

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

Voices from the edges: Tellings of women's spirituality narratives

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of**

**Master of Arts in Psychology
at Massey University**

**Kirstina Cheals
2002**

Abstract

There has been an absence of women's accounts of their experiences in traditional psychology. There has also been an absence of psychological interest in spirituality. However, there appears to be an increased interest, particularly within feminist and social constructionist approaches. This thesis contributes the voices of nine women from Aotearoa/New Zealand as they tell themselves and their spirituality. Four narratives are identified: journey/searching; self-knowing; life trauma/choice point, and fighting for life narratives. The researcher investigates the subject positions produced in these narratives and considers the effects of these subject positions on enabling and constraining women's accounts of spirituality. The narrative approach used in the analysis is informed by Labov's narrative structure and experiential narrative approaches. A Foucauldian approach to power relations informs the reading and writing practice of the researcher.

Acknowledgements

This study represents a year of my time and energy, and without the input of so many generous and wonderful people, this journey could never have been embarked upon...

I wish to thank my participants for honouring me with their stories. Without their willingness to participate, none of this could have existed.

I also wish to thank generations of women who have fought and resisted, in silence and in voice, and who kicked down doors and barriers creating spaces I have been able to speak from.

My thanks to my friends and family for supporting me, making me laugh, inspiring me, believing in me and keeping it real, especially the Wellington crew who kept me sane.

Thanks to my mother for singing me into a strong woman and never putting limitations on who I can be.

And finally, my thanks to my supervisor Mandy Morgan for her inspirational brilliance, her willingness to let me speak from the edges while guiding me through the hazards, and for being a guardian to my wilder thoughts.

Preface – the interconnectedness

Through my thesis I have placed three translucent pages each with an image and quote. These images are all found in ancient archaeology, and my own understanding is that they represent the natural cycles of existence and demonstrate the importance of understanding these cycles. Writing a thesis is a fascinating process and some of the journey cannot be included here. I have therefore introduced another aspect of representation with my academic writing – that of imagery and of expressions of spirituality. I believe that spirituality goes beyond our ability to capture it in words. I have therefore presented three images and three quotes which contribute to making meaning of spirituality. I generated these images quite simply using computer software.

One image is the Yin Yang which comes to us from ancient Chinese philosophy. It may be understood as signifying the moments of Solstice and Equinox, representing perhaps the movement of seasons and the interconnectedness of each, a cycle that is continuous. It has also come to signify masculine and feminine energy, and the completeness of the two, as neither can exist in the absence of the other. Similarly, the triple spiral is found on ancient stone carvings like at Newgrange in the UK, and it may represent the connectedness of the sky, the sea and the land. It may also represent the importance of the number three. The single spiral is found in many aspects of nature, from cellular patterns to galaxy formations. It is found in art forms the world over. So I have included these images to demonstrate spirituality beyond human words.

As each of the quotes suggests, once we name it, we didn't quite capture it, and perhaps our individual lives begin and end in the meaning we place upon things. I think this is a beautiful understanding and I am inspired to include these concepts in my research. We can potentially go beyond structure and constraints and each be inspired to be the highest selves possible. Interestingly the three quotes I have included here have male authors. This was not deliberate in terms of gender, although may reflect the availability of knowledge produced by males.

Table of Contents

		Page
Abstract		ii
Acknowledgements		iii
Preface	The Interconnectedness	iv
Table of Contents		v
Chapter 1	Introduction: Silences and edges	1
Chapter 2	Threads and strands	13
Chapter 3	Method	22
Chapter 4	Analysis: Journey/Searching Narrative	35
Chapter 5	Analysis: Self-Knowing Narrative	47
Chapter 6	Analysis: Life Trauma/Choice Point	59
Chapter 7	Analysis: Fighting for Life	68
Chapter 8	Discussion: Moving beyond binaries	85
Appendices	Appendix A: Goddess Spirituality	89
	Appendix B: Information Sheet	90
	Appendix C: Consent Form	91
	Appendix D: Conversation-style Interview Prompts	92
	Appendix E: Transcribing Key	93
	Appendix F: Letter Back	94
References		95
 List of Insert Pages		
Insert 1	Yin Yang and Muller extract	21
Insert 2	Triple spiral and Knox extract	34
Insert 3	Spiral and Bach extract	84