indicating they had read the information sheet and they were voluntarily willing to take part in the interview, and they were reminded of their right to withdraw at any time. Moreover, due to the potentially sensitive nature of the topic, I reassured the interviewees that they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to, and that anonymity would be ensured. Following the interviews the participants were given a second consent form (see Appendix G) giving permission to use their comments in the research. They were also given the option of being sent a copy of the interview transcript to review before the analysis, but none of the participants wanted one (please see Appendix M for a reflexive account of the interviews with the lay people).

Therapists

Similar to the lay-people, once the couple therapists indicated they were willing to take part in an interview a convenient time and place was scheduled to speak. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with the therapists at the Relate centres where they worked, and they lasted between 1 hour and 90 minutes. All the interviews took place between February and May 2010.

Again, before each interview the therapists were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix G) indicating they had read the information sheet and they were voluntarily willing to take part in the interview, and they were reminded of their right to withdraw at any time. I advised the therapists that they did not have to answer any questions that they did not want to (although I was not asking them any questions about their personal relationship experiences). Following the interviews the therapists were asked to give consent to their comments being used in the research (see Appendix G). They were also given the option of being sent a copy of the interview transcript to review before the analysis, but like the lay-people, none of the therapists wanted one (please see Appendix N for a reflexive account of the interviews with the therapists).

3.5.5 After the Interviews

Part of the qualitative research process (particularly phenomenological research) is the notion of the researcher reflecting on and ‘bracketing’ the assumptions and pre-conceptions they bring to the research process. Willig (2012a) states that this “[...] does not mean erasing them; rather, it involves a process of recognising their effects, of interrogating them, of being suspicious of them and, as a result, being able to hold them more lightly and more flexibly” (p.98). However, Smith (2007) draws on Heidegger’s work to highlight the way in which a researcher may not be aware of their pre-conceptions, and that these may only become visible through the analytic process. This was certainly the case for me, possibly because it was the first time I had conducted qualitative analyses, and at the time of conducting the interviews I did not know what preconceptions I was bringing to the research process. In an attempt to reflect on and manage my assumptions, I kept a reflexive diary (see Appendix O) after each of the interviews. Immediately after each one I would write down any thoughts or feelings I had about how the interview had gone. These notes were initially in simple lay terms (rather than consciously trying to couch them in ‘appropriate’ technical terms), which I then went back to and discussed with my Director of Studies. This process helped to highlight some of the assumptions I was bringing to the research process (please see Appendix P for reflexive examples of how this process worked).

3.5.6 Transcribing the interviews

Transcription involves many decisions by the researcher and is an interpretative act in and of itself (e.g. Kvale, 1996; Dille, 2004). The transcription protocol represented theoretical assumptions about which facets of the text were considered important, and thereby shaped the possibilities of the subsequent analyses that were conducted and the interpretations that were produced (e.g. Emerson and Frosh, 2004). Broadly speaking, I produced a ‘de-naturalized’ transcript, which had been relatively ‘cleaned’. This was because I was primarily interested in (1) the meaning of the content (IPA); and (2) the macro discursive structure of the content (FDA). That is, I was not focusing on the micro situated language use of the respondents. I acknowledge that the situated context (including the dynamics and power relations of the interview; respondents’ attempts to represent themselves in certain ways; and my decisions to pursue certain avenues and not others) would have inevitably shaped the process of data collection and my consequent feelings and decisions about the interpretative process. However, these were not my primary focus. Thus, all the interviews (lay people and couple therapists) were digitally audio recorded and transcribed (soon after each interview took place) by me using the transcription protocol outlined in Appendix Q, with all participants given a pseudonym. Whilst quite laborious, the process of transcribing the data was very useful as it embedded me within the participants’ accounts and ensured I was familiar with their narratives for the following stages of the analyses.

3.6 Conducting the Analyses

3.6.1 Lay People – The Twin Focus Analysis – Deciding on an interpretative sequence

One of the key decisions that I had to make when I conducted the twin focus analysis on lay peoples’ interviews was the procedural sequence in which I conducted the IPA and FDA. Whilst this seemed like a pragmatic decision at first, it soon became clear that the decisions I made had a theoretical basis, and had implications for the ways in which I balanced the different interpretative foci whilst I worked through the various phases of the two analyses.

In terms of the sequence of analyses, in my case I felt more comfortable and confident starting with the empathic IPA. As Willig (2012a) has stated “Although ‘empathic’ interpretation is not easy and is a skill that needs to be deployed and practised, it does not require familiarity with existing theories” (p.14). In contrast, the suspicious FDA required a technical understanding of language-use being structured into coherent discourses which, whilst I ‘understood on paper’, I had not actually applied in practice as an interpretative framework. Therefore, I took the position that searching for these system-like linguistic ‘packages’ of metaphors, assumptions, and ideas would be facilitated by engaging in the IPA first. When I approached the IPA I felt I had a ‘looser’ more open gaze towards the complex, initially undifferentiated, thematic patterns as they emerged as units of meaning; whether these were articulated as concept-understandings, phenomenological descriptions or hermeneutic preoccupations that held personal significance for the speaker. I felt that this provided me with a detailed ‘close up’ understanding of the text, from which I could subsequently proceed to interrogate it from the ‘distanced’ analytic point of FDA. Again, as with all of these pragmatic decisions, whilst I chose to conduct the IPA first, other researchers could choose to start with the FDA⁴⁴ to provide a ‘panoramic view’ of the prevalent linguistic constructions of objects and events, which could also raise familiarity and aid the researcher to navigate the text when subsequently viewing it through the lens of IPA⁴⁵.

However, whilst I conducted the complete IPA before the FDA, the first stage of both analyses were conducted simultaneously.

3.6.2 Conducting the first stage of Studies Two and Three simultaneously

The first phase of analysis for both IPA and FDA involved a detailed line-by-line deconstruction / coding of the interview transcripts. Therefore, in the case of the twin focus analysis on lay people’s talk, I decided to conduct this first phase of analysis for both the IPA and FDA in parallel (See Appendix R for full explanation as to why I took this decision).

⁴⁴ See, for example, Willig (2011) who presents a discursive, then phenomenological (not IPA) mapping of the experience of being diagnosed with cancer.

⁴⁵ This is because the twin focus approach took the position that language and experience are deeply intertwined, and therefore the sequence of the analyses could be conducted in either way.

This process was conducted on each interview in turn and began with me reading and re-reading the transcript to ensure I was familiar with the content. Once familiar, the transcript was prepared in a three column table, with the interview in the central column. The left hand column was then used for the subsequent detailed coding of the transcript. The coding process involved me systematically ‘un-packing’ the content of each interview. This meant I made a concerted effort to not take anything for granted in the transcript, but attempted to clearly break down, in detail, what was being expressed and clarify any ambiguous comments. For example, if a respondent said something like “...it’s like this...”, I would make sure that I clearly traced and identified the object to which they were referring (See Appendix S).

This initial encounter with the texts often felt like I was stumbling in the dark, and I frequently felt very unsure or reticent when making notes in the left hand column. I was concerned whether or not I was ‘doing it right’, and wanted to ensure that I was not simply paraphrasing the transcript. I felt like I did not want to ‘miss anything’, so I spent excessive amounts of time trying to peel back the layers of taken-for-granted meaning, struggling through three pages of transcript a day, and when I finished coding all of the interviews I felt extremely relieved.

3.6.3 Completing the IPA of Lay Talk

“To generate different kinds of interpretation requires not just the application of different analytic strategies but also the adoption of a different stance towards the data” (Willig, 2012a, p.147). In the initial stage I tried to adopt a stance that would allow me to conduct a line-by-line deconstruction of the text that could simultaneously form the basis of the IPA and FDA (for the lay). In the second phase of analysis, this coding from the first phase was revisited (along with the text) in light of two things: 1) a *deliberate* focus on the IPA informed research questions and analytic foci and 2) a simultaneous *relaxed awareness* about the research questions and analytic foci of the FDA.

Thus, interpretative coding/structuring of units of meaning and initial themes were noted in the right hand column of the table, primarily for the IPA, but also for the FDA. These were written in two different formats to distinguish between them (See Appendix S). From this position the process of ‘relaxed awareness’ allowed me to attempt to

suspend my attention on one analysis to allow the full unfolding of the other analysis. There was a deliberate focus on one analysis, while the second analysis was considered from a position of relaxed awareness. In this second stage, I did not *solicit* the hermeneutics of suspicion, but remained open to allow the interpretative stories to unfold. This allowed me to conform to the IPA process in an inductively rigorous way whereby the themes could be interpreted, whilst also facilitating the initial stages of the FDA.

Once this second phase was complete, the IPA and FDA analyses became completely separate, and the IPA continued through the stages of analysis as outlined by Smith *et al.*, (2009). Recurrent themes were produced along with illustrative extracts. These were compiled in a new document (See Appendix T) which was then analysed for higher order themes, guided by three things: i) points that appeared relevant and significant to the participant; ii) points that appeared to be highly recurrent; and iii) points that addressed the research questions. Thus, the preliminary themes became sub-themes, and sub-themes with similar overarching content were ‘clustered’ into three Master Themes, and each one was given an appropriate descriptive label to illustrate the conceptual nature of the component sub-themes. These master themes and sub-themes were recorded in tabular form (See Appendix U), along with indicative quotes from the transcript (with page and line numbers) to illustrate each sub-theme, and also to ensure that the integrity of what the participants said was preserved.

Whilst this account might suggest that the process was a simple, linear one, it was actually a circular, iterative process with much back-and-forth between the different stages, which involved the adoption and discarding of many different themes and interpretations. This process involved many discussions with my Director of Studies and much personal deliberation before I reached a ‘final’ interpretation of each participant’s narrative. These stages were repeated for all interview transcripts, and whilst I attempted to approach each interview with an open mind, the influence of preceding analyses were often easily foregrounded in my mind (please see Appendix V for a reflexive account of conducting the IPA).

3.6.4 Completing the FDA of Lay talk

Once I had completed the IPA, I returned to the FDA, which had been left since the second phase of the IPA. Thus the coding and other purposeful notes from the first two phases were revisited through the lens of the FDA research questions and analytic foci, and a relaxed awareness of the IPA findings that had just been completed. I now focussed principally on the FDA and the analysis was guided by Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine's (2008) framework for Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. Therefore, the analysis focused on looking for, and mapping the following:

- i. Problematisations: I looked across the transcripts to see “under what circumstances and by whom [were] aspects of human being[s] [e.g. relationship dissatisfaction] rendered problematic” and the “moral domains or judgement[s]” upon which they were based (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008, p.101).
- ii. ‘Technologies of Power’ which were “located beyond [the] text, and refer[ed] to an assemblage of knowledge, instruments, persons, buildings and spaces which act on human conduct from a distance” (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008, p.102).
- iii. Subject Positions made available through certain constructions of relationship satisfaction. How these positions made available certain rights and speaking duties for the satisfied or dissatisfied-subject.
- iv. ‘Technologies of the Self’ and associated processes of ‘subjectification’, which referred to instances where individuals exercised power over themselves “by acting on themselves within a particular moral order and according to a more or less conscious ethical goal” via “specific practices of self-regulation” (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008, p.103). That is, I looked for the practices-of-the-self which the satisfied subject or the dissatisfied subject were compelled to engage in and with, in order to produce and take-up different ‘versions of self’ (e.g. Wetherell & Edley, 1999).

Interpretative points relating to the four analytic foci above (and informed by the initial detailed coding) were noted in the right hand margin of each of the interviews (e.g. See Appendix S). This process was repeated for all of the interview transcripts, and then the dominant (i.e. most prevalent) examples of the above analytic foci were recorded in a separate document and illustrated with extracts from the interview transcripts (e.g. See Appendix W). In this way, an analysis of the entire body of data was conducted to

arrive at an overall discursive mapping of the topic. Again, this was an iterative process and many ideas and hunches were adopted and discarded along the way (please see Appendix X for a reflexive account of conducting the FDA of lay talk).

3.6.6 FDA with the Couple Therapists

The analytic process for conducting the FDA with the therapists mirrored the approach I took for the lay people except I did not have the parallel phenomenological focus. Therefore, the initial coding phase was conducted purely for the FDA, and during the later stages of the analysis I did not find myself slipping into a parallel empathic-interpretative attitude (e.g. See Appendices Y and Z). I found the FDA with the couple therapists more accessible because I had experience and more confidence in applying Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine's (2008) theoretical framework following the FDA of lay people's talk. Moreover, the couple therapists more readily discussed relationship satisfaction and dissatisfaction as concepts in-and-of-themselves (although their emphasis was more on relationship dissatisfaction and the practices of the dissatisfied subject – see chapter 4), and this meant I found it easier to 'see' problematisations and technologies of power being produced in the therapists talk compared to the talk of the lay people. Again, this was probably due, in part, to the fact that I did not ask couple therapists about their personal experiences of relationship satisfaction, and therefore the data that were jointly produced contained less phenomenological descriptions than the lay people's accounts (please see Appendix AA for an ethical reflection on the FDA of therapists' talk).

Once the analyses from the three studies were completed, I then had to decide how to present my interpretative readings.

3.7 Presenting the Analyses

Whilst I conducted the analyses in the order of Lay IPA > Lay FDA > Therapists FDA, I made the interpretative decision to present the empirical chapters in the opposite order. This was because, having adopted Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine's (2008) framework and engaged / struggled with the theory and the analyses, I felt like I was producing a coherent narrative, but one that made more sense when presented from 'Top-down' to 'Bottom-up'. That is, one which started with the broader discursive structures (e.g. problematisations, technologies, and subject positions, processes of subjectification),

and then moved onto subjective experience. This felt like the presentation of a narrative that started from a point of distance and suspicion and gradually moved closer to examine the phenomenon from a 'closer', more empathic position. Therefore, the interpretative narrative now begins in Chapter 4 with the FDA of Couple Therapists' talk.

4.

Couple therapists' constructions of relationship satisfaction

Partners experiencing relationship dissatisfaction may choose to engage in couple therapy (see Chapter 2, Section 2.7) and they often report benefits from this practice in terms of increased relationship satisfaction (e.g. Shadish & Baldwin, 2003). Critical theorists (e.g. Rose, 1989; Kleinplatz, 2001) have nonetheless also highlighted the need to examine the role that the institution of therapy plays as part of the norm-setting mechanisms that prescribe what is meant by 'relationship satisfaction', thus contributing to the socio-historical cycle of knowledge (e.g. Nicholson, 1993; Tieffer, 2005). In line with this theoretical call, the present chapter offers the first empirical study of this thesis: a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of couple therapists' talk, which maps the ways in which they construct relationship satisfaction.

4.1 Contextualising the Analysis – A brief reflection on the interviews with therapists

Across the body of interviews with the couple therapists, relationship dissatisfaction is discursively produced as the phenomenon which they are "always looking at". This emphasis is illustrated by Gwen⁴⁶:

Extract 1:

Interviewer: [In couple therapy] (.) does satisfaction, as a concept get (.) does it get thought about much? Does it get considered much?

Gwen: No.

Interviewer: *Really?*

Gwen: I don't think so, because we're working with the negative all the time.

Interviewer: Erm, so, if we take the flip of that (.) is dissatisfaction something that's

Gwen: yeah, we're *always* looking at the dissatisfaction, we're always looking at dissatisfaction. Erm, and ["What's satisfaction?"] it's not a question that people ask very much, and [researchers] are obviously looking at (.) predictors of failure, predictors of distress all the time.

(Gwen, 60 year old, white Scottish therapist, with 20 years experience. Pg10, lines 455-468)

⁴⁶ To ensure anonymity, all participant names are pseudonyms.

In particular, the conversations focus on the ways in which relationship dissatisfaction is predominantly understood as a problematic, “negative” relational state (by both the therapists and their clients); a dualistic construction that is underpinned by research that produces dissatisfaction in terms of categories such as “failure” and “distress”. In addition the therapists talk about the ways in which they understand their clients’ patterns of behaviour as leading to, and sustaining dissatisfaction. While all the therapists interviewed in this study are adamant that relationship dissatisfaction is a subjective, client-specific problem, there are incidences where they, themselves, produce a state describable as “relationship dissatisfaction” in negative terms. Rather than, for example, as a potential platform for re-negotiating needs and subjective realities, which could lead to collaboratively derived new knowledges from, and about, each partner in the couple. Their narratives tend to focus on highlighting the relationally satisfying skills and behaviours that they see as a core part of the treatment programmes and which underpin their therapeutic interventions.

Overall, the concept of ‘relationship satisfaction’ is talked about far less explicitly. Rather, it comes to be known through the production of its discursive corollary - relationship dissatisfaction - as problematic (that is, through the absence of satisfaction - See also Chapter 6, Section 6.1.2). It is also constructed through the satisfying practices and technologies-of-self warranted by the institution of couple therapy, which render the ‘problem’ of relationship dissatisfaction manageable and the dissatisfied subject governable.

The Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of the body of data generated with the therapists reflects this conversational path. It will be presented in two parts and outlines and illustrates my discursive interpretation of the conditions of possibility which produce ‘relationship dissatisfaction’ and the ‘dissatisfied subject’ as knowable and governable in certain ways. In line with Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine’s (2008) framework (See Chapter 3, Section 3.6.4), Part 1 (Section 4.2) of my discursive interpretation begins by deconstructing the therapists’ accounts of *relationship dissatisfaction as a problem*, and maps the technologies of power underpinning these accounts (in particular, the ‘expert’ mainstream psychological knowledges), and the subject positions made available through constructions for the ‘relationally dissatisfied’ subject. In Part 2 (Section 4.3), the analysis deconstructs the dominant therapeutic interventions presented by the

therapists as underpinning the practice of couple therapy. More specifically, it maps the ways in which the therapists understand their clients' behaviour as dissatisfying, the subject positions made available to clients through these constructions, and the satisfying technologies-of-self they warrant. I argue that these are part of the processes of subjectification that operate at the level of 'ethical problematisations'; by this I mean at the level of practices-of-the-self, which normalise certain types of satisfying behaviour. In parallel with the assemblage of institutional practices and powers of couple therapy (including the role of the therapist and therapeutic space) these processes of subjectification function to produce a governable, ethical, relationally-satisfied subject;⁴⁷ a 'version-of-self' (Wetherell & Edley, 1999) that dissatisfied clients are compelled to take up and invest in. Table 1 below summarises the discursive constructions which are presented in this chapter.

Table 1: Summary of the Discursive Analysis of Couple Therapists' Talk

Discursive Constructions of Relationship Dissatisfaction		Subject Positions
Relationship Dissatisfaction as Problematic	Relationship Dissatisfaction as an intolerable threshold	
	Relationship Dissatisfaction as a state of poor physical health and psychological wellbeing	
	Relationship Dissatisfaction as bad-example parenting	
Therapeutic modes of subjectification: Positioning and satisfying clients through couple therapy	Relationship Dissatisfaction as Sexual Inactivity	The Dissatisfied sexually non-intimate subject
		The Dissatisfied sexually dysfunctional subject
	Relationship Dissatisfaction as Unfulfilled Needs	The Dissatisfied Unfulfilled Hyper Critic Subject Position
		The Dissatisfied Unfulfilled Silent Partner Subject Position
	Relationship Satisfaction as "Awakened Relating"	The Satisfied Awakened Subject

⁴⁷ My analysis uses the following notation conventions:

- Names I give to constructions, discourses, subject positions etc. are *"italicised and in double quotation marks"*
- Quotes from participants are in "double quotation marks" but not *italicised* unless illustrating participants' own emphases
- Words of phrases that I do not take at face value, or which I am problematizing, are in 'single quotation marks'

Before presenting my analysis, I wish to reflexively acknowledge that I make claims about the ways in which the respondents produce and reify certain constructions, practices, and subject positions. However, in doing so, my analysis *also* functions to further reify these concepts through its status as academic knowledge. Therefore, I wish to explicitly acknowledge that this analysis is, in itself, a discursive construction – produced by me as a way of interpreting the respondents' talk about relationship satisfaction through the application of discursive and Foucauldian analytical concepts. Whilst I present a deconstruction of the talk that produces and sustains relationship satisfaction and dissatisfaction, I accept that my analysis is a form of knowledge production that could also be deconstructed.

Part 1

4.2 Problematizing Relationship Dissatisfaction

Across the couple therapists' talk, relationship dissatisfaction is presented as knowably problematic in three dominant ways; each of which positions and disempowers the relationally dissatisfied subject in different ways. I call these constructions:

1. *“Relationship Dissatisfaction as a subjectively intolerable threshold”*
2. *“Relationship Dissatisfaction as a state of poor physical health and psychological wellbeing”*
3. *“Relationship Dissatisfaction as bad-example parenting”*

Implicit or explicit to all of these productions is the notion of relationship satisfaction as a favoured discursive site. I present these three constructions in sections: 4.2.1; 4.2.2; and 4.2.3 respectively.

4.2.1 Relationship Dissatisfaction as an intolerable threshold

When constructed as *“an intolerable threshold”* relationship dissatisfaction is rendered problematic *for*, and *by* clients because it represents a relational state that has crossed a threshold which is understood as no longer “working” for them. This construction produces a static, dualistic relationship dissatisfaction in which the couple are understood as being ‘stuck’ as a ‘dissatisfied’ or ‘distressed’ couple - no longer able to manage the everyday intersubjective processes of their relationship. This positions the dissatisfied subjects as being on an unavoidable pathway to relationship dissolution and

at risk of incurring the associated 'costs', and losing the investment they have put into their relationship over the years. Therefore, the "*intolerable threshold*" simultaneously functions to signify a "*threshold of potential lost investment*", "*a threshold of anxiety*" and a "*threshold of last resorts*" which, having been passed, incites individuals classified as "dissatisfied" to engage with couple therapy. The operation of these constructions is illustrated by Joan:

Extract 2:

"[...] we see the couples (.) they come when whatever has worked (.) *ceases* to work, or fails to work or hasn't been working for a while, so they decide to do something about it, because it's crunch time and it's the last resort [...] this is the last resort coming to Relate".

(Joan, 62-year-old, white British therapist, with 20 years experience. Pg5, lines 202-209)

Across the therapists' accounts, it is constructed as a pre-given that relationship dissatisfaction is framed and experienced as a problem by clients because they are presented as having chosen to engage with therapy in order to 'rectify' it. In Joan's extract, for example, she speaks of the threshold of relationship dissatisfaction as a "crunch time" which warrants engagement with couple therapy as a "last resort". In this way the 'dissatisfied' subject is produced as an ultimatum subject who, having passed an event horizon⁴⁸ of dissatisfaction, is compelled to engage in couple therapy or face relationship dissolution. This is a rigid, one-way construction which makes available only two courses of action for the 'dissatisfied' couple: either "come to therapy" or "lose everything". Other discursive possibilities are closed down and no other avenues for action are available to the dissatisfied couple when the "*intolerable threshold*" discourse is mobilised. This mirrors Gwen's comments in Extract 1 and presents couple therapy as the institutional space in which the 'problem' of relationship dissatisfaction is presented as manageable, and where dissatisfied subjects are made governable via their urge to "do something about" their relationship dissatisfaction.

For the therapists, the "*relationship dissatisfaction as an intolerable threshold*" construction acts as a diagnostic tool to account for their clients' decision to engage with couple therapy. Whilst these constructions produce an active, agentic dissatisfied subject - insofar as they are positioned as having decided to engage in therapy - the

⁴⁸ The term 'event horizon' comes from Astrophysics and refers to the gravitational boundary of a Black Hole. Once this boundary has been crossed, nothing (including light) can escape the gravitational pull of the Black Hole.

therapeutic technologies of power operate through clients' privileging the institution of couple therapy (Rose, 1989) as the only site in which their dissatisfaction can be made manageable, and through which they can be repositioned as satisfied subjects. Moreover, whilst not explicit, Joan's production of the dissatisfied relationship "ceas[ing] to work" recycles connotations of the couple as an economic unit of production (see also Willig & dew Valor, 1999, as cited in Smtih, 2008), thereby constructing relationship dissatisfaction as a problematic state of non-optimal economic functioning. These economic connotations, implicit in the production of dissatisfied relationships as having passed an "*intolerable threshold*", reflect mainstream psychological accounts based on interdependence theory (Rusbult *et al.*, 2004) and make visible the imminent loss of everything that clients have "invested" in their relationship. This economic "*threshold of lost investment*" construction is also mobilised by Rebecca in order to make sense of the uncertainty and anguish with which her clients present:

Extract 3:

"[...] they're at a crisis point generally where (.) and it's (.) people's lives are crumbling in front of you (.) because, you know, you've invested years sometimes, 30 years, you might have had children, the emotional investment (.) is absolutely huge and they're at breaking point generally (.) the vast majority of people are, are at real crunch point [...] they don't know whether or not they can survive this, You know, "How much more can I take?" You know, "It's killing me", you know this type of feeling [...] you know, if you (.) hit a point, where you're thinking "Well what was the point of all that?" you know, that could happen *any* time".

(Rebecca, 44 year old, white British therapist, with 7 years experience. Pg4, lines 159-170)

In Rebecca's extract she also puts forward the construction of "*relationship dissatisfaction as an intolerable threshold*", and uses the exact same "crunch point" terminology as did Joan. Constructed in this way relationship dissatisfaction is problematic for the clients as it represents them having passed a "*threshold of anxiety*" - a condition of "crumbling" psychological anguish, "killing" them, and leaving them in a state of disempowered uncertainty asking "How much more can I take?" However, simultaneously drawing on broader economic discourses, the relationally dissatisfied client is also positioned as desperate and potentially fatalistic. Faced with losing the "huge" "investment" they have made in the relationship, in terms of "emotional investment" and also "children", they are left in a position of questioning "What was the point of all that?" (Rebecca's production of the dissatisfying "*intolerable threshold*"

also hints at construction of relationship dissatisfaction as having a detrimental impact on children, but this is explored further in Section 4.2.3). This shifting production of the dissatisfied couple as a site of “*psychological anguish*” and one of “*investment awareness*” once again demonstrates the multiplicity and fluidity of everyday sense-making. The couple relationship is constructed as a form of investment, with the associated expectations that both partners should receive something in return for their investment. This discursive explanation mirrors other discursive work (e.g. Hochschild, 2003; Willig & dew Valor, 1999 as cited in Smith, 2008) which has illustrated the dominance of economic discourses in producing and governing inter-subjective behaviour. Relationship satisfaction is implicitly constructed as a process of mutual giving and receiving (a construction explored in further detail in Section 4.3.3) that prevents the “*intolerable threshold*” (and its associated costs) being reached. In this way, the “*intolerable threshold*” is a relational construction which responsabilises one or both partners for their relationship dissatisfaction and prompts them into taking action by attending therapy. Charlotte produces two distinct ways in which this prompting takes place:

Extract 4:

“[...] it can be (.) something disastrous from left field. You know, the, erm, the *nasty* big secret (.) the person's not who they thought they were etc. (.) *or* it can just be, erm, you know, the (.) the tipping point of all the dissatisfaction just gets [too much] (.) with no, with no erm, understanding from the other one that this is how you feel about it, that there is something that they can do, that it's worth doing. So (.) you know, I think there is a sort of spectrum of how dissatisfaction creeps in”.

(Charlotte, 66 year old, white British therapist, with 14 years experience. Pg7, lines 298-309)

Charlotte puts forward two different ways in which the “*intolerable threshold*” can be reached, each with different implications for the power relations within the couple. Firstly, there is the sudden “disastrous” shock from “left field” such as a “nasty secret”. In this case, the individual with the secret is presented as holding more power as they occupy a position of knowledge, and it is the discovery of this “secret” knowledge that shocks their partner across their subjective “*intolerable threshold*” of relationship dissatisfaction. In this example, the couples' relationship dissatisfaction is primarily individualised and located within the partner who had been lied to, yet it is simultaneously collectivised as a discursive product of their partner's actions. In contrast to the sudden shock, Charlotte also mobilises a construction of the “*intolerable threshold*” being breached as a result of the gradual accumulation of “all the

relationship dissatisfaction”, and this construction represents a more ambiguous power relationship between partners. Whilst there is not an obvious subject to blame (e.g. like the partner with the “nasty secret”), an “*oblivious*” dissatisfying partner is produced who has “no understanding” that their partner is dissatisfied, nor “that there is something that they can do” to address it, and therefore they are positioned as (at least partly) responsible for their partner’s dissatisfaction due to their relational ignorance.

Operating through both of these constructions of the “*intolerable threshold*” is the notion of the dissatisfying relationship as a site in which partners do not fully know each other. By contrast, relationship satisfaction is implicitly constructed as a site of open honesty, with no “secrets”; in which the relationally satisfied subjects are compelled to *know* and be *known* by each other. This recycles dominant discourses of romantic idealism which provide heightened expectations about the relationally satisfied couple, as well as discourses of ‘disclosing intimacy’ (Jamieson, 1998; Finn, 2012) as a route to satisfaction. The upshot is that not knowing each other is presented as a relational practice which can lead to the “*intolerable threshold*” being breached by one, and then both partners. Thus, through this relational construction, both partners are responsabilised and called into action because their way of relating is scrutinised vis-a-vis the romantic and intimate imperatives to be ‘*known*’. There is very limited discursive space available in which satisfied partners can occupy a position in which they can be understood as being able to retain aspects of their ‘selves’ as hidden. Instead, they are positioned as being compelled to open up and not withhold anything from each other and this reflects the satisfying prescriptions of mainstream psychological (e.g. Prager & Roberts, 2004) and therapeutic (e.g. Meneses & Greenberg, 2011) research. This form of governance is further sustained and warranted through the confessional technologies (Foucault, 1978) of the institution of couple therapy and its associated prescriptions for satisfying technologies-of-self which pivot around partners not withholding secrets from each other; a further example of the psy-complex (Rose, 1989) in operation (see Sections 4.3. and 4.4 for further discussion).

However, there is an element of tension for the therapists when mobilising the static, dualistic construction of “*relationship dissatisfaction as an intolerable threshold*”. This tension is outlined by Phillipa:

Extract 5:

Phillipa: “[...] the couple aren’t able to function [...] the word that springs to mind (.) is disharmony. (.) But that’s hilarious in itself because I’m asking couples to live with disharmony ordinarily. That life isn’t all about harmony, that it’s light and shade (.) so (.) it’s funny to use the word disharmony [...] So the erm (.) the satisfaction bit (.) I don’t own, I can’t answer that as my question in a funny sort of way, because [...] I can’t do it for them. So I think it’s a difficult question, because it’s not *my* question”. (Phillipa, 49 year old, white Welsh therapist, with 4 years experience. Pg5, lines 234-240)

A tension appears for Phillipa when she sees relationship dissatisfaction as an “*intolerable threshold*” in which the “couple aren’t able to function” because she simultaneously normalises dissatisfaction (“disharmony”) as an inherent part of “ordinary” relating, and presents relationships as sites of “both light and shade”. Hence, relationship dissatisfaction is here elaborated and framed as a relational practice that is simultaneously detrimental *and* normal. This tension illustrates the way in which dualistic constructions breakdown at the interpersonal level in which behaviours and experiences are continuously constructed and re-constructed. Seeing this tension in action once again illustrates the multiplicity and fluidity of everyday sense-making, and the social constructionist proposal that discourses are mobilised in dynamic and contradictory ways (Jackson & Scott, 2010). However, as Phillipa shifts between these contrasting constructions, she attempts to manage the discursive tension by positioning her clients as the arbiters of their subjectively dissatisfying threshold. In this way, she personalises relationship dissatisfaction as *meaningfully* problematic vis-à-vis the clients’ productions of themselves as dissatisfied subjects. As Phillipa states, the “satisfaction bit” is “not my question”. In this way, at this particular site in her narrative, Phillipa attempts to resist prescribing how relationship dissatisfaction is made problematic as a way of managing the tension between competing constructions of what constitutes relationship dissatisfaction. Instead, her discourse empowers her clients by responsabilising them and positioning them as the ‘owners’ of their dissatisfaction (see Section 4.3.3.2 for further discussion of this satisfying mode of subjectification).

Notwithstanding the conversational sites where therapists’ constructions of ‘relationship dissatisfaction as a client-defined problem’ (as exemplified by Phillipa) are observable, I argue that there are two dominant ways in which the therapists themselves primarily draw upon a formulation of relationship dissatisfaction as problematic. Firstly, as “*a state of poor physical health and psychological wellbeing*”, and secondly as a practice

of “*bad-example parenting*”. Once again, discursive tension manifests when therapists use these different constructions because they shift in terms of the ways in which they locate relationship dissatisfaction in the individual partners, or in the couple as a unit, or in broader familial relationships.

4.2.2 Relationship Dissatisfaction as a state of poor physical health and psychological wellbeing

Another dominant way in which relationship dissatisfaction is constructed by the therapists includes terms that draw on the realm of pathology, the body, and physical and psychological health. This construction of “*Relationship Dissatisfaction as a state of poor physical health and psychological wellbeing*” positions the dissatisfied subjects as *biological* subjects liable to suffer poor health, and is underpinned by broader biomedical discourses frequently mobilised in mainstream research (Kiecolt-Glaser, Bane, Glaser, and Malarkey, 2003; Shields *et al.*, 2012). This construction is illustrated by Phillipa:

Extract 6:

“[...] the couple aren't able to function with enough [...] it's, the disharmony is bad enough that [...] it's a difficult phrase 'couples can't function' – they can get through a day, they can do whatever, but (.) at the end of their day they don't (.) have enough (.) enough of what they would call being positive. [...] the levels of anxiety and distress are too high (.) for (.) enough satisfying functioning. (.) It's kind of tipped them (.) beyond (.) coping, you know (.) because part of it is (.) really not healthy for them any longer”.

(Phillipa, pgs5-6, lines 246-255)

In Phillipa's extract the couple's relationship dissatisfaction is rendered problematic vis-à-vis its construction as having a negative impact on the dissatisfied subjects' psychological wellbeing. In this way, the non “functioning” relationship signifies the couple's failure to achieve mutually “positive”, “satisfying functioning”, and therefore the dissatisfied subjects are located in disempowered positions in which they experience “anxiety and distress” at levels which are “too high”; a relational state “bad enough” to “not [be] healthy for them any longer”. This account mirrors mainstream accounts (e.g. Sprenkle, 2012) and pathologises the dissatisfying relationship. It is also produced by Gwen who talks about a neuro-scientific experiment she has seen where individuals are administered small electric shocks:

Extract 7:

"[...] if their hand was being held by their partner they felt less anxiety, but also less pain, physically less pain, and that was measured by what was going on in the brain. So they're finding out that relationships effect everything about us, even our ability to feel stress and pain, and that's amazing, it's extraordinary. [...] And all statistics around (.) you can predict (.) the number of infectious illnesses the other partner will have because of the effect of dissatisfying relationship, erm (.) and expressions of contempt actually affect your partner's immune system".

(Gwen, pg5, lines 234-240)

In Gwen's extract, the dissatisfying relationship is constructed as a pathological state which impacts on partners' "immune system[s]", and the dissatisfied subject is again located in a disempowered position as a pathologised subject who is susceptible to more "infectious illnesses". In contrast, relationship satisfaction is produced as a favoured relational state of health and wellbeing; the relationally satisfied subject is positioned as a neurologically privileged subject who experiences "less anxiety" and "physically less pain" when exposed to stressors (Coan, Schaeffer and Davidson, 2006). This representation of the satisfying relationship as a protective state, and the satisfying partner as protecting, is also articulated by Charlotte who simultaneously draws on broader humanist, and attachment discourses to discursively construct relationship satisfaction as a site of psychological healing and growth:

Extract 8:

"I think relationship satisfaction is (.) you know, it's almost like (.) all the facets of, of your life, of which the relationship, although it's only one, it's a sort of overarching one, because it's a very personal one. Erm, and it's almost like, erm (.) the relationship is, I mean (.) psychotherapists like me you may come across us using terms like a container in which people can (.) you know, sort of, erm (.) lick their personal wounds erm (.) be open and vulnerable, and at their best (.) there can be individual psychological growth through, erm, a good satisfying relationship really".

(Charlotte, pg3, lines 101-108)

Underpinned by attachment discourses (e.g. Banse, 2004; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2005), Charlotte presents relationship satisfaction as an "overarching" empowered state of psychological wellbeing in which the satisfying relationship is understood as a site of security – a "container" – in which it is possible for partners to "lick their wounds". This attachment framework is mobilised in parallel to a humanist construction of an empowered, individualised, satisfied subject who occupies a position in which they can achieve "psychological growth" and be "at their best" via the satisfying, and mutually-actualising practices of being "open" and "vulnerable". Again, this construction warrants a satisfying mode of relating which compels partners to be "open" and "vulnerable" to each other (i.e. an intimate psychologised authority which produces and

compels a true inner self to be *known* in order to be relationally satisfied). An upshot is that this discourse sustains relationship satisfaction as a relational process underpinned by the governance of the confessional (Foucault, 1977). The humanistic concern demonstrated in Charlotte's talk for clients' psychological development and wellbeing is also extended to the children of the couple. This is the focus of the third dominant way in which relationship dissatisfaction is constructed as problematic by the therapists – as a detrimental environment and poor pedagogical example for the children of the couple.

4.2.3 “Relationship Dissatisfaction as bad-example parenting”

When therapists mobilise the discursive construction of “*Relationship Dissatisfaction as bad-example parenting*”, relationship dissatisfaction is presented as something specifically problematic for couples who have children. Echoing mainstream accounts (e.g. Cummings & Schatz, 2012), the clients' dissatisfaction is constructed as a relational state which has a two-fold detrimental impact on their children. Firstly, relationship dissatisfaction is understood as an environment that does not promote the children's psychological wellbeing (in a similar way to that of the couple - see Extract 6 above) and secondly, because it sets a bad pedagogical example to the children by not teaching them the satisfying practices and techniques-of-the-self, and therefore a cyclically perpetuating, “*generational relationship dissatisfaction*” is produced. In this way, relationship dissatisfaction shifts from a dissatisfaction of the couple to a “*dissatisfaction of the family unit*”, and this shift functions as a further imperative (form of governance) for couples to achieve and maintain relationship satisfaction. For the therapists, this construction is always produced if clients have children; however, it is a construction that clients reportedly sometimes mobilise and sometimes do not. In the latter case, the institutional practice compels therapists to help couples recognise this discursive problem and responsabilise them as parents. This is outlined by Rebecca and Rachael:

Extract 9:

“[...] when they come into counselling it's about (.) maybe (.) *exploring* those choices of behaviour and what other ones would be more beneficial to them. (.) Because generally they say “Well it's not good that we're not doing this, not good on the children, not good on us.”

(Rebecca, pg6, lines 251-255)

Extract 10:

"[...] you don't want them to do is go away thinking "Oh, my goodness we're damaging our children by this", but what you want them to do is have some perception that (.) you know, your children will learn about how to be in a relationship by what they witness their parents do [...] being aware that the relationship between the parents will affect your individual children is an important thing. [...] Actually research shows that if you invest your energies into your own relationship your children will benefit more. So actually working on the couple relationship is (.) as important, if not more important than working on your relationship with your children because if you and your partner have got a good relationship then the children will ultimately benefit anyway". (Rachel, 51 year old, white British therapist, with two and a half years experience. Pg5, lines 229-243)

Rebecca's extract illustrates how dissatisfied clients reportedly sometimes produce the construction of "*relationship dissatisfaction as bad-example parenting*" (as well as the "*relationship dissatisfaction as a state of poor physical health and psychological wellbeing*" construction) as they are positioned as coming to therapy already aware that their mode of relating is "not good on the children, not good on us". They are constructed as recognising their relational practices as 'knowably problematic' through this persuasive discourse, and this compels them to engage in the self-governing practices of "exploring" their "choices of behaviour" in an attempt to replace them with "other ones" that would be "more beneficial to them" and their children. This practice of reflecting on problematic behavioural practices and replacing them with "more beneficial" ones operates through the technologies of power inherent to the institution of couple therapy and these are explored in more detail in section 4.3. When the therapists (and clients) utilise the "*relationship dissatisfaction as a problem of bad parenting*" construction there is a discursive shift whereby the dissatisfied *couple* is collectivised as the dissatisfied *family*, and the relationally dissatisfied individuals occupy a dual subjectivity as both partners and parents. However, implicit to the discourse is that occupying the position of *satisfied parents* is privileged and empowered, and this is constructed as being made available vis-à-vis clients' ability to, firstly, occupy the position of satisfied partners and *do* satisfying relating. This is reflected in Rachael's comments that "*if you invest your energies into your own relationship your children will benefit more. So actually working on the couple relationship is (.) as important, if not more important than working on your relationship with your children*". Thus, the satisfying couple relationship is promoted and warranted as *the* principal discursive site to "benefit" children, and the position of 'satisfied partner' is subjugated to that of 'satisfied parent'. Again, implicit to these constructions

is the notion of the 'functioning family', and the social-imperative to produce and maintain the 'family-as-the-unit-of-society' (e.g. Finn, 2012; Weeks, 2007).

There is a point of tension for some of the therapists when they engage this construction of relationship dissatisfaction as a problem of bad-example parenting, and this further illustrates the dynamic, multifaceted nature of the therapists' attempts to make sense of relationship dissatisfaction through language. As illustrated by Rachel, whilst she states that it is "an important thing" for couples to be "aware" that their "children will learn [...] how to be in a relationship by what they witness their parents do", she does not want to pathologise her clients and position them as being at fault or at blame and "go away thinking *"Oh, my goodness we're damaging our children by this"*. This production simultaneously 'responsibilises' the dissatisfied couple as *"bad example parents"* whilst absolving them of blame by positioning them as not "being at fault" for their "damaging" parental practice. This operates through broader attachment discourses (going back to Bowlby, 1969) by positioning the dissatisfied, bad-example partners as having never been taught by *their* parents how to relate in a satisfying way. This is illustrated by Gwen:

Extract 11:

"Erm (.) and some people aren't taught, or *shown* rather (.) by their parents how to negotiate, how to compromise. If you grow up with parents who are, you know, disagreeing all the time, you, you're not going to see how it's done. Erm, and first of all I think them having an understanding that it's a process that, that you sort of learn, and they might have missed out on that at some stage (.) can be helpful in itself, it makes the whole thing less toxic if you know what I mean? Erm, it's not just bloody-mindedness, it's, it's actually just something they weren't taught (.) and it makes them more (.) I think it makes them more willing to (.) to *learn* because they can *see* that (.) they're doing the same thing to their kids. Equally they're, they're not showing their kids how to (.) how to negotiate, how to compromise. So often that's a motivation for them to (.) to learn".

(Gwen, pg8, lines 378-389)

Gwen's narrative brings forth ideas from pedagogical ethics of dissatisfaction and so positions her clients as not warranting blame because they have never been "taught, or *shown* [...] by their parents" the satisfying practices and technologies-of-self, such as "how to negotiate, [and] how to compromise". This illustrates the inherent tension when therapists use the *"Relationship Dissatisfaction as bad-example parenting"* discourse. This tension is managed by Gwen through her presentation of it as "helpful" because it prompts clients to change, yet also de-pathologises their "toxic" position of

“*bad-example parents*” by repositioning them as not being responsible for their dissatisfaction through agentic “bloody-mindedness”. Rather, their inability to *do* satisfying relating is understood as being “just something they weren’t taught” – a further example of the cyclical “*generational relationship dissatisfaction*”. This produces relationship satisfaction as a pedagogical process of learning and repeating the requisite relationally satisfying practices, and this echoes mainstream research on the ‘importance’ of intersubjective skills (e.g. Lawrence *et al.*, 2008; see Ch2, Section 2.6).

The power of this construction to govern clients operates through its capacity to position them as subjects with insufficient knowledge and skills. This makes them “more willing to *learn*” the satisfying technologies-of-self under the guidance of the therapists so that they do not repeat the mistakes of their parents and “[do] the same thing to their kids”. This is an example of Foucault’s “Pastoral Power” (Golder, 2007), which drew on the notion of the shepherd caring for their flock. Here, the therapist occupies the position of the shepherd who cares for and guides their clients in the satisfying practices of the couple therapy. In doing so they make available a discursive space in which the ethically satisfied neo-liberal subject is produced via the appropriation and internalisation of the relationally *enskillling* technologies of couple therapy. These technologies operate through a productive governance of reflective “exploration”, “negotiate[ion]” and “compromise”, and represent a dominant discursive point-of-convergence in the ways in which the therapists understand and position their dissatisfied clients, and prescribe certain satisfying practices of the self in order to manage the tension inherent in their constructions of relationship dissatisfaction as a *relational* phenomenon - simultaneously understood as a ‘problem’ yet also a ‘normal’ part of everyday relating. These ‘satisfying’ modes of subjectification and the subject positions they make available for the clients are explored in further detail in Part 2.

Part 2

4.3 Therapeutic modes of subjectification: Positioning and satisfying clients through the institution and practices of couple therapy

The aim of Part 2 of the analysis is to deconstruct the therapeutic interventions that are prescribed by therapists in order to satisfy their clients. In addition to the productive Pastoral Power which operates through the therapist-client relationship, the formal spaces and processes of couple therapy function as technologies of power (Foucault, 1975) which oblige clients to enact satisfying therapeutic practices. These technologies are illustrated by Gwen and Charlotte:

Extract 12:

"[...] people don't understand it or how it works or (.) they often think that (.) I'm going to be the one with a magic wand, but actually they have to (.) open up and, erm, be *honest*, be reflective, let go of their defences a bit, and (.) put in the *work*. (.) And it's an expensive, erm, sort of option, [...] anybody coming up has to pay [...] so people, you know, they want to get value from it (.) they can be challenging to me, and I'm challenging back to them, and if they're completely inert (.) about things (.) I will sort of, you know, put it to them, "Do you really want to come here, every week, and pay your money and *not do* some of the things that we *three* suggest you have a go at in the interim?"

(Charlotte, pg4, lines 176-190)

Extract 13:

"I suppose what we're providing is a safe structure for them to (.) *air* (.) these feelings, which seems so risky, for whatever reason. Erm (.) but because there's a structure of, it's time limited - you've got an hour (.) you know at the end of it you can put it all down and go out and (.) resume your life. There's another person there who's going to stop things going off at the deep end, which is the counsellor's role really, you're providing safe boundaries (.) for them to explore those feelings that it doesn't feel safe to explore at home".

(Gwen, pg14, lines 652-661)

As outlined by Charlotte, when couple therapy is understood as a process of monetary exchange and temporal investment the therapist embarks in therapeutic interventions that discursively serve to compel clients to engage in the satisfying practices of "honest reflect[ion]", and put in the necessary "work" in order for them to get financial "value" out of their investment⁴⁹. This is demonstrated when she challenges her clients and asks them whether they "really want to come [...] every week, and pay [their] money" and not engage in the satisfying practices mutually agreed upon by all "three" individuals in

⁴⁹ This is an interesting example in which the construction of satisfaction in the *therapeutic* relationship parallels constructions of satisfaction in the *couple* relationship: both being understood as satisfactions of mutual investment.

the therapeutic context. Similarly, Gwen constructs the therapeutic space as a “safe structure” with “time limit[s]” and “another person who’s going to stop things going off at the deep end”, and these spatial and temporal institutional technologies provide the “safe boundaries” in which clients can begin to employ the satisfying practices of “air[ing] [...] feelings” that “it doesn’t feel safe to explore at home”. Thus, the institution of therapy provides the discursive space and techniques through which the ‘dissatisfied’ subjects can gradually be repositioned as satisfyingly enskilled, reflective and responsible. One upshot is that the dissatisfied subjects are framed as being compelled to engage in a constant satisfying self-surveillance – an inner turn to the self (e.g. Furedi, 2004) - to fully appropriate the subject positions that are made available to them, and internalise the practices of the therapeutic institution in order to ‘rectify’ the dissatisfying ways of relating that they present with in therapy.

Across the couple therapists’ talk, clients’ relational practices are constructed as behaviourally problematic in two dominant ways: Firstly, the ‘dissatisfied’ subject is presented as a sexually inactive subject, and secondly, they are constructed as a subject who cannot negotiate mutual need fulfilment with their partner. I present these constructions as:

1. *“Relationship Dissatisfaction as Sexual Inactivity”*
2. *“Relationship Dissatisfaction as Unfulfilled Needs”*

Both constructions produce ‘dissatisfied’ subjects who are relationally un-skilled in some respect, and therefore understood as being in need of therapeutic intervention. I argue that operating through all of the therapeutic interventions discussed in the following sections is a governance of the confessional (Foucault, 1975), and the relationally dissatisfied client is always, in some way, presented as a non-communicating subject who is compelled to communicate (Plummer, 2003). As there are different ways in which the alternative constructions are deployed to explain clients’ dissatisfaction and ‘treat’ it, there are subtle shifts in the way in which this governance of the confessional operates. As a result, I argue that different subject positions are made available to both therapists and clients with subtly shifting speaking rights and obligations:

1. *“Relationship Dissatisfaction as Sexual Inactivity”*
 - a. *The “Dissatisfied sexually non-intimate subject”*
 - b. *The “Dissatisfied sexually dysfunctional subject”*

2. *“Relationship Dissatisfaction as Unfulfilled Needs”*
 - a. *The Dissatisfied Unfulfilled “Hyper Critic Subject”*
 - b. *The “Dissatisfied Unfulfilled “Silent Partner Subject”*
 - c. *The Satisfyingly Fulfilled “Awakened Relating Subject”*

In the following sections I focus on these positions and practices to illustrate the claim that couple therapy is part of the mechanism of norm-setting which props up and reifies different versions of relationship satisfaction.

4.3.1 “Relationship Dissatisfaction as Sexual Inactivity”

A dominant construction put forward by the therapists is that clients' lack of sexual intimacy discursively functions as the signifier (to both the clients and the therapists) that the client occupies the position of the relationally dissatisfied subject. As Rebecca outlines:

Extract 14:

Interviewer: “So dissatisfaction (.) I mean how does it get expressed then, dissatisfaction?”

Rebecca: Well it, it could be dissatisfaction in that they're continually arguing (.) it could be (.) there's no intimacy in the relationship (.) that tends to be quite a big thing that the intimacy disappears, erm,

Interviewer: In what sense the intimacy?

Rebecca: Well their sexual relationship, you know, will (.) will just disappear (.) will be very infrequent”.

(Rebecca, pg5, lines 230-244)

This construction is underpinned by a view that satisfying relationships should be sites of sexual intimacy and therefore, as Rebecca states, if the practice “disappears” or is “very infrequent” it is “quite a big thing” and is frequently produced by clients as their presenting problem. This construction mirrors mainstream work which presents sexual and relationship satisfaction as cyclically reinforcing (e.g. Sprecher & Cate, 2004) and illustrates Weeks' (1995; 2007) claim that sexual activity has become a key signifier for the success of contemporary Western coupledom. An upshot is that there is little room

for the practice of 'celibacy' in dominant narratives of relationship satisfaction. Two contrasting discursive explanations of clients' sexual dissatisfaction manifest across the interviews with couple therapists. Each account differs in the extent to which clients' 'sexual lives' and 'relational lives' are understood as intertwined or distinct.

At times it appears to be necessary for some of the therapists to present sex as embedded in clients' broader relational contexts and, as a consequence, challenge their clients' reported dissatisfying tendency of seeing the two as distinct. At other times, some of the therapists present sexual dissatisfaction in terms of functioning bodies distinct from the broader relational context. These positions operate in light of two different discursive authorities: a discourse of disclosing intimacy, and a discourse of biomedical dysfunction. These shift the way in which relationship dissatisfaction is produced vis-à-vis clients' presenting sexual dissatisfaction. The first discursive authority presents clients' sexual activity as totally embedded within their broader relational context. When understood in this way, the clients' lack of sex functions as a signifier for their relationship dissatisfaction and is symptomized as an upshot of their inability to maintain a sense of intimate connection and communication with each other (e.g. McCarthy, 2002). In contrast, the second therapeutic construction separates the 'sexual' from the 'relational' and is sustained by broader bio-medical discourses that pathologise clients' lack of sexual intimacy in terms of individualised sexual dysfunction (e.g. Birnbaum *et al.*, 2006) distinct from their broader relational context.

4.3.1.1 The “Dissatisfied sexually non-intimate subject”

When couple therapists produce the “*Dissatisfied sexually non-intimate subject*” they understand clients' presenting problem of sexual dissatisfaction as discursively representing a symptom of the clients' underlying lack of interpersonal intimate communication (e.g. Byers & Demmons, 1999; Cupach & Comstock, 1990). This is illustrated by Joan:

Extract 15:

“[...] whether there is sex or isn't (.) that's often a sort of (.) er measures the temperature of the relationship. So, if there are, say, communication difficulties and a couple aren't speaking (.) so also not communicating sexually. So once they start speaking and they understand each other, and they, then they feel more warmly towards each other then sex just falls into place”.

(Joan, pgs15-16, lines 744-749)

Joan's extract illustrates the claim that clients' lack of sexual activity discursively functions as the signifier to both clients and therapists that there is something 'wrong' with the relationship because sex "measures the temperature of the relationship". Presented in this way, Joan constructs the root 'cause' of the problem of clients' sexual dissatisfaction as '*actually*' stemming from a lack of intimate communication and inter-partner connection. The upshot is that the governance of the intimate confessional subordinates sexual practice to communicative practice, and dissatisfying sex is presented as a consequence of partners' inability to talk to each other. This reflects mainstream psychological accounts which produce sexual satisfaction as an upshot of relationship satisfaction (e.g. Sprecher & Cate, 2004). In this way, developing and maintaining intimacy is promoted as the principle satisfying discursive function of clients' relationships, and sex represents a 'superficial' manifestation of this 'deeper', more relationally satisfying intimate communication; such that once partners start "speaking and they understand each other" sex just "fall[s] into place". Thus, whilst a lack of sexual activity is frequently understood as one of the dominant problems that prompts clients' to engage in therapy, and which they present with, it is not recognised as the underlying problem by therapists when they put forward this construction of the "*Dissatisfied sexually non-intimate subject*". Within this discursive framework, as Gwen outlines, it is the therapist's role to intervene by 'helping' clients to appreciate this link between their sexual practices and their broader relational context:

Extract16:

"[...] it's getting *both* of them (.) to relate, to try and put sex in the context of (.) what they're really looking for, which is a sense of closeness (.) a sense of connection [...] you know, trying to get them to see it all as part of a pattern, and that your sex life is a reflection of your general relationship and not something separate that will (.) effect [...] the *rest* of your relationship.

Interviewer: [...] do couples (.) presenting with relationship dissatisfaction tend to (.) separate them, or see sex as (.) something separate from the relationship?

Gwen: Yes, yes (.) they do, I don't know if couples do generally, I mean, of course because I'm seeing couples who are presenting with dissatisfaction [...] it would be interesting how happy couples see sex. But certainly couples who are (.) trying to describe what's wrong with their relationship, will often put it in terms of (.) "We haven't got a sex life" (.) as if it were something separate".

(Gwen, pg3, lines 110-130)

Here, Gwen reproduces the claim that sexual satisfaction is relationally embedded, and also produces clients' practice of viewing their 'sexual dissatisfaction' as distinct from their broader relational context as ethically problematic. In this way, she collectivises

her clients' by positioning them and their sexual satisfaction as inherently *relational* - "really looking for [...] a sense of closeness [and] connection" - and their sexual activity functions as one practice for achieving a relationally satisfying connection. Gwen presents her clients' sexual dissatisfaction as an upshot of their inability to appreciate the underlying intimacy-seeking nature of their sexual practice. She constructs this as a frequently *gendered* problem to be challenged and addressed via the technologies and practices of couple therapy:

Extract 17:

Interviewer: "[...] do you find there are differences across gender? Fairly systematic ones?"

Gwen: Mm, the sex one is a *big* division, and I think, you know, the original way that they conceptualise sex, men and women (.) as I say, through the course of counselling they will often come to talk about it in the same terms eventually, but *initially* (.) erm, I think for men it's, it's a mechanism for expressing affection. [...] Whereas for women [...] it's a response to how they feel *generally* about the relationship. Erm (.) and so I suppose (.) it's trying to get men to see that, you know (.) you [chuckles] use slogans like "foreplay begins at breakfast". [...] Seeing it all on a kind of spectrum, which starts with [...] ritual acts of kindness like making cups of tea and saying "Did you have a good day at work dear?" erm, to sort of, everyday physical contacts like hugs and kisses, and going up through (.) sexual intercourse. If you're kind and loving to your wife throughout the day she will want to have sex with you at the end of the day".

(Gwen: Pgs 2-3, Lines 134-155)

Gwen reproduces dominant, heteronormative sexual scripts (Capdevila, 2007) and constructs women's sexuality as innately more relational - an indication of how close and connected they felt to their partner. In contrast, men's sexuality is understood as innately more instrumental - as a means of expressing affection distinct from the relational context - and an example of Hollway's (1989) 'Male Sex Drive' discourse in operation. Given the privileging of intimacy in the construction of the "*Dissatisfied sexually non-intimate subject*", male clients are understood as occupying a problematic space where training and enskilling is warranted in order for them to appreciate the link between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction vis-à-vis intimacy. Thus, therapists' use of this construction enables them to challenge male clients' *dissatisfying* productions of the 'male sex drive' discourse whereby sex is understood as distinct from the relational context. However, this challenge, which at first appears empowering, operates through pedagogical, behavioural techniques; a banality of satisfying sexual maintenance, in which in order for men to coax women into sex, the couple's everyday processes of relating become sexualised in a process of self-governing "ritual acts of kindness". In this way, these prescriptions continue to reinforce the hegemonic,

heteronormative view of women-as-sexual-object (Hollway, 1989) whose sexual desire operates only in *response* to men's (Ussher, 2005).

In contrast to these accounts of satisfying sexual intimacy, the other dominant way in which sexual dissatisfaction is understood by therapists constructs the 'sexual' and 'relational' realms as distinct from each other.

4.3.1.2 The “Dissatisfied sexually dysfunctional subject”

When this discursive construction is mobilised by couple therapists they dualistically present their clients' sexual dissatisfaction as distinct from their relational dissatisfactions. Instead, sexual dissatisfaction is understood in terms of physical “dysfunctions” free from the clients' relational context. Propped-up and sustained by broader bio-medical discourses, this sexual and relationship dissatisfaction of body parts warrants a different therapeutic approach – one of behavioural reinforcement and/or enskilling. Joan illustrates this view in the following extract:

Extract 18:

Joan: “[...] there's a whole range of (.) sexual *dysfunction*, which is, is not necessarily to do with the (.) relational aspects you know, so it needs to be (.) treated differently.

Interviewer: Can you give me some examples of those?

Joan: Erectile dysfunction, for example [...] there's this thing called vaginismus [...] but that is treated very, very differently (.) erm (.) it's not counselling in the way that I've kind of described it. It's very behavioural [...] there's a sort of educative kind of aspect [...] exercises are prescribed, so it's a very different way of working. Very structured, very behavioural.

Interviewer: Why is that kind of treatment much more structural, behavioural?

Joan: (.) (.) (.) (.) (.) Erm (.) (.) that's a very good question [...] sexual dysfunction erm [...] it's not to do with erm (.) (.) (.) values, or, you know, those contextual things you were talking about [...] it's about your body and how it works and [...] it *can* be about breaking down barriers, but it can also be about education because some people don't know about, you know, or they haven't tried this or that, and so it, you know, that's part of the educative process”.

(Joan: Pg 16, Lines 750-793)

This biological, mechanistic construction is governed by the heteronormative, coital imperative such that treating dysfunctional body parts requires the “prescription” of gender-specific “exercises”: a pedagogical governance to produce sexually enskilled subjects who learn about things they “don't know about [...] or haven't tried”. This “educative process” further reinforces the construction of clients' as mechanistic “*sexually dysfunctional subjects*”, and addresses the ‘problem’ through the practice of

“very structured, very behavioural” reinforcement and training. Superficially, Joan presented this “treatment” as empowering clients through the “educative process” and its subsequent capacity for “breaking down barriers”. However, a potential problem arises from this understanding because sex is constructed in terms of symptoms and heteronormative coital performance (Capdevila, 2007; Segal, 2000). Here, we have a clear illustration of the way in which institutional therapy has the power to operate as a pathologising technology which privileges a certain type of sexuality, with little appreciation of the broader contextual factors that might be impacting on clients’ capacities to engage in, and experience sex (e.g. Kleinplatz, 2001).

In summary, the positioning of the ‘dissatisfied’ subject as the sexually inactive subject highlights the way in which sex discursively functions as a key signifying practice for the satisfying relationship and the satisfied subject. In the following section I propose that the second key behavioural signifier of relationship dissatisfaction is escalating and unresolved conflict, and I present this as an upshot of partners’ unfulfilled needs.

4.3.2 “Relationship Dissatisfaction as Unfulfilled Needs”

The principle way in which the therapists present relationship dissatisfaction is as a relational state where clients are *unable* to maintain mutual need fulfilment. This account acknowledges the transactional and ongoing nature of meanings and (re)negotiations that takes place between partners. The needs of each partner and how they are satisfied is constructed as depending on, and shaped by, the needs and actions of the other, and this mirrors and recycles the dominant mainstream psychological accounts of ‘relationship satisfaction as needs fulfilment’ (e.g. VanderDrift & Agnew, 2012). For the therapists, their clients’ relationship dissatisfaction is understood as a function of their inability to successfully manage this dialectic of mutual need fulfilment via the practice of successful intimate communication. This is illustrated by Joan:

Extract 19:

“[Dissatisfaction is] when their needs are *not* met [...] I mean it depends how the couple manage (.) different *needs*, and the question is are these needs (.) well first of all, are they expressed, and are they met? One of the needs we’ll hear over and over again is erm, you know, the need to be heard and understood (.) alright, so (.) that requires (.) communication to be effective [...] when I ask “What do you want to be different?” or “What is the issue?” communication, being able to communicate better, being able to listen more, to be able to make myself understood more (.) all those kind of things is, is, erm (.) something that I would regard as my role to *facilitate*”

(Joan, pg1, lines 39-55)

In line with mainstream research (e.g. Emmers-sommer, 2004), within this construction of “*relationship dissatisfaction as unfulfilled needs*”, “effective communication” is, once again, presented as *the* defining satisfying practice for the dissatisfied subject to master. Thus, the dissatisfaction of unfulfilled needs is constructed as functioning, not through partners’ refusal to provide need fulfilment, but rather through a production of them as unable to manage the dialectic of self-&-other’s needs through a process of talk. In Joan’s account, couple therapy provides the satisfying conditions of possibility through which the problem of poor communication can be addressed in order to “facilitate” partners’ mutual need fulfilment. She understands partners as needing to be “heard and understood”, and therefore they are presented as recognising that the responsibility for their needs fulfilment depends on the actions of their partner. However, when Joan speaks of clients’ needing to “listen more” she also produces a need fulfilling ethic based on clients’ appreciating their role in fulfilling their *partner’s* needs. This technical emphasis on listening and appreciating the ‘other’ produces a “*satisfaction of egalitarian need fulfilment*”. It reflects the optimistic message of the ‘modern, transformative intimacy’ outlined by Giddens (1991) in which relationships are entered into for their own sake, maintained through mutual self-disclosure and contingent on partners’ experiencing mutual satisfaction. This view was also recycled by Flo:

Extract 20:

“I think respect is the key (.) erm, I think *communication* (.) is a very vital key (.) and I think it’s being able to ask (.) to have your needs met (.) *or be able* to have your needs met, and also of you your husband’s needs, so instead of one, you know, it’s all about me, this is what I need, it’s about, you know, my husband or my wife are (.) you know, equal partnerships and ‘How can we both be happy?’ So it’s very much compromise, but I think (.) you (.) it’s hard to compromise without the respect (.) and without the really effective communication”.

(Flo: 56 year old, white British therapist, with 12 years experience. Pg4, lines 157-163)

Constructed in this way, satisfaction of self-&-other’s needs warrants not only the articulation of self’s needs, but also an awareness and appreciation of the needs of the other so that individuals do not occupy a dissatisfying, selfish position of “it’s all about me”. Flo uses this dominant construction as a way of understanding a particular dissatisfying problem that her clients’ frequently present with: not appreciating the need fulfilling role of their partner. That is, clients are constructed as having a tendency to perceive the costs of fulfilling their partner’s needs whilst failing to recognise the need fulfilment they *receive* from their partners. I argue that, once again, as with the

discourses of “*Relationship satisfaction as bad-example parenting*” and “*Relationship dissatisfaction as Sexual Inactivity*”, this dominant construction of “*Relationship Dissatisfaction as Unfulfilled Needs*” warrants and sustains prescriptive, normalising therapeutic interventions which make available a range of subject positions for the clients to occupy or resist. I present three positions as: the “*Dissatisfied Hyper Critic Subject*”, the “*Dissatisfied Silent Partner Subject*”, and the “*Satisfied Awakened Relating Subject*”.

4.3.2.1 “The Dissatisfied Unfulfilled Hyper Critic Subject Position”

When positioned as the “*Hyper Critic Subject*” the relationally dissatisfied clients are constructed as being preoccupied with what they perceive their partners are not doing for them vis-a-vis their personal need fulfilment. In terms of the satisfying dialect of self-&-other's needs, the “*Hyper Critic*” is positioned as occupying a site of power in which they ‘*know*’ they are doing more for their partner in terms of need-fulfilment, and are blind to the need-fulfilling actions of their partner. Although governed by an economic authority of cost-benefit analysis inherent in managing self and other's needs, the “*Hyper Critic*” is presented as operating through a hyper surveillance of perceived costs, and is therefore compelled to blame and accuse their partner of not doing enough. This discursive blind spot is outlined by Joan:

Extract 21:

“Yeah (.) *noticing* things, you know, couples do things for each other, they come in the counselling room and then they blame each other, right, and then they're sort of saying “I do this and this and this” and the other one will say “Well yes, and what about me? I do this, this and this.” And what has been absent is they just haven't *somehow* appreciated, *shown* that they appreciate, that they've even *noticed* how much they're doing for each other, you know, whatever it is that they are contributing (.) but their contribution just hasn't felt appreciated enough, you know [...] that sort of encouragement, that positive feedback. [...] we all need to feel appreciated (.) and it's very evident to me in so many cases where what a couple need from each other *is* that demonstration of appreciation, and I think that is very, very often absent. You know people take each other for granted (.) erm, and so on. You know, just need to feel appreciated because it makes you feel valued (.) you know, and needed, but *valued* especially”.

(Joan: pgs18-19, Lines 890-905)

Joan highlights the way in which clients' are constructed as frequently presenting for therapy whilst locked into the position of the “*Hyper Critic*”; here the discursive invitation to engage in blame, and failing to “appreciate” what their partner does for them. Thus, the satisfying couple relationship is implicitly produced as a site in which

partners are entitled to, and *need* to feel valued and appreciated by each other. That is, dissatisfied clients “need” to be positioned by each other as “valued” need-fulfilling partners (see also Chapter 6, Section 6.2). One of the discursive functions of this construction, when mobilised by therapists, is as a professional tool to identify and make sense of clients’ internecine ‘tit-for-tat’ interactions. When Joan states that the clients “haven’t even noticed”, she presents them as failing to “appreciate” that there are times when their partners actually do things for them. Furthermore, the extract illustrates the way in which the “*Hyper Critic*” is not only blind to the actions of the other, but also refuses to hear the other’s claims of providing need fulfilment. Paradoxically, individuals are also constructed as being able to mobilise the speaking rights of the Hyper Critic as a form of defence *against* their partner’s hyper critical accusations. When Joan says the clients ask “What about me? I’ve done this, this and this” they shift from being the object of hyper critical blame to the subject who *blames* by highlighting how much they have done for their partner. Thus, the “*Hyper Critic*” is positioned as sustaining a skewed, lop-sided governance of the confessional, such that the subject is compelled to talk but not to listen. Therefore, positioning their clients as “Dissatisfied Hyper Critic Subjects” enables the therapists to locate relationship dissatisfaction in the Hyper Critics’s practice of not listening. This, it can be argued, serves to warrant and sustain a pedagogical therapeutic intervention in which the therapist teaches the Hyper Critic to listen to their partner. This intervention is outlined by Rachel:

Extract 22:

“And so it’s that (.) hearing, listening (.) and then actually making sure that (.) what you heard is what that person really (.) meant. Not putting your own interpretation on it, which is a negative interpretation (.) and then responding on that basis. So people get into this totally vicious circle of (.) erm (.) *everything* the other person says they’re interpreting as negative so they snipe back, and so this person *now* is defensive back. And, and it, and what we’re trying to do is break that down, and, and let them see what it is they’re doing to each other. (.) And *teach them* how they can actually say “Oh what do you mean by that?” (.) Not confrontational, just like (.) “Oh, what do you mean by that?”

(Rachel, pg11, lines 541-549)

As presented by Rachel, in order to address the ‘problems’ of accusing and not listening, the pedagogical authority of the therapeutic practice legitimises the training of clients in prescriptive, enskilling behavioural techniques as a way of re-locating the “*Hyper Critic*” to a position of a hearing, listening subject who is not “confrontational” and

who can ask “Oh, what do you mean by that?” This egalitarian construction reflects therapeutic accounts of satisfied partners as expressive and responsive (e.g. Johnson & Zuccarini, 2010) and draws on notions of mutual respect and, in this sense, offers a more empowering position for both partners. However, if taken-up and recycled uncritically, it potentially runs the risk of introducing simplistic notions of ‘confrontation as a process to be avoided’ or ‘confrontation to be strictly managed’ (e.g. Wilhelm & Surra, 2001) - thereby compelling clients to constantly engage in a process of self-surveillance and self-censorship. This is evident in the second subject position that is made available through therapists’ construction of “*Relationship Dissatisfaction as Unfulfilled Needs*”. The therapists also talk about the way in which dissatisfied clients can occupy a disempowered position of silence where they are unable to speak and express their needs – a position that I call the “*Dissatisfied Silent Partner Subject*”.

4.3.2.2 The Dissatisfied Unfulfilled “Silent Partner Subject” Position

When the therapists position their clients as dissatisfied unfulfilled “*Silent Partner Subjects*” they construct their clients’ dissatisfaction as stemming from their inability to explicitly articulate their needs to each other. As Gwen states:

Extract 23:

“[...] the ability to actually share and (.) say (.) what they need (.) honestly and openly to each other (.) has dropped off. Usually it’s a sign that there’s something not being said, usually it’s a sign that one person might be quite angry underneath, but (.) either isn’t acknowledging it themselves or feel that they can’t raise it. (.) So the work then is to try and (.) peel back the layers and, and find out what the underlying (.) resentment (.) or issue is (.) and get that (.) aired [...] to explore it and find it, and bring it out into, into the open. And that often unblocks their communication”.
(Gwen, pgs13-14, lines 633-651)

This position of silence is presented by therapists as either an upshot of partners feeling they cannot talk and/or as a potential symptomatic-signifier of a ‘deeper’ issue that is “not being said”; one that either has not been “acknowledged” to self or cannot be articulated to the other (see also Chapter 5, section 5.2.1.2). In this way, the construction draws on broader humanist discourses that present relationships as sites in which individuals can and should be known through sharing “honestly and openly”. The “*Silent Partner*” is the disempowered *unknown* subject; their dissatisfaction maintained through an ethic of self-censorship – either through their inability to articulate their concerns to themselves, or through the silencing actions of their partner.

An upshot of this construction is that therapeutic technologies are warranted in order to “explore” and reveal the “*Silent Partner's*” underlying problem by “bring[ing] it out into [...] the open”. Therefore, when put forward in this way, there is limited discursive space for a silent satisfied subject in the therapeutic interventions, and the ‘satisfied self’ is *compelled* to be a ‘confessional self’ (Elliot & Lemert, 2006; Plummer, 2003; Rose, 1990). This is unlike the “*Hyper critic*” position where self-censorship is actively prescribed. Some of the therapists simultaneously present the “*Dissatisfied Silent Partner Subject*” position as gendered and *not* gendered. For example:

Extract 24:

“Yes, well, the factors could be (.) a gender thing, er, but it's (.) it's important not to generalise (.) too much, because (.) you know, I mean (.) I guess it's well known that (.) *generally* women are more able to talk about their needs than men, but that doesn't mean to say that, that it isn't the other way round in (.) specific relationships, it can be absolutely the other way around, you know”.

(Joan, pg3, lines 121-125).

Joan's extract illustrates the simultaneous mobilisation and resistance of gender injunctions for the “*Silent Partner*” subject position. A gendered silence is produced in the sense that Joan is aware of normative prescriptions concerning differences in the tendency for men and women to articulate their feelings, such that “generally women are more able to talk about their needs than men”. This account recycles well documented gendered emotion scripts (e.g. Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Tingey, 1993) which construct men as being ‘innately’ more likely to occupy the “*Silent Partner*” position. Couching men's silence in these terms in effect absolves them of responsibility for inter-subjective communication, and positions women as the arbiters of the couple's ‘emotion work’ (Hochschild, 2003). However, Joan simultaneously resists this gendered construction and presents the practice of silencing one's needs as non-gendered, such that “it can be [...] the other way around” and either partner can occupy the “*Silent Partner*” position. This illustrates the multiple discourses that therapists draw on when they produce the “*Silent Partner*” as a way of understanding clients' relationship dissatisfaction. There are economic discourses of mutual exchange; humanistic notions of being ‘known’ ; gendered accounts of emotional expression; and egalitarian non-gendered scripts of need-fulfilment. As with the “*Hyper critic*” position, these discourses converge in the way in which they warrant prescriptive *satisfying* behavioural interventions that train clients to communicate in a satisfying way:

Extract 25:

“(.) Erm (.) well, by drawing attention to it. (.) (.) By (.) erm (.) by encouraging the use of ‘I’ messages (.) we have this thing called ‘I’ messages rather than ‘you’ messages. So, you know (.) if you’re not satisfied (.) with something, alright (.) then saying that “I don’t like it when” or, erm (.) (.) “because” erm (.) and “I would prefer”, so you’re actually expressing your *need*, and your wish (.) and taking responsibility for that, rather than (.) erm (.) saying “You’re at fault” and pointing the finger (.) because immediately (.) because that doesn’t actually bring you what you need. That antagonises (.) your partner is on the defensive, and it tends to exacerbate the problem, you know, and so you’re in the cycle, you get into these cycles”.

(Joan, pg7, lines 325-334)

In the extract above, Joan presents an enskilling practice, which operates through a behaviouristic governance of conditioned, rote learning. Under the guidance of the therapist who “dr[aws] attention” to the couple’s dissatisfying communication practices, and “encourage[s] the use of ‘I’ messages”, the dissatisfied subject is gradually repositioned through the mobilisation of prescriptive satisfying technologies-of-self. Again, these processes of subjectification function through Pastoral Power (Foucault, 1977), and the “*Silent Partner*” is gently encouraged to speak and “express [their] need” via the use of “I messages”. This technique reflects dominant therapeutic accounts (e.g. Meneses & Greenberg, 2011) and is also presented as a route by which the “*Hyper Critic*” can avoid “pointing the finger” of blame and putting “their partner [...] on the defensive”. The couple are compelled to engage in these practices because through their enactment the individuals are reproduced as possessing the ability to break their dissatisfying communicative “cycles”. Whilst potentially empowering, there is the risk that the intervention simply produces a subject who unquestioningly takes up a mode of relating in which ‘silence’ and ‘conflict’ are understood as simplistically dissatisfying. Moreover, relational constructions and therapeutic interventions that emphasise partners’ intersubjective skills can fail to acknowledge the role of couple’s broader relational and life contexts, and the social and cultural scripts which prop-up and sustain different ways of understanding and doing relationship satisfaction at any given time (Furedi, 2004; Harre-Mustin, 1991). Instead, attention is focussed on the individual partners’ contributions to each other’s need fulfilment. However, in Extract 25 Joan also speaks of a therapeutic ethic compelling clients to reflect on and “take responsibility” for their own “needs[s]”. Whilst only implicitly spoken of here, these reflective practices-of-the-self underpin the third subject position that is made available through the therapists’ mobilisation of the “*Relationship Dissatisfaction as Unfulfilled Needs*” discourse – I call this position the “*Awakened Relating Subject*”.

4.3.3 The Satisfyingly Fulfilled “Awakened Relating Subject” Position

The therapists produce a non-gendered *satisfied* “Awakened Relating Subject” by inviting their clients to sign up to the following two ideological propositions:

1. Reject high idealism
2. Accept oneself in order to satisfy oneself

Each proposition is discussed and illustrated in turn.

4.3.3.1 The “Satisfied Awakened Subject’s” rejection of high idealism

When couple therapists prescribe this technology-of-the-self they challenge dissatisfied clients' recycling of relational ideals, and compel them to engage in a satisfying practice of understanding and accepting the contextual reality of their relationship. Through their reported mobilisation of broader discourses of romantic idealisation, dissatisfied partners are understood as locating themselves in positions of inevitable disappointed and disillusionment (Segal, 1990). Therefore, the practice of rejecting high idealism invites clients to empower themselves and stop unfavourably comparing their relationship to idealised alternatives. These alternatives are presented as including other peoples' relationships, as well as previous times in the couple's own relationship. Charlotte frames and illustrates this dissatisfying ‘tendency’ of her clients to mobilise romantic ideals when accounting for the ways in which they frequently present for therapy:

Extract 26:

“Er, they say really hard to quantify things like, erm, “We just want to be happy” or “We want it all to be like it was when we first met” which is a particularly unrealistic one. [...] I try to disabuse them if they say something like “We want it to be like it was when we were first together”, because you can't put the clock back [...] [Also] it's (.) you know, the sort of belief that everyone else in their street, in their place of work is, say, having a better sex life (.) and actually I always challenge that, I say “How do you know?”

(Charlotte, pgs13-14, lines 601-627)

In the extract above, Charlotte locates dissatisfied subjects' relational practice as problematic because her clients are positioned as frequently failing to acknowledge their relationship as a process; instead, they reportedly often long to return to a previous idealised state which will “[...] be like it was when [they] were first together”. Similarly, the dissatisfied subject is also presented as failing to face up to the reality of their own relational context. Instead they have the “[...] belief that everyone else in their street [or] place of work is, say, having a better sex life”, and therefore they are positioned as

understanding their dissatisfaction as a comparative deficit in relation to other peoples' imagined relationships.

Charlotte mobilises the “*satisfying rejection of ideals*” construction as a way of challenging her clients' taken-for-granted assumptions, and to re-position them as “Satisfied Awakened Relating Subjects”. Through the rejection of clients' comparisons to perceived alternatives, Charlotte promotes a satisfying technology of the self which pivots around a focus on the clients' own relationships, needs and concerns. For Charlotte, it is ethically important for her clients to recognise and accept the reality of their intimate life in order to satisfy themselves. This discursive proposition represents a more open and possibly empowering mode of relating. However, as with any construction, it further adds to the ‘rules’ which constitute what it means to be a satisfied or satisfying partner, and promotes a mode of self-surveillance that shifts from a focus on ‘ideals’ to a focus on ‘acceptance of realities’. This satisfying governance of acceptance is also produced by Phillipa when she talks about clients coming to a realisation of what constitutes a “good enough” relationship for them:

Extract 27:

“It's very tempting to always talk about the ‘good enough’. But I think what it is (.) when I think of good enough I think of a client's (.) it's an acceptance of reality, their reality as they've created them (.) and understanding (.) that we, we've kind of arrived I always feel with clients when we have an awareness between the three of us that (.) they know where they came from and they know where they'd like to go to, and they know what they *have*. So it's a kind of acceptance of knowing all those (.) and (.) in marrying their possibilities up with their limitations”.

(Phillipa, pg2, lines 81-88).

On the face of it, the “good enough” relationship that Phillipa speaks of signifies an “understanding” and recognition by clients of their relationship as an ongoing process, and also their “acceptance” of their relational “possibilities” and “limitations”. In this way, through the interventions of couple therapy, the satisfied subject is constructed as having faced the “reality” of their current situation and their possible futures instead of mobilising and fixating on unattainable romantic ideals. This echoes long-established mainstream research which privileges partners having ‘realistic’ expectations (e.g. Aria & Beach, 1987; Larson, 1992). However, this practice of satisfied “acceptance” requires individuals to engage in reflective surveillance of their relationship in order to ‘*know*’ it as it ‘truly’ is (and was), and to also formulate a narrative in which the

ongoing process of their relationship is constructed as predictably knowable. Therefore, this satisfying mode of subjectification - based on clients' "acceptance" rests on a static notion of the relationship as fixed and knowable at any given time. Therefore, once again, whilst this construction is a more open and potentially empowering discourse, it inevitably adds to the 'rules' of doing satisfaction, and risks being recycled dogmatically and uncritically.

The imperative to engage in practices of reflection and "acceptance" also permeates the second ideological proposition that is mobilised by therapists when they produce the "*Satisfied Awakened Relating Subject*".

4.3.3.2 The "Satisfied Awakened Relating Subject's" self-acceptance

In contrast to the "*Hyper Critic*" and "*Silent Partner*" (both of whom are subjects who are constructed as focussing on the need-fulfilling role of their partner), when therapists produce the "*Awakened Relating Subject*" they draw on humanist discourses and view the subject as occupying a position of self-acceptance in which they fulfil their own needs as opposed to always looking to their partner for fulfilment. In this way, the therapists construct the "*Awakened Relating Subject*" as a self-responsible subject who is presented as capable of recognising and managing the dialectical tension between *independency* and *co-dependency* inherent to the practice of mutual fulfilment of self-&-other's needs. That is, the "*Awakened Relating Subject*" is constructed as occupying a position of satisfaction through their ability to do satisfying *interdependent* needs fulfilment. This discursive framework warrants the counselling practice of inviting dissatisfied individuals to 'relate to themselves' in a satisfying way by acknowledging and taking ownership of their own needs and concerns within the context of their relationship. This echoes common advice given across couple therapy that in order to relate to another in a satisfying way, one needs to relate to oneself in a satisfying way (e.g. Christensen & Jacobson, 2000). This is illustrated by Charlotte and Rebecca who construct the importance of partners' self-acceptance for their experience of relationship satisfaction:

Extract 28:

"[...] one of the fundamental things about a relationship is that (.) if you're not very good at having a relationship with yourself and, sort of, ok in yourself (.) you will run into all manner of difficulties having a relationship with somebody else, and if you look to the relationship to (.) prop you up or, you know, make up the gaps in yourself then it's gonna be quite a *limited* relationship".

(Charlotte, pg7, lines 325-330)

Extract 29:

"[...] peace of mind's about being able to say "I'm accepted for who I am (.) I don't have to be anything else because not only am I *accepted* by my partner, but I accept *who* I am." Generally, if you tend to accept yourself you (.) project that out (.) and then others then tend to (.) accept you for who you are (.) because people, you know (.) think there's elements of "I'm not good enough" (.) you know, "I'm not the wife I should be," "I'm not the husband I should be," (.) you know, "I've disappointed." So it's about that acceptance of yourself I think, and getting that peace".

(Rebecca, pg4, lines 184-190)

Both Charlotte and Rebecca implicitly produce a relationship satisfaction of *intra* and *inter*-partner acceptance, which echoes broader attachment notions of the couple relationship as a secure site of psychological wellbeing and growth stemming from positive conceptions of self and others (first outlined by Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). This construction operates through a satisfying governance-of-the-self based on partners' own self-acceptance, and also their acceptance of each other. Relating in a 'satisfying' way is presented as being "about [...] acceptance of yourself" because "if you tend to accept yourself [...] others then tend to accept you". In contrast, individuals who think they are "not good enough" and who are "not very good at having a relationship with [themselves]" are further disempowered through being positioned as subjects who inevitably experience "all manner of difficulties having a relationship with somebody else". This is because the subject who considers themselves as "not good enough" is positioned as over-reliant on their partner and in need of the "relationship to prop [them] up" or "make up the gaps" in themselves, and this is understood by the therapists as ultimately leading to a "*limited* relationship". Thus, implicit to the practice of relationally satisfying self-acceptance is the need to acknowledge and take ownership for one's own needs in the relationship. Once again, this discourse potentially produces a more empowered subject, yet it still operates through a self-policing productive power (Foucault, 1975; Rose, 1990). The satisfied subject has no option but to engage in self-surveillance by monitoring their levels of personal need fulfilment, whilst also governing (i.e. limiting to an 'appropriate' level) the relational, inter-subjective

expectations that they place on their partner. This process is talked about by Gwen and Charlotte:

Extract 30:

“[...] it’s about getting that balance right, how much can I do for myself, and how much (.) can I legitimately expect from my partner? And sometimes (.) one partner might just [...] put all those needs out onto their partner, and it’s more, obviously, than one partner can (.) cope with. (.) And I think it’s just an increasing problem of the way our society has gone, that (.) and the way we conceive of a couple now, that we tend to think that this one other person is going to be able to meet all our needs and one person can’t do that. You know, so a lot of it is just about being *realistic* about what another human being can actually do for you, and how much you have to do yourself”.

(Gwen, pg2, lines 60-70)

Extract 31:

“So it’s constantly a dance, and, and it’s the constant tension with the “What I want for myself”, and there’s a heck of a lot of that around, because “I’m worth it” and stuff, and this sort of, you know, babes in the wood, everything to each other. And it’s how you *manage* that tension and, that, is really the secret to a *satisfying* relationship. Because this is sort of dependency [draws two significantly overlapping circles], and if you get here [draws two separate circles] it’s *independency*, but actually, what you need to have is this sort of constant backwards and forwards of *interdependency*”.

(Charlotte, pg7, lines 349-357).

In Gwen’s extract she implicitly mobilises notions of the self-responsible, self-fulfilling neo-liberal subject (Hawkes, 1996; Weeks, 2007) and constructs the dissatisfying practice of clients’ “putting all [their] needs out onto their partner” and expecting their partner to “be able to meet all [their] needs” because “one person can’t do that”. Both Gwen and Charlotte understand these practices as “increasing[ly] problem[atic]” in the current socio-historical context because of the availability of broader discourses which simultaneously privilege yet isolate the couple as a site of personal satisfaction (e.g. Beck & Beck-Gersheim, 1995; Hochschild, 2003; Jackson & Scott, 2004). Thus, the therapists prescribe a relationally satisfying technology-of-the-self which operates through the practice of individuals acknowledging that they have needs that they must take responsibility for themselves and ask “how much can I do for myself, and how much can I legitimately expect from my partner?” As Charlotte states “it’s how [partners] manage that tension [...] that is the secret to a satisfying relationship”. Thus, I present the “*Satisfied Awakened Relating Subject*” as occupying an empowered position in which they are capable of getting the “balance right” between receiving fulfilment from their partner and also fulfilling their own needs, and this self-governance produces the satisfying “backwards and forwards of interdependency”. Again, Charlotte’s construction of satisfying *interdependency* presents a more

empowered position within the context of the discourse of “*Relationship Dissatisfaction as Unfulfilled Needs*”. However, the risk of this construction being mobilised and sustained in a dogmatic way was illustrated when the therapists talked about the tension that sometimes arose when they prescribed the self-reflective practice of the “*Awakened Subject*”. Their clients were often understood as resisting the therapists' invitation to engage in the practice of self-reflection necessary for them to occupy the position of satisfying discovery. Instead, the clients were constructed as often yearning for direct instruction about what they should do, but this was presented as a futile, ultimately dissatisfying practice by the therapists, and one that they resisted:

Extract 32:

“[...] it's very *hard* because they'll sit there and say “If only you'd tell us what to do!” [laughs] And of course you'd *love* to tell them what to do, but you *can't*, you mustn't [laughs] [...] It's about *them* getting the understanding, feeling it in their gut, you know, otherwise nothing really will change [...] you know they have to struggle with it [...] and they have to, you know, find *their* way of (.) erm, articulating it”.
(Gwen, pg24, lines 1159-1174)

Extract 33:

“So it, it sounds like a strange job [...] but we are not directive. It is about them exploring it [...] if we are directive it would be 6 weeks, things are ok, and then they leave and everything's gone horribly wrong again. So, I think, hopefully they leave with the skills to communicate and, and *keep up* this exploration forever”.
(Flo, pg12, lines 646-659)

Both Gwen and Flo show an awareness of the power that operates through their position as an expert, and they resist this in order to take up positions where they self-responsibilise and empower their clients as “*Awakened subjects*”. However, these extracts also make explicit the upshot of failure if the two partners do not internalise the self-reflective practices of the therapeutic intervention. If the clients do not “struggle” and “find *their* way of [...] articulating” suitable satisfying practices then they are understood as running the risk of “everything go[ing] horribly wrong again”. This construction opens out two options - either self-reflect or fail – and thereby functions to further justify the practice of couple therapy and to compel the clients to engage with the processes of subjectification that are made available to them so that, as Flo says, they can “*keep up* this exploration forever”. This illustrates the role that couple therapy plays in the norm-setting mechanisms that prescribe the ways in which relationship satisfaction and dissatisfaction are produced, and the types of subject, practices, and interventions that are enabled and warranted through these. As with any dominant

discourse, there is the risk that lay individuals presenting for therapy simply change one dogma for another and close down alternative ways of relating (Tiefer, 2005).

4.4 Summary

This chapter has argued that relationship dissatisfaction is understood as problematic in several different ways across the couple therapists' talk and this discursive frame (within which therapeutic interventions happen) makes available certain dissatisfied subject positions. The institutional and pastoral power operating through couple therapy enables and warrants the prescription of satisfying technologies-of-self, which operate at the level of inter-subjective *relational* practices. These interventions promote intimacy as the key satisfying practice and limit alternative behaviours (e.g. silence) as problematically dissatisfying. They are put forward as relational 'skills' that need to be taken up and invested in by dissatisfied clients in order for them to be repositioned as satisfied. I have argued that these practices present a mode of subjectification that is mobilised and promoted uncritically, and there is a risk that they could be taken up and recycled dogmatically due to the powerful role that the institution of therapy has in the mechanism of discursive norm-setting. In the following chapter, the operation of 'intersubjective-practices-as-a-mode-of-subjectification' comes to the fore in the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of lay peoples' talk.

5.

Laypeople's constructions of relationship satisfaction

This chapter presents the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) of lay-peoples' talk, and explores the culturally embedded, taken-for-granted assumptions that inform lay peoples' understandings of relationship satisfaction in long-term, heterosexual coupledness. This analysis forms one half of the twin focus analysis outlined in Chapters 1 and 3 (the other half is the IPA presented in Chapter 6) and, as with the FDA in Chapter 4, I acknowledge that it represents a form of knowledge production which, itself, could be deconstructed (see Chapter 4, Section 4.1).

The FDA presented here shows a preoccupation by the participants with wanting to achieve a state described by them as satisfied. The analysis also indicates a range of discursive practices (at the *level of the couple*) as a source through which 'satisfied' and 'dissatisfied' 'versions of self' are made possible and taken up with subjective investment. In this way, the analysis touches on earlier theoretical work (e.g. Wetherell & Edley, 1999) in that the production of 'satisfied' and 'dissatisfied' *selves* is theorised as a method of self-presentation that involves investment in specific 'satisfying practices'. These practices are simultaneously understood as situationally-specific yet also dependent on broader social discourses which constitute Relationship Satisfaction. Through the respondents' take-up and reproduction of these practices and discourses, they are ordered, disciplined, and subjectified as satisfied or dissatisfied selves. In this way, the practices function as 'self-formative' or 'onto-formative' (Foucault, 1977). However, because multiple and contradictory accounts are available, the 'versions of self' are presented as plural and ongoing - "achieved through discursive work, constantly needing to be brought into being over and over again" (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p.352).

Hence, the core focus of the chapter is on mapping these *processes of subjectification* including the 'versions of self' that are made available when lay people talk about relationship satisfaction. In particular, the analysis offers an account of how these modes of subjectification enable and sustain 'versions of self' through the discourses and practices that are mobilised by respondents in relation to what it means to be satisfied or

dissatisfied. These discursive constructions and the associated versions of self are summarised below in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of the Discursive Analysis of Lay peoples' Talk

Discursive Constructions of Relationship Satisfaction		Versions of self
Relationship Satisfaction as a transactional obligation for needs fulfilment	Satisfying the "Intimate Confessional"	The monitor version of self
		The articulator version of self
		The diligent negotiator version of self
		The dissatisfied blamer version of self
	Satisfying Romantic Idealism	The inevitably dissatisfied monitor version of self
		The effortless negotiator version of self
Relationship Satisfaction as heroic, leap-of-faith relating		The Leap of Faith version of self
		The Heroic version of self

As outlined above, across the lay peoples' accounts I argue that two distinct constructions of relationship satisfaction are produced which underpin the processes of subjectification:

- i) "*Relationship satisfaction as a transactional obligation for needs fulfilment*"
- ii) "*Relationship satisfaction as heroic, leap-of-faith relating*".

Each is now presented and discussed in turn.

5.1 "Relationship Satisfaction as a transactional obligation for needs fulfilment"

When this discourse of "*relationship satisfaction as a transactional obligation for needs fulfilment*" is mobilised by lay-people, partners are ontologically represented as beings with innate needs, and their relationship discursively functions as the primary site in which many of these needs are met. This construction mirrors the therapists' account of "*relationship dissatisfaction as unfulfilled needs*" (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.2) as well as the dominant mainstream psychological accounts of relationship satisfaction (e.g. Emmers-Sommer, 2004; Hazan & Shaver, 2004; VanderDrift & Agnew, 2012), and maintains relationship satisfaction as signifying that partners' needs *are* being met. In contrast, relationship dissatisfaction is understood as the signifier for the problem of un-fulfilled needs (see also Chapter 4, Section 4.3.2). This construction is produced across the body of interviews and is succinctly illustrated by Lisa and Ruth:

Extract 34:

"Relationship satisfaction's about (.) being content in the relationship, that you've both got (.) expectations and needs that (.) are being met".

(Lisa, 31-year-old, white British, office worker, in her relationship for three years, and living with her partner. Pg8, lines 395-396)

Extract 35:

"I suppose you can *demand* something off [your partner] a little bit as well, you know (.) "Can you do this for me?"; "I need you to do this for me"

(Ruth, 29-year-old, white British, teacher, in her relationship for five years, and living with her fiancé. Pg3, lines 116-117)

Implicit, yet pivotal to this discursive construction is the notion of partners' transactional obligation as part of signing up to a satisfying relationship. Partners are constructed as having a right to expect their needs to be fulfilled by each other ("Can you do this for me?"), and also have a duty to fulfil each other's needs, such that "both [partners] expectations and needs [...] are being met". This mirrors other discursive work which has illustrated partners heightened expectations in terms of 'correctly' enacting relational rights and duties (see for example, Hawkes, 1996; Nicholson, 1993; Tunariu & Reavey, 2007; Weeks, 2007). This discursive privileging of *mutual* need-fulfilment is illustrated by Lydia who presents the importance of her husband also experiencing relationship satisfaction:

Extract 36:

Lydia: "If I want to be satisfied do I think my husband needs to be satisfied as well? Yeah, I think so, yeah. Because you can always *tell* if your partner's not (.) feeling 100%, not feeling satisfied, and that (.) wears off on you, definitely.

Interviewer: So that's gonna influence (.) your own feelings of satisfaction?

Lydia: Yeah, and by contrast if that person's able to be really joyful and not (.) burdened then that rubs off on you as well. (.) So I guess you do kind of mould together in a lot of ways".

(Lydia, 31-year-old, white British, self-employed, in her relationship for five years, and living with her husband of two years. Pg11, lines 511-520)

Here, each partner is represented via a dual discursive subjectivity which simultaneously individualises them as autonomous beings with unique needs, and collectivises them as part of the couple (see also Finn, 2012) – constructed as *ethically* compelled by a governance of mutual need fulfilment ("If I want to be satisfied do I think my husband needs to be satisfied as well? Yeah, I think so, yeah"). In this way, the "*Transactional Obligation*" account of relationship satisfaction centres on the dialectic of self-and-other's needs, and what individuals perceive they are not rightfully receiving or giving – and draws on broader neo-liberal, economic discourses of

egalitarian individualism (e.g. Giddens, 1991; Willig & dew Valor, 1999 as cited in Smith, 2008). To be understood as relationally satisfied the 'self' gets positioned as having a duty to engage in a practice of satisfying its partner's needs, but also expects to be satisfied in return. This is a key example of the practices that prop up and sustain this mode of satisfying subjectification.

This formulation of a 'fulfilling' and 'fulfilled satisfied self' is adopted by the majority of participants and is understood in light of two distinct, broader dominant discourses. The first discursive route operates through a governance of intimate communication by mobilising the authority of the confessional. In contrast, the second mobilises broader discourses of idealised romanticism. This reflects Crawford's (2004) claim that satisfaction in modern coupledness is simultaneously produced by two 'ideal' narratives: one of egalitarian reciprocity and one of heterosexual romance. These prescribe different versions of self with different speaking rights and duties vis-à-vis managing the dialectic of self-and-other's needs in the transactional obligation. This tension perfectly illustrates the multiplicity and fluidity of discourse in action in everyday sense-making. Each is now discussed and illustrated in turn.

5.1.1 Transactional obligation Part 1: "Satisfying the Intimate Confessional"

When the "*Relationship Satisfaction as transactional needs fulfilment*" construction is produced in light of the dominant discourse of the intimate confessional (Foucault, 1977; Rose, 1989), relationship satisfaction centres around partners being presented as engaging in diligent, pragmatic, *and* egalitarian cost-benefit analyses of the extent to which their own, and each other's needs are met. Therefore this construction echoes both mainstream social exchange theoretical accounts (e.g. Johnson & Lebow, 2000) as well as discourses of transformed intimacy (e.g. Giddens, 1991; Weeks, 2007). On the one hand, individuals are compelled to fulfil their own needs in order to be satisfied, but this can only be achieved in relation to their partner in an ongoing dialectical process of negotiation and egalitarian compromise (e.g. Giddens, 1991). This process of subjectification can be discursively explained in terms of relationship satisfaction being constructed as requiring '*work*'. This compels partners to engage in *satisfying* practices of the self which include reflective "*monitoring*" of their mutual levels of need fulfilment; "*articulating*" their needs or the aspects of their relationship that they are dissatisfied with; and "*negotiating*" a mutually acceptable compromise.

Within this discursive framework, partners are constructed as *knowable* selves through the practices of monitoring and communication. This requires the satisfying practices of the confessional, and the pedagogical technologies of partners learning and developing the requisite communication skills. Perceived transgressions of these steps are constructed as potentially warranting *justified blame* that one partner is being selfish or not meeting the agreed 'rules' of their relationship. It is through these practices (which function as technologies-of-the-self) that a mode of subjectification is made available to partners which enables different "versions of self" (some of which are understood as satisfied, and others as dissatisfied) to be taken up or resisted. When the "*Relationship Satisfaction as transactional needs fulfilment*" construction is produced in light of the dominant discourse of the intimate confessional, I argue that at least four overlapping "versions of self" are made available in which the need fulfilling 'self-other' dialectic operates (sometimes in gendered ways). I am going to focus on: "*the monitor version of self*", "*the articulator version of self*", "*the diligent negotiator version of self*", and "*the blamer version of self*". For each of these "versions of self", each partner simultaneously occupies a position of practicing (e.g. monitoring, articulating etc.) and being practiced upon (i.e. being monitored, being articulated to), and different power relations operate through these. Each of these four "selves" is explained and illustrated in detail, beginning with "the monitor".

5.1.1.1 The "monitor version of self"

The "*monitor version of self*" is constructed as being compelled to engage in a regime of monitoring both their own, and each other's status of relationship satisfaction, by assessing the extent to which they are meeting their mutual duty as need fulfilling partners. The "*monitor version of self*" is propped up and sustained by broader discourses of egalitarian economic individualism (that is, each partner has a *right* to receive and provide need fulfilment within the context of their relationship). When partners take up the "monitor version of self", they are constructed as viewing self and other as *knowable* through a regime of deliberate reflection and evaluation. This discursive process reflects Foucault's (1975) theoretical account of regimes of power producing subjectivities through their internalisation; a form of governance that disciplines subjects through compelling them to engage in diligent self-surveillance and self-governance (Weeks, 2005; 2007). In terms of the "*Transactional Obligation*" and the dialectics of self-and-other's needs, the self as monitor is understood as reflecting on

whether they and their partner are doing enough for each other, and they are simultaneously aware that this question is being asked of them. In this way the “monitor version of self” is constructed as occupying a site of discursive power which enables them to ‘judge’ partners’ relational performance – a judgement directed by both partners towards self and other. This process of monitoring is illustrated by John who presented an account about monitoring his own relational performance and whether or not he was “putting enough” into his relationship.

Extract 37:

“I feel, that, from time to time (.) have a few minutes and you just reflect on it you know? And think is everything going well? Am I putting my (.) bit into this? Is there anyway that I could (.) improve what I’m doing? Not by (.) being someone different, but just by (.) you know, am I putting enough into this? (.) Is there anything I (.) we *should* be doing that we’re not doing?”

(John: a 28-years-old, white English office worker, in his relationship for two and a half years, and living with friends. Pg 12, Lines 551-556)

John’s extract illustrates the practices of self-monitoring-self and self-monitoring-other and echoes mainstream psychological accounts of equity theory in which relationship satisfaction is understood in terms of equitable costs and benefits (e.g. Adams, 1965 as cited in Guerrero, Anderson & Afifi, 2007). John is presented as taking up the “monitor version of self” by reflecting on his subjective individual performance as a partner (“am I putting enough into this?”), and then whether he and his girlfriend are doing enough as a collectivised couple (“Is there anything [...] we *should* be doing?”). This reflection can be understood as operating as a form of self-governance in light of the normative prescription of the need-fulfilling transactional obligation. The need fulfilment of John’s partner is framed from the perspective of John’s personal performance in the relationship (e.g. “anyway that I could improve?”) rather than on whether or not his partner is fulfilled. Hence, occupying the “*monitor version of self*” is promoted as crucial in constructing how satisfying or “well” his relationship is going. The upshot is that the “monitor” represents a socially valued version of self because *doing* monitoring permits the subject to evaluate their relationship and understand themselves as the “*satisfied* monitor version of self”. This warrants John’s take-up, investment and internalisation of the monitoring practice. However, the risk is that the practice of monitoring ‘individual performance’ fails to recognise the broader social context and simply functions as a form of self-regulation (Finn, 2012) that recycles and sustains dominant, taken-for-granted assumptions regarding what partners “[...] *should* be doing” in constituting ‘satisfying relating’.

However, across the texts, the “*monitor version of self*” is discursively mobilised in conflicting ways vis-à-vis the satisfying “*transactional obligation for needs fulfilment*”. Whilst occupying the “*monitor version of self*” is framed as a crucial mode of subjectification for understanding and confirming one’s status as a satisfied subject, it also discursively operates as the signifier for relationship dissatisfaction. This discursive tension is illustrated by John:

Extract 38:

“Am I a good boyfriend, am I a good girlfriend? (.) if you’re asking yourself the question then you’re already in a predicament. If you’re not asking yourself the question then you’re a good boyfriend / girlfriend (.) I would say basically. Or possibly not, maybe I’m slightly more conscientious (.) no, I don’t think so. [...] I think, behind that kind of genuinely satisfying relationship (.) I think you pretty much know (.) you *know* if what you’re doing is right or wrong kind of thing. I think it’s just (.) as I say, if something’s wrong that’s when you start asking yourself that question.”
(John, pg18, lines 849-865).

Constructed in this way, John presents a “*dissatisfied monitor version of self*” who views the practice of monitoring as a sign of ‘dysfunction’ (“a predicament”) in the relationship i.e. as a sign of relationship dissatisfaction. Thus, the speaking rights and duties of the “*monitor version of self*” shift according to the extent to which the self engages in the practice of monitoring. This tension once again illustrates the fluidity and multiplicity of discourse in action, and the subsequent ‘rules’ and contradictions that speakers have to navigate in their processes of sense-making. For John, occupying the position of the “*monitor self*” excessively (by frequently reflecting on one’s performance as a partner and asking “Am I a good boyfriend, am I a good girlfriend?”) signifies a transgression of the transactional obligation and this produces a “*dissatisfied monitor version of self*”. I argue that the notions of ‘excessiveness’ in this construction implicitly draws on discourses of obsession and ‘madness’ and presents excessive monitoring as a dissatisfying practice of psychological pathology (e.g. Foucault, 1964). In contrast, occupying the position “from time to time” is privileged as socially valued (see also Extract 37) and empowers the “*satisfied monitor version of self*” – a subject who periodically checks that their transactional obligation is being upheld. Across the participants’ narratives this mode of subjectification is frequently discussed in gendered terms. In particular, across the women participants’ talk they construct themselves as monitoring their levels of need fulfilment to a greater extent than their male partners; both in terms of how they feel about their relationship overall, and also the extent to which they monitor specific aspects of the relationship. In the following extracts, this

gendered mode of subjectification is illustrated by Anya, who presents men as being “satisfied with less satisfaction”, and Clare, who constructs her needs as more “complicated” than her boyfriend’s.

Extract 39:

“They would be maybe more satisfied with less satisfaction (.) if you know what I mean. Er, lower level of satisfaction would be enough for them to think that’s good relationship, “it’s fine”, “it doesn’t bother me” (.) they’re maybe not as picky as us women [...] maybe for women (.) there’s a larger number of elements than for men. I think men probably evaluate much smaller number of things that (.) maybe important to them in a relationship”.

(Anya: a 37-year-old, Bosnian, researcher, in her relationship for 10 years, and living with her partner. Pg 17-18, Lines 840-848 & Lines 853-856)

Extract 40:

Clare: “[...] it’s not so much different [needs], it’s just mine are more complicated. [...] I would say Vince’s idea of our relationship and our satisfaction (.) would be much, I mean this interview would be much quicker (.) it’s not that he loves me less (.) it’s just not as complicated for him (.) he would have a list of things he always needed, and things he needed within a time period.

Interviewer: And would the items on his list also (.) shape your views of relationship satisfaction?

Clare: (.) they’d be very similar, it’s just I would have sub-headings, and mind maps, and diagrams, and pictures, and photographs, and feely boards underneath. It would be like that [laughs]. The sub-heading would be like the same thing, just mine would be all a bit more complicated”.

(Clare, a 30-year-old, white British, primary school teacher, in her relationship for seven years, and living with her partner. Pgs18-19, lines 895-933)

Mobilised in this way, women participants produce a “*gendered monitor version of self*” based on a construction of women’s relational needs as including a “larger number of elements” and therefore being more “complicated” than men’s less “picky” needs. This construction of women’s emotional “complexity” recycles dominant discourses that position women as innately more ‘relational’ and ‘emotional’ than men (Jackson, 2005). These gendered ‘feeling rules’ (e.g. Hochschild, 2003) produce a gendered technology-of-the-self which compels women to engage in a policing-regime of monitoring self and other to a greater extent than men. Hence, the “*gendered monitor version of self*” discursively reifies a gender imbalance in the transactional obligation so that women are constructed as monitoring the rules of their relationships to a greater extent (e.g. Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Hochschild, 2003), and are therefore constructed as less easily satisfied than men. In contrast, the formulation of men’s ‘ease’ of satisfaction with the transactional obligation (based on their less “complicated” needs) negates the need for them to engage in the practice of monitoring their

relationship as much as women. This illustrates the process of 'subjectification-through-practice' and the ways in which certain discursive frameworks make available and prescribe certain practices which prop up and sustain different versions of self. That is, once the subject occupies the "*gendered monitor version of self*" they 'sign up' to the gendered imperative that 'women monitor more than men' and these practices cyclically reinforce that version of self.

Across the participants accounts, the "monitor version of self" is constructed as being made available through interactions and engagements with other people. In this way, others are constructed as being crucial in the practice of self-surveillance, and I argue that subjects can be ushered into taking up, and investing in, the "monitor version of self" through the discursive practices of others. Once again, this construction illustrates a mode of subjectification-through-practice, and this process is exemplified by Gaby and Lisa who present the impact of significant others (friends and family) in them taking up the monitoring version of self:

Extract 41:

"[...] when you're talking to friends or family [...] it's really nice, you know, compliments about your relationship from people who matter. (.) that means a lot, and (.) you do kind of think "Oh, yeah", you know, I don't really *see* it that way because I'm in it, but somebody maybe points it out to you. Things that you don't (.) you take for granted I suppose, about the way you are together. Sometimes you need a bit of an outside perspective".

(Gaby, a 41-year-old, white British student, in her relationship for eleven years, and living with her fiancé. Pg9, lines 419-426)

Extract 42:

[...] it's *nice* for your friends to like your partner and for your friends and family to see you as a great couple [...] I've got other friends (.) who *aren't* so sure about him [...] not that they explicitly say that to me, although (.) some *have* (.) but I kind of *know* that even though, in some cases they're pretty good friends, they don't actually know (.) me and Nick together (.) and don't know Nick (.) so (.) I don't think it changes how *I* feel about (.) my relationship.

(Lisa, pgs7, lines 303-308)

Whilst the "*satisfied monitor version of self*" is formulated as someone in the habit of practicing self-surveillance and self-governance (in light of normative satisfying prescriptions for mutual need fulfilment), Gaby's and Lisa's extracts illustrate how this surveillance and governance is also discursively reified through engagement with others⁵⁰. When either Gaby or Lisa are positioned as being in a satisfying relationship

⁵⁰ And further reified through my act of producing knowledge through my discursive interpretation presented here

by their friends or family, they take up the speaking rights and duties of the “*satisfied monitor version of self*”, and adjust and survey their relationship in light of the normalising acceptance of others. Therefore they construct it as “really nice [to receive] compliments [...] from people who matter”, and for their “friends and family to see [them] as a great couple”. Thus, the “*satisfied monitor version of self*” is presented as being made available and reified through the broader economic discourses that underpin the “*Transactional obligation for needs fulfilment*” construction. The ‘existence’ of the “*Satisfied Monitor Version of Self*” is then made all the more ‘possible’ when the subject is socially rewarded (through compliments) and ushered into appropriating that version of self. However, when faced with a critical evaluation from some of her friends, Lisa can be understood as mobilising a discursive private-public divide between her intimate relationship and those outside of it - positioning her friends (even the “pretty good” ones) as external to her relational dyad and, as such, do not really “know” her partner. In this way, I construct Lisa as resisting the “*dissatisfied monitor version of self*” and, instead, she reclaims the power of the socially valued “*satisfied monitor self*” from her friends. Therefore, Lisa is understood as being able to resist the authorising power of her friends to position her boyfriend as someone they are not “so sure about”.

Across the participants’ narratives, this implicit need to work at one’s relationship as part of the “*transactional obligation for needs fulfilment*” also underpins and warrants the satisfying practices of ‘articulating’ ones needs to ones partner. This practice makes available the “*articulator version of self*”.

5.1.1.2 The “articulator version of self”

When relationship satisfaction is constructed by lay people as a “*transactional obligation for needs fulfilment*”, producing relationship satisfaction requires individuals to occupy a position whereby they articulate their needs, or anything they are unhappy about, to each other. Relationship dissatisfaction is constructed as stemming from *not* talking to one’s partner, and not being ‘open’ and ‘honest’ about how one feels. In this way, what I call the “*satisfied articulator version of self*” is enabled via the governance of the confessional (Foucault, 1978; Rose, 1999) which mobilises broader discourses of satisfying disclosing intimacy, and sustains a narrative of ‘relationship satisfaction’ based on partners’ ability to manage intimacy (e.g. Cherline, 2004; Giddens, 1992). This satisfying process of subjectification-through-practice is put forward in the extract below by William:

Extract 43:

"I think in a relationship where you *are* going to manage it, it is about (.) being really *open*, being honest, actually tell that other person how you feel (.) and as long as that other person (.) is wanting to still maintain (.) that relationship, then that should be enough (.) in terms of them being able to start thinking about a solution (.) through *words*, through actually discussing it (.) keeping things (.) in the open and not just bottling things up and allowing it to become (.) a bigger and bigger issue until eventually (.) perhaps the smallest thing sparks it off into erm (.) an un-resolvable conflict".

(William: a 27-year-old, white British, local authority worker, in his current relationship for 18 months, and living with friends. Pgs17-18, lines 844-854)

William's extract illustrates that the practice of self-articulating-to-other through talk can be understood as offering a mechanism to deal with relationship dissatisfaction by enabling a discursive space in which partners are not being silenced, or "bottling up" personal concerns. Here, the "*articulator version of self*" is understood as coming to the fore in maintaining relationship satisfaction through the practice of making visible their needs or problems to their partner, who (under the 'rules' of the "*transactional obligation*") is constructed as having a 'duty' to address them. Within this discursive framework the power of the "*satisfied articulator version of self*" operates through the subject's capacity to talk away dissatisfaction by inviting their partner - the listener - to take up the views and practices of the "*diligent negotiator version of self*" (see Section 5.2.1.3) and thereby instigating the resolution of relational problems via compromise (as opposed to "bottling things up and allowing [them] to become (.) a bigger and bigger issue until eventually (.) perhaps the smallest thing sparks it off into erm (.) an un-resolvable conflict"). This 'invitation to negotiate through articulation' reflects mainstream research which privilege 'problem solving' through 'intimate communication' (e.g. Ridley *et al.*, 2001; Markman & Rhoades, 2012) and further reifies and warrants partners taking up the "*Satisfied Articulator Version of Self*". However, this mode of subjectification leaves no space for 'silence' in producing relationship satisfaction, and the imperative to voice one's concerns echoes the claims of theorists (e.g. Rose, 1989) who saw the pervading influence of the 'psy' technologies and talking therapies in producing intimate life; the confessional of the church relocated to the inter-subjective space of the relational dyad so that satisfied couples are compelled to be "really *open* [and] *honest*" with each other. However, in the next extract John produces an account in which someone may find themselves in a position where they are unable to speak because they are constructed as being unable to articulate their concerns to themselves first. This presents a blurring of the monitor and

the articulator subject positions, such that the practices of the “*monitor version of self*” are understood as propping up and sustaining the “*articulator version of self*”:

Extract 44:

“It sometimes *can't* be [articulated] [...] how do you turn round and say (.) “there doesn't seem to be something right between us, and hasn't been for a while, and I think it's because you're not putting x, y, and z in” (.) It's fine if you can explain the x, y and z bit, but if you can't do that, I think that's when you've got problems you know? [...] I mean, how the hell do you resolve something (.) with somebody else if you can't resolve it in your own head? [...] possibly that's what causes breakdown in relationships is that feeling of frustration of whatever, you know, how can I do this? [...] I think self-realisation's the first stage in *most* things (.) if you can't articulate it (.) in your own head, how the hell are you ever going to make anybody else understand it? That's the thing (.) parity with your own thoughts, and it doesn't matter if those thoughts then prove to be wrong. So upon being challenged you change those views - that's fine, *but* if you can't articulate them in the first place there's almost no point as far as I'm concerned.

(John, pgs15-16, lines 729-829 and pgs21-22, lines 1039-1055)

In this extract John constructs relationship satisfaction as a *relational* process which compels partners to firstly engage in a practice of self-surveillance and reflection on their needs in order for them to be articulated to their partner. Here, relational (that is, inter-subjective) dissatisfaction is understood as arising when people are unable to identify the source of their concerns (“[...] how the hell do you resolve something (.) with somebody else if you can't resolve it in your own head?”). This extract demonstrates the power and the overlap of the “versions of self” that are available within the discursive rules of the “*transactional obligation*”, and illustrates a discursive blurring of the practices of the monitor and articulator versions of self. This blurring exemplifies the fluid and dynamic qualities of these versions of self, as well as the complex, varied, and multiple ‘realities’ that language makes possible. Through the process of conducting and presenting this analysis, I have constructed these “versions of self” as a way of systematically structuring and simplifying the workings of discourse in my participants' talk. However, these versions of self do not ‘exist’ outside of the reifying capacity of the participants' talk and my subsequent analysis of this talk. Hence, the discursive ‘blurring’ of the versions of self arises because everyday sense-making and self-presentation through talk are complex, often contradictory processes.

Monitoring and reflection are constructed as empowered technologies-of-self and discursively function as the first practices required in rendering relationship dissatisfaction manageable. John constructs individuals as needing to reach a point of “self-realisation” (a position from which they can articulate-to-self) before they can

occupy a position of articulating-to-other and broach any problems with their partner. In John's extract, the satisfying mode of subjectification that is made possible through the "*Transaction obligation for needs fulfilment*" discourse functions through partners' taking-up the empowered "*articulator version of self*", and this is understood as firstly requiring the practices of the "*monitor version of self*": that is, for partners to have engaged in a process of relational evaluation. However, John also produces a discursively *dissatisfying* possibility: that whilst the position of monitor represents a space which allows for evaluation and reflection, it does not necessarily signify a guaranteed space from which to speak. Similar to the monitor position (see extracts 39 & 40), this potential difficulty in articulating is discursively explained across the interviews in gendered terms, which present men as "emotionally introverted" and women as able to "express themselves [more] easily or freely"; particularly when articulating relational concerns. This "*gendered articulator version of self*" is produced by Gaby:

Extract 45:

"I think that's where things get difficult a lot of the time because men *don't* express themselves as easily or freely as women generally (.) men harbour things a bit more, they don't *say* what's pissing them off so much (.) in a relationship (.) until it comes out, because it's normally, I find, it's the woman who kind of brings it up (.) who'll notice that things aren't going right in the relationship [...] women are much more active in relationships, definitely (.) men *do* tend to let things just kind of *fester* (.) They're much more (.) emotionally introverted (.) than women. Women will point things out and say "Hang on, this isn't working, let's talk about it, let's do something about it", and men don't generally."

(Gaby, pgs19-20, lines 937-945 & 953-962)

The extract above recycles the view that women engage in more monitoring than men, and that they *also* more readily speak about relational issues. The production of a "*gendered articulator version of self*" means that, as highlighted elsewhere (e.g. Duncombe and Marsden, 1993; Jackson & Scott, 2004), women are constructed as occupying a position of being "much more active" and doing a greater share of *satisfying* emotion work (e.g. Hochschild, 2003) within the relationship because the resolution of points of tension, or dissatisfaction, is presented as being more likely to be initiated by women. An upshot is that the "*gendered articulator version of self*" presents women and men with a different access to power. On one level, men are seemingly disempowered through their inability to speak. However, this 'innate' understanding also absolves them of responsibility for the "*transactional obligation*" compared to women who, as outlined by feminists (e.g. Thargaard, 1997), are

responsibilised for the relationship satisfaction through the practice of articulation. The “*gendered articulator version of self*” is also produced by William who speaks about the way in which his tendency to occupy the articulator position is probably “unusual” from a male perspective:

Extract 46:

“[...] I would be the sort of person that *is* more willing to talk about things like that (.) there’s been a number of issues in the relationship (.) it’s up and down all of the time (.) but I certainly have learnt that the best thing to do (.) is to actually discuss some of this (.) bring it up, even if it doesn’t necessarily feel comfortable because ultimately (.) it will get things out onto the table, but I think I’m more willing to do that and probably quite unusual from a male perspective”.
(William, pg18, lines 875-883)

In the extract above, as well as reproducing the “*gendered articulator version of self*”, William also re-produces the “*articulator version of self*” as difficult to occupy (see also John’s extract 48). However, rather than accounting for this in terms of not being able to articulate to self (as in John’s extract), William suggests that the difficulty arises by presenting the “*articulator version of self*” as (potentially) subjectively not very “comfortable” to occupy (see also Chapter 6, Section 6.1.6). This produces a discursive tension between the imperative to articulate (to ‘correctly’ do one’s transactional obligation) and the possibility of feeling discomfort in articulating something that one is not happy with. In the extract above, William deals with this tension by re-emphasising the importance of the practice of articulation by presenting it as the “best thing to do” because “it will get things out onto the table”. Implicit here, is a construction of silence as a relational threat that prevents issues being resolved and ultimately leading to growing resentments. Thus, once again, there is no place for silence when the production of the “*Transactional Obligation for mutual need fulfilment*” is underpinned by broader discourses on intimacy and operates through the governance of the confessional. In light of the participants’ constructing the practice of “*the articulator version of self*” as simultaneously an imperative, yet subjectively difficult to engage in, Anya attempts to deal with this tension by mobilising a *relational* construction in which individuals can be ushered into taking up the “*articulator version of self*” through their partners’ actions:

Extract 47:

“Again, if you don't want somebody to lie to you then you have to make sure that you (.) never behave in a way that can frighten them in telling you the truth you know? [...] So, when people lie to each other (.) might be, not just because you know, they wanna lie to you, but because you go ballistic whenever (.) they tell you the truth”. (Anya, pgs15-16, lines 742-750)

Within the relational rules of the “*transactional obligation for needs fulfilment*”, mutual fulfilment is understood as being facilitated by individuals taking up and sustaining the practices of the “*articulator version of self*”, and also by helping their partner to take-up this version of self too. In Anya's extract she produces a *relational* regime of self-governance, such that the responsibility for one's partner's “honest” articulation is understood as resting with oneself and one's own actions (“[...] you have to make sure that you (.) never behave in a way that can frighten them in telling the truth”). That is, through one's actions (i.e. not going “ballistic”) one is constructed as *empowering* their partner who is subsequently constructed as being permitted to occupy the “*articulator version of self*” instead of being silenced. Thus, in terms of the “*transactional obligation for needs fulfilment*”, responsibility for not silencing the articulator is understood as resting with both partners. Like Anya, Ruth also speaks of this facilitation, but her focus is on receiving this facilitation.

Extract 48:

Interviewer: “And can partners help each other to open up (.) to talk about what they're not happy with?”

Ruth: Yeah I think they can. I think if they are willing to take into account the other person's view, and sort of respect it and acknowledge it, and make an effort to understand it, then, yes. (.) Well there's always a reason behind everything, it's just whether you're listening to that reason and then, I suppose it's trying to negotiate, to compromise, and decide (.) what's the best way to get through that”.
(Ruth, pg14, lines 652-658)

Beyond Anya's point about partner's not going “ballistic”, Ruth produces a facilitation of the “*articulator version of self*” based on the recipient (of the articulation practice) demonstrating satisfying “respect” and “listening” to what the articulator has to say. This *relational* practice of making an “effort to understand” and “acknowledge” the articulator is understood as empowering for both self and other, and this enables Ruth to take up a “*satisfied articulator version of self*”. This version of self represents a subject who is satisfied not through their needs necessarily being fulfilled, but through their needs being *heard*. In this way, a “*relationship satisfaction of stages*” is produced, which compels partners to commit to the different versions of self that are constructed

as necessary for managing the process of transactional needs fulfilment. Through speaking their dissatisfaction, I present the “*articulator version of self*” as discursively inviting their partner to engage in the process of negotiation and compromise. Through their subsequent, reciprocal practice of “listening”, I argue that the partner signals their acceptance of this invitation and takes up the speaking rights and duties of, what I call, the “*diligent negotiator version of self*”. It is this inter-subjective practice that enables the subject to shift from the “*articulator version of self*” to the “*satisfied articulator version of self*”. Again, this *relational* practice (which is prescribed through the “*Transactional obligation for needs fulfilment*” discourse) illustrates a mode of subjectification in which others are constructed as being crucial in the practice of self-surveillance and governance, because subjects can be ushered into taking up, and investing in, different versions of the self through the discursive practices of others.

5.1.1.3 The “diligent negotiator version of self”

The “*diligent negotiator version of self*” is discursively characterised by a specific mode of listening and responding. This practice is presented as a ‘diligent negotiation’ which recycles dominant social scripts that construct an ethic of ‘relationships as / requiring work’ (Finn, 2012). Taking up the “*diligent negotiator version of self*” is constructed as warranting a mindful practice of concern and respect for one’s partner in order for partners to establish what they can give each other, and what compromises they can accept in terms of transactional need fulfilment. This mode of subjectification echoes mainstream accounts of interdependence theory (e.g. Rusbult *et al.*, 2004) and presents and compels a satisfying, needs-fulfilling *relational* practice which involves partners simultaneously mobilising the speaking rights and duties of both the “*articulator version of self*” and the “*diligent negotiator version of self*”. In the extract below Imogen’s narrative illustrates the overlap of these two versions of self:

Extract 49:

“[...] a satisfying, healthy relationship (.) there should be a dynamic that allows (.) you to say when you’re not happy about something (.) and know that the other person is gonna listen [...] and then there is a way of having a conversation that helps you to try and (.) come to a compromise or at least understand each other, and understand where you’re coming from because (.) you need to find ways of getting past that coz obviously no two people are always gonna agree on everything”.

(Imogen, 29-year-old, white British, barrister, in her relationship for 4 years and living with her fiancé. Pg6, lines 250-261)

Imogen highlights the ongoing discursive tension of the self-and-other dialectic inherent in productions of the “the transactional obligation for needs fulfilment” (a tension that

arises in both the participants' talk *and* in my analytical deconstructions of that talk). This tension between self and other's needs is dealt with via Imogen's construction of relational disagreement as normative ("obviously no two people are always gonna agree on everything"). However, in constructions of the practice of diligent negotiation there is an expectation on partners to give something to each other. This recycles discourses of 'reciprocal gifts' (Gilfoyle, Wilson & Brown, 1992) - partners are produced as having something that the other needs, and they negotiate the conditions under which they will give it to each other. This negotiation is achieved through talk, and so there is a discursive overlap between the practices of the "*articulator version of self*" and the "*diligent negotiator version of self*". However, the "*diligent negotiator version of self*" emphasises the practice of "listening" – that is, one of the key responsibilities of the diligent negotiator is presented as facilitating their partner's articulation because it enables a "[...] dynamic that allows (.) you to say when you're not happy about something (.) and know that the other person is gonna listen". Therefore, for Imogen, this practice signifies a relationship as not only "satisfying", but also "healthy". This is presented as a *relational*, circular, satisfying discursive process in which both partners cyclically occupy the articulator and diligent negotiator versions of self. The transactional obligation of need fulfilment warrants that partners flip between the two until a satisfying "compromise" is reached. In this way, the two positions represent a satisfying discursive dialectic, and relationship satisfaction is represented as the upshot of partners continually shifting between both versions of self and, as a consequence, coming to an agreed compromise. The practice of compromise represents a way in which the normative tension of self-and-other's needs is rendered manageable. Ruth illustrates the significance of the practice of "compromise" as a discursive signifier for relationship satisfaction:

Extract 50:

Interviewer: "(.) as you said earlier, about compromise.

Ruth: Yeah, making the effort to do it. I think even if it doesn't work out the way you wanted it to (.) if the effort has been made and the conversations being there, and you feel like you've been listened to then, you'd be happier about compromising about certain things than if that person said "Well that's what I'm doing, sod you" kind of thing.

Interviewer: It's almost your partner's (.) *willingness* to compromise (.) makes you more willing to even if you're the one who ends up *doing* the compromise.

Ruth: Definitely, yeah, yeah. I think it applies all the way through with everything I think. (.) it's that whole kind of attention thing, it's just willingness to (.) listen or to,

make the effort to do things (.) if you can't reach a compromise or (.) one person is a definite "no", not just a "maybe" I think that can be dissatisfying".

(Ruth, pg14, lines 660-692)

In Ruth's extract, satisfying compromise is understood as functioning as a *joint* decision – and represents a discursive co-production by self-&-other; constructed as being experienced as a form of mutual subjectivity that maintains an equality of power across the self-&-other dialectic. Through the practice of respectful listening and "*willingness*" to compromise, the "*diligent negotiator version of self*" is understood as facilitating their partner (the articulator) to also occupy the diligent negotiator version of self and potentially do the compromising. So that "even if it doesn't work out the way you wanted it to (.) if the effort has been made and the conversations being there, and you feel like you've been listened to then, you'd be happier about compromising." In contrast, dissatisfying relating is represented via the absence of the diligent negotiator, and the refusal, by one partner, to listen to the other's articulation ("[...] if you can't reach a compromise or (.) one person is a definite "no", not just a "maybe" I think that can be dissatisfying"). This represents a difference of power, such that the articulator is disempowered and silenced through their partner's inconsiderate rejection ("sod you") of their right to be heard. Thus, occupying the "*diligent negotiator version of self*" and permitting one's partner to talk and be heard, is constructed as critical for the satisfying compromise. On the face of it, this mode of subjectification presents a fairer, more egalitarian set of discursive practices. However, this dominant construction of 'reciprocity' (Braun, Gavey & McPhillips, 2003) still 'adds to the rules' of what it means to be a satisfied subject, and how this 'should' be achieved. That is, this discursive framework still operates through a productive power of self-surveillance and self governance. This is illustrated, for example, by William who constructs satisfying compromise as a practice that requires knowledge of one's partner:

Extract 51:

"[...] having an understanding of how that other person is going to feel about (.) things that you bring (.) it's about looking at how that's gonna feel for that person (.) from their perspective, and yeah (.) being prepared to resolve it (.) I think that's the other thing as well, preparedness is quite (.) well I suppose it's the same point again (.) if you want it to work (.) then you've got to be willing to make (.) those sorts of (.) decisions about (.) things jointly".

(William, pg18, lines 858-866)

In the satisfying compromise, both the "*articulator*" and "*diligent negotiator versions of self*" are represented as considering the impact of their actions on their partner. In

this way, the “*transactional obligation for needs fulfilment*” discourse produces an *empathising*, monitoring, self-governance, which discursively compels partners to reflect on their actions and consider how these might impact on their partner in order to jointly-produce a satisfying compromise. Moreover, the power of the transactional obligation is directed towards the self, and functions through partners policing their own behaviour (i.e. being self-responsible) in order to facilitate a satisfying compromise (“[...] it’s about looking at how that’s gonna feel for that person (.) from their perspective, and yeah (.) being prepared to resolve it”). However, William also talks about the way in which responsibility for the compromise could be understood as resting with one’s partner:

Extract 52:

“[...] I think compromise *is* quite an important thing (.) if you’re with the right person, then you are willing to make a lot of compromises and a lot of sacrifices in terms of your own selfish ends (.) for the greater good of (.) the other person. [...] and that, to a certain extent (.) there’s something *about* that person to *make* me want to compromise for them (.) when maybe (.) I certainly wouldn’t be prepared to make that compromise for (.) somebody else”.

(William, pgs4-5, lines 195-213)

The transactional obligation involved in satisfying need fulfilment is very apparent here; William understands himself as being prepared to negotiate or compromise, but on the condition that his partner can “*make* [him] want to compromise for them”. Therefore, he can be understood as resisting the responsibility of the “*diligent negotiator version of self*” to facilitate compromise by reframing this ‘duty’ in terms of his personal “willingness” to compromise, and this “willingness” functions as the discursive signifier to him that he is with “the right person” because “if you’re with the right person, then you are willing to make a lot of compromises”. In this way, William draws on broader romantic scripts which produce heightened expectations about what partners ‘should’ provide each other, and he constructs the responsibility for his own compromise as being located in the actions of his partner. This enables a space in which he can ‘justifiably’ refuse to compromise based on his partner’s failure to make him “want to” (“[...] there’s something *about* that person to *make* me want to compromise for them (.) when maybe (.) I certainly wouldn’t be prepared to make that compromise for (.) somebody else”). Thus, the “*diligent negotiator version of self*” is presented as being contingent not only on a governance-of-empathising focused on self, but also a governance-of-expectations focused on other. In the event of partners not meeting these

expectations, or failing to compromise, the “*dissatisfied blamer version of self*” is made available.

5.1.1.4 The “dissatisfied blamer version of self”

When participants mobilise the “*Transactional obligation for needs fulfilment*” discourse, a discursive space is enabled in which partners’ perceived failure of need fulfilment makes available, what I call, the “*blamer version of self*”. This version of self is constructed as a dissatisfied, angry, and disappointed self who blames their partner for not meeting their ‘duty’ as a ‘needs fulfilling partner’. As William outlines in the following extract, the “*blamer version of self*” can be understood as feeling “let down” by other.

Extract 53:

“[...] there might be times when you feel really disappointed about something that that person’s done or said, or hasn’t done (.) I don’t know, their choice of (.) whatever, you know, you can feel really quite let *down* by that person”.

(William, pg19, lines 935-939)

Constructed in this way, the “*dissatisfied blamer version of self*” is a subject of discursive power who focuses on ‘other’ (not on ‘self’), and operates through the practice of accusing the other of not meeting the relational terms of the transactional obligation. Unlike the practice of articulation, which functions as a discursive invite, blaming is not an invitation to one’s partner to take-up a version of self, but a means of *positioning* them through a process of objectification. Understood in this way, I argue that the practice of blaming mirrors what Buber (2008) referred to, as an ‘I-it’ mode of relating: in terms of processes of subjectification, the “*dissatisfied blamer version of self*” represents a ‘self’ who objectifies their partner and has clear expectations of what the partner ‘should’ do. The “*dissatisfied blamer version of self*” is constructed as knowing and able to articulate (at least to themselves) which of their needs or expectations have not been met, and they construct the other as being at fault (through failing to uphold their side of the transactional obligation). In response to being blamed, respondents are presented as mobilising different speaking rights and duties. They can either accept the blame, or challenge it and counter-blame their partner through constructing them as being unfair. This shifting, dynamic quality of the self-&-other dialectic in the “*dissatisfied blamer version of self*” is evident in the following extract. Here, David reproduces the interactions that took place between him and his

partner following his unintentional failure to attend the birthday of his girlfriend's sister:

Extract 54:

"I knew (.) it wouldn't be seen as a mistake [...] so I was just worried about her reaction (.) I tried calling her, obviously she didn't answer, and then she sent me texts (.) you have these, sort of, silly messages (.) "I can't believe you did this David, I just don't know what to do". (.) I wanted to open some sort of dialogue, and she wanted to tell me that I'd fucked up basically. (.) we'd had this period of every few weeks, some minor thing turning into a major thing (.) and then it's all talk (.) should we be together, what should we do, how we gonna fix this? And it's just very (.) it's *laborious* in some ways, and there's a part of me that just sort of thinks (.) let's just get over it, let's just not bother going on about it. It's just (.) what it is. [...] I have been difficult in some ways, and I understood that I needed to (.) make a bit more effort [...] so yeah, there are points when I realised that the expectations are fair enough, and I have changed my behaviour [...] because I see them as pretty fair, pretty normal expectations [...] you know, if she was a demanding girlfriend then I would just say no, but she's not at all, I have to give her credit, she's lovely, and she makes a lot of effort".

(David, 27-year-old, mixed race British, student, in his relationship for three years and living with friends. Pgs24-26, lines 692-720)

In this extract David constructs himself as taking up a "*blamed version of self*" and produces his partner as occupying the "*dissatisfied blamer version of self*". Through this construction his partner is understood, and discursively enabled, to be in control of their interactions and, not only position David as unreasonable, but also effectively silence him through refusing to acknowledge his articulation ("I tried calling her, obviously she didn't answer, and then she sent me texts [...] 'I can't believe you did this David [...]' (.) I wanted to open some sort of dialogue, and she wanted to tell me that I'd fucked up basically"). His partner occupies the "*dissatisfied blamer version of self*" as a prelude to engaging in the process of negotiation, but this mode of subjectification is constructed as being on her own terms and when she is ready. As a defensive manoeuvre David takes up the speaking rights of the "*dissatisfied blamer version of self*" and questions the legitimacy of his partner's actions by presenting her reaction as disproportionate and potentially unfair ("[...] we'd had this period of every few weeks, some minor thing turning into a major thing [...] And it's just very (.) it's *laborious* in some ways, and there's a part of me that just sort of thinks (.) let's just get over it, let's just not bother going on about it.") Presented in this way, David attempts to reclaim the discursive power of the blamer position by producing a dissatisfaction based on a formulation of his partner being unreasonable. In effect, through his account he makes available and takes up a "*dissatisfied unfairly blamed version of self*". He attempts to shift the terms of the transactional obligation by presenting his partner's blame as, firstly, a refusal to engage in the practice of the diligent negotiation (e.g. "obviously she

didn't answer") and, secondly, as an excessive mobilisation of the "*articulator version of self*" (e.g. "some minor thing turning into a major thing"). This paradoxical representation simultaneously constructs his partner as a subject who does not talk enough *and* who talks too much. In this sense, (and similar to the other 'versions of self' already discussed) the *relational* quality of the "dissatisfied blamer version of self" is laid bare – not only in terms of the intersubjective process of one partner blaming the other, but also because the speaking rights and duties of the "*dissatisfied blamer self*" need to be acknowledged by the partner being blamed in order for a satisfying resolution to be achieved. This becomes evident later on in David's talk when he constructs himself as having "been difficult" and having needed to change. He takes on the speaking duties of self-blaming-self and, accordingly, presents a re-evaluation of his partner's expectations as "fair" and not overly "demanding". However, at the same time David also mobilises an account in which the process of relational work (through articulation and negotiation) can be "laborious", and he attempts to resist these practices. David's narrative presents a desire to engage in, what I call, an 'effortless negotiation' whereby he and his partner can "just get over" transgressions of the transactional obligation without needing to "bother going on about it". Produced in this way, the satisfying "*transactional obligation for needs fulfilment*" is represented, not in terms of the practices and governance of the intimate confessional, but in light of broader discourses of romantic idealism which produce relationships as sites of effortless fulfilment. This is the focus of the following section.

5.1.2 Transactional obligation Part 2: Satisfying Romantic Idealism

In addition to drawing on broader discourses of 'disclosing intimacy' and notions of 'relationships as requiring work', there are times when participants produce the economic construction of the "*Transactional obligation for needs fulfilment*" in light of discourses of romance. This account reflects previous discursive work (e.g. Burns, 2000; Duncombe & Marsden, 1995) and, in this way, respondents present "*the transactional obligation of need fulfilment*" as a spontaneous, effortless process in which satisfying partners are understood as automatically knowing how to react to each other's needs. This produces an alternative process of subjectification because partners are constructed as being free from the responsibility of relational work, and so the practices of the "*articulator version of self*" and the "*diligent negotiator version of self*" are absent from this discursive framework. In addition, the practices of the

“*monitor version of self*” and the “*blamer version of self*” shift, such that they are compelled to assess their relationship in light of romantic ideals instead of pragmatic cost-benefit analyses, or egalitarian notions of working towards compromise. I argue that this discursive framework makes available, what I dub, the “*Inevitably dissatisfied monitor version of self*”.

5.1.2.1 The “inevitably dissatisfied monitor version of self”

This version of self is illustrated by Clare who presents herself as frequently engaging in the practice of monitoring by focussing outside of her relational-dyad, and constructing how satisfied she is in light of other relationships that she views and understands in idealised terms.

Extract 55:

“[...] it’s how (.) *solid* they seem, that’s what I worry about, so I’ll see something and I’ll think [Gasps] “Oh that’s what makes it perfect”, you know, “he’s never gonna leave her because of (.) something” (.) it might be an act [...] it might be something that they’ve done, he’s done for her, or she’s done for him, that makes me think that they’re more stable, or (.) I *should* be doing something like that (.) the envy is more about (.) worrying about (.) the insecurity of my relationship [...]”
(Clare, pg11, lines 506-518)

When drawing on broader discourses of romantic idealism the “*monitor version of self*” is presented as being compelled to evaluate their own, and their partner’s relational performance, in unfavourable terms. In terms of subjectivity, Clare understands herself as a “*monitor version of self*” who is anxious and envious because, through her preoccupied monitoring of an idealised other she inevitably understands her own relationship as lacking. I present Clare as taking-up the disempowered subjectivity of the “*inevitably dissatisfied monitor version of self*” through her recycling of ‘the spectre of the ideal’ and her formulation of other couples’ modes of relating as “perfect”. Resistance to this idealised discourse is produced across the texts and respondents present monitoring as an inevitably dissatisfying practice if governed by romantic ideals. For example, Martin talks of how he and his partner came through a ‘difficult’ time in their relationship which he presents as being exacerbated by him focusing on perceived ‘better’ alternatives that might have been available.

Extract 56:

“Eventually we had, like, a big talk (.) and that (.) called me back from the edge, and made me realise what I had, and to try and stop comparing (.) something *real* with something that’s (.) *not* real. Because you can’t go through your whole life comparing”.
(Martin: a 36-year-old, white British, project manager, in his relationship for eight years, and living with his partner. Pgs13-14, lines 644-650).

In light of the spectre of the ideal, Martin's (and Clare's) extracts illustrate the way in which the "*Inevitably dissatisfied monitor version of self*" is constructed as promoting and sustaining subjective dissatisfaction. As a way of resisting this disempowered subjectivity, Martin mobilises broader discourses of 'disclosing intimacy' and 'relationships as requiring work' by constructing himself as being "[...] called back from the edge" and "made [to] realise what [he] had" through the *relational* practice of having the "big talk" with his girlfriend. He rejects constructions of perceived ideals by stating that "[...] you can't go through your whole life comparing". Whilst this rejection of "comparing" presents a potentially more empowered subjectivity, I argue that the practice of "comparing" is inherent to productions of the "*monitor version of self*". This is because I present monitoring as *always* being in light of some relational rules or expectations, and I argue that these will always be informed by broader social scripts which constitute the satisfied subject, and the practices that 'make them satisfied' (Unger & Crawford, 1996; Finn, 2012). In the following extract, Lisa also produces a resistance of the "*inevitably dissatisfied monitor version of self*" by mobilising a pragmatic negation of the existence of ideals. However, its discursive power continues to operate through her simultaneous, and ongoing, reification of "the one" and her production of subjectively desiring to experience the "perfect" relationship:

Extract 57:

Lisa: "[...] Other expectations (.) movies (.) "the *one*", everybody's looking for "the one". It should all be perfect, their best friend (.) best lover (.) best boyfriend, romantic (.) listening (.) able to meet *all* my needs.

Interviewer: Does such a person exist?

Lisa: *No*. I don't think they do *but* that doesn't stop me from thinking "I would really like that".

Interviewer: [...] do (.) those views and images shape the way you perceive your own relationship, or the way you feel about your own relationship?

Lisa: I have it in, like, two hands. One hand is (.) you can have (.) *almost* what the movies will tell that you can have (.) and in the other hand saying "That's just ridiculous" [...]

Interviewer: So then can it ever be achieved, that sort of ideal?

Lisa: [...] I don't think it can be achieved, but [...] I would like to think it *can* be achieved but (.) there will always be in the back of my mind I think, in any relationship [...] this isn't *that* perfect relationship (.) and therefore (.) is it the *right* relationship? (.) But at the same time I know that (.) it's not *right* to have that.

(Lisa, pgs5-6, lines 245-273)

The heightened expectations of modern coupledness (e.g. Gillies, 2003; Hawkes, 1996; Weeks, 2007) are recycled by Lisa when she states "It should all be perfect, their best

friend (.) best lover (.) best boyfriend, romantic (.) listening (.) able to meet *all* my needs". The tension between this idealised discourse and the notion of 'relationships as requiring work' is also evident in her narrative. Lisa presents herself as resisting the romantic ideal as "ridiculous" and claims that she knows "it's not right" to recycle romantic discourse. Yet she can be understood as simultaneously engaging in the practice of the "*Inevitably dissatisfied monitor version of self*" because whilst she constructs herself as resisting ideals, she understands herself as still thinking "I would really like that". In this way, she constructs doubt in the sense "there will always be in the back of my mind, in any relationship [...] this isn't *that* perfect relationship". This functions as an ongoing form of self-surveillance informed by the idealised romantic discourse of "the one". In effect, her relationship is continually monitored and evaluated as not fulfilling when compared with culturally taken-for-granted romanticised norms. In this situation, Lisa represents a subject who is locked into monitoring the self vis-à-vis dominant romantic discourses, and this disciplinary power compels her to always question whether her relationship is the "right one" because it is not "perfect". This mirrors well documented discursive work on the disappointment of romantic objectification (e.g. Segal, 1990). In light of the romantic authority, relationship satisfaction represents an impossible goal because there is potentially always something 'better out there' and therefore the "*Inevitably dissatisfied monitor version of self*" is sustained and taken-up by Lisa. Again, this illustrates the multiplicity and fluidity of the different modes of subjectification that are enabled through the contradictory technologies-of-the-self that are prescribed by the different discourses that inform the "*Transactional Obligation for Needs Fulfilment*". Lisa's co-production of pragmatic and idealised satisfactions produces a conflicted relationship satisfaction and a conflicted subject. On the whole, resistance to this idealised authority is produced in the participants' texts, but its discursive power, based on the alluring promise of effortless satisfaction and happiness, means that the spectre of the satisfying ideal is presented as frequently 'trumping' the practices of disclosing intimacy, and this manifests in the production of, what I call, the "effortless negotiator version of self".

5.1.2.2 The 'effortless negotiator' version of self

When this version of self is produced in the participants' narratives, they make available a subject who expects their partner to simply know what they need, and the negotiation of mutual need fulfilment is understood as a process that should not require relational

work via talking, listening and compromise. This is in stark contrast to mainstream psychological and therapeutic accounts which privilege and emphasise the notion of 'relationship satisfaction as work' (e.g. Lebow *et al.*, 2012; Markman & Rhoades, 2012; Sprenkle, 2012). The negotiation is constructed as being implicit and not requiring an inter-subjective transactional dialogue. This is illustrated by Lisa in the following extract:

Extract 58:

"[...] a satisfying relationship *does* take a bit of effort to (.) just the *boring* things of being mindful of what annoys somebody else and (.) what that other person (.) likes doing (.) Not that you think about it in any conscious standards, just being aware of what that other person's needs are and, to (.) thinking about (.) *that*, when you're doing whatever it is. But *without* having, all of that being done without having to make the effort to do any of it. [...] me and [my boyfriend] know each other, we love each other, and now (.) this is when I expect (.) us to be able to (.) deal with everything, and he should be listening to me, and he should be able to (.) understand where I'm coming from, and potentially *know* what I'm thinking without me having to tell him".

(Lisa, pg7, Lines 321-327)

Lisa acknowledges the "*diligent negotiator version of self*" and presents relationship satisfaction as an "effortful" process, but she simultaneously resists it as a "boring" practice and takes-up the subjectivity of the "*effortless negotiator version of self*" who can be understood as expecting their partner to know and understand them without the "*effortless negotiator*" needing to articulate their needs to their partner ("[...] he should be able to (.) understand where I'm coming from, and potentially *know* what I'm thinking without me having to tell him"). This is a complex construction whereby the "*effortless negotiator*" represents a subject who is compelled by an ethic of silenced, high expectations which, whilst shifting the responsibility of satisfaction to their partner, simultaneously disempowers their partner by expecting them to be psychic and refusing them the speaking rights and duties of the "*satisfied articulator*" and "*diligent negotiator*" versions of self. In this way, the "*effortless negotiation*" represents a *relational* practice - of which only *one* partner is aware. In the following extract, David constructs this practice of silent, effortless negotiation as preferable to the effortful kind:

Extract 59:

David: "[...] obstacles are not meeting expectations mainly [...] but I don't think [that] *needs* to be an obstacle (.) if you're (.) I don't know, if you have this unspoken understanding

Interviewer: So if you're able to negotiate these

David: if you're able to negotiate that's good, but, like I said, one better than that is not even having to get to where you have to, where you just *know* (.) like when someone's being grumpy (.) you give them some space, just knowing how to respond.

Interviewer: so you wouldn't see that necessarily as a form of negotiation?

David: No, no, a negotiation is literally talking through it. [...] I still stick with the, erm, overly romantic ideal (.) something (.) where it just works. Where she understands me, and I understand her, where if I'm in a bad mood she can (.) change my mood or she knows how to react to me. So she could (.) well, either make me happy or give me space, just to, you know, an unspoken understanding".

(David, pgs38-39, lines 1130-1149)

David's construction of the effortless negotiation mirrors the romantic ideal; if partners can negotiate then David states "that's good", but not having to negotiate is privileged as "one better". From this position the "*effortless negotiator version of self*" tells their partner effortlessly and implicitly what they want from them, and they expect their partner to do the same. Unlike the "*Awakened Relating Subject*" (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4.1) the "*effortless negotiator version of self*" constructs themselves as absolved of responsibility for their own needs fulfilment and positions their partner as responsible. David's talk clearly illustrates the way in which conflicting versions of self are made available when the transactional obligation is produced in the light of competing discursive authorities. Satisfying mutual need fulfilment is constructed as coming about either by the *effort* of the confessional, or the *effortless* romantic ideal. As David states, "[...] a negotiation is literally talking through it. [...] I still stick with the, erm, overly romantic ideal (.) something (.) where it just works. Where she understands me, and I understand her [...] you know, an unspoken understanding". In terms of constructing relationship satisfaction, the former presents the satisfying transactional obligation as an artefact of talk whilst the latter renders talk problematic as a signifier that the relationship is not "the one". Thus, the relational rules of the transactional obligation shift in light of these two different authorities, and this once again illustrates the multiple, contradictory, and fluid nature of everyday sense-making through language. The overarching rule of the transactional obligation remains (that is, 'you meet my needs and I meet yours'), but the discursive practices by which this produces relationship satisfaction and satisfied subjects changes.

In summary, I argue that when the "*Transactional Obligation for needs fulfilment*" discourse is mobilised, different modes of subjectification are made available which produce the satisfied subject either through an effortful process governed by the intimate confessional, or through an effortless process of implicit understanding governed by the romantic ideal. Productions of partner transgressions (by self or other) make available a space for blame which, respectively, is constructed as signifying that

one or both partners are not putting in the effort that they should, or that the relationship (or partner) is not “the one”.

These positions of expectations and blame are replaced by unconditional trust in the second dominant construction of relationship satisfaction produced by lay people: “*Relationship satisfaction as heroic, leap-of-faith relating*”.

5.2. “Relationship Satisfaction as heroic, leap-of-faith relating”

In the second dominant construction produced in the interviews with lay people, relationships are understood as sites of security and unconditional acceptance that facilitate the psychological wellbeing and growth of both partners. Whilst the “*transactional obligation*” is presented as operating through various dominant discourses (including ‘economic utilitarianism’, ‘relationships as requiring work’ and ‘romantic idealism’), the “*heroic, leap-of-faith*” construction presents relationship satisfaction in terms of mainstream discourses on secure attachment (e.g. Hazan & Shaver, 2004), and humanistic notions of an ontologically innate self, constructed as achieving its ‘true potential’ through a process of self-actualisation (e.g. Prager & Roberts, 2004). In contrast to the “*transactional obligation*”, the discourse of “*Relationship Satisfaction as heroic-leap of faith relating*” operates through the production of partners’ who focus on each other’s wellbeing. The satisfied subject is presented as the product of a particular relational practice, characterised by, what I dub, partners’ mutual ‘heroic’ support, knowledge and acceptance of each other. The upshot of this particular construction of a satisfying mode of relating is that individuals are understood as being able to take a ‘leap of faith’ – and experience absolute trust in their partner to offer unconditional support and acceptance; a satisfying practice that echoes mainstream research which privileges trust (e.g. Charania & Ickes, 2007). In contrast, relationship dissatisfaction is rendered problematic as a state in which partners feel unsupported, or feel excessive expectations placed upon them to conform to certain prescriptive norms. Within this discursive explanation, partners are constructed as satisfyingly *knowable*, and two satisfied dialectical versions of self are made available – the “*Leap of faith version of self*” and the “*Heroic version of self*”. I present relationship satisfaction as the upshot of partners taking-up both versions of self, and these are illustrated in the following sections.

5.2.1 The “Leap of Faith version of self”

In this construction, the defining *satisfying* practice of the “*Leap of faith version of self*” is understood as *trusting* one's partner to offer support and to be utterly dependable – that is, to engage in a mode of subjectification that constructs one's partner as ‘heroic’.

This is put forward by Gaby:

Extract 60:

“First thing, the most important thing for *me* is trust. Above *absolutely* everything. I *could not* be in a relationship where there wasn't trust, I'd just find it (.) you know, impossible [...] there's trust obviously in the sense of (.) not being unfaithful. [...] but there's also the trust (.) that (.) the other person is (.) is always gonna look out for *you*, and do the for you, and that they'll, always be there to support you. [...] I always know whatever goes wrong in life, I always feel, there's this (.) deep sense of security in me that Pete will always *try* to make it right. Now he might not be able to do that necessarily, but (.) I've got that trust in him that he will (.) try and make it right. [...] I think it's important that I can trust that he would always do his very best (.) to make it right, and hopefully I'm the same, he feels the same way about me. [...] So, it's a real deep sense of security, and kind of reassurance (.) that helps you get by (.) all the crap, when there is crap”.

(Gaby, pgs5-6, lines 232-258)

Gaby's extract illustrates a production of the “Heroic, Leap-of-faith” as a dialectical, relational practice. An upshot of this discourse is that, in order for one partner to be constructed as taking up the “*Leap of Faith version of self*”, the other partner must be constructed as mobilising the “*Heroic version of self*”. That is, each version of self can only be *meaningfully* produced in light of the other. So Gaby is able to understand herself as a satisfied “*Leap of Faith*” subject because of her construction of her partner Pete as being a dependable, satisfying “*Heroic*” subject (“I always know whatever goes wrong in life, I always feel, there's this (.) deep sense of security in me that Pete will always *try* to make it right”). In this way, the “*Leap of Faith version of self*” mobilises broader discourses on secure attachment, and the notion of the intimate relationship as a safe haven (e.g. stemming back to Hazan & Shaver, 1987) in times of trouble or difficulty. Whilst there is a sense of heightened expectations in Gaby's narrative – in terms of her production of absolute trust in her partner – she does not recycle romantic discourse. The “*Leap of Faith*” self can be seen as discursively pragmatic insofar as Gaby acknowledges that her partner might not “necessarily” be able to make things “right”. Instead, she presents herself as a subject who is compelled to express complete trust in her partner's *attempts* to “always [...] make it right”. As a consequence, the “*Leap of Faith version of self*” sustains, and is sustained by, attachment discourses of relationship satisfaction as a “reassuring” site of support, security and dependence (e.g.

Brock & Lawrence, 2008; Kane *et al.*, 2007); and these operate through a prescriptive, psychologised governance in which the satisfied subject has a dual moral responsibility to provide and receive 'correct' affection and emotional support (Finn, 2012). However, there is also resistance to the "Leap of Faith" self in the talk of some respondents, and this discursively manifests through the speakers' production of doubt. Such doubt is illustrated by Clare and Lisa:

Extract 61:

"[...] that's what the tragedy issue is (.) it's very hard to be strong then isn't it? Who gets to be strong? (.) Do you know what I mean? If one person is making compromises in their life, then the other person has to be strong, so like, when we move he has to be strong (.) if I have a problem, he has to be the one in charge (.) equally (.) if something else came along and he had to make a big compromise *I* would have to be strong, but when something like that hits, when you're both weak, that's what I worry about (.) who gets to be strong?"

(Clare, pg16, lines 769-777)

Extract 62:

"[...] we actually don't have any (.) worries in our relationship, we don't have (.) money, or children, or job worries, or (.) any family issues. Haven't really been (.) *challenged* by anything (.) that really effects how we might go about (.) our relationship. (.) What if we haven't been challenged enough and therefore (.) our relationship hasn't (.) isn't the *right* one because we don't know (.) if we can deal with what (.) major challenges or (.) illness, or whatever?"

(Lisa, pg13, lines 600-606)

In Clare's talk, her production of doubt manifests as discursive uncertainty about whether or not she and/or her partner could take up the "*Heroic version of self*" in the face of a significant challenge ("[...] that's what the tragedy issue is (.) it's very hard to be strong then isn't it? Who gets to be strong?"). Absent from Clare's talk is a construction of unfailing trust that is the key discursive practice for the "*Leap of Faith version of self*", and therefore she is unable to fully take up the speaking rights and duties of that subject. Similarly, Lisa expresses doubt about her relationship because she presents her relationship as not having been sufficiently "challenged" ("What if [...] our relationship hasn't (.) isn't the *right* one because we don't know (.) if we can deal with what (.) major challenges or (.) illness, or whatever?"). In the above extracts both speakers construct themselves as engaging in practices of doubt, and represent subjects who are not at ease because they question the 'certainty' of the "*Heroic version of self*", or demand proof of its existence. In this way they enable, what I call, a "*Crisis of Faith version of self*" who is unable to unproblematically *do* unfaltering trust. When occupying the "*Leap-of-faith version of self*" the above conversation and doubt do not

'exist', and the speaker is empowered through their production of total trust in their "heroic" partner. Beyond the notion of support, the other characteristic that is presented as pivotal for the "Leap of Faith version of self" is that the subject constructs themselves as experiencing unconditional acceptance from their "heroic" partner. Anya describes this process:

Extract 63:

"You know that the person accepts you (.) regardless. I said, you know (.) that your views are similar, but, again, with my partner (.) he might not agree with something I do, or, you know, there's a few things I've done and, he wouldn't, you know, it's not the best thing I've done, but yet he's gonna actually (.) he's gonna go *so far* to (.) make me feel better (.) about it, and still (.) support me in it, even though he might not really agree with what's been done (.) what's been said etc. but erm (.) and hopefully you have the other way around".

(Anya, pg3, lines 102-110)

When occupying the "Leap of Faith version of self" Anya can be understood as producing a relationship satisfaction that pivots around her partner's acceptance of her views and actions; even when he is presented as not necessarily agreeing with her. This account mirrors mainstream accounts on 'supportive personalities' (e.g. Ickes, 1997; Geoff, Fletcher & Lange, 1997) and positions her 'heroic partner' as being able to provide inter-subjective understanding, validation and caring, in a relationally satisfying way. Across the respondents' accounts, this practice of satisfying acceptance between partners draws on humanistic discourses and is constructed as an acknowledgement and acceptance of each other's 'true self'. This satisfying mode of subjectification is illustrated by Gaby:

Extract 64:

"I think it's important that you (.) *can* be [yourself], and if you *can't* be (.) then (.) you're not in the right relationship basically, because that's quite *key* to me. That you can show *all* facets of yourself (.) without, fear of judgement or (.) feeling uncomfortable (.) about that".

(Gaby, pg1, lines 46-50)

In this way, by viewing Gaby as engaging in the practices of the "Leap of Faith version of self", she can be understood as producing an unhidden, *uncensored* relationship satisfaction of being known and completely accepted by her partner. This construction is in stark contrast to the "transactional obligation" and the "Monitor version of self". The "Leap of Faith version of self" represents a subjectivity that does not feel monitored or the pressure of expectations being placed upon it, and therefore they are

produced as an empowered self “without fear of judgement”. The notion of the “*transactional obligation*” and economic discourses about what one is ‘*rightfully owed*’ within their relationship are absent; replaced by an unconditional acceptance. This acceptance inherent in the heroic, leap-of-faith dialect represents a relational practice that responsabilises both partners by mobilising humanist discourses which construct satisfaction in terms of transcendence and the realisation of partners’ innate human potential. As Freddie and William claimed:

Extract 65:

“[...] I think you’ve got to be able to be yourself (.) hopefully (.) become, it sounds a bit clichéd but (.) *better* with that person than you are on your own. So that comes back to what we were saying earlier on (.) about being a lot more confident in yourself, to go and do something you wouldn’t do if you were on your own”.

(Freddie, 38-year-old, white British, office worker, in his relationship for three years, and not living with his partner. Pg3, lines 132-135)

Extract 66:

“I think the first thing I said was (.) that in a relationship it’s really important to be yourself (.) so never to be *false* with that person, because the moment (.) you start to do that, which is how I (.) reflect back and think that’s how I was in that situation (.) is the moment that you’re never *truly* gonna be happy because you can’t really (.) self-actualise when you’re (.) playing the part of someone else”.

(William, pgs8-9, lines 370-399)

Produced in this way, the satisfying relationship discursively functions as the site in which the “*Leap of Faith version of self*” can be constructed as their true self, and capable of becoming “better” because they can “self-actualise”. In this way, the “*Leap of Faith version of self*” represents a subjectivity empowered and socially valued for its ‘potential’, and this further privileges and warrants the practices that sustain and underpin the “*Heroic-Leap of Faith*” mode of subjectification. However, this is an asocial construction in which broader social prescriptions and injunctions constituting relationship satisfaction are absent. Therefore, the satisfied subject is once again produced vis-a-vis intersubjective practices. In William’s extract the “*Leap of Faith version of self*” is presented as being compelled to open themselves to the other, and never censor their true self, or be “false”. In this way (and similar to ‘the monitor’ and ‘the articulator’ versions of self), the Leap of Faith self can be understood as discursively governed by the intimate confessional (e.g. Cherline, 2004; Giddens, 1992). However, the humanistic authority to self-actualise in the “*Leap of Faith version of self*” means that the satisfying practice of being ‘known’ relocates the economic practices of

the monitor and the articulator into wider, metaphysical discourses on life-purpose and happiness, and these discourses also underpin the "*Heroic version of self*".

5.2.2 The "Heroic version of self"

As already suggested, the "Leap of Faith version of self" is enabled by a satisfying mode of subjectification which is presented as functioning through the practices of unconditional support and acceptance. I argue that this 'acceptance' is enabled through partners being constructed as taking up the "*Heroic version of self*". This represents a 'self' who is engaged in an accepting practice of refusing to place excessive expectations on their partner. Gaby produces this practice when she talks about the actions of her partner Pete:

Extract 67:

"In lots of relationships there *are* expectations of how you're *supposed* to be, but I don't feel that in my relationship (.) I probably did at the beginning, it's hard to remember really, but I think *now*, I don't feel that Pete has any (.) he doesn't put that kind of pressure on me to be oh, you know (.) as a girlfriend, partner, you need to be doing this, or you need to behave this way (.) I don't feel that from him. (.) I feel *less* expectations from Pete than I do from anybody else in my life I think. He's very much (.) *accepting* of (.) how I am. You know, good, bad, whatever".
(Gaby, pg3, lines 120-130)

When understood as occupying the "*Heroic version of self*", Pete is constructed by Gaby as not placing expectations on her and therefore she presents herself as not experiencing the "pressure" of normative prescriptions about how partners *should* be within the context of their relationship ("[...] he doesn't put that kind of pressure on me to be oh, you know (.) as a girlfriend, partner, you need to be doing this, or you need to behave this way (.) I don't feel that from him"). In this way, I argue that the "*Heroic*" partner's talk can be viewed as being free of 'inter-subjective demands', and this signifies their total acceptance of their partner. In addition, the "*Heroic version of self*" can be understood as engaging in a satisfying practice of unconditional support. Again, Gaby produces this support in her account:

Extract 68:

"I suppose it's just about getting confidence (.) because (.) if I feel (.) lacking in confidence for something, going for an interview or whatever (.) I can be quite (.) hard on myself and think "I'll never – oh I won't bother going to that. I'll never get that", you know? (.) whereas with Pete it's always been great because he's *always* been able to say to me "Come on, why can't you do it? You can do it!", and build my confidence and just give me that little bit of a (.) you know I *feel* him behind me (.) when I go to things like interviews, that he's sort of around somewhere going "You can do it!" And

I think just, somebody who you know really well telling you that is really important for that kind of support, confidence. (.) I *know* that Pete will support me and he'll (.) come up with suggestions to say right, ok this isn't working, why not try this? Let's try this, let's try this, do you know what I mean?"

(Gaby, pg4, lines 185-196)

Gaby constructs her partner Pete's relational practices as "*Heroic*" in that "he's *always* been able to say [...] You can do it!" and this encouragement is put forward by Gaby as enabling her to "build confidence", and signifies to her that she is able to take up the "*Leap of Faith version of self*" and produce the claim that "I know Pete will support me". This illustrates my claim that the "*Heroic, Leap-of-Faith Relating*" discourse makes available a dialectical mode of subjectification in which satisfied subjects are produced through taking up both the "*Leap of Faith version of self*" and the "*Heroic Version of Self*". In this way, both subjectivities are satisfyingly empowered – the *Leap of Faith* self is constructed as more confident in light of their partner's heroism, and the *Heroic* self is constructed as unfailing in their support and acceptance. In line with this proposal, across the participants' talk the "*Heroic version of self*" is understood as being compelled by a selfless ethic of simply wanting the best for their partner.

Extract 69:

"[...] just a feeling that you want the best for the other person. (.) that you would do anything to actually make them feel happy [...] Because he wants me to be *happy*, and I want him to be happy and therefore (.) if (.) there is something that's gonna make him happy, even though it's not something that I (.) *really, really* agree with, but I can (.) work to it (.) Er, I would still want him to do that because I wouldn't want him to (.) go through his life and feel, and be left short because (.) he was with *me*, so he couldn't do this, or that".

(Anya, pg1 lines 34-37 & pg3, lines 110-116)

In Anya's narrative, her production of the "*heroic version of self*" somewhat mirrors the "*effortful negotiator version of self*" in that both represent subjectivities that acknowledge and facilitate the speaking rights of their partner, even when there is not necessarily agreement. However, within the discourse of "*Heroic-Leap of Faith Relating*" the "*Heroic version of self*" is underpinned and sustained through a production of relationships as sites of unconditional care and acceptance, rather than being understood as a mechanism to facilitate the satisfying "*effortful negotiation*" of need fulfilment (as in the "*Transactional Obligation*" discourse). Again, this overlap demonstrates the fluidity of discourse and the way in which different *meanings* and subjectivities can be made available through practices that, superficially at least, appear the same. This multiplicity is illustrated by Lisa who constructs the practices of the

“*Heroic version of self*” as, not only satisfying for the “*Leap of Faith*” partner, but also as a satisfying, ‘reinforcing’ mode of subjectification for the “*Hero*” themselves:

Extract 70:

I think it demonstrates that you're still choosing to be in that relationship, and you're making the effort to show that person that you care, that you appreciate them (.) that you love them. (.) It's almost a conscious reminder to *yourself* as well (.) of your relationship, of its importance. Not just to tell that other person, but to remind yourself that (.) this is why I'm in this relationship and (.) if you do it, if you make a gesture to somebody else, and you get a good reaction, which presumably you will, then (.) it's confirming to you as well why you're there.

(Lisa, pg1, lines 41-54)

I argue that whilst the participants' narratives primarily construct the “*Heroic version of self*” as being governed by an ethic of selflessness and concern for the ‘other’, Lisa presents the “*Heroic*” practices as signifying to *both* partners that their relationship is “important” and why they are in it; constructed in this way, making the “effort” to “care” is understood as serving to remind both the recipient *and* the donor of their commitment in a mutually satisfying way. Thus, in Foucauldian terms, individuals' seemingly selfless ‘heroic acceptance’ and ‘leap-of-faith trust’ still function as forms of self-regulation (Foucault, 1987, 1990) because they demarcate and prescribe what is ‘possible’ in terms of ‘appropriate’, satisfying inter-subjective behaviours.

5.3 Summary

This chapter has presented two dominant ways in which relationship satisfaction is constructed by lay people and argued that these constructions enable different ‘modes of subjectification’ which sustain a range of satisfied and dissatisfied ‘versions of self’. Across the lay talk these versions of self are taken up with subjective investment and are characterised by specific intersubjective, *dialectical* practices in which the ‘self’ is always in a position of *acting* on its partner and being *acted upon* by its partner. These productions present relationship satisfaction as a relational process and this relational dialectic also comes to the fore in the following chapter, which presents the IPA of lay peoples' talk and focuses on the subjective lived experience of relationship satisfaction.

6.

Laypeople's experiences of relationship satisfaction

The third and final empirical chapter presents the second half of the twin-focus-analysis: an interpretative phenomenological analysis of laypeople's talk about relationship satisfaction. The review of the literature in Chapter 2 demonstrated that whilst mainstream psychological research has conceived of relationship satisfaction as some form of subjective evaluation, no research has explored its *subjective lived experience*⁵¹. Much research has linked satisfaction to happiness, but other research has suggested a possibly more nuanced phenomenological profile for satisfaction characterised by a range of phenomenological depths and a generalised or *pre-intentional* focus. Turning to phenomenological work on intimacy highlighted the ways in which intimate relating could be a source of anxiety and ontological insecurity, and that the way in which partners' experienced three supra-relational dialectics (autonomy-connection; stability-change; and openness-closedness) shaped their experiences of their relationship. Ideas from existentialism introduced the notion of authentic relating as a way of managing these dialectics in a potentially satisfying way. In light of this theoretical work the aim of this chapter is to explore the ways in which lay people understand and interpret their subjective experiences of relationship satisfaction.

An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the twelve interview transcripts produced three master themes:

- The first is '*Knowing*' relationship satisfaction: *A journey of awareness between satisfied engagement-in-the-world and dissatisfied preoccupation*. A characteristic of this theme is that relationship satisfaction is less phenomenologically accessible than relationship dissatisfaction. Whilst relationship satisfaction is understood as a way of finding oneself engaged-in-the-world, relationship dissatisfaction is experienced as a preoccupying distraction.
- The second master theme is '*Negotiating Relational Expectations of self-&-other: The satisfying experience of engaging with self and other as subjects*'.

⁵¹ This was still the case as of 8th September 2013.

Here, the experience of relationship satisfaction reflects a way of *intra* and *intersubjective* relating in which partners feel that their expectations are respected. In this way, they experience themselves as subjects with agency. In contrast, relationship dissatisfaction is characterised by an experience in which one's expectations are unacknowledged.

- The third is *'Relationship Satisfaction as Ontological Security: Balancing the Autonomy-Connection Relational Dialectic'*. This theme looks at relationship satisfaction as a site of simultaneous autonomy and inter-partner connection. Satisfied partners experience both their 'selves' and their relationship as existing in harmony. In contrast, the experience of relationship dissatisfaction reflects feelings of one's subjectivity being lost or engulfed by the relationship or one's partner.

These Master Themes and their sub-themes are summarised below in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of the Phenomenological Analysis of Lay peoples' Talk

Master Themes of Relationship Satisfaction	Sub-themes
'Knowing' relationship satisfaction: A journey of awareness between satisfied engagement-in-the-world and dissatisfied preoccupation	Satisfaction as cognitively elusive
	Preoccupied Dissatisfaction – From “outburst” to “insidious” uncertainty
	Relationship satisfaction as happiness
	Relationship dissatisfaction as frustration and blame
	Relationship Satisfaction as embodied engagement in the world
Negotiating Relational Expectations of self-&-other: The satisfying experience of engaging with self and other as subjects	Relationship Dissatisfaction as alienated embodiment
	Satisfying negotiation – experiencing one's subjectivity
	Dissatisfying relating – objectifying self and other
Relationship Satisfaction as Ontological Security: Balancing the Autonomy-Connection Relational Dialectic	Relationship Satisfaction as managing the autonomy-connection dialectic
	Relationship dissatisfaction as losing one's autonomy

Each master theme is described, illustrated, and discussed in turn, via selected extracts from across the entire corpus of interview transcripts. It should be noted that whilst this

chapter is written in a realist tone, I acknowledge that it is *my* interpretative reading and other readings would be equally legitimate.

6.1 Master Theme 1: 'Knowing' relationship satisfaction: A journey of awareness between satisfied engagement-in-the-world and dissatisfied preoccupation

The first Master Theme presented reflects the way in which participants describe their experiences of relationship satisfaction as a journey of phenomenological awareness about their mode of engagement in the world and their relationship. When participants become aware of their being-in-the-world, they describe a phenomenological shift from satisfied pre-reflection and engagement in the world, to a state of either dissatisfied, preoccupied relationship appraisal, and/or a feeling of inchoate, dissatisfied unease that is unarticulated⁵².

Participants differentiate between these qualitatively unique experiences according to their different affective and embodied characteristics. Here, relationship satisfaction is understood as a happy experience, in which respondents feel both a temporal and embodied engagement with the world and other people. In this way, their satisfying relationships are experienced *not* as an object of their awareness, but as a phenomenologically deeper, *pre-intentional mode* of being-in-the-world through which other aspects of the participants' lives are experienced in a positive light.

In contrast the experience of relationship dissatisfaction is understood in two distinct ways. The first is as an articulated, intentionally-specific frustration/anger, in which aspects of their relationship, or their partner, are the *object* of their experience. The second account of the participants' experience of dissatisfaction is as an unarticulated, inchoate feeling of unease or anxiety, characterised by preoccupied 'searching' and embodied feelings of dislocation and burden. Whilst this latter experience of dissatisfaction is experienced as phenomenologically *deeper* (i.e. less accessible) than the former 'articulated' dissatisfaction, it is still described as more phenomenologically accessible than the participants' experience of relationship satisfaction. Thus, for the participants, this deeper dissatisfaction is experienced as having an intentional object

⁵² Across the participants' accounts this phenomenological awareness is always experienced in terms of dissatisfaction. At 'best', the participants acknowledge that they are satisfied *on the whole* with their current relationships, but this is caveated with specific reservations / points that they are dissatisfied with.

(the relationship), but also represents a deeper mode of being-in-the-world through which aspects of their lives and their relationships are experienced in a negative light.

6.1.1 Satisfaction as cognitively elusive

The presentation and discussion of this first theme begins with an illustration of the way in which relationship satisfaction is experienced as phenomenologically elusive. Martin, a 34 year old project manager, who is living with his girlfriend of seven years, describes the way in which relationship satisfaction is difficult to know.

Extract 75:

“(.) you can't put it (.) into a computer and, you don't get a percentage figure of satisfaction out of it do you? You've just got different perceptions of things (.) I don't know how you process that [...] I don't know how to really express (.) how, you know, how you measure satisfaction.”

(Martin, pg15, lines 731-743)

Martin's understanding suggests that the experience of relationship satisfaction is often implied rather than declared. Here, relationship satisfaction is not an object which can be easily “known” and certainly does not reflect the mainstream psychological conception of a fixed readily knowable construct variable (e.g. Funk & Rogge, 2007). As Martin states, “(.) you can't put it (.) into a computer and [...] get a percentage figure of satisfaction out”. This uncertainty about knowing the extent to which one is relationally satisfied is also expressed by Imogen:

Extract 76:

“[...] I think it's possible to be (.) *unsure* about whether you're satisfied [...] there's nobody telling you or (.) affirming for you that you're feeling 100% satisfied today, or you're feeling 80% satisfied today, you don't really know, you kind of feel generally ok, or not, and there's lot's of other (.) factors effecting how you *feel* on any given *day*, not just the relationship, so, you can be (.) uncertain about what's affecting your mood.”

(Imogen, pg15, lines 716-727)

Imogen expresses a degree of uncertainty in her experience of relationship satisfaction, and that it is “possible to be (.) *unsure* about whether you're satisfied”. As Van Deurzen (2009) has stated, in the process of their daily lives, individuals “must rediscover and illuminate what is actually there for [them] and what makes sense to [them]. At the same time [they] must accept that everything that [they] throw light on will also cast a shadow and that things will therefore remain mysterious no matter how well they [elucidate] them” (p.55). For Imogen, her experience of relationship satisfaction reflects a way of finding herself in the world – a “mood”- which is shaped

by the various life-projects in which she is engaged. These are not distinct, or easily delineated; rather, there is extensive phenomenological overlap between them such that “there’s lots of other (.) factors effecting how you *feel* on any given *day*, not just the relationship”. In this way, Imogen’s relationship satisfaction is experienced, *not* as an intentionally specific cognitive-affective state, but as one aspect of being-in-the-world which shapes her experience of the world (including her relationship) as satisfyingly *meaningful*. This account reflects Ratcliffe’s (2005, 2010) notion of existential feelings, and suggests a phenomenological depth to relationship satisfaction. This phenomenological depth is further expounded upon by Martin who talks about the way in which his feelings of relationship satisfaction or dissatisfaction act as a phenomenological lens through which aspects of his relationship are understood and experienced:

Extract 77:

“[...] like having an argument (.) when you generally feel overall, that everything’s ok (.) has much less of an effect (.) If you’ve got a negative view of that relationship already, it just adds to that and then it (.) makes a much bigger difference. The same thing, in the *bad* time, the good things (.) don’t contribute as much (.) as if you’re in a good place with it anyway, and then other good things just make you feel better about it (.) So yeah, kinda (.) goes back on itself really [...] at good times and bad times things can be kind of *amplified* in how important you think they are [...] or (.) less significant [...] some things I think *matter* at one time, but don’t matter at another time.”
(Martin, pg19, lines 881-899)

In Martin’s account there is a constant cyclical interplay between his experiences of relationship satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and the processes which, in turn, shape that experience. For him, relationship satisfaction is experienced as a pre-intentional filter shaping his awareness, understanding *and* experience of his relationship - specifically the way in which aspects of his relationship present themselves as intentionally significant. In the background of all his actions, relations and experiences is an appreciation (if only implicit) that they are subject to a constant process of change that is ultimately finite so that “some things [...] *matter* at one time, but don’t matter at another time”. Hence, everything that *matters* to Martin is always fleeting. In this way, I argue that satisfaction or dissatisfaction is experienced by him as an *amplification* or *suppression* of intentionality. This phenomenological awareness corresponds to a pattern in which satisfaction makes probable (amplifies) positive intentional appraisals of his relationship, and negates (suppresses) negative intentional appraisals so that, for example, “having an argument [...] has much less of an effect”. In contrast,

dissatisfaction is understood in opposite terms – as a state-of-being in which negative intentional appraisals become probable (amplified) whilst positive intentional appraisals are suppressed so that “in the *bad* time, the good things (.) don't contribute as much”. In this way, like Ratcliffe's (2005, 2010) ‘existential feelings’, the experiences appear to involve a phenomenological depth which makes probable certain intentional experiences whilst precluding others.

This experiential depth is further articulated by participants when they describe the unique phenomenological characteristics of relationship satisfaction and dissatisfaction. David, who has been in a relationship with his girlfriend for four years, spoke of the way in which relationship satisfaction is not actively reflected upon.

Extract 78:

“[...] and satisfied is not querying anything I suppose. [...] when you're not particularly happy, when things aren't going well, you start to (.) analyse and question them, so, weirdly satisfaction means (.) there is no analysis. You just are. You're in the moment, you're enjoying it, you don't have to (.) stop and think is everything alright. Satisfied is (.) a lack of assessment. You don't need to assess it because you're happy and content and so you don't have to do it.”
(David, pg36, lines 1050-1068)

In David's account relationship satisfaction is experienced as the default experiential position of engagement in the world, characterised by the absence of intentionally directed appraisals (“a lack of assessment”) about the relationship or other life-projects. As van Deurzen (2009) has stated, “there is much that eludes us because we do not direct our attention to it and do not reflect upon it. Much of our living is done by default rather than by deliberation [...]” (p.56). Therefore, David's account reflects Heidegger's claim that one of the ontological capacities of human-being is that individuals always find themselves in a state of mind, yet this is rarely reflected upon. In line with Ratcliffe's work on existential feelings, David's state of satisfied *being* presents itself as a pre-intentional framework through which his life-world is experienced as a place of “happiness” and “contentment”, and he feels authentically engaged in “the moment” of his life projects. In this way, his relationship satisfaction is, in effect, not known but *lived*, and appears to be experienced at a phenomenological depth akin to Heidegger's *satisfied-for-one*⁵³ (Ratcliffe, 2005, 2010) in which, as David states, “you just are”.

⁵³ The deepest of Heidegger's three levels of experience.

6.1.2 Preoccupied Dissatisfaction – From “outburst” to “insidious” uncertainty

In participants' accounts, the experience of cognitively *knowing* satisfaction comes about through its absence, characterised by the appearance of a preoccupation with relationship appraisals. This shift in phenomenological awareness from pre-intentional satisfaction to intentional relationship dissatisfaction is outlined by Lisa, who is living with her boyfriend of seven years.

Extract 79:

“It can take over from (.) whatever else I'm doing [...] my relationship with my partner is one of the most important things (.) [...] Yeah, so if, if I'm dissatisfied with what I consider is the most (.) important thing (.) then it'll play on my mind for the rest of (.) whatever I'm doing (.) and I find it, difficult to be able to do anything else or concentrate on anything else [...]”.

(Lisa, pg 11, lines 499-511)

In Lisa's account, she becomes aware of things ‘malfunctioning’ in her relationship, such that her experience becomes an ‘obstacle’ to her being-in-the-world (c.f. van Deurzen, 2009), and “take[s] over from (.) whatever else [she is] doing”. Her experience of dissatisfaction makes itself known in her consciousness as she becomes engaged in preoccupied appraisals, and therefore the experience is phenomenologically more accessible than satisfaction. Lisa describes an experience that is intentionally specific, insofar as she knows the ‘object’ of her dissatisfaction is her relationship and, in this way, her dissatisfaction reflects an experience akin to Heidegger's (1962, 1995 cited in Ratcliffe, 2005) *dissatisfied-by*⁵⁴. However, the way in which her relationship dissatisfaction precludes other experiences and “takes over” from her other life projects, such that they are experienced in light of her relationship dissatisfaction which “play[s] on [her] mind”, reflects a deeper phenomenological experience – one akin to Heidegger's *dissatisfied-with*⁵⁵. This phenomenological range of relationship dissatisfaction was further articulated by John, who had been with his girlfriend for two and a half years, and who differentiated between dissatisfaction which had an “outburst” and one that was more “insidious”.

⁵⁴ The ‘shallowest’, most phenomenologically accessible level of experience.

⁵⁵ The ‘middle’ level of experience. Deeper than ‘by’ but shallower than ‘for one’.

Extract 80:

"I mean you could have dissatisfaction and make it known (.) like you could be dissatisfied that, you know, they never do the fucking washing up, or something like that, and you could just like, fly off the handle, that's one sort. I think the more like *insidious* one though, is probably the dissatisfaction where it's like, it hasn't got that outburst, it's just a probably, it's just a sort of *general* feeling that something's not right [...], that is probably more difficult to resolve than [...] one that's been communicated (.)"

(John, pg15, lines 709-721)

For John, there is a clear distinction between relationship dissatisfaction experienced as an intentionally-specific affective "outburst" in which an aspect of the relationship becomes the object of the experience, compared to relationship dissatisfaction experienced as the intentionally *unspecific* "insidious" *feeling* that something about the relationship is "not right". There are clear parallels here between John's distinction and the mainstream conceptual distinctions between specific-vs-global appraisals of relationship satisfaction. However, it is also clear that the mainstream conceptual argument remains rooted in a view of human experience as being ready at hand, and lacks the nuanced phenomenological distinction to which John alludes. Whilst it could be argued that the difference between John's "outburst" and "insidious" dissatisfactions simply reflects the traditional distinction between an intentionally-specific emotion versus an intentionally-generalised mood (e.g. Solomon, 1993; Goldie, 2002), there is a sense that the difference goes beyond the intentional *focus* of the experience, to one of phenomenological depth / accessibility. For John, this difference is experienced as the inability to *know* the "insidious" dissatisfaction through a process of *articulation*. It cannot be spoken into meaningful existence, and therefore its ontological status is more ephemeral and its phenomenological characteristics more elusive. In this way, the "insidious" dissatisfaction occupies an experiential space somewhere between relationship satisfaction - which the participants do not even explicitly consider, let alone articulate - and the phenomenologically concrete outburst dissatisfaction. This process of knowing one's dissatisfaction and bringing it forth from the phenomenological depths through a process of articulation is also described by William who talks about his experience of deciding to end a previous relationship.

Extract 81:

"[...] you're not necessarily aware that you're doing it, but in all your day-to-day interactions with people (.) particularly where you're talking about your life, it *does* get you thinking about (.) where you are, and reflecting back on the experience of breaking up with somebody (.) once I started having those conversations with other people about the doubts that *were* appearing in my mind, that was the point at which those doubts actually became (.) much more of a reality (.) which ultimately led to me being self-empowered enough to do something about it (.) as opposed to just carrying on regardless."

(William, pg14, lines 668-676)

For William, the process of articulating his dissatisfaction prompts a qualitative phenomenological shift, such that the experience of being dissatisfied with the relationship becomes ontologically more *real* and phenomenologically more accessible, such that "once [he] started having [...] conversations with other people about the doubts that *were* appearing in [his] mind that was the point at which those doubts actually became (.) much more of a reality". Therefore, his experience of relationship dissatisfaction crystallises from an experiential 'glance' to a 'deliberate' reflection⁵⁶. As a consequence, William experiences his being-in-the-world also shifting; his articulation prompts a move away from "carrying on regardless" and merely occupying his dissatisfying relational life-project, to an authentic engagement with his dissatisfaction, in which he commits to the ethics of his dissatisfying experience and feels empowered to "do something" – namely end the relationship. In this way, through a process of articulation, William experiences himself as a dissatisfied agentic being capable of acting of his own volition. John and William's descriptions of their need to articulate their dissatisfaction in order to fully understand the experience and "resolve" it mirrors the 'articulator-self' (see Chapter 5, section 5.1.1.2) and also Heidegger's third ontological capacity of human-being; that of understanding one's life projects through the process of discourse. However, their difficulties in speaking their (insidious) dissatisfaction suggest that the experience signifies and is made meaningful for them in ways that sometimes elude talk. These alternative unarticulated signifiers include participants' affective experiences.

6.1.3 Relationship satisfaction as happiness

Anya talks about the difficulty in articulating her relationship satisfaction, but explains that she "know[s]" she is satisfied through her affective response of feeling "happy":

⁵⁶ This experience mirrors the stages of reflection outlined by Smith *et al.* 2009 – see Chapter 3, Section 3.4.

Extract 82:

"[...] it's very difficult actually (.) explain (.) to somebody (.) what makes, you know (.) How do you know you're satisfied? You just *know*, and I don't, I can't really (.) most of the time I can't explain why, but I'm just happy and you know."

(Anya, pg18, lines 876-881)

Whilst difficult to articulate, in Anya's extract it is clear that the experience of relationship satisfaction can be known and made phenomenologically meaningful for her through its affective signifiers. In Anya's case the primary affective characteristic is happiness. This happiness, as described, is not intentionally specific but appears to be felt as a pre-intentional state of being. That is, her *satisfied* being-in-the-world is synonymous with her *happy* being-in-the-world. This affective phenomenological characteristic is mirrored by Lydia who has been with her husband for five years and married for three:

Extract 83:

"I mean I would associate satisfaction with something positive, and being happy (.) erm (.) but I suppose you could say "Yes, I'm satisfied to a point" on a practical level, or (.) "It works" on a sort of day-to-day level, but not really on an emotional level. (.) but no, I would say that satisfaction and happiness go together really."

(Lydia, pg9, lines 417-422)

Whilst Lydia also hints at an alternative relationship satisfaction experienced on a "practical level", and where personal happiness is less salient, she personally rejects this notion (and it is absent from other respondents' accounts too). These descriptions of the experience of satisfaction as difficult to articulate, yet inextricably intertwined with happiness, can be understood in terms of Ratcliffe's (2005, 2010) notion of satisfaction as an existential feeling; that is, as a pre-intentional framework which makes possible (and probable) certain intentional, affective, experiences. For relationship satisfaction, this is happiness. Lisa and Clare describe the way in which the satisfying *intrapersonal* affective signifier of happiness can be prompted by and communicated *between* partners, and for both of them, this relational process is experienced as gendered:

Extract 84:

"[...] men perhaps don't need the (.) affirmation (.) of (.) "We're in a relationship, and we're satisfied" (.) going back to what you'd asked me before, how do I know if I'm satisfied? I *do* (.) it's a gut feeling, but I kind of (.) *want* reassurance as well (.) whether it comes in (.) seeing that person (.) smiling at me, in a way makes me realise "Oh, he's really happy to be with me" or (.) a gift, or (.) just the fact that he (.) makes the effort to speak to my aunty, that kind of (.) external (.) feedback."

(Lisa, pg15, lines 726-734)

Extract 85:

“[...] I think I get in a pickle, unnecessarily, because (.) I have an ability to, and I don't have any control over that, or don't *seem* to [...] I don't think Vince thinks about our relationship at all because I don't think he ever feels he needs to [chuckles]. He only thinks about it when he's got me going off on one!”
(Clare, pg17, lines 797-801)

Lisa describes a way of relationally knowing her *own* satisfaction vis-à-vis her partner's perceived satisfaction. His behaviours prompt certainty that she is held in high esteem and, perhaps more importantly for her, that he is satisfied with her and the relationship. In this way, Lisa's experience reflects Sartre's being-for-others, in that her experience of relationship satisfaction is *confirmed* to her vis-a-vis the “smiling” look from her partner. For Lisa, she understands this experience as gendered, and feels that men's experiences of satisfaction are less relational – that is, less influenced by their partner's experience of satisfaction (see also Master Theme 2, Section 6.2). In this sense, she feels that her experience of relationship satisfaction is less phenomenologically accessible than her partner's experience, because it involves a characteristic of gendered, interpersonal uncertainty that needs “reassurance”. In contrast, she understands men's satisfaction as less interpersonally-dependent. This is similar for Clare, who feels that her experiences of relationship dissatisfaction are far more phenomenologically accessible than her partner's because she has less “control” over her feelings. Lisa and Clare's descriptions reflect both mainstream accounts of women as more relational and more emotional, as well as feminist critiques (e.g. Greer, 2007) that outline the way in which women are positioned as relationally dependent with their stories ending with the formation of their relationships. In addition to these affective characteristics of relationship satisfaction, the participants also describe the affective components of experiencing dissatisfaction.

6.1.4 Relationship dissatisfaction as frustration and blame

In the following extract Martin reflects on a ‘bad patch’ that he and his current girlfriend experienced, and he describes the “frustration” of preoccupied dissatisfaction, as well as a sense of confusion:

Extract 86:

“[...] (.) I felt pretty shit, for quite a while. Confusing (.) I don't know if it made me unhappy but (.) just (.) frustrated, *not* being able to switch off. I think I was annoyed, (.) for a while I was just quite negative about this relationship (.) it made me feel pretty crap”
(Martin, pg13, lines 638-644)

Similar to Lisa's comments in Extract 79, Martin highlights the pervasive nature of experiencing dissatisfaction, and the way in which it demanded his attention. It is this pre-occupied being-in-the-world that he found most "frustrating" as it precluded other experiential possibilities (i.e. he couldn't "switch off"), and made probable the experience of feeling "pretty crap", and intentionally "negative" about his relationship. The affective intentionality of dissatisfaction is also described by Lydia, who outlines the way in which it can manifest as blame of self or other in the respective forms of feeling "inadequate" or "neglected" (See also Chapter 5, Section 5.1.1.4 and the '*blamer-version-of-self*').

Extract 87:

"I think you feel inadequate (.) probably jealous of other people (.) *unfulfilled*, you feel like (.) no one really cares about you (.) and *neglected* really. (.) I suppose it's all to do with what you think the other person thinks of you, and if you're (.) *dissatisfied* then you perceive that they don't really care."
(Lydia, pg9, lines 405-410)

Again, in Martin's and Lydia's descriptions there is a phenomenological range in the experience labelled as dissatisfaction. It shifts from a phenomenologically deep experience that, in some respects, is akin to Ratcliffe's existential feelings (or Heidegger's 'dissatisfied-with' or 'dissatisfied-for-one') because it appears to preclude other experiential possibilities. However, as described by Martin and Lydia, the experience can also be experienced as phenomenologically more accessible, to the point where it is understood as an intentionally specific affective response, with the object of its focus being the relationship and/or self or partner.

Beyond experientially knowing satisfaction and dissatisfaction through their affective phenomenological characteristics, the participants also describe the ways in which they understand and know their relationship satisfaction through their embodied experiences.

6.1.5 Relationship Satisfaction as embodied engagement in the world

William speaks of a "warm" relationship satisfaction emanating from the core of his being.

Extract 88:

"[...] you have that feeling of (.) *warmth* almost, you know (.) it's a kind of a bit of a cliché but I can understand where it comes from, that kind of (.) *really* feeling so into someone that you do tend to (.) does feel like it kind of comes from your heart, even though physically (.) it can't."
(William, pg12, lines 587-591)

Whilst he acknowledges that this is physiologically impossible, his satisfaction is felt as a radiating energy, generated from the “heart” of his being, *possibly* directed towards his partner. There is also the sense that he knows that this embodied experience can be easily understood within a clichéd, romanticised discourse. He appears to experience some tension between attempting to dismiss this “cliché” and acknowledging it as a way of understanding and making sense of his embodied satisfaction. This sense of experiencing an embodied energy when relationally satisfied is also outlined by Imogen:

Extract 89:

“You’ve got (.) no worries, or if you have any they don’t seem as important anymore. You’re quite, it feels (.) like you’ve got lots of energy and enthusiasm for life (.) it feels like (.) you’ve got *connection* with other people (.) it feels like you’re *light* as opposed to heavy and weighed down with worry you know, you’re quite light and you feel [...] dynamic and (.) interested and (.) kind of *future focused*.”
(Imogen, pgs9-10, lines 444-453)

Imogen describes satisfaction in terms of experiencing her own physical mass as qualitatively “lighter” and not burdened or “weighed down”. This is combined with her feeling full of “energy”. In these descriptions her body appeared as the intentional object of her experience. However, her account also describes the ways in which her embodiment is experienced as a pre-intentional engagement with the world; that is, where her body is the agent of perception, not the object. This pre-intentional engagement manifests in experiencing herself as a *relational* being-with-others, “connected” to other people. Furthermore, it also leads to her experiencing an authentic, committed engagement in her life-projects; a ‘flow’ like experience (Mihalyi, 1990) where she feels “interested” and “dynamic”, as opposed to passively occupying her position. This is also experienced as a temporal engagement with her life-projects as she feels “future focussed”, which suggests an optimism, rather than anxiety or “worries” in the face of her unknown future. In addition, Imogen’s description of relationship satisfaction reflects Ratcliffe’s (2005, 2010) account of existential feelings in the way in which her satisfaction is experienced as a pre-intentional, embodied engagement in the world. This theme of satisfaction being experienced as a pre-reflective engaged being-in-the-world is also evident for John who describes his experience of relationship satisfaction as making the extra-relational aspects of his life more manageable.

Extract 90:

"[...] everything seems (.) balanced you know? If you're satisfied (.) in your relationship, everything (.) it just makes everything else *that bit* easier, or (.) makes everything else that slightly, er, *less relevant*, or (.) it just *enables* you to (.) sort of switch off from things".

(John, pg11, lines 511-514)

The experience of relationship satisfaction shapes the way in which John relates to his other life-projects. He experiences an engagement with them whereby his embodiment feels "balanced" and unburdened; where his life feels a "bit easier". Rather than experiencing an inauthentic preoccupation, his relationship satisfaction involves an embodied shift in his intentional focus whereby the significance of his other life projects are felt to be less "relevant". This manifests in his acceptance of his embodied being-in-the-world in the face of potential or actual anxiety. For both Imogen and John, their embodied "attunement to the world set[s] a certain atmosphere, a certain tonality" (van Deuzen-Smith, 2002, p.64), in which both feel a wholly embodied engaged unity with the world; and in which Imogen experiences herself as the source and process of creative change. In contrast, the experience of dissatisfaction evinced an unsettled, preoccupied embodiment.

6.1.6 Relationship Dissatisfaction as alienated embodiment

The experience of relationship dissatisfaction reflects an embodied 'dysappearing'; a term coined by Leder (1990) to describe the body's loss of taken-for-grantedness during illness. In this way, the participants' awareness of their dissatisfying embodiment comes about from the 'dysfunction' of their relationship. For some, this is experienced as an "inescapable embodiment" (Toombs, 1992, p.134), and this inescapability is felt as an alienation from their satisfied position in the world (Frank, 1998). This is described by Clare who, unique among the participants, explicitly described her embodied relationship satisfaction in terms of her embodied sexual satisfaction.

Extract 91:

"*Frustration! Massively*, yeah. (.) It's like being *hungry* (.) and I can't sleep if I need sex (.) It's not a (.) *choice* thing, well it's certainly not for me (.) it's an absolute necessity, it's like eating, or breathing, or sleeping (.) you're dissatisfied if your body is telling you, you haven't had enough (.) and you're satisfied when you go to sleep (.) so satisfaction for me is all about that feeling where you go to sleep"

(Clare, pgs11-12, lines 552-557)

Here, Clare's dissatisfaction is experienced as an essential embodied need ("like eating, or breathing, or sleeping") that demands to be satiated; like a somatic reaction in which

her body signifies as a spontaneous, unwilled expression of her irrepressible wants or needs. In this way, her embodied sensations inform her of her dissatisfaction before she cognitively knows. In contrast to her relaxed embodied sexual satisfaction, Clare's dissatisfaction presents itself as an uncontrollable "hunger", which results in a pre-occupied intentional focus on it – one that she can clearly locate *and* articulate. Thus, her embodied experience is phenomenologically very accessible, and her embodied sensations are experienced as both the agent and the object of her sexual dissatisfaction. In contrast, a dissatisfying embodied experience that is phenomenologically less accessible is described by John:

Extract 92:

"[...] it's sort of a *general* feeling that something's not right, as I said like a sort of *dislocation*. So (.) going back to my analogy about the road where you feel like you're walking it together, and that's fine if you wanna take this path one day and they wanna go down *this* path that's fine. It's whe::n you feel like you're kind of ten steps behind, or you're ten steps ahead. (.) It's that (.) it's very difficult to sort of (.) describe, but that's a more, I would say, sort of *insidious* dissatisfaction [...]"
(John, pg17, lines 820-827)

John's intentionally "general", more "insidious" dissatisfaction (i.e. unarticulated) is qualitatively experienced as a spatial "dislocation" from his partner. Whilst he acknowledges that partners can often take different "paths" or life-projects (a focus of Master Theme 3, Section 6.3) his embodied dissatisfaction manifests in such a way so that even when he and his partner are travelling along the same path (i.e. engaged in their relational life-project as a couple) the sense of a spatial inter-personal separation remains and he feels "ten steps behind or [...] ahead". In this way, the intentional *object* of his experience is his relationship (not his actual body as was the case with Clare), but his sense of embodied-being-with-others functions as the agent of this perception. This sense of not fully belonging *in* one's embodied being-in-the-world is further described by Ruth:

Extract 93:

"Er (.) sort of uncomfortable in your own skin, if you're feeling a bit taken for granted, or (.) if there's things that are being done, or *aren't* being done, or should be done, or you feel like (.) more of an effort could be made. I suppose that's for dissatisfied."
(Ruth, pg13, lines 614-618)

Similar to John, Ruth describes an embodied sense of knowing dissatisfaction through feeling an embodied sense of displacement. Whereas John's displacement is experienced *between* him and his partner, Ruth's is experienced *within* herself, such that

she feels “uncomfortable in her own skin” and ill-at-ease. In a sense she feels her embodied sensations are not the normal ones that belong to her – almost as if she is wearing someone else’s clothes. John and Ruth’s descriptions of losing the familiarity of their bodies when experiencing dissatisfaction offer potential explanations as to why some forms of “insidious” dissatisfaction are difficult for participants to articulate. Firstly, it may be difficult to translate somatic reactions or sensations into words⁵⁷. Secondly, Kliever (1995) argued that the loss of familiarity with one’s own body impairs individuals’ abilities to experience themselves as beings with the capacity to speak for themselves. This is because they lose their sense of self-coherence, and consequently have difficulty in experiencing themselves as the object of their own speech, which leads them to struggle in asserting the linguistic ‘I’. This is no mind-body dualism – this is embodied being-in-the-world, where the body shifts and can be both the object *and* agent of perception. In Ruth’s description, her body appears to be the agent of perception, intentionally focused on the ways in which her relational expectations are not being met (i.e. the rules of her relationship are not being upheld by her partner) and she feels “taken for granted”. It is these ‘relational rules’ that are the focus of Master Theme 2. In particular, the ways in which partners experience their relationship satisfaction in terms of their relational ethics-of-expectations.

6.2 Master Theme 2 – Negotiating Relational Expectations of self-&-other: The satisfying experience of engaging with self and other as subjects

This master theme recognises the active *relational* nature of the experience of relationship satisfaction. Participants describe their fluid, ongoing experiences of satisfaction in terms of their ability to negotiate their relational ethics-of-expectations. Relational ethics are experienced because, in a relationship, each individual becomes a fundamental part of the other’s life project - each revealing, and being revealed by the other. Thus, participants feel an ongoing dialectical tension between their expectations to *give* to one another, and their expectations to *receive* from one another. In light of this dialectical tension, and the subsequent relational compromises necessary in managing it, relationship satisfaction is understood and experienced in terms of a partner feeling their individual subjectivity had been acknowledged and respected. In this way, the descriptions of the experience of relationship satisfaction echo Buber’s

⁵⁷ Akin to the difficulty one might experience when trying to articulate the sensations of a dream upon waking.

(2008) I-Thou relating because the satisfied subject does not feel objectified by their partner. In contrast, experiencing dissatisfaction is characterised by a phenomenological tendency for participants' to objectify either themselves, their relationships, or their partners – sometimes in light of idealised expectations. In doing so, this facilitates experiences of blame and/or feeling one's subjectivity is not being acknowledged or respected.

The theme begins by illustrating the way in which the whole of Master Theme 2 is set against a phenomenological background in which participants' understand their relational ethics-of-expectations as allowing them to expect and “demand” things from each other. As Ruth explains:

⁵⁸Extract 94:

“[...] you depend on that person, and you feel like they won't let you down, that doesn't mean that they don't *ever* let you down but (.) you feel like you can kind of, I suppose you can *demand* something off of them a little bit as well, you know (.) “Can you do this for me?”; “I need you to do this for me”, that helps as well.”

(Ruth, pg3, 114-118)

Ruth describes the process of inter-relating as a transactional experience of partners depending on each other to meet each other's expectations. One consequence for Ruth is that this experience can be understood in terms feeling “let down”, and intentionally-directed blame towards her partner. This extract illustrates the way in which her experience of relationship satisfaction is a continually fluid, negotiable process of *relating* (a quality under-appreciated in the mainstream psychological focus on intra-psychic explanations of relationship satisfaction). Ruth acknowledges that this process involves a tension between self and other, which means it is not possible for both partners' expectations to be met all the time. However, across participants' accounts, it becomes apparent that the phenomenology of relationship satisfaction does not equate to a simplistic ‘expectations met = satisfaction’ whilst ‘expectations *unmet* = dissatisfaction’. Rather, it is the way in which participants experience the process of negotiating their ethics-of-expectations that shapes their experience of relationship satisfaction.

⁵⁸ Extracts 94 and 95 were also used in Chapter 5 (see Extracts 37 and 54 respectively) however they are used here in a different context to illustrate different empirical claims.

6.2.1 Satisfying negotiation – experiencing one's subjectivity

For example, Ruth outlines the way in which *satisfying* compromises can be facilitated by feeling she had been listened to, and appreciated:

Extract 95:

“Yeah, making the effort to do it. I think even if it doesn't work out the way you wanted it to (.) if the effort has been made and the conversations been there, and you feel like you've been listened to then, you'd be happier about compromising about certain things than if that person said “Well that's what I'm doing, sod you” kind of thing.”

(Ruth, pg14, lines 662-666)

For Ruth, experiencing a relationally satisfying compromise rests upon her feeling that her subjective position and preferences have been heard and acknowledged by her partner. Feeling that she has been able to articulate her subject position means that she maintains her sense of being an agentic partner authentically engaged in her own life-projects. In this way, Ruth's description of satisfying compromise reflects Buber's I-Thou relating - her compromise is satisfyingly experienced vis-à-vis her partner's perceived respect (akin to the diligent negotiator-self in Chapter 5, Section 5.1.1.3), as opposed to feeling her subjective relational rights have been 'dismissed' and not considered in a dissatisfying way. The phenomenological characteristics of satisfying compromises are further articulated by Clare, but unlike Ruth, Clare's focus is in relation to her *partner's* compromise:

Extract 96:

“[...] try to make sure the compromises you make are *even* (.) never let that person make a compromise that will actually (.) affect them later, never let somebody be *so* self-sacrificing that (.) it would affect us later, never let someone say “Oh no, I don't mind, we can do this, we can do that”, and then eventually (.) you see it (.) sort of, sucked them dry. You can't let somebody (.) be totally self-sacrificing.”

(Clare, pg14, lines 679-684)

Clare's account illustrates the two-way relational characteristics of experiencing satisfaction. Whilst Ruth had highlighted the way in which she experienced herself as compromising in a satisfying way, Clare highlights the way in which her satisfaction also depends on feeling that her partner is making satisfying compromises. In this way, her relationship satisfaction is experienced in terms of a balance between self-and-other's expectations. As Clare states, the compromises in her relationship have to be “even”, such that neither partner is “self sacrificing”. In this way, she acknowledges the importance of her partner maintaining his subjectivity in a balanced I-Thou way of

relating. Clare illustrates this experience of satisfying, mutual I-Thou relating when she describes the process by which she and her partner decided to move from London to Edinburgh – something her partner has always wanted to do, yet about which she has reservations:

Extract 97:

“[...] he's (.) said to me so many times since, 'Is this something you can do?' [...] he checks that it's ok (.) it is a compromise that I'm making, and we both know that, but it's something he *wouldn't* let me make if (.) I (.) you know, the fact that he wouldn't let me make it *lets* me make it. [...] I feel that's something I can confidently compromise in my life because (.) he's *checking* (.) coz he's not doing it lightly, he's not taking advantage of me, he's not (.) taking something away from me, he's letting me give him something, and he's checking I'm ok doing it.”

(Clare, pg15, lines 694-703 & 726-729)

The above extract is an excellent illustration of partners understanding their experience as a mutually satisfying negotiation in which both acknowledge each other's subjectivity and show concern for the impact of their *shared* decision on each other's life-projects. By feeling that her partner will not allow her to *sacrifice* her life-projects for his, or that he is “taking advantage” of her, Clare comes to experience her compromise in terms of giving a “gift” to her partner, rather than something that is being “taken” from her. As she says, “the fact that he wouldn't let [her] make it *lets* [her] make it”. In this way, Clare is able to understand and experience a significant shift in her life-project in a satisfying way.

In contrast to these satisfying accounts, the interviewees also describe the potential dissatisfying phenomenological characteristics of negotiating the ethics-of-expectations.

6.2.2 Dissatisfying relating – objectifying self and other

The experience of relationship dissatisfaction is often characterised by a tension between experiencing self and partner as reflective, agentic subjects, and a tendency to understand both in objective, pathologised terms – as something that is at fault. Here, the experience of authentically reflecting on, and engaging in a fluid relational ethics between two subjects breaks down into an non-reflecting experience of blaming self and/or other. In the background of this phenomenological tension is a tendency for participants to feel that they should *implicitly* know their partner's experience. This feeling is illustrated by Lydia and Clare:

Extract 98:

“What if I want to be satisfied do I think my husband needs to be satisfied as well? Yeah, I think so, yeah. Because you can always *tell* if your partner's not (.) not feeling 100%, not feeling satisfied, and that (.) and if you really love someone then that, you know, wears off on you, definitely.”

(Lydia, pg11, lines 511-514)

Extract 99:

Clare: “[...] Knowing somebody well enough to (.) maybe making sure you do over and above what you *should* [...] Just knowing what that person wants or needs.”

Interviewer: “How would you know what you *should* do?”

Clare: “I think that's instinct isn't it? When you're in a relationship (.)you get to a stage where you share your life [...] you *do* know what they want and need.”

(Clare, pg2, lines 76-86)

This unspoken knowing reflects the Effortless Negotiator position presented in Chapter 5 (Section 5.2.2.1) and represents an objectifying inauthentic way of relating because it is experienced as not requiring reflection on the relational ethics that self-and-partner have committed too. Yet this “instinct[ual]” knowing of what each other needs absolves each partner of fully, and authentically engaging in their relational life projects and simultaneously opens them up to experiencing blame if their relational ethics are not being fulfilled as they “should” be. Lisa illustrates how this could be experienced in terms of blaming herself:

Extract 100:

“[...] maybe my expectations were too great, and (.) actually this *is* a good relationship and (.) you should just quit your moaning and actually (.) just accept that this is a good relationship and not every relationship is perfect (.) you know.”

(Lisa, pg 5, lines 222-225)

Lisa's account of not having her expectations met illustrates an experience of self-doubt, and self-blame as she locates the problem in her ‘unreasonable’ expectations. The extract also demonstrates the ongoing tension between experiencing herself as an object and as a subject as Lisa struggles to understand her relational dissatisfaction. In one way she experiences an objectification of herself as a faulty product as her commitment to her expectations and subject position faltered – similar to Buber's relating to self as an ‘it’. However, she simultaneously describes an authentic process of reflecting on, and rejecting the spectre of the ideal. The point here, is not to identify which experience is the ‘correct’ one (i.e. whether or not Lisa's expectations are “too great”), but to illustrate the ongoing, fluid phenomenological *uncertainty* that Lisa *experiences* in her relationship, and the hard work (reflecting on [or monitoring – see also Chapter 5]

self and relationship) she does to try and understand and make sense of her experience of relationship dissatisfaction. This experiential interplay between questioning oneself in light of a perceived ideal, and attempting to reject that ideal, is further illustrated by Clare who talks about this experience at the level of the couple. She outlines the way in which she experiences her relationship as dissatisfying when she perceives other peoples' relationships in idealised terms:

Extract 101:

Clare: "I'll see something and I'll think "Oh my God, that's what you're supposed to do, that's how you're supposed to do it!" and then I need to be told that it's ok that we don't [...] I look at other people in the club, and I see them laughing, and then I look at me and Vince, and if we're not laughing I think "Oh shit, there's a problem", and then I go home and cry [laughs] and say that we're not happy, and he says "What? I don't understand what's going on!" [laughs].

Interviewer: "So basically, your own opinions, your opinions of your own relationship are influenced by seeing"

Clare: "Yeah, massively(!), by seeing other people, and you *shouldn't* do it! [chuckles] I *really* wish I didn't do that, I don't think you can *judge* your relationship (.) and compare it to anyone else's (.) because you don't know what's going on *inside* their lives (.) too often I *worry* about what we're doing in a direct comparison to someone else, when they might be looking at me and thinking how lovely my life is".

(Clare, pgs7-8, lines 339-359)

Clare's extract illustrates the dissatisfying experience of objectifying both her own and other peoples' relationships. The upshot is that she perceives other peoples' relationships in idealised terms ("Oh [...] that's how you're supposed to do it!") and experiences dissatisfaction, anxiety, and worry about her relationship ("Oh shit, there's a problem") because she feels that she and her partner are somehow not doing things right. In this way she occupies an inauthentic position in which she does not commit to her relational-life-project or reflect on it in an authentic way – refusing to acknowledge the subjective reality or her own lived-experience, and the actual (i.e. non-idealised) lived experience of others. This dissatisfying experience, I argue, reflects Buber's I-it relating but at the level of the couple; in effect, an 'Us-that' type of relating. However, similar to Ruth, Clare *does* attempt to engage in a process of authentic reflection centred around her lived-experience. She simultaneously rejects the spectre of the ideal ("you *shouldn't* do it!") in order to experience her relationship in an authentic 'Us-They' way relative to other peoples' relationships.

This ongoing, phenomenological tension between occupying an inauthentic relational position and committing to one's subjectivity is further described by David who

discusses the two-way experience of partners allocating, accepting, and rejecting blame for perceived transgressions of their ethics-of-expectations. In this particular extract he talks about an ongoing tension experienced between him and his girlfriend about visiting his girlfriend's parents:

Extract 102:

"[...] it's the weekend, I don't particularly want to go to Suffolk and hang out with her parents. And that *is* selfish (.) and then sometimes I think is it *actually that bad*? I mean, she expects it [...] and it's *always* there, and it's something she feels particularly strongly about [...] and I suppose (.) these expectations [...] I probably have fallen short of a number of their expectations, but on the flip side I didn't want (.) I didn't want their expectations [chuckles], and I just think that those sort of create (.) a lot of problems".

(David, pg20, lines 582-584)

David's account illustrates the experiential 'reflective tight-rope walk' he is engaged in, in trying to understand both his and his girlfriend's experience. Again, the focus here is not on identifying who is 'in the right', but to illustrate the ongoing dialectical experience of self and other as object-and-subject. On the one hand, David acknowledges his girlfriend's subjectivity and her 'relational rights' to place expectations on him, and experiences himself as having been "selfish". In that instance, he also commits to himself as an agentic subject by acknowledging that it had been *his* decision *not* to go to his girlfriend's parents. However, he also experiences a shift in which he objectifies himself and his partner. Firstly, he talks about falling short of expectations as if he is a product that has not measured up. He subsequently goes on to objectify his partner and argue that he does not "want" her expectations – that is, he *rejects* the experience of his girlfriend's perceived objectification of him. However, rather than an authentic, subjective negotiation, this process reflects an inauthentic *retreat* from *relating* by both partners. As van-Deurzen (2009) has argued "it is [...] all too easy for us to become inauthentic and think of ourselves and others as mere objects to be manipulated" (p.57). David's extract demonstrates an ongoing, alternating experience reminiscent of Buber's I-thou *and* I-it relating, and illustrates the phenomenological tension experienced by partners as they try to pin down their own experience whilst also trying to understand the experience of their partner. This reflects David's phenomenological uncertainty regarding his dissatisfaction as he flips between experiencing himself as being authentically "selfish" and remaining committed to his subject position as a partner with rights, to being inauthentically at fault and objectified through the unreasonable expectations of his partner. This provides a nuanced view of

relationship satisfaction/dissatisfaction that is missing from the mainstream literature which attempts to fix the experience in terms of partners' intra-psychic characteristics. The experience of feeling objectified by one's partner is described in further detail by William when he reflects on a previous relationship in which he felt his partner was unwilling to compromise:

Extract 103:

"There certainly wasn't a match in terms of (.) compromise and (.) sharing values and that lead to me going quite *inwardly* into my inner shell (.) and deliberately not (.) doing the things that I would normally have wanted to do [...] I would define myself more or less by the relationships I have with other people. I think that's how you communicate, that's kind of how you show who you are (.) and therefore if somebody stops you from doing the things that you enjoy doing (.) somehow, yeah, that stops you being true to yourself".

(William, pgs6-7, lines 297-304)

William describes a sense of losing his subjectivity and not being "true" to himself because he feels that his preferences and expectations were not acknowledged by his previous girlfriend, and therefore he started "deliberately not (.) doing the things that [he] would normally have wanted to do". This account reflects Young (1990) who stated "a subject's experience or action is alienated when it is defined or controlled by a subject who does not share one's assumptions or goals" (p.168), and in this way, William experienced himself as an objectified 'it'. He felt distanced from a sense of being his "true" self, and no longer authentically engaged in his personal life-projects; displaced from the subject position through which he experienced his life-world as *meaningful*. The interchangeability of partners' viewpoints is necessary for relating to occur, and the inability to negotiate this is a precursor to mutual alienation (Young, 1990). Thus, experiencing a sense of being satisfyingly "true" to himself would have required a different mode of relating between William and his girlfriend; one which would have acknowledged and preserved his sense of subjectivity, as an autonomous agentic individual. This experience of ontological security and managing the autonomy-connection dialectic, and its perceived impact on relationship satisfaction is the focus of Master Theme 3.

6.3 Theme 3 – Relationship Satisfaction as Ontological Security: Balancing the Autonomy-Connection Relational Dialectic

The third and final master theme presents participants' experiences of relationship satisfaction in terms of their feelings of ontological security⁵⁹. Here, relationship satisfaction is experienced as a paradoxical balance between autonomy and connection in which participants describe simultaneous feelings of intense closeness to their partners *and* feelings of freedom and autonomy to pursue extra-dyadic life-projects. In contrast, the experience of relationship dissatisfaction is described in terms of feeling engulfed and losing one's own subjectivity or feeling as though one is withdrawing and isolating oneself from the relationship. In this way, these experiences touch upon – on the one hand, feelings of satisfying authentic engagement versus, on the other hand, dissatisfying and inauthentic occupation of one's life projects. The discussion of this theme begins with an extract from Clare who describes the inherent tension experienced by partners when attempting to manage the relational dialectic of autonomy and connection.

Extract 104:

“What happens is everything gets, like *pooled* (.). And actually that's one, one of the hardest things I think, because you've started off with two different people doing your own stuff (.). and you start sharing something and by the end of it *everything* is in one big barrel (.). and then who does what gets (.). dispersed out again.”

(Clare, pg5, lines 222-226)

Clare's comment illustrates the way in which she experiences *relating* as two distinct individuals with their own life-projects having the capacity to come together and connect, such that their life-projects are shared and combined in “one big barrel”. In this way, her relational life-world is experienced as a vessel in which she and her partner are contained. However, she also indicates that she and her partner retain their autonomy as they experience their life-projects being “dispersed out again” i.e. leaving the “barrel” of their shared relational life-world. She indicates that this is potentially a difficult experience, and one of the “hardest things” to manage.

⁵⁹ The notion of security here is different to that which is outlined in Attachment Theory. Whereas attachment theory understands 'security' in terms of individuals feeling that relationships with others are secure and dependable, the concept of ontological security refers to the experience of feeling that one's very being is stable and secure – i.e. that one's own existence as a 'self' is coherent, stable and secure.

6.3.1 Relationship Satisfaction as managing the autonomy-connection dialectic

When managed well, participants describe intense satisfaction, and this is illustrated by Anya who describes her experience of feeling increasingly connected to her partner as their relationship has progressed:

Extract 105:

“[...] every now and then, you realise that (.) you moved a notch up in the relationship and it's *really* hard to describe because every time you move up you think (.) you can't have more of this because you feel *so* close to that person (.) and then *again*, sometime later (.) a month (.) years (.) you move and you just think “God, I feel *even* closer now. How is that possible?” (.) it's really actually *hard* to describe the closeness (.) it is an amalgam of all these small things that (.) just move a level up (.) the intensity of all these things changes, erm (.) either for better or worse (..) but I would say for me, it's always for better”

(Anya, pg11, lines 504-517)

Here, Anya's experience of increasing connection and closeness is “always for the better”, and therefore her satisfaction is qualitatively experienced as an ontological closeness, such that she feels like she and the relationship have ascended to some higher relational realm of increased satisfaction. In this way, the experience also suggests a phenomenological stratification of relationship satisfaction – one in which partners are unaware of the “level” of connection above until they suddenly ‘find themselves there’. This experience comes as a surprise to Anya and, again, reiterates the view from Master Theme 1 that the experience of relationship satisfaction is not actively reflected upon, or indeed understood in the abstract, but in the lived experience of *being* it (for example, see Extract 78). While this is experienced in positive terms for Anya, she goes on to explain the importance of maintaining a sense of her (and her partner's) autonomy in her relationship and how, paradoxically, feeling connected to her partner fosters her sense of autonomy:

Extract 106:

“I guess if you are very satisfied, then you really enjoy spending time – *all* the time if necessary with that person (.) you know you *do* feel like a *part* of (.) the couple (.) but at the *same* time it gives you your individualistic (.) *freedom* as well, so (.) that you don't feel (.) over [suffocated], you feel (.) satisfied on your own as well (.) happy on your own and happy when you're with them. [...] you have the rest of your life as well to live and (.) it's quite exciting for me to see that George has his own, you know, *self*, and he doesn't need me to be around (.) with him all the time. Erm, and the same for him I guess. I think that's important as well, keeping part of you, it's not *secret*, but keeping part of it for yourself.”

(Anya, pgs9-10, lines 406-412)

For Anya, relationship satisfaction is experienced in terms of her and her partner feeling they are “part” of the couple, yet simultaneously able to differentiate (e.g. Bowen, 1993) and maintain their autonomous “freedom” to engage in their own distinct life-projects, and therefore not feel “suffocated” by each other or qualitatively smothered by their relationship. This is an excellent example of satisfaction experienced and understood vis-à-vis the experience of ontological security (and the phenomenological paradox of simultaneously experiencing increasing independence with increasing authentic satisfying connection) based upon being acknowledged as an autonomous individual with their own unique and separate subjectivity. In this way, Master Theme 3 shares phenomenological characteristics with Master Theme 2, and partners experience ontological security through feeling they are able to give themselves up completely – to lose themselves in relating, and become “part” of the couple – confident in the knowledge that they are simultaneously autonomous, and that their autonomy is acknowledged and respected by their partner. Thus, to experience relating in a satisfying way, Anya journeys between the poles of connection and autonomy. In the extract below, Lisa demonstrates the difficulty and tension in finding this balance:

Extract 107:

“I would hate to only deal with something *as a couple*. I don't even know if that's possible (.) I think about things on my *own* (.) they come out pretty quickly, I would have my own, kind of views (.) but it may be that (.) the way that we deal with something as a couple is not how I would deal with it (.) individually, but (.) as a couple you have to deal with that [difference], and (.) that's the most important thing, that you deal with it as a couple, and you just (.) accept that there are other things which you individually think differently about”

(Lisa, pg14, lines 659-669)

Lisa feels that it is of paramount importance that she and her partner learn to manage the tension between their autonomy and their shared relational-life-project (“as a couple you have to deal with that [difference]”). To do this involves an authentic, ontologically secure acceptance of each other's subjective individuality, and also an acceptance by each of them that there may be times where their autonomy gives way to their relational project. However, Lisa staunchly advocates her autonomy and personal preferences, and it is clear that this is important for her sense of relationship satisfaction. She would “hate” to not experience this and losing her autonomy would be experienced as dissatisfying.

6.3.2 Relationship dissatisfaction as losing one's autonomy

This dissatisfying experience of losing one's autonomy is described by Anya who speaks of a difficult period where she was in a previous relationship with a possessive individual who would not tolerate, let alone facilitate her autonomy.

Extract 108:

“[...] people who are extremely (.) possessive [...] another partner, many years ago, lasted 8 years (.) it was impossible to be with other people because of extreme possessiveness, extreme worry, paranoia. You couldn't *relax* around *men*, you couldn't *relax* around *women* (.) men because obviously he thought that they would try to chat me up, and women because he didn't know what we talking about.”

(Anya, pg4, lines 187-193)

Anya experienced her dissatisfaction as a result of her partner's extreme possessiveness, and in terms of being refused permission to experience her autonomy, and engage in her own extra-relational life projects (“it was impossible to be with other people”). Her partner's behaviour reflected deep ontological insecurity in the sense that he appeared to rely too much on Anya for his experience of being-in-the-world, and therefore he could not tolerate the thought of losing or not knowing her completely, for fear of losing or not knowing his very own sense of being (e.g. Laing, 1971). This experience of relying on one's relationship, or on one's partner, for one's sense of self is described by William when he talks about a previous relationship:

Extract 109:

“[...] finishing that relationship was something I thought about for a while (.) but (.) I just couldn't see a way out, because I'd got so enmeshed into a situation where (.) bills were being shared, we bought a house together, there were *even* cats! (.) All that sort of stuff, which sounds like really mundane kind of things, but actually (.) *that was my* life at that particular time (.) so it's quite a big decision when you suddenly have to (.) wrench your life away again and effectively start from scratch.”

(William, pg7, lines 336-342)

In William's account of his relationship dissatisfaction, he experiences a feeling that he was “enmeshed” and entangled in the relationship, and he had lost his autonomy and become engulfed by it. His sense of ontological insecurity manifested in a total reliance on the relationship – it “was [his] life” – and he felt that he could not leave it, despite the fact that he had contemplated finishing the relationship for some time. This experience could be understood in terms of William losing his sense of autonomy to such an extent that he no longer felt he had permission to act of his own volition and end the relationship. This mirrors Anya's account in the previous extract because, despite her dissatisfaction, her relationship lasted eight years. Perhaps, for both William

and Anya, the loss of their autonomy might have been accompanied by an uncertainty of knowing what they wanted, and a feeling that they did not have permission to engage in their autonomous, subjective life-projects. They experienced themselves in-the-world in positions of diminished power, and therefore, as William outlined, it required a “concerted effort” to remove themselves from their relationships. In addition, William’s description of feeling that he needed to be in the relationship because of the shared ownership of “mundane” material possessions, reflected a torpor of normative thinking, and mirrors Heidegger’s account of individuals inauthentically occupying life-projects dictated by the broader social discourse of ‘das Man’ or ‘the they’. Hence, William’s eventual decision to end the relationship could be understood as his rejection of ‘das Man’ and a commitment to engaging in a satisfying life-project to which he feels authentically committed. Such interpretations offer an alternative explanation to the mainstream investment accounts of why individuals might stay in a relationship experienced as dissatisfying: dissatisfied individuals might experience themselves in pathologised terms if they attempt to resist normative relational prescriptions, or they might not experience themselves as autonomous beings capable of “wrench[ing]” themselves away, or resisting such dominant discourses.

6.4 Summary

In summary, the IPA analysis presented in this chapter has argued that the experience of relationship satisfaction is rich, and multifaceted, and does not fit well with the mainstream notion of a fixed and knowable construct. Instead, it appears to be a fluid, ongoing *relational process* with a range of phenomenological depths and qualities, which is characterised by individuals maintaining a sense of their own subjectivity and authentic engagement in their life projects. At the same time the experience of relationship satisfaction signifies to individuals in affective and embodied ways which are sometimes difficult to articulate and ‘know through talk’. The ways in which this analysis links to the FDA of lay peoples’ talk will be discussed in detail, along with the other aims of the thesis, in the following final chapter.

7.

Conclusions and Discussions

The purpose of this final chapter is two-fold. Firstly, it outlines the thesis' original contribution to knowledge production vis-à-vis the topic of relationship satisfaction. It revisits the purpose, rationale and aims of the thesis and explores the ways in which these have been addressed. In line with the “*and/and*” philosophy of the thesis, which embraces multiplicity and contradictions, this final chapter considers how the thesis advances theory by re-conceptualising Relationship Satisfaction in terms of: 1) the recycling of normalising discourses which reify certain kinds of relationships and practices as satisfying; 2) the interplay between lay discourses and lay experiences of relationship satisfaction; and 3) relationship satisfaction as a fluid and ongoing *relational* process shaped by normalising discourses, and experienced as the dissolving of intersubjective boundaries. The emerging interpretative story will be positioned within existing literature, and the benefits of re-theorising relationship satisfaction for the fields of psychology and couple therapy will be presented. Secondly, the chapter will outline the thesis' novel contribution to methodological knowledge by presenting an evaluation of the methodological approach and the Twin Focus Analysis. This evaluation will draw on selected established evaluation criteria for qualitative research (Yardley, 2008), but will be driven by a commitment to the concept of ‘epistemological reflexivity’ (Willig, 2012b) and will include a reflexive account of the empirical challenges and struggles I have dealt with as a researcher. The reflexive process will be completed in the final section of the chapter where I will draw on Wilkinson’s (1988) notions of personal and disciplinary reflexivity as a way of foregrounding my subjective relationship with the research process, and reflect on how this impacted both the process of knowledge production and me as an individual.

7.1 A return to the purpose, rationale and aims of the thesis

This thesis set out to reconceptualise the topic of Relationship Satisfaction in order to advance theoretical understanding of the phenomenon and also make recommendations for couple therapy. The rationale was that current mainstream psychological research on relationship satisfaction:

- Would benefit from a fuller, more comprehensive appreciation of the complex and pervasive way in which relationship satisfaction is socially constructed through discourse, social practices and institutions (of which the discipline of psychology and the institution of psychotherapy are two components).
- Tends to ‘fix’ and ‘define’ relationship satisfaction as a form of “positive” subjective evaluation, but has not explored the subjective lived experience of relationship satisfaction.
- Tends to favour *intra* psychological theoretical accounts of relationship satisfaction, and therefore lacks an appreciation of relationship satisfaction as an ongoing, fluid *relational* phenomenon.

To address these gaps in the literature, three research aims were proposed:

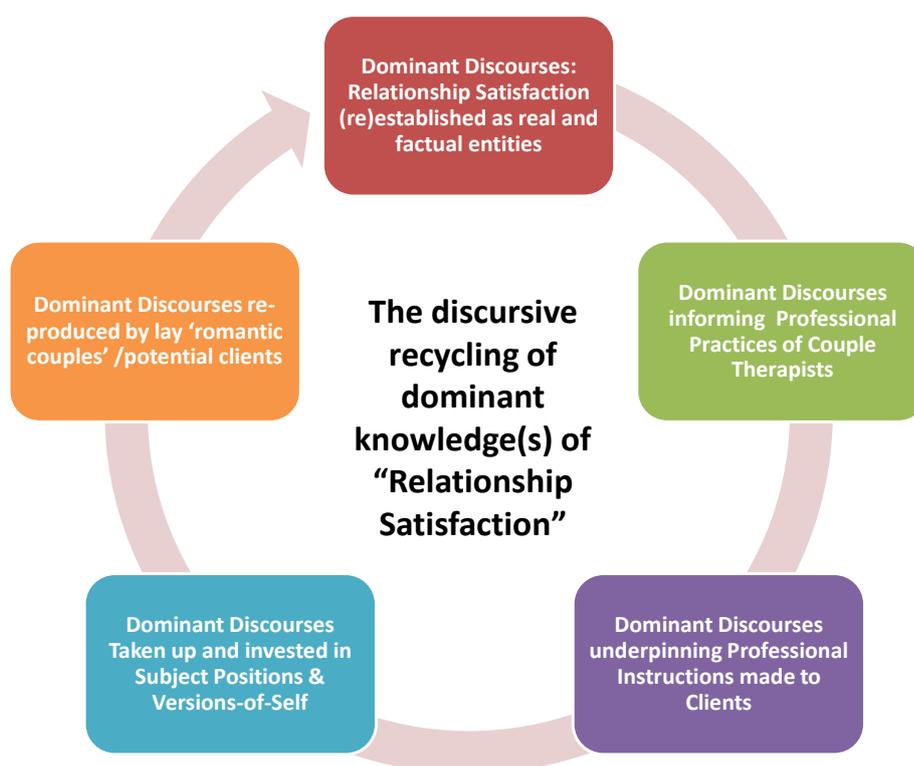
- (i) To map out the dominant constructions of “relationship satisfaction” produced by lay people *and* by couple therapists, and the ways in which these productions overlap or vary. In this way, the aim was to draw on theoretical claims about the discursive ‘cycle of knowledge’ production, and explore whether therapists had an awareness of their role in the norm-setting mechanism which sustains certain ways of thinking about, and ‘doing’ relationship satisfaction (Nicholson, 1993).
- (ii) To map lay peoples’ phenomenological, subjective experience of satisfaction as part of a twin focus analysis designed to explore the interplay between discourse and experience.
- (iii) To draw on insights from social constructionist *and* existential phenomenological theoretical accounts in order to shed light on relationship satisfaction as a *relational process*.

All three of these aims involve theory generation in terms of re-theorising relationship satisfaction as a socially constructed phenomenon, as an experiential phenomenon, and as a relational phenomenon. In addition, the second aim also involves methodological originality in terms of using two different qualitative methodologies to analyse a single dataset through a hermeneutic framework. This allows two distinct, but complimentary ‘analytical lights’ to illuminate different aspects of relationship satisfaction, whilst not violating the epistemological assumptions of either approach.

7.2 The Discursive Re-cycling of Relationship Satisfaction

Twenty years ago Paula Nicholson (1993) presented the discursive ‘cycle of knowledge’ to draw attention to the ways in which sex therapists lacked awareness of the role they played in the discursive norm-setting mechanism. Nicholson highlighted that the institution of sex and couples therapy produced, reified, and sustained notions of ‘correct’ and ‘dysfunctional’ sexual performance as if they were neutral categories (see also Kleinplatz, 2001) rather than forms of knowledge and power *in action* which made possible certain sexual-subjects and closed-down alternatives. Applying this theoretical account to ‘relationship satisfaction’, the operation of the discursive cycle could be represented in the following way (see Figure 1):

Figure 1: The reification of Relationship Satisfaction through the cycle of knowledge



Presented in this way, the discursive ‘cycle of knowledge’ is understood as functioning in the following way:

- There are dominant discourses available throughout the broader culture, as well as psychological research and the institution of psychotherapy (e.g. attachment theory; intimacy as an interpersonal process etc.), which the couple therapists draw on in order to make sense of relationship satisfaction and position their dissatisfied

clients. Through the mobilisation of these discourses, ‘relationship satisfaction’ and the ‘satisfied subject’ become reified in certain ways and understood as ‘real’ and ‘factual’ entities, whilst other types of relating are produced as problematically dissatisfying.

- These dominant knowledges make available and prop up certain therapeutic practices (e.g. presenting relationships in terms of intersubjective skills deficits, which requires an enskilling, pedagogical approach from the therapists);
- These discursive practices permit (and warrant) therapists to provide professional instructions to clients which compel them to engage in specific, ‘satisfying’ intersubjective practices. For example, ‘talk’ is privileged as a way of making visible a fixed and hidden ‘true’ self. These instructions function as “rule reminders” (Hochschild, 1983, p.57) and render the clients as satisfyingly governable (Foucault, 1987). Over time these accepted knowledges and practices become normalised, diffused and circulated to lay people in the broader society (e.g. through social interactions between people, self-help literature, television programmes, and depictions of the therapeutic context in popular media).
- In this way, both clients and lay people take up and invest in the socially privileged practices of the ‘satisfied’ subject positions and versions-of-self which are prescribed by the institution of couple therapy (and which have become ‘freely available’ as taken-for-granted norms in the wider culture). Certain notions of satisfying relating become reified and are gradually accepted and mobilised as taken-for-granted norms. Likewise, other modes of relating are understood as problematic and in need of therapeutic intervention.
- The two-fold consequence is that the broader culture in which the institution of therapy is embedded continues to recycle and reinforce the discourses and practices of therapy. In addition, when lay people find themselves in need of therapy, they present in terms of well-rehearsed relational scripts which further recycle and reinforce the discourses, practices, and prescriptions of therapy (Rose, 1990).

There are instances in the data which can be understood as fitting the ‘cycle of knowledge’ as it is constructed above. Firstly, there are many occasions where the therapists’ and lay people’ mobilise accounts of relationship satisfaction that recycle mainstream psychological research. Secondly, there are commonalities across the therapists’ and lay peoples’ narratives and these are presented as points of overlap that

illustrate the recycling of dominant constructions. Moreover, the therapists are constructed as uncritically prescribing certain therapeutic interventions. This enables me to reiterate the claim that Nicholson (1993) made twenty years ago – that the therapists still demonstrate a lack of awareness of the power of their role in the discursive norm-setting mechanism.

7.2.1. The cycle of knowledge in action: linking across therapists’ and lay peoples’ talk

Many links between the therapists’ and lay peoples’ constructions of relationship satisfaction can be presented. These are summarised below in Table 1:

Table 4: Overlap of Couple Therapists’ and Lay Peoples’ Discursive Resources

Couple Therapists’ Discursive Resources	Lay Peoples’ Discursive Resources
Commonalities and Overlap	
Relationship Satisfaction as a privileged discursive site	Relationship Satisfaction as a privileged discursive site
Relationship Dissatisfaction as simultaneously normative <i>and</i> problematic	Relationship Dissatisfaction as normative <i>and</i> implicitly problematic.
Satisfying Relationships as a site for "Psychological Growth" and being "known"	Relationship Satisfaction as "Heroic / leap-of-faith relating"
	Implicit in the monitor version-of-self who can "know" self and other
The discourse of "Relationship dissatisfaction as Unfulfilled Needs"	The discourse of "Relationship Satisfaction as a transactional obligation for needs fulfilment"
The Silent Partner Subject Position (also the Sexually dissatisfied non-intimate subject)	The Dissatisfied Articulator version-of-self
The Hyper Critic Subject Position	The Dissatisfied Monitor / Blamer versions-of-self
The prescription of ‘satisfying’ practices of listening and appreciation / respect	The Diligent negotiator version-of-self
Women as “more relational” than men – more readily able to articulate	Women as “more relational” than men – more readily able to articulate

The FDAs of the therapists’ and, to a lesser extent, lay people’s talk present a tension in the way in which relationship dissatisfaction is simultaneously understood as a

normative part of relating yet also rendered problematic. Constructing dissatisfaction as ‘a problem’ mirrors the binary distinctions (frequently seen in the mainstream psychometric literature) between ‘relationship satisfaction as good’ and ‘dissatisfaction as bad’ (e.g. Funk & Rogge, 2007), but these dualistic constructions breakdown at the intersubjective *relational* level in which experiences and behaviour are continuously constructed and re-constructed (e.g. Shotter, 1993) (See section 7.4.1 for further discussion).

This tension is more explicit in the narratives of the therapists who simultaneously present relationship dissatisfaction as part of the “natural light and shade” of relating, but also as a problem for the couple which can spread beyond them to include broader family members (particularly children). Thus, dissatisfaction is constructed as problematic in several distinct ways, all of which recycle mainstream psychological research (e.g. Sprenkle, 2012), including: as a state in which the couple cannot ‘function’ (e.g. Whisman & Uebelacker, 2006); in which they are likely to suffer poor physical health and mental wellbeing (e.g. Shields *et al.*, 2012); and lastly, as a bad pedagogical example for the children of the couple which fails to teach them how to relate in a satisfying way (e.g. Cummings & Schatz, 2012). Respectively, these constructions are underpinned and sustained by broader discourses of neo-liberal economics and the notion of the couple as a ‘functioning’ economic unit of production, biomedical discourses, and attachment discourses. These constructions compel clients to come to therapy and warrant the prescription of satisfying behaviourally-enskillng techniques, which are primarily designed to help clients express ‘genuine’ intimacy. These practices echo mainstream academic work that has put forward the notion of relationship satisfaction as a function of partners enacting ‘correct’ interpersonal skills (e.g. Lawrence *et al.*, 2008). This can be understood as an example of the power of the ‘psy’ technologies (Rose, 1989) in action with psychological research informing therapeutic practice, and the associated (uncritical) prescription and take-up of certain ‘satisfying’ inter-subjective practices.

For the lay people, the tension in rendering dissatisfaction as problematic is more implicit, and manifests in their simultaneous privileging of relationship satisfaction and their constructions of relationship dissatisfaction as an inevitable part of relating which requires partners to *negotiate* compromises. This mobilises a view of ‘relationships as

requiring work' and recycles mainstream theories of intimacy as a key satisfying practice (e.g. Prager & Roberts, 2004), centred around the practices of the confessional (Foucault, 1976), such that 'satisfied partners' are compelled to talk, express and 'know' their 'private self'. This practice presents a further point of convergence between the lay and professional accounts. Across the therapists' talk, relationship satisfaction is consistently put forward and privileged as a site of humanistic growth and secure attachment; a discursive site in which partners 'true' selves can be known and flourish (e.g. Cherline, 2004; Giddens, 1992). Similarly, across the lay talk it is taken-for-granted that relationship satisfaction is a privileged and desired relational state. Humanistic notions are also mobilised and evident in the lay productions of relationship satisfaction as "*heroic-leap-of-faith relating*" in which individuals' fixed 'true' selves can self-actualise and 'be their best'. These discursive constructions make available and privilege unconditional support and acceptance as key satisfying intersubjective practices, and are underpinned by mainstream attachment theories (e.g. Hazan & Shaver, 2004).

The most obvious commonality across the analyses of the lay peoples' and therapists' talk is the production of "*relationship satisfaction as needs fulfilment*" which requires inter-subjective 'work'. These constructions mirror the dominant mainstream account of relationship satisfaction (e.g. VanderDrift & Agnew, 2012) and are propped up and sustained by psychological knowledges which include: Interdependence Theory (e.g. Rusbult *et al.*, 2001); Attachment theory (e.g. Charania & Ickes, 2007); and Interpersonal Skills research (e.g. Lawrence *et al.*, 2008). The "*relationship satisfaction as needs fulfilment*" narrative constructs personal need fulfilment as an individual 'right' of couples (Hawkes, 1996) and recycles prevalent 'discourses of reciprocity' (see Braun, Gavey & McPhillips, 2003) which have long privileged 'balanced' relationships (e.g. Goodman, 1999). In addition, within this discursive framework, both the therapists and lay people are understood as presenting a mode of subjectification which operates at the level of intersubjective practices, and which privileges partners' monitoring of self and other's needs fulfilment and subsequent negotiation through talk. Here, the 'known' subject functions as the signifier for the satisfied subject.

Therefore, across the lay people and therapists' accounts there is little space for silence, which is presented as a problematic (i.e. dissatisfying) practice. This is reflected in the therapists' production of the "*Silent Partner*" as a disempowered, dissatisfying position, and the lay peoples' privileging of the "*articulator version-of-self*". Thus, both the therapists' and the lay people recycle notions of satisfied partners having to 'work' at their relationships through the practices of intersubjective dialogue. This is reflected in both the therapists' behavioural prescriptions to 'listen' and 'respect', and also the lay peoples' productions of the satisfying practices of the "*diligent negotiator version of self*" who is understood as acknowledging and facilitating their partner's articulation. In this way, these discourses warrant partners' industrious joint vigilance and constant dedication to maintaining mutual needs fulfilment and relationship satisfaction. A form of self-governance couched within notions of free choice (Weeks, 2007; Finn, 2012) and reflecting Giddens's (1991) 'transformative intimacy' based on equality and achieved through mutual self-disclosure. However, these accounts of disclosing intimacy offer partial accounts which mask the complexity and contradictions of couples' lived experience of satisfying relationships (Jamison and Scott, 2004a).

In contrast to this production of 'satisfying relating', relationship dissatisfaction is understood in terms of appraisals that partners' needs are not being fulfilled and/or a production of them as being unable to 'negotiate'. Thus, an overlap can be constructed between the therapists' presentations of the practices of the "*Hyper Critic*" (who focusses on what they perceived they were not getting and accuses their partner of not meeting their 'duty' as a need fulfilling partner) and the lay peoples' accounts of the practices of the "*dissatisfied monitor version-of-self*" and "*blamer version-of-self*". All of these represent dissatisfied subjects who are understood as having engaged in a practice of evaluating their relational needs as unfulfilled, and this legitimises the subsequent practice of (primarily) blaming their partner for not meeting their 'duty' as a needs-fulfilling-partner.

A further point of convergence can be identified in the lay peoples' and couple therapists' mobilisation of gender injunctions. On occasions, both present intersubjective practices in heteronormative terms (although the lay people do this to a greater extent than the therapists), such that women are positioned as more readily able to articulate than men. This well documented script (Jackson & Scott, 2004) puts

women forward as innately more ‘relational’ and in need of more intimacy than men, and also renders them responsible for initiating and managing this ‘emotion work’ (Gilbert & Walker, 1999). In this way, an asymmetric gendered relationship satisfaction (and satisfying practices) is produced, which represents socially ‘permitted’ ways of *doing* gender and satisfying relating, and which is underpinned by post-industrial economic assumptions about the ‘proper place’ of men and women in the realms of ‘work’ and ‘the home’ (Harre-Mustin, 1978; Weeks, 2013). For the therapists, these gendered accounts are most evident in the prescription of heteronormative practices aimed at teaching men to recognise and meet their partners’ ‘innate’ needs for intimacy so that their partners will then be encouraged to meet the men’s ‘innate’ needs for sex – a well-rehearsed script in which women represent the ‘sexual object’ (Hollway, 1989) and their desire is produced as a response to men’s (Ussher, 2005). This represents an example of the therapists failing to appreciate or critically reflect on their own role in the norm-setting mechanism.

In the FDA of couple therapists’ talk, they are presented as sometimes challenging their clients’ ‘dissatisfying tendencies’ (e.g. holding romantic ideals). However, they are also understood as not critically reflecting on their own prescriptions for satisfying relating (e.g. for intimate communication, and sexual enskilling). In their productions of satisfied subjectivity, the therapists are framed by their training, and therefore certain types of ‘satisfied subjects’ and ‘satisfying practices’ are more likely to be produced in the therapeutic context. For example the governance of the confessional and notions of fixed and knowable selves which underpin and sustain their practice are taken up and recycled uncritically (Elliot & Lemert, 2006; Plummer, 2003). Whilst, on the face of it, these practices and modes-of-subjectification empower clients (by ‘giving them voice’), there remains a risk that such practices could be taken-up and recycled dogmatically (Tiefer, 2005). Through their position of power, the therapists instil the norms and practices of therapy in their clients, who are compelled to internalise them and “keep up this exploration forever”⁶⁰.

In summary, I argue that the points of overlap between lay and professional talk that have been put forward above (particularly the overlap between the practices uncritically

⁶⁰ Cited from Extract 33 in Chapter 4

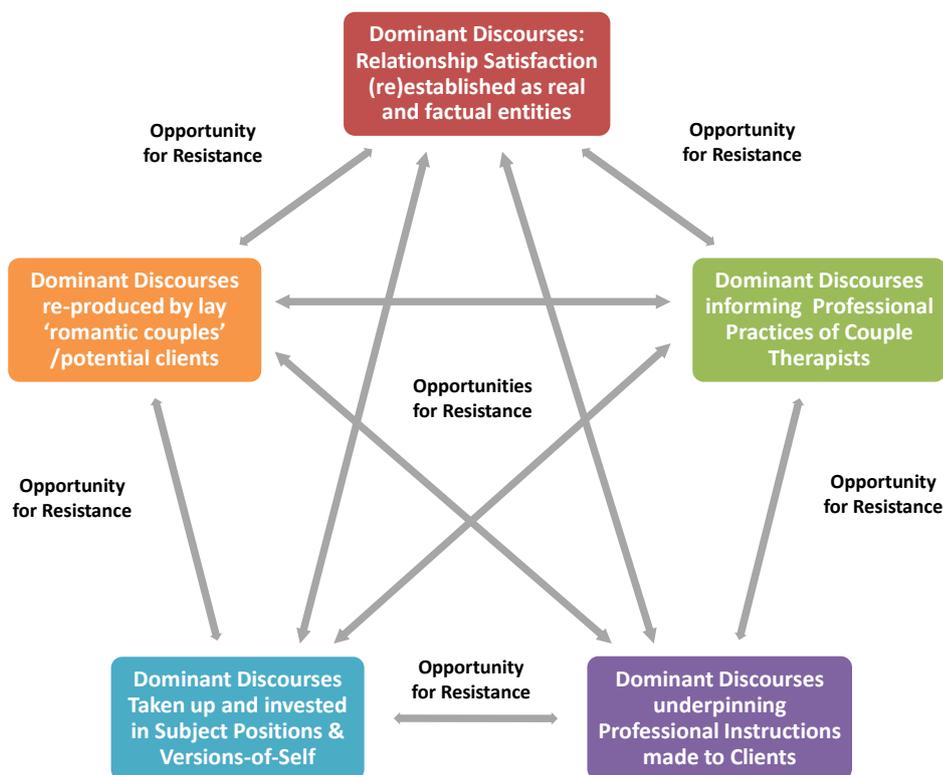
prescribed by the therapists and the modes of subjectification produced by the lay people) make visible the re-cycling of discursive norms in a way that reflects Figure 1. Whilst drawing on well-established theory (e.g. Nicholson, 1993; Kleinplatz, 2001), this is an original contribution which highlights that the institution of couple therapy still risks silencing clients and ‘satisfying’ them in a rigid, narrow way. However, taking this critique further, I acknowledge that this is *one way* in which the recycling of discourse can be *made* to operate. This presentation is itself a form of reifying knowledge which can close down alternative ways of understanding the richness and complexity presented in the analyses.

7.2.2 Problematizing the cycle of knowledge

The theoretical ‘cycle of knowledge’ presented above serves as a useful heuristic to highlight that Nicholson’s (1993) critical claims are still applicable to the ways in which ‘relationship satisfaction’ is produced in the context of couple therapy today. That is, there is very limited recognition by therapists of the role they play in the norm-setting mechanism and their power in re-cycling dominant discourses.

However, these claims are examples of knowledge production and power-in-action that must be problematised in and of themselves. Presented as it is in Figure 1, the discursive cycle invokes notions of unidirectional causality, which suggests that the recycling of discourse happens in one distinct way. This is not the case – many ‘recyclings’ happen in multiple and plural ways, and these points are always open to resistance (Foucault, 1978). The power-knowledge-nexus *in action* is better represented as the operation of a material-discursive network that is held in place by microphysics of power. These can reinforce and recycle dominant knowledges in any direction and are always under forces of resistance and destabilisation (See Figure 2 below):

Figure 2: The reification of Relationship Satisfaction and opportunities for resistance through the discursive power-knowledge network



If the ‘cycle of knowledge’ (in Figure 1) is taken up uncritically it may shut down this complexity and opportunities for resistance presented in the network above (for example, lay people could change the therapists). Knowledge is always provisional and is always imbricated with power, not just the therapeutic knowledge of the therapists but also the knowledge produced in this thesis. The knowledge in this thesis, whilst destabilising mainstream taken-for-granted norms, nonetheless adds to the ‘social rules’. That is, to the academic knowledges that produce relationship satisfaction and discursive theory⁶¹. By focusing on overlap and uncritically mobilising the ‘cycle of knowledge’ my knowledge production could, *itself*, silence resistance and close down variation because the presentation of the ‘tyranny of discourse’ further reifies and sustains it as tyrannical. Yet the analyses presented in this thesis contain lots of flexibility and variation across lay and professional talk. This is outlined below in Table 2:

⁶¹ This mirrors the therapists’ prescriptions. Whilst seemingly more empowering and challenging clients’ taken-for-granted norms, their practices nonetheless produce Relationship Satisfaction in a certain way and close off alternatives.

Table 5: Variation across Couple Therapists' and Lay Peoples' Discursive Resources

Couple Therapists' Discursive Resources	Lay Peoples' Discursive Resources
Variations and Points of Divergence	
The Awakened Subject: Take care of one's own needs	Focus on not letting one's partner be sacrificing, but absence of focus on fulfilling one's own needs
The Awakened Subject: Reject romantic ideals	Simultaneous resistance and mobilisation of romantic discourses – the 'spectre of the ideal'
Relationship Dissatisfaction as Sexual Inactivity	Sexual Satisfaction rarely spoken about explicitly

There are variations in the ways in which the lay people and therapists mobilise the discourse of “*relationship satisfaction as needs fulfilment*”. For example, the therapists are presented as putting forward “*the awakened subject*” - a satisfied version-of-self who operates through the satisfying practice of acknowledging and fulfilling their own needs as opposed to focusing on what they are (or are not) receiving from their partner. This form of governance-as-self-responsibility (Rose, 1999) is far less evident in the lay talk. Instead, the lay people are understood as having a tendency to present satisfying relating in terms of discourses of mutual reciprocity (Braun *et al.*, 2003) and respect for each other's needs, and not being too demanding on their partner (rather than on fulfilling their own needs). A further point of divergence is evident in the way in which the lay people are presented as mobilising discourses of idealised romance in their productions of relationship satisfaction (e.g. in the “*effortless negotiator version-of-self*” who has an unspoken, implicit understanding of their partner), whereas the therapists are understood as resisting these narratives as ultimately dissatisfying. The lay people *also* present romantic ideals as ‘unrealistic’ and ultimately dissatisfying, but the ‘spectre of the ideal’ remains in their simultaneous productions of desiring ‘the one’ and also the “*effortless negotiator version-of-self*”. In this way, the lay constructions of relationship satisfaction are seen to operate through the simultaneous mobilisation of two ‘ideal’ narratives: one of ‘non-gendered equality and reciprocity’ and one of ‘heterosexual romance’. This original contribution echoes Crawford's (2004) work on productions of women's sexuality.

Unsurprisingly, a key difference across the therapists' and lay peoples' accounts is in terms of what they are *doing / achieving* through their constructions. For example, the therapists' productions function more as 'therapeutic tools'; as a way of understanding (and positioning) *their clients'* dissatisfactions and subsequently sustaining their prescriptions for satisfying inter-subjective practices and modes of subjectification. In contrast, the lay people mobilise these accounts as ways of understanding and *managing* their *own* relationship satisfactions, practices and satisfying modes of subjectification. This original contribution of the thesis demonstrates a subtle but important difference across the analyses. Constructions which, on the face of it, are very similar (underpinned by, for example, similar discourses of need fulfilment) are deployed for different purposes to achieve different things in different contexts. For example, when considering the position of the "*Hyper Critic*" and "*Blamer version-of-self*", the blamer is produced by lay people (who identify as being in satisfied relationships) as a justified (or unjustified) practice made available as part of the "*transactional obligation*". In contrast, the therapists present the "*Hyper critic*" subject as a way of positioning and understanding the 'dissatisfying' practices of their clients.

Beyond the discourse of needs fulfilment, a noticeable difference between the therapists and the lay people is that the therapists speak far more explicitly about the importance of sex for relationship satisfaction (as presented through the discourse of "*Relationship Satisfaction as Sexual Inactivity*"). These accounts can be seen to recycle mainstream psychological research (e.g. Sprecher & Cate, 2004) in which sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction are simultaneously produced as synonymous *and* distinct. Sexual satisfaction is either subjugated to relational intimacy (e.g. Byers & Demmons, 1999; McCarthy, 2002) or understood in instrumental terms of partners' dysfunctional body parts and/or lack of sexuo-mechanical skills. Thus, the therapists' productions are understood as being underpinned by the heteronormative, coital imperative (Capedevilla, 2007). In contrast, apart from *one* of the lay people (Clare), the lay people do not speak explicitly about sex. I believe that this is probably a result of the research context and the therapists' greater comfort in speaking openly about sexual relationships. The lay people *do* construct sex as important, but (apart from Clare) they do so to a far lesser extent and in more opaque terms (e.g. they talk about the "intimacy side of things" needing to be "right", but only mention sex when asked to explain what they mean). Beyond reflecting a possible discomfort in talking openly about sex in the context of the

research interview, their responses might also reflect an action orientation outlined in previous research (e.g. Tunairu & Reavey, 2007) in which participants have a tendency to present their current sexual relationships in un-critical terms.

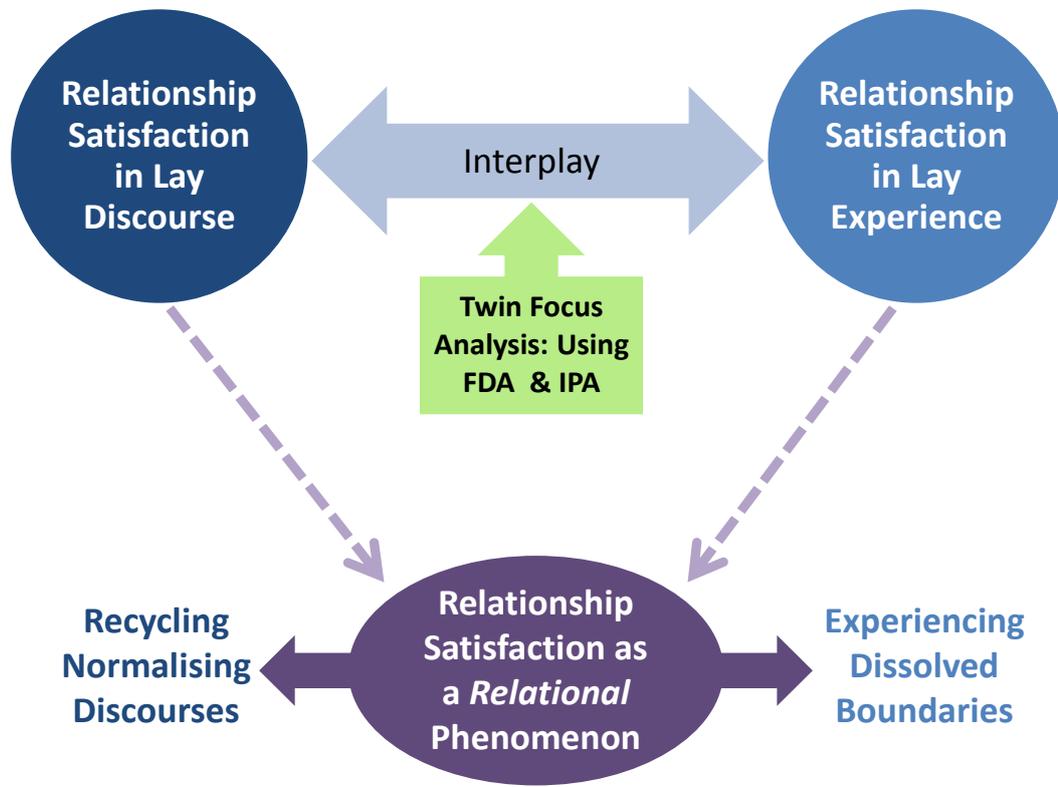
This level of complexity and variety (in terms of the variation *and* the overlap) provide a glimpse of the complex phenomenon that relationship satisfaction is made to be, both across the participants' talk and the analyses of their talk. This complexity and multiplicity is further illustrated by considering the IPA of lay peoples' talk.

7.3 Relationship Satisfaction as discourse and lived experience

The second aim of the thesis was to explore both the lived experience and the discursive productions of relationship satisfaction. This is based upon the theoretical proposition that there is much to be gained from exploring both the social constructedness, *and* the phenomenology of relationship satisfaction because a sole focus on discourse misses out the 'felt actuality' of relationship satisfaction, and a sole focus on phenomenology misses out on the socio-cultural conditions-of-possibility of experience. This reflects other empirical work which has drawn on discursive and phenomenological approaches (e.g. Cosgrove, 2000; Willig, 2011⁶²), and required methodological originality (Colahan, Tunairu & Dell, 2012 - see Section 7.2 for further discussion) through the epistemological route of the Twin Focus Analysis. This aimed to provide a "fuller" theoretical output (in terms of reconstruction) and also offer insight into the *relational* characteristics of relationship satisfaction (see Section 7.1.3 for further discussion). Figure 3 attempts to capture these three layers:

⁶² Smith & Eatough (2008) state that IPA and FDA have been integrated in the work of Duncan, Hart, Scoular, and Bigrigg (2001). However, upon reviewing this paper I could not see any explicit references to Foucauldian concepts or discourse analysis.

Figure 3: Reconceptualising Relationship Satisfaction as Lay Discourse, Lay Experience, and as a Relational Phenomenon



As with the lay and professional discourses, I interpret a broad range of links between the lay constructions and the (accounts of) lay experiences of relationship satisfaction. The various points of overlap in the content between the two analytical interpretations are outlined in Table 3 below:

Table 6: The links between Lay Discourse and Lay Experience

Relationship Satisfaction in Lay Discourse	Relationship Satisfaction in Lay Experience
Commonalities and Overlap	
The dissatisfied Monitor version-of-self	Experience of dissatisfaction as frustrating preoccupation
The gendered monitor version-of-self	Women feeling they are less easily satisfied than their male partners
Dissatisfied monitor or articulator version-of-self	Insidious feeling of being unable to locate / know / articulate one's dissatisfaction
	Frustrating dissatisfaction
	Embodied feeling of being weighed down

The articulator version-of-self	Experiencing an intentionally specific 'outburst' satisfaction
The diligent negotiator version of self	Experience of one's subjectivity being acknowledged
	Experience of 'giving one's partner a gift'
Not taking up the diligent negotiator version of self	Feeling uncomfortable in one's own skin
	Feeling one is sacrificing one's own needs
	Feeling dismissed / objectified
The blamer version-of-self	Feeling neglected / let down by one's partner
	Feeling frustrated / angry
	Feeling objectified through being blamed
	Feeling inadequate
Leap of faith version of self	Deep connection to one's partner, but one's autonomy is maintained
	Feeling unconditionally accepted
	Happiness
	Embodied being in the world? Optimistic? Light?
Variations and Points of Divergence	
Satisfied monitor version of self	Accounts of satisfaction as a state of pre-reflective being-in-the-world

I argue that the IPA shines a light on the tension, variety, and range of phenomenological experiences that participants produce as a way of making sense of the shifts between the different 'versions-of-self' that are made available through the discourses of relationship satisfaction. For example, when considering the accounts of relationship dissatisfaction as a phenomenologically conspicuous (and sometimes frustrating) experience, which 'demands one's attention', links could be made to the practices of the "*dissatisfied monitor version-of-self*" and the practice of 'scanning' one's relationship in order to render one's experience knowable. Moreover, the production of the "*gendered monitor version-of-self*" links to Clare's and Lisa's experiential accounts of needing reassurance, and feeling less in control / more reliant on their partners' perceived levels of satisfaction. Similarly, the "*gendered monitor version-of-self*" can be associated with the gendered experiential narratives of women's

satisfaction as more ‘complex’ and, at times, ‘irrational’. These productions reflect the discourses of the ‘crazy’ woman (Harre-Mustin, 1991) which, when mobilised, discount or deny women’s experiences by drawing on traditional gendered accounts of male rationality vs female emotionality.

The discursive production of individuals who invest in, and shift between the “*monitor*” and “*articulator versions-of-self*” can be seen to map onto the phenomenological shifts presented in the IPA between experiencing the “*insidious*” and knowable “*outburst*” relationship dissatisfactions. That is, when one is unable to take up the “*articulator version-of-self*” (a socially privileged mode of subjectification accomplished via the intersubjective practices of speaking) then the experience is presented by some as a more “*insidious*” less phenomenologically accessible form of relationship dissatisfaction. However, at the same time, taking up the “*articulator version-of-self*” is sometimes presented as an ‘uncomfortable’ experience which partners do not always find easy. However, this is resisted as it is understood as potentially leading to dissatisfying silence. This original contribution presents the experiential tension associated with the conflicting needs of self and other that operate in the “*relationship satisfaction as needs fulfilment*” discourse.

Failing to “*diligently negotiate*” is understood as a dissatisfying practice, and echoes the experiential narratives (outlined in Master Theme 2 and 3) of experiencing: in-authentic objectification (by partner or self), alienation from one’s own life-projects which are experienced as being ‘sacrificed’ (Young-Eisendrath, 1999), possible ontological ‘engulfment’ by one’s partner or the relationship (Laing, 1971), or feeling embodied dislocation (possibly within oneself and/or between oneself and ones partners). In this way, the production of either partner failing or refusing to take up the “*diligent negotiator version-of-self*” opens a space for phenomenological accounts which share similar characteristics with Buber’s ‘I-it’ mode of relating⁶³, and Laing’s (1971) notions of ontological insecurity⁶⁴. Similarly, the “*effortless negotiator version-of-self*” (who is sustained through a practice in which they objectify their partner as someone who ‘should’ implicitly ‘know’ them) also reflects the dissatisfying experiential accounts of ‘I-it’ relating. These experiences can be understood as enabling

⁶³ Outlined in Master Theme 2 – the Ethics of Expectations

⁶⁴ Presented in Master Theme 3 – Managing the autonomy –connection dialectic

and warranting investment in the “*blamer version-of-self*”, a subjectivity characterised by feelings of frustration, anger and/or feeling neglected or let down (when directed at one’s partner), or in terms of inadequacy when directed at self.

In contrast, the “*diligent negotiator version-of-self*” reflects a practice of relating (characterised by dialogue) in which partners feel their subjectivity has been acknowledged and respected, rather than feeling that they have been objectified (Young-Eisendrath, 1999). In this way, the practice of “*diligent negotiation*” can be understood as enabling an experience akin to Buber’s ‘I-thou’ relating. In this experience, satisfying compromise is understood as ‘giving a gift’ rather than a dissatisfying ‘sacrifice’. This account of the felt actuality of compromise offers a counterpoint to discursive work (e.g. Gilfoyle, Wilson & Brown, 1992) that has identified a ‘pseudo-reciprocal gift discourse’. This discourse challenges notions of equality and mutuality because the practice of ‘giving gifts’ is presented as a gendered practice with women giving more ‘gifts’ than men (Komter, 1996). Whilst the discourse may not be empowering to women, it is interesting to see the experience described as such by the women participants in the study. This original contribution of the thesis demonstrates the strength of the twin focus analysis. It allows a space for the participants’ narratives about the felt actuality of their lived experience to be acknowledged, whilst also providing a critical counterpoint that highlights discursive power in action so that the experiential accounts are not uncritically taken at face value.

Lastly, the practices of unconditional support and acceptance presented in the lay peoples’ “*heroic-leap-of-faith*” dialectic, could possibly be understood in terms of the satisfying sense of ontological security (presented in Master Theme 3 of the IPA) and the ‘paradox of interdependency’ (Young-Eisendrath, 1994) in which partners’ experience the fluid back-and-forth of the autonomy-connection dialectic – that is, freedom to be an autonomous, agentic being through feeling connected to one’s partner, who is presented and experienced as supportive and accepting of one’s life projects. In addition the “*leap-of-faith version-of-self*” could potentially link to the phenomenological accounts of satisfying relating being experienced in terms of feeling an embodied lightness, and temporal and relational engagement in one’s life project.

When considering variation in the interplay between the two analyses (notwithstanding their different underlying analytic foci) I identify one primary difference and that is between the “*satisfied monitor-version-of-self*” who is presented as engaging in the practice of positive relational evaluations, and the phenomenological accounts of relationship satisfaction as a pre-intentional mode of being-in-the-world, or ‘existential feeling’ (e.g. Ratcliffe, 2005, 2010) in which appraisals and evaluations are absent from one’s experience. This is an example where the practices of the satisfied subject and the experiential accounts of the satisfied subject can be seen as being incongruent. This presents an original view of relationship satisfaction and highlights the limitations inherent to mainstream research which attempts to objectively define and ‘fix’ relationship satisfaction as a knowable ‘state’. Furthermore, it also highlights how the twin focus analysis demonstrates the richness, fluidity and contradictions inherent to the process of sense-making.

In summary, the IPA of lay peoples’ talk presents relationship satisfaction as a very relational experience shaped by the intersubjective processes and practices between partners. In turn, these relational practices can be seen as being enabled and warranted through the satisfying modes of subjectification and versions-of-self presented in the FDA of lay talk (both in the “*transactional obligation for needs fulfilment*” discourse and the “*heroic-leap-of-faith*” discourse). However, it is important to re-emphasise the analytical difference between the FDA and IPA interpretations. For example, the IPA focuses on lay peoples’ accounts of their *lived* experience of managing the negotiation of mutual needs fulfilment, *not* on mapping the discursive modes of subjectification which operate through certain intersubjective practices and make available certain ‘versions-of-self’. In this way, where links can be drawn the IPA can be understood as mapping the subjective, phenomenological quality of taking up and investing in certain versions-of-self presented in the FDA⁶⁵. In contrast, the FDA focuses on mapping the discursive resources (including practices and technologies-of-self) which enable and sustain the different versions-of-self in the first place.

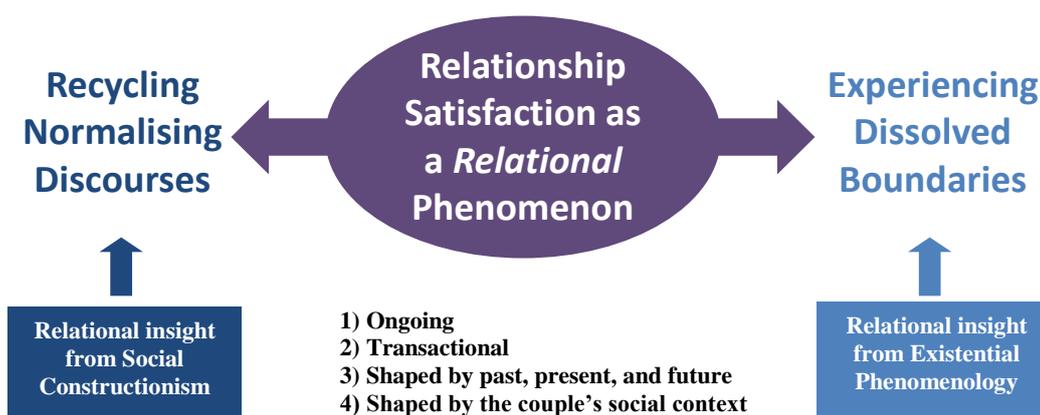
⁶⁵ This does not equate to making causal claims between specific practices / versions-of-self and specific experiences. Rather, it attempts to illustrate both the socially constructed nature of relationship satisfaction and also the felt actuality of the experiences that the participants understood and identified as relationally satisfying / dissatisfying.

The twin focus analysis suggests that the ‘experience’ of relationship satisfaction is discursively situated and made meaningful through discursive practices. Yet it also makes itself meaningfully ‘known’ through embodied and affective signifiers which are sometimes experienced as ‘pre-discursive’ and therefore difficult to identify and articulate. In this way, the twin focus analysis sheds two complementary analytical lights on the lay peoples’ talk and presents a richer, deeper account than either analysis on its own. These analyses can also be seen to shed light on the *relational* qualities of relationship satisfaction.

7.4 Reconceptualising the ‘relational’ in Relationship Satisfaction

The third overarching aim of the thesis is to reconceptualise the *relational* qualities of relationship satisfaction. Underpinning this aim is the theoretical proposition (See Chapter 1, Section 1.2.4) that both social constructionism and existential phenomenology present theoretical frameworks that are inherently *relational* and which can offer insights about ‘relationship satisfaction as a relational phenomenon’ that are currently absent from the literature. The mainstream literature is dominated by *intrapsychological* explanations of relationship satisfaction (Gergen & Walter, 1998; Duck, 2011). When ‘relational’ accounts *are* presented (e.g. achieving satisfaction via intimacy as an interpersonal process, see Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005) they frequently depict a restrictive view of relating in terms of a sequence of isolated interactions between two contained and distinct individuals who unproblematically use language as a purely representational medium⁶⁶. As outlined in Chapter 1, some social psychological theorists (e.g. Erbert & Duck, 1997; Duck, 2011) have drawn on dialectical theory to present relating as an ongoing transactional process of managing contradictions, which is shaped by the temporal and social context of the relationship (both of which are also fluid and subject to change). Whilst this theoretical approach offers an account which more readily captures the fluidity and contradictory nature of relating, the analyses presented in this thesis offer further insights. These are reflected in Figure 4 below:

⁶⁶ I imagine this in terms of ‘Newton’s Cradle’ – in which five ball-bearings are suspended from a small frame. One of the end ball-bearings is swung and its kinetic energy is transferred through the middle three ball bearings (which stay stationary) and into the one at the other end which consequently swings out.

Figure 4: The ‘relational’ qualities of Relationship Satisfaction

As outlined in Figure 4 (and Section 7.2), the FDAs of therapists' and lay peoples' talk can be understood as highlighting the role of normalising discourses in underpinning, privileging and recycling certain relational practices as 'satisfying'. Secondly, the lay peoples' experiential accounts present 'satisfying relating' in terms of dissolving life-world boundaries. Each have been referred to in the sections above, but they are explicitly discussed, in turn, in the following sections.

7.4.1 The power (and invisibility) of relational discursive norms

As discussed in Section 7.2, both the lay people and the therapists mobilise *relational* discourses of relationship satisfaction that are underpinned and sustained by intersubjective practices. In lay accounts, the "*transactional obligation for needs fulfilment*" presents a relational construction of relationship satisfaction which centres on a production of partners having a mutual *duty* to fulfil each other's needs (VanderDrift & Agnew, 2012). Again, this functions through a governance of expectations and, when mobilised in parallel with discourses of disclosing intimacy and egalitarian individualism (e.g. Giddens, 1992), enables a satisfying mode of subjectification which is understood as pivoting around partners' ability to take-up and mobilise the practices of three versions-of-self: "*the monitor*"; "*the articulator*"; and "*the diligent negotiator*". The first operates through a governance of surveillance (of self and other); the second through a governance of the confessional (Foucault, 1978; Rose, 1999); and the third through a production of 'satisfying relating as work' achieved through talk and compromise (Finn, 2012). In contrast to the "*transactional obligation*", the construction of "*relationship satisfaction as heroic, leap-of-relating*" presents a mode of subjectification which pivots around the inter-subjective practices of

unconditional acceptance and support. In this way, and in contrast to the “*transactional obligation*”, expectations are absent from partners talk and the key satisfying characteristic is *trust* in one’s “*heroic*” partner. These productions are propped up and sustained by humanistic notions of the satisfying relationship as a site where partners can be understood as their uncensored ‘true’ selves and ‘self-actualise’ via their partner’s support and acceptance of this ‘true’ self (e.g. Bodenmann *et al.*, 2008). Thus, as with the “*transactional obligation*”, the satisfied subject represents a self who is constructed as being *satisfied-in-relation-to-another*.

The *relational* quality of the lay modes-of-subjectification is evident in two ways. Firstly, they pivot around *inter-subjective* practices and each partner is presented as always being in a position of *acting upon the other*, and *being acted upon* (i.e. the dialectic of self-&-other comes to the fore in these constructions). Secondly, the speakers are understood as capable of being ushered into taking up different versions-of-self through the practices of others (either their partner or family or friends etc.). For example, unconditional acceptance from one’s “*heroic*” partner can be seen to usher speakers into taking up the “*leap-of-faith version-of-self*”. In addition, positive evaluations by friends are presented as ushering speakers into taking up the “*satisfied monitor version-of-self*”. Similarly, ‘not going ballistic’ is put forward as a way of facilitating one’s partner to occupy the “*articulator version-of-self*”. Therefore, both the “*transactional obligation*” and the “*heroic-leap-of-faith*” emphasised relationship satisfaction as a joint production between partners and also their broader social relationships, and this is an original contribution to the mainstream intra-psychological accounts.

Moreover, these productions demonstrate the power of normalising discourses in shaping the conditions of possibility for understanding and doing satisfying relating (Rose, 1989). For example, when the transactional obligation is mobilised in light of discourses of romantic ideals, the relational ‘work’ (of “*articulation*” and “*diligent negotiation*”) is absent. In fact, they come to be understood in problematic terms because they signify that the relationship or partner is not ‘the one’. This illustrates the multiplicity of meanings around productions of relationship satisfaction. The different ways of mobilising the “*transactional obligation*” enable relational practices which, superficially at least, appear the same, but which signify and function in different ways

in light of different discursive norms. Whilst the lay people can be understood as explicitly acknowledging and attempting to resist the power and operation of romantic scripts, they can also be understood as not questioning the discourses of disclosing intimacy which construct relationship satisfaction as requiring ‘work through dialogue’, and neither do they question the humanistic and attachment discourses which underpin the “*Heroic-leap-of-faith*” – all of these are seen to be taken up and recycled uncritically.

When considering the therapists’ narratives, the relational discourses they mobilise (of “*relationship dissatisfaction as unfulfilled needs*” and “*sexual inactivity*”) enable them to prescribe satisfying relational practices which centre around clients relationally enskilling themselves (in particular, their inter-personal communication skills. Also see Section 7.2). Given the production of satisfying relationships as sites in which partners need to be ‘known’ and fulfilled, ‘talking’ and ‘listening’ function as the key satisfying inter-subjective practices to be mastered in order to reposition dissatisfied subjects as satisfied. In addition to these practices, the therapists are understood as promoting a satisfying mode of subjectification which rests on two ideological propositions: the first is for clients to resist mobilising discourses of romantic idealism, and the second is for them to take ownership of, and to fulfil their own needs (as opposed to always relying on their partner). The former functions through a governance of ‘realistic expectations’ and the latter through a governance of ‘self-care’.

The therapists can be seen to demonstrate some awareness of discourses of heightened expectations (e.g. Hawkes, 1996; Weeks, 2007) on modern couples as they construct clients’ increasing focus on their ‘rights’ for personal self-fulfilment as problematic. However, as outlined in Section 7.2, the therapists’ prescriptions for satisfying relating still focus predominantly on clients’ intersubjective processes, a ‘turn to the self’ (Furedi, 2004) that frequently fails to recognise the action of other taken-for-granted cultural norms and prescriptions about what it means to be in a satisfying relationship and (with) a satisfied partner (Unger & Crawford, 1996). In this way, the analyses demonstrate the way in which the ‘relational’ quality of relationship satisfaction discursively operates beyond the inter-subjective realm of the couple. Not only is it made meaningful through the interactions with their broader familial and social networks (which has been acknowledged within the mainstream literature), it is also

made manifest through the socio-cultural norms in which the couple and their relationship are embedded (Ussher & Baker, 1993; Tiefer, 2010). It is this appreciation that is missing from the mainstream literature.

7.4.2 The dissolving of relational boundaries

The *relational* quality of the experience of relationship satisfaction is also presented by lay people when they speak about the way in which they sometimes experience their relationship as satisfying. For example, sometimes the lay people understand their satisfaction vis-a-vis their partner's perceived levels of satisfaction. This reflects an experience akin to Sartre's (1957) *being-for-others* in that the experience only becomes concrete in relation to the 'look' of the other. Furthermore, the participants' accounts illustrate the ways in which their experiences are fluid and dynamic as they struggle to make sense of both their own experiences and those of their partner. This fluid uncertainty presents a range and richness to the participants' accounts that is absent from the mainstream literature which tends to dualistically categorise individuals as 'satisfied' or 'dissatisfied'. The relational quality of the experience of satisfaction comes to the forefront in Master Theme 2 of the IPA, which focuses on partners negotiating their "*ethics of expectations*". As outlined in Section 7.3, the different ways in which these relational practices are negotiated and managed shifts the ways in which the participants experience themselves as an acknowledged and respected subject, or objectified and alienated from their life projects.

Master Theme 3 of the IPA presents relationship satisfaction as an experience understood in terms of managing the tension of the autonomy-connection dialectic inherent to relating (Erbert, 2000). Relationship dissatisfaction is associated with descriptions of feeling engulfed, enmeshed, or trapped in the relationship, a sense of losing one's sense of self as an autonomous agentic being. This experience is understood in terms of feeling over reliant on the relationship for one's sense of self or smothered by one's partner, or feeling that one needs to isolate oneself and withdraw from relating. These narratives echo Register & Henley's (1992) accounts of intimacy, and the radical phenomenological work of Cooper (1972) and Laing (1971) in which relating to another can be experienced as an overpowering fusion of selves, or the intrusion of another into the self. In contrast, relationship satisfaction presents a paradoxical experience of intense closeness and simultaneous feelings of autonomy and

freedom to engage in one's own life projects. Here, an individual's ontological sense of self is reinforced through satisfying connection, through the knowledge that they can give themselves up to relating and become part of a shared relational life project, whilst still experiencing themselves and their partner as separate beings with their own unique life projects (Young-Eisendrath, 1994).

Thus, whilst the lived experience of relationship satisfaction may feel private, 'owned' by individuals and impermeable, through relational exchanges the boundaries of partners' lived experiences can be seen to *dissolve*. This is because two separate life projects are experienced as coming together as one *relational life project* (Young-Eisendrath, 1999). As each partner becomes part of the other's life project (Schutz, 1970) each is experientially revealed as a *being-in-the-world* by and through the other (Sartre, 1957). This is in sharp contrast to mainstream models of relational processes (e.g. Reis and Shaver's (1988) interpersonal model of intimacy; or Aron, Aron & Smollan's (1992) model of 'Intimacy as including the other in the self') in which individuals remain distinct and contained. However, when partners interact they do not 'receive talk and actions' as if these were a ball that was being thrown between them. Rather, their actions permeate each other, they impact and penetrate and refigure each other's being and experience. In this way, the phenomenological analysis presents an original account of relationship satisfaction as a relational process, which is experienced as an *organic* and *ongoing* process of fusion and delineation – not a static, contained and distinct cognitive-affective state.

In summary, this thesis and the empirical analyses presented within it expand on the dialectical, social psychological version of relationship satisfaction in three ways. Firstly, it brings insight from social constructionism in highlighting the ways in which normalising discourses shape and delimit what it means for partners' capacities to be and do 'relational'. Secondly, the thesis brings insight from phenomenology about the tensions that partners experience in relating, and how they make sense of these. Thirdly, there are insights from existential philosophy in the sense that 'the relational' is understood in terms of two ongoing life-projects that are experienced, understood and foregrounded in light of each other. That is, relationship satisfaction is presented as a 'process of becoming' that is always in relation to another.

7.5 Re-theorising Relationship Satisfaction Benefits & Applications

There is multiplicity, variation and fluidity in the productions of relationship satisfaction and dissatisfaction across all three analyses. Relationship satisfaction represents a shifting, dynamic, multifaceted process that is always ‘up for negotiation’. Moreover, this process (these productions and experiential accounts) operate not only at the intersubjective level of the couple, but also at the level of extra-dyadic relationships which are salient to the individuals in the couple (e.g. children, family, friends) and also at the broader social level. That is, what is understood and experienced⁶⁷ as satisfying and how partners should be satisfied. Whilst it is subjectively experienced in a very private way it is the result of a complex, very active (albeit taken-for-granted) combination of assumptions that we continuously mobilise and recycle (Jackson & Scott, 2010; Tiefer, 2010; Weeks, 2013). Furthermore, the experience is dialectical and characterised by ongoing and fluid experiences between the poles of subjectification-objectification (e.g. Young-Eisendrath, 1999) and autonomy-connection (e.g. Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Macquarrie, 1972). There are several benefits to re-theorizing relationship satisfaction in this way.

Firstly, in terms of psychological research, this re-conceptualisation could prompt a level of theoretical & conceptual engagement that is currently missing from the mainstream literature. When mainstream research fails to take into account the socially constructed nature of relationship satisfaction, it misses out the very source which creates the shifts and variability in its meaning. Relationship satisfaction is not distinct from narratives of the self. It is not an independent experience of an asocial, fixed and coherent self. Rather, it is indebted to culture and it gets discursively recycled. Not acknowledging this process can lead to a position where we come to believe that relationship satisfaction and satisfied subjects are fixed entities with their own pre-existing reality. Therefore, the thesis invites researchers to look at the assumptions that are taken for granted, to be open to alternatives, and value individual variation over normative definitions of ‘relationship satisfaction’.

In addition, the experiential characteristics presented through the IPA suggest a subtle, nuanced quality to the ways in which individuals attempt to make sense of their

⁶⁷ This theoretical claim echoes theoretical work (e.g. Harre , 1986; Parkinson, 1996) which has outlined the socially constructed nature of emotions.

experiences of relationship satisfaction. For example, it highlights a potential drawback to mainstream psychometric approaches (e.g. Funk & Rogge, 2007) which focus on asking respondents to rate the extent to which they are satisfied and/or dissatisfied with different aspects of their relationships. These approaches assume that this knowledge is accessible and reflected upon by respondents and this may not be the case. Whilst the approach taken in this thesis also makes these same assumptions, the qualitative nature allows space and time for participants to reflect on their experiences and understandings, and to articulate them in all their discursive richness (including contradictions and nuances). This is missed in a questionnaire which limits and pre-imposes categories of *meaningful* responses. Therefore, the mainstream focus on individual, cognitive appraisals appears limited and too narrowly focused. In the attempt to ‘fix’, ‘define’, measure and predict relationship satisfaction, the practices of mainstream psychological research silence its richness. Such research, which treats relationship satisfaction as a simple variable, is problematic and misses out on the complexity presented by respondents in this thesis. Research on relationship satisfaction would benefit if this complexity was acknowledged, and the content and processes of experience were valued, as opposed to trying to measure and fix it via generalised nomothetic explanations.

Beyond the benefits for psychological researchers, the reconceptualisation of relationship satisfaction has potential benefits for practitioners that engage with the phenomenon in a therapeutic environment (as well as anyone who might read this thesis as a ‘lay’ person). Firstly, theorising relationship satisfaction in terms of discursive resources helps lay people, clients, *and* therapists get a better understanding of the impact of the assumptions that they are mobilising. This appreciation of the broader social prescriptions is often absent from the respondents’ (both lay and therapists’) talk (see Section 7.2 and 7.4). Therefore it could be beneficial for the therapists and clients to reflect on the taken-for-granted assumptions – not only in terms of what constitutes satisfying or dissatisfying relating, but also what constitutes the therapists’ prescriptions for satisfying relating (Elliot & Lemert, 2006). Critical therapeutic works have highlighted this, but these works are still marginalised, and this is evidenced in the fact that mainstream research (e.g. Lebow *et al.*, 2012) is still concerned with ‘discovering’ universal laws of successful therapy. In addition, understanding the power of the cycle of knowledge would empower clients because it would give them more awareness of

the ways in which their experience is linked to the taken-for-granted assumptions they have about relating (e.g. heightened expectations). This awareness could facilitate acceptance and openness to alternatives, as opposed to blindly following and recycling readily available social scripts and practices. However, the thesis also presents variety and complexity across couple therapists and lay peoples' constructions, and therefore there are always opportunities for resistance. Extending the critical lens beyond the data, and to my own knowledge production, the thesis highlights the risk in uncritically recycling established theories. These are also forms of knowledge and power-in-action, which can limit and close down other ways of making sense of the complex accounts of relationship satisfaction presented in the analyses.

Beyond the discursive analyses, a phenomenological reconceptualization of relationship satisfaction can help lay people and couple therapists to appreciate the multiple dimensions of the experience of relationship satisfaction, and its fluidity and relational quality. Effectively, this could open up a different 'vocabulary of relationship satisfaction' and potentially remove feelings of blame and guilt. It could help partners to understand and make sense of their own experience, and the ways in which it is not always 'accessible', but can signify in many ways that will always be in relation to one's partner. This *relational* reconceptualization could help partners to anticipate and understand their relationship satisfaction as a co-production – not something that either of them possesses. Therefore, whilst their experiential world may be felt as private, they will understand that it is *always* in relation to both cultural norms and to the life-project of another, that is, an ongoing 'process of becoming' *in relation to others*. These conceptual benefits outlined above are made possible owing to the methodological approach taken in the thesis, and this approach is the focus of the following section.

7.6 Evaluating the Methodological Approach

Evaluating qualitative research which is underpinned by social constructionism is challenging due to its appreciation of multiple and fluid meanings, and its rejection of 'objective' knowledge claims. Thus, traditional 'quantitative' concepts such as validity, reliability, generalisability and control are not appropriate concepts⁶⁸. Several examples

⁶⁸ These could be appropriate evaluative criteria for qualitative research which adopts a realist epistemological position.

of qualitative evaluation criteria have been produced (e.g. Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992, for Grounded Theory; Elliot, Fischer & Rennie, 1999; Yardley, 2008)⁶⁹, and Smith *et al.* (2009) state that Yardley's (2008) framework offers a useful way of evaluating qualitative research (particularly IPA). Yardley presents the following four evaluation criteria:

1. The 'Impact & Importance' of the analyses
2. The 'Sensitivity to Context' of the research (both in terms of the analytical *processes* and the analytical accounts themselves)
3. The 'Commitment & Rigour' on the part of the researcher
4. Transparency and coherence (again, both in a methodological and epistemological sense)

The 'Impact and Importance' of the thesis have already been discussed in Section 7.5 above. In the following sections the other three criteria are used as a way of evaluating the thesis, but they are tailored in several ways⁷⁰. Firstly, Chapter 3 has already presented a detailed reflection on the *methodologies, methods* and *procedures* employed in the thesis. Therefore, the following evaluation will shift focus, and reflect more on the knowledges that have been *produced* (although this will inevitably bring in discussions on methodology). This emphasis will be most evident in discussing the criteria of 'Sensitivity to Context' and 'Commitment & Rigour'. For the most part, these have already been addressed and therefore they will only be referred to briefly here (and the relevant sections in Chapter 3 flagged). Instead, the discussions will focus on the 'Transparency & Coherence' of the knowledges produced, and the challenges encountered during the process.

7.6.1 Evaluating 'Sensitivity to Context' and 'Commitment & Rigour'

This thesis demonstrates sensitivity to context in several ways. Firstly it is sensitive to the "socio-cultural milieu in which [it] is situated" (Smith *et al.*, 2009, p.180) as it is presented within the existing literature: in terms of the rationale/aims (as presented in

⁶⁹ As outlined by Willig (2008; 2012b), there is some common ground across these criteria including assessing the extent to which qualitative analyses are: Systematically and clearly presented; Grounded in the data; Reflexive; Demonstrate an awareness of the analyses' "contextual and theoretical specificity and the limitations that this imposes upon [their] relevance and applicability" (Willig, 2008, p.152).

⁷⁰ Several researchers (e.g. Madill, Jordan & Shirley, 2000; Reicher, 2000; Willig, 2012b) argue that because there is no singular qualitative paradigm, evaluative criteria should always be tailored to the methodological approaches adopted by the researcher.

Chapters 1 and 2), the epistemological and methodological framework (Chapter 3, Section 3.3 and 3.4) and also in terms of the knowledges produced (as presented in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7). Both the substantive and theoretical literatures were reviewed in depth and in instances where material could not be found that was directly relevant, alternative literatures were reviewed as a way of offering insight (e.g. when there was no phenomenological work explicitly on relationship satisfaction I reviewed phenomenological and existential work on intimacy and mental health). Furthermore, the thesis adopts a constructionist stance and is therefore more explicitly sensitive to the socio-historical conditions in which these literatures have emerged, and more readily acknowledges their capacities, assumptions and limitations.

The ways in which the methodological procedures were carried out also demonstrates sensitivity to context. In Chapter 3 (Section, 3.5) I reflected on the interactional nature of data-collection-as-a-joint-production, and demonstrated sensitivity to context through the ways in which I prepared for the interviews, conducted them, and reflected on them afterwards. I was conscious of putting the participants at ease and ensuring they were 'given a voice' by reflecting on my own assumptions and interview practice. I reflected on the power dynamics during the data production process, and this ethical concern extended to the analyses themselves. I ensured that the analyses were grounded in the data, and reflected on the power that I held through the analytical processes – particularly when I was producing the 'suspicious' interpretative readings of the FDAs, and the presentation of the 'cycle of knowledge'. Thus, the thesis engages with, and commits to ethical research principles in a way that goes beyond a 'tick the box' exercise.

The points outlined above also serve to illustrate the thesis' 'Commitment & Rigour'. Again, these are well illustrated in Chapter 3 which evidences commitment to the underlying theoretical principles of the FDA and IPA, and a rigorous engagement with them – including the ways in which the interviews and analyses were conducted, and the resultant interpretative narratives were situated within the broader literature. Furthermore, Smith *et al.*, (2009) outline how the concept of the 'Independent Audit' can be particularly useful for demonstrating rigour. The audit involves another person (or persons) reviewing the processes undertaken by a researcher, not with the aim of

establishing the ‘truth’ of an account, but as a way of assessing how “systematically and transparently [an] account has been produced” (p.183).

The level at which this was achieved in the thesis was via supervision. For example, with my Direct of Studies (who was more embedded in the day-to-day aspects of the research) I was able to regularly check my progress and understanding, including the more intricate details of applying the methods, such as the coding and themes I produced. At a later stage, when I had initial drafts of chapters (which I had formulated with my Director of Studies), I was able to get feedback through ‘fresh eyes’ from my Second Supervisor who provided a more distanced view of the ‘bigger research picture’, and destabilised the knowledge claims I was making. For example, this included discussions on how the three analyses would fit together at the thesis level, as well as helping me to apply the Foucauldian discursive concepts in Chapters 4, 5 and 7⁷¹. In this way the process of supervision also helped to ensure that the research was procedurally and methodologically transparent and coherent.

7.6.2 Transparency and Coherence

The knowledges I have produced in this thesis are social constructions that are imbued with power. They are not ‘truths’, rather, each of them is one of many possible readings. I have *produced* them following the joint production of data that was the interview process (a process that was always-already enmeshed and indebted to broader social frameworks of meaning). In doing so, I have made claims about the ways in which the respondents produced and reified certain constructions and practices of relationship satisfaction. In turn I acknowledge that my analyses and this thesis are examples of power-in-action, which function to further reify these concepts through their status as academic knowledge, and these knowledges could themselves be critiqued and deconstructed.

However, each of the analyses, taken as a standalone account, is *epistemologically valid* because they are congruent with the epistemological assumptions of their respective methodologies. For example, the Foucauldian discourse analyses of couple therapists’ and lay peoples’ talk present a mapping of the discursive ‘conditions of possibility

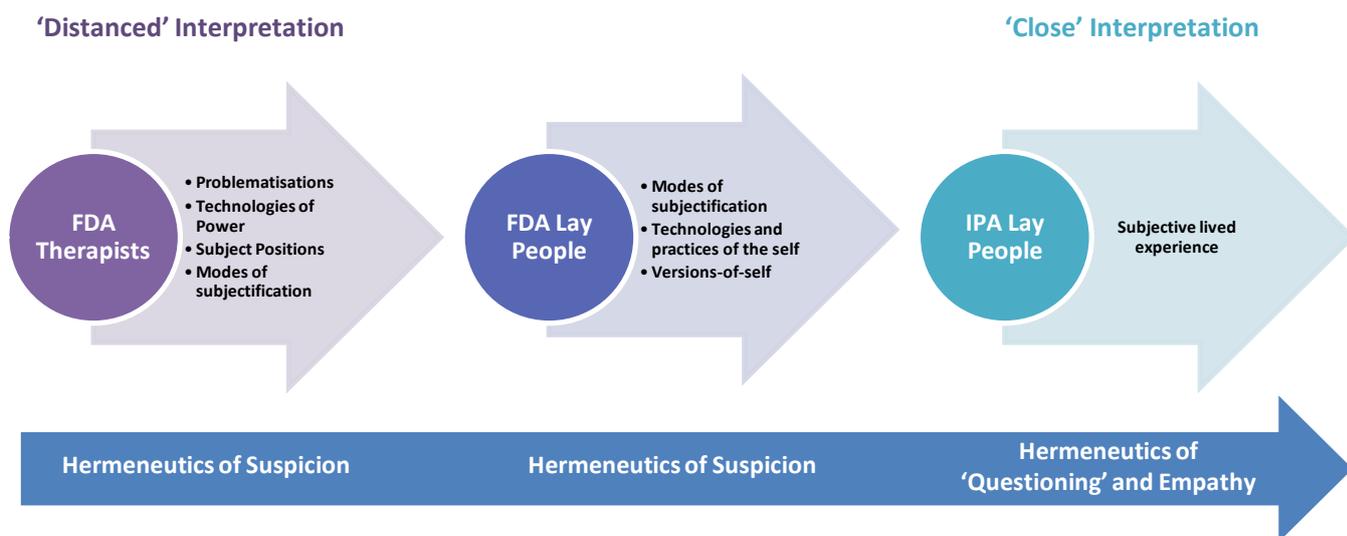
⁷¹ The distinction between the types of feedback I received from my supervisors is a broad distinction, and it should be noted that both of my supervisors provided detailed and ‘bigger picture’ feedback during the course of conducting my PhD.

through which relationship satisfaction (and the satisfied subject) are rendered knowable and governable in certain ways. In contrast, the IPA of lay peoples talk presents a thematic reconstruction that emphasises the participants' subjective lived experience. Furthermore, each of the analyses is internally coherent. I present points of tension and variation, but these are placed in the broader contexts of the theme or discourse to which they apply. Therefore, the thesis applies the concepts of FDA and IPA in a way that is congruent with their underlying epistemological and theoretical principles. Whilst another researcher might produce analyses with different content, I believe they would still make claims of the *form* (type) that I have.

Beyond looking at the analyses in isolation, I also wanted to integrate them in complementary ways by highlighting links between them. In order to accommodate this aim a hermeneutic framework was adopted. Therefore, the socially constructed knowledges that have been produced are also interpretative (hermeneutic) knowledges informed by different hermeneutic 'attitudes' towards the production and analyses of the texts, and the subsequent presentation of those analyses. As outlined in Chapter 3, these attitudes of empathy and suspicion are underpinned by different interpretative theoretical frameworks. The former (empathy) by ideas from phenomenology and existentialism, and the latter (suspicion) by Foucauldian and discursive concepts. Willig (2012a) states that: "*Given the lack of consensus on the question of the validity of interpretations, the best we can do to evaluate interpretative research is to scrutinize the extent to which the balance between bottom-up (or participant-led) and top-down (or researcher-led) input is congruent with the researcher's declared approach to interpretation*" (p.156). This thesis has taken the position that a 'fuller' picture of relationship satisfaction can be achieved by presenting both 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' interpretations via the use of the twin focus analysis. The presentation⁷² of the three empirical chapters achieves this by moving from a position of distant suspicion, to one of close empathy. This 'interpretative continuum' and the associated empirical steps are outlined below in Figure 5:

⁷² As outlined in Chapter 3, I actually undertook the analyses in the opposite direction (See Section 3.7)

Figure 5: The Interpretative Continuum of the Thesis



The presentation of the three analyses in this thesis begins with FDA interpretations that are more distant and prescriptive, and which problematise the constructions of relationship dissatisfaction. They subsequently move from mapping the technologies of power of the therapeutic space, through to the subject positions that are made available to dissatisfied clients, and then onto the satisfying modes of subjectification and associated versions-of-self that are made available when certain practices-of-the-self are mobilised and invested in (by both therapists and lay people). These latter concepts 'draw the analyses closer' to the intersubjective level of the couple, and then the IPA presents a close interpretation of satisfying lived experience at both the intersubjective level, and the level of the individual life-world. The thesis then moves on to the final mode of knowledge production: a presentation of the interplay between the analyses in order to address the three overarching aims of the thesis, and this process represents a mixture of distanced and closer interpretations. Whilst the discussions on the 'cycle of knowledge' involve distanced suspicious interpretations⁷³, the discussions concerning the 'interplay between language and experience' and the 'relational qualities of relationship satisfaction' involve both distanced and closer accounts.

There were distinct challenges in moving from the individual analyses (outlined in the separate empirical chapters) to the overarching aims of the thesis which are addressed this chapter. I struggled in presenting the fluid and complex dichotomies that had been

⁷³ Both in terms of the operation of the participants' discursive resources *and* my interpretation of this operation

taken on (i.e. mapping the overlap between professional and lay discourse, exploring the interplay between language and experience in the twin focus analysis, and drawing on social constructionism and existentialism to re-conceptualise the relational quality of relationship satisfaction). Firstly, whilst I wanted to draw links between the lay therapists FDAs in order to illustrate the cycle of knowledge, I was conscious and concerned that I might slip into causal language. In earlier drafts of the empirical and discussion chapters I had frequently done this, and often defaulted into a realist tone. However, following discussions with my Director of Studies and my Second Supervisor, I came to appreciate that I was not making traditional causal claims, but reflecting on the *material* processes through which discourse gets recycled. Furthermore, the claims I made were *themselves* forms of knowledge and power in action which needed to be destabilised. Beyond the discursive work, there were occasions when I began to try and interpret the impact of the therapists' constructions on the lived experience of their clients. In these instances I was going too far beyond my aims by trying to take a holistic view of all my analyses. In a sense, the aim of the twin focus approach (and my theoretical claim that a focus on discourse alone was not sufficient) began to slip into my aim of mapping the interplay between professional and lay discourse.

Similarly, the 'philosophy' of the *and-and* approach may have influenced my approach to gender in the analyses. Having reflected on the individual analyses I believe that gender is in some ways absent. It *does* appear in all of them, but only when the participants explicitly refer to gender, and so it appears more like an occasional 'subheading'. I am aware, and acknowledge, that I have not pulled 'gender' through as a theme or as a lens through which to interrogate the data. When I was conducting the interviews and analyses it did not *feel* like gender was explicitly 'present', but given my commitment to social constructionism and my acknowledgment that language (especially about heterosexual relationships) is *always-already* gendered, I have reflected on what its 'absence' in my analyses means. Two possible explanations have occurred to me. Firstly, gender injunctions are so deeply ingrained that we are often blind to them and take them for granted without realising. This may be even more pertinent to me as a man who has always been embedded in a patriarchal socio-cultural context. I have never experienced being the 'other' in the same way as women have (e.g. De Beauvoir, 2012) and therefore, whilst I am aware of critical and feminist literatures I am probably often blind to the workings of gendered discourses because I

occupy a privileged space within them. This would be an excellent example of the tyranny of discourse (e.g. Parker, 1992) and the difficulty in ‘seeing’ the operation of the discursive cycle when one is embedded in it. However, on further reflection, I also acknowledge that one of my main interests in this thesis is the ‘humanness’ of lived experience. Some theorists (e.g. Segal, 1994; Tunariu, 2003) have argued that there *is* potential benefit in exploring experience in categories other than gender, and it is possible that this analytical outlook was implicitly fostered via the application of the twin focus analysis and my turn to existential works.

With respect to the twin focus analysis, I attempted to integrate, somewhat, the two different readings by presenting complementary links (and variations) across them instead of leaving them ‘side by side’. In particular, I attempted to draw links between the versions-of-self and the lived experience, and I also drew on both analyses to highlight the *relational* quality of relationship satisfaction. However, I have not attempted to integrate them completely and seamlessly (I do not think that is epistemologically possible). Rather, I have highlighted possible points of convergence in the separate processes of sense-making which, I believe, shed more light on the topic of relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, the two analyses are presented separately, and the integration takes place in this chapter and outside of the two empirical analyses.

Using IPA and FDA presents a twin focus approach which *can* facilitate the integration of analytical narratives⁷⁴. Furthermore, the “turn to interpretation” and my occupation of a less relativistic constructionist position facilitated my ‘simultaneous holding’ of the contradictions that arose from the different aims (and the different methodologies chosen to operationalise these aims). Experientially speaking, it was as if this position allowed me to bring the different analytical interests a little closer together⁷⁵. Managing the potential ‘complementarity’ of the different interpretations was facilitated in this way. This was a challenge at first, and I kept looking for the ‘correct’ epistemological position that would allow me to ‘hold everything’ and ‘find a solution’ for everything.

⁷⁴ In contrast, other approaches would need to remain more distinct. If, for example, I had been doing a descriptive phenomenological analysis then I think it would have been more problematic (not *impossible* – given my and/or philosophy) to draw links between the two, but they would have stood more distinctly and I think I would have had to shift between two (more distant) epistemological positions.

⁷⁵ As opposed to them repelling each other in the way that like-poles of two magnets do

Developing the confidence to ‘allow’ this tension took time (See Section 7.7 for further discussion on this).

The two analytical readings for the twin focus analysis are very complementary. I certainly did not aim to produce something that was ‘nice and neat’ with ‘all the loose ends tied up’. I would argue that the complementarity between the FDA and IPA of lay talk *was* in the data, it was not completely imposed. However, my mindset will have inevitably been influenced by the simultaneous early steps of the two analyses, but as I explained (See Chapter 3, Section 3.6.2), I could not focus solely on one and ignore the other because *both* were always in my mind. At best, I could hold one more loosely. In addition, the inherent nature of the analyses, looking for dominant constructions / master themes, means that the unique and variable can more easily get overlooked (a process I tried to rigorously manage, see Chapter 3, Section 3.6.3 for example).

Perhaps this is something to learn from in future research which utilises a twin focus analysis. Exploring the tension and conflict between the two analyses could be a more explicit objective. Furthermore, another methodological step could be to re-visit the interpretations from the twin focus analyses after a period of time when the researcher is less ‘embedded’ in them. Smith (2007) has done this with an IPA study and he was able to further develop previous interpretations. Thus, in a sense, one could re-visit a qualitative analysis (be it empathic *or* suspicious) at a later date with a more ‘suspicious’ interpretative attitude informed by a reflexive framework but this time the focus would be on the interpretative readings, not the ‘raw’ textual data⁷⁶. Such a process would effectively extend the methodological evaluation presented here, and offer a further way of operationalising the reflexive theoretical call to acknowledge and reflect on the role that the researcher has played in shaping the knowledge produced.

Future research could also extend the twin focus analysis to other relational contexts. During the planning stages of this thesis I considered interviewing couples and collecting dyadic data, but we moved away from this idea because we felt that there could be ethical issues and a greater chance of self-censorship. I wanted participants to feel that they could freely articulate as much as possible. However, I would still be

⁷⁶ This is a process that I engaged in when reflecting on the presentation of the ‘cycle of knowledge’ (see Section 7.2).

interested in collecting and analysing dyadic data, and possibly map inter-subjective practices in action by incorporating micro discursive methodologies. This would require careful ethical consideration for the wellbeing of both partners. Moreover, I had considered interviewing individuals who were currently in couple therapy. Again, I decided against this idea due to the ethical barriers and timescales involved in recruiting these participants, but I believe it would be beneficial to interview clients in therapy too. As outlined elsewhere, all of the participants identified their current relationships as ‘satisfying’, and it would be theoretically beneficial to map the subjective experiences and discursive resources that individuals identified as ‘dissatisfied’ produce.

I had also considered looking at same-sex relationships too, but chose not to as my main interest was on heterosexual relationships. Since this decision, I have frequently reflected on whether or not I made a heteronormative assumption in presuming that same-sex relationships would be different. I think I probably did. Again, my heterosexuality is taken for granted and (in the same way as gender) as a heterosexual male I am culturally privileged as ‘the norm’, not as the ‘other’. However, given the large bodies of LGBT academic literatures I appreciate that same-sex relationships are embedded in, and produced through, discursive frameworks that I am unfamiliar with. Therefore including same sex relationships in this thesis might have been theoretically too challenging as it would have required familiarisation with further bodies of academic literature such as queer theory, pink therapy (Davies, 1996), and recent debates about re-orientation therapy⁷⁷.

Related to this point, my group of participants were relatively homogenous: middle class and culturally homogenous. I believe it would be both ethical *and* of theoretical interest to explore the productions of other diverse groups, perhaps those who are marginalised and less frequently given a voice (e.g. different cultural and ethnic groups, or those with a disability⁷⁸, or older individuals). Lastly, I believe the twin focus approach would suit further couple therapeutic work, because I see interesting parallels between the types of interpretations that go on in the therapeutic context. The therapists described the interpretative process they engaged in with their clients, and in some ways

⁷⁷ A controversial and discredited ‘sexual re-orientation therapy’ already banned by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP).

⁷⁸ This would be of personal interest to me as my sister has a spinal cord injury.

it seemed to reflect the process I went through with the data; simultaneously trying to understand and empathise with their clients' experiences whilst also attempting to make sense of the underlying assumptions that their clients draw on.

7.7 Final reflections - Embracing openness and resisting foreclosure

The production of this thesis took place within a broader system of academic institutions, discourses and practices, and represents a form of power-in-action designed to reposition me as a 'Doctor'. Therefore it is important to personally reflect (Wilkinson, 1988) on my role in producing this knowledge, and also how the process has 'produced me'.

Willig (2012b) states: "[...] to interpret an account, the researcher needs to bring some ideas, some expectations, some conceptual tools with which to approach the text. At the same time, the researcher needs to be open to being changed by the encounter with the text [...]" (p.156). In my case, my assumptions were shaped by the theoretical and epistemological position(s) I adopted for the thesis. However, early on in the process they were also shaped by a range of other factors. When I started my PhD I was an inexperienced social psychologist, and an inexperienced qualitative researcher. For a long time I was influenced by other theoretical positions that I was previously aware of, and also the taken-for-granted realist epistemological position that I had adopted all my life until I started doing my PhD. In addition, I *did* have personal experience of the topic I was investigating, and I certainly took it for granted that relationship dissatisfaction was 'a problem'.

It took time to shake off my own preconceptions which I found easy to mobilise (in the interviews and the analysis) and gradually incorporate the new ideas from the different theoretical frameworks that I had adopted. Beyond the mainstream literature on the topic of relationship satisfaction I had to collect, review, and become familiar and comfortable with: critical social psychology, social constructionism, phenomenology, existential philosophy, hermeneutic philosophy, dialectical theory, pluralism in qualitative methodologies, and mainstream and critical therapeutic literatures. This was exceptionally challenging but, with the help of my Director of Studies and my Second Supervisor, I was gradually able to draw on the contradictory ideas in a way that felt

authentically ‘mine’ and I became comfortable with ‘holding’ the tension between the different literatures.

This feeling was crystallised for me by an article I saw in *The Times* in 2010⁷⁹. It had been written by Salman Rushdie and contained three extracts which caught my attention. The first was a quote from the *Song of Myself* by the poet and author Walt Whitman:

*Do I contradict myself?
Very well then, I contradict myself.
(I am large, I contain multitudes)*

The second was a comment by Rushdie:

“Literature has never lost sight of what our quarrelsome world is trying to force us to forget. Literature rejoices in contradiction, and in our novels and poems we sing our human complexity, our ability to be, simultaneously, both yes and no, both this and that, without feeling the slightest discomfort.”

These extracts helped me to understand the notion of ‘contradictions being *ok*’. I had struggled with the different knowledges in the early stages of the PhD and had often attempted to identify the ‘correct one’. However, I became comfortable with looking at relationship satisfaction from different perspectives and acknowledging that these different perspectives did not have to perfectly map in a one-to-one causal relationship. It was possible to learn more by looking at a topic in two distinct ways: an ‘*and/and*’ approach as opposed to an ‘*either/or*’ one. This became the whole philosophy of the thesis and it celebrated the multiplicity and contradictions inherent to the processes of sense-making; not only in looking at the participants’ productions and experiences of relationship satisfaction, but also in the process of producing academic knowledge which often looks for single ‘truths’ or perspectives.

Therefore, whilst my relationship with this thesis has not always been a satisfying one and has been challenging on many occasions over the past six years, it has been worth celebrating the struggle of opening myself up to alternatives, rather than turning away from them when they have destabilised me and challenged my taken-for-granted assumptions. Thus, the main way in which I have been changed by this thesis is in a gradual turn from a position of searching for single ‘truths’ and foreclosure to one of

⁷⁹ It had been left on a train on the seat opposite me and I was flicking through it to pass the time.

openness and acceptance of contradictions and multiplicity; a philosophy encapsulated by the *and-and* approach and the third extract from that Times article:

“The Arabic equivalent of the formula “once upon a time” is kan ma kan, which translates: “It was so, it was not so.” [...] And in our age of oversimplification, this beautiful complication has never been more important.” (Rushdie, 2010)

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Appendix A – Understanding lived experience and the structure of its discursive context: A dual focus methodological approach

Understanding lived experience and the structure of its discursive context: A dual focus methodological approach

Matthew Colahan, Dr. Aneta Tunariu & Dr. Pippa Dell

In this paper we discuss the methodological framework of the first author's PhD thesis in order to expose the thinking underpinning a dual focus methodology for a research programme which sets out to explore both the lived experience, and the socially constructed nature of 'satisfaction' in long-term, heterosexual relationships. The proposal is that these two distinct exploratory foci can be addressed by conducting two distinct qualitative analyses on a single body of narrative data generated via interviews with twelve people from the general population; using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and then using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). This approach presents a theoretical challenge as the two methodologies are grounded within different epistemologies. We propose that by adopting a critical realist position at the thesis level, rather than at the individual empirical level of the research, the epistemological assumptions of both methodologies can be maintained and the two foci can yield analytic insights alongside one another. By drawing on established hermeneutic theory, we propose that the interpretative stories generated from this dual focus approach can come together in potentially complementary ways and "bridg[e] the classical dichotomy between distanced explanation and close understanding" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p.130) associated with FDA and IPA respectively. The current paper will present and discuss the proposed dual focus approach, addressing the benefits and challenges of conducting both an IPA and an FDA on the same data set. It will conclude by outlining pragmatic suggestions for undertaking a dual focus analysis, including managing the interview structure and process, and the phases of analysis. The intention is to contribute to the growing preoccupation within the field of qualitative research about the limitations of an exclusive focus on the role of language in shaping realities and experience (e.g., Willig, 2007).

Why a dual focus?

Whilst other researches have drawn on ideas from both IPA and FDA in their work (e.g. Chadwick, Liao, & Boyle, 2005; Flowers, Duncan, & Francis, 2000; Johnson, Burrows, & Williamson, 2004), in general, the connection between the two methodologies remains implicit. However as Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) point out, since IPA and FDA "appear to come to the social world in *potentially* complementary forms [there may be] value in a more explicit articulation of the relationship between them" (p.196). IPA and FDA are delineated by distinct analytic foci and, as such, are able to shed light on the topic of relationship satisfaction in different ways. In IPA, for example, the emphasis would rest with mapping participants' understandings, and gaining a sense of their internal life worlds in terms of their subjective

experiences of relationship satisfaction. By contrast, in FDA the emphasis would be on mapping patterns of discursive resources, how these are mobilised by participants to construct relationship satisfaction in certain ways, and how certain constructions come to warrant certain social practices but not others.

Whilst FDA does attempt to theorise subjective experience, it does so by accounting for it in terms of “subject positions” – vantage points, and their associated rights, duties, and power, made available when the speaker occupies a discourse. Discourses are understood as forms of structured language that are available to a linguistic community in a historical time, which shape and limit what we can think, say, and do, and also what can be done to us. As cultural formulations, discourses about romantic relationships construct its subjects as certain types of people and not others (e.g. good enough partner, ‘normal’, ‘abnormal’), and open up subject positions which cannot be avoided (e.g., ‘the care taker of my lover’s needs’), although we can become aware of these, recycle or try to resist them. Once one accepts, or is unable to resist a particular subject position, they are “locked into the system of rights, speaking rights and obligations that are carried with that position” (Burr, 2003, p.111). In FDA, subjective experience is thus investigated and understood through discursive concepts and expands our knowledge about the close relationship between discourse, culture and subjectivity. It shows how discursive constructions and practices play a central, formative role in the ways in which we experience ourselves (e.g. as ‘partner’, ‘lover’, ‘satisfied’, ‘dissatisfied’ etc.). However more can be explored about the subjective richness of experiencing oneself as a dis/ satisfied ‘romantic’ partner, beyond the reifying role of language or the tyranny of discourse, to get a closer look into the humanness of experiencing these phenomena. There are further nuances and dimensions of psychological experience, say of experiencing satisfaction in one’s intimate relationship, that are difficult to articulate and, as Willig notes, “seem to involve [one’s] entire being, in a pre-reflective kind of way [and] seem to be about more than the use of language” (2007, p.210).

FDA permits us to say something important about the contours of experiences that might be made available, or limited, by certain discourses and subject positions, but it cannot tell us (and does not aim to) about the phenomenologically grounded awareness of an encounter; in other words, about the felt *actuality* experienced by individuals within a given context and time (Willig, 2001; 2007). Several researchers have explored alternatives or extensions to discursive work, which allow for the study of embodiment and subjectivity (e.g. Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Radley & Taylor, 2003; Gillies *et al.*, 2005). IPA also offers a potent way forward. Through the research process IPA allows the interpretative theorising of extra-discursive qualities of subjective meaning making activities. IPA treats participants’ accounts as

expressions of their experience as it appears and signifies to them, and therefore goes beyond seeing the structure and nature of participants' talk in terms of discursive resources. While FDA points out that the discourses we use have direct implications for what we can experience (Henriques *et al.*, 1984); IPA can offer a more direct, albeit interpretative, approach to articulating these implications from the point of view of the experiencing participant. This is the purpose of the dual analytic focus proposed here.

Epistemological Challenges

Whilst the dual focus approach has the benefit of allowing the exploration of the interplay between language, culture and experience, using both methodological frameworks within the one research programme (here a PhD thesis) poses epistemological challenges which need to, and can be addressed. These challenges stem from the fact that whilst IPA and FDA both concern themselves with the role of meanings, collective meaning (patterns of commonality), and individualised meaning (patterns of variability) in constituting subjective realities, they do so in different ways. FDA has a stronger and more direct empirical commitment to social constructionism than IPA typically has (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Amongst other things, FDA represents the speaker's narratives and associated realities as constructed through discourse, and seeks to map dominant patterns of collectively shared meanings deeply indebted to a local culture. IPA draws more on ideas from the symbolic interactionism of George Meade and so aims to articulate themes representing the speakers as individuals with hermeneutic agency and, importantly, with individualised, psychological life-worlds. The empirical interest of a researcher to gain insight into these psychological life-worlds will necessarily encounter the conditions of the "double hermeneutics" (Smith, 1996); namely, that IPA knowledge-claims are provisional, relative and always a contextualised function of the researcher's interpretations of the participants' own interpretations as they reflect and try to make sense of their experiences within research settings.

Commonly, empirical applications of IPA principles tend to be sympathetic to social constructionism in that there is acknowledgment that meaning-making processes involve the speaker taking-up and mobilising certain discursive resources. There is an appreciation that participants' narratives are always already situated within, and therefore shaped, limited and enabled, by language and practices (Smith *et al.*, 2009). The linguistic and social fabric of any given community acts as a framework for potentially individualised production of meanings and offers socially valued formulations, which, when taken up, are subject to becoming taken-for-granted "habits of thought" (Parker & Shotter, 1990). In turn, such psychologically generated habits of thought contribute to the very system where they were created; namely to the system of dominant discourses, associated practices, gendered injunctions, and so on. Recycled by

speakers within daily interactions, internalised habits of thought prop up reified cultural expectations about, for example, the right and responsibility to have a ‘good romantic’, ‘satisfying’ relationship (see also Tunariu & Reavey, 2003). The discourse analysis of narratives about relationship satisfaction would involve a critical mapping of the “bodies-of-knowledge that *constitute* [relationship satisfaction] in a wider cultural environment [that] might be accessed” (Larkin, 2006, p.109). On the other hand IPA subscribes to a less singular empirical translation of social constructionism than FDA, and does not invest in the same critical, deconstructive aims.

One way to navigate contrasting epistemological commitments within the same thesis is by adopting a position which moves away from the more relativistic (radical) forms of social constructionism, and moves towards a position that can accommodate a notion of reality that can be arrived at by “differentiating between the ‘real’ and the ‘actual’ ” (Willig, 1998 p.102). Such a position would accept that the experience of relationship satisfaction or dissatisfaction is always grounded within prevailing cultural understandings about intimate relationships, and these are always already prescribing, but the experience does not become less *real* to an individual once its social construction has been established through theory (e.g., Tunariu, 2003). This position also acknowledges that a series of distinct actual conditions are required for ‘relationship satisfaction’ to possibly unfold in meaning and experience in certain ways. For example, these could include material (embodied), cognitive (inchoate anxiety which an individual is attempting to articulate), or social (linguistic access to certain communal views but not others) conditions (e.g., Harré, 1998). This position shares, therefore, common epistemological ideas with critical realism. Critical realism theorises “a structural reality to the world [...] which in some way underpins, generates or ‘affords’ our ways of understanding and talking about it” (Burr, 2003, p.96). Social and physical arrangements can be involved in providing the conditions-of-possibility for the emergence of discourses without determining them. As Willig (1999) puts it, “[c]onditions of life, as experienced by the individual through discourses, provide reasons for the individual’s actions. It follows that from a non-relativist social constructionist point of view, meanings are afforded by discourses, accommodated by social structures and changed by human actors” (p.44). Other theorists have also proposed bridges across the material-discursive divide. For example, Nightingale and Cromby (2002) argue for “the ‘co-constitution’ of personal experience by both the nature of material reality and the constructive force of language” (Burr, 2003, p.100). In summary, the epistemological features argued as necessary for the dual focus approach proposed in this paper are as follows: that when spoken about, the experience does not become less real to the speaker once we notice the workings of discourse-use (IPA can capture this); and that the actuality and conditions-of-possibility point to materiality and their affordability of meanings (again IPA can capture this).

The proposed dual focus methodological approach encounters the task of co-joining epistemological interests as outlined above, and then of integrating findings to serve both sets of analytic foci (IPA and FDA), as well as the thesis' overall research questions. Two separate analyses of the same body of textual data can meet the first challenge and accommodate the epistemic criteria of both IPA and FDA. In order to meet the second challenge (that of integrating the findings of both analyses), current discussions on the role of hermeneutic theory in research methods need to be drawn upon to guide the treatment of the text, such that the ways in which the text is treated under the FDA and IPA paradigms will generate two complementary interpretative stories.

Hermeneutics of Empathy and Suspicion

Hermeneutics refers to the process of interpretation. Whilst the original focus was on the interpretation of biblical texts, hermeneutic theory has broadened to encompass a much wider range of texts. Today, social theorists have argued that hermeneutic theory is at the heart of the qualitative research process (Rennie, 2007) and can offer much to contemporary psychology (Smith, 2007). Ricoeur (1970 cited in Langdridge, 2007) outlined two broad interpretative positions: the hermeneutics of empathy, and the hermeneutics of suspicion. The former tends to focus on the content of talk, and aims to reconstruct the speaker/author's experience in their own terms. In contrast, the latter takes a more critical view of language and the role of the speaker/author, and draws on external theoretical perspectives to deconstruct the social-structure of their talk (Smith *et al.*, 2009; Sullivan, 2010). Recently there have been arguments in favour of incorporating both hermeneutics of empathy and suspicion (see Langdridge, 2007; Rennie, 2007). Broadly speaking, IPA operates from within a hermeneutics of empathy, whilst FDA tends towards a hermeneutics of suspicion, although this distinction is neither as rigid, nor as simple as stated.

Smith *et al.*, (2009) state that IPA can take a centre-ground position in relation to the hermeneutics of empathy and suspicion (see also Smith, 2004; Larkin *et al.*, 2006) as long as the focus remains on elucidating the meaning of experience. This does not involve adopting the critical, deconstructive aim of the hermeneutics of suspicion; but rather, incorporating what Smith *et al.*, (2009) call a hermeneutics of 'questioning'. So whilst the IPA researcher wants to empathise with the participant's experience, and to 'put themselves in their shoes', they also want to examine the experience from other angles and ponder the meaning-making of the participant. The IPA research process starts with a hermeneutics of empathy, but may become more questioning. However, this questioning is always driven by the content of the text itself, rather than an external theoretical framework (see also Langdridge's 2007 work on Critical

Narrative Analysis). Thus, whilst IPA may involve a hermeneutics of questioning, it is clearly a different interpretative process to Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

The hermeneutics of suspicion share common aspects with Foucault's work which, inspired by Nietzsche's genealogical method, attempted to "search for the shameful, fragmented origin behind societal phenomena, whose origins have become mythologised, with the passing of time, as noble rationality and unambiguous clarity" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p.130). The hermeneutics of suspicion looks beyond participants' subjective meaning-making to consider the social structures through which and for which their meaning-making is made possible. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) articulate this as the injection of "critical social theory into the hermeneutical circle to facilitate an understanding of the hidden structures and tacit cultural dynamics that insidiously inscribe social meanings and values" (p.288). With the upshot that "[w]hat seems natural and self-evident should be problematised via insight (the hermeneutics of suspicion) and critique" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p.167). As outlined earlier, FDA can provide this sceptical, critical view of the broader social context, and prevent the researcher from falling into the trap of culturally-shared 'common-sense' meanings (Tunariu & Reavey, 2007). Smith *et al.*, (2009) have argued that "it makes sense to present the two readings separately so that the reader can see the different analytic leverage [that] is going on" (p.106). The dual focus analysis presented here represents a way of operationalising this theoretical call.

Pragmatic considerations for a dual focus approach

In applying the dual focus approach, pragmatic considerations and decisions have to be made at every milestone typical of deconstructing the exploratory nature of the qualitative research process. These pragmatic considerations require the researcher to acknowledge possible points of tension between the two methodologies of IPA and FDA, and make decisions about the best way forward to ensure that the epistemological assumptions of both are maintained, and that the research questions and interests remain protected. The initial milestone, once the topic is decided (see also Coyle, 2010), is to formulate the research questions from within the epistemological and theoretical frameworks of the respective methodologies. In the case of the first author's PhD the research questions included, for example, "How do participants experience satisfaction in their relationships?" and "How do participants know when they are 'satisfied'?" for the IPA focus. For the FDA, research questions included "How do people construct relationship satisfaction? What dominant discourses get mobilised?"; "When does it make sense for participants to talk about relationship satisfaction in a certain ways?" and "What subject-positions are being created, and what modes of experiencing relationship satisfaction (including distribution of power) do these make available?"

Overlapping with the process of articulating the two strands of research questions for the empirical project are considerations and articulations at the level of epistemology. Here, the researcher needs to remain acutely aware of the epistemological assumptions of IPA and FDA and how these inform their respective analytic foci (see earlier discussions for outline). A third procedural milestone requires the researcher to establish the direction in which they wish to go in preparing to collect data. As with any qualitative work, the epistemological position and theoretical framework adopted influences the formulation of the interview questions as well as the interview style. In terms of interview structure, in the case of the first author's PhD, the selection of questions emerged from a commitment to remain open and curious towards the participants' voice and aware of the researcher's own intellectual and personal assumptions, and, as much as is possible, keeping these bracketed. The set of questions devised to guide but not restrict the interview conversations thus featured open-ended questions which tried to tap into the analytic foci of both FDA and IPA. For example questions such as '*What do you understand by the term relationship satisfaction?*' were followed by '*How do you know when you're satisfied? What does it feel like?*'. The aim was to encourage as much narrative, and as much reflection as possible, and to prompt the participants to describe their internal life-world, whilst noting points of tension in their accounts. This process required active engagement with the interview process and was challenging because of the simultaneous needs to be relaxed enough to allow free narrative, whilst also remaining curious and aware of potential moments of segueing into novel areas, or contradiction with what had already been said, as these moments hold high potential for both IPA and FDA interests. It required constant reflection by the interviewer on what had been covered, and the extent to which the analytic foci and questions had been addressed.

The first author found it useful adopting what can be called a 'relaxed awareness' style during the interviews with the participants; relaxed in the sense of being receptive to and engaging with the participants' subjective accounts, whilst being aware of points of tension in their narratives as these often delineate boundaries between dominant discourses employed in the same conversation. Likewise, on the one hand paying attention to participants' descriptive narratives and phenomenological accounts as much as possible, and on the other hand remaining aware of contradictions in their talk as a gateway into exploring the simultaneous mobilisation of multiple discourses and/or as gateways exposing interpretation and experience arising together. Other researchers interested in taking the dual focus approach might take an alternative approach. For example, one might develop an interview style that is active in highlighting contradictions and tensions in language and try to invite the participants to take a position in relation to this in preparation for the hermeneutics of suspicion later on.

The fourth research milestone that has pragmatic implications for conducting a dual focus approach is data analysis. This includes the procedural sequence that the researcher decides to use to conduct the two analyses, and also how they balance the different analytic foci whilst working through the various phases of the analyses. Outlining the phases of analysis is intended for the purpose of transparency and accountability which, alongside reflexivity, are a necessary part of ensuring inductive and epistemological rigour in the process of knowledge making. The interpretative claims then presented as master themes or discourses, respectively, can stand the scrutiny of credibility, viability and transferability applicable to qualitative research. In terms of what sequence to conduct the analyses, in the case of the first author's PhD, the researcher decided to start with the IPA. This is due to the fact that the analytic focus of FDA requires a technical understanding of discourse theory, which speaks of language-use as being structured into coherent discourses i.e. linguistic packages. As such searching for these system-like linguistic 'packages' of metaphors, assumptions, and ideas yields better to a more global look at the text, yet with a technical gaze as its deconstruction unfolds as part of the encounter with the data. A panoramic view of the prevalent building blocks used to construct objects and events, and associated links or contradictions, can raise familiarity and aid the researcher navigate the text when deconstructing it through the lens of IPA. In doing IPA first, the researcher sets out with a looser, more open gaze towards the complex, initially undifferentiated thematic patterns as they emerge as units of meaning, whether these are articulated as concept-understandings, phenomenological descriptions or hermeneutic preoccupations that hold personal significance for the speaker. Therefore, the researcher may decide to engage in the IPA analysis of the data first then, armed with a detailed understanding of the text, to proceed to interrogate it from the analytic vantage point of FDA.

The dual focus approach invites the researcher to subscribe to the idea that language and experience are deeply intertwined, and therefore the sequence of the analyses could be conducted in either way. The invitation is to suspend the analytic foci and concerns of one mode of the analysis while embarking on the other. Starting with a clear outline of the phases of analysis derived through principles, and tailored to research questions, can help the researcher embrace this invitation. Commitment to engage with the text within the framework of an IPA or FDA lens can translate in a disciplined application of de-construction and re-construction of text. However throughout the research process the dual focus approach will remain visible to the researcher; at times, these will be experienced as an 'and-and' rather than a clear cut 'either-or' process. Awareness that this will happen, that the intention to suspend one set of concerns may not always necessarily be possible, increases the researcher's readiness to proceed. For instance, while conducting the FDA of a body of text, IPA related ideas, hunches, or reflexions may arise and need to be 'purged' by noting them down next to the 'parent' narrative for later use. When

done with purpose and intention, this noting practice can be usefully incorporated as part of the phases of analysis step of the dual focus analysis.

The first author, once again, found the approach of ‘relaxed awareness’ to be a useful way of managing this challenge. A distinct outline of phases of analysis was developed for each mode of analysis. All interview transcripts were analysed individually, either via IPA or FDA respectively, and then a collective mapping of the overall body of transcripts, prepared. The first phase of analysis for both the IPA and FDA was conducted in parallel. This entailed familiarity with the data ensuring curiosity was maintained. Once familiar, the data were prepared in a three column table, with the interview transcript in the central column. The left hand column was then used for the first phase of analysis - the initial, detailed, text vs. interpretation driven analysis of the narrative. Subsequently, in the second phase of analysis, the coding from the first phase was revisited (along with the text) in light of two things: 1) a *deliberate* focus on the IPA informed research questions and analytic foci and 2) a simultaneous *relaxed awareness* about the research questions and analytic foci of the FDA. Thus, interpretative coding/structuring of units of meaning and initial themes were noted in the right hand column of the table, primarily for the IPA, but also for the FDA. These were written in two different formats to distinguish between them. From this position the process of ‘relaxed awareness’ allowed the researcher to attempt to suspend their attention on one analysis to allow the full unfolding of the other analysis. There was a deliberate focus on one analysis, while the second analysis was considered from a position of relaxed awareness. In this second stage the researcher did not solicit the hermeneutics of suspicion, but remained open to allow the interpretative stories to unfold. This allowed the researcher to conform to the IPA process in an inductively rigorous way whereby the themes could be interpreted, whilst also facilitating the initial stages of the FDA.

Once this second phase was complete, the IPA and FDA analyses became completely separate, and the IPA continued through the usual stages of analysis (e.g. Smith *et al.*, 2009). Recurrent themes were pulled out along with illustrative extracts. These were compiled in a new document which was then analysed for higher order themes, guided by three things: i) points that appeared relevant and significant to the participant; ii) points that appeared to be highly recurrent; iii) points that addressed the research questions. These formed the basis of a diagrammatic representation of the master themes with their associated sub-themes. The process was repeated for all participants and then the researcher looked across the entire corpus of data to arrive at an overall IPA mapping of the dominant themes. Once completed, the researcher returned to the FDA, which had been left since the second phase of the IPA. Thus the coding and other purposeful notes from the first phases were revisited through the lens of

the research questions set, the FDA foci, and a relaxed awareness of the IPA findings that had just been completed. The researcher was now principally focussed on the FDA, once an orderly revisit of the IPA notes took place solely in light of FDA concerns. The analysis was now guided by an attention to i) the various ways in which the topic was constructed through discourse; ii) the associated social practices warranted by these constructions; iii) the subject positions made available by the mobilisation of these discourses. Again, this process was repeated for all interview transcripts, before an analysis of the entire body of data was conducted to arrive at an overall discursive mapping of the topic.

One of the reasons for adopting this approach in the first author's PhD is that the researcher felt he could not simply do one analysis followed by the other because the research questions and analytic foci of *both* analyses were always in his mind. Thus, the researcher suspended (within the parameters outlined above) their attention on each analysis in turn, in order to give equal attention to both, yet IPA and FDA were both constantly in their awareness: one deliberate, and the other one relaxed, and then vice versa. The assumptions of one analysis cannot be fully bracketed, and a fuller picture can only be accessed by seeing them in action together. The dual focus approach brings the researcher closer to the complexity and dynamics of this interplay and allows it to inform the integration of the findings from the two analyses. To integrate the findings the researcher returns to their initial research questions, as these serve as a rigorous structure to separate the two interplaying aspects of language and experience before 'dropping them back together'. As such the dual focus methodological approach proposed here allows an 'artificial separation' of the two aspects that are always already intertwined for the benefit of closer examination and interpretative insight.

In summary, in the procedural milestones of the dual focus research project, the IPA and FDA phases of analysis run parallel at various points and overlap during others. They are connected at the point of establishing the research topic, but separate when articulating the research questions, and remain separate in terms of epistemology. They overlap during the data collection process in some ways, but remain separate in others; together in the sense that the data for both analyses are collected at the same time, but separate in terms of what the researcher asks and pursues during the interview process. Similarly, for the phases of analysis the two methodologies overlap in the initial, detailed, close-to-the-text analytic stage, where both happen at the same time. Then in the further 'theory neutral', or interpretation focused phases of analysis, the two analytic foci remain distinct but one set of concerns are deliberately in focus, and the other one are monitored and noted. The methodologies then run in parallel until they are fully separated for the later phases, and will come together once again in the integration of the findings.

Both IPA and FDA methodologies emphasise the relative nature of knowing and the role of context in participants' meanings and experiences. This shared emphasis offers the basis for "fertile links" between them (Smith, 2009, p.196). The dual focus methodological approach presented here allows the same phenomenon to be analysed at both the discursive, social level, and also at the psychological, sense making level. While the IPA maps out patterns across experiential accounts of individual's meaning-making activities grounded by a cultural and inter-personal discursive context, the FDA maps out the structures of the discursive context itself. In the analysis of the same set of data the dual focus approach is able to follow two strands of emerging knowledge. To achieve this in an empirical research project requires epistemological reflexivity so that the researcher has transparency and clarity in their approach to both methodologies. To allow the full unfolding of one analytic journey at a time the researcher must also temporarily suspend their other empirical interest. This requires tolerance of overlap, uncertainty, and possibly contradiction. During the process the researcher must decide how and when they intend to treat the text i.e. in terms of empathy or suspicion? They must constantly reflect on whether the text is better understood as a discourse or as a phenomenological theme. This requires them to know their interpretative story i.e. what interpretative findings do they want to present as viable knowledge? This is driven by their analytic foci, which, in turn, translate from the study's research questions.

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Appendix B – The ‘innate human needs’

Baumeisster & Leary (1995) argued that humans were born with survival needs (such as food and shelter) and, over time, developed additional interpersonal needs (see also Rusbult, Arriaga, and Agnew, 2001). This view was exemplified by Fiske (2009) who proposed that over time humans developed five core social motives (Stevens & Fiske, 1995): ‘*belonging*’, ‘*understanding*’, ‘*controlling*’, ‘*enhancing self*’, and ‘*trusting others*’ to facilitate their social group functioning and increase the chances of their survival. Similar to Fiske, Weiss (1974, as cited in Duck, 2011) outlined seven ‘fundamental provisions’ which produced innate human needs to belong, and feel accepted and understood. These included: (1) *Belonging and a sense of reliable alliance*, which entailed the need to be accepted and approved by others, and to know they were ‘there’ for you; (2) *Emotional integration and stability* because it was through relational, not individual, experience that people made sense of their ‘place’ in the world; (3) *Opportunities to communicate about ourselves* which facilitated feeling accepted; (4) *Provision of assistance and physical support*, both literally and as a symbolic gesture which demonstrated that the recipient (and their relationship to the giver) was valued; (5) *Reassurance of your worth and value* as an individual with personal autonomy, rights and freedom of choice; (6) *Opportunity to help others* to demonstrate one’s value to others and also one’s implicit decency to oneself; (7) *Personality support* by sharing intimate details about one’s ‘inner self’ with people who shared the same values and thought in the same way.

These dominant constructions were also reflected in the psychological literature on close relationships. For example, Drigotas and Rusbult (1992) claimed that there were five categories of needs which were fulfilled within the context of contemporary relationships: (1) intimacy needs (confiding in each other, disclosing feelings, sharing thoughts), (2) companionship needs (engaging in activities and spending time together), (3) sexual needs (including all forms of intimate tactility), (4) security needs (experiencing certainty, stability, and security in the relationship and life), and (5) emotional involvement needs (corresponding, and influencing each other’s, moods and emotions) see also Le & Agnew (2001).

Appendix C – Further discussion on Attachment Theory and the Satisfied Subject

The power of Attachment Theory to produce the ‘satisfied subject’ can also be seen in the way in which Bowlby’s focus on cognitive processes and attachment ‘working models’ came to be mirrored in the tenets of cognitive therapy [See Section 2.7.2 for further discussion], and a number of authors have suggested that attachment theory provides a framework for understanding the underlying principles of *all* relationships and effective therapies (e.g. Biringen, 1994; Fish and Condon, 1994; Lopez, 1995), without taking the context of the emergence of these ideas into account. Such governance warranted individuals to aim for certainty, stability, and security, whilst also fulfilling their obligations for mutual emotional care and support in order to achieve and experience stable, *satisfying* relationships. Thus, as outlined above, secure *satisfying* relationships were produced as sites of positive, responsive, self-assured interactions, and lacking in serious dyadic problems (e.g. Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney, J.A., & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) due to partners’ conflict negotiation (Feeney, 1994), emotional expressiveness (Feeney *et al.*, 1998), ‘appropriate’ patterns of disclosure (Keelan, Dion & Dion, 1998), and sexual satisfaction (Birnbaum, 2007). In contrast dissatisfying relationships were constructed as ‘insecure’ sites of negative affect, characterised by low levels of trust (e.g. Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney, J. A., & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Rothbard & Shaver, 1994), and low sexual satisfaction (Butzer & Campbell, 2008). Thus, the psychologisation of ‘healthy’ attachments meant that the subjects of *satisfying* relationships were compelled by a moral responsibility for their mutual development and contentment via the enactment of ‘correct’ affection and emotional support (Finn, 2012). Such research reinforced the attachment theoretical perspective that relationships were satisfying to the extent that they meet “innate” needs for comfort, care and sexual gratification in gender-specific ways (e.g. Shaver and Mikulincer, 2005).

Appendix D – Further discussion on Interdependence Theory and the Satisfying Relationship

Within the discursive framework of interdependence theory, satisfaction effectively became constructed as a conscious, cognitive evaluation that one's relationship was either 'good enough' or (more pessimistically) 'better than the available alternatives'. In the 'good enough' scenario relationship satisfaction occurred when partners' expectations (or '*comparison levels*' - CL) were met. Outcomes exceeding CL were experienced as satisfying, whilst outcomes below CL were dissatisfying, and people were happier with close partners to the extent that the partner met or exceeded their internal standards (Sternberg & Barnes, 1985; Wetzel & Insko, 1982). In the 'better than the available alternatives' scenario satisfaction was effectively synonymous with resigned commitment. An individual may have been dissatisfied with their relationship but there may have been no better alternative available to them, or the 'cost' of finding an alternative may have been too great. This is a rather pessimistic construction, which discursively privileges dissatisfying relationships over being single, and is a long way from the productions of 'safe havens' in attachment theory.

Given the basic interdependence premise that constructed relationship satisfaction as a close correspondence between relational expectations and actual experience (Fletcher & Kininmonth, 1992, Schaefer & Olson, 1981), I argue that interdependence theory produces a twin 'cognitive governance' of satisfied subjects in the forms of, what I call, a 'governance of expectations' and a 'governance of perceptions'. The 'governance of expectations' produces subjects that were likely to feel stressed, disillusioned, or disappointed when their standards were not fulfilled (Larson, 1992; Alexander, 2008; Gordon, Baucom, Epstein, Burnett, and Rankin, 2006), and therefore warranted partners' to hold expectations that were *realistic* and not *irrational* (e.g. Arias & Beach, 1987; Larson, 1992).

In contrast the 'governance of perceptions' warranted a satisfying *perceptual* process at two levels: firstly, the satisfied subject was produced through a mode of subjectification that compelled them to ignore (e.g. Smith LeBeau & Buckingham, 2008) or disparage (e.g. Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Van Lange & Rusbult, 1995; Rusbult, Van Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich, & Verette, 2000) possible alternative partners; secondly, the satisfied subject was encouraged to hold idealised views or 'positive illusions' (Murray & Holmes, 1993) about their own relationship (e.g. Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000; Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999; Martz *et al.*, 1998; Rusbult *et al.*, 2000) and

their own partner by perceiving flaws as 'idiosyncratic virtues' (Murray *et al.*, 1996; Sciangula & Morry, 2009). Again, as has often been the case, the power of this governance operated in gendered terms. Women were compelled to think positively about their relationships to a greater extent than men (e.g. Acitelli, Rogers & Knee, 1999) because their self-identity was represented as more 'relational', and therefore women's subjectivities (including cognitions, emotions and behaviour) were constructed as more likely to be influenced by their relationship (Cross & Madson, 1997).

In these cognitive accounts, *committed* relationships (constructed in such a way as to be defined by monogamous, equitable, rational, economic exchanges) become, in effect, the signifier for *satisfying* relationships. Rusbult's (1983) investment model further extended the economic construction of relationship satisfaction by positing that it directly related to partners' levels of investment in their relationship. Greater satisfaction was presumed to increase relational investment which, in turn, led to greater commitment. Similarly, greater investment in and of itself supposedly increased commitment (or decreased the chances of relationship dissolution) and promoted relationship satisfaction as committed partners became more likely to engage in pro-relational behaviours. They had, in effect, decided to stay together because they had invested too much for the relationship to fail, and therefore they might as well make the best of things (Rusbult *et al.*, 2001). This discourse of satisfying investment was also mobilised by respondents in a qualitative study on relationship dissolution (Lawes, 1999). The participants produced both a discourse of 'relationship success as luck', and also a discourse of 'satisfaction as investment' in which relationship dissolution was constructed in terms of partners' not making adequate investments in their relationship, with the implication that 'sufficient' investment would lead to relation 'success'.

**Appendix E: Sufficiently Skilled Partners: A Gendered Confessional Satisfaction
of Closeness, Intimacy, and Knowing**

The Satisfying Relational Skills: Emotional Closeness and Intimacy

As outlined in Section 2.3.1, some social theorists (e.g. Giddens, 1991, 1992; Weeks, 2007) argued that the production of intimacy as a form of inter-subjective psychological and emotional disclosure emerged in the face of relational uncertainty following the sexual revolution of the 1960s, along with the concomitant rejection of sexual monogamy as the “mark of true dyadic closeness and authenticity” (Finn, 2012, p.615), and the rise of the companionate marriage. Given this proposed detraditionalisation of intimate life, and the subsequent way in which individuals experienced a plurality of selves in an ongoing project of self-making, intimacy as a process of mutual *knowing* privileged, stabilised, and satisfied the intimate couple in new ways. Doing intimacy and satisfaction required partners to reveal their ‘real’, ‘private’, yet ‘knowable’ self. A knowable self who was constructed as *needing* to be known and accepted. As a consequence, the relational regimens of self-disclosure became the yardstick by which satisfying intimate relationships could be achieved and demonstrated (Jourard, 1964, as cited in Finn, 2012; Giddens, 1991, 1992).

Psychology began to measure partners’ perceptions of intimacy from the early 1980s (Schaefer & Olson, 1981), and there was a concurrent rise in therapeutic technologies which provided interventions designed to help couples express ‘genuine’ intimacy (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Dandeneau & Johnson, 1994; Jacobson & Christensen, 1996; Waring, 1988; Masters, Johnson & Kolodny, 1982) and to facilitate partners’ emotional expression (e.g., Greenberg & Johnson, 1988). This governance of disclosure, reminiscent of the confessional (Foucault, 1977), dominated contemporary research where the couple-dyad was constructed as *the* context in which partners could be *truly* open and ‘honest’ about themselves (e.g. Hinde, 1978; Reiss & Shaver, 1988; Prager & Roberts, 2004). Despite the discursive categorisation of a ‘type’ of relationship that was low in intimacy yet still high in satisfaction (e.g., Fitzpatrick, 1988; Raush, Hertel, Barry & Swain, 1974; Gottman, 1993), and feminist scepticism regarding the role of self-disclosing intimacy in couples’ everyday lives (e.g. Jamieson, 1999), it remained a warranted practice for partners’ relationship satisfaction (e.g. Aron, Aron, & Smollan’s, 1992; Aron & Aron, 1997; Acevedo & Aron, 2009; Medvene, Teal, & Slavich, 2000; Laurenceau *et al.*, 2005; Lipert & Prager, 2001; Patrick, Sells, Giordano & Tollerud, 2007; Talmage & Dabbs, 1990). This was exemplified by Prager & Roberts (2004) who stated:

“[...] intimacy and connection are the bedrock of human happiness and meaning [...] psychological theorists and researchers alike have systematically articulated: True intimacy with others is one of the highest values of human existence; there may be nothing more important for the well-being and optimal functioning of human beings than intimate relationships” (p.43)

This psychologisation of intimacy meant the production of the satisfied couple rested, not just on what partners did, but crucially on who they *were* and how they were made visible. As Prager & Roberts (2004, p.44) stated, “relational intimacy both requires and touches the self as much as it does the relationship”. Thus, the discourses of satisfying intimacy made possible the satisfied subject of psychology who, under the gaze of their partner, was compelled to confess and reveal their ‘true’ nature in the neo-liberal quest to self-actualise and become free and fulfilled (Finn, 2012).

This was how the power effects of intimacy operated; satisfied individuals were not only compelled to reveal and be *accepted*, but to also allow the *revealing* and be *accepting* of their partners; and this power operated in gendered ways. For example, husbands’ relational talk (Acitelli, 1992) and emotional expressivity (Cordova, Gee and Warren, 2005) were presented as shaping wives’ marital happiness and adjustment, while such talk (by either partner) was constructed as having no link to husbands’ satisfaction. Therefore, demonstrations of emotional engagement by men were constructed as highly significant for women’s sense of satisfaction. The explanation for these findings pivoted around a production of women as innately relational with a greater need for intimacy for their sense of self compared to men (e.g. Prager *et al.*, 1989; Uebelacker, *et al.*, 2003).

However, this discourse of intimacy assumed a private, coherent, and relatively static self, which could be accessed, spoken, and known; a model stemming from the Enlightenment (Foucault, 1990). This ignored the ways in which the self has been re-theorised as continually constituted and reconstituted relationally, and is therefore always provisional (e.g. Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn & Walkerdine, 1984; Foucault, 1990; Shotter & Gergen, 1994). Furthermore, the discourse of satisfying intimacy also posited an overly simplistic view of inter-subjective communication as involving the straightforward, transparent, unmediated transmission of information, as opposed to being constitutive of those engaged in the conversation (e.g. Shotter, 1993).

These assumptions about intimacy also underpinned the psychological research on the relational skill of ‘interspousal support’.

The Satisfying Relational Skills: Interspousal Support

Research into spousal support has seen a marked increase over the last decade or so (e.g. Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006; Neff & Karney, 2005; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998; Brock & Lawrence, 2008), such that the satisfied subject has been positioned as the *supported* subject (e.g., Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994; Baxter, 1986 Dehle, Larsen, & Landers, 2001; Julien & Markman, 1991; Katz, Beach, & Anderson, 1996; Kane *et al.*, 2007). Similarly, the supportive individual has been psychologically constructed as possessing a stable, knowable, cognitive architecture that facilitated their ability to provide support to their partner because they were low in neuroticism (see Karney & Bradbury, 1995 for a review; Fisher & McNulty, 2008) and high in empathic ability. This positioned them as being able to provide inter-subjective understanding, validation and caring, in a relationally satisfying way (Ickes, 1997; Geoff, Fletcher & Lange, 1997). This ‘governance of support’ compelled partners to provide each other with appropriate support in order to foster greater satisfaction, with *inappropriate* support (e.g. unwanted advice) potentially being experienced as intrusive (Ickes & Simpson, 2008), patronising or insensitive, and leading to dissatisfaction (Dehle *et al.*, (2001).

Again, for the most part, the literature viewed interspousal support as gendered, such that it was more important to women’s satisfaction (e.g. Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994; Acitelli, Rogers & Knee, 1999; Julien & Markman, 1991), and the proposed differences across gender were, again, understood as stemming from women’s identities, which were constituted as more relational than men’s (e.g., Cross & Madson, 1997; Markus & Oyserman, 1989). Taking a feminist position, Thargaard (1997) has outlined how women were effectively positioned as the providers of care, whilst men were positioned to control and use this care (see also, Duncombe and Marsden, 1993; Wood & Lindorff, 2001). Hence, there was a tendency for men to take their partner’s support for granted, and women to not count on their care and support being reciprocated.

In Foucauldian terms, the focus on intimacy (See Section 2.6.1) and mutual support produced a satisfied subject who was disciplined via the regimens of confession and surveillance. The practice of confessing revealed one’s inner-most facets in the

presence of the other (Foucault, 1978; Rose, 1990), and each individual being aware (if only implicitly) of the normalising gaze of the other, was subsequently compelled to engage in a process of self-surveillance (Foucault, 1987; 1990) to ensure they were enacting their role as a satisfying partner correctly. Thus, the *relationally* satisfied subject not only revealed, but was also compelled to facilitate their partner's revealing, and this mutual revealing was to be rewarded with mutual acceptance and support. Given the emphasis on closeness, intimacy and support for the experience of relationship satisfaction, the practices of positive inter-subjective communication and successful conflict management became teleologically important, lest partners should find their capacity for mutual self-discovery and need fulfilment hindered.

The Satisfying Relational Skills: Communication and Conflict

The overwhelming majority of relational research has addressed communication and conflict management. In a similar way to intimacy, doing *satisfying* relationships became a function of partners unproblematically *doing* 'transparent' inter-subjective communication in *specific*, correct ways, which privileged positivity and facilitated the mutual self-disclosure of concerns and needs (e.g. Emmers-sommer, 2004). In contrast, communicative behaviours such as criticism, coercion, and blame represented predictors of marital dissatisfaction (e.g. Smith, Vivian & O'Leary, 1990; Julien, Markman & Lindahl, 1989; Noller, Feeney, Bonnell & Callan, 1994; Feeney, 2002; Metts & Cupach, 1990; Rusbult *et al.*, 1987), with lack of respect (e.g., contempt) being produced as particularly harmful to relationships (Baxter, Dun, & Sahlstein, 2001; Feeney *et al.*, 1997; Frei and Shaver, 2002; Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006), especially for wives (Schumm, Barnes, Bollman, Jurich, & Bugaighis, 1986).

Within this discursive framework, 'positive' interaction became privileged and warranted if partners were to experience relationship satisfaction, with 'negative' communication regarded as 'neutral' at best or, more likely, as detrimental (see Karney and Bradbury, 1995 for a review). Yet at the same time 'negative' communication and conflict were constructed as normative and inevitable processes in everyday relating (e.g. Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Heyman, 2001; Heavey, Layne & Christensen, 1993; Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Woody & Costanzo, 1990). The production of the importance of 'positive' communication for relationship satisfaction was exemplified by research which theorised satisfying relating as needing a ratio of five positive

interactions to every negative interaction (Bodenmann, Gottman, & Blackman, 1997; Feldman & Ridley, 2000; Fitzpatrick, 1988, 1990; Fitzpatrick, Follies, & Vance, 1982; Gottman, 1993, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Cupach, 2000). This empirically *quantified* construction of satisfying communication represented a ‘communicative governance of banality’ which reduced the complex, ongoing, dialectical interpersonal process of relating to a series of quantifiable, discreet, isolated interactions. Moreover, the discursive demarcation between ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ communication operated as a normalising practice that privileged certain types of intersubjective behaviour.

Within this prescriptive framework, the way in which conflict was constructed as ‘best managed’ became reciprocally crucial for relationship satisfaction (e.g. Berscheid, 1998; Cupach, 2000; Gottman, 1979; Metts & Cupach, 1990; Rusbult, Morrow, & Johnson, 1987; Kelly & Conley, 1987; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993; Cramer, 2000; Cramer, 2002), with a continued emphasis on positive conflict resolution. For example, in the literature relationship satisfaction was seen as being associated with partners’ willingness to respond in positive or accommodating ways to potentially destructive behaviour (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik and Lipkus, 1991), with the use of integrative, issue-oriented, problem-solving strategies being key (Canary & Cupach, 1988; Ridley, Wilhelm, & Surra, 2001). In a similar way, relationship dissatisfaction was presented as being associated with negative conflict resolution strategies e.g. reprimanding or threatening behaviour, inciting guilt, or escaping (Alexander, 2008; Ting-Toomey, 1983), engaging in demand-withdraw (e.g. Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Christensen & Shenk, 1991), responding in ways that were critical, belittling, demanding and presumptuous, self-oriented, defensive and less problem-solving (Ridley, Wilhelm, & Surra, 2001), or in the invalidating of expressed feelings about relationship problems (Gottman, 1994).

Thus, even in the most heated, volatile relational contexts, the ‘satisfied subject’ was still compelled to police and control their communicative behaviours. Again, this process involved a policing of self and other’s behaviours, and was something that individuals could ‘work on’, or develop, via the respective pedagogic and therapeutic technologies of education programmes (e.g. Halford *et al.*, 2003) and couple therapy (see section 2.7). This form of communicative governance was reflected in broader political concerns about the high social and personal costs of relationship distress and

dissolution, which led to Governments in many Western countries offering relationship education in many countries (Markman & Halford, 2005). In this way, psychological discourses constructing relationship satisfaction normalised certain ways of communicating and functioned to discipline partners' communicative practices.

The power of these disciplinary practices operated along gendered lines. For example, and conceptualising women as possessing a 'relational' sense-of-self, Duarte & Thompson (1999) argued that women were more likely to experience dissatisfaction from self-silencing because good communication was theorised as 'especially important' for women's experiences of relationship satisfaction (Acitelli, 1992; Davis & Oathout, 1987). In line with this, the 'wife-demand and husband-withdraw' pattern of conflict was theorised as much more common than the 'husband-demand and wife-withdraw' pattern (Christensen, 1988; Christensen & Shenk, 1991), whilst congruent conflict 'styles' were associated with women's satisfaction more than men's (Acitelli, Douvan, and Veroff; 1993).

However, at the same time, the construction of women as innately relational also warranted that they engage in greater relational 'emotion work' (e.g. Erickson, 1993; Tingey, Kiger & Riley, 1996) to accommodate their partners, manage the relationship, and maintain relational satisfaction. Thus, women were positioned as *needing* communicative closeness more than men, but the responsibility fell on them to fulfil this need. For example, men's avoidance was presented as leading to women self-censuring, and silencing their needs to avoid causing conflict (Jack, 1991; Jack & Dill, 1992), although Uebelacker *et al.*, (2003) claimed that both men and women's marital dissatisfaction were correlated with self-silencing. Previous qualitative studies that explored partners' accounts of their marital experiences from a feminist theoretical framework (e.g. Dryden, 1999; Lawes, 1999) also found the dynamics to be highly gendered, and this gendering came to the discursive forefront in mainstream constructions of partners' satisfying sexual skills.

The Satisfying Relational Skills: Sensuality and sexuality

Within the mainstream literature, the dominant construction of sexual satisfaction came to mirror that of relationship satisfaction, and represented a cognitive-affective appraisal "arising from one's subjective evaluation of the positive and negative dimensions

associated with one's sexual relationship" (Lawrance & Byers, 1998 p.514). Indeed, it was argued by some social theorists (e.g. Weeks, 1995) that sexual satisfaction had become the normative conceptual lens through which relationship quality and satisfaction was evaluated, and this left little discursive space for alternative (marginalised) practices such as celibacy. The dominant assumption was that partners in satisfying intimate relationships *should* engage in sexual (coital) practices. This was exemplified in the mainstream literature where sexual and relationship satisfaction were constructed as cyclically reinforcing (e.g. Hatfield & Rapson, 1993, S.Hendrick *et al.*, 1988; Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Cupach & Comstock, 1990; Edwards and Booth, 1994; Henderson-King & Veroff, 1994; Sprecher, 2002; see Sprecher & Cate, 2004, for a review) across both ages and cultures (Contreras, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1996; Guo, Ng, and Chan, 2004). There *were* examples where clinical research produced couple 'types' who presented with only one or the other (e.g., Edwards & Booth, 1994; Kaplan, 1974), but the implicit construction of these diagnostic categories was one of pathology and thus, the relationally satisfied couple were normatively positioned as the sexually satisfied couple.

This view was underpinned by an 'ethics of reproduction' whereby sexual desire was driven by a gendered reproductive imperative (e.g., Buss, 1998; Buss & Schmitt, 1993). These hegemonic, heteronormative scripts constructed women's desire as a *response* to men's (Ussher, 2005), and this made available a well-recognised narrative for women to follow: that of sexual object who was responsible for managing men's sexual needs and vulnerabilities, whilst not appearing too voracious in the sexual realm (Hollway, 1989). Male sexuality was privileged over female sexuality, which was presented as submissive to the active expert male sexuality, with heterosexual coitus privileged as the practice through which the sexually satisfied 'self' could be defined and made complete. Within this dominant discursive framework, women's attempts to resist or subvert this narrow prescription for their sexual practice were presented as problematic and/or perverse (Ussher, 1997; Kitzinger, 1995). Therefore, dominant psychosexual scripts about satisfying relationships remained coital- and hetero-centric (Capdevila, 2007), recycled gendered, heteronormative assumptions that produced conflicting feminine and masculine sexual satisfactions, and warranted different types of gendered, relationally satisfying practices. Thus, I argue that within the literature on relationship satisfaction, a discursive distinction was established between 'masculine instrumental

sexual' and 'feminine sexual-relational' needs, practices, and subjects. This distinction sustained hetero-normative productions of relationship satisfaction that centred on the coital imperative and operated through gendered normalising practices.

The 'feminine sexual-relational satisfaction' represented a satisfaction of interpersonal-communication, whereby *relationship* satisfaction became a matter of partners enacting correct *sexual* communication (e.g. Byers & Demmons, 1999; Chesney, Blakeney, Cole, & Chan, 1981; MacNeil & Byers, 1997; Yelsma, 1986); characterised by an expressive (Cupach & Metts, 1991) communicative process of mutual self-disclosure and appropriate responsiveness (e.g. Banmen & Vogel, 1985; Cupach & Comstock, 1990; Wheelless, Wheelless, & Baus, 1984), which allowed for greater sexual-relational intimacy and satisfaction along gendered lines (Banmen & Vogel, 1985; Cupach & Comstock, 1990; Lawrance & Byers, 1995; Meeks, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1998). These sexual-communicative regimens were constructed as especially important for women's relationship satisfaction because women's sexuality was constructed as innately more 'emotional-interpersonal orientated' than men's sexuality (e.g. Birnbaum & Laser-Brandt, 2002; DeLamater, 1987; Gagnon & Simon, 2005; MacNeil & Byers, 2005; Peplau, 2003). Thus, 'feminine sexual-relational satisfaction' represented a governance of the confessional (akin to intimacy), such that *more* sexual talk between partners functioned as the signifier for more satisfaction in both sexual and relational domains (especially for women).

This discourse of feminine sexual-relational satisfaction came to be reflected in the conspicuous division between Couple Therapy and Sex Therapy. Traditionally, couple therapy simplistically viewed sexual "dysfunction" as a symptom of a deeper, underlying *relational* problem (e.g. poor communication, or an imbalance of power), which, once treated, would simply result in the 'sexual dysfunction' automatically resolving itself. Hence, sexual dysfunction was seen as the symbolic expression of disguised relational issues, not as an issue in its own right (McCarthy, 2002). Whilst this simplistic distinction subordinated the *sexual* to the *relational*, its treatment of sex and the relationship as two separate realms simultaneously mobilised the 'masculine instrumental sexuality' of body parts.

Here, relationship satisfaction was understood in terms of partners satisfying their personal sexual needs, which were individualised and constructed as distinct from broader *relational* satisfactions. This reinforced patriarchal constructions of sex-as-coitus, such that relationship satisfaction was understood in terms of heteronormative sexual outcomes whereby the absence of orgasm (Young, Denny, Luquis & Young, 1998), or the presence of discursively pathologised ‘sexual dysfunctions’ led to relational dysfunction (e.g., Birnbaum *et al.*, 2006; Hartman, 1983; Hassebrauck & Fehr, 2002), but the regimens of prescriptive ‘sex therapy’ had the capacity to increase relationship satisfaction (Wright, Perrault, & Mathieu, 1977). Within this discursive framework, the impact of sexual communication was explained in *instrumental* economic terms (Cupach & Metts, 1991) where increased communication about sexual likes and dislikes led to an improved ratio of sexual benefits to costs for both men and women (MacNeil & Byers, 2005), although this practice was presented as more important for men’s sexual and relational satisfaction than for women’s (e.g. Purnine & Carey, 1997; Ross, Clifford, & Eisenman, 1987). This was because the ‘male sex drive discourse’ (Hollway, 1989) constructed men’s sexuality as conforming to immutable, innate drives that were relatively immune to sociocultural influence, whilst women’s sexuality was constructed as far more malleable and influenced by educational and religious institutions (e.g. Baumeister, 2000).

The authorising power of psychological research technologies to position relationship satisfaction within a patriarchal sexual framework was exemplified by Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs (2001) who presented “undeniable evidence” that men possessed a higher sex drive than women, and this “conclusion was supported by every measure and every study” (Vohs & Baumeister, 2004 p.195). Consequently, sexual conflict was explained as generally arising from men wanting more sex or more specific activities than women (Vohs & Baumeister, 2004), and therefore similarity in partners’ positivity towards sexuality was related to men’s relationship satisfaction (Cupach & Metts, 1995). This focus on biological similarities and ‘sex differences’ between men and women resulted in the sociocultural component of satisfying sexual life being largely ignored in the psychological literature. Heterosexual relationships were de-politicised as men and women were constructively individualised and understood as distinct from the broader social context (Potts, 1998).

However, context was always crucial for the ways in which people produced sexually satisfied subjectivities, and people could frequently talk about their sexuality in very different ways with their partner, friends, therapists, or with a researcher. For example, Peterson and Hyde's (2010) meta-analysis suggested gender differences in sexuality were actually small, with men reporting more casual sex, masturbation and use of pornography. Moreover, Allen (2003) found young couples mobilising a discourse which reversed traditional heterosexual scripts, with women positioned as having the stronger sexual desire, such that sex was more important for their relationship satisfaction than men's⁸⁰. Similarly, in Muise's (2011) study of women's sexual blogs, she found women resisting traditional feminine discourses of 'passivity' (Holland *et al.*, 1994) and adopting masculinised representations of sexuality and positioning themselves as active authors of their desire. However, Muise (2011) also pointed out that women's sexuality was, in a sense, discursively 'trapped'. If conventionally framed within feminine discourse women's desire was positioned as passive, morally bound to monogamous coupledness, and intimately tied to the production of relationship satisfaction. If represented by masculinised discourses, women's desire became a product of physical responses – thereby preventing any appreciation of social, cultural, or relational factors in shaping sexual satisfaction. Within both discursive frameworks, the posited innate gender differences in sexual plasticity warranted women to adapt and adjust their sexual behaviours and expectations in line with men's (Ard, 1977). This 'male in the head' (Hollway, 1984) positioned women as submissive to the immutable, un-bending male sexuality, and therefore women were disempowered and compelled to relationally manage and engage in the emotion work of compromise and accommodation in the sexual sphere of the relationship (e.g. Duncombe and Marsden, 1993; 1995).

The Satisfying Relational Skills: Decision making and control

Productions of satisfying 'decision making and control skills' are rare in the mainstream literature. Research has constructed relationship satisfaction as positively associated with equality in relational power (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983; see also Aida & Falbo,

⁸⁰ In a similar way, Vares, Potts, Gavey & Grace (2007) talked to older women who described the importance of penetrative sex, and expressed the desire for a partner who could sufficiently satisfy their sexual needs. Talking to women who had engaged in casual sex, Farvid (2010) found participants mobilising 'permissive' / 'liberal' discourses (Hollway, 1984) which constructed their sexual encounters as generally positive, 'emotionless' encounters with 'no strings attached'.

1991; Whisman & Jacobson, 1990). Similarly, individuals who have been constructed as 'satisfied' are presented as feeling greater freedom and less controlled in their relationships compared to individuals who have been typologised as being in 'distressed' relationships (Ehrensaft, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Heyman, O'Leary, & Lawrence, 1999). Taking a feminist perspective, Crawford (2004) argues that mainstream research continues to be underpinned by the assumption that there are deeply-rooted innate 'sex differences' in relational needs, motivations, goals, social skills, and 'personality'. Therefore this male-vs-female 'two cultures' model produces a discursive space in which gendered power inequalities are represented as "peculiarities" that partners "need to work around" (Dryden, 1999, p11). However, if partners encounter difficulties in 'working around' any challenges they can always turn to the discursive institution of couple therapy.

Appendix F –Information Sheet for Lay People

School of Psychology
Information Sheet



Project Title: Understanding relationship satisfaction in long-term heterosexual intimacy: A phenomenological exploration into the interplay between discourse and experience.

Researcher: **Matthew Colahan**

You are invited to take part in the above named research. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve.

Background to the study

The perceived absence of satisfaction in relationships leads to emotional disengagement, couples seeking relationship therapy, and/or relationship dissolution to the detriment of family life. Achieving and sustaining wellbeing, happiness and satisfaction within intimate, romantic coupledness has been a longstanding preoccupation of couples, sex and family therapists alike. Hence, the aim of the research is to examine the ways in which individuals view, understand, and experience satisfaction in their relationships.

Why have I been chosen?

We are asking adults in long-term, heterosexual relationships to take part in this study

Do I have to take part?

It is your decision whether or not you take part. If you decide to, you are free to withdraw any time and you will not be asked to give any reason.

What will happen if I take part?

You will be asked to read and sign a consent form, and then take part in an interview about your views and experiences of satisfaction in your relationship. The interview should take between one and two hours to complete. You will be given an opportunity to ask questions before and after the interview is done.

Are there any possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

There are no known risks in taking part in this study.

What are the benefits of taking part?

The study will provide information on how individuals conceptualise, experience, and talk about relationship satisfaction. You will have an opportunity to express your views, and this information will then be used to examine the phenomena of satisfaction in long-term, heterosexual relationships.

Will my confidentiality be respected?

All information will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. The consent form, which bears your name, will be separated from the rest of the information.

What if something goes wrong?

It is highly unlikely that the interview method used in this study will have any harmful effects. However, if you were harmed by taking part in this research, there are no special compensation arrangements.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the study will be written up as part of a Ph.D. thesis and may also be written up and submitted as a research paper to an academic journal. As part of our confidentiality policy, you will not be identified in any reporting of this research.

Who is organising this research?

The research is being carried out by Mr Matthew Colahan (B.Sc) as part of his Ph.D. thesis in Psychology. The research is being supervised by Dr A.D. Tunariu (Senior Lecturer in Psychology, University of East London).

Contact for further information

If you have any questions please contact Mr Matthew Colahan by phone or email (0208 223 3000 or m.colahan@uel.ac.uk).

Alternatively, you can write to Mr Matthew Colahan at the School of Psychology, University of East London, Stratford Campus, Romford Road, London. E15 4LZ.

This copy of the information is yours to keep. If you agree to take part, then you will be asked to sign a Consent Form, and you will be given a copy to keep.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Matthew Colahan

Graduate Teaching Assistant and PhD Candidate
School of Psychology
University of East London

**Appendix G – Consent for to take part in the interview and for the recorded
interview to be used in the research**

Appendix H – Information Sheet for the Couple Therapists

Invitation to take part in research

Title of research: Understanding relationship satisfaction in long-term heterosexual intimacy – a qualitative exploration of everyday and professional accounts

Who is doing this research?

I am Matthew Colahan, a PhD candidate in the School of Psychology at the University of East London. I am conducting research on (a) exploring romantic partners' views and experiences of satisfaction in their long-term relationships, and (b) considering implications of everyday understandings of relationship satisfaction for the management of satisfaction from within a therapeutic perspective. Dr Aneta Tunariu is my director of studies. The research details of this project have been scrutinised and have received ethical approval from the University of East London (please see attached).

What exactly is the study, in which you are invited to participate, about?

Over the last thirty years or so there has been a growing trend for dissatisfied couples to seek couple therapy in order to address perceived relational and/or sexual problems. The aim of the study in which you are invited to participate is to explore how you, as a relationship therapist, conceptualise and work with couples who report experiencing dissatisfaction in their relationships. The intention is to try to understand how therapy can shape the way in which individuals think about, understand, and act in their relationships, and how this can shape the way in which they directly experience their relationships.

What would taking part in the study involve?

You are invited to join me in a one to one interview lasting approximately 30 minutes to an hour. However, the duration of this interview is flexible according to your time restraints and availability.

The interview is guided by a set of open-ended questions concerning your views on, and how you engage with, couples seeking your advice regards dissatisfaction. There are no right or wrong answers. Your professional experience with regards to this presenting issue is what is being sought. You can refuse to answer any question that you deem unsuitable at any point during the interview.

Where will the interviews take place?

At a location and time convenient to you.

What about confidentiality?

All interviews will be treated confidentially, in accordance with the strict guidelines set out by the British Psychological Society. In addition, any information provided during the interviews will be anonymised when presenting extracts from the analysis of the interview data such that at no point can the speaker's identity be identified. The interviews will be audiotaped and then transcribed. The audiotapes will be kept in a locked cupboard, as will the transcripts. Real names of the participants will not be disclosed to anyone.

What will be done with the findings?

The findings will be written up as part of my PhD research, which you will be able to see should you so wish.

What if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time. You can decide that you no longer want to participate without any questions being asked, and without any disadvantage to you at any point.

Who do you contact for further information?

If you are a couple therapist, and you would like to take part, or if you would like to ask any further questions about the study, I would love to hear from you.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this invitation.
Kind regards,

Matthew Colahan
PhD Candidate
School of Psychology
University of East London
Romford Road
London E15 4LZ
Tel. 07915 071 145
e.mail: m.colahan@uel.ac.uk

University Research Ethics Committee

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the programme in which you are being asked to participate please contact the Secretary of the University Research Ethics Committee: Ms Debbie Dada,
Administrative Officer for Research,
Graduate School,
University of East London,
Romford Road, Stratford,
London E15 4LZ.
Tel: 020 8223 6274
e.mail: debbie5@UEL-Exchange.uel.ac.uk

Appendix I – UEL Ethical Clearance

Dr Aneta Tunariu
School of psychology
Stratford

ETH/09/18

14th August 2008

Dear Dr Tunariu,

Application to the Research Ethics Committee: Understanding relationship satisfaction in long-term heterosexual intimacy (M Colahan)

I advise that Members of the Research Ethics Committee have now approved the above application on the terms previously advised to you. The Research Ethics Committee should be informed of any significant changes that take place after approval has been given. Examples of such changes include any change to the scope, methodology or composition of investigative team. These examples are not exclusive and the person responsible for the programme must exercise proper judgement in determining what should be brought to the attention of the Committee.

In accepting the terms previously advised to you I would be grateful if you could return the declaration form below, duly signed and dated, confirming that you will inform the committee of any changes to your approved programme.

Yours sincerely



Debbie Dada
Administrative Officer for Research
d.dada@uel.ac.uk
02082232976

Research Ethics Committee: ETH/09/18/0

I hereby agree to inform the Research Ethics Committee of any changes to be made to the above approved programme and any adverse incidents that arise during the conduct of the programme.

Signed:.....Date:

Please Print Name:

Appendix J – Relate Institute Ethical Clearance



University Centre, Doncaster

High Melton Campus

Doncaster

DN5 7SZ

Telephone: 01302 553915

Email: info@relateinstitute.ac.uk

Website: www.relateinstitute.ac.uk

5th March

Dear Colleague

Research Proposal

I am enclosing correspondence related to a request to conduct research within Relate and as you will see, the Relate Institute Research Committee has approved the proposal in terms of the criteria set out in the attached guidance.

If you agree to the involvement of your staff in this research it could now go ahead.

If you have any concerns or queries about this do please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Nick Turner
Director of the Relate Institute

Email: nick.turner@relateinstitute.ac.uk

Landline: 01302 553553 X2588

Mobile: 07903 935541

relate
the relationship people



UNIVERSITY CENTRE DONCASTER
A JOINT DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN DONCASTER COLLEGE AND THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Appendix K – Interview Schedule for the Lay People

Understanding relationship satisfaction in long-term heterosexual intimacy
Interview Schedule _ study 1 v3

Gender:

Age group:

Length of current relationship:

Date of the interview:

Pseudonym:

Part 1 - On relationships

1. How would you describe a close, intimate romantic relationships?
 - a. Prompt: What distinguishes it from other close relationships?
 - b. Prompt: What functions does it serve for both participating individuals?

2. What does makes a relationship a good relationship?
 - a. Prompt: What ingredients are needed?
 - b. Prompt: How can one tell that their relationship with a romantic partner is a good relationship?

Part 2 - On the notion of relationship satisfaction

3. How would you describe the notion of relationship satisfaction?
 - a. Prompt: What does it refer to?
 - b. Prompt: Does it involve an appraisal?

4. How can pone tell that they are experiencing satisfaction or dissatisfaction in their intimate relationship?
 - a. Prompt: What things matter in establishing this conclusion?
 - b. Prompt: When / why do they matter?
 - c. Prompt: How does it feel to be satisfied and dissatisfied?

Part 3 - On managing relationship satisfaction

5. What obstacles, if any, do you think partners are likely to encounter in long-term relationships?
 - a. Prompt: What does a person seek in their relationship?
 - b. Prompt: Can that be achieved and sustained?
 - c. Prompt: How do partners manage change and variation in their life together?

6. Can one feel satisfied and dissatisfied in their relationship at the same time?
 - d. Prompt: If so, how can this be?
 - e. Prompt: If not, why not?
 - f. Prompt: Are their gender differences that shape the experience of relationship satisfaction?

Appendix L – Interview Schedule for the Couple Therapists

Understanding relationship satisfaction in long-term heterosexual intimacy - a qualitative exploration of everyday and professional accounts

Interview Schedule _ professional accounts_v3

Gender:

Age group:

Years/ period of practice as a relationship counsellor:

Date of the interview:

Pseudonym:

Part 1 - On the notion of relationship dis/satisfaction

1. How would you describe the notion of relationship satisfaction?
 - a. Prompt: What is its place within a professional conception of healthy relationships?
 - b. Prompt: How does satisfaction or dissatisfaction get expressed?
2. What does it mean to be satisfied in one's intimate, romantic relationship?
 - a. Prompt: Does this change over the course of the relationship?
 - b. Prompt: Are there any systematic differences between women and men?

Part 2 - On therapeutic engagement with the phenomena of relationship dis/satisfaction

3. In your experience, how are complaints of the relationship dis/satisfaction presented by couples seeking your council?
 - a. Prompt: How often do you encounter the issue of dissatisfaction in your every day practice?
4. What would be the therapeutic goal with regards to relationship dis/satisfaction?
 - a. Prompt: What would you regard as a success?
 - b. Prompt: What would clients perceive as a target / successful goal?
 - c. Prompt: Are these formulations shaped by the gender of the client? Or by any other factors?
5. Are there tensions between your professional and personal positions?
 - a. Prompt: Are there tensions between the advice you can offer to clients, and the clients' own views and targets?

Appendix M – Reflections on Conducting the Interviews with Lay People

The process of conducting the interviews with lay people required active engagement and was challenging because of the simultaneous needs to be relaxed enough to allow free narrative, whilst also remaining curious and aware of potential moments of segueing into novel areas, or contradiction with what had already been said - as these moments held high potential for both IPA and FDA interests. This process was challenging and it required constant reflection by me on what had been covered during the interview, and the extent to which the analytic foci and questions had been addressed. In an attempt to achieve this, beyond taking extensive notes during the interviews, I found it useful adopting, what I now call, a 'relaxed awareness' style during the interviews with the participants; *relaxed* in the sense of being receptive to and engaging with the participants' subjective accounts, whilst simultaneously being *aware* of points of tension in their narratives - as these often delineated boundaries between dominant discourses employed in the same conversation. Thus, on the one hand I paid attention to participants' descriptive narratives and phenomenological accounts as much as possible, and on the other hand remained aware of contradictions in their talk as a gateway into exploring the simultaneous mobilisation of multiple discourses and/or as avenues exposing interpretation and experience arising together. In general I tended to follow the participant, and therefore at times it was difficult to bring them back to the topic of Relationship Satisfaction as a concept in-and-of-itself. This was because (1) the participants had a tendency to talk more about their experience as a dis/satisfied subject (which influenced the subsequent FDA of Lay Talk in Chapter 5), and this was probably due, in part, to the twin-focus attempt to capture both lived experienced and discourse simultaneously; (2) experiential material was easier for me to recognise there and then in the interview; and (3) having no experience of conducting an FDA I often wondered if what they were saying was 'relevant'. I did not want to impose the 'correct' way to talk about relationship satisfaction, but I wanted to make sure that I was exploring different discursive resources.

For the most part, I enjoyed conducting the interviews and the majority of interviewees appeared eager to talk and had little difficulty in responding to my questions and engaging in a fluid dialogue with me. Only on two occasions did I experience the interviews as challenging. In each of these cases the respondents gave rather truncated responses. On reflection, I believe that a power dynamic operated in those interviews (either implicitly or explicitly) whereby they perceived me as an 'expert'. Therefore,

more so than the other respondents, they expressed difficulty in articulating feelings and asked me if they were giving the ‘right kind of answer’ and if their response was ‘what I was looking for’. I repeatedly assured them that there was no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answer, but it appeared that their reticence to ‘go off topic’ remained, and they focused on giving direct answers to my questions. Ironically, this was experienced by me as disempowering and I found myself frequently looking to my notes to help me think of suitable prompts, and ultimately I felt rather relieved when the interview process was over.

This experience highlighted to me that the process of data collection was itself relational – shaped by the type of relationship that both the respondent and I thought we were having. Whilst relatively fleeting in the research process, qualitative data is a joint-production of this relationship. Therefore my questions “how did it feel? etc.” and my attitude that relationship satisfaction was worthwhile being curious about “will have had an influence on the type of account that [the participants were] able to produce within the context of our interview. And this, in turn, ha[d] implications for the kinds of insights that my analysis of the data was able to generate.” (Willig, 2012a, p.104). For example, I had presupposed that my participants were willing and able to reflect on, and articulate their experiences to me – to engage and respond to my questioning then and there in the interview – i.e. that they were “open to a process of meaning-making in collaboration” with me (Willig, 2012a, p.104). On reflection I believe the participants were able to do this and their accounts provided rich textual data for the subsequent analyses. Likewise, I had assumed that the participants had reflected on their previous experiences of relationship satisfaction and were “willing to scrutinize it, to interrogate it, and to explore how it is constituted” (Willig, 2012a, p.104). This assumption was somewhat challenged during the process of conducting the interviews as it became apparent that the experience of ‘relationship satisfaction’ was rarely actively reflected upon by the lay participants (See Chapter 6, Section 6.1.1).

Over the course of conducting the thirteen interviews, I became more relaxed because I grew more confident in my ability to move away from the interview schedule. In the early interviews, I found myself returning to the schedule structure and asking questions that had already been covered. This became apparent to me when I listened to the interviews again for the purpose of transcription, and there were times where I

experienced frustration with myself for being repetitive in the interview. However, at the same time I accepted that this was the first time I had conducted in-depth qualitative interviews and realised that this was part of my interpretative journey. Similarly, whilst I may have been overly cautious in the earlier interviews, I was conscious that I did not want to become complacent in my approach to the later interviews and start ‘taking it as read’ that I knew what the respondents would talk about. There were occasions where I ‘caught myself’ doing this, and realised that there were two major factors beginning to influence my attitude towards the interview process. Firstly, I felt emotionally engaged with the participants’ accounts, many of which resonated with my own experiences, and therefore it was easy for me to accept accounts at face value and not question them or probe deeper. Secondly, whilst I was adopting phenomenological and social constructionist frameworks in the research, I was still embedded in the mainstream psychological and normative cultural frameworks prescribing relationship satisfaction⁸¹. Therefore, I found it was easy for me to ‘slip’ into conducting the interviews in light of these taken-for-granted, normative assumptions. Keeping a reflexive diary (see section 3.5.5) helped to manage this process.

⁸¹ This was somewhat exacerbated by the fact that I was continually reviewing the mainstream literature during this period (for Chapter Two), and therefore ‘mainstream’ theories and concepts were often in my mind.

**Appendix N – Reflections on Conducting the Interviews with the Couple
Therapists**

As with the lay interviews, I enjoyed conducting the interviews with couple therapists and (perhaps unsurprisingly), all of them appeared comfortable discussing relationships. By the time I conducted the interviews with couple therapists I had already conducted all of the interviews with the lay people. Therefore I felt more confident with the process of in-depth, one-to-one interviewing and the joint-production of qualitative data. However, I still experienced uncertainty in the first interview as to which additional avenues of conversation to pursue, and therefore I found myself referring back to the interview schedule frequently. In general, the therapists' talk focussed as much, if not more, on the concept of relationship *dissatisfaction* and this shaped the subsequent FDA that I produced (see Chapter 4). During the interviews I often summarised and reflected back what they had said to me, and this helped to orientate me, and also to pick out points of interest to pursue, *or* (more often than not) prompted the respondent to continue. At times I had to 'control' this a little if I felt we had begun to get too far off topic. For example, even though understanding institutional practice *was* important, there were several times when the therapists would start explaining the minutiae of Relate procedure, and other times where they started explaining relational theories (e.g. of intimacy or attachment) in general, and of which I was already aware.

There was a different power dynamic in the interviews with the therapists compared to those with the lay people. In the lay interviews, the dynamic positioned me as 'expert' in terms of the academic knowledge and understanding of the research process. Furthermore, whilst the lay people were 'experts' of their own experience, it was an experience that I had also felt and therefore recognised. In terms of the therapists, they were the 'experts' of the topic of therapy, but at times I felt like I had more 'expertise' in the academic literature, because I was familiar with mainstream *and* critical theoretical works. On reflection, I think this sometimes manifested in an interpretative 'arrogance' on my part. Not in the sense of being rude or dismissive during the interview, but there were times when I felt eager (and hoped) to hear dominant constructions recycled – as if I had an ability to see the workings of discourse when my respondents could not. This was an important ethical point that I had to consider when conducting my later analysis (and an important consideration of any hermeneutics of suspicion, where underlying processes are attributed to the respondents' accounts), and one that I attempted to manage by using keeping a reflexive diary after the interviews (See Section 3.5.5).

Appendix O – Example of the Post-interview Reflexive Diary

1. David

I felt like it was a great first interview, which went really well (although I have nothing to compare it to). I was nervous at first and thought I might struggle to get 20 mins, let alone 45. However, David was really articulate and had a lot to say. In particular he gave some detailed phenomenological descriptions. He seemed to have a slightly idealised view of what he wanted his relationships to be, and relationships seemed to be quite intense for him. As for me, I found the process comfortable and interesting. I was conscious of not leading David, and I attempted to explore different avenues as and when they arose, rather than waiting for the corresponding question. This required a considerable effort to remain focused – and certainly now I’ve had a taste of “active listening”. Ultimately it was a relief to complete my first interview, and it’s spurred me on.

Later reflections: Why did I say “great” and “went really well”? What did I mean by those phrases? Currently I think the answer is twofold: Firstly, and more obvious to me, is that the methods of analysis I have chosen require rich detailed descriptions. IPA, in particular, requires the ability to articulate complex subjective feelings (a process several of the participants have said is difficult). David was able to do this, ergo, the interview was a success in these terms [I was fortunate that subsequent interviews were similar, including the two “harder” interviews].

Secondly, and more interesting to me from a reflexive point of view, is that I think I saw the interview as a success because I had got caught up in the twin-temptation to *collude* and *verify*. The temptation to collude with dominant discourses on relationship satisfaction, leads to the temptation to verify existing theories on the topic. Yet I knew that this was not my approach – my aim is not to achieve a “triangulation of data” about relationship satisfaction via a ‘bottom-up’ approach. I guess I still had my ‘scientific hat’ still on, although on the plus side, I was aware of an inchoate feeling of disquiet i.e. that I was not looking at the contents of the interview *quite* in the right way; one that meshed with the spirit of qualitative exploration. This would continue throughout the subsequent interviews, and, until I had the opportunity to discuss the interview process with Aneta.

Having transcribed David’s interview, I noticed there were sections where he clearly speaks about the role of consumerism / consumption in the way people live their relationships. Initially I thought “Great! That’s the discourse of consumerism (e.g. Gail Hawkes), and economics discourse underlying it”. However, I began to question whether the analysis was that simple. Was there anything going on beyond my initial gut feeling of the text? Was I, again, seeing predominant discourse that I am aware of? I raised this with Aneta, and she reminded me of *action orientation*. What was David, the speaker, attempting to achieve during this section of the interview. This will require an analysis of the context of that section of the transcript at a later date. It will be interesting to see whether an (apparent) explicit awareness of certain discourses leads to points of tension, contradiction or recycling. I expect it could well lead to all three!

2. Martin

Again, I was a little apprehensive, and I wasn't too sure how comfortable or easy it would be for Martin to discuss my topic. Martin was a little more pragmatic with his views possibly – often referring to work. He said some good stuff about ideals, and the paradox of familiarity. I thought his views might be a bit more traditional regards gender roles, and in some respects they were. In addition, it struck me how he would attribute motivations to his partner's behaviour that I wouldn't have. Occasionally I found myself trying to “open his eyes” by probing further. I need to remember to bracket my own assumptions and let the participant's voice be heard. However, at the same time I don't think I went too far, and this kind of probing, if done well, certainly enriches the data. I do begin to feel relief when I get near the end – it's hard work! Overall I think the interview was a success, and we once again went for 90mins.

Later reflections: Again, I use terms such as “good stuff” (see collusion and verification above). Two points jump out at me when I reflect on these initial notes. Firstly, I was a little apprehensive about the interview. How might this have influenced the experience (for both me and Martin? From memory, the interview seemed to flow well, but how did we both view it? This leads to my second point where I say I wanted to “open his eyes”. The interview is a social interaction, and, whilst it isn't my analytic focus, discursive psychology reminds us that individuals have a stake in such interactions, which they manage in order to achieve certain social functions. What about me and Martin? What were we trying to “achieve”? For my part, I'm trying to encourage participants to talk freely and openly, with a level of introspection they might not normally be used to. Furthermore, I'm bringing “expert” knowledge to the interaction, which might shape my ideas about the things participants *should* say. Whilst the interviews never felt like a therapeutic (healing) interaction, Aneta highlighted that there could be an element of counselling (me being a source of knowledge and, potentially, advice). What was Martin doing? Well, he was trying to respond in “appropriate ways” and give me “good” answers. Perhaps be the “good” participant. He may have been anxious; he may have been more self-aware than usual. He may have attempted to minimise these feelings. However this is all guess work currently, as he didn't seem to show these signs, and I won't know till I analyse his transcript in detail. However, this highlights the need to reflect on the interview process, both as an experience (phenomenology), and as a social interaction where individuals are oriented towards certain types of action (discursive psychology).

Appendix P – Examples of how the Reflexive Diary Foregrounded my Assumptions

The Reflexive diary helped me to foreground some of the assumptions I brought to the research process. For example, after my first few interviews with lay people I had made comments such as “The interview went well, he said a lot of good stuff”. My Director of Studies and I discussed what I meant by “good stuff” and it became apparent that I was making this comment when the respondents made comments about relationship satisfaction which reflected the mainstream literature. This helped me to realise that I was slipping into a mainstream, realist mind-set and, in effect, forgetting my analytic foci. My Director of Studies reminded me that my goal was not to ‘find’ qualitative support for existing theories via a ‘bottom-up’ approach. In a sense, I was surrendering and colluding with taken-for-granted assumptions, and seeing this helped me to approach subsequent interviews with a more critical attitude and to question respondents’ claims in more detail. Later entries in the reflexive diary included comments such as “said the usual point about X” and this highlighted that I was at risk of becoming complacent in my attitude towards the respondents talk, and taking for granted the process of joint data production between me and the respondent.

An example from the couple therapists was that I made notes such as “They mentioned X⁸² discourse!” The excitement with which I declared this highlighted that I was, in effect, trying to ‘trap’ the respondent. Again, following reflection with my Director of Studies, we realised that this potentially stemmed from my own lack of confidence in applying a discursive interpretative framework, and therefore I had developed a hyper-critical attitude towards the respondents’ accounts. This was an important realisation as it highlighted the importance of reflecting on the ethical implications of the interpretative process. In this way, the reflexive diary allowed me to operationalise the (potentially abstract) theoretical call to conduct ethical, reflexive research, and in a way that foregrounded assumptions that I was previously unaware that I had.

⁸² Details are omitted to protect the anonymity of my participants.

Appendix Q - Transcription Protocol

Adapted from Edwards & Potter (1992) and Wetherell & Edley (1999)

(.)	=	indicates a short pause (0.5 – 5 seconds)
:: e.g. reca::ll	=	colons used to signal elongation added by the speaker
italics e.g. <i>recall</i>	=	text in italics shows emphasis added by the speaker
:: & italics e.g. <i>recall::</i>	=	indicates elongation and emphasis added by the speaker
[...]	e.g. [...]	= indicates text omitted by the author for practicality
[text]	e.g. [recall]	= indicates text added by the author for clarity

Appendix R - Reflections on Conducting the Twin Focus Analysis

One of the reasons for conducting the first stage of the two analyses in parallel was that I felt I could not simply do one analysis followed by the other because the research questions and analytic foci of *both* analyses were always in my mind. Thus, I attempted to suspend my attention on each analysis in turn, in order to give equal attention to both, yet IPA and FDA were both constantly in my awareness: one deliberate, and the other one relaxed, and then vice versa. I argue that the assumptions of one analysis could not be fully bracketed, and a fuller picture could only be accessed by seeing them in action together. Throughout the research process the twin focus approach remained visible to me; at times, this was experienced as an ‘and-and’ rather than a clear cut ‘either–or’ process. For instance, while conducting the IPA of an interview, FDA related ideas, hunches, or reflections frequently arose and needed to be ‘purged’ by noting them down next to the ‘parent’ narrative for later use. When done with purpose and intention, this noting practice was usefully incorporated as part of the second phase of analysis of the twin-focus-analysis.

My awareness and acceptance that this would happen – i.e. that the intention to suspend one set of concerns might not always necessarily be possible, increased my readiness to proceed. However, doubts arose for me during the process because I was aware of my limitations (and my limited experience) as a qualitative researcher, and I only gradually began to realise that what I was attempting was relatively difficult in epistemological and methodological terms. It meant that I felt fraudulent or inauthentic at times because I did not feel like the ‘expert’ that I thought I should be. However, over the course of conducting the research this was replaced with a calmer acceptance – a confidence in accepting the appropriateness and limitations of each approach - not looking for the ‘right’ answer, but being comfortable in my ability to produce interpretations that were based on my reflexive interactions with the data, and which were within the epistemological boundaries of the chosen methodologies.

The twin focus approach brought me closer to the complexity and dynamics of the interplay between language and experience and helped to inform the integration of the findings from the two analyses (via the hermeneutics of empathy and suspicion). To present the two interpretations in a complementary way I returned to my initial research questions, as these served as a rigorous structure to separate the two interplaying aspects of language and experience before I ‘dropped them back together’. As such, from my

perspective, the twin focus methodological approach allowed an ‘artificial separation’ of the two aspects that were always-already intertwined for the benefit of closer examination and interpretative insight.

**Appendix S – Example of the Three Column Table used for the Initial Stages of
Analysing the Lay Peoples’ Transcripts**

<p>: <u>Partners cannot know if they have managed any changes to their CIRR</u></p> <p>: <u>Managing change within a CIRR</u> a) partners must engage in “honest” communication - prevents “misunderstandings” “miscommunication” - failure to communicate experienced as an unarticulated “undercurrent” - felt as “resentment” - warrants accusations “not doing this right, not doing that right”</p> <p>: <u>Doing conflict</u> - partners “accuse” each other</p> <p>: <u>Emotional change within the context of a CIRR allows for accusations that one’s partner is “not paying you enough attention”</u></p>	<p>MC: Well, if you can think of any other</p> <p>GABY: (.) Hmm (.) I don’t know, because <u>you can’t even know if you do manage it</u>. Erm (.)</p> <p>MC: I suppose as you were saying earlier (.) in some cases, some people (.) sort of how you work at the relationship.</p> <p>GABY: Yeah, yeah (.) yeah, I suppose you’ve got to work at it, again it comes down, it does come down to <u>communication</u> (.) and <u>honesty</u> (.) really. Erm (.) because if you’re not talking about it. If there are changes going on, and you’re not talking about it (.) you just, it’s always an <u>undercurrent</u> isn’t it, erm (.) and that can just lead to (.) lots of <u>misunderstandings</u> and <u>miscommunication</u>, a lot of <u>resentment</u>. (.) You’ve got to get it out there I think, you, yeah you’ve got to get it out there (.) on the table. (.) Talk about it.</p> <p>MC: As you were saying earlier.</p> <p>GABY: Yeah, <u>express yourself</u> best you can (.) <i>without</i> (.) hopefully getting into <u>big rows</u>, you know, you’ve got to kind of, <u>take a step back</u> haven’t you? A little bit, and not get into big rows about things (.) or <u>accusing</u> you know? When things are changing (.) emotionally, it’s <u>very easy to accuse</u> the other one of <u>not (.) paying you enough attention</u>, I’m <u>not doing this right</u>, I’m <u>not doing that right</u> (.) very easy to sort of get into that so.</p> <p>MC: Ok then, can one feel, actually you’ve answered this already, can one feel satisfied and dissatisfied within a close long term romantic relationship at the same time? You said</p>	<p>Uncertainty in the experience of managing RS</p> <p>Privileged / Satisfying practices: Communicate / talk Absence of silence</p> <p>Experience of Resentment – blame directed toward ‘other’? Experience of ‘undercurrent’ – felt but not articulated?</p> <p>Undercurrent & Resentment – expectations about roles? I.e. failing to meet one’s duty? [NTS – i.e. partners feel the other is not fulfilling their role”] - accusing evaluated as “very easy” to do</p> <p>Satisfying practice – to “express” oneself Dissatisfying practice – i) rows; ii) accusing / blaming (other and self) [NTS – fear of not having one’s need / entitlement for “wanting to be wanted” fulfilled within the shifting relational context]</p> <p>Experience / feeling one is falling short – “not doing this right” – i.e. one’s role / duty?</p>
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<p>: Experiencing <u>simultaneous satisfaction and dissatisfaction within the context of a CIRR</u></p> <p>a) partners can experience overall / global satisfaction but still experience dissatisfaction with specific elements</p> <p>b) experiencing “dissatisfaction” as always present - “always be something you’re dissatisfied with [...] could be done better”</p> <p>c) experiencing dissatisfaction as fluid and changing over the course of the relationship “gonna change at different points”</p> <p>c) specific elements evaluated as i) “manageable” - allows for feeling overall satisfaction ii) not significant “little” elements “rather than anything major” - experienced as “niggly”</p>	<p>earlier</p> <p>GABY: Yeah, I suppose it does, I suppose you can (.) feel both. (.) Erm (.) you know, <u>are you ever going to feel really satisfied?</u> That’s what I’m actually thinking now. Are you ever gonna <i>really</i>? <u>There’s always gonna be something you’re dissatisfied with</u> I think. Erm (.) and it’s <u>gonna change you know at different points</u> in the relationship, it’s not always gonna be the same thing. Erm (.) there’s, there’s always something (.) that <u>could be done better</u> I suppose (.) but I think you <u>can feel overall satisfaction</u>, like we were saying, with the relationship, but there might be <u>little (.) elements</u> that you’re dissatisfied with (.) that you’d rather were different. So yeah I (.)</p> <p>MC: But those elements that you’re dissatisfied with aren’t (.) or they’re manageable?</p> <p>GABY: Well yeah, they <u>must be otherwise overall you wouldn’t feel satisfied</u> (.) because they’re probably more (.) <u>little niggly things</u> (.) that you’re dissatisfied with, rather than anything kind of <u>major</u> (.) I would say.</p> <p>MC: And (.) and in terms of things that are major, again, kind of, the sort of things we’ve spoken about earlier – those sort of major things that are important.</p> <p>GABY: Yeah, yeah, those, yeah exactly.</p> <p>MC: Erm, so my last question then, would you say that there are gender difference that shape one’s understanding of relationship satisfaction?</p> <p>GABY: (.) Hm, do you mean in my relationship or in general? In general?</p>	<p>Experience is multifaceted – not dualistic – can be satisfied <i>and</i> dissatisfied. Dissatisfaction <i>directed</i> / intentionally specific on “little elements” [NTS – the spectre of the ideal rears again here. Begs the question, as asked by the participant, ever “are you ever going to feel really satisfied?” Need to explore further. Not within a logocentric understanding of satisfaction. The actuality is always a shadow of the ideal. A different understanding of satisfaction might be needed]</p> <p>- (dis)satisfaction not homogenous nor static</p> <p>Unfulfilled as problematic - Framing dissatisfying elements as “little” allows / warrants their acceptance?</p>
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<p>: <u>Understandings of relationship satisfaction as shaped by gender</u></p> <p>a) Communication is more important for women than men b) sex is possibly more salient for men c) both men and women evaluate partner support as important</p> <p>: <u>Women value communication in terms of the ability to “express” oneself in an unedited “frank” way</u></p> <p>: <u>Understandings of relationship satisfaction as shaped by gender</u></p> <p>d) men do not express themselves “as easily or freely as women”</p> <p>e) men “harbour things” i.e. do not articulate their dissatisfaction</p> <p>f) women are attuned to a CIRRR not “going right”</p>	<p>MC: I suppose in general, or first of all.</p> <p>GABY: (.) Erm (.) well (.) I think, I do think generally that women would put <u>communication at the top</u> of a pot of relationship satisfaction. Erm (.) you know, that’s going from just my experience and, you know, my girlfriends. Erm (.) and whereas men (.) I wouldn’t, that wouldn’t be quite as important to them (.) <u>possibly as sex</u>, or possibly an (.) erm (.) I think erm (.) <u>support from the woman</u> is important for the man. Erm (.) well it’s important for <u>women as well</u> actually, support, but I think the communication thing is the thing that sticks out in my (.) mind as being, you know, top of, top of the women’s list. Maybe a little bit lower down for men.</p> <p>MC: Communication in what sort of sense?</p> <p>GABY: Erm (.) in just <u>being able to express yourself</u> (.) and erm (.) just being able to have <u>frank conversations</u> (.) with somebody, with the other, you know, your other half basically.</p> <p>MC: So for women it’s important (.) to both be able to express themselves and also for their partner to express themselves?</p> <p>GABY: Yeah, but I think that’s where things get <u>difficult a lot of the time</u> because <u>men don’t express themselves as easily or freely as women</u> generally, I mean that just tends to be the pattern, and (.) what you <i>find</i> is (.) erm (.) men can kind of <u>harbour things</u> I think a bit more, you know, they <i>harbour</i> things, they <u>don’t say what’s pissing them off</u> so much (.) in a relationship (.) until it comes out, you know, because it’s normally, I find, it’s the woman who kind of <u>bring it up</u> (.) and the woman who’ll <u>notice that things aren’t going right</u> in the relationship</p>	<p>Gendered Satisfying practice – communication / talk privileged for women - heteronormative narratives – women as relational; men as needing sex</p> <p>Satisfying practice – to “express” oneself “Frank” (i.e. honest?) conversations - self-censuring or silence as problematic i.e. dissatisfying practices</p> <p>Gendered roles – women as expressive; men not expressive Women engaged in the emotion work of the relationship [NTS – can men articulate dissatisfaction it? Do they reflect on it?]</p> <p>NTS – women more sensitive to the lived actuality of the CIRRR, or have a more defined understanding of what the CIRRR ‘should’ be? Perhaps, if socially prevalent portrayals of what CIRRRs should be are aimed more at women?</p>
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**Appendix T – Example of the Document Summarising the IPA Recurrent Themes
with Illustrative Extracts**

Sub theme 1 Knowing / Being Satisfied

Satisfaction as cognitive

Implied rather than declared, hence, difficult to articulate

Martin: (.) Erm (.) I suppose, like (.) peace (.) like safety, (.) comfort (.) erm (.) happiness (.) I don't, it's quite, things like that are quite hard to (.) to (.) coz you don't really, think about it, it's almost like, just, I'm having a good feeling or (.) just, feeling shit, having uneasiness or something that you're aware of, it's not something you really put into words at the time (.)

Anya: [...] how do you know you're satisfied? You just *know*, and I don't, I can't really (.) most of the time I can't explain why, but I'm just happy and you know.

Imogen: You might not feel the need to look for exactly why you're feeling that way because, you know what I mean, you're not trying to solve any problem. [...] So in a way it might be actually harder to (.) to articulate why you feel good about it.

Not a deliberate process but a state of being i.e. the status quo.

Not thinking about satisfaction

Gaby: (.) I suppose it does, it's not something you do really consciously is it? It's not something you, you kind of sit and think "Am I satisfied in this relationship?" Well I don't, maybe I should [laughs]. I don't know erm.

MC: Do you think people do in general?

Gaby: (.) Hmm (.) I think a lot of the time you *don't* actually. I think a lot of the time (.) you just go along, you go in the flow, you're not really (.) you don't really sit down and ask yourself "Am I satisfied? Is there something else I really need from this relationship?"

Lydia: Erm (.) I think (.) I probably more obviously feel dissatisfaction (.) because if I'm satisfied (.) I don't really think about it (.) because I'm just (.) life is good (.) and I'm just getting on with life and (.) my, my relationship, is my relationship, a good relationship, and I don't, I don't need to think about it.

David: [...] and satisfied is being happy, it's, it's not querying anything I suppose. [...] Yeah, but happiness, but also, like I was saying, you know, when you're not particularly happy, when things aren't going well, you start to (.) yeah analyse and question them, so, weirdly satisfaction means (.) there is no analysis. You just are. You're in the moment, you're enjoying it, you don't have to (.) stop and think is everything alright. Satisfied is (.) is that, is a lack of that, erm, assessment. You don't need to assess it because you're happy, and not just happy, but erm (.) yeah, well, I mean (.) you're content and so yeah, you don't have to do it.

The act of appraisal / questioning one's relationship is indicative of something 'not right' [NTS – For the FDA]

John: Am I a good boyfriend, am I a good girlfriend? Erm (.)

MC: How would you know?

John: Well, yeah, exactly – you wouldn't. You'd have to (.) I don't think you'll ever know that, you shouldn't (.) if you're asking yourself the question then you're already in a predicament. If you're not asking yourself the question then you're a good boyfriend / girlfriend (.) I would say basically. Or possibly not, maybe, maybe I'm slightly more conscientious (.) no, I don't think so. I think, behind that kind of genuine relationship (.) I think you pretty much know (.) you know, you *know* if what you're doing is right or wrong kind of thing [...] but on balance, I don't sit there and question the fact that I'm a

bad, or a good boyfriend. I think it's just (.) as I say, if something's wrong that's when you start asking yourself that question.

Variation on 'Not thinking about Satisfaction'

Appraising satisfaction ('savouring the good times') as something we should do

Anya: [...] So, so, erm (.) you *really* question don't you when it's, it goes down the hill. [...] Which may be not good, because you think then (.) maybe you should really, you should explore it when it's good [...] So that you know (.) what, how it has to be (.) for it to go on and be good

Appraising being satisfied (or is this akin to appraising dissatisfaction?)

Gaby: I suppose other people's perspective on it does come into that (.) you know, because I (.) it's funny because when (.) you get (.) you get used to somebody don't you, you don't necessarily think "I'm, we're in a good relationship", you don't think that yourself because you're just (.) *in* it (.) and I think it's *really* (.) you know when you're talking to friends or family and (.) people (.) say "Oh, you know, it's really *good* when I see you two together you know, you obviously get on really well", and it's really nice, you know, compliments I suppose about your relationship from people who matter.

(Shaped by age?)

David: I think everyone does, you know, you look at, you stop and you, you, am I happy in my job, you know, [...] and we do it a lot now, and I think we do it more so (.) our generation does it more so than older generations. Erm, you know my mum and my dad don't (.) I've asked my dad a number of times is he happy, and he can't answer the question. It's like, yeah alright, I've got, you know, I do what I've got to do (.) but you know he's 68 and works five 12 hour shifts (.) [...] so (.) I think that, yeah, it is about looking at it, stopping, and I think that is this reflecting, and you do it all the time.

Uncertainty 'knowing' satisfaction: How to 'measure' satisfaction?

Martin: (.) you know, you can't, you can't put them into erm (.) into a computer and, you know, you don't get like a percentage figure of satisfaction out of it do you? You've just got different things on perceptions of things (.) I dunno how, I don't know how you process that (.) emotion. [...] there are things that (.) I'd prefer were different (.) about (.) about (.) well, about Lisa, and about our relationship, but (.) it doesn't mean I'm not satisfied with our relationship. So I don't know how you kind of measure, I would say, I'm satisfied in our relationship, but I don't know how I can, you know, I don't know how to really express (.) how, you know, how you measure satisfaction.

Imogen: [...] I think I would add to that I think it's possible to be (.) also, *unsure* about whether you're satisfied or dissatisfied. [...] (.) Because it's all about how you feel isn't it? And how, how, you know (.) there's no kind of like (.) there's nobody telling you or (.) affirming for you that this is, you know, you're feeling 100% satisfied today, or you're feeling 80% satisfied today, you know, you don't really know, you kind of feel generally ok, or not, and there all, lot's of other (.) factors effecting how you *feel* on any given *day*, not just the relationship, so, know what I mean, you can, you can be (.) uncertain about what's effecting your mood.

Comparisons

Compare to previous relationships

Imogen: there might be two, or there might be two erm (.) (.) two gauges if you like, one is gonna be like an absolute, and one is gonna be a relative. You might have had other relationships before [...] and so you might gauge it in relative terms to your level of satisfaction that you had with those other relationships [...] or the relationship that you see other people having, and your perceptions of them [...] you obviously learn (.) from experience of what you, what you (.) find satisfactory, or, you know, or what makes you happy or not.

To other peoples' relationships

Ruth: I suppose you *watch* other couples, erm (.) try not to make comparisons because I always think that you don't really know what goes on behind closed doors in other people's relationships. So it's *easier* to try and *not* compare yourself I think. Doesn't always work out that way. (.) I mean you might compare yourself favourably or unfavourably I suppose. But I think that every, what, what I've noticed when I compare myself, if you like, to other couples is that they have their good points as well as their bad points but (.) no (.) I don't think I know the perfect relationship you know? There's always (.) different issues within every relationship, everyone's got something that they have to work at you know?

Appendix U – Example of the IPA Master Themes Table with Extracts

Master Theme 1 “Knowing Satisfaction”

Uncertainty / lack of cognitive Awareness of Satisfaction

Martin: (.) Erm (.) I suppose, like (.) peace (.) like safety, (.) comfort (.) erm (.) happiness (.) I don't, it's quite, things like that are quite hard to (.) to (.) coz you don't really, think about it, it's almost like, just, I'm having a good feeling or (.) just, feeling shit, having uneasiness or something that you're aware of, it's not something you really put into words at the time (.)

David: [...] and satisfied is being happy, it's, it's not querying anything I suppose. [...] Yeah, but happiness, but also, like I was saying, you know, when you're not particularly happy, when things aren't going well, you start to (.) yeah analyse and question them, so, weirdly satisfaction means (.) there is no analysis. You just are. You're in the moment, you're enjoying it, you don't have to (.) stop and think is everything alright. Satisfied is (.) is that, is a lack of that, erm, assessment. You don't need to assess it because you're happy, and not just happy, but erm (.) yeah, well, I mean (.) you're content and so yeah, you don't have to do it.

Anya: [...] So, so, erm (.) you *really* question don't you when it's, it goes down the hill. [...] Which may be not good, because you think then (.) maybe you should really, you should explore it when it's good [...] So that you know (.) what, how it has to be (.) for it to go on and be good

David: I think everyone does, you know, you look at, you stop and you, you, am I happy in my job, you know, [...] and we do it a lot now, and I think we do it more so (.) our generation does it more so than older generations. Erm, you know my mum and my dad don't (.) I've asked my dad a number of times is he happy, and he can't answer the question. It's like, yeah alright, I've got, you know, I do what I've got to do (.) but you know he's 68 and works five 12 hour shifts (.) [...] so (.) I think that, yeah, it is about looking at it, stopping, and I think that is this reflecting, and you do it all the time.

Martin: (.) you know, you can't, you can't put them into erm (.) into a computer and, you know, you don't get like a percentage figure of satisfaction out of it do you? You've just got different things on perceptions of things (.) I dunno how, I don't know how you process that (.) emotion. [...] I don't know how to really express (.) how, you know, how you measure satisfaction.

Imogen: [...] I think I would add to that I think it's possible to be (.) also, *unsure* about whether you're satisfied or dissatisfied. [...] (.) Because it's all about how you feel isn't it? And how, how, you know (.) there's no kind of like (.) there's nobody telling you or (.) affirming for you that this is, you know, you're feeling 100% satisfied today, or you're feeling 80% satisfied today, you know, you don't really know, you kind of feel generally ok, or not, and there all, lot's of other (.) factors effecting how you *feel* on any given *day*, not just the relationship, so, know what I mean, you can, you can be (.) uncertain about what's effecting your mood.

	<p><i>Knowing satisfaction as not dissatisfaction</i></p>	<p>Imogen: (.) Erm (.) (.) well I think, as, as I said earlier, I mean it's just to me, it's whether I feel (.) happy or not (.) in a kind of generalised way [chuckles] You know it's the, in a way it's the absence of problems (.) the absence of arguments, the absence of dissatisfaction (.) as well as (.) a kind of positive feeling of (.) you know (.) I'm happy to, I'm happy (.) to be with this person, I want to spend time with them, I'm attracted to them (.) I enjoy their company.</p>
	<p><i>Affective 'knowing'</i></p>	<p>Laura: I mean I would associate satisfaction with something positive, and being happy (.) erm (.) but I suppose you could say "Yes, I'm satisfied to a point" on a practical level, or, erm (.) you know "It works" on a sort of day-to-day level, but not really on an emotional level. (.) Erm (.) but no, I would say that satisfaction and happiness go together really.</p> <p>Laura: (.) I think you have peace in your heart, you're not always (.) looking for something else (.) or <i>someone</i> else I suppose. (.) Yeah, you just have that (.) assurance (.) erm (.) that that person likes you (.) loves you (.) wants to be with you, that you're important, that you're special to them. (.) So I think its em (.) yeah, a sense of (.) erm (.) a sense of peace really (.) you know, you're not trying to be someone else, or be something else, and you're not (.) wishing that they <i>were</i> someone else, or something else as well. Just being <i>content</i> with each other</p>
	<p><i>Satisfaction as embodied</i></p>	<p>William: [...] you have that feeling of (.) <i>warmth</i> almost, you know, that kind of emotional (.) it's, it's a kind of a bit of a cliché but I can understand where it comes from, that kind of, aspect of (.) <i>really</i> feeling so, so into someone that you do tend to, kind of (.) does feel like it kind of comes from your heart, even though physically (.) it can't.</p> <p>Clare: It feels sleepy [laughs]. (.) Or, there's a, we used to say "Fuck-struck". Fuck-struck because (.) and I see it round here, I work with women who are between 23 and about 32 majority (.) like there's (.) 70 of us, and <i>most</i> people are 23, well, 24 and 33, and quite a lot of the girls are seeing someone, or like engaged, or just married, and like, you see it down the corridors, when people just s::inging, or (.) whistling for no reason, or grinning, or (.) and you think "What the <i>fuck</i> is wrong with them? It's Thursday morning at 7:30am, and I haven't had my coffee!", And you can tell that they've just had a <i>shag</i>, and they're fuck-struck, and you're like "Oh my <i>God!</i> It's <i>so</i> unfair!", or (.) sometimes you're a bit fuck-struck, and someone comes in and goes "What's wrong with you?"</p>

Appendix V - Reflexive Account of Conducting the IPA of Lay Talk

During the IPA, the process of interpretation (for me) was an *active* process. In fact, it often felt like hard work, and I re-encountered the uncertainty that I had felt during the initial coding stage as I attempted to produce broader / deeper interpretative analyses. With the IPA I kept feeling like I wasn't adding anything new – just stating the descriptive obvious. I felt myself thinking “So what?” and I urged myself to ‘see something deeper’ than a superficial description. I kept thinking “How do I move beyond stating the obvious?” (E.g. “the participants felt positive when they were satisfied in their relationships”). During my IPA I was initially drawn to the affective and embodied characteristics that the participants described. However, later on, as I began to feel more confident with the ideas from phenomenology, I began to think more in terms of intentionality, and object-vs-agent of perception; and object-subject experiences. Eventually, I began to interpret links between the themes I was producing and certain ideas from existential thinking (See Chapter 6).

This move to higher order, more abstract interpretations, again, represented a whole series of choices by me. On reflection, my interpretations were influenced by Smith's (2007, 2009) work on the underlying foundations of IPA (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2.3); discussions with my Director of Studies about the existential theorists Martin Buber & RD Laing; and also by a talk I went to by Virginia Eatough in 2010 where I was introduced to the concept of existential feelings (see Chapter 2, Section 2.8). As I became more familiar with the themes, and then drew links to the broader existential literature, I began to feel myself being pulled along by the analysis. The pull of the theoretical interpretation was, as Willig (2012a) stated, “seductive” (p.147), and this manifested in feelings of clarity / a sudden realisation that I was ‘getting it’. In actual fact this was the clarity of being able to apply an interpretative framework which fit and amplified the meaning in the data. Although it *did* feel at times like a clarity of ‘discovering the truth’, this was when I had to pull back and remember the limitations of my interpretative claims. At times I wondered if I was forcing the data into my interpretative framework – I would stop and question possible alternatives but, broadly speaking, I felt confident that my interpretation remained grounded in the participants' accounts of their experiences. That is, the interpretation remained *empathic*. The data came first, and I did not encounter the existential theories until *after* my initial analysis. Hence, the descriptive analyses of all lay interviews were well established by that point, and suddenly the existential concepts (such as existential feelings, ontological security,

and I-Thou relating) seemed to expound further on the experiential qualities that I had interpreted from my IPA. Thus I used existentialism as a framework to help expand the IPA, but I would not say that I was *doing* an existential analysis.

In addition, the more theoretical (existential) interpretations of the individual accounts helped me to present common ‘themes’ across the body of interviews and to integrate these common themes. The challenge then was not to lose the ‘unique’ because IPA takes an *idiographic* approach to research and is concerned with ‘the particular’; in terms of being a highly *detailed* analysis, and also in the sense of being concerned with the *contextually situated* experience of particular individuals. Smith *et al.*, (2009) have suggested several ways of managing this tension. For example, the researcher may decide that a ‘master theme’ must occur in at least a third, half, or *all* of the individual interviews. In the case of my research I initially (and, on reflection, arbitrarily) decided that if a theme occurred in the majority of the interviews it would count as a recurring theme. However, I kept in mind the potential tension that could arise if a theme was mentioned in fewer interviews, but more emphatically than other themes mentioned more frequently across the body of data. In this way, I hoped to balance the constant tension between the more-general and the more-idiographic facets of the participants’ phenomenological experiences. As it happens, the master themes that I produced were common to all respondents. This could have been an upshot of pursuing certain avenues of conversation during the interviews and not others, or possibly because I had a group of participants who were, culturally speaking, fairly homogenous.

Another way in which I tried to remain committed to the individual respondents was by reflecting back on the interviews themselves (i.e. not just focusing on the words of the transcript). As outlined by Smith (2007), who drew on the work of Schleiermacher (who viewed the hermeneutic process as one of grammatical *and* psychological interpretation, which could shed light on the textual meaning *and* the intentionality of the author), the interview texts produced in my research were contemporary texts, and therefore during the analysis, and my engagement with the interpretative process, I was constantly thinking back to the actual interviews and the specific contexts of each dialogue in which I had actively taken part.

Whilst some researchers seek the participants' input on their interpretations (e.g. Williams & Morrow, 2009), I did not. I took a position similar to other researchers (e.g. Langdridge, 2007) that my interpretations were not made any more 'accurate' by the participants' agreement or 'misguided' if they disagreed. Hermeneutic phenomenology may well produce an interpretation that the participant wouldn't recognise. If I were focussed primarily on description then I concede that it would have had potential value, but I wanted to draw on other theoretical works and engage in a hermeneutics of questioning for my IPA (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

Appendix W – Example of the FDA Constructions Table with Extracts

Relationship Satisfaction as dialectical need fulfilment: partners' transactional obligation

Self-as-monitor / self-as-monitored

John: I feel, that, from just time to time (.) have a few minutes and you kind of just reflect on it you know? And think is everything, you know, is everything going well? Am I putting my (.) my bit into this? Is there anyway that I could (.) improve what I'm doing? Not by (.) being someone different as such, but just by (.) you know, am I putting enough into this? (.) Is there anything I (.) we *should* be doing that we're not doing?

Martin: I think eventually we had, we had, like, you know, a big talk and stuff (.) and that (.) and that (.) called me back from the edge, and made me realise what I had, and to try and stop comparing (.) something *real* with something that's (.) *not* real. Because you can't go through your whole life comparing (.) and I, and I think when I felt like I was settled as well, coz, like, you can be settling for what you've got (.) but, it was just like, so many different emotions involved (.) I couldn't absorb, it was just too much to process.

Clare: How *stable* they are, how *stable* they appear. It's not about sex or romance it's how (.) *solid* they seem, that's what I worry about, so I'll see something and I'll think [Gasps] "Oh that's what makes a perfect, solid", you know, "he's never gonna leave her because of (.) something"

MC: Yeah.

Clare: It's not about the sex or the romance for me when I compare, it's kind of more about (.) it might be an act which has made me think that's the (.) you know, it might be something that they've done, he, he's done for her, or she's done for him, that makes me think that they're more stable, or (.) I *should* be doing something like that, but (.) the envy is more about (.) worrying about (.) the insecurity of my relationship, if my relationship is insecure, and it's not about my relationship, that's about my *head*.

Freddie: Er (.) the only thing that I would have to go off, erm (.) obviously past experiences. Erm (.) you all have the good and the bad but (.) er, so that comes with time I think. (.) Erm (.) and then probably (.) peer examples, you know, other people and you know, you've got friends, [ask yourself] are they still together? Do they bicker? Or whatever, you know, but, it seems to work for them. Er, or (.) at the opposite end of that, people that get on very, very well, and you just look at what, well they look to have a great relationship.

MC: How do you think that influences the way you see your own relationship?

		<p>Freddie: Erm (.) I think it would if you were, were looking around and thinking “Well no one else (.) seems to have this”, or, you know, be that good or bad, erm (.) you could look and see “Well I don’t see these other people arguing about going out for beers” or whatever, I don’t know, small things, but (.) er, so that does play a part but (.)</p>
	<p>Gendered monitor</p>	<p>Anya: Yeah, less, they would be, they would be maybe more satisfied with less satisfaction (.) if you know what I mean. Er, lower level of satisfaction would be enough for them to think that’s good relationship, “it’s fine”, you know, “it doesn’t bother me”, you know, erm (.) the word picky may be wrong, but they’re maybe not as picky as us women, you know, wanting everything to be perfect, erm, wanting everything to be romantic, erm (.) And erm, you know, where does he throw his pants, where does he do this, his socks and that, you know? Erm, [sighs] “It’s so annoying” or whatever, and where for a guy I guess he just doesn’t see that either. You know, you’re just, whatever, you know.</p> <p>Clare: (.) mine are more complicated. [...] I would say James’ idea of our relationship, or what we want, and our satisfaction (.) would be much, I mean this interview would be much, much quicker (.) and it’s not that he loves me less, or (.) it’s just that he doesn’t see (.) it’s just not as complicated for him. [...] they’d be very similar, it’s just I would have sub-headings, and mind maps, and diagrams, and pictures, and photographs, and feely boards underneath. It would be like that [laughs]. The sub-heading would be like the same thing, just mine would be all a, just a bit more complicated.</p>
	<p><u>Self-as-articulator / self-as-articulated to</u></p>	<p>John: Goes back to what I was saying before probably, sort it out in your own head [...] Yeah, I think self-realisation’s the first stage in <i>most</i> things. So I think, as I said before, if you can’t articulate it (.) in your own head, how the hell are you ever going to make anybody else understand it? I think that’s the thing, it’s like (.) parity with your own thoughts, and it doesn’t matter if those thoughts then prove to be wrong. So upon being challenged you change those views - that’s fine, <i>but</i> if you can’t articulate them in the first place there’s almost no point as far as I’m concerned.</p>

Appendix X – Reflections on Conducting the FDA of Lay Talk

The experiential quality of conducting the FDA was steeped in uncertainty. I often ‘lost myself’ in the content of the accounts, and wondered if I was applying the theoretical concepts in the right way (more so than with the IPA). I had doubts about what I should be looking for with the FDA – that is, the practical application of the concepts did not come easily to me, despite the fact that the theoretical concepts provided a clear direction to the analysis. This uncertainty was managed via regular meetings and discussions with my supervisors who helped me to engage with the concepts and to apply them. On reflection, I felt that part of the challenge may have been linked to the interview structure of the twin focus analysis. Because I was seeking to elicit experiential accounts from the lay people, the topic of conversation and resultant transcripts focused far more on the ‘satisfied subject’ rather than the more abstract ‘relationship satisfaction’. Therefore, the constructions of relationship satisfaction were made visible / mobilised through the satisfying practices and modes of subjectification that the lay people produced (See Chapter 5).

During the FDA of lay people the earlier themes and categories from the IPA did keep entering my mind. At times this was useful in that it helped me to interpret the different ‘versions of self’, but I was concerned about simply repeating myself (by simply swapping the term ‘theme’ for ‘discursive construction’). Again, speaking to my supervisors helped me to understand and appreciate the conceptual differences, and returning to my research questions also helped re-focus my interpretations. Moreover, I think it was easier to not let the first reading determine the second because I was moving from an empathic ‘tentative’ interpretation to a more theoretically prescriptive one (Willig, 2012a).

**Appendix Y – Example of the Three Column Table used for the Initial Stages of
the FDA of Couple Therapists’ Transcripts**

<u>Coding</u>	<u>Interview 2 – Joan</u>	
<p><u>RS as a CIRR that “works”</u> - conceptualised as enduring interdependency “togetherness” - i.e. prevents two individuals separating</p> <p><u>Professional conception of RS as couple specific</u> - “couples need different things to be satisfied”</p> <p><u>RS requires fulfilment of needs</u> - happiness - love - closeness - all formulated within a couple’s specific relational context</p> <p><u>Doing RS – the “ingredients”</u> a) requires intimacy b) effective communication c) similarity “common interests”</p> <p><u>Evaluation of the importance of specific needs as specific to the couple</u></p>	<p>MC: Do you mind telling me your age?</p> <p>Joan: Erm (.) I’m 62.</p> <p>MC: 62, and how many years have you been practising as a counsellor?</p> <p>J: Erm (.) well I’ve been at RELATE since 1994, as I mentioned in my email (.) but I was counselling before then (.) probably since 1990 maybe.</p> <p>MC: How would you describe the notion of relationship satisfaction?</p> <p>J: (.) When (.) when it works (.) for a couple, because (.) erm, you know, couples need different things to be satisfied. So, you know, whatever works really (.) it’s important to know what, you know, works for them and what doesn’t work for them. What do they mean by happiness? What do they mean by love? What do they mean by (.) closeness? (.)</p> <p>MC: So when you say ‘it works’, what exactly is ‘it’?</p> <p>J: The relationship (.) erm, what makes, what makes a couple want to be together (.) what is it that, that draws them together, and what is it that sustains their togetherness?</p> <p>MC: And you also mentioned there terms such as happiness, love, closeness, and you would associate those with satisfaction?</p> <p>J: Yes (.) intimacy (.) effective communication (.) common interests (.) but, you know, for some couples some things are more important than others, you know, it, it (.)</p>	<p>Relationship Satisfaction as a “working” relationship - <i>Economic construction</i> / couple as the unit of labour?</p> <p>Relationship Satisfaction as needs fulfilment - Needs privileged – happiness / love / closeness - Relationships as a site of ‘positive’ interactions / intimacy (Limiting – no space for being unhappy / upset / distant)</p> <p>Satisfying practices: - Intimate communication</p> <p>Relationship Satisfaction as couple-specific - a space for variation / alternatives?</p>

<p><u>RdS as need fulfilment</u> [Who's responsible? What are the expectations?]</p> <p><u>RdS as unmet needs</u> - responsibility for need fulfilment placed with partner?</p> <p><u>RdS as accumulation of events</u> - threshold level of acceptable dS?</p> <p><u>RdS as specific crisis point</u> a) an affair b) a bereavement</p> <p><u>Crisis points / events as changing needs</u> - how are 'new' needs fulfilled?</p> <p><u>RdS as unfulfilled needs</u> a) Un-expressed needs b) Un-met needs</p> <p><u>Professional conception of CIRRs as the progression through a series of stages</u> - Different needs associated with different stages - expected / acknowledged "crunch" / difficult times</p> <p><u>Motivation / 'trigger' for engaging in therapy</u> - Moments of significant change within the context of the CIRR - disruption to how "the couple" relate</p>	<p>MC: Well that's what you were saying at the beginning there, just about the different needs (.)</p> <p>J: Yes, whether their needs are being met, yeah.</p> <p>MC: So (.) what is relationship dissatisfaction?</p> <p>J: When their needs are <i>not</i> met! [laughs] (.) When their needs are not being met (.) when, when there is a, you know, sometimes it might be (.) an <i>event</i> though (.) or a sequence of events, a trauma (.) erm (.) you know, it could be things erm, it could be, you know, an affair, it could be a bereavement (.) erm (.)</p> <p>MC: And so it's these events themselves (.) that partners find dissatisfying? Or lead to diss</p> <p>J: Well they, yes, I mean it depends how the couple manage (.) erm I'm saying that there are sometimes events (.) <i>impact</i> on the relationship, so, say for example there's a bereavement (.) well, you know, one or other, say the partner who's been bereaved, you know, might <i>need</i> (.) different things, or more of some things than they might have needed before. Erm, you know, and erm (.) or say, illness, you know, one or other could become very ill, erm, and er, you know, that would be something <i>different</i> in the relationship, it then sets up (.) <i>different needs</i>, and the question is, you know, are these needs (.) well first of all, you know, are they expressed, and are they met? (.) So (.)</p> <p>MC: Ok, so we've got about three points there I'd like to pursue a little bit more with you. Erm, firstly, it sounded like (.) so it's <i>changing</i> needs, it's that, it seems like it's the relationship <i>changing</i>, and partners' ability to manage that (.)</p> <p>J: Yes (.) and of course there is the, sort of, you might say natural evolution of, of (.) of a relationship, I mean relationships go through different stages (.) and, I mean (.) you know, there are</p>	<p>Relationship dissatisfaction as unfulfilled needs</p> <p>Relationship Dissatisfaction as a state / static?</p> <p>Satisfying Empowered Practice [warrants partners to monitor / reflect on personal level of satisfaction, and to articulate this to partner. Responsibility lies with self in the first instance, and then partner in the latter] - self as knowable and communicable - needs as negotiable</p> <p>Relationships as stages - implicit acknowledgment of change / relational processes? - one static stage to the next? - 'stages' predisposed / produced as RdS</p>
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<p>- e.g. arrival / leaving of children</p> <p><u>RdS as sudden change in relational context of "the couple</u></p>	<p>these times that we call crunch times, which are not these unexpected things, but the more (.) the more kind of expected things, like if there are children (.) well, the arrival of a first child for example, erm (.) an then further children, and then (.) it's like, when the children leave home, that's a crunch time. This is when couples, er, a lot of couples sort of find their way to RELATE, you</p>	
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**Appendix Z - Example of Therapists' FDA Analytic Points in a Separate Table
with Extracts**

Therapeutic Construction

Relationship Satisfaction as the fulfilment of needs

Charlotte: Erm (.) I think it very much depends on the expectations of the two individuals that make up the couple.

Joan: When their needs are *not* met! [laughs] (.) When their needs are not being met (.) when, when there is a, you know, sometimes it might be (.) an *event* though (.) or a sequence of events, a trauma (.) [...] I mean it depends how the couple manage (.) erm I'm saying that there are sometimes events (.) *impact* on the relationship, so, say for example there's a bereavement (.) well, you know, one or other, say the partner who's been bereaved, you know, might *need* (.) different things, or more of some things than they might have needed before. Erm, you know, and erm (.) or say, illness, you know, one or other could become very ill, erm, and er, you know, that would be something *different* in the relationship, it then sets up (.) different *needs*, and the question is, you know, are these needs (.) well first of all, you know, are they expressed, and are they met? (.) So (.)

Gwen: (.) Erm (.) I would say within (.) couples it's about the ability to get your needs met and (.) that implies, in the first place, being able to (.) have an understanding of what your needs are (.) and an ability to be able to express them. I mean that's just very (.) broad

[TO GO WITH AWAKENED SUBJECT] Gwen: Erm (.) sometimes it's about getting that balance right, how much can I do for myself, and how much, erm (.) can I legitimately expect from my partner? And sometimes (.) one partner might just be suffering from low self-esteem and that can effect (.) their ability to make themselves feel good, and they sort of put all those needs out onto their partner, and it's more, obviously, than one partner can (.) can *cope* with. Erm (.) and I think it's just an increasing problem of the way our society has gone, that (.) and the way we conceive of a couple now, that we tend to think that this one, this one other person is going to be able to meet all our needs and one, one person can't *do* that. You know, so a lot of it is just about being *realistic* about what another human being can, can actually do for you, and how much you have to do yourself, or, you know, get from other means.

Flo: I think respect is the key (.) erm, I think *communication* (.) is a *very* vital key (.) and I think it's being able to ask (.) to have your needs met (.) *or be able* to have your needs met, and also of you your husband's needs, so instead of one, you know, it's all about me, this is what I need, it's about, you know, my husband or my wife are (.) you know, equal partnerships and 'How can we both be happy?' So it's very much compromise, but I think (.) you (.) it's hard to compromise without the respect (.) and without the really effective communication.

Therapeutic Prescription / Mode of Subjectification

Communication / Articulation as a key satisfying practice

MC: How would you describe the notion of relationship satisfaction?

Rachel: Communication (.) would be, I mean if wanted a one word answer it's communication. (.) And it's (.) it's the ability to express to your partner and for them to express to you (.) their needs and how you can meet each others needs.

MC: (.) So that then, it's communication (.) and the way (.) specifically it's that ability of both partners to express their needs (.) and then how they go about meeting those needs.

Rachel: Yeah, yeah, so it's to be able to, I suppose, erm, let your partner know about your (.) what your vulnerabilities are, what your needs are in the relationship (.) and to be able to meet (.) meet those needs in a way that is (.) erm, you need to be true to yourself, you can't (.) I mean what I often say to clients is "You can't change anyone else, you can only (.) change yourself, and

you need to be *true* to yourself”, but there are ways of negotiating, erm, solutions if you like, erm, where people can still be themselves but actually can provide their partner with what they need as well.

Joan: Yes, because I mean, I guess, er, er (.) er, well, I suppose (.) very often the starting point is erm (.) a breakdown of communication, you know, and, erm (.) the issue of communication and whether it’s effective or not, I mean, that’s kind of, I would say from my experience, erm, you know, the number one .) thing (.) that er, a lot of the (.) that is *common* to (.) erm (.) most counselling of couples (.) that is brought as an issue.

Joan: Well I think yes, I think, well (.) if we’re talking about *need* – alright I mean there are many different kinds of needs. One of the needs we’ll hear over and over again is erm, you know, the need to be heard and understood (.) alright, so (.) that requires (.) communication to be effective (.) erm (.) and very often it isn’t (.) in, in our experience, or perhaps I better just talk about my experience. Erm, so, er you know, couples say (.) when we ask them (.) or when I ask “What do you want to be different?” or “What is the issue?” communication, being able to communicate better, being able to listen more, to be able to make myself understood more (.) all those kind of things is, is, is erm (.) something that I would regard as my role to *facilitate*, to facilitate more effective communication, so that yes, and so, you know, so that needs can be expressed more openly (.) more effectively, so that then (.) you know, the partners can respond (.) erm (.) appropriately (.) well that, that’s another matter about the responses.

Gwen: Well often sex (.) er, sex and closeness, erm (.) has (.) not just closeness, but the, the ability to actually share and (.) say (.) what they’re feeling (.) honestly and openly to each other (.) has dropped off. Usually, usually it’s a sign that there’s something not being said, usually it’s a sign that one person might be quite angry underneath, but (.) either isn’t acknowledging it themselves or feel that they can’t raise it. (.) So the work then is to try and (.) peel back the layers and, and find out what the underlying (.) resentment (.) or issue is (.) and get that (.) aired.

Gwen: That’s right, to explore it and find it, and bring it out into, into the open. And that often unblocks their communication. (.) (.) Apart from anything else, I suppose what we’re providing is a safe structure for them to (.) *air* (.) these feelings, which seems so risky, for whatever reason. Erm, it might feel risky because, you know, in their family those feelings were not aired. Erm (.) but because there’s a, there’s a structure of, it’s time limited - you’ve got an hour (.) you know at the end of it you can put it all down and go out and (.) resume your life. There’s another person there who’s going to stop things going off at the deep end, which is the counsellor’s role really, to provide a safe, you know, you’re providing safe boundaries (.) for them to explore those feelings that it doesn’t feel safe to explore at home. I think that’s one of the most (.) *basic* (.) things that counselling provides.

Rachel: And so it’s that (.) hearing, listening (.) and then actually making sure that (.) what you heard is what that person really (.) meant. Not putting your own interpretation on it, which is a negative interpretation (.) and then responding on that basis. So people get into this totally vicious circle of (.) erm (.) *everything* the other person says they’re interpreting as negative so they snipe back, and so this person *now* is defensive back. And, and it, and what we’re trying to do is break that down, and, and let them see what it is they’re doing to each other. (.) And *teach them* how they can actually say “Oh what do you mean by that?” (.) Not confrontational, just like (.) “Oh, what do you mean by that?”

**Appendix AA - Reflections on the Ethics of Conducting the FDA of Therapists'
Talk**

I had to consider the ethical implications of my FDA of the therapist's talk carefully because I was only producing a suspicious interpretation and therefore, unlike the twin focus analysis of the lay people, I was not presenting an empathic interpretation to 'balance' the discursive interpretation I was producing. Therefore, ethically speaking, the research process that I adopted afforded me greater power over the couple therapists than the lay people, because the IPA provided the lay people the opportunity to generate their own meanings via the hermeneutics of empathy. In contrast, a discursive analysis "silence[s] participants and interferes with their right to author their account" (Willig, 2012a, p.40). As mentioned previously, I was aware of this power 'over' the therapists manifesting during the interpretative process when, at times, I felt like I was trying to 'trap' them. However, the FDA mitigated this *somewhat* in the sense that the focus was on the discursive structures of the therapists' talk, rather than the therapists themselves. In this way, FDA could be seen as less ethically problematic (Willig, 2012a) because the focus is on the broader discursive structures available in a given socio-historical context, and the "research participants are not seen as strategic users of discourse but rather as historical subjects who are themselves constructed through and positioned within discourse [...] discourse analysis is primarily concerned with discourse and not people" (p.128). However, I think it is important to remember that a participant who is not aware of the technical, discursive theoretical concepts could well see a discursive reading of their text and perceive that motivations were being attributed.

Glossary

Authenticity/inauthenticity – One of the governing norms of Existentialist theory. Authenticity refers to a condition of self-making whereby an individual experiences themselves as actively committed to their various ‘life projects’ as if they were ‘their own’. In contrast, inauthenticity refers to the experience of merely ‘occupying’ one’s being-in-the-world; engaged in different life projects out of a sense of ‘duty’ or broader social norms.

Empowerment/disempowerment – in line with Foucault’s claim that knowledge and power are inextricably linked, ‘empowerment’ and ‘disempowerment’ refer to the processes whereby certain constructions, subject positions, or subjectivities are privileged as the norm (empowered) or marginalised (disempowered) within a given set of socio-historical material-discursive conditions.

Empowered/disempowered subject position – the ‘empowered’ subject occupies a privileged site within a given discursive context such that their speaking rights and duties are privileged as the norm. Occupying an empowered subject position *may* also produce a broader ‘horizon of agency’ for the speaker by enabling a wider range of speaking rights and duties (although this will depend on the discursive context). In contrast, the disempowered subject occupies a position of marginalisation in which, for example, they are silenced, pathologised or produced as being in need of intervention. At any given time a subject is produced through multiple and potentially contradictory discourses. For example, a ‘working mother’ may be produced as an empowered position within liberal feminist discourse, yet simultaneously be produced as marginalised within a conservative, patriarchal discourse.

Ethic – Referring to the discursive norms which underpin a given *mode of subjectification*. That is, the ‘rules’ through which the ‘self’ acts upon the ‘self’ in the production of the ‘self’. These ‘rules’ are privileged or warranted within a given discursive context and therefore dictate how the self “*should*” act upon itself. For example, within broader discourses of intimacy-as-an-interpersonal-process, the ‘self’ is produced through an ethic of ‘open’ and ‘honest communication’ and is therefore compelled to engage in dialogue and forego silence or self-censorship.

Governance – the *productive* discursive norms or ‘rules’ which underpin and sustain a discursive framework. These rules ‘dictate’ the ways in which it is possible for different phenomena to be produced. For example, discourses of mutual need fulfilment could be produced through a ‘governance of the confessional’ or a ‘governance of romanticism’. The former would produce ‘fulfilment’ and the ‘fulfilled subject’ in terms of ‘open’ intersubjective dialogue, whilst the latter would warrant the production and enactment of romantic ideals.

Neo-liberal subject – Drawing on Foucauldian theory, the neo-liberal subject is produced through the discourses, practices and modes of subjectification made available through ‘neoliberalism’ – the dominant economic movement of the 20th and 21st Centuries, which privilege economic growth and individual economic gain through the operation of free markets. The neo-liberal subject is underpinned and compelled by an ethic of economic exchange, and individual choice and consumption.

Ontological status – the extent to which, and the manner in which, a phenomenon ‘exists’. From a discursive perspective, a given ‘thing’ comes into meaningful existence through language and the broader discursive context, and therefore ontological status is always fluid and dynamic. From a phenomenological point of view, the ontological status of an experience is shaped by an individual’s felt actuality of that experience. For example, an experience may shift from feeling ‘real’ and ‘concrete’ to something that is more ‘ephemeral’, ‘transitory’ and ‘less tangible’.

Subjectivity – pertaining to the discursive production or the phenomenological experience of ‘the self’, and the ways in which the subject is produced or experienced as a particular ‘type’ of self. From a discursive theoretical position, subjectivity is seen as fluid, dynamic, and socio-historically located, and is understood as being produced through a set of discursive conditions of possibility (e.g. through the subject positions, discursive practices, and modes of subjectification). From a phenomenological theoretical perspective, subjectivity refers to the ways in which an individual understands and *experiences* their sense of self-hood.