YOU'RE ALWAYS IN A DREAM: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF WOMENS' EXPERIENCES OF MARRIAGE TO ALCOHOLIC HUSBANDS

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to develop knowledge about how alcoholics' wives live out, interpret, and express the experience of living with an alcoholic husband. My intent was to remain as close as possible to the lived experience of five alcoholics' wives--all at mid-life. In this endeavor, I employed the vocabulary used by five women as they described the structure of their experience to me. I wanted to broaden the lens of co-dependency, an explanatory theme used in alcohol treatment programs and recent `pop' literature to define the wives' difficulties. The stories told to me by five informants were analyzed and presented in three common recurring themes: constantly being on guard; being in a pit; and push and pull. The themes refer to the inner and outer forms of experience that comprise the women's existence. They reflect emotionality, temporality, autonomy, trust, self-blame, weakening of self, dependency, powerlessness, female inferiority, isolation, separation, loss, and insulation.

I chose Spradley's (1979) ethnographic interviewing methodology to search for thought and behavior as interwoven strands of meaning. The ethnographic method allowed me to explore the experience of marriage to an alcoholic by examining the culture of five alcoholics' wives. `Culture'

in this sense refers to the shared context of five women's life worlds. Meaning embedded in the language of the five informants was interpreted for an intended audience of counsellors.

Suggestions for counsellors include consideration of how internalization of cultural norms and the interactional dynamics of the marital relationship seriously affect the wives' experience. Entrapment in an alcohol-dependent marriage fosters a lived experience of fear--particularly fear of change. Counsellors need to be cognizant of and respect alcoholics' wives' immense barriers against change (i.e. suppressed emotions, social pressures, cultural beliefs, weakened self). Further, ethnographic questions could be employed therapeutically to understand clients' meaning systems. Finally, ethnographic questioning could be integrated into counsellor training programs to raise trainees' awareness of the significance of clients' use of language.

What stood out from this study is evidence of a complex interaction in the experience of the alcoholic's wives involving internalization of cultural expectations, weakening of self, and embeddedness in an alcohol-dependent marriage.

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Acknowledgments

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Dedication

In memory of my parents, Jack and Dora Banister

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> You're always in a dream. Your problems, big problems seem small because they don't seem real. Nothing seems real. The worse it got, the more I would pretend it wasn't getting worse....Well, there has to be something wrong with my mental health for that to happen. I mean I don't know why I don't have any self-confidence when it comes to that particular man....Like I wasn't having a normal life....I didn't feel normal and I blame myself for most of that. (Debbie, age 46, married 28 years to an alcoholic).

In this ethnographic study I examine the fundamental question: How do five women live out, interpret, and express the experience of living with an alcoholic husband? Each of the women I talked to likened the experience of being married to an alcoholic to "not living a normal life" or "living a double existence". After years of living within the interactional patterns of an alcohol-centered relationship, the wife queries her identity and undergoes a weakening of boundaries between her sense of what is real and what is artificial. She asks, "Who am I? Would the real person stand up?" This, then, is a study of biography, for it delves into the life stories of five women who each share the experience of having an alcoholic husband.

As an `outsider', I adopt the point of view of the five women who opened the door of their cultural reality and allowed me to see how they construct meaning from their experience. Each of their lives is entangled with emotional and social difficulties that can include financial

struggles, physical abuse, unemployment, abrupt disruptions in social networks, marital separations, extra-marital sexual encounters, and physical illness. Each woman and her alcoholic husband live in a negative emotional environment in which alcohol has become the dominant focus of hostile interaction (Denzin, 1987). Such interactional processes undermine the couple's ability to generate positive, emotional feeling toward the self and other. Consequently, the study of the wife of an alcoholic becomes an inquiry into the meaning of existence as existence is lived by her within the alcohol-centered relationship. Thus, my thesis is a study of what I term "existence within an alcohol-centered relationship." I hope to illuminate some understanding of what it means to be married to an alcoholic from the perspective of five women at this time in the twentieth century.

After years of living in a relationship centered around her husband's drinking behavior, the wife of the alcoholic experiences distorted forms of `normal' temporality and emotionality. One of the noticeable threads of experience woven into each of the five women's lives is fear of future interactions with her alcoholic husband. Over time, the interactional pattern of violent emotionality rooted in the marital relationship blurs the wife's sense of reality. She queries what is `artificial' and what is `real'. As one woman explained:

> If you're dealing with someone and you know that they mean what they say--well then,...it's easy to be open and honest and you don't feel guarded....Living two lives-there doesn't seem like there's enough of the real to say, `living two lives'. Now the artificial seems to weigh and I don't have enough of the real....Until I get all of the feelings out then I'm still acting and not having the strength enough or even know myself enough to come up with authentic responses as far as my own feelings. (Louise, age 47, married to an alcoholic for 18 years).

All too often, the wife attempts to escape the reality of her husband's alcoholism by denying its existence (Denzin, 1987). She hangs on to the continuity she has of family and marriage, however profoundly it is flawed (Bateson, 1990). If change were less painful, if the risks were not so great, she might confront the problem sooner. However, eventually an accumulation of problems in the marital relationship leads her to eliminate temporarily possible explanations for her husband's dysfunctional behavior and instead develop a new perception that her husband is an alcoholic (Asher, 1988). As one woman put it:

> I didn't think he was an alcoholic [until] the last four or five years. I just thought he drank alot and I didn't really know about alcoholics....The media was doing alot of programs on TV, all the different things and I started to think, you know, about alcoholism and I knew my Dad, you know, who died of cirrhosis of the liver, and that twigged (sigh) that maybe--well, I knew then that he was an alcoholic. I don't know--it just sort of grew on me and then I could see that it wasn't just drinking to have a good time. (Debbie)

Often after years into the marriage, when the wife is confronted with the reality of the alcoholism, she may decide to seek outside help (Gorman and Rooney, 1979a)

Frequently, she is then encouraged to adopt the definitional understanding that her problems are alcohol-related (Asher, 1988).

Because of the interactional and cultural factors that influence the wife's concept of self, she all too often accepts blame for her husband's alcoholism (Asher, 1988). Consider the following self-statement given by a woman married to an alcoholic:

> Oh yes...you wonder where you've gone wrong in your marriage. You think, "well, what have I done? I think I've been a pretty good wife." And you go back to maybe something--like I have not been able to have children. (Mary, age 61, married 39 years).

Trapped in a spiral of self-blame and weakened self-imagery, the wife is vulnerable to "interpretations of self-culpability associated with `co-dependence'". (Asher, 1988, p. 326) Notice the following account from a woman married 24 years to an alcoholic:

> First of all, I had alot of difficulty with [the phrase] that `we are as sick as they are.'...but when they come home and they're constantly at us, instead of just [walking away] and saying "to hell with you", you know, we, I allow myself to fight with him....Because I think when you speak to other women like basically we're all scared of change, we're all scared to step out of the roles that we're in because we feel that we can't look after ourselves....[he] looks after everything (Karen, age 47).

However, there is a potential pitfall for the wife. Alcohol treatment programs tend to use an illness/disorder model, inherent in the ambiguous term of co-dependent (Asher & Brissett, 1988; Gierymski & Williams, 1986). Designating

the wife as co-dependent can reinforce the traditional passive role of women in relation to men (Asher & Brissett). "The label `co-dependent' is introduced and varyingly accepted or rejected by the [wife]....This may have a profound impact on her view of herself and of her husband." (Asher, 1988, p. 51) In our conversation, one woman described her resistance to being labelled:

> They tell you how you enable them and that's where you get enough to get your bloody back up because you end up being, you blame yourself and then other people blame you too...for him drinking. Well, I can see how I did [enable him]...there's truth in that. I didn't have to make it so easy for him....So, I did enable him to drink. I know that now.....I remember listening to the program on the radio and thinking, "God, I did do that"....Until last year I definitely didn't even think of, in fact, it made me angry to think that anybody would think [of what] I was doing for him. (Debbie)

Within the past decade, the upsurge of `pop' literature on the subject of co-dependency (Beattie, 1987; Schaef, 1986), adds to the ambiguous use of the term.

There is no consensus in the literature on alcoholics' wives concerning whether to use the concept of co-dependency to define their difficulties (Cermak, 1986; Zelvin, 1988). To date, there are no empirical studies that support the concept of co-dependency. Current research on the wife of the alcoholic often focuses on the family or marital couple (Steinglass, Bennett, Wolin & Reiss, 1987; O'Farrell & Birchler, 1987). Nevertheless, a symbolic interaction study by Asher (1988) on the `moral career' of defining oneself as an alcoholic's wife, and Denzin's (1987)

ethnographic/phenomenological study of the alcoholic self, voiced important insights into the interactional and cultural aspects of the wife's experience. Denzin's concept of the wife as `enabler' resembles the idea of co-dependency, whereas Asher explicitly rejects the co-dependency syndrome as an explanatory theme.

I have chosen to explore the experience of being married to an alcoholic by examining the culture of five women married to alcoholics. The term `culture' is employed to refer to the shared context of five womens' life-worlds: This definition is based on the premise that we all live in co-created cultures of reality (Spradley, 1979). The term `life-world' is used to represent the inner structures of each woman's experience. My data is drawn from nine one-hour interviews conducted between January and April, 1991. My method combines life-stories with ethnographic interpretation.

An ethnography begins with people (Spradley & Mann, 1975). The ethnographer has to "rely on the supposition that people in a shared cultural and linguistic community, name and identify their experience in a consistent and shared manner." (von Eckartsberg, 1986, p. 16)

An ethnographic methodology allows me to gain entry into the culture of five alcoholic's wives by examining their life-stories as they describe them in their own terms. Ethnography invites me to search for the cultural groups'

patterns of thought and behavior as interwoven strands of meaning (Fetterman, 1989). It beckons me to analyze and identify these patterns and weave each part into a tapestry of common themes. Particularly, it requires me to interpret my understanding of the meaning of the experiences as described to me by each woman. Ethnography allows me to clarify the meanings embedded in the language use of another. It allows me to translate my interpretation into the language of the intended audience (Denzin, 1989).

The focus of this study on women's experience is not meant to minimize other forms of relationship with alcoholics. I believe that the application of a research method used to develop knowledge into the male's perspective on being the spouse of an alcoholic would offer important insights into alcohol-centered relationships.

There were a number of reasons why I decided to study women's point of view on being married to an alcoholic: (1) women married to alcoholics are more accessible--very few husbands married to alcoholics seek outside help; (2) there is a dearth of literature available on husbands married to alcoholics; (3) During a practicum placement at a drug and alcohol center, I had the opportunity to co-counsel alcoholics and their wives. As a counsellor, I wanted to broaden my knowledge about alcoholics' wives.

This study has a "retrospective bias" (Denzin, 1987, p.25), for the stories told to me by each woman are filled

with recollections and remembrances of different behaviors and thoughts experienced throughout the course of her marital relationship. But, "the experience that is reported upon, even though it has occurred in the immediate or distant past, becomes, in the moment of telling, an account of the self in the present." (Denzin, p.25). What is important, is the meaning the wife derives from the account, whether or not it is objectively true. One needs to keep in mind that the experience of the moment is "just as much an interpretation as is the experience of a past event" (de Rivera, 1981, p. 21). From each woman's story I was able to weave threads of common experience and create an ornate human tapestry of cultural understanding. These common threads of experience are woven into three themes--presented in Chapter IV.

If I am successful in interpreting the lived experience of five alcoholics' wives, if I have incorporated previous understandings about their experiences, and if I have been able to present my interpretation in a coherent manner for the reader to understand, then I will be content that I have fulfilled the purpose of this work.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to develop knowledge into the culture of alcoholics' wives by capturing the essence of how they co-create meaning within an alcohol-

centered relationship. My intent is to remain true to the womens experience. I will employ terms that the women use as they describe the structure of their experience to me.

The theories of co-dependency serve to divert attention away from lived experience of alcoholics' wives. It is not my intent to offer a new theory of co-dependency. However, I hope to broaden counsellors' knowledge about alcoholics' wives through my interpretation of the stories told to me by five informants.

This study is based on the underlying assumption that dimensions of meaning in cultural experience can be discovered through analyzing conversations that occur between an ethnographer and informants. Built on this premise, I assume that through a dialogic process between myself and five informants, I will discover meaning of womens' experience of being married to an alcoholic. In the next chapter I offer a critical reading of existing literature of alcoholics' wives.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Within the last fifty years, the perspective concerning the wife of the alcoholic has evolved from a view of her as having a personality disorder which causes her husband's alcoholism (Clifford, 1960; Whalen, 1953), to an acknowledgement of her as a normal person (Moos, Finney, & Gamble, 1982) living in a double bind relationship (Denzin, 1987) that may or may not result in dysfunctional coping behavior (Orford, Guthrie, Nicholls, Oppenheimer, Egert, & Hensman, 1975). This view has merged into a systemic perspective (Steinglass, 1981; Steinglass, Tislenko, & Reiss, 1985) where the behavior of the wife is seen as part of an interactional process occurring within the family around the husband's drinking behavior. More recently, the wife has been viewed as someone in need of individualized care. The latter approach can lead to a labelling of the wife as co-dependent. This chapter presents a chronological review of the literature pertaining to the wife of the alcoholic, then outlines opinions and empirical research concerning her treatment, and ends with a discussion of co-dependency.

Historical Review of the Literature

Early literature on the alcoholic's wife was based on clinical impressions and case reports of psychiatrists and

psychiatric social workers which maintained that the wife had a pathological personality disorder which precipitated her husband's drinking and/or she decompensated once his drinking was under control (Futterman, 1953; Whalen, 1953). These studies were generally written from the Freudian perspective popular during that period (Asher, 1988).

Concerns with the methodological limitations of the psychoanalytical theory helped promote empirical studies and brought into question the pathological personality structure of the alcoholic's wife. These studies resulted in a sociological interpretation that claimed the environmental stress of living with an alcoholic created behavioral disturbance in the wife (Jackson, 1954, 1956).

Jackson's studies (1954, 1956) require special attention because of their relevance to this present work. She conducted two consecutive participant observation studies on members of Al-Anon. Delineating seven critical stages of family adjustment to progressive alcoholism, Jackson reported that there are no social definitions of appropriate behavior for dealing with alcoholism, as there are for dealing with other family crises such as bereavement. This is especially noticeable in the dynamics surrounding the experience of shame. With the lack of cultural guidelines for appropriate responses to the husband's devious behavior, the family tends to be unstructured and confused.

Alcoholism is rarely identified as a problem until later stages of family crises. With each stage of the crisis, change takes place in family roles, position, `self' and `other' images, and in how the problem is visible to the outside (Jackson, 1956). Adapting to these stages creates considerable mental conflict among family members.

Jackson's (1954, 1956) inquiries were significant in broadening the scope of the literature on alcoholics' wives. Of note, the women in her studies had intact marriages and were at the later stages of family crises when seeking outside help. Also, most participants were unaware of their husband's drinking problem early in the marriage (Jackson, 1954, 1956). A similar observation was made by James and Goldman (1971) who found that for most wives of alcoholics, a drinking problem in the husband goes unnoticed early in the marriage.

Later, Jackson (1959) wrote that family members of alcoholics are under pressure to control the alcoholic's deviant behavior to meet society's expectations of a `good' family. It is not unusual for the wife to be held principally responsible for this deviant behavior; consequently she experiences guilt, shame and isolation.

Studies found the alcoholic's wife exhibited increased psychophysiological symptoms when her husband was actively drinking (Bailey, Haberman & Alksne, 1962) and that extended maintenance of sobriety was inversely related to gross

deviance such as; physical abuse, frequent infidelity, and loss of job (Haberman, 1965).

Jackson and Kogan (1963) reported that for most wives, seeking outside help corresponded to recognizing the existence of an alcohol problem in their husbands. However, the wife's recognition of the problem came years into the marriage despite her having endured many episodes of physical and emotional hardship (Gorman & Rooney, 1979a). There was an average delay of seven years after the first episode of physical abuse prior to the wive seeking outside help (Gorman & Rooney).

Attention was given to the decrease in negative coping behavior noticeable in wives that obtained outside support from regular attendance in Al-Anon (Gorman & Rooney, 1979b). Coping behaviors that maintained interactional engagement and focused on the alcohol rather than the drinker were correlated with better outcomes for decreased drinking (James & Goldman, 1971). Another study reported that the more interactional coping behavior the wife exhibited, the better her husband's prognosis for recovery (Orford et al., 1975).

Differences in perception between the wife and the husband about the drinking behavior (Chiles, Stauss, Benjamin, 1988; O'Farrell & Birchler, 1987; Orford, 1976) form a common interactional dynamic in the alcohol-centered relationship. Consideration was focused on the couple's

differences in perception concerning the wife as a causal factor in her husband's relapses (Maisto, O'Farrell, McKay, Connors, & Pelcovits, 1988). These differences had a significant negative impact on the couple's interactive behavior.

Some studies viewed the wife and/or marital relationship as normal. Orford (1975) argued that alcoholic marriages are not unique. Features such as isolation, role reversal, and anxiety are manifested in marriages affected by a variety of crises such as illness, bereavement, and unemployment. Stressing the coping abilities of alcoholics' wives, Wiseman (1975) conducted a study in Finland and concluded that 40% were able to create an independent existence apart from the alcoholic (eg. full time employment) while remaining in the marriage. Along the same line, Moos, Finney, and Gamble (1982) found that wives are basically normal people who are trying to cope with the dysfunctional behavior of their alcoholic husbands.

A significant ethnography of the alcoholic experience (Denzin, 1987) deserves particular attention not only because of its insights into the stress of being the alcoholic's other, but also because of the relevance to this present work. Over a five year period, Denzin interviewed recovering alcoholics as they sat around the table at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. He described the "alcoholically divided self (and its other)...[as living]

two modes of existence, referenced by the terms sober and intoxicated (Denzin, p. 135). Trapped in a field of contrasting emotions, the alcoholic's other begins to gradually go insane. Denzin found violent emotionality part of the daily life of alcoholics and their emotional associates. The alcoholic's other is an enabler: his or her identity is gradually molded into that of a helper to the alcoholic (Denzin). Denzin noted that the alcoholic's other experiences an alternation or transition in identity in conjunction with the recovering alcoholic. As the other engages in Al-Anon or alcohol related support groups, the identity that is assumed through membership is "less deviant, or stigmatized, than is the label of `alcoholic' that the alcoholic assumes." (Denzin, p.169) The investigator added that the other will find a social group that supports change in identity but that recovery, which is not well understood, is a different process than in the alcoholic. His study was significant in bringing attention to the painful lived experience of the alcoholic's other.

It is worth mentioning in this review that recent trends in substance abuse treatment have focused on the interactional behavior of the alcoholic's family. Studies on the wife within the context of the family show that intrafamily engagement is the best indicator of long term marital stability (Steinglass, 1981), that family interaction tends to have a biphasic nature depending on the

drinking and non-drinking behavior (Liepman, Nirenberg, Doolittle, Begin, Broffman, & Babich, 1989), and that the seriousness of alcoholism is not associated with the wife exhibiting dysfunctional coping behavior (Steinglass, Bennett, Wolin, & Reiss, 1987).

Treatment of Alcoholics' Wives

Descriptions aimed directly at the treatment of alcoholics' wives is noticeably scarce in the literature. Most treatment approaches that have been described, however, have been within the context of couple or family therapy. Membership in Al-Anon is often correlated with individual treatment. Ablon (1974) was a participant observer of Al-Anon activities for 18 months and found that the emphasis on the physical disease aspect of the husband's alcoholism as well as the non-professional group support had a strong therapeutic value for the wife. An empirical study on treatment outcome for an eight week treatment program for 23 wives was conducted by Dittrich and Trapold (1984). Assertiveness training and management of feelings was combined with professional treatment based on Al-Anon principles. Findings showed significantly reduced psychological dysfunction and enabling behaviors at eight weeks. One year later, 39% of the wives had separated from their husbands and 48% of the husbands had entered some form

of alcoholism treatment program or support group such as Alcoholics Anonymous.

Whether accepting and living out the Al-Anon principles is beneficial to the wife is controversial in the literature. In an opinion article, Burnett (1984) criticized the emphasis Al-Anon places on the wife's role in her husband's sobriety. Also, the author stressed the importance of assessing alcoholism in marital therapy so that the effects of the drinking behavior on the marital relationship can be addressed. In treatment, most wives fail to mention their husband's excessive drinking (Burnett).

Co-dependency

Co-dependency is a definitionally ambiguous term that has emerged in the past decade. For the purpose of this study, I refer to co-dependency as it is used in alcohol treatment programs in relation to alcoholics' wives difficulties and behaviors centered around their husbands' alcoholism. Whitfield (1984), described the wife as a co-alcoholic and claimed that like the alcoholic, she has a progressive illness exemplified by dysfunctional behavior whereby her chances of recovery are less successful than her husband's (Mendenhall, 1989). It has been suggested in the literature that co-dependency be defined within the American Psychiatric Association's DSM-III under the diagnostic

category of Mixed Personality Disorder (Cermak, 1986). However, Gierymski and Williams (1986) were concerned about co-dependency being viewed as another incidence of medicalization and argued against this diagnostic categorization. Instead, the authors noted that a chronic disease in a family such as cancer, typically creates stress similar to that manifested by families with alcoholism.

Smalley and Coleman (1987) described co-dependency as a dysfunctional behavior pattern that includes extreme dependency with resulting identity confusion. In still another definition, co-dependency was viewed as a primary condition of "debilitating physiological stress," according to Mendenhall (1989, p. 6), that results from living in a committed relationship with an alcoholic. The author described the main interactional pattern within the family as one of inconsistency that subsequently makes members afraid to express their feelings. Mendenhall suggested that co-dependency is an addiction and that recovery from the condition is often less complete than that from alcoholism. Finally, the position has been taken that there are two factors that contribute to co-dependency in women: 1) socialization of dependence in women, and (2) society's denial of alcoholism (Zelvin, 1988).

Empirical Research on Co-dependency

Two recent qualitative studies on wives of alcoholics reported on the syndrome of co-dependency. These warrant some extra attention here because of the relevance to the present work.

First, in a retrospective-prospective study, Asher and Brissett (1988) challenged the notion of co-dependency as an objective condition, by stressing the social construction of the condition. Using a structured interview format, 52 wives of alcoholics described their interpretation of the term `co-dependency'. In the descriptions, two common definitional themes emerged: "(1) notions of caretaking and pleasing others, and (2) affliction by association with a chemically dependent person" (P. 346). From their research, the authors observed that with most wives, the perspective of co-dependency offered to them by helping professionals, maintained their image of passivity and involves "a deviantizing of the women's identity and life situation and, subsequently, a medicalization of this alleged deviance." (p.348, emphasis added)

Then, the question of how a woman constructs her life before and after defining her husband as an alcoholic--her `moral career' of becoming the wife of an alcoholic--was investigated by Asher (1988) through the application of a symbolic interactionist and social constructionist framework. Asher (1988) found that "the experiences of

being a woman married to an alcoholic are marked off as part of a class of `special' troubles, outside of usual problems-of-living, that seriously challenge and change wives' self definitions over time" (p.326). A long and trying process of social interactions either help or hinder naming these `special troubles' as alcohol related. Soley as a result of this process, it is not unusual for those alcoholics' wives, who seek outside alcohol-related support groups or alcohol treatment programs, to designate themselves as `co-dependents' who are `sick' and in need of special treatment (Asher).

A substantive finding of Asher's (1988) study was that the "nature of `co-dependency' is interactional, not personal. The interdependency of the `reality' of alcoholism and `co-dependency' is a <u>created, not discovered</u>, phenomenon" (p. 330, emphasis added). The investigator stressed that the interactional patterns in alcohol-complicated marriages contributed to the wives' experiencing a down-turn in self-image and feelings of self-blame for their husbands alcoholism (Asher, 1988). Consequently, they are vulnerable to readily accept the "culturally emergent...label of co-dependency" (p. 326).

Asher (1988) concluded: "meeting an actual or later-designated alcoholic might simply be an aspect of the `dating game' and [that] `adjustment to a mate's alcoholism is almost totally a post-nuptial phenomenon'" (p. 328).

Treatment of Co-dependency

The ambiguity that surrounds labelling the identity of the wife as a co-dependent, points to the need for both a formal and informal definition of the term (Asher & Brissett, 1988). Within the context of formal intervention programs for family members of alcoholics, the label co-dependent suggests an association with the medical paradigm:--that to be co-dependent is to be sick (Asher & Brissett). The definitional ambiguity of the term corresponds to a paucity of treatment methods for the `condition' in the literature. Nevertheless, a few opinion articles have suggested various methods of treatment such as the use of mental imagery combined with a goal-oriented process that integrates the concepts of co-dependency (Cleveland, 1989); and an approach that helps wives change co-dependent behavior patterns so that intimate dysfunctions in the marital relationship can be improved (Smalley & Coleman (1987). Whitfield (1989) recommended a full recovery program for the condition of `co-alcoholism' in the wife which involves a process of self-responsibility and creativity. Part of this treatment program includes regular and long attendance at self-help groups (Al-Anon, Co-Dependents Anonymous), group therapy, and individual counselling. Also, in their discussion of treatment approaches, Asher and Brissett (1988) suggested alcoholics' wives be encouraged to think constructively about their

situations in life, rather than be treated in a program that uses the `illness/disorder' model. The authors agree that self-help groups such as Al-Anon combined with family treatment programs and other low-cost supportive and educational services can focus on the needs of family members not requiring medical or psychiatric intervention. They stress that should medical intervention be required, reference to the co-dependency syndrome be avoided altogether (Asher & Brissett).

Summary of Literature Review

Over the past fifty years, the perspective of the alcoholic's wife has evolved from that of her having a personality disorder which causes her husband's alcoholism, to acknowledging her as a normal person who lives in a relationship of double bind: She is constantly having to adjust to her alcoholic husband's drinking and non-drinking behavior.

Much of the research on the wife places her within the context of the alcoholic marriage, which can be seen as similar to marriages experiencing either conflict or crises. However, some studies view the marital relationship as one of violent emotionality where the husband's drinking and non-drinking behavior can create dysfunctional coping for the wife: An increase in drinking behavior corresponds to an increase in dysfunctional coping behavior in the wife.

The structural and behavioral dimensions of the interaction within the marital relationship determines the coping style of the wife.

Recently in the literature, rather than being viewed as a part of the husband's treatment plan, the wife is seen as someone in need of individualized care. However, this individualized care is often delayed for years since she tends to get trapped in the pervasiveness of denial while attempting to live out a social definition of family and marriage. When the alcoholic's wife does seek help, she may be encouraged to engage in a social process of designating herself as co-dependent so that `recovery' can occur. Narrowing her identity to co-dependent may be enhanced by her readiness for self-blaming that emanates from her negative self-imagery--typical of wives who have experienced years of violent emotionality within the alcohol-centered relationship. Likewise, designating oneself as a co-dependent can perpetuate passivity and contribute to the avoidance of responsibility for change. No empirical research supports the concept of the phenomenon of co-dependency but evidence suggests a cultural and interactional base for the connection between symptomatic behavior in the wife that leads to a diagnosis of the syndrome.

After conducting an extensive search of the literature applicable to the wife of the alcoholic, I was struck by the

dearth of studies that describe her experience. With most investigations that involve the alcoholic's wife, the focal point has centered on the marital couple or family. In addition, some recent works have questioned the wife's definitional enterprise of labelling herself as a co-dependent.

This present work attempts to remove the lens of co-dependency through which alcoholics' wives have been viewed. The central research question guiding this study is: What are five women's experiences of marriage to alcoholic husbands? This research question beckons us to see the wives' life worlds as they have seen and experienced them. It invites counsellors to acquire further knowledge of how five alcoholics' wives live out their everyday lives.

I went directly to five women married to alcoholics to gather descriptions of how they construct meaning of their experience. My intent was to remain as close to the actual lived experience as possible by weaving a pattern of themes that emerged from their life-stories.

By examining alcoholics' wives use of vocabulary, the ethnographic interviewing research method allowed me to gain entry into their cultural reality. It is to this that I now turn my attention as I outline the route of cultural discovery.

CHAPTER III

TACTICS OF INQUIRY

> Ethnography is...a process, a way of studying human life. Ethnographic design mandates investigatory strategies conducive to cultural reconstruction....The strategies used elicit phenomenological data; they represent the world view of the participants being investigated, and participant constructs are used to structure the research. (Goetz and Le Compte, 1984, p. 3)

Chapter III describes the arrangements I made in order to discover how five women married to alcoholics view their world. My study is an ethnography with an emic focus on the wife of the alcoholic (see Glossary of Terms, Appendix E, page 146, for an explanation of specific terms having to do with ethnography). This ethnography is limited to an exploration of how five alcoholics' wives construct meaning of their existence within their marriage. The emic perspective, or the native's perception of reality, is at the core of most ethnographic research (Fetterman, 1989). The informants were women who had identified themselves as wives of alcoholics.

Ethnography attempts to capture the truths of human experience by entering the world of the informants. The researcher tries to understand and interpret this world by asking how a problematic act or event, gives meaning to the persons studied (Denzin, 1989). Ethnography asks, "`What is this or that kind of experience like?'" (van Manen, 1984, p. 37)

A basic assumption of ethnography is that dimensions of meaning in cultural experience can be discovered through the study of language. Language enters every phase of the research process and shapes the cultural reality under investigation. By examining how the informants use their phrases and terms, the ethnographer is led directly to decoding the full meaning of symbols in the culture under investigation (Spradley, 1979). The ethnographic interview is a vehicle for discovering the forms of discourse through which knowledge about the the informant's experience is revealed (Bertaux, 1981). Spradley refers to this discourse as a "particular kind of speech event." (p.55)

> Words help us clarify our own experience, and words are a major (though not the only) avenue to understanding the experience of others. Thus, while we are not interested in word usage but, rather, in a reality that lies beyond words, we have a basic trust in language as a gateway to experience. (de Rivera, 1981, p. 16)

Ethnographers work with two distinct languages: the informants' and their own. Two main tasks of ethnography are discovery and description. The ethnographer first discovers informants' definitions of cultural reality as expressed through their particular linguistic patterns (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984) and then attempts to share this cultural understanding with a particular audience. Language is pivotal to these tasks (Spradley, 1979). We are not concerned here, however, with any language. What is relevant is how, through psychological reflection, the

researcher uses language to make sense of the themes, distinctions, and relations described by the informant (Wertz, 1983).

Entering the Field

> The interview situation bears upon the retrieval of personal information in a very important way. There are certain kinds of personal information that are ordinarily unavailable to almost everyone. There are things that strangers do not have a right to know....However, the "interviewer" constitutes a special kind of stranger in our society, one who can ask about many personal matters without being perceived as breaching another's right to privacy. (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979, p. 63)

The initial part of the meeting is referred to by anthropologists as entering the field. Leininger (1985) writes that the professional stranger must enter the social situation under investigation in a way that establishes trust. How this initiation between the informant and interviewer comes about can influence the tone of the entire interview. Putting the informant at ease facilitates the relationship-building (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) necessary to obtain accurate data. Often the researcher engages in a friendly conversation (Spradley, 1979) at the beginning of the interview. "The conversational mode communicates empathy, encouragement, and understanding...[and] is most likely to elicit the trust, confidence, and ease among respondents necessary for yielding elaborate, subtle, and valid data." (Goetz & LeCompte,1984, p.131)

Influence of Researcher's Role

> First of all, we must engage in a co-operative dialogue with our `person-subject informants'. The method is hence dialogical and the researcher enters into a give and take with the person [studied]...Both the person researched as well as the research-person are thus being changed...they change each other. (von Eckartsberg, 1971, p. 75)

Within this dialogal relationship, a double-hermeneutic circle unfolds whereby two interpretative structures interface one another. The informant who reveals the cultural reality is at the centre of one circle and the researcher who interprets that reality is at the centre of the other. The circles overlap depending on the degree of shared understanding between the informant and researcher (Denzin, 1989). The researcher's questions and basic concepts guide the cultural reality revealed by the informant and influence this shared understanding. "Whether it is explicitly or implicitly drawn, the presence of the researcher is in the conversation, in the environment, and in the final accounting of the conversation." (Cottle, 1977, p. 18)

The above will serve as background for the remainder of this chapter. It will include two elements: my experience in the research setting and a discussion about the co-creation of informants' stories.

According to Leininger (1985), a conceptual framework serves as a guide for the study and should be related to the goals of the investigation. Prior to commencing the study,

the researcher is often aware of some general and vague features of the culture under study. At this stage, Leininger recommends the researcher become immersed in the phenomenon both by conducting a literature search and by direct experience with people representative of the culture.

My introduction to wives of alcoholics began in 1988 during a counselling practicum placement at a family services agency. Contact with women married to alcoholics was brief since the agency required referral to a local drug and alcohol centre if any clients presented with a drug or alcohol-related problem. This led to another practicum placement in 1989 at a drug and alcohol centre where I acquired counselling experience with alcoholics' wives. I served as a team member behind the mirror in treating alcoholic families and co-counselled two alcoholic husbands and their wives within the context of couple counselling.

Through these experiences, I gained familiarity with treatment offered to wives of alcoholics and adopted a theoretical perspective that behavior of wives is part of an interactional process that occurs within families around drinking behavior. Familiarity with the working environment and staff at this practicum site, facilitated contact with a drug and alcohol centre in my geographical area.

Initial Contact

I contacted the director of a local drug and alcohol centre by telephone to offer a brief explanation of the purpose of obtaining appropriate informants for the study. I then met with the director in order to explain the rationale for the study in more detail. A request was made at that time for assistance in obtaining appropriate informants. A letter of agreement (see Appendix A, p. 136) was signed by the administrator prior to commencing fieldwork with the wives of alcoholics.

Identifying Informants

"Selection of informants rests more on the careful identification of persons, often in advance, who are representative of the culture and who show potential to reveal substantive data...on the domain of inquiry." (Leininger, 1985, p. 47) The informant's current involvement in the cultural scene for a minimum of one year is recommended (Spradley, 1979). On the basis of Spradley's suggestion, I chose five women currently married to alcoholics who were willing to describe their experience. The initial contact with each informant took place over the telephone at which time I explained the purpose and goals of the study. The informants were told that previous research had not been conducted on women's descriptions of the experience of living in an alcohol-centered marriage.

Credibility was established by mentioning the affiliation with the University of Victoria. The interviews were arranged according to the convenience of each informant.

A "private conversation" (Cottle, 1977, p. 18) assumes the protection of personal privacy for the informant. How the present writer protected the privacy of each informant is outlined in the consent form (see Appendix B, p. 138). This form was signed during the initial stage of the first meeting at which time confidentiality and anonymity was assured.

Cultural and historical data help provide a contextual frame of reference between the interviewer and informant (Leininger, 1985). Context-related questions help informants recall situations and clarify ideas that are meaningful. For example, I asked each informant to describe how she learned that her husband was an alcoholic. Along this line, specific biographical information (see Appendix C, p. 140) was obtained from each informant when the first meeting commenced.

I took the attitude of a novice in discovering the cultural knowledge of each informant (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979). As a novice, I was the `learner' in the research situation and the participant was invited to teach me about her experience. "People...more readily impart their knowledge by teaching it rather than by describing it." (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979, p. 254) The informant was told

that what she knows of her experience of having a marital relationship with an alcoholic is new information.

Sample

Five women who identified their husbands as alcoholics, each volunteered to be informants for this study. Four of these alcoholic's wives were informed about the study through a local drug and alcohol center. The fifth woman, an acquaintance of mine, was the pilot interviewee.

Of the four women obtained from drug and alcohol centre, three initiated contact by telephoning me at home. I telephoned the fourth after obtaining her name from a drug and alcohol counsellor at the centre. This initial contact with the four women occurred in February and March 1991. I telephoned the fifth woman in December 1990 at which time I requested her participation as the pilot interviewee for the study. The first interview was arranged with each person within two weeks following the initial phone call.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) said that minimizing obvious differences among the participants increases the possibility that the researcher will collect similar data on a given category and find important differences not discovered in earlier data collection. With this in mind, I carried out this study by equalizing differences in terms of age, educational background, socioeconomic level, language, and

number of years married. This demographic information can be found in the portrait of each woman in Chapter IV.

An understanding about select cases can occur with purposeful sampling--this understanding need not be universally shared (Denzin, 1989; Patton, 1980; Spradley, 1979). This study is not meant to be representative of wives of alcoholics. Nevertheless, some truths about of five women living with an alcoholic husband, have been revealed.

I explained to each of the women who volunteered for this study, the importance of her role as my `teacher'. Each woman was committed to contribute knowledge about wives of alcoholics to the counselling profession.

The Ethnographic Interview and Method of Analysis

The Pilot Interview

Fieldwork with a pilot interviewee is recommended prior to starting the actual research project to ensure that the interviewer and interviewee share approximately the same language (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984). Pilot research can provide the investigator with first-hand insight into the culture and language of the informants (Brenner, 1985). I conducted a pilot interview on a woman married to an alcoholic. After some informal conversation, I asked, "Can you give me a general picture of what it is like to be married to an alcoholic?" Then, with open-ended questions,

I invited the pilot interviewee to share her lived-experience. Open-ended broad questions help avoid researcher bias by inviting the informant to set the direction of the interview (Bogden & Biklen, 1982; Dobbert, 1982).

Using the ethnographic interview method on the pilot interviewee helped prepare for future interviews. I gained familiarity with descriptive and structual questioning and collected a valuable sample of language. When the interview was transcribed into written text, I conducted a search for domains and learned how to formulate three kinds of ethnographic questions: (1) descriptive questions, (2) structural questions, and (3) contrast questions (Spradley, 1979). I included the pilot interviewee's descriptions in the ethnographic text in Chapter IV.

Confidentiality and anonymity were adhered to. A consent form was signed by the pilot interviewee prior to conducting the initial interview (see appendix B). The form was kept locked in a drawer in my home and will be destroyed upon completion of the investigation. I protected the pilot interviewee's identity by assigning code letters to both the audiotape and transcripts. The audiotape was destroyed after being transcribed into a typed text. For the final write-up, I used a fictitious name for the pilot interviewee and altered the personal and contextual information I obtained from the interview. I was very careful to refer

only to the pilot interviewee's fictitious name on any written material throughout the analysis and with any discussions that occurred between myself and supervisor regarding the research. These same measures were employed for the remaining four informants.

Interviews on Informants

After the pilot interview was transcribed into a written text and analyzed, consecutive interviews were arranged with each of the four informants. With one exception, each interview was conducted in the woman's home as a way to minimize formality and facilitate trust (Wenger, 1985). Spradley (1979) recommends interviewing occur in a location familiar to the informant as a way to build rapport and gather important contextual information. At her request, the conversations with one informant took place at a local drug and alcohol centre. In all cases, rapport was quickly established and the women spoke freely.

Nine one-hour interviews, all audiotaped, were conducted among the informants and were all transcribed for analysis of the content. The ethnographic interviews were conducted and the typed transcript analyzed according to the Developmental Research Sequence (DRS) of Spradley (1979). Each interview was subjected to analysis before the next interview was conducted (Spradley).

As each interview was conducted, pertinent contextual information and important terms and phrases that emerged from the informant's descriptions were written in a condensed account. Then, an expanded account was written following each interview. The expanded account incorporated the following: the condensed account, the transcription of each tape recording, and a research journal. Special attention was given to recording my biases, feelings, and reactions in an introspective account in order to understand their influence on the research (Spradley, 1979).

The task of the interviewer is to become immersed in the phenomenon--in this instance, to become awakened to the different possibilities of what the experience of being married to an alcoholic is like. The consideration was given to treat every word as having potential to unlock the mystery of the participant's way of looking at the world (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

Three main ethnographic elements (Spradley, 1979) were kept in mind while conducting the interviews. First, the purpose of the interview was made explicit to each informant. Second, each woman received an explanation regarding the tape recording, written notes to be taken during the interview, and her role as the `teacher'. Third, three basic kinds of questions were used: (1) descriptive questions, (2) structural questions and (3) contrast questions (Spradley).

The three types of questions were presented in the informal flow of conversation throughout each interview.

Descriptive questions

First, descriptive questions elicit the informant's representation of some aspect of her culture or world (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984) and help collect an ongoing sample of her language. Attention was given to remain as close to the lived experience as possible by asking questions in a concrete manner (van Manen, 1984). For example, descriptions of a focal event such as a typical time of day spent between the informant and her husband, elicited a valuable source of embedded meaning. Often, this kind of event is a metaphor for a way of life and can provide a lens through which to see the culture (Fetterman, 1989).

To begin generating descriptions from each informant, questions posed in broad statements such as the following were used:

> If I were to photograph you and take a picture of what you were experiencing as you and your husband stood at the front door the other night, what would I see?
>
> I'd like to give you the opportunity to teach me about your experience of being married to your husband. To begin with, how would you describe your experience in a few sentences?

Further information was elicited from the informant's response by asking for elaboration. The following example will illustrate how further descriptions were gathered by asking the informant for more detail:

Pilot Interviewee:

> I think I would have to say that it is a very, very irrational way of living, never knowing from one day, from one hour, from one minute to the next, what is going to take place

Interviewer:

> Can you tell me more about irrational?

Pilot Interviewee:

> Well, I think a perfect example was the other night. Just as [my husband] was walking into the house from work...he was as happy as could be, joking about something I had said...and I was on my way to pick up the [kids]. When I came home 20 minutes later he was sitting on the chesterfield as sullen as could be....If I hadn't answered the way he wanted to be answered he would have been angry.

These examples illustrate how descriptive questions were used to obtain an initial survey of the meaning system of the informant (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972). As the interviews progressed, more descriptive questions were formulated on the basis of the information obtained.

Structural questions

The use of structural questions as an ethnographic interviewing methodology was based on the principle that discovering similarities between symbols leads to an understanding of meaning (Spradley, 1979). This discovery principle underlies both taxonomic and domain analysis (Spradley), both to be explained later in the section on ethnographic analysis.

Structural questions are used to generate the constructs, or domains, informants use to describe their worlds (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). These constructs, or

domains are the basic units in an informant's knowledge (Spradley, 1979). Any symbolic or folk category, designated as a cover term, that includes other symbolic or folk categories, designated as included terms, that share at least one feature of meaning is a domain . A folk term or category, refers to words or phrases used by members of the culture under investigation. Domains are the most important and basic unit of analysis in ethnographic methodology (Spradley). The use of structural questions elicits similarities between folk terms in this discovery of meaning.

For example, during our conversation, when Debbie used the folk term "I believe that I'm crazy", part of her cultural meaning was discovered by asking the structural question, "are there different reasons for believing that you are crazy?" Based on the assumption that this aspect of Debbie's experience seemed important, the structural question was formulated around a hypothesized domain. The three folk terms that Debbie used to describe different reasons for believing she is crazy, all shared this one feature of similarity. These folk terms: "loss of self-respect", "being isolated", and "wanted him to stay" (see Figure no.4, p.52), all within the same category, also implied difference--that more meaning could be discovered by asking how these folk terms are used differently. Attention to asking for differences between folk terms so that more

meaning can be discovered, will be addressed once this discussion moves on to contrast questioning.

An excerpt from one of the ethnographic interviews presents an example of how structural questions are used after a piece of Debbie's knowledge about her world was obtained by first posing a descriptive question:

Debbie:
> Before maybe you'd think, `Oh God, you can't raise kids without a house and you need two incomes to have a house.' So that can sort of justified me staying but I've got no reason at all now. The only reason I'd have now for staying with him would be to hurt myself.

Interviewer:
> So hurt yourself. Can you tell me more about that?

Debbie:
> Well, if I did stay with him, if we ended up living together the rest of my life, unless it changes, it would be the same thing....It would mean me supporting him all the time emotionally or my never being vulnerable.

Interviewer:
> So hurting yourself is you can't be vulnerable with him--that you're having to support him. Are there <u>other ways</u> of hurting yourself?

Debbie:
> Yeah, losing my self-respect and thwarting my own successes, all of them, because I would be holding myself back all the time because I didn't want [him] to feel threatened.

This cycle of questions and answers would continue until the topic reached saturation or there was a new focus in the interview.

<u>Contrast questions</u>

Whenever ideas or objects are grouped together within the same category, whether verbally or nonverbally,

similarity implies contrast. Some folk terms are placed within the category and other folk terms are left outside. The contrast principle in ethnographic methodology is based on the assumption that the meaning of a concept within a given category, cannot be understood without specifying what it contrasts with (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972). For example, the folk term used by an informant, "It was sort of mens' right in England to drink" drew attention to a cultural rule about men and drinking. It also implied that it is not womens' right to drink. The folk terms `men' and `women', belong to the same restricted contrast set--restricted to a limited amount of semantic information. Although men and women are different, they share the same semantic information of being at an adult level of development and of being different sex.

Contrast questions were used to discover the meanings of and the relationships among the constructs that informants use (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). In this study, the application of three types of contrast questions proved to be powerful tools for discovering tacit relationships (Spradley, 1979) among the folk terms that informants had already elicited. The three types of contrast questions are: (1) dyadic contrast questions, (2) triadic contrast questions, and (3) rating questions. These three types of contrast questions will be explained in turn.

First, a dyadic contrast question asks the informant about the difference between two different terms. In this way, differences that are important to the informant are revealed. The following example illustrates the use of this kind of questioning:

Interviewer:
> I wonder if you could just start by telling me what it is like to be married to...your husband?

Debbie:
> Mostly, it's like living two lives....It's sort of like being a split personality, almost-you know. Two different sides, two different things.

Interviewer:
> So you see yourself living two lives. Can you tell me the difference between the two...Give me one example of each?

Debbie:
> Okay. I was president of [a group] for six years....I had no trouble negotiating with top negotiators at a federal level and I felt very confident and strong in what I believed in and....I would go home and my husband ...somehow convinced me that I had no rights at home....So I could be very outgoing, very responsible in one end and then at home I would just do everything he wanted and hide everything.

Further meaning was discovered by asking Debbie to elaborate on these differences throughout the rest of the interviews.

When a triadic contrast question is used, meaning is discovered by asking the informant to make distinctions using three categories. Three familiar terms, all from the same contrast set, are presented. The informant is asked, "Of these three, which two are similar and which one is different from the other two? Notice the following account

of a triadic contrast question within the contrast set "reasons for not being connected":

Interviewer:
> So let's take those three terms, "no longer having him as my confident:, "very little communication between us", and "being miles apart". Of those three--which two are similar and which one is different?

Ann:
> "Very little communication between us" and "being miles apart" are more similar and "no longer having him as my confident" is different.

Interviewer:
> Okay, so "very little communication between us" and "being miles apart" are more similar. "No longer having him as my confident" is different. In what way would you say this is different?

Ann:
> The first two are part of communicating. If you have different perspectives it's hard to communicate. The last one is part of trusting.

Another series of questions elicited further descriptions from Ann about her use of the folk term "trusting".

When rating questions are used, values informants give to their cultural symbols, are discovered. The informant is asked to make contrasts between folk terms within the same category based on any rating criteria. The rating question posed in the following example, asked the informant to distinguish the difference between three kinds of fear that she had discussed earlier on in the interview:

Interviewer:
> Okay, so there are three kinds of fear: (1) fear of giving up your financial security, (2) fear of abandonment, and (3) fear of change. Of those three, which would you say is the most important? ...

Ann:

I know financial security. I would have a little difficulty working to support myself, having to support myself.

Interviewer:

So it sound like the security part would be most important. Of those three: (1) fear of losing security, (2) fear of abandonment, and (3) fear of change--which would be sort of the same and which two would be different?

Ann:

Well, financial security is probably related to change too. Your standard of living, your reasons for working.

Interviewer:

So your fear of abandonment would be the different one.

Ann:

If I thought more about it...I'm sure that's a big one.

This segment, taken from the typed transcript of an ethnographic interview, illustrates how Ann conceptualizes meaning around different aspects of fear.

Usually, the interview juxtaposed structural and contrast questions. Both kinds of questions help organize an understanding of the native's view of reality (Fetterman, 1989). When possible, consideration was given to announcing when a new form of questioning would be introduced in order to warn the informant that for a moment the interview would be moving away from a friendly conversation. As each informant became familiar with the various kinds of questioning, the conversations seemed to proceed in a casual manner.

Ethnographic Analysis

Ethnographic analysis is a means to discover meaning, based on the premise that informants organize their knowledge about their world into categories (Spradley, 1979). One of the basic ways that informants make meaning of their world is by categorizing their knowledge of objects and events into similarities and differences. Categorization, one of the underlying principles of ethnographic methodology, is based on the idea that every human group creates its own reality in a shared culture and that each culture divides up the natural world (Spradley & Mann, 1975). Categorizing objects, time, places and persons, helps people simplify their world and organize their experience (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972). Ethnographic methodology is a means to discover how this categorization occurs by dividing the terms and phrases used by informants into units (domains) and indicating how the units are similiar and different from one another (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

Four kinds of ethnographic analysis were used in conjunction with the various types of ethnographic questions as a way to discover the system of meanings that alcoholics wives use (Spradley, 1979) and to continually clarify and validate these cultural meanings (Spradley, 1979; Hycner, 1985). The four kinds of analysis are: (1) domain analysis,

(2) taxonomic analysis, (3) componential analysis, and (4) theme analysis. These will be discussed in turn.

Domain Analysis

After conducting a preliminary search of folk categories, I first focused on tentative identification of domains. Domain analysis involves a search for domains each made up of folk terms all within the same category.

Terms are linked together in people's language use by means of semantic relationships. One principle of organization that seems to apply to every culture is one of inclusion. The phenomenon of inclusion of reference is so common that we usually do not think about it (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972). Inclusion is revealed with ordinary statements such as "a cat is an animal", or "a house is a building". The meaning is created through this linkage of terms. Spradley (1979) suggests searching for possible domains under one of nine universal semantic relationships (see Appendix F, p. 148).

After eliciting possible folk terms within the same category, or domain, I next posed structural questions to verify the hypothesized domains and elicit additional folk terms included in the domain. "While the investigator offers a type of interpretation of the other's experience, the other retains the authority to argue whether or not the interpretation fits his or her experience" (de Rivera, 1981,

p. 23). By engaging in this dialogic process the interviewee and interviewer become collaborators in the analysis and interpretation of the data (Mishler, 1986).

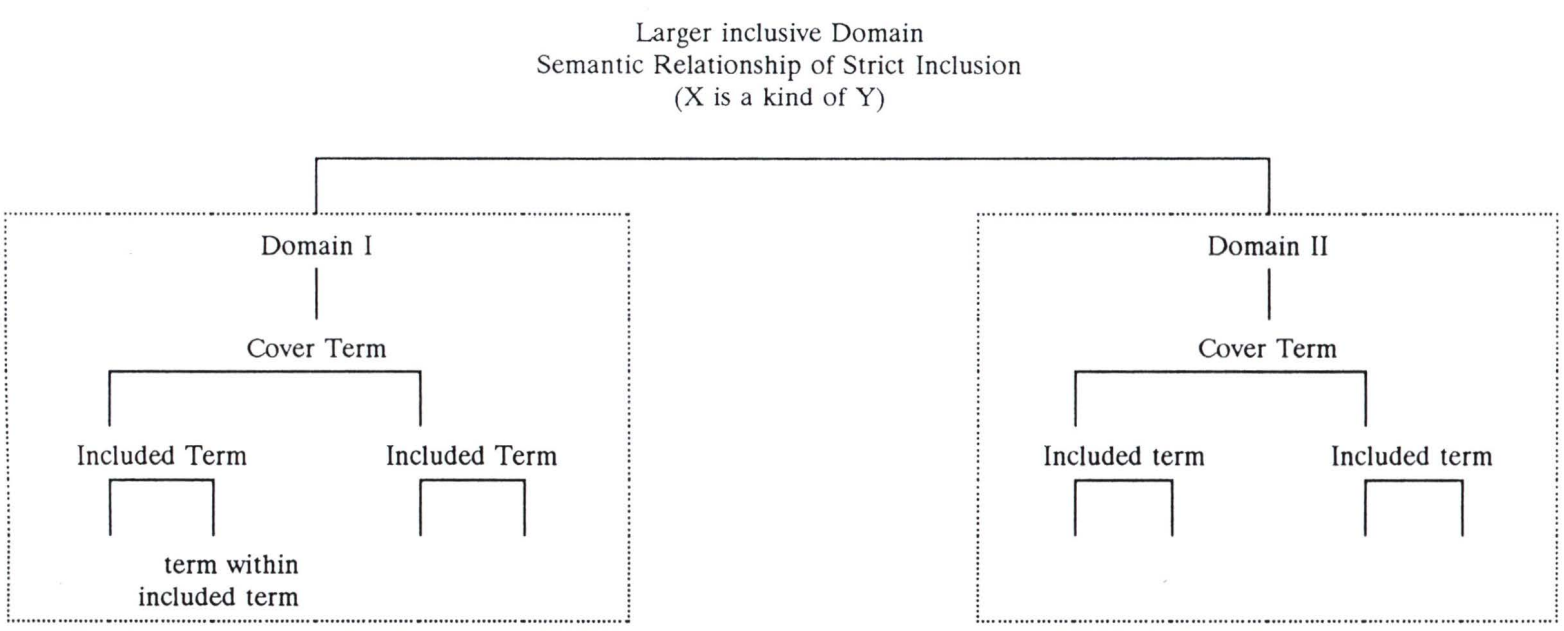
Two criteria were employed in the preliminary choice of domains for this study. First, domains were selected from specific topics that were described most frequently by each informant. Second, domains were selected from parts of informants' experiences that were relevant for counsellors learning about the topic of inquiry. With these criteria in mind, those domains that were verified for accuracy by informants were subjected to taxonomic analysis.

Taxonomic analysis

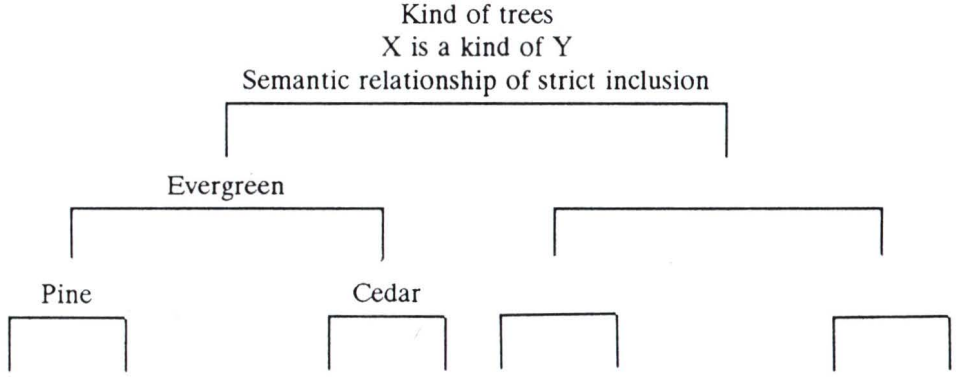
The second kind of ethnographic analysis, taxonomic analysis, involves an in-depth examination of a limited number of domains (Spradley, 1979). In taxonomic analysis, the internal structure of a domain is examined by identifying commonality among folk terms. These folk terms are all organized on the basis of the same semantic relationship (see Figure no. 1, p. 48).

Taxonomic analysis involves the construction of a taxonomy. Spradley and McCurdy (1972) refer to a taxonomy as a structure used to represent a set of categories related

Figure No. 1: Making a Taxonomic Analysis *



EXAMPLE



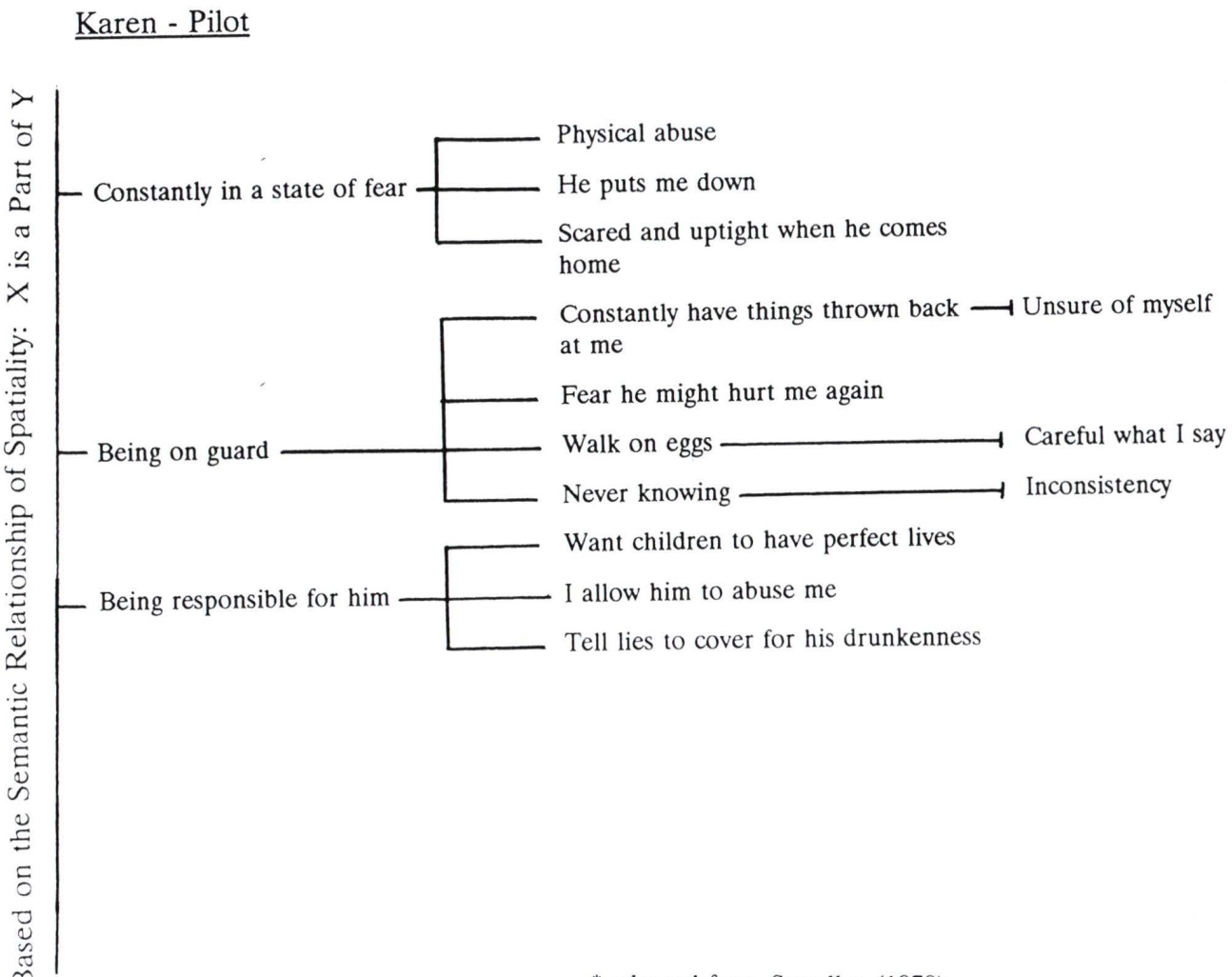
* adapted from Spradley (1979)

by inclusion. A folk taxonomy and a domain are both comprised of a set of categories organized around the same semantic relationship. However, a taxonomy allows for a more complex representation of all of the terms within a domain. Constructing a taxonomy allows not only the content to be revealed within a domain but the structure of how all the terms are related to one another. In this respect, showing the structure of all of the terms within a domain reveals the different levels of generality. More specific meaning is revealed as subcategories of terms are discovered for each cover term. (see Figure's no. 2-6, p. 50-54, for taxonomy's that were constructed to represent part of each informant's cultural knowledge).

The first step in taxonomic analysis is to look for all folk terms that belong within the same category. After as many included terms as possible have been found, descriptions that elaborate on these included terms are searched for (subcategories of meaning). The researcher then formulates structural questions to be presented at the next interview in order to verify the taxonomic relationships and gather new terms (Spradley, 1979). At this point in the research, the alternation of interviewing and analysis is necessary (Spradley).

When enough terms have been collected through analysis and questioning, a search for a large inclusive domain that could subsume the domain being analyzed for the taxonomy,

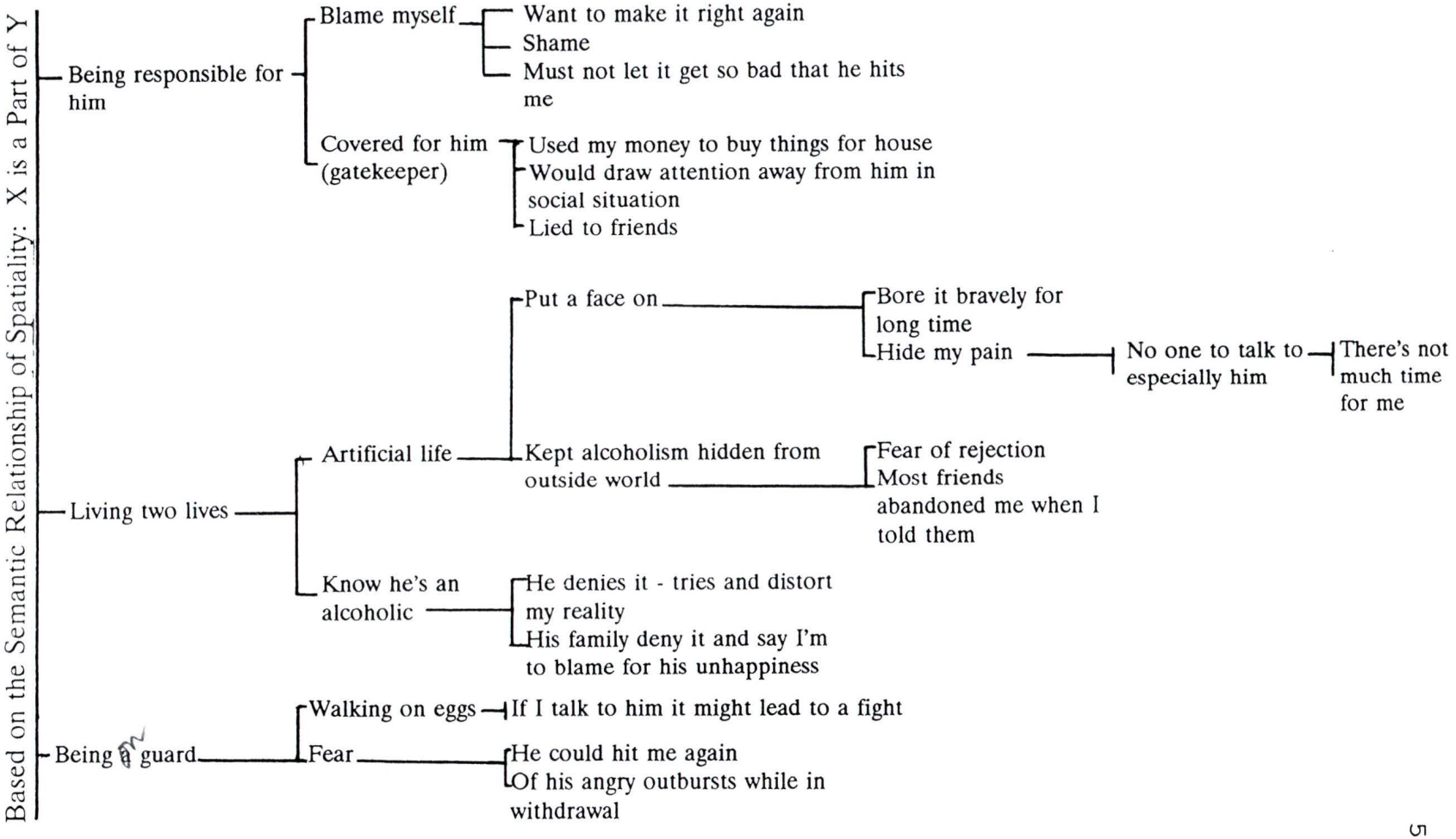
Figure No. 2: Taxonomy of Ways of Falling Into a Trap *



* adapted from Spradley (1979)

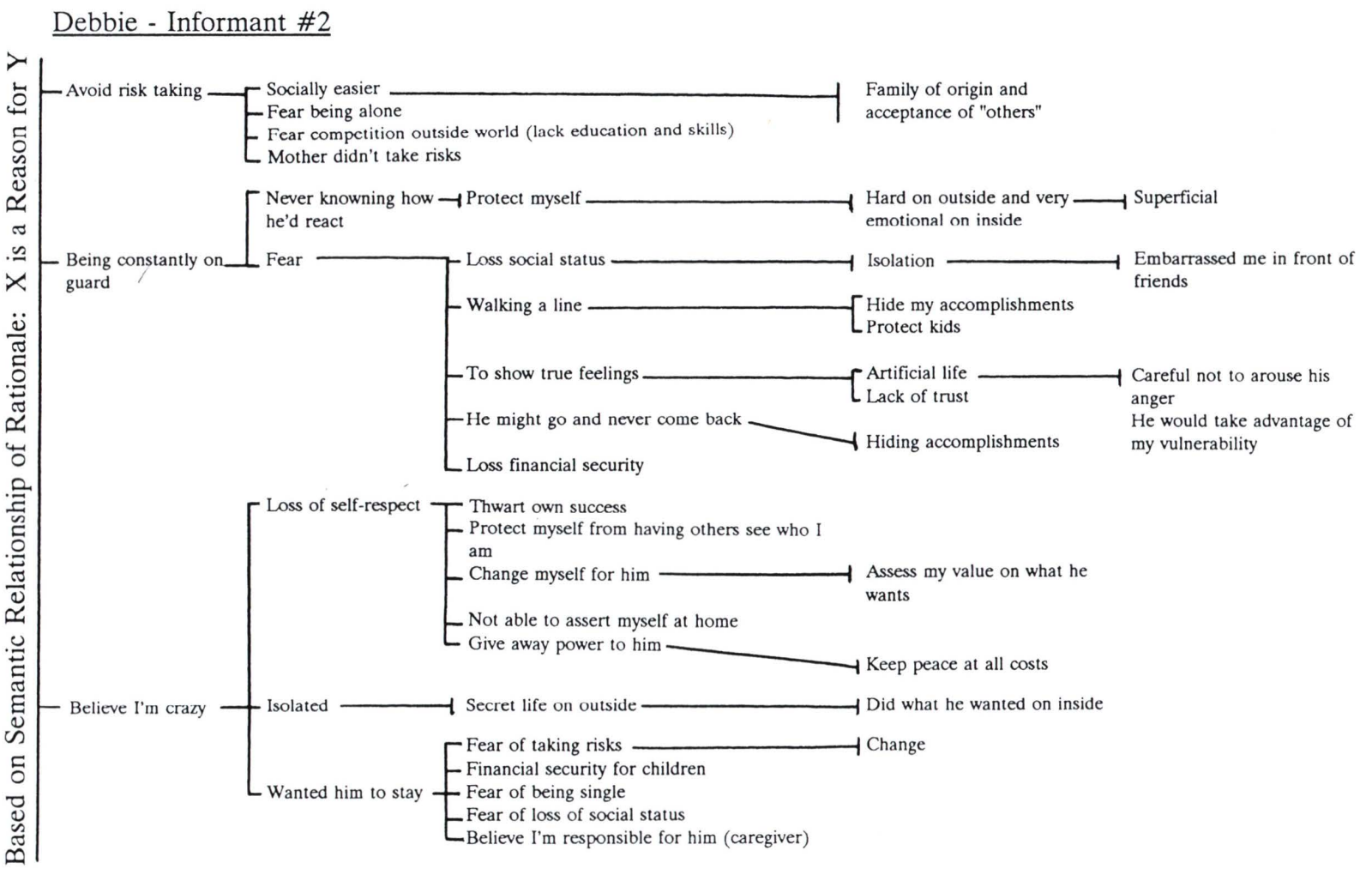
Figure No. 3: Taxonomy of a Part of Becoming More Isolated *

Mary - Informant #1



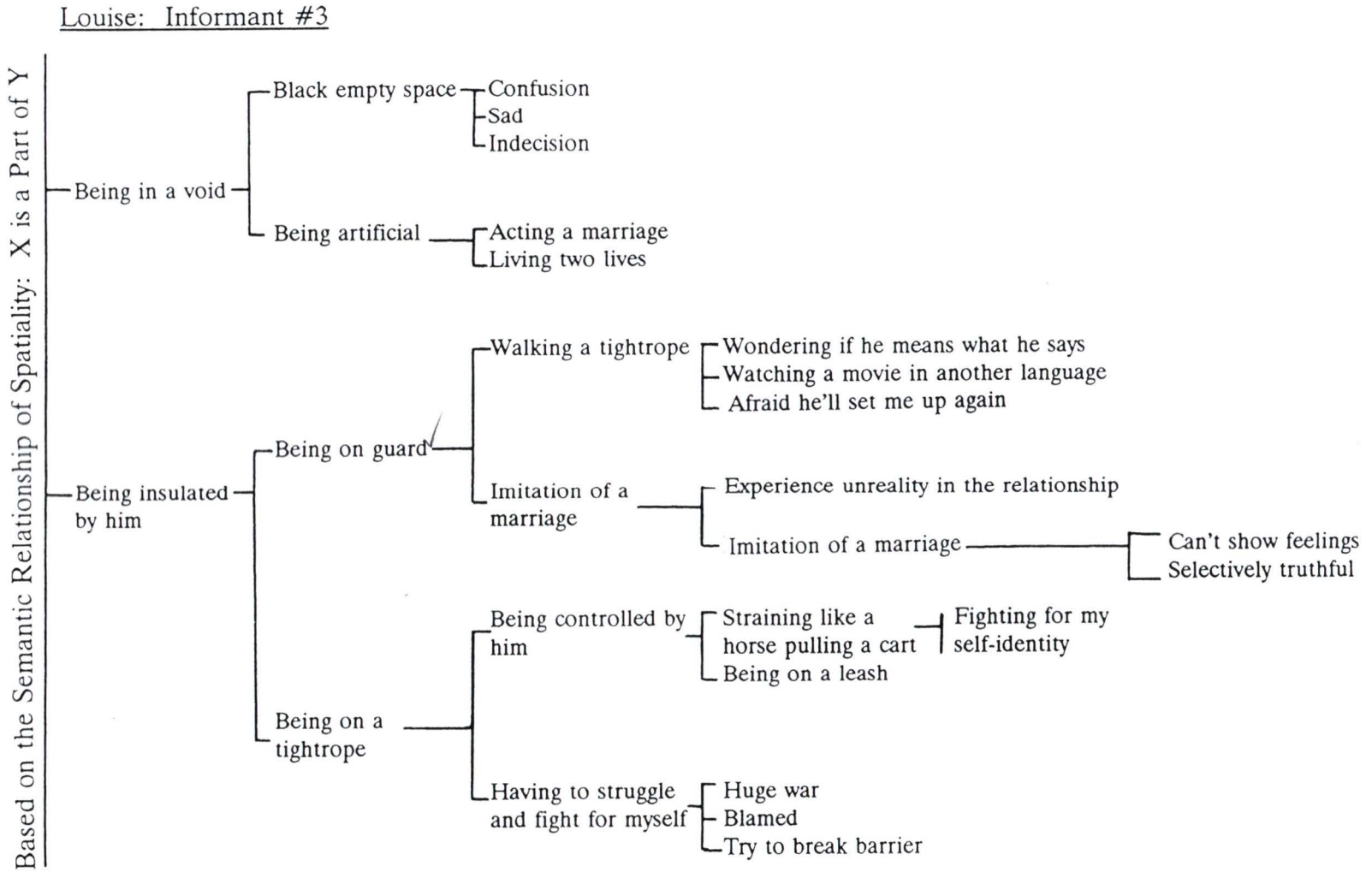
* adapted from Spradley (1979)

Figure No. 4: Taxonomy of Reasons for Living a Double Existence *



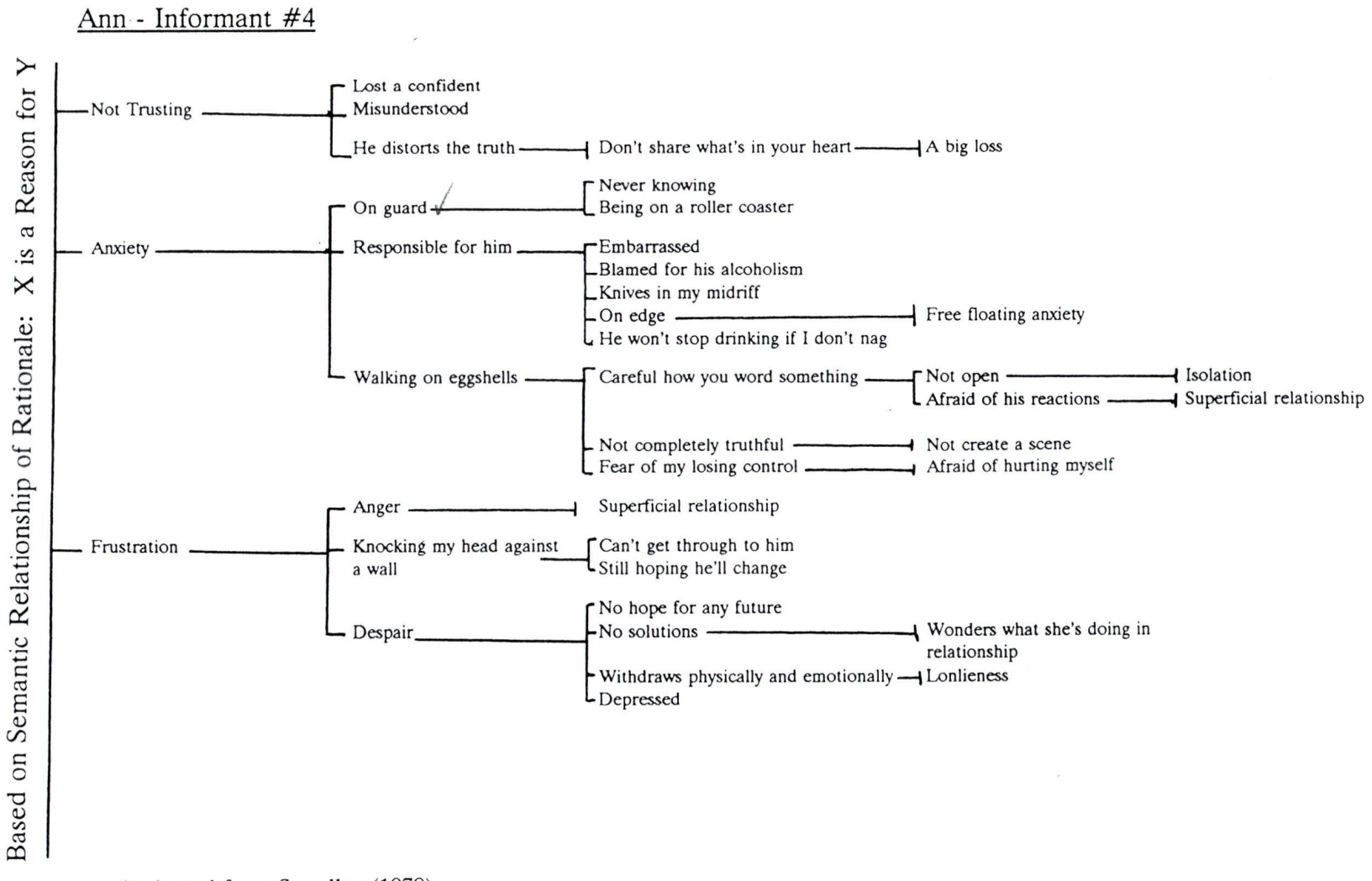
* adapted from Spradley (1979)

Figure No. 5: Taxonomy of a Part of Not Trusting *



* adapted from Spradley (1979)

Figure No. 6: Taxonomy of Reasons for Experiencing Isolation in the Relationship *



* adapted from Spradley (1979)

occurs. In the example of Figure no. 4, I found that the folk term "Living a Double Existence" included some of the important domains that had been discovered about Debbie's cultural knowledge.

Componential analysis

In every society, people have learned common ways to define their world. They learn "complex rules for perceiving, classifying, and relating the phenomena of experience" (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972, p. 73). Taxonomic analysis and componential analysis combined, look at a set of rules and maps that people follow in their customary behavior.

While taxonomic analysis reveal what categories are in restricted contrast, componential analysis goes a step further to show how they are different. Pieces of information that people use to distinguish differences between terms are called attributes. Each attribute makes up one part or component of the total meaning designated to a category (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972).

Whenever two terms are said to be similar of different, the informant is choosing certain attributes to make this judgment. For example, in our culture if we use the folk term `woman' as a member of the domain `human being', some of our cultural meaning is revealed. Nevertheless, the term `woman' also has many other things associated with it:

women are of the female sex, women bear children, women are often thought to be caretakers, etc. Componential analysis involves a search for attributes associated with all of the terms in a category.

Almost every contrast question reveals additional relationships and information about the folk term in question (Spradley, 1979). It is not possible to place the terms in a taxonomy because of all of the different semantic relationsips revealed through contrast questions. Each example presented in Figures no. 7 and no. 8, shows a single folk term with some of its attributes. The diagrams illustrate how each attribute is connected to the folk term by a semantic relationship. Notice the different kinds of semantic relationships (see pages 57 and 58).

The following example illustrated how a greater understanding of the folk terms "walking a line" and "living on the edge", both within the category of "reasons for experiencing fear", was obtained through all of the extra information elicited from Debbie.

Debbie:

> `The edge' sounds a lot scarier than `walking the line'.... You sort of pretended, like I used to pretend that I wasn't doing all the things that I was doing because he would get ...very jealous if I did anything independent of him....So I used to hide...any accomplishments I had.

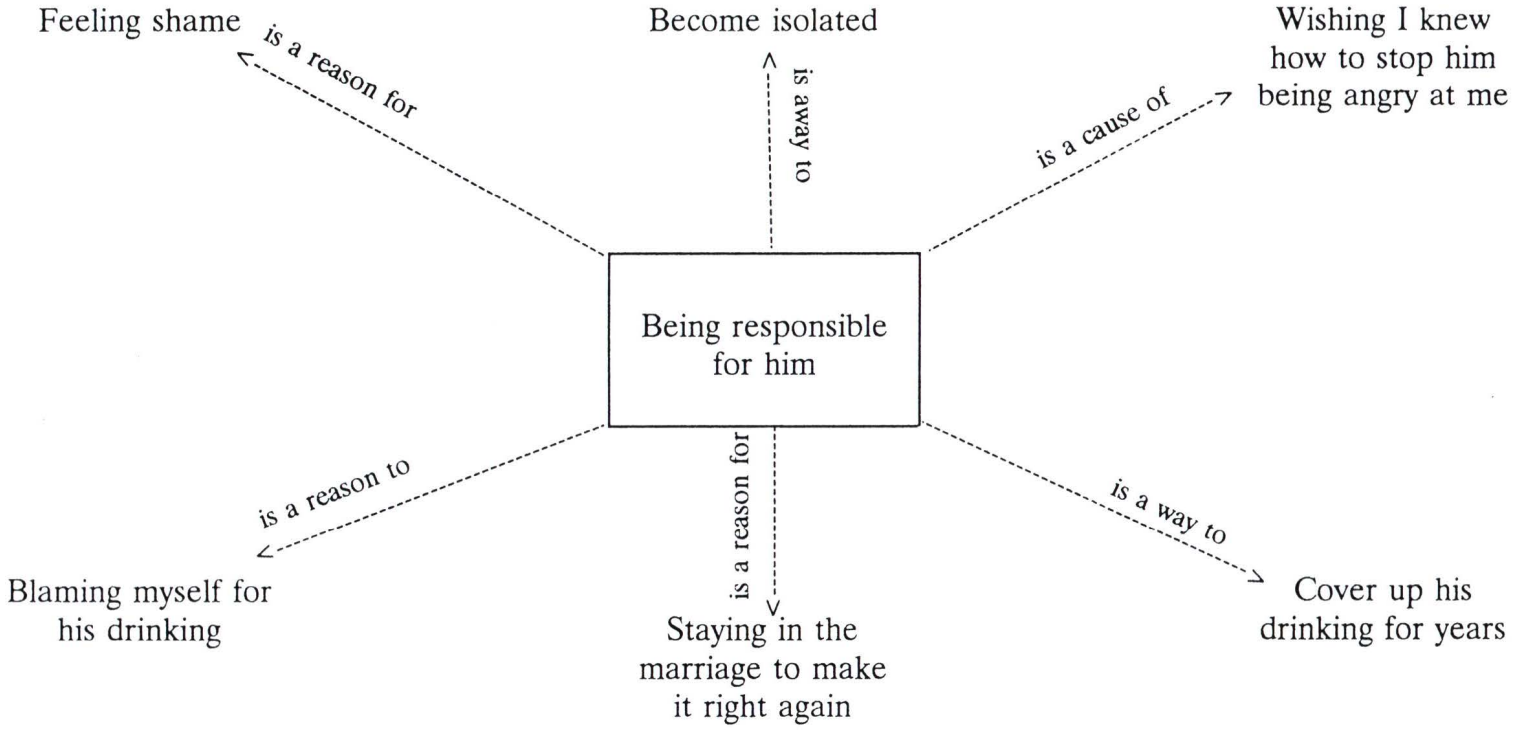
Interviewer:

> Okay, so `walking a line' for you was sort of hiding your accomplishments.

Figure No. 7: Step in Componential Analysis *

Some Attributes and Semantic Relationships of Being Responsible for Him

Mary - Informant #1

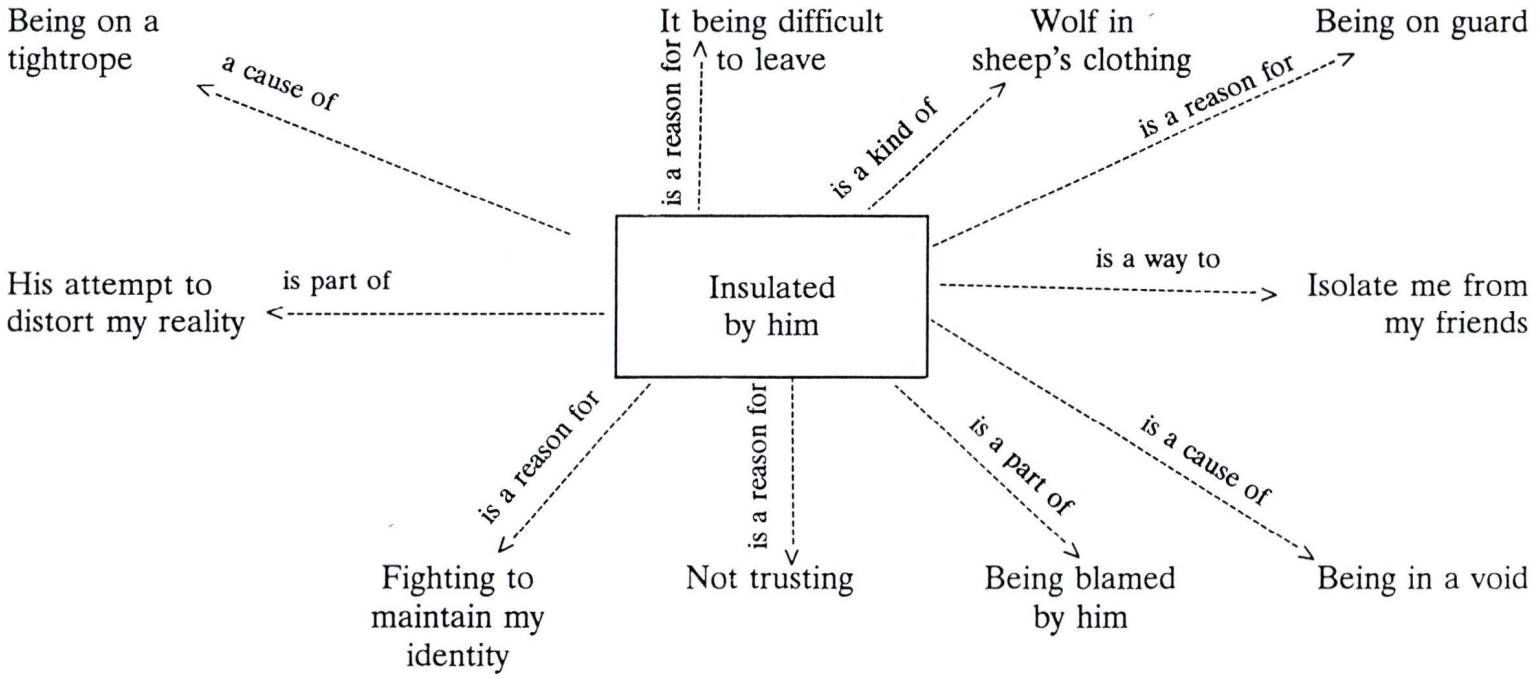


* adapted from Spradley (1979)

Figure No. 8: Step in Componential Analysis *

Some Attributes and Semantic Relationships of Being Insulated by Him

Louise - Informant #3



* adapted from Spradley (1979)

Debbie:

> Yeah...killing yourself at home, like cooking and cleaning and doing everything at home and he didn't do anything. And, you didn't dare ask. He sort of had a way of making it so you didn't dare ask for anything.

Interviewer:

> Okay. So `walking a line' was...fulfilling his needs and doing what he wanted [you] to do...

Debbie:

> I'd say `living on the edge' was being afraid all the time of his reactions. `Walking the line' was more...it's a calm thing. You just did exactly what he expected you to do at home and then you kept hidden all...the things you were doing outside of the home.

From this excerpt, attributes that are both explicit and implicit reveal some of Debbie's cognitive understanding of her world. For example, some implicit attributes associated with the term "walking a line" are: (1) "keep the peace-avoid conflict", and (2) "take care of his needs before my own". Looking at the same term "walking a line", some of the attributes explicitly associated with the cultural category "reasons for experiencing fear" are: (1) "hide my accomplishments from him", (2) "keep things calm between us".

The main tool used for componential analysis is a paradigm worksheet (see Figure no. 9, p. 60). A paradigm represents part of an informants cognitive map (Spradley, 1979) by showing some of the contrasts among terms within a particular category. Terms from the category to be contrasted are placed vertically on the left hand column (the contrast set) and the attributes or values, associated

Figure No. 9: Paradigm Worksheet *

Debbie: Informant #2												
Example of Worksheet for a Componential Analysis of Reasons for Experiencing Fear												
	Fear of being single	Responsible for him (pick up the pieces	Kept my accomplish ments hidden from him (men should be successful)	Protect ego	Not strong enough to let him go (fear of being single)	Don't expect anything for myself	Never be yourself (double life)	Avoid conflict - keep the peace	Want 'normal' home envir. for children	Doubt myself	Women take care of men; put own needs last	Not open; don't show feelings or might get hurt
Loss of financial security	yes	yes	no	yes (no)	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	n/c
He might go, never come back	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Walking a line. Afraid the kids would find out	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	n/c	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Living on the edge: afraid our friends would find out what kind of person I am for associating with my husband	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
He'll take away any happiness I have (friendship, creativity)	no	no	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes

Possible Themes ----------->

1. Experience of powerlessness
2. Never be yourself
3. Avoid conflict - keep peace
4. Afraid of being single
5. Diminished meaning as a person in relationship
6. Doubt myself: women weaker than men
7. Nurturer - family needs come first
8. The more I suffer the better person I am

* adapted from Spradley (1979)

with these terms are place horizontally along the top of the column. By creating a visual representation of as many attributes or values revealed in relation to each of the terms in the contrast set, and comparing which terms carry those attributes and which do not, more of the informants cognitive reality is revealed. This representation of the informants' cultural understanding is a useful tool for discovering themes.

Theme Analysis

By comparing, contrasting, and sorting all of the bits of information required in ethnographic methodology, patterns of meaning comprised of interwoven strands of a cultural group's behavior and thought emerge for analysis and identification (Fetterman, 1989). An emergent framework of understanding that has integrated as many of these strands as possible, while remaining open to new categories that have been generated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), converges into larger patterns of understanding or themes.

These larger patterns are cognitive principles that people use to organize their experience around assumptions about their world which they accept as true. Cognitive principles, or cultural beliefs, are usually in the form of assertions (Spradley, 1979). For example, Ann's statement, "it's mens right to drink" is an assertion that can be

generalized to how each of the women in this study understand male-female relationships.

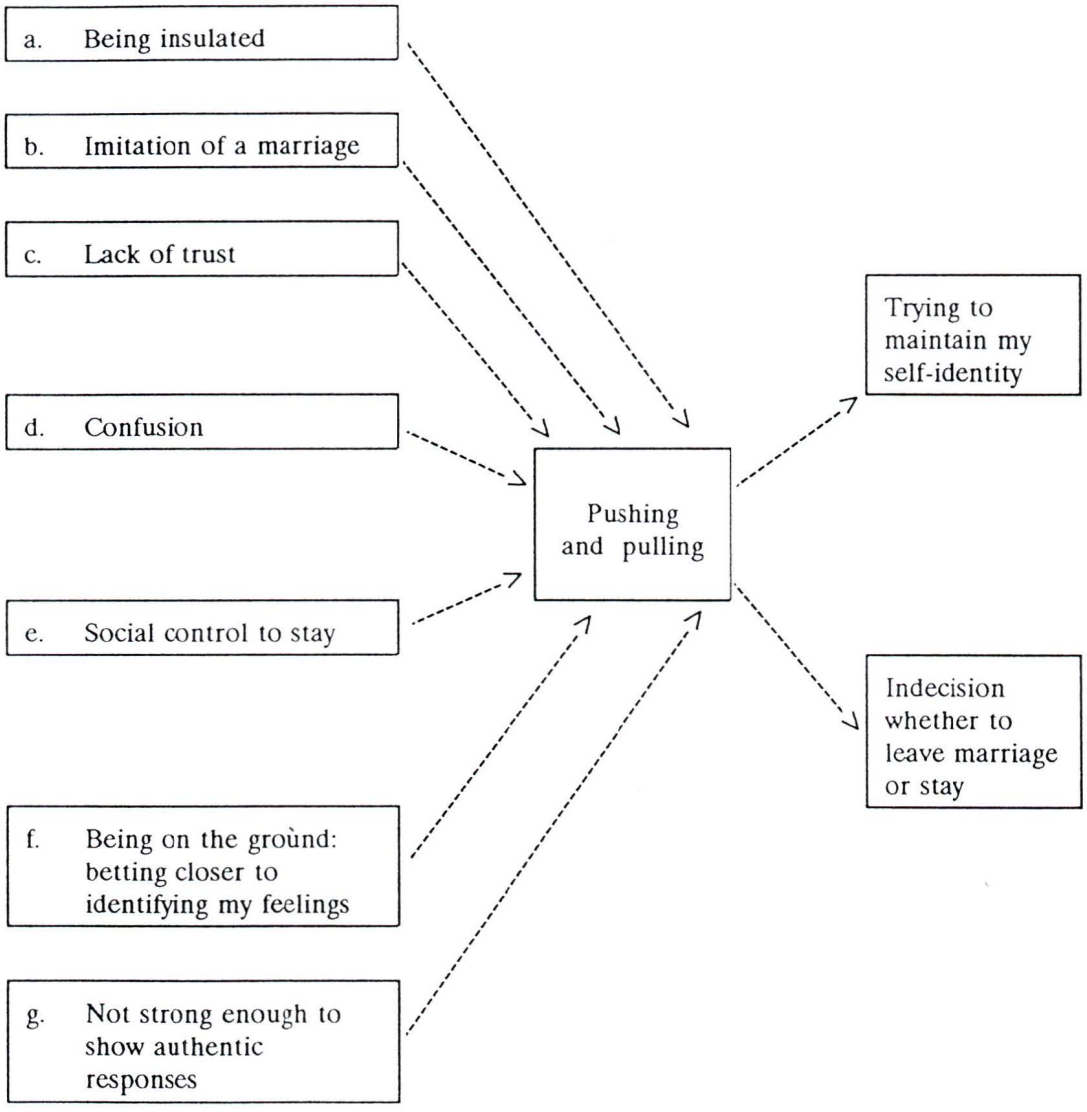
Recurring ideas in several domains and in dimensions of contrast suggest the possibility of themes. Many cultural themes are at the tacit level of the informant's knowledge (Spradley, 1979).

Spradley (1979) discusses a number of strategies for discovering cultural themes. My basic tools for discovering the three cultural themes that emerged from the five womens' descriptions were: (1) application of componential analysis for each informants' descriptions, (2) search for organizing domains that represented all of the womens' experiences, (3) creation of diagrams that represented parts of each informant's cultural knowledge (See Figure's no. 10-12, p. 63-65), and (4) identification of six universal cultural themes (see Spradley, p. 199; for a discussion of the universal themes).

Figure No. 10: Discovering Cultural Themes *

Pushing and Pulling

Louise - Informant #3

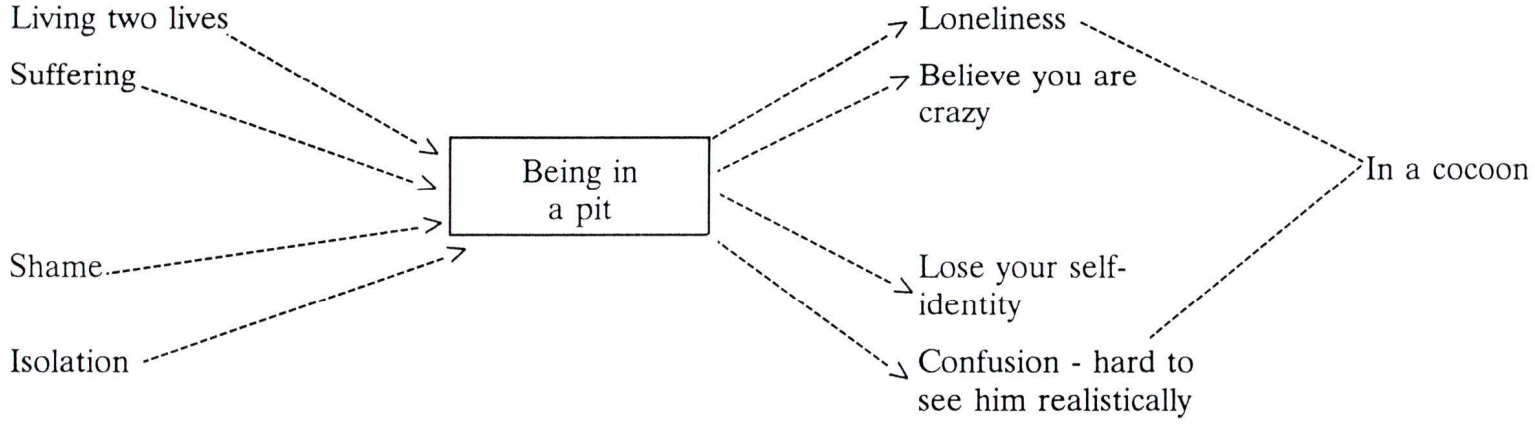


* adapted from Spradley (1979)

Figure No. 11: Discovering Cultural Themes *

Debbie - Informant #2

Being in a pit: "You get to the top of the slimy wall of the pit thinking you could see daylight again and then something completely crazy would happen and you'd go back down again and try to sort yourself out."

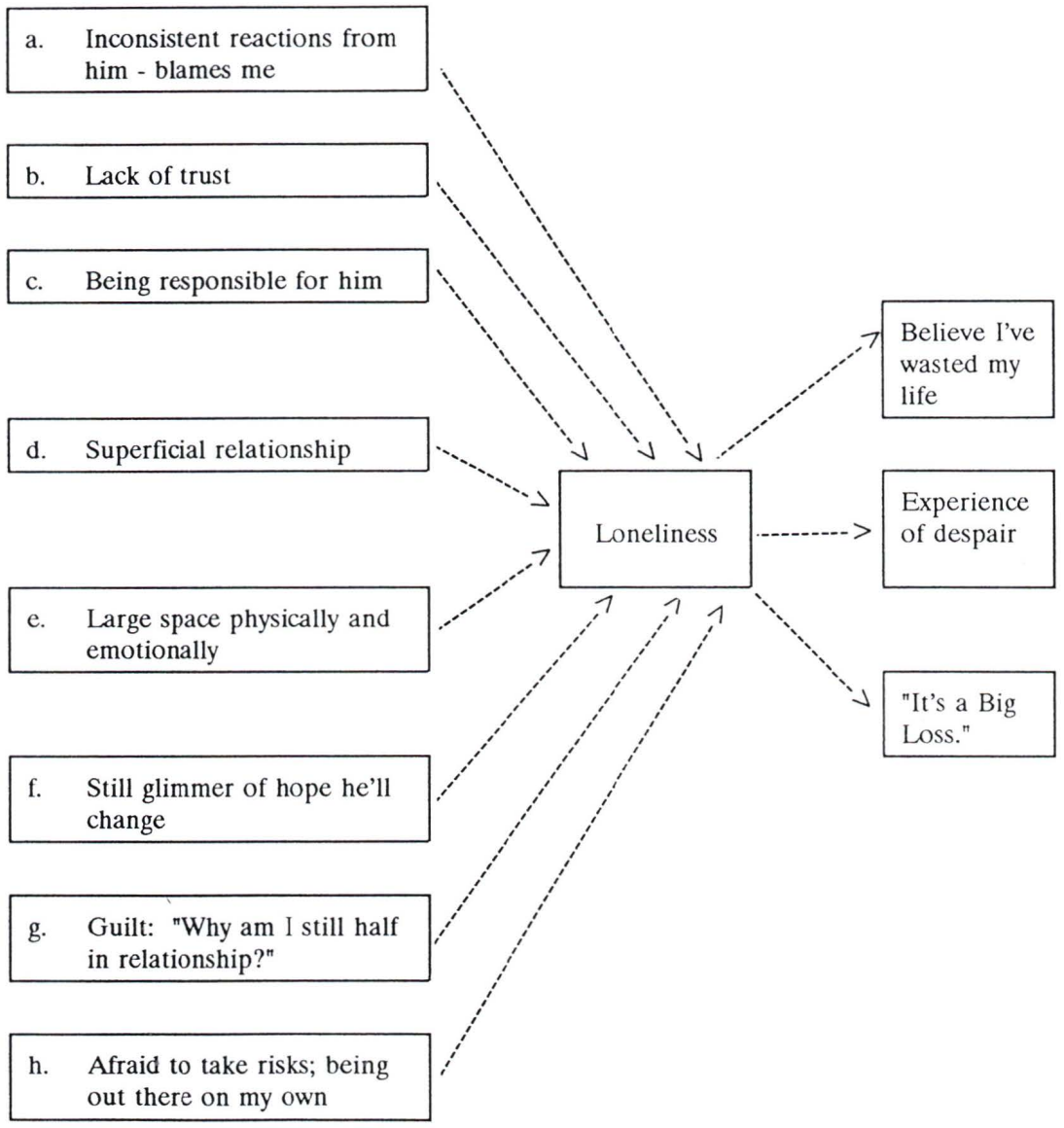


* adapted from Spradley (1979)

Figure No. 12: Discovering Cultural Themes *

Loneliness and Loss

Ann - Informant #4



* adapted from Spradley (1979)

Credibility

The goal of ethnographic research is to "understand the cultural patterns and meaning of the domains of inquiry according to the people's world view" (Wenger, 1985). Two specific methods were employed to solidify the credibility of this qualitative study. First, during the interviewing process, each informant was asked to verify the hypothesized domains that had been explicated from the typed transcripts. Second, after analyzing the data and creating the text, consideration was given for accuracy by returning to each informant for verification of the themes (Brenner, 1985).

Summary

Spradley (1979) uses the term ethnographic semantics, to define the theory and method used to understand cultural meaning systems. The method is based on the assumption that cultural meaning is discovered through an examination of how people use their language. Ethnographic semantics eliminates neither ambiguity nor the need to interpret order from the informants' descriptions. The task of the ethnographer is to interpret the cognitive understanding of the cultural scene with as little distortion as possible (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972). The foundation of this interpretation lies in the interaction between the ethnographer, informants and the audience for whom the study

is intended. It is to the presentation of this interpretation that I now turn.

CHAPTER IV

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC TEXT

As most people would imagine, living with an alcoholic husband is difficult and complex. The wife lives in a world of diverse cultural meanings which she has learned in order to cope with and make sense of a deeply embedded relationship of violent emotionality not seen by the outsider or casual observer. In this chapter, the life stories of five women married to alcoholics are presented to the reader in order to contrast and broaden this outsider's perspective.

This ethnographic study is intended for an audience of counsellors. A partial description of the culture (Spradley, 1979) obtained from the five informants has provided the foundation for a heurmeneutic understanding of their life-worlds. How the text is interpreted is based on the outsiders or readers experience with the phenomenon under study (Denzin, 1989).

By carefully explicating from the text the womens use of words and phrases, a rich tapestry of common themes has emerged to form a connectedness between their worlds. Separate strands of experience gathered from each informant have been woven to create this mozaic of cultural understanding.

This chapter is divided into two sections: (1) introduction of the five women living out and composing lives within the culture of being married to an alcoholic, and (2) discussion of three themes--common to each of the women's experiences. The first section is organized as follows: portrait of each informant, setting the stage for the ethnographic interviews, and description of a small slice of time. A detailed examination of the three common themes is reserved for the second part of this chapter. I will present the themes in the following order: (1) constantly being on guard, (2) being in a pit, and (3) push and pull. I have given each of the women a fictitious name.

The Women

Karen

Portrait of Informant

At the time of the interview in December 1990, Karen was living with her husband and two teenaged sons in an immaculatly kept middle class home located in a city on the west coast of Canada. She is an attractive woman--her dark hair is styled smartly to suit the fashionable clothes she wears over her slim body.

Karen, a teacher, met her husband shortly after her father died; a difficult time in her sixteenth year. The memories of her religious upbringing on the prairies are

evoked with images of loneliness and abandonment--she was 4 when her mother died and was left vulnerable to criticism from family members. She describes how she "fell into" the relationship with her husband.

> I felt that my whole life was falling apart. I was angry at God. I remember being really angry and screaming and asking Him why He was doing this to me. I think that I probably gave up all hope that He was looking after me...so I needed someone who was really going to be like my father--and [he] was.

The couple were married 24 years ago, at which time Karen, employed as a teacher, chose to change roles and stay home with their first born. Karen, reviving her interest in teaching after 15 years absence as a homemaker, was updating her qualifications at the time of the interview.

It was not until approximately six months before the interview that Karen, still not certain her husband was an alcoholic, started talking to a few select people about her husband's excessive drinking, believing for years that the anxiety and depression she often experienced and was treated for with antidepressant medication, were due mainly to her own inadequacies. The Psychiatrist, who saw her for approximately ten visits 4 years ago, had not addressed her husband's alcoholism, which Karen told me was a familiar experience with other members of the Al-Anon group that she had recently become involved in. Because the Psychiatrist's visits were inconvenient--he lived out of town--Karen, still struggling with anxiety and periods of depression, sought

counselling at an out-patient facility two years prior to our meeting. By the time we met for the interview, Karen had joined the above mentioned Al-Anon group and had started seeing a "co-dependent" counsellor.

Setting the Stage for the Ethnographic Interview

When initial contact was made with Karen requesting her involvement in this study as the pilot informant, she was very interested in teaching me about her experience of living with her alcoholic husband. Agreeing to participate, an appointment was arranged for the following week.

A casual conversation over an impromptu lunch took place with Karen, an acquaintance of mine, before the taped interview began. Karen told me she was worried her husband would arrive home unexpectedly. When we moved into the brightly lit family room located off the kitchen and started the interview, she seemed to relax and talked freely and articulately in an emotionally detached manner.

I received a telephone call from Karen 2 months after the interview. Her husband had moved out 5 days previous--she doubted her sanity and wondered why she still wanted him to come back. She asked me, "Am I as sick as he is? Do I love him too much?" Our short telephone conversation gave her a chance to talk about some of her feelings and concerns.

Description of a Small

Slice of Time

Karen described the dinner hour as a time of being on edge. When we spoke of her fear about the anticipation of her husband's arrival home she said to me, "I really used to...get really, really scared wondering what to expect." Karen was attempting to reconstruct her reality around this fear by using some Al-Anon slogans such as, "Let Go and Let God, Live and Let Live" and by asking for help from God. Rather than get involved in an argument she was learning to walk away and concentrate on relaxation. It was not easy to learn a new way of being:

> I would really, really panic and the minute he would come in and, of course, he comes in immediately and asks a question and I will give him the answer and the question is repeated. He's not happy with my answer or else he wants to start a fight....You can't just let down your hair...you never know what's going to happen....You constantly have to be aware and on guard.

As Karen spoke about how she was always careful with her responses to her husband, she pointed out that to get involved in an argument, "could mean a beating for me."

Karen's descriptions of the dinner hour when her husband was out of town were noticeably different. She enjoyed this time with her sons--she was aware that the three of them seemed relaxed.

> We just had a beautiful dinner and I was so aware of the difference. We chatted, we were able to do the normal things....We were not nearly as uptight.

Karen's description of how she experiences temporality--of living in fear in anticipation of her husband's arrival home, is part of the theme of constantly being on guard. This common theme will be described in the second part of chapter two.

Mary

Portrait of Informant

Mary, a retired legal secretary, married her husband, a mechanical engineer, in Britian in 1950 despite her parents disapproval. When we talked about the pain of the rejection she still experiences related to her parents, she told me:

> There's a pain where my parents didn't accept [him] when we were getting married and I was thrown out of the house six weeks before the wedding. I was the youngest in the family and the last child to go. That was terribly painful. There was never a reconciliation. My parents are now dead.

The couple immigrated to Canada from Britian 15 years later because of better job opportunities for them both. Mary is short with a kind of figure that imparts a matronly look. She has a clear, ruddy complexion and short straight hair which is turning silver. Having a capacity of caring for other people made it difficult for Mary when she discovered she was unable to have children. I found it easier to visualize Mary in her role as a homemaker, where she enjoys baking, cleaning, and knitting, than in the demanding atmosphere of a lawyers office.

Twenty-five years ago, when Mary noticed changes in her husband's drinking pattern, which coincided with constant arguments between them, she returned to Britian for 3 months where she was to decide whether to leave the marriage. Mary believed that her husband's drinking would stop--the couple reconciliated only to return to the previous way of being.

Eight years ago, when Mary first started talking about her struggle with the marital relationship, her family Doctor confirmed that her husband was an alcoholic. It was six months prior to the ethnographic interview that Mary first started receiving professional counselling, the only formal support she has had in relation to her alcohol-dominated marital relationship.

Setting the Stage for the Ethnographic Interview

Mary had been told about this present study by a counsellor at a local drug and alcohol centre. When Mary first contacted me by telephone, she was very interested in participating as a co-researcher, and said, "I hope that people will learn more about women like me who live with an alcoholic." We arranged for the ethnographic interview to take place in her home the following week when her husband would be at work.

When I arrived for the interview, Mary greeted me warmly. I noticed she seemed tense by her quick movements

as she led me through a small sitting room and kitchen into a large, brightly lit family room which overlooked an expansive green field covered with wild yellow flowers. Mary pointed out how this room was peaceful to her. Prior to starting the interview, she offered me tea and a selection of cookies she had baked.

As I was asking Mary the demographic questions during our initial time together, she said to me, "I hope I don't cry too much while I talk to you because I cry over the drop of a hat...ever since I started counselling." After getting acquainted, the interview proceeded into a comfortable dialogue.

Description of a Small
Slice of Time

When we spoke of what usually occurs once Mary's husband arrives home from work, I visualized silence taking up large, empty space between them as a way to avoid conflict. Very little is said between the two of them other than trivial talk throughout their normal evening routine. Mary described how the lack of conversation becomes uncomfortable as the evening progresses:

> It's comfortable to begin with and then it becomes uncomfortable because I'm on my own all day. I want someone to talk to....During the day, that doesn't matter. I have a big house. I have alot of work to do. I like cooking and baking and all those things that a housewife does. I find sometime how, especially since he's been in withdrawal, that we argue about something

> that's on the television....He angers very quickly and I have to try and almost think what I'm going to say to him so I don't stand on his toes.

Mary finds her husband's frequent sudden outbursts of anger frightening and still shudders when she recalls how he hit her unexpectedly for the first time a few months prior to the interview. She approaches him with caution during their conversations, for fear that he might strike out at her again.

Mary's eyes welled up with tears during our conversation as she described how this period of time together was spent in the past:

> We used to come home when we were having our good days....He would come in and say, "Let's go sit outside...or what kind of day have you had today?" Or, he'd pick me up from work and say, "how have things gone today?."

Mary's description of the recent scenario between the couple illustrates part of her experience in relation to the cultural theme of constantly being on guard. This theme, common to all of the women in this ethnographic study, will be discussed in more detail in the second section of this chapter.

Debbie

Portrait of Informant

At the time of the interview, Debbie, an artist, was living on her own in the house she had lived in for the past three years. Her husband moved out 9 months previous to our

meeting. This was not their first marriage separation--Debbie left for two days when their children, now aged 24 and 26, were toddlers.

Debbie's energetic composure corresponds with her free-flowing, medium length, natural blonde hair. The casual floral dresses she enjoys wearing, accent her attractive medium- built figure. Debbie's descriptions of her childhood were filled with images of her mother struggling to raise five teenagers after her father's death--he died of liver failure when Debbie was 13. Debbie met her husband when she was 18. She described a romantic beginning--the couple lived in separate cities and exchanged love letters for 3 years prior to their marriage.

Debbie started reconstructing meaning around her husband's excessive drinking and abusive behavior 5 years ago when the news media was relaying information about alcoholism and co-dependency. She defies labels. When members of Al-Anon appeared on the media, she told me:

> I hadn't been to Al-Anon and I'm not a member...I've watched programs with Al-Anon people and they tell you how you enable [the alcoholic] and that's where you get enough to get your bloody back up because you end up being, you blame yourself and then other people blame you too...for him drinking....Then I really started to get resentful.

Debbie has not received any counselling other than three visits to a Psychiatrist a few years ago.

Setting the Stage for the Ethnographic Interview

When Debbie first contacted me she told me she had heard about the study from the counsellor her estranged husband was seeing at a drug and alcohol centre. She spoke about how she was interested in helping others learn more about alcoholics' wives and indicated that she wanted to participate. I arranged our first meeting for the following week to fit into her demanding work schedule.

Upon arrival at Debbie's two bedroom bungalow, located in a middle class section of the city, I noticed that her friendly greeting was mixed with anxiety. As we sat in her studio, a brightly lit room at the front end of the house, I saw a soft, creative side of Debbie emerge as she showed me the watercolors she was working on--all at different stages of completion. She talked freely once the recorded interview began--similar to a friendly conversation she might have with a friend. Frequently throughout the interview, Debbie's voice broke as tears welled up from her eyes. I was aware of Debbie's sensitivity to some of the topics that emerged as she started to describe her experience--there were slices that she had never divulged to anyone before.

The second ethnographic interview took place 3 weeks later. Then, two weeks later still, when we met for the third interview, Debbie took me on a tour of her home. As

she pointed out meaningful objects reminiscent of the 24 years of her marriage, she was fighting back tears of grief. It was only that week she had integrated a new meaning of the relationship and asked her estranged husband not to visit her again.

Description of a Small

Slice of Time

It was not possible, knowing her husband would frequently arrive home drunk, to learn to depend on a regular dinner time. Debbie's descriptions of the dinner hour spent with her husband were filled with memories of futile arguments and reflections of her crashing her unbreakable dishes into the sink. When we spoke of her frustration with her husband as they sat at the kitchen table together, she said to me:

> We'd we sitting there eating and making just a little bit of small talk...and (sigh) if he'd been drinking or if we'd been drinking...little things seemed to escalate into arguments....I start slamming things when I'm mad. I get physical...smash dishes...my way of swearing at him probably. We'd scream horrible things to each other...he'd go down into the basement to his den and drink or he'd go out. I'd come here (into her studio)....The kitchen was our battle ground. Never one of us was relaxed...neither one of us could sit in the living room and read the paper. It was isolating....we spent the evening physically as far apart as possible.
> I instigated it as much as he did....I'm sure deep down somewhere I started it so he would leave and go out the door.

This description presents a lens for looking at one theme common to the five women in this study--being in a pit--discussed in the following section of this chapter.

Louise

Portrait of Informant

At the time of the interview, Louise was living with her husband in a modest bungalow they had occupied for 14 years, located in a well established working class area of the city. The couple, each having been married once before, wed 19 years ago and have separated twice-the last separation occurred 5 years ago when Louise left for 3 months. They have five grown children between them--two from Louise's first marriage--the remainder from his.

Louise's artistic side is matched by her graceful movements and soft spoken manner. She evokes images of meditative quietness--not congruent with the hectic business atmosphere of the hospital where she is employed full time as an admitting clerk. Her clothes are loose fitting and uncluttered--turtleneck sweaters, neutral colored pants, and comfortable walking shoes. She has short, fine brown hair and hazel eyes accented by burgundy colored, fashionable eye-glasses.

Louise has been surrounded by alcoholism most of her life--both parents are alcoholics as were her previous and present husband. Ten years ago, when her daughter showed

her some brochures she had gotten from school that described the symptoms of alcoholism, Louise changed her meaning surrounding her husband's drinking patterns. Shortly after, she joined Al-Anon and signed up for a therapeutic co-dependent group. At the time of the interview, she was seeing a counsellor at a local drug and alcohol centre--her first experience with individual counselling.

Setting the Stage for the Ethnographic Interview

When initial contact was made with Louise she indicated she was interested in being an informant for this present study. The first ethnographic interview was arranged to take place three weeks later at a local drug and alcohol centre--her husband, who had retired 2 years ago as a manual labourer, was usually home, so Louise preferred not to meet there.

Our talk started with addressing Louise's concerns with issues of confidentiality and anonymity--her reserved manner relaxed after the tape recorder was turned on--she talked comfortably and articulatly about her experiences.

Two weeks after this first meeting, Louise telephoned to invite me for a tour of her home--she wanted to provide me with more contextual information. A time was arranged for the following week when her husband would be out for the day.

Louise showed me around the house, her comments moving between the momentos of the past and present. We moved through the dimly lit kitchen and family room, upstairs to her art studio where she pointed out the collection of art she had produced. Memories of her past were evoked as she described the meaning behind each piece. We then chatted over a cup of tea in her small living room--surrounded with photographs of her children and grandchildren. The tour ended by making arrangements for our next ethnographic interview.

As Louise and I sat in a counselling room at a drug and alcohol centre for the second interview, the rapport established between us was reflected in our free-flowing, relaxed conversation. Despite the loud construction noises outside, muffled slightly by the closed window, our talk moved into deep levels of descriptions of Louise's experiences.

Description of a Small
Slice of Time

Louise, in her descriptions about moments of time spent with her husband, kept using metaphors of acting to convey what she was experiencing--not evident to the outside observor. "It's like watching a movie and what you see isn't what's really going on....Like it's part of acting--unreality." Louise went on to describe how she hides her true feelings in the relationship--how she is constantly on

guard to her husband's subtle ways of control. Possibilities of intimacy turned to confusion in the following example of a conversation that took place that week:

> I never have an absolute sense of trust....For example, on Sunday, I said, `It's Palm Sunday' and he said, `Oh, I forgot all about it.' Now he's a Catholic. (voice quieter) He said, `I was going to go to church but I slept in.' So then we get into this pseudo-religious conversation--he loves to set me up for these subjective kinds of conversations....I've just recently started taking the bus. The conversation began with an article about cars--we went into technology and so on....Then, zap, right in the middle of this lovely conversation about cars [he says], `people like you who take the bus when they could use alternate sources of travel.' The conversation quickly takes the zig-zag and it's turned on me....The issue is control. When I take the bus he loses control. If I was a decent wife...if I did what he wanted me to then he would have no need to set me up in either really blatant ways...or more subtle ways..that he's now doing--he's getting quite clever.

This description presents the insider's view of one example of how the wife of an alcoholic composes and lives out an inauthentic existence in relation to her husband--part of constantly being on guard. Constantly being on guard is a common theme and will be examined in the second section of this chapter.

Ann

Portrait of Informant

Ann immigrated to Canada from Britian shortly after her marriage 32 years ago. The couple's 2 grown children live in separate cities out of the province. Even though they

are still married, Ann and her husband live in separate quarters in a fashionable home they have occupied for four years--located in a quiet neighbourhood near the ocean on the outskirts of town.

It is important to Ann that she maintain her job as a medical secretary, where human contact gives her a respite from her isolation at home. Ann likes to dress informally and wears casual loose clothing. She has short curly hair which is a mixture of light brown and silver. Her sparkling blue eyes and clear fair skin refer back to her British ancestry.

Ann's exposure to alcoholism was not new--her father was an alcoholic. Despite the family history, she was married for 28 years before she integrated a new meaning around her husband's frequent drinking and erratic behavior. The information on alcoholism in the brochures she obtained from a drug and alcohol centre was congruent with her sense that her husband could be an alcoholic.

Back in the early 1970's Ann and her husband saw a Psychiatrist for marriage counselling. A few years after that she started regular visits to her family doctor for anxiety and depression--she did not tell her doctor about her marital difficulties. Almost 2 decades later, she attended a co-dependent group for 8 weeks and then had a few sessions with a private counsellor. It was only recent that Ann became involved in Al-Anon.

Setting the Stage for the Ethnographic Interview

Ann heard about my study from a friend and telephoned me to ask if she could participate as an informant. She liked the idea of teaching me about the culture of alcoholics wives and we agreed on a time to meet the following week.

A week later, I arrived for the first ethnographic interview at Ann's residence. I noticed her hair was wet. She has just showered and seemed hurried--having realized only moments before that she had forgotten to change her clocks for Daylight Saving Time. Ann showed me to the living room and then excused herself to complete her grooming while I set up the tape recorder. The space in the room was intruded by large pieces of oak furniture and seemed out of harmony with the free movement of the ocean's waves seen in the distance outside the sliding glass doors.

Prior to starting the interview, Ann pointed out a door at the end of a short hallway which was covered with a removeable bookself. As Ann described the meaning behind this removeable wall, she seemed embarassed--for two years her husband had been living in separate quarters on the other side--not visible to the outsider. Freedom of space was only temporarily created by opening the door prior to the arrival of any visitors.

After getting acquainted and comfortable, the conversation moved into deep levels of descriptions of Ann's experiences as an alcoholic's wife. As we talked, Ann occassionally stood up to re-enact some of the scenes she was describing: This method of presentation offered me vivid glimpses into her life-world. After the interview had ended and we stood at the front door, Ann motioned her eyes toward the bookshelf--her voice changed to a quiet whisper.

As Ann greeted me when I arrived for the second interview, her comments centered on her observation that the Al-Anon book she was holding in her hand made no mention of grief--she believed grieving was an important aspect of the alcoholic's spouse's experience. The rapport established between us created an atmosphere of trust which allowed Ann to present rich descriptions of her life as our talk moved between memories of her lived experience of the past and more recent present.

Description of a Small
Slice of Time

Reconstructing meaning of an emergent violent emotionality has been difficult for Ann to integrate as part of her life-world. She said to me, "I started to feel and I actually had these visions if I had a knife that I'd want...and I started to think, `My God. You know it's time you did something' because I was getting violent." Ann went on to describe recollections of a time in the distant past

when the anticipation of tranquility with her young family was severed by her husband's drunken behavior:

> There have been times when I've felt this [anxiety] severely. I've actually [reached] a point, and it just comes to mind right now, years ago when we were at the cottage. There was a horrible scene and I can remember that night I didn't sleep all night and my stomach was just, I could feel it...like your whole insides were just upset and I can remember that next morning and I walked up to [him] and I said, `If you have a drink today I'll kill you.'....I literally felt...I look at it now and think I should have got in my car and gone home....it's not easy when you are somewhere and some person gets out of control...to get in your car and leave him sitting there.

Ann is sharply conscious of her violent reactions being connected to an extreme sense of frustration when her husband relates to her in a disinterested, detached manner. She told me, "it's like knocking your head against a wall--you can never can get through to him." When Ann remembers how she directed her frustration at her children she is filled with remorse. The themes: constantly being on guard, and being in a pit are woven from this strand of experience. These two common themes will be discussed in the following section of chapter 4.

Five women married to alcoholics have been introduced in the first section of this chapter so that the reader will capture a glimpse into each of their life-worlds. By weaving together portions of the womens recollections and reminiscences, I have discovered three recurrent common themes. These common themes, described in the following section of this chapter are:

(1) Constantly Being on Guard

(2) Being in a Pit

(3) Push and Pull

The Themes

To the outsider, each of the five alcoholics' wives may appear normal by society's standards; most of them have raised families, have been in their present marital relationships for over twenty years, and have held a steady job. An understanding beyond this outsider's view requires an interpretation of the wife's life-space as experienced within the realm of the alcohol-dominated world she shares with her husband. It appears that the wife's experience of temporality and emotionality has been distorted through years of interactional experiences woven through her husband's "alcoholically altered stream of inner consciousness" (Denzin, 1987, p. 18). Metaphors of "not living a normal life" are frequently used by each of the women in their narratives. In fact, this is an important part of their tacit cultural knowledge.

These women's lives are not meant to represent alcoholics' wives in general but rather the life-spaces of five women married to alcoholics. As I worked through the material, weaving together similar threads of their lives, I was able to create a tapestry of three themes representative of the five women's lives. The themes are:

(1) Constantly Being on Guard

(2) Living in a Pit

(3) Push and Pull

I will consider each of the themes in turn.

Constantly Being on Guard

In contrast to normal relationships where love and affection bond two individuals, the alcoholic relationship is experienced as painful emotionality on a daily basis. Interacting with her alcoholic husband, the wife must determine whether her husband has been drinking or whether he is sober.

> The `sober' [situation] produces one set of definitions regarding accountable and nonaccountable violent, emotional conduct. The `intoxicated,' of `he has been drinking' [situation] produces another set of meanings and interpretations. These two frameworks may exist side by side in the same interactional situation. (Denzin, 1987, p. 138).

For the wife, composing a life means integrating the ambiguous meaning surrounding these interactions. Fear and confusion, as Jackson (1956) observes, fills her emotional field of experience in anticipation of what phase of the drinking cycle her husband will be in.

When I asked Ann how she would describe her life with her husband she gave me an example of having to be on guard when she told me:

> It's extremely stressful...you don't really know from one minute to the next just how things are going to be.

> There's never any consistency. There's constant up and downs-like a roller coaster....you're constantly in a state of tension. There's always tension or anxiety floating around you.

After years of trying to make sense of her alcoholic husband's inconsistent behavior, the wife's inner world in terms of emotionality and temporality has been reconstructed--she dwells in the future--fearful of future interactions with her husband. Violent emotionality, in the form of emotional and physical abuse is part of each woman's experience.

Debbie told me about being on guard whenever she anticipated her husband's arrival home from work. She said, "you're constantly in fear, not knowing what kind of a mood the person is going to be in when they come in the door because alcohol usually changes you so much."

In her narrative, Karen spoke about having to constantly be on guard around her husband's "irrational" behavior. She described to me the events that took place one evening following a "bit of an argument" the couple had been engaged in. She had just gone to bed in her own bedroom. Witness the following account:

> I become very, very scared because I'm not sure whether or not he's going to be abusive. I've almost accepted the verbal abuse. The physical abuse is quite new and I'm finding it really, really scary....he walked into my bedroom after I was in bed. I wasn't sleeping because I heard him come up and already my heart was pounding, it really, really was, and he...leaned right over and practically touched me, and said, `Goodnight asshole!' Well I mean to me that is not a normal way to live.

Other forms of violent emotionality were described by each of the women I interviewed. Debbie said to me, "I was constantly on guard...I could never relax around him because if I show any vulnerability he seems to able to sense that and use it to his advantage."

Mary was shocked when her husband recently "backhanded" her after she responded to his question about setting the alarm clock. Mary is always "walking on eggs" when she is with him because of his sudden outbursts of anger. She told me her husband has recently stopped drinking and is "going through withdrawl". There is no way that she can approach him about his anger. She said:

> His temper at times is violent almost, not to the point of hitting but it's a violent surge of anger. (cries)..I want to say, `What's wrong with you? Why are you doing this?' But, after that, having had a backhander once, I wouldn't dream of it in case he might do it when he's not drunk. Ha, Ha, Ha. You know, when you've been struck once that's enough.

In the five womens' descriptions of being on guard, each of them used the terms artifical and superfical to describe how she experiences her life-space of negative emotionality. Over time, the wife's verbal exchanges with her husband are shallow, meaningless monologues. Buber (1947) used the term `reflexion' to describe an artificial interchange as "the mysterious intercourse between two human worlds [as] only a game....In the rejection of the real life confronting [her], the essence of all reality begins to disintegrate" (p.42). Eventually, the spouse of the

alcoholic has learned to suppress her emotions and finds herself living an inauthentic life. Frankl (1986) wrote, "consistent suppression of intrinsically meaningful emotional impulses because of their unpleasurable tones ends in the killing of a person's inner life" (p.111). Each of the women learned to remove herself emotionally from her husband's behavior.

Debbie told me, "Whenever I saw that change in him I knew it was going to be bad for me so I immediately get very defensive and very removed because you're protecting yourself, getting all ready to fight off the hurt". She went on to describe how she keeps her feelings inside and said, "I don't know if you can put a fire inside an icicle....all the feelings you're experiencing-all these emotions--but outside you're just hard and cold because you've got to protect yourself."

Living an inauthentic life was explicitly described by each women. In our conversation, Karen told me she never talked to anyone about her painful feelings and that her feelings were "almost" concealed from herself. She said:

> I was a person walking around with a shell, dressing really nicely, making sure that my hair was always really nice and so on and so forth. My make-up was always really nice so that no one would see the inner....I mean I was perfect at putting on that show...perfect (voice drops to soft whisper)....I guess I was doing everything on the surface and almost my feelings were probably almost in the deep freeze, right?

Louise's descriptions of the conversation in which she and her husband engage each evening after dinner, were filled with images of empty space. She told me, "It's kind of pathetic when I think about it in these scriptual terms, but it's courtesy on my part and almost ingratiating on his part." She went on to say, "There's seldom any input on my part. I would be exchanging some information but primarily you would be hearing him talk."

I noticed a pervasive lack of trust interwoven throughout each woman's descriptions of having to constantly be on guard with her husband. The loss of trust grows with every negative interaction. Trust, a necessity to human social life, as Bateson (1990) observed, is not easy to maintain when the emotional field the wife shares with her alcoholic husband is one of fear and anxiety.

It is not easy for Louise to trust her husband. Because he often distorts the truth she is always "walking a tight rope" in interaction with him. Moments of intimacy turn to confusion and mistrust when she senses his subtle methods of control. Louise told me about a time her husband drove her to work after she had missed her bus. When he put his hand on her knee and asked her for lunch, she was tacitly aware of being on guard of his motives:

> On the way to work we're driving along and it's a lovely day and then he touches my knee and says, `We should have lunch-how about lunch today?' I feel this feeling that I can't identify...what I see, that's going on, like the whole thing is a perfectly normal

> loving thing, but that's not how I feel....I gave a polite response that I had to juggle around.

In this example, Louise's implicit awareness of not trusting her husband, was made explicit when she used two metaphors- "being in a void" and "an empty black space"--to describe her experience of spatiality in relationship with him. She went on to say, "[it] feels like when you look at the stars at night--it's black and empty, yes, empty. That's what the void is...it's a lack of trust."

As the women talked to me about being on guard as part of their life-space, I noticed that for each of them, all in their mid-life, the male-female relationships have been characterized by a disparity of power--weighed heavily on the side of the husbands. I am reminded that in our society, gender issues related to male superiority and female inferiority are only recently being addressed. Bateson (1990) wrote, "issues of female inferiority still arise for virtually every woman growing up in this society" (p.39). The above examples of being on guard that were explicated from the women's descriptions, reflect each of the five women's tacit cultural knowledge that her existence within her marital relationship is experienced as powerless.

This research project is not intended to identify the power imbalance in the marriages as the cause of the violent emotionality in the alcoholic relationship. Denzin (1987) said the alcoholic ignores rules of social conduct by engaging in verbal or physical violence or both. It seems

likely from the five women's descriptions, alcohol fosters the males tendency to go beyond cultural inhibitions towards violence.

Bateson (1990) wrote about women in our society working to change the imbalance in male-female relationships since the late 1960's and early 1970's by expecting equality where growth is fostered and the relationship affirmed through a sense of collaboration and trust. Each of the five informants entered traditional marriages at a time when inequality within the marital relationship was expected (Bateson, 1990). They learned "to avoid even the appearance of equality lest it threaten the marriage and lead to competition and conflict" (Bateson, 1990, p. 109). But for each alcoholic's wife I interviewed, asymmetry in the marital relationship turned to distorted forms of exploitation.

In her narratives, Debbie told me that she was on guard each time she achieved public recognition for her creativity and hard work as an artist--she was sharply aware that she had to keep her accomplishments hidden from her husband. The following description from my talk with Debbie, illustrates how she had to thwart her successes in order to protect her husband's ego.

> Yeah, I would kill myself at home, like, cooking and cleaning and doing everything at home and he didn't do anything. And, you didn't dare ask....I have to hide everything I do. I hide every success that I have because I'm always worried that he's going to feel

> insecure and I know his reaction in the past to my successes. I'm always measuring him against myself because he's...really talented himself but he can't say, `Well, you're good here and I'm good here'. He says, `You're good here and I'm the only one that's supposed to be good.'...he gets scared that way....When I grew up the fellow was always, you catered to what he wanted.

I have examined the theme of being on guard as experienced by the wife of the alcoholic within the interactional space of the alcohol-centered relationship. I sketched the various scenarios that flow from the interactions, with their underlying fear, anxiety, and lack of trust. I also presented a deeper cultural meaning to these interactions in terms of male-female relationships. I will turn now to the theme of being in a pit and examine some aspects of the wife's weakening of self within the alcohol-centered relationship.

Being in a Pit

> You have a picture of yourself as you want to be and I wanted to be independent, I want to be respected. I want to be a strong person and a sensitive person. You have all these visions of...the ideal person and you've started to be that way and, being married to a drunk, you lose all those things. You don't want other people to know that you've lost it. You only want people to see the way you want to feel about yourself, but probably not the way you are.

The above statement by Debbie during one of our conversations, introduces the theme of being in a pit--the experience of a weakening of self within the alcohol-centered relationship and how this loss relates to each of my informant's cultural learning of being a woman in

society. I will discuss how the alcoholic's wife finds herself trapped in the pit through the erosion of self in relationship with her husband and through the cultural myths she lives by.

Von Eckartsberg (1986) wrote, "Persons are not selves separated from their world which is presumed to exist completely independently of them. Rather, they are personal involvements in a complex totality network of interdependent ongoing relationships which demand response and participation." (p. 12) Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) found that women tend to define themselves in terms of their relationships and connections to others. Living with an alcoholic who could "never succeed in bringing the "I" of his inner existence into the interactional world of others" (Denzin, 1987, p. 114), compounded by his contrasting emotionality, contributes to the wife's constant difficulty with having an identity within the relationship and in the outside world.

It is not easy for each of the wives to have a strong sense of herself when she is constantly being subjected to her husband's violent emotionality. Each violent interaction tends to erode her self-concept. As Karen and I were talking about her recent struggle to return to university after 20 years absence, she said to me:

> We have been used to being called down, to being led to believe that we're no good, that we can't do anything properly-everybody else can do things better than you

> can. It was pretty hard to all of a sudden decide you're going to get this ego up on your own and really try to prove that you aren't all those things.

For Debbie, being in a pit meant a state of confusion each time she was subjected to her husband's subversive behavior. After each confusing interaction, she would spend days of loneliness trying to reconstruct meaning in relation to self. She described a step to being in the pit:

> My whole life was confusing...he still all those years said how much he loved me and I was the world to him...I had that on the one hand and then how he acted was so different....He would make demeaning comments to me...this is part of the step to being in a pit. He would always test what he could do to me and see how far he could go...if I suffered he would go a little bit further....You get to the top of the slimy wall of the pit, thinking you could see daylight again, then something completely crazy would happen and you'd go back down again and try to sort yourself out.

Being the wife of an alcoholic is not the only reason that each of these five women struggled with her sense of self. Bateson (1990) observed that in our society, women have a tendency to believe messages of unworthiness and disdain which lead to a vulnerability to distorted perceptions of themselves.

Debbie, in her narratives told me about "falling into the habit" of believing everything her husband said.

> I'd never look at him having a problem, always turn it to me. There's something lacking in me that made him not want to come home....yeah, I just felt like it was almost like a pit. and like I took his word for everything. Like looking back on it....like he was some sort of god. He knew everything and whatever he said I believed.

Karen spoke about how she had arrived at believing she would fail an upcoming final exam:

> The weekend before I wrote those exams [he] was awful to me. Just awful...just adding every bit to me to make me feel really, really low. Well, I went to my first test and I mean I blew it. I didn't even have any oxygen in my brain.

Bateson (1990) also reported that women in this society learn to assume a victim mentality and are often targets of blame, especially in situations of vulnerability. This victim mentality, places the alcoholic's wife in a vulnerable position to receive her husband's and others blame for everything wrong in the relationship. Findings by Asher (1988); Denzin (1987); and Maisto, O'Farrell, McKay, Connors, and Pelcovits (1988) support this dynamic of blame found in the alcohol-centered relationship.

Being in a pit for Mary meant an experience of isolation each time a friend or relative invalidated her experience of living with an alcoholic. Mary bears the scars from the time her sister-in-law turned against her, reminding her of the close relationship she thought they shared:

> Well, I got blasted. I was given my whole character. I was told that I was the wrong person for [my husband] and she'd never known it all these years and now she felt that it would be a good idea if I divorced him....`He's not an alcoholic and he never has been and he never will be. It's because he's living with you.' (cries) You tend to blame yourself this way anyway....But you see, the thing is that the woman has to deal with this all the way through....I am now being blamed by the people I thought I was closest to.

Bateson (1990) observed that women are too ready to accuse themselves of being failures. This predisposition for self-blame tends to be exaggerated in alcoholic's wives when they experience shame, guilt, and isolation in their failure to control their husbands deviant behavior. Driven to maintain the social status of having a `normal' marital relationship, as Jackson (1959) observed, they take on the role of `enabler' (Denzin, 1987) to meet the ordinary demands placed upon the alcoholic. A spiral of self-blame and of responsibility for the marital relationship keeps the wives in the pit.

In her recollections, each informant presented images of shame and embarrassment in connection with her husband's public display of drunken behavior. It was not easy for Ann to hide her shame with her husband's "bizarre" drunken behavior during one evening spent with her brother-in-law and his wife. She said:

> Well, that night I felt really embarrassed. My brother-in-law said something [and] my husband went off on a tangent completely in another direction. This was part of the tension...I could see it and I stood up--and he wouldn't have shut up if I hadn't done that--but then I feel that I'm taking control and, you know taking responsibility for [him].

Incidents such as this have humuliated Ann to the point where she avoids social situations with her husband if he has been drinking. During our conversation, she said, "He's a reflection on me." Social isolation is, for Ann, part of her experience of being in a pit.

"Shame requires the existence and awareness of an interpersonal space, a space `in which there is at least one whose judgment counts'" (von Eckartsberg, 1986, p. 130). When I interviewed Debbie, I was sensitive to her fear that others might discover the `inside' story of her marital relationship. Our conversation included topics she had never disclosed before. She told me, "I didn't want people to know that I'm the kind of person who'd be married to this kind of person." When Debbie explained how her terms "secret" and "hidden" were used differently, I discovered some of her tacit cultural knowledge related to the cultural contradiction she lived by--to project the image of a `normal' marital relationship to the outside.

> `Hidden' is that you don't want people to know how much he drinks. Like you keep the bottles in the cupboards, you don't let anybody know how much alcohol is being abused. Just being an alcoholic is not a nice thing to be so you hide the fact that your husband is an alcoholic. `Secret' is things that he does that are horrible that you don't like that I could almost say are immoral (voice breaks)....It's not like you're hiding a fact but you're, when you're secretive, you're covering up something...if anyone knew you'd feel dirty (fights back tears).

Spradley (1975) wrote, "In our society it is a cultural rule that males do the central, important tasks in the division of labor while females do the supporting tasks" (p 49). Even though each woman gave first priority as nurturer to her traditional gender role linked to homemaking (Bateson, 1990), as the `enabler' she also took on many responsibilities traditionally assumed by the male. This

loss of boundaries around responsibilities--a diffusion of her sense of where her self ends and her husband's self begins--adds to the wife's loss of identity.

For Karen, home used to be a joint composition where she and her husband shared traditional male-female roles. She pointed out that for the past 5 years she managed many of the jobs that in the past her husband undertook. During our talk, she tried to imagine how a `normal' marital couple would share different household tasks:

> I imagine that there would be more cooperation between one another and that just doesn't happen here....I wonder if I have fallen into that role. You know, things aren't getting done so instead of not letting them be done I have taken over....I'm wondering if I've almost become a caretaker, you know, looking after, you know, if the lawn's not done, instead of just letting it be, [Karen] goes out and does it...rather than accepting the fact that it's really someone else's responsibility..

The pit is a "private world of insulated madness" (Denzin. 1987, p. 146) protected from the outside by soft, padded, moveable walls where, as Denzin observed, the wife's identity is molded into a dependency on the alcohol-dependent relationship, and her self becomes entrenced and intertwined into that of the alcoholic self. Debbie told me:

> I lost my sense of identity completely...isolation helped create the environment where I could no longer see myself or grow or I couldn't...strange...when I was isolated with him I wasn't isolated as a person...I was just isolated with him...and I started gradually losing all sense of what was important to me.

Debbie went on to describe her loss of self as she became "completely coccooned in loneliness"

> It's like there's this little cloud all around it and it was soft in there and that was where I was lonely....Like soft-because you could push on the walls and they'd move-it wasn't really-it was a trap but it wasn't a trap that you would fight to get out of...it wasn't a real place....It got worse after the kids left...because I had people to love and we talked and it just brought life into the house and after they left it was just [my husband] and me and more and more I had to face that we didn't have anything and obviously I didn't face it because I kept trying to make something out of the hell we had. I kept trying to think it was a good marriage and I had run out of excuses to stay.

Each of the five women has lost her freedom in the pain of her loneliness. Caught in a spiral of isolation and insulation that involves a weakening of self and an ambiguous sense of what is real and unreal, the wife believes she is unable to change. This loss of freedom reflects not only her dependency on her alcoholic husband but also her cultural knowledge aimed at solving the problem that would arise from confronting the possibility of facing life on her own.

I have analyzed the meaning of being in the pit for each of the five women. I examined the centrality of the weakening of self embedded within this meaning. The various scenarios that emerge from being a woman in an alcohol-centered marriage, with its self-blame, guilt, shame, isolation, responsibility, and victim mentality, were also outlined. I will now turn my attention to the theme of push

and pull as I trace the five women's struggle with issues relating to change.

Push and Pull

> `Insulate' is what he tries to do. I think of that as soft padding like words and flowers, stuff like that and nice gestures, pushing, wolf in sheep's clothing kind of stuff. So I think of `insulate' as soft stuff. `Isolate' I think is the result of trying to do that--and all of the stuff about pulling and straining is the fact that I think it's just everyone's nature, either you give up or you fight. I guess the pulling is the fighting....No wonder I have all this terrible indecision [about leaving the marriage] when in fact I do have all this padding....It's hard to see the forest for the trees. (field conversation, April 25, 1991, Louise)

This excerpt illustrates the powerlessness that dominates the lives of the women I talked to and predisposes them to conflicts around issues of dependence-independence (Rubin, 1979). Rubin reported that most women experience conflicts especially at mid-life, around independence, separation, and individuation largely as a result of socialization processes that encourage dependency and passivity in women. However, these conflicts seem exaggerated for the alcoholics' wives, who for years have lived in marriages referenced by a cycle of dependency, which makes escape extremely difficult. Denzin (1987) explains this spiral of dependency and powerlessness in terms of the interaction between the alcoholic's desire for control in his world and his wife's role as enabler. Not surprisingly, each of the informants, whose self had been weakened after years of living in the

pit, faced an insurrmountable struggle to "break through the barrier" of this spiral with her attempts toward individuation and autonomy. The interplay between the socialization processes and participation in an alcohol-centered marriage contributes to confusion and fear when the wife moves toward separation. All this suggests a complexity in the interaction between each woman's internalization of cultural expectations and her experiences. In the theme of push and pull, I explore this interaction in relation to the five women's difficulties around issues of change.

Denzin (1987) found that the alcoholic, who lives with a distorted perception of self and other, eventually moves deeper into isolation from the `real' world and "becomes an outsider to society" (p. 196). It appears that as the husband becomes less engaged with the `outside' his dependency needs on his wife are increased. "Because [the wife] is embedded within the socially constituted meanings of [her] common sense world, [she] is explicitly aware neither of the taken-for-granted nature of this reality nor how [she] constitute(s) it." (von Eckartsberg, 1986, p.9) Indeed, the wife's knowledge of her husband's alcoholically-clouded stream of consciousness that pushes him toward increased isolation is implicit. The meaning she derives from this isolation is comprised of powerlessness, embedded with guilt. The centrality of isolation in the alcoholic

relationship is revealed in the following statement by Debbie. She was talking about how eventually everything in her relationship seemed to lead to isolation. I then asked her to describe different ways of being isolated in relationship with her husband.

> I feel that it was even physical isolation....At one time when I had three couples--three women I was particularly close to at work and their husbands--we used to socialize a lot....He didn't like that even though he was always included and so he came up with the idea that for a year we wouldn't see anybody but each other. You know, and that was definitely isolation and I agreed to that....He would say things that would make me feel guilty if I didn't just want to be with him, come up with all sorts or reasons why I shouldn't even want to be with other people.

The above statement supports Denzin's (1987) observation that the self-centered, self-seeking alcoholic experiences a terrifying, desperate loneliness that pervades all emotional relations with others. The wife is confronted daily with her husband's clinging, dependent behavior--often manifested subtly in distorted forms of control. The following account speaks to this feature of their shared life. Louise has to "fight a huge war" against her husband's forms of control in her struggle to be more independent. She speaks the following:

> I'm trying to remember some night when I went out, he talks about how he misses me and it sort of, he's just trying to crowd me in, to make my world small. Like [he says] my friends, whichever ones I bring home, which I stopped doing years ago, [that] they're all trying to dominate me, for example. That's trying to insulate me so that I have no friends and only do his things....Like if we were joined at the hip I'm sure that we'd live happily ever after--which is a lie of

> course....He insulates me because he's afraid of missing me.

It is no wonder that each woman believed she was "weak" and "not strong enough to leave." In addition to the marital pressure toward dependency, the socialization processes that tend to groom women for a lifetime of dependency and passivity (Rubin, 1979) add to the difficulty to change. Karen told me, "When we first got married I was a very passive person--I did not argue back at all." During our conversation, Karen associated passivity with fear of change:

> I think when you speak to other [alcoholics' wives] like basically we're all scared of change. We're all scared to step out of the roles that we're in because we feel that we can't look after ourselves because they're looking after the money....[He] looks after all the bills; he looks after everything.

Rubin (1979) observed that women's early experiences of powerlessness gear them to a lifetime of conflict around issues of dependence-independence and of struggle to develop separate personal boundaries in their relationships. Rubin added that if a woman had been raised in a culture that valued her for her independence, she wouldn't experience fear each time she moved in that direction. Any moves toward autonomy are often met with responses that "bring her back--albeit ambivalently--into compliance with the wishes of those on whom she must depend" (Rubin, p.154).

This was true for the women I interviewed. It was not easy to achieve autonomy when the need for love and security

was often withdrawn by various forms of subversive behavior by the husband. The following account addresses this aspect of the wife's experience. When Debbie tries to assert her needs, her husband proceeds to either walk out the door or not talk to her. Childhood experiences of insecurity and fear are evoked each time this happens:

> He would go directly from work to the beer parlour, and coming home 11:00, 12:00 at night, and I didn't even think I had the right to say, `You can't do this.' All I did was, you know, get upset....He would manipulate a conversation into an argument and then sometimes he'd just walk out the door with his cigarettes and not come back....[This all] started with my mom years ago. She used to...stop talking to us if, as children, like for two weeks, if we did anything wrong....So when [he] would walk out or not talk to me when he was angry I probably had a good start in that before I ever got married to him....[I felt] scared and threatened...that he would not love me and he would leave.

Within the alcohol-dependent marriage, the role the wife assumes as enabler with its accompanying focus on her husband's alcoholism, adds to the independence-dependence struggle. From his research, Denzin (1987) observed that by rescuing the alcoholic, the other becomes entrapped in the dependency cycle:

> The alcoholic relationship solidifies into a set of reciprocally expected, alcoholic identities that center on alcohol and drinking. Spouses...become enablers and coalcoholic dependents in the relationship....They become dependent upon the alcoholic's dependency and mold identities that place them in a "helping" relationship...(p. 142).

As stated in the previous theme, it seems that socialization processes for women that lead to a sense of responsibility and to self-blame contribute to the wife

assuming the role of enabler. Women alone bear the burden of keeping the marriage intact, often putting aside their needs for the sake of marital stability (Rubin, 1979). Women have traditionally been raised to be more other-centered than autonomous and tend to direct their energy into maintaining a relationship with one person (McBride, 1990). The five women, all from a generation that lived in compliance with the cultural norms that relegated them to domestic concerns understood themselves through care for their families and the nurturance of relationships within them (Bateson, 1990). As a result, the theme of "caretaking and pleasing others" (Asher & Brissett, 1988, p. 346) was woven throughout their lives. It appears that, analogous to the dependency cycle inherent in the alcohol-centered marriage, the role of enabler was cast for each woman by the cultural stereotypes and customs she adhered to.

> [I believed that] to be a good wife you made a good marriage....I made his whole life easy....[If] he was drunk, I would drive. If he was drunk and didn't pay the bills, I'd take a second job and no matter what, I always was there to pick up the pieces and I was always there for, you know, moral support--anything...(Debbie, field conversation, April 18,1991).

It seems too that in the alcohol-centered marriages, these stereotypical demands of nurturance and care were exploited by the husbands' extreme dependency needs-pressing heavily on the wives' sense of responsibility. Debbie spoke to this when she said, "He even resented my closeness with the kids." This seems to run parallel to an observation

made by Bateson (1990) that women in our society are vulnerable to the subversive effects of self-sacrifice. Imprisoned for years of caring for their husbands, the five women were pushed away from independence.

For the women, living with an alcoholic meant "getting out of touch with your needs." Rubin (1979) observed that the power of socialization processes that for generations have trained women for self-sacrifice, prepares them to bear guilt whenever they consider their needs. Guilt, the "dark shadow of responsibility" (Yalom, 1980, p. 276) that can paralyze the willing process, played a central role in each woman's struggle for change. In the following account, Ann's need for intimacy is clouded by self-condemnation:

> Well...you're not communicating verbally, you're not communicating physically....This is where some of the guilt comes in too because I feel that my husband.was much better at showing his affections, more than I ever have. I was more...I was the one that wouldn't openly show it....So I'm sure he's very lonely too. I'm definitly sure he is....This is where I feel for myself...because I feel people that live with alcoholics...get out of touch with [their] needs. I don't really know what they are. I don't even know what I really need....

As women encounter not only the internal pressures toward change but external ones toward stasis, their determination and confidence tends to weaken so that future possibilities are relinquished. This was true for the women. Although conscious of the painful state of their marriages, they were unable to act on their internal struggles toward alteration. Debbie said, "I could have

walked" but speaks of some pressures that blocked her way. Her husband moved out 9 months previous to our conversation:

> I think society did expect women to stay home and either be old maids or else be married or else be a whore. Our roles were cast for us. You didn't seem to be an adverturer or free spirited woman who could be alone and respected....[If I stayed in the marriage] I would be accepted by people and society in general probably....Who would accept me more as a married person? Probably my family (laughs)....Oh yeah, everyone endures marriage [in my family]....Yeah, it makes you a better person in Mom's eyes. The more pain you can live through, the better person you are.

For Louise, external expectations regarding the institution of marriage are deeply embedded in her consciousness. After a number of recent major losses, a flood of suppressed feelings surfaced, forcing her to face the pain of her marital relationship. Louise speaks of her father's influence on her inability to choose divorce:

> It's been a hell of a year...but I think it brought about all of these feelings. It brought them all to a head so I can look at them....I couldn't keep them down any more....And then in January...my father, I thought, was going to die too and he didn't. He's got cirrhosis [of the liver] and I felt at that time that if my father died, somehow...I remember feeling this way and thinking that I would be able finally to be free....I just felt at that time...it would be easy to do that.

Because most women have been forced to suppress and repress so much of their nature, they are fraught with ambivalence and ambiguity when faced with the possibility of disrupting the continuity of their lives (Rubin, 1979). As it is, the alcoholics' wives artificial existence and corresponding "hidden" feelings, may have added to their ambivalence about divorce. When Debbie spoke about her

inauthentic existence, I was reminded of Sadler's (1969) comments that living an inauthentic life reduces risks. Debbie said, "socially it was easy....It was easier in my mind, I think it was easier to live that phoney existence than to strike out on my own..." (emphasis added).

Yalom (1980) wrote, "To decide one thing always means to relinquish something else. One must relinquish options, often options that will never come again. Decisions are painful because they signify the limitation of possibilities" (p. 318). Rubin (1979) found that most women in mid-life fear divorce and are unwilling to take the risk no matter how great the personal cost. Rubin added that in reality, mid-life women reckoning with divorce, face the possibility of financial deprivation and limited social options. Limited social options for single women were a major driving force behind the wives fear of change. Notice the following account told by Debbie about the social limitations of being single:

> It sounds ugly...from what I said that I couldn't see myself as a person--just as half a couple....I think society's geared to--nothing's geared to one....I couldn't even go in a restaurant and have a meal by myself....to feel comfortable as a woman instead of the woman with a man....Yeah, if I had been a man I'm sure I never would have felt inhibited about doing anything....You feel a sense of disrespect from a lot of, well, men especially, if you are a single woman. I mean if I'm out there, a lot of men could make me feel like I wasn't there for all the reasons I was there....[I'm] so inhibited. (sigh) There are so many things that are not acceptable for a woman to do alone.

Decision, as Yalom (1980) observed, means confronting not only freedom but also fearful isolation. Even though she lives separate from her husband in the same house--separated by a door with a removeable bookshelf--Ann chooses to stay financially and socially comfortable as a married woman. She speaks of her fears of divorce:

> Yeah, fear of change, fear of...being out there and just being on your own. Totally. Like even in this situation, even when those doors are shut, I still haven't lost him totally. Like I still know that he's there for me if I need him so I guess I'm not really 100% sure [I could leave]. I guess...I don't want to give it up....When I look ahead I can't always see. I think I'm independent to a degree but yet I don't see myself as one to go out and try the world on my own....There's fear of abandonment...I know financial security. I would have a little difficulty working to support myself...

A major thread woven through the theme of push and pull is disillusionment. Phrases such as, "It's a waste of life", and "It's a big loss" illustrate the women's despair. Future possibilities with their husbands are anticipated with images of loneliness and isolation. All at mid-life, a difficult time for most women, when old roles are shed and priorities reestablished (Rubin, 1979), the women struggle with the reality of being sold a cultural myth of family and marriage. The following account addresses the women's poignant reconstruction of meaning as they come to realize the futility of promises for a better future. Ann told me:

> Futility or pointlessness...I don't know what the word is....I think you get to a point where you do really get that gut feeling that this is not going to change....It's very disappointing and it's probably

> very sad....I see that having a very big influence in my future and in my decisions about my future right now and down the road--retirement and all those things....Total despair....to know that that person can't be depended on....I'm sitting here thinking, after all of these things that I've said, `What am I doing still half in this relationship?'

In the theme of push and pull, I have examined some barriers the alcoholics' wives face when confronting change. Relevant to the interactional effects of their husbands' alcoholism on the wives, I have discussed issues of powerlessness, dependency, and isolation. I have examined how womens' socialization processes exacerbate their conflicts around autonomy and join with these interactional effects to push against the wives' ability to change.

Summary

The three themes are woven throughout the womens' lives. Each of the themes organize the wives' experience around their husbands' alcoholism and cultural expectations. Taken together, the themes refer to an interaction process that focuses on the wives' construction of meaning around their husbands' drinking behavior.

The concepts of emotionality, temporality, autonomy, dependency, powerlessness, trust, self-blame, female inferiority, weakening of self, isolation, loss, separation, and insulation refer to inner and outer forms of experience that make up the womens' essential structures of existence. The themes do not always function at a level of

conscious interpretative strategies but rather structure the wives experience at a taken-for-granted level (Denzin, 1987). As such, the themes reflect my interpretation of five alcoholics' wives being in the world. I now turn my attention to a discussion of this study with implications for counsellors.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The wife of the alcoholic has been my topic. The central research question guiding this analysis of women married to men socially designated as alcoholics is: How do five women live out, interpret, and express the experience of living with an alcoholic husband? It is now necessary to reflect on some aspects of this ethnographic study of alcoholics' wives experience as I have presented it. I will discuss briefly, in turn, the following topics: (1) significance of the study; (2) implications for counsellors; and (3) implications for future research.

Significance of the Study

A basic premise guiding this ethnographic study is that, "Humans are the only animals that do not live in the real world....We live in created worlds of culture" (Spradley & Man, 1975, p. 6). People are shaped by their culture. As an ethnographer, I set out to discover the rules and maps of the culture of women married to alcoholics and provide the outsider with an understanding of the women's world as they see it. Fundamentally, ethnographic research sets out to discover aspects of experience that reflect not only natives' cognitive understanding but also their social-structural reality. The importance of this study is that through my search for some of the rules and

maps of the culture of five alcoholics' wives, I have created a new vision of the inner and outer structures of the womens' experience.

Because I rigorously applied Spradley's (1979) ethnographic interviewing methodology to discover meaning in alcoholics' wives' existence, I illuminated the impact of socialization processes on their experience. The emphasis in ethnography on cultural meaning systems required me to explore not only the inner structures of the womens' experience but also the outer structures influenced by cultural learning and expectations. Also, I broadened the perspective of the alcohol-dominated interactional dynamics of the marital relationship.

My intent was in part to transcend the restricted concept of co-dependency--a `pop' label that has emerged within the past decade. For the purpose of this study I refer to co-dependency as it is used in alcohol treatment programs in relation to alcoholics' wives' difficulties and behaviors centered around their husbands' alcoholism.

This work builds on and adds to a symbolic interaction study by Asher (1988) on the `moral career' of defining oneself as the wife of an alcoholic and on Denzin's (1987) ethnographic/phenomenological study of the alcoholic self. Denzin's study provided important insights into the interactional aspects of the wives' experience. My work explores the five women's experience from a wider

perspective than Asher's or Denzin's. The resulting framework comprises the following themes: constantly being on guard; being in a pit; and push and pull.

I concur with Denzin (1987) who suggests alcoholics' others live in a field of contrasting emotions centered around alcohol-dependent marital interaction. I also agree with Asher (1988) who proposes strong cultural and interactional bases for wives' ways of defining themselves and their problems. Asher challenges co-dependency as an explanatory theme for alcoholics' wives symptomatic behaviors and instead suggests that cultural and interactional factors provide the license for designating them as co-dependent.

Although Denzin's (1987) concept of the wife as `enabler' resembles the idea of co-dependency, his insights into the lived worlds of the alcoholics' others transcend the co-dependency label. Narrowing the perspective to co-dependency has served to divert attention away from the lived-experiences of the wives. Asher (1988) explicitly rejects the co-dependency syndrome as a explanatory theme.

Based on the descriptions from five informants, all at mid-life, I suggest that a cultural conspiracy emanating from socialization processes which encourage women to be passive, dependent, self-sacrificing, and self-blaming has contributed to the phenomenon referred to as co-dependency. Even though enabling behavior, as defined by Denzin (1987)

was described as part of their experience, the women struggled with being labelled as `co-dependent' or `enabler' because of the resulting implications that they were to blame for their husbands' alcoholism. Designating the wives as co-dependent seems to represent a pervasive trend in our society that strips away individuality in favour of what Asher (1988) suggests are "judgments of conditions in the natural world" (p. 335). Instead, what clearly stood out from this biographic study is evidence of a complex interaction in the experience of the alcoholic's wives involving internalization of cultural expectations, weakening of self, and embeddedness in an alcohol-centered marriage.

My interpretation of the wives' experience refers to the cognitive and emotional structures that shape their actions. The concepts of emotionality, temporality, autonomy, dependency, powerlessness, trust, self-blame, female inferiority, weakening of self, isolation, loss, separation, and insulation refer to the inner and outer forms of experience that make up the womens' essential structures of existence.

I have woven five life stories into three themes as presented in Chapter 4. The themes relate to an interaction centered around the husbands' alcoholism and the womens' socialization. These themes do not always function at a level of conscious interpretative strategies but rather

structure the wives' experience at a taken-for-granted level (Denzin, 1987). They are limited by my reflections and interpretation of the wives conduct in the world.

Finally, the ethnographic method offers important contributions to the substantive field of alcohol studies. Except for Denzin's (1987) study on the alcoholic self which revealed insights about the alcoholic's other, an ethnographic methodology has not been used as the route of discovery into the culture of alcoholics' wives. The ethnographic interviewing method and subsequent analysis of the data reveal an in-depth understanding of five alcoholics' wives experiences with emphasis on their meaning centered around their cultural learning. Finally, ethnography discovers the taken-for-granted distinct and different meaning systems people use to interpret experience and generate social behavior. Spradley (1979) wrote that the most frequent difference in perspective is between males and females. Thus, by examining the subtleties of the women's meaning systems concerning gender socialization, I uncovered a rich source of cultural knowledge. I found therefore, that using the ethnographic method allowed me to go beyond individual experience and illuminate cultural structures and processes.

Implications for Counsellors

This study has generated information concerning five women's experiences of marriage to an alcoholic. It is now necessary to discuss briefly some suggestions for counsellors based on my interpretation of five women's descriptions.

With the emergence of the label of `co-dependence' a medical paradigm tends to dominate the treatment and understanding of alcoholics' wives. However, findings from my work suggest that limiting the perspective to an `illness' or `sickness' model diverts attention from factors in society that may contribute to the wives' difficulties. With awareness that internalization of cultural norms and the interactional dynamics of the marital relationship seriously affect the wives' experience, I present some suggestions for counsellors.

First, since the wives experience dependency and powerlessness in marriage and are already vulnerable to these issues through socialization, they present special difficulties for counsellors. Entrapment in an alcohol-dependent marriage fosters fear, particularly fear of change. Counsellors need to be cognizant of and respect alcoholics' wives' immense barriers against change (i.e. suppressed emotions, social pressures, cultural beliefs, weakened self). Should the wives present with painful dilemmas involving separation and autonomy, counsellors need

to consider these barriers and respect the womens' own pace toward change.

Second, consideration of clients' beliefs (eg. blaming themselves for their husband's alcoholism) could offer a larger framework of the presenting problems. Questions such as, "Where did you get the idea that you are a co-dependent"? challenge the wives' tendency to accept blame. Therefore, particularly useful would be counselling strategies that promote figure/ground shifts in perception--specifically those that encompass understanding of problems within the cultural context.

Third, keeping in mind that marital interaction centered around violent emotionality leads to suppression of feelings, I suggest counsellors employ strategies that encourage clients to experience and integrate feelings with behaviors and thoughts.

Fourth, I have some suggestions for counsellors based on my experience with ethnographic interviewing methodology. Integration of ethnographic questioning in the therapeutic interview would shift more emphasis to clients' use of language. This way, clients could be actively involved in shaping meaning of their cognitive maps. Also, ethnographic questioning would elicit valuable descriptions and contrasts of clients experience. Some examples of ethnographic questioning that could be utilized in the therapeutic interview will be discussed in turn.

First, descriptive questioning would elicit clients' representation of some aspect of their world. For example, a mini-tour question that evokes descriptions of a focal event (i.e. a typical time of day) would reveal a rich source of embedded meaning. A focal event is often a metaphor for a way of life (Fetterman, 1989). An example of a mini-tour question is, "Can you run through a typical dinner hour in your home?"

Second, structural questioning would extract similarities between aspects of experience. For example, if a client says, "Being married to an alcoholic means you get out of touch with your needs", a structural question such as, "Are there different ways of getting out of touch with your needs?" would draw out different parts of this aspect of the client's experience.

Contrast questioning seeks differences between parts of experience and would show how clients' conceptualize meaning. For example, rating questions would reveal values clients give to aspects of experience that are in the same category. I used the following rating question during one of the ethnographic interviews. "Okay, so there are three kinds of fear: (1) fear of giving up your financial security, (2) fear of abandonment, and (3) fear of change. Of those three, which would you say is the most important?"

Fifth, I suggest a counsellor training model could be developed that builds on Spradley's (1979) ethnographic

questioning. Integrating ethnographic questioning into counsellor training programs could raise trainees' awareness of the significance of clients' use of language. Trainees could learn how to apply ethnographic questioning as a therapeutic tool for mapping out clients' meaning constructs.

Finally, it seems reasonable to suggest that the concepts of weakening of self, push and pull, and constantly being on guard as outlined in this work may be applied to other circumstances in the lives of women who experience similar problematic behaviors and relationships (i.e. emotional and/or physical abuse.

Implications for Future Research

Previous research on wives of alcoholics has indicated the importance of considering traditional gender socialization in future studies on alcoholics' wives. Even though I did not start out to investigate the subject of gender roles as it applies to wives' experience, it emerged as a suggestive variable. Further studies on alcoholics' wives which investigated concepts such as weakening of self, powerlessness, inauthentic existence, and insulation could offer further knowledge into the impact of cultural expectations on the wives' experience.

There is a paucity of reported research on alcoholics' husbands. A study that considers socialization and alcohol-

centered marital dynamics from a male perspective would offer a wealth of new information to the field of alcohol studies.

The five women in this study experienced despair over lost years of personal fulfillment. A study that focuses on the developmental aspects of women at mid-life would offer important information into the effect of life situations on adult development. A developmental model that accounts for life stressors could then be applied to the area of counselling.

Lastly, in my study a recurring thread of meaning woven throughout the womens' experiences was centered around issues of loss and grief. I did not find any studies reported in the literature that focused on these issues in relation to alcoholics' wives. Therefore, I suggest that future studies that explore issues of loss and grief relevant to alcoholics' wives could offer valuable contributions to the literature.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Letter of Agreement

I hereby give the consent of this agency to support a study entitled: Women's Experience of Being Married to an Alcoholic: A Mini-Ethnography.

I understand that the persons responsible for this study are Dr. Vance Peavy and Miss Betty Banister, University of Victoria, Psychological Foundations, Department of Education, telephone number, 721-7799. Miss Banister has explained that the purpose of the study is to explore the life experiences of women married to alcoholics.

Miss Banister has asked for this agency's assistance in obtaining the names of two informants who meet the above criteria. Participation by the clients will be entirely voluntary. The clients may withdraw from the study at any time. Miss Banister has assured me that precautions for confidentiality and anonymity will be strictly followed with regards to any clients referred by us for the study.

This agency will present the purpose of the study to appropriate clients. Any clients that wish to contact Miss Banister regarding the possibility of participating in the study will then telephone her at 721-7799. During this initial contact Miss Banister will be explaining the purpose and goals of the study and requesting willingness to participate. At this time she will arrange a meeting in the

home of each woman. During the meeting, she will conduct a one hour interview which will be tape recorded.

If I have any questions about the study I can contact Miss Banister or Dr. Peavy by telephone (721-7799).

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU ARE WILLING TO HAVE THE AGENCY SUPPORT THE STUDY, HAVING READ THE ABOVE:

SIGNATURE TITLE

Date:

APPENDIX B

Letter of Consent

I hereby give my consent for my participation in the study entitled: Women's Experience of Being Married to an Alcoholic: A Mini-Ethnography.

I understand that the persons responsible for this study are Dr. Vance Peavy and Miss Betty Banister, University of Victoria, Psychological Foundations, Department of Education, telephone number, 721-7799. Miss Banister has explained to me that this study has the following objective: to understand what it means to be married to an alcoholic--what this experience is like from each woman's perspective. It is hoped that the findings of this study will offer new insights for counsellors who are working with alcoholics' wives.

Miss Banister has explained to me she will tape record and take notes of any interviews she conducts with me. Precautions for confidentiality and anonymity will be taken by coding each interview tape numerically. The tapes will not be identified by name and will be destroyed after the data analysis is completed. Only the research supervisor and interviewer will have access to the tapes.

I am aware that at any time I may withdraw from the study. I may also refuse to respond to any question during the interview. If I have any questions about the study I can

ask Miss Banister at the time of the interview or contact her or Dr. Peavy by phone (721-7799).

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU ARE WILLING TO PARTICIPATE, HAVING READ THE ABOVE:

SIGNATURE DATE

APPENDIX C

Interview #

Demographic Information

Age.....

Race.....

Religious orientation.....

Education completed.....

Occupation.....

Date of marriage.....

Date of any previous marriages.....

Number of children and ages.....

Number of years living in present home.....

Husband's age.....

Husband's education completed.....

Husband's occupation.....

Previous counselling experience.....

Support groups attended.....

APPENDIX D

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OR PROPOSED RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

To: Committee on Research and Other Studies Involving Human Subjects, Office of Research Administration

From: Betty Banister January 16, 1991

Psychological Foundations Home phone:

Department of Education 592-8489

(i) Title of Proposed Research:

Women's Experience of Being Married to an Alcoholic: A Mini-Ethnography

Research Proposal Outline

The purpose of this study is to learn through a qualitative interview method, how women experience living with an alcoholic husband. The women (informants) will be interviewed in their homes and will be asked to describe in their own words, how they each experience living with an alcoholic. The interviewer will ask for more information or description as new terms, phrases, and information emerges from the interviews. During the interview, the researcher will tape record the dialogue and will write down words and phrases the informant uses. The tape recording and notes will then be transcribed into hard text for data analysis. After each interview is analyzed, the interviewer will

return to each informant to clarify and elaborate on the emerging data.

Descriptive analysis will be used. The descriptions will attempt to stay as close as possible to the language and terms the women use as they describe their 'worlds' in relation to their alcoholic husbands.

(ii) Informants

Four wives of alcoholics who have been married for at least one year and who have sought counselling for themselves at a drug and alcohol centre will be asked to participate in the study.

(iii) Obtaining Informants

The directors of two drug and alcohol centres have been contacted by telephone and asked to participate in the study. Each director will receive a copy of the finished proposal after which time a meeting will be arranged with the researcher. A request will be made to have appropriate women referred to the researcher for the study. A letter of agreement (see enclosed) will be signed by each director at this meeting. After receiving the names of informants, the researcher will contact each woman by telephone, explain the purpose of the study and will request participation. A meeting with each woman will be arranged at the time of the telephone contact.

(iv) Voluntary Participation

Each woman will be asked to participate in the study at the time of the telephone contact and again at the initial meeting. Prior to conducting the interview, voluntary participation will be explained verbally by the researcher. Then, each informant will be asked to read and sign the consent form (see enclosed). The informant will be told she can withdraw at any time from the study. She will also be told that she can choose to turn off the tape recorder during the interview.

(v) Confidentiality

Consent forms will be signed by each informant prior to conducting the interview. The identity of each informant will be protected by assigning letters of the alphabet to each transcribed text. The names of the informants will be changed in the transcripts and in the finished text. Once the tapes have been analyzed, they will be destroyed. Only the researcher, one committee member and the supervisor will read the transcribed tapes. The consent forms will be stored in a locked drawer in the researcher's home and will be kept separate from the interview material.

(vi) Possible Risk

There will be no danger of physical risk to informants in this study. The interviewer will be focusing on the terms and phrases used by each informant to describe the experience of being married to an alcoholic. However,

stressful feelings may emerge with the recall of disturbing events. Should emotional disturbance occur during the interview, the interviewer will offer support and empathy and will reflect the feelings that emerge. Following the interview, de-briefing will take place so that the informant can talk about her experience of participating in the interview.

(vii) Explanation of the Study to Participants

The informants will be told prior to beginning the interview, that they will be asked to describe what their experience is of being married to an alcoholic; that what they know of that experience is valuable information. The researcher will inform them that the phrases and words they use in describing their experience will be important to this study and that the researcher will be taking a 'learner' or 'student' role in learning about their experiences.

Informed consent will be obtained by having each informant sign the consent form (see enclosed form).

(viii) Institutions Involved

Alcohol and Drug Program Clinic, Victoria.

1250 Quadra Street

Victoria, B.C.

Phone: 387-5077

This agency will provide two informants for the study. The director will be asked to forward the letter of agreement (see attached) to the Human Subjects Committee.

Summit Drug and Alcohol Centre

203-149 Ingram Street

Duncan, B.C.

Phone: 746-3620

This agency will provide two informants for the study. The director will be asked to forward the letter of agreement to the committee.

(ix) Person designating herself as in charge of the research:

BETTY BANISTER

Signature Date

Supervisor:

DR. VANCE PEAVY

Signature Date

Chairman of Department or School:

DR. DONALD KNOWLES

Signature Date

(x) Additional Information

Approximate starting date: January, 1991

Approximate termination date: May, 1991

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH AND OTHER STUDIES INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Chairperson's signature Date

APPENDIX E

Glossary of Terms

Informant: Is a native speaker, or person representative of the culture under study, who through the use of native langauge, provides information to the ethnographer.

Ethnography: The work of describing a culture in order to understand another way of life from a native point of view.

Culture: Knowledge people acquire to interpret their experience and generate social behavior (Spradley, 1979).

Emic: The natives perspective of a culture which is derived from investigating their language, beliefs and experiences. The emic view is grounded in language use and expressions (Leininger, 1985).

Speech event: A social occasion which is identified by the kind of conversation that takes place. It involves an implicit set of rules of social conduct such as; when to begin, end, pause, ask questions, and how close to stand to one another (Spradley, 1979).

Professional stranger: Refers to the interviewer who has the privilege of obtaining personal information within the context of the interview (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979).

Tacit cultural knowledge: Knowledge about one's culture that is not usually expressed in direct ways. This

tacic knowledge is revealed through peoples' speech, behavior, and artifacts (Spradley, 1979).

Domain: Is a symbolic category that includes other categories--related by at least one aspect of cultural meaning. It is the basic and most important unit used for ethnographic analysis (Spradley, 1979).

Entering the field: The initial part of the interview or meeting. Establishing rapport with the informant is crucial at this beginning stage of the interview.

Double-hermeneutic circle: Both the interview and the interviewee are involved in the interpretation of the cultural reality under investigation. Qualitative research aims to find some understanding between the two.

Folk term: Symbols used by the informant to represent cultural meaning.

APPENDIX F

Universal Semantic Relationships

The following universal semantic relationships as defined by Spradley (1979) are:

(1) Strict inclusion: X is a kind of Y

(2) Spatial: X is a place in Y, X is a part of Y

(3) Cause-effect: X is a result of Y, X is a cause of Y

(4) Rationale: X is a reason for doing Y

(5) Location for action: X is a place for doing Y

(6) Function: X is used for Y

(7) Means-end: X is a way to do Y

(8) Sequence: is a step (stage) in Y

(9) Attribution: X is an attribute...of Y
(Spradley, 1979, p.111)

VITA

Surname: BANISTER Given Names: BETTY MARIE

Place of Birth: CALGARY Birth Date: Feb. 5, 1945

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria 1987 to 1991

University of British Columbia.....1986 to 1987

University of Victoria.....1978 to 1982

University of Alberta.....1966 to 1968

Royal Alexandra Hospital School of Nursing 1963 to 1966

Degrees awarded:

B.Sc. Nursing University of Alberta 1968

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Title of Thesis:

You're Always in a Dream: Ethnographic Study of Women's Experiences of Marriage to Alcoholic Husbands

Author: [redacted]

(Signature)

BETTY MARIE BANISTER
(name)

September 30, 1991
(Date)