

APPENDIX

As a direct result of my academic experience in the faculty of psychology at the *Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo* in the state of Michoacán, Mexico and the running of a private clinical psychoanalytic practice I have faced the problematic of female sexual abandonment in the context of migration.

This particular problematic came to form an important part of my work since one of my duties as an academic was the tutoring of students and this included direct intervention to support the academic development and learning processes of students. Once a week, and for a pre-established period, -which is a common practice of the ANUIES (the National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education in Mexico)-¹, a number of female students attended these tutorials and indicated that one of the reasons for their problems in making academic progress was that they lived alone or had to raise one or two children by themselves since they were either married to, or in a relationship with, a male migrant. In the majority of these cases the male migrant (partner) was absent most of the year, returning to Mexico from the United States on a cyclical basis -an average of three times a year- usually to participate in important religious celebrations in the community of origin.²

On the other hand, as part of my private clinical practice I had the opportunity to analyse women patients who in some way had experienced abandonment due to the same migration phenomenon. This female experience, traversed and shaped by a male sexual desertion that, although negative in itself, was neither devastating nor psychically damaging -as the classic psychoanalytic theory of loss, abandonment and mourning establishes-, presented itself as an interesting topic of study since some of its manifestations are essentially subversive in the way they challenge patriarchal constructions of female subjectivity and femininity.

¹ *Programas Institucionales de Tutoría: Una Propuesta de la ANUIES para su Organización y Funcionamiento en las Instituciones de Educación Superior*, 2nd. Ed.

² For a thorough account of the characteristics of cyclical migration and its impact in the family and community social dynamics as well as its differences with the permanent migration pattern, see Robert A. Pastor and Jorge G. Castaneda, *Limits to Friendship: the United States and Mexico* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

As a result of listening to these female patients and students (in their respective contexts and intervention settings), I was often forced to question the clinical strategies I was employing and interrogate psychoanalytic theoretical approaches that established abandonment as a paradigm of mental catastrophe. I considered these approaches inadequate to explain a female experience that was essentially centred on the ambiguous status of simultaneously being in and not being in a relationship. These women were simultaneously single but not single; abandoned but not abandoned.

In order to tackle the unconscious vicissitudes underlying this form of female subjectivity, and since I do not usually keep written or taped records of my patients, I considered the implementation of clinical group work outside the context of my consulting room and office at the University. It was also necessary to establish a research technique that would facilitate the bringing together of both experiences: the tutorial and the clinical, which is to say, a learning process and a therapeutic experience. The practical support granted by the *Instituto Michoacano de la Mujer* (The Michoacan Women's Institute)³ in Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico, was fundamental to this investigative quest and the nature of this support will be explained later.

The Technique and Theory of Clinical Group Work

A) Enrique Pichon-Riviere and the Operative Group.

The clinical group work experience was organized applying the research techniques proposed by Enrique Pichón-Riviere, a Swiss-born Argentinean socio-psychoanalyst (as he referred to himself) whose theoretical approach was based on a synthesis of psychoanalysis and social psychology and who became deeply involved with the enigmas of group dynamics and their role in society. The idea was to break with the traditional

³ The Ministry of Women is a local government institution. Created in 2002, the ministry's responsibilities are principally the formulation, promotion, application and evaluation of public policies for promoting equality between women and men. It is part of this institution's commitments to mitigate all forms of discrimination and ostracism against women in Michoacán, to support gender perspective projects and initiatives in order to facilitate women's development in all areas: political, economic, psychological, educational, social and artistic. The ministry's principal goal is to promote action that may contribute to the prevention, attention, sanctioning and eradication of misogyny and violence against women in whatever form they may appear. For further information on the Ministry's functions see: http://transicion.michoacan.gob.mx/smujer/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=230&Itemid=242 accessed on November 12, 2008.

concept of psychoanalysis as a practice used exclusively for dealing with individual suffering and psychopathology. He wanted to use the basic assumptions of psychoanalysis in a social context so as to understand the behaviour of groups and institutions and their impact and influence on individual psychology.⁴

His most original contribution, based on this synthesis of psychoanalysis and social psychology, is the ‘operative group’. Following the experiential learning and action research techniques of the founder of modern social psychology, Kurt Lewin⁵, Pichon-Riviere proposed the operative group as a technique for social psychology research that promoted an interdisciplinary, cumulative and teaching-oriented methodology. This method developed a ‘learning to think’ process for the resolving of difficulties created and manifested in group contexts rather than individual ones. As he himself describes it, “the technique of these groups is centred on the task, where theory and practice are resolved in a permanent and concrete praxis of the ‘here and now’ of each indicated field.”⁶

The two main hypotheses guiding the operative group technique are: one, the pre-existence within each subject of ECROS (Conceptual Referential Operative Schema)⁷ which are stereotyped structures of thought (collections of experiences, information and affects with which the individual acts and thinks)⁸ that achieve a certain unity through group work and later stimulate the group’s operative referential scheme; and two, that there is an essential similarity between the processes of teaching and learning, on the one hand, and of therapy, on the other. Mexican psychoanalysts Tubert-Oklander and Juan Reyna Hernandez sum up Pichon-Riviere’s position as follows:

⁴ Enrique Pichon-Riviere *El Proceso Grupal: Del Psicoanálisis a la Psicología Social* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 2000), pp. 215-220.

⁵ Action research refers to Kurt Lewin’s use of field theoretic concepts and linked laboratory experiments to applied problems. He directed his theorising, and his research to multiple fields of which problems of democratic leadership and the conditions for effective individual and group growth were paramount. His action research techniques gave rise to a widening concern about ways in which greater knowledge of human behaviour could be used to deal with social problems. See Benjamin, Ludy. *A Brief History Of Modern Psychology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 183-187; Miner, John. *Organisations Behaviour 3: Historical Origins, Theoretical Foundations and the Future* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2006), pp. 79-89; Lewin, Kurt. *A Dynamic Theory of Personality: Selected Papers* (London: McGraw Hill, 1935).

⁶ Enrique Pichon-Riviere, *El Proceso Grupal: Del Psicoanálisis a la Psicología Social*, p. 120.

⁷ Enrique Pichon-Riviere *El Proceso Grupal: Del Psicoanálisis a la Psicología Social*, pp. 215-220.

⁸ Enrique Pichon-Riviere, *El Proceso Grupal: Del Psicoanálisis a la Psicología Social*, p. 110.

He believed in a continuum of feeling, thinking, learning, understanding, and healing, which was organised around the axis of rational action. For him, that was the crux of the matter: only action was able to modify reality, and the goal of dynamic groups was to create the basis for an effective operation, both for the group and the individuals that composed it; hence the name “operative groups”.⁹

This essential similarity means that while pursuing an explicit rational learning task, and therefore an educational goal, individuals involved in an operative group participate in a therapeutic process due to the mobilisation of the inherent imaginary beliefs and assumptions and the stereotyped structures of thought (ECROS) which appear during the group experience. Such mobilisation is therapeutic because it propitiates the operation of symbolic processes that had been obliterated by anxiety, which in the light of Freud’s thinking on this topic¹⁰ is concomitant to any change or new situation experienced by the ego and constitutes a critical component of neurotic behaviour.

Pichon-Riviere’s conceptualisation of the operative group goal is clear:

The final goal of operative groups is, therefore, to attain a higher order learning which transcends the mere acquisition of information and the development of skills. This experience of praxis gives the members an opportunity to learn and to think. This amounts to a major change in their personalities and their interpersonal and social relations.¹¹

The operative group is therefore a technique that can be applied to all kinds of groups: therapeutic groups, small groups, therapeutic communities, multifamily therapy groups, in the supervision and training of psychotherapists, for learning groups and laboratory and workshop groups.

⁹ Tubert-Oklander and Juan Reyna Hernandez de Tubert, *Operative Groups: The Latin-American Approach to Group Analysis* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2004), p. 20.

¹⁰ Freud’s theory of anxiety was always dominated by the problem of the origin of anxiety and its relation to sexual excitation and the libido. It was the analysis of little Hans which brought Freud to a first formulation of anxiety as it being the result of free libido. “The libido which has been liberated from the pathogenic material by repression is not converted [...] but is set free in the shape of anxiety.” Relevant to the argument here is Freud’s isolation of anxiety neurosis as a kind of illness in which psychical working-over of the somatic sexual excitation was absent or done insufficiently. That is, there is a lack of psychical mediation (symbolic mediation) that leads to neurotic behaviour. In Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac, 1988), pp. 37-40.

¹¹ Enrique Pichon-Riviere *El Proceso Grupal: Del Psicoanálisis a la Psicología Social*, p.128.

B) Bion and the Basic Assumptions Group

Basic assumptions group theory was British psychoanalyst W.R. Bion's groundbreaking contribution to the psychoanalytic comprehension of group situations and dynamics. Relying on his accounts of experiences with groups, Bion provided a clinical framework for group psychoanalytic psychotherapy that demonstrated there are certain aspects of individual psychology that can only be explained by reference to the group matrix as the situation creating them. Scottish psychoanalyst and clinician J.D. Sutherland, in his revision of Bion's work, considers the latter's psychoanalytic approach to group dynamics as one that 'permitted the exposure of unrecognised, irrational, and powerful relationships that were specific to the group situation.'¹²

In opposition to Freud's and Le Bon's assertion that intellectual ability in the group was reduced¹³, Bion affirms that even when basic assumptions –which will be briefly explained below- are active, the group performs advanced-level intellectual work in the assimilation of interpretations. "The group as a whole can be seen to operate on certain shared assumptions which lie outside awareness [...] the group events can be seen as the varying and fluid interaction between cognitive and affective aspects of group life."¹⁴

In general terms, what Bion postulates is that there is a group mentality, -the unanimous expression of the will of the group that presents difficulties for the individual in the pursuit of their aims¹⁵-, which can be understood in the light of three basic assumptions, or three recurrent patterns of behaviour, which at the same time maintain an interdependent relation with a group culture. As described by Bion, "a group culture includes those aspects of the behaviour of the group which seemed to be born of the conflict between group mentality and the desires of the individual"¹⁶

The principal endeavour of Bion's theoretical model is therefore to show how the three elements of group mentality, group culture and individual desires - inasmuch as they are interdependent phenomena-, work in practice and in the confines of a 'here and now' group situation where the task to be carried out may be explicitly therapeutic or not.

¹² J.D. Sutherland, "Bion Revisited: Group Dynamics and Group Psychotherapy", *Bion and Group Psychotherapy*, ed. Malcolm Pines (London: Routledge, 1985), p. 57.

¹³ See Freud, Sigmund, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1921), *SE* 18: 72-88.

¹⁴ Patrick B. De Mare, "Major Bion" in *Bion and Group Psychotherapy*, ed. Malcolm Pines, p. 110.

¹⁵ W.R. Bion, *Experiences in Groups and Other Papers* (London: Tavistock, 1961), p. 60.

¹⁶ Idem.

Bion therefore proposes two different meanings for the term ‘group therapy’: the first is therapy for individuals involving the treatment of the neuroses of a number of individuals in a group setting, while the second is therapy in groups subscribing to a planned endeavour to develop the forces leading to smoothly running cooperative activity.¹⁷

The three basic assumptions, which Sutherland defines as ways of dealing with impulses so as to satisfy the defensive needs of group members, compromise formations between impulse and defence¹⁸ which are: pair, fight-flight and dependence.

The first refers to the meeting of two individuals within the group whereby a kind of mutual interest leads to a verbal exchange seen by the other members in terms of sexual intercourse. Every time two people in a group are close to each other, irrespective of their gender, it is assumed there is something sexual between them, both by the group and by the pair concerned. The emotions associated with this idea are also sexual and it seems they can be tolerated by the group indefinitely, although they do lead to considerable conflict between the pair’s desire to pursue their conscious aim and the emotions derived from the basic assumption that two people can only meet for a single purpose.¹⁹

It is a different case for the second basic assumption. The combination fight-flight is the correspondent outcome of the only two modes the group seems to know for self-preservation: attack or flight. The basic assumption is that the group is there for fight-flight so any activity not entailing a fight-flight form tends to be rejected: ‘It is assumed that if the human being as gregarious animal chooses a group he does so to fight or run away from something.’²⁰

The individual feels that the group’s well-being is of primary importance and consequently their own interests and concerns are subordinated, leading to feelings of abandonment. What is most important is the survival of the group, not of the individual.

Lastly, the basic assumption of dependence refers to the idea that the group gathers together to gain security and forms dependence on a leader; on a single individual. This is done in such a way that there is always a special leader in whom anxiety is deposited and from whom they expect salvation and protection. This psychological elevation of one

¹⁷ W.R. Bion, *Experiences in Groups and Other Papers*, p. 11.

¹⁸ B. De Mare, Patrick, “Major Bion”, in *Bion and Group Psychotherapy*, p. 151.

¹⁹ W.R. Bion, *Experiences in Groups and Other Papers*, p. 63.

²⁰ Idem.

person, says Bion, creates difficulties for the ambitious, or indeed for anyone who wishes to be heard, because it means that in the eyes of the group, and of themselves, such people are in a position of rivalry with the leader.²¹

The most easily expressed feelings in the dependence group are anger and jealousy which are derived from a sense of being cheated or starved by the leader while they also feel resentment at being in a dependent position as this inevitably clashes violently with the adult's individual needs.

The Organisation of the Clinical Group Work Experience (Practicalities and Specificities)

My study case was therefore organised as an operative group inasmuch as it was centred on the participants' pursuit of a rational learning task and not an explicitly therapeutic one. This means that participants were not labelled as patients requiring a therapeutic process but as individuals (women) who were invited to join a group learning experience.

On the other hand, the group experience itself was conceived and conducted in relation to Bion's basic assumptions concerning group theory, which means the application of a theoretical understanding of the psychoanalytic principles of group psychotherapy.

At the beginning of October, 2003, I contacted the *Instituto Michoacano de la Mujer* (now known as the Ministry of Women) to obtain information about women who would like to participate in this group experience. The reason for contacting this Institute was its maintaining of records on women in a variety of risk situations, many of whom had been affected by migration.

The only requisite for participation was that these women maintained a sexual relationship with a migrant man. The nature of the bond did not have to be marital but it did need to suffer the effects of absence. In other words, it was important for my research purposes that the women willing to cooperate had experienced abandonment as the result of migration but it was not important to be specific about the period of abandonment or whether it was temporary, permanent or recent.

²¹ W.R. Bion, *Experiences in Group and Other Papers*, p. 80.

By the beginning of November of the same year, the person in charge of the social connections of the Institute had compiled a list with the names of six women who may possibly have been interested. The invitation sent, which was previously agreed with me, offered a weekly space for them to talk about themselves and to learn about their experiences of migration. They were told that participation was completely voluntary and that its initial purpose was to contribute to the development of a research project by a university professor and secondly, but most importantly, to provide them with the opportunity to learn about their own experiences as women and discuss their struggles and plights, where relevant, while involved in a relationship with a migrant. They were also aware of my clinical training so that offered assurance of my ability to lead the group experience.

Once I had the list of names, I phoned the women to agree on the starting date as well as the time and place for the first meeting. From the six people on the list, four replied affirmatively and we arranged a meeting at the home of Ms. M on Friday 21st November at 4 p.m. The group work continued for three months until February 6, 2004.

Of the four women, three had a marital bond with the migrant man and just one was in another form of relationship. Their ages ranged from 25 to 75. One of the youngest participants was studying for a degree, another was studying a technical course and the other two had no formal education, with one being functionally illiterate. This deliberately heterogeneous group composition responded to the principle stated by Pichon-Riviere that a high degree of heterogeneity provides maximum homogeneity in terms of the task accomplishment which is thus translated into a much more efficient group.²²

The task to be accomplished in this case consisted of the reading of a short story and the subsequent verbalisation of any thoughts and feelings, regardless of their apparently immoral, futile or absurd character. The intention was for participants to simply express anything that came to mind freely and without judgment or prejudice in accordance with the psychoanalytic method of free association.

The short stories were selected on the basis of their theme, which needed to be relevant to aspects of the research topic, and thus included stories about the separation of lovers,

²² Enrique Pichon-Riviere, *El Proceso Grupal: Del Psicoanálisis a la Psicología Social*, p. 113.

abandonment, marriage problems and ordeals, female sexuality and the role of women in Michoacán's migrant communities. The titles of the stories were as follows (I will present a brief synopsis of each story in separate footnotes):

- 1) "*La Tejedora*" ("The Spinner")
- 2) "*El Hombre de Hierro*" ("The Iron Man")
- 3) "*Gracias a la Vida*" ("Thanks to Life")
- 4) "*Underwood*"
- 5) "*El Esposo*" ("The Husband")
- 6) "*Una Yunta*" ("A Yoke")
- 7) "*Los Ciclos de la Vida*" ("Life Cycles")

Eight sessions were held and participants were advised that if at any point they wanted to leave they should give advance notice to the group. The roles of the group work coordinator and observer as established in the operative group technique were explained and a psychoanalyst colleague played the role of the observer.

Briefly, the coordinator's role, which was my role, was to orient the individual's participation in order to favour their intercommunication, engagement in the task and avoid aggressive confrontation. The observer, on the other hand, kept written records of non-verbal manifestations, acting-outs and communicated these at the end of each session.

The Group Work Course

Session 1: Friday 21st November, 2003

Participants: Ms. M., Mrs. O., Mrs. B.

For the opening session Ms. M. was in charge of arranging the physical space and the women arrived during the first half hour, although not all those who had confirmed attendance turned up. This unexpected situation offered one of the first insights into the group experience. Assuming that the women who turned up unexpectedly were invited by those who were expected, how was this invitation made? Were the former women's names included on the list handed in by the advisor from the Ministry of Women? If so, why was the non-institutional approach more convincing?

Once we were all together, I framed the conditions for group work: the purposes, method, tasks and commitments. I introduced myself and the observer and highlighted the value of participant collaboration and thanked them for their time and interest. The sessions would last ninety minutes, there would be one per week for a period of three months and everything said during the sessions, I emphasised, would remain strictly confidential.

The first meeting commenced with the participation of Mrs. B, a 65-year-old woman whose sons and daughters were living in Chicago, USA. Her husband had also migrated on several occasions but at the time was living with Mrs. B in Mexico. She was a farmer, with no formal education, living with her husband in a modest household supported by their children. She had travelled several times to visit her daughters and sons and on certain occasions she had been tempted to stay. She had travelled with fake documents and as a result had suffered from paranoid anxiety due to the fear of being caught by border police.

Mrs. B. had been separated from her husband for long periods due to his recurrent migration to the United States. However, she had considered this situation advantageous because she was fed up with her husband's drinking: "Vice spoils everything," she said.

Another participant was Mrs. O.; a working class woman aged roughly 50, who had been a "mojada" (a term used to describe undocumented migrants in the United States meaning "wetback") on more than five occasions. As a result of "furious encouragement" on her part, as she recalled, her children were now living in the United States.

Mrs. O was a fierce critic of education as the way out of poverty, saying education was useless in the country of 'green backs' where being a dentist or having a degree as a school teacher meant nothing, "strong arms and a wide, strong back are what you need."

She was the only one in this session who, before telling us anything about herself, challenged my own interests. She was very anxious about knowing my 'true intentions' and those of my colleague for being there. 'What did we really want to know?' was the line of much of her questioning which included a sense of there being something shameful about the discussions. It seemed to me she thought I considered migration to the United States a shameful activity, so she was trying to show me through her questions

and attitude that I was wrong. This participation hinted at some of the ambivalent feelings and gender patterns regarding migration.

She wanted to say that to be a migrant is something to feel very proud of; she was proud of having been a “mojada” and offered evidence to that effect which included an experience where she had to completely transform herself into a different person to match the photograph of a false document.

Ms. M, at 20 the youngest of the group, was involved in a relationship with a man living as an undocumented migrant in the United States. He had insisted on Ms. M. packing her bags and joining him there, but she said she did not want to go because the moral principles of American society were corrupt: “everybody can do whatever they want”; and there was too much licentiousness, which she didn’t like. She was studying for her undergraduate degree as part of a weekend programme and she was working from Monday to Friday in a government office.

Before ending the session, the observer read out some of the comments she had recorded which were considered the most relevant for highlighting the women’s contrasting experiences concerning migration.

Session no. 2; Friday, November 28th, 2003

Participants: Ms. M., Mrs. Z. and Mrs. B.

Story: “*La Tejedora*” (The Spinner)²³ by: Marina Colasanti

²³ The story concerns a young woman who weaves all day for as long as she likes. She wants for nothing. Every time she needs something she can’t have in the real world, she simply goes to her spinning wheel and weaves it. If she is hungry, she weaves a lovely fresh fish and immediately after doing this the fish is there on the table waiting to be eaten. If she is thirsty she weaves a soft piece of white thread to create a nice glass of milk. At night she sleeps peacefully after weaving her dark coloured thread. Weaving is all she wants to do and all she does. But one day she feels lonely and for the first time thinks it would be nice to have a husband. Without hesitation she starts to mix the threads and colours which would provide company for her. Slowly but surely her wish takes shape: a feathered hat, a bearded face, a well proportioned body and shiny shoes. When she is about to finish the last stage of the figure somebody knocks on the door. She doesn’t need to open it to know who is there; the young man takes off his feathered hat and enters her life.

As soon as her new husband becomes aware of the spinning wheel’s power, he can’t stop thinking about the wonderful things he could possess. So he asks his wife to weave castles, fancy clothes, gold caskets and all kinds of wealth. These wishes keep the young woman weaving and prevent her from being happy. She then decides she was better off alone and should return to her former life. One day, just before dawn, she begins to unravel the castle, the animals, the farm and the servants. When dawn is about to break her husband wakes and is surprised by how hard the bed is. Frightened, he looks around but cannot stand because she has already begun to undo his shoes and he can see his legs and feet vanish. She smiles once

This session started late because the participants arrived late. Mrs. O sent her apologies for not being able to attend this time, and as it turned out she never returned.

A new participant joined the group without previously being announced, a Mrs. Z. who was aged 25 and was married with a husband living in the United States. He had left two years previously leaving behind his wife and a newborn. Mrs. Z. said that joining the group appealed to her because she wanted to have something else to do besides looking after her young child. She worked for a theatre group as an accounting assistant and was willing to share her experiences with other women who were married to migrants.

The theme of the discussion then shifted towards the reasons why participants had joined the group. Ms. M said she accepted the invitation to participate because she wanted to share her experiences and hear what others had to say. It helps, she said, “to listen to other points of view”. Mrs. B. agreed with what the other two women said about their reasons for accepting the invitation.

In order to get on with the task, the initial idea was for the women to take turns reading the story. I had prepared photocopies for each person. However, since Mrs. B. could not read I had to change the dynamic and read the story aloud.

Immediately after finishing the story the women made many associations, most of them centred on the idea of loneliness as a condition encouraging self-reflection and learning. The women also made comments concerning the importance placed on money while the most valuable things in life are free. They said that as long as you have love that’s all that matters.

Ms. M. talked about some of her experiences as the child of a single parent. She was brought up by her mother and did not meet her father until she was 13. In fact, up until that time she had thought he was dead because that was her mother’s ‘official’ version. There was even a special celebration for her father on the Day of the Dead. Ms. M. used to place flowers on a small altar to honour her dead father and her mother forced her to go to church and pray for him. However one day, Ms. M. wanted to visit her father’s grave and her mother had no other choice but to tell her the truth, that her father was

more. In Spanish in *Cuentos Breves Latinoamericanos*, ed. Cecilia Pisos (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1998), pp. 34-37 (my translation).

alive. Ms. M's mother then asked her daughter if she wanted to meet her father and she said yes.

So one day Ms. M's mother took her to see her father. Ms. M. was a little confused because her father's welcome was not very warm but after a while this 'resuscitated' father started to give Ms. M. an allowance.

Throughout this session Ms. M. talked about experiences with her mother's relatives and her two sisters, who are in fact half-sisters because they have a different father. She said that for the rest of the family the idea of four women living together with no man around to keep things in order would only lead to chaos. Some relatives expected them to get pregnant quite young and as a result be forced into marriage or go mad.

Ms. M. remembered the suffering caused by hearing these predictions and said she had been trying to cheat "destiny" by studying and working hard. She was driven by the need to dismantle gender prejudices which insisted that a father is necessary for you to get on in life and show that her mother "had been enough". Then Ms. M. voiced her doubts about wanting to continue her relationship with her migrant boyfriend since she felt the relationship had cooled and that there was no more chemistry when they spoke on the phone.

She bravely spoke about a suicide attempt when she was 15-years-old that led to her being taken to hospital. After medical and psychological care she realized that suicide was not the best way to deal with her problems. However, she considered herself a weak and fragile person who, due to her youth, couldn't think of any other solution when faced with serious and unbearable emotional situations. She said that things had changed and she was very happy to be alive, she admired her mother and believed that problems need to be faced with a different frame of mind.

Mrs. B. was very touched by Ms. M. story and said she was a wonderful person with lots of good qualities and that she shouldn't think about those things anymore. Mrs. Z. remained silent.

The story of the "resurrected" father was very interesting since it reflected, in my view, the same kind of identity constructed in response to the migrant husband who is considered both dead and alive: dead in the sense of being absent from the space of the shared relationship, but symbolically alive through the legal discourse of marriage,

however far away he is. A direct consequence of this contradictory condition is the alteration of the wife's identity from simply being married to being the widow of a "living-dead" o *viuda de muerto parado*, as this kind of sexual arrangement is popularly labelled in these communities.

Session no. 3: Friday, 12th December, 2003

Participants: Mrs. B, Ms. M, Mrs. Z and Mrs. F

Story: "*El Hombre de Hierro*" (The Iron Man)²⁴ by: Canela (Gigliola Zecchin de Duhalde)

Before reading the story the women discussed their ideas about this particular date which is relevant in Mexican culture because it is the day the Virgin Mary is celebrated, the most important of all female Catholic icons.

A new member joined the group, Mrs. F. a 73-year-old woman whose eleven children were all living in the United States. She was the first to comment on the story, saying she would like to wrap herself up with her children, binding them with silk to her body in order to prevent them leaving. She added that her children were all nice, gentle, generous and caring: "They would rather take the bread from their own mouths than let me starve."

Mrs. B. described an experience where she felt stunned and sickened by what she considered to be a snub: when her son refused to lend her money and instead gave it to

²⁴ This is one of the shortest stories. Once upon a time there was an iron man. He was strong. His muscles were made of iron; he could do any kind of work. His legs were made of iron and he could walk without getting tired. His head was made of iron and he could be beaten without feeling anything. His thoughts were firm as iron. His hands were made of iron and he could firmly take whatever he wanted. His penis was made of iron and was always erect. His heart was also made of iron, so his feelings weighed heavily on him. Sometimes they were unbearable.

One day this huge iron man fell in love with a silk woman. The silk woman had almost transparent skin. Her eyes and her gaze were made of silk. Her silk hands could make the most delicate creations. Her silk feet left no trace. Her silk arms were impalpable when embracing. Her silk head fell like a waterfall over her fragile silk shoulders. Her vagina was an incandescent silk hollow. Her silk voice could hardly express the complexity of her silk heart.

The iron man held the silk woman in his arms and was enveloped by her. He walked into the woods and it started to rain. It rained heavily. The silk woman was soaked and stuck to the iron man. The iron man continued walking through the mud. Due to his weight he sank further and further into the mud. He tried to free himself of the silk woman so she wouldn't sink as well, but she was knotted around the iron man's neck. The wind shook the silk woman like a damaged shred. The rain stopped. The silk woman's body unfolded into the air and began to wave like a flag, like coloured light.

That was a signal for the others. They would soon come to rescue the iron man who had almost sunk into the earth. In *Cuentos Breves Latinoamericanos*, pp. 25-29. (my translation).

his wife and in-laws. Mrs. B. spent several days in bed without the energy to get up and was unwilling to move, saying she was very sad. She felt rejected and excluded from her son's affections and still could not understand why her son preferred his wife to her. To Mrs. B. this situation was wrong because "mothers should always come first".

Then she mentioned what I consider her philosophical principles, saying that all women who are in love and want to make it last should be discrete. This was her way of saying they should not kiss in public because that is an unmistakable sign that they are close to breaking up.

Ms. M. offered her own opinion of Mrs. B.'s idea about love and discretion, saying that if you love someone you should show it and let other people know. With respect to the story, she added that the iron man reminded her of her boyfriend who was very cold and inexpressive. He didn't show his feelings, although perhaps that was because he had had a tough life since childhood when he was sent out to work to support his mother and sister. He could not finish his studies and had to become, in a way, 'an iron man' to get on in life.

Mrs. Z. asked Mrs. B how she managed to breastfeed so many kids because she herself couldn't do it and she only had one child. Mrs. Z. was worried about the best way to breastfeed her daughter and at the same time about performing her household duties. Mrs. B. was an expert in this particular field and gave Mrs. Z. plenty of advice. To conclude her participation in the session, Mrs. B. added that marriage is complicated and that she had wanted to abandon her husband on many occasions. She had never felt the house they lived in was really hers but she was certain about her children's rights, so she had no right to separate them from what was legally theirs.

Session no. 4. Friday, 9th January, 2004.

Participants: Mrs. Z. Ms. M. Mrs. F.

Story: "*Gracias a la Vida*"²⁵("Thanks to Life") by: Graciela Hierro Perezcastro.

²⁵ This extract from a book entitled: "Thanks to life..." is based upon the author's experience as a mother, professional and married woman. She tells her son all about his birth, about her feelings and the circumstances surrounding this major event. It is a kind of trip through the biographical events of the son's developing life and its links to hers. She describes the schools he attended and the way she felt about the choices she made in order to offer him a good life.

The session was delayed in order to comply with the correct group size conditions indicated by Bion.²⁶ While we were waiting Ms. M. talked about her memories of Christmas, emphasizing their unpleasant nature. Christmas Eve was very upsetting because of her relatives, specifically uncles (the same who criticised and condemned Ms. M, her sisters and mother), who would turn up at her house drunk at inappropriate times and in seemingly deliberate outbursts of violence they would smash windows, kick the furniture and beat her mum and aunts. She immediately added –as if to compensate for these terrible memories- that she is fonder of spring events because she likes the warm weather, in particular Easter celebrations and flower blossoms.

After reading the story all the women agreed on the outstanding personality of the protagonist. Mrs. Z. wondered whether the positive impression stemmed from the fact that the protagonist was married twice or because she was a successful scholar.

Ms. M. considered the protagonist’s courage wonderful since she continued to pursue what she wanted despite social impositions. She also praised the woman’s bravery and the organizational skills that allowed her to continue studying while looking after her children.

They all laughed about the part of the story where the author says that whenever her children were asked if they would like to study at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, the biggest in the country, they replied ‘no’ because they had already studied there (as babies or while in their mother’s belly).

Mrs. F. said it was important for women not to give up on their dreams just because they have children; all goals can be reached. Nevertheless, in her own case she had been

The second part of the reading is about the author’s personal experiences with education and the obstacles she had to overcome to fulfil her wishes, in particular the problems presented by Mexican cultural gender expectations for a woman. She describes her family’s opposition to her desire to become a philosopher and a committed feminist.

“All my education was due to a mistake: I thought I was a man” she writes. Or worse than a man, her mother believes.

The author also expands on the difficulties she had with her two husbands trying to make them understand the important role study played in her life. In Graciela Hierro Perezcastro, *De la Domesticación a la Educación de las Mexicanas* (México, D.F.: Torres Asociados, 1989) pp. 26-35. It is important to note that Graciela Hierro was founder of the first academic programme in gender studies launched by the UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico) –the most important academic institution in Mexico- in 1992. She was a prominent feminist philosopher whose work was devoted to bridging ethics and pleasure-seeking in terms of educative processes as the only path by which individuals, both women and men, could improve their lives and their chances for happiness as human beings.

²⁶ The minimum size of the group is three. Two members have personal relationships; with three or more there are interpersonal relationships, in W.R. Bion. *Experiences in Groups*, p. 26.

unable to leave her husband even though she had often been criticised by her in-laws and this had led to suffering.

Mrs. F.'s dominant idea was that her in-laws didn't like her because she was ugly and later on, when the marriage had been consummated, because they thought she had stolen some land from them. She wanted a divorce and the support expressed by her children for this decision forced her husband to change his attitude.

Ms. M. shared certain experiences with the group concerning her decision to study and work at the same time. She said that she wasn't able to attend university full time because her mother didn't have enough money and her two younger sisters were still at school. As a result she had decided to work until such time as her beloved aunt, her mother's sister, had offered her support. Ms. M. was very determined about the decision so she enrolled on a course leading to a degree in I.T for Administration while holding down her job.

At this point she announced to the group that she had split up with her boyfriend; there was no point in carrying on with a long distance relationship she said. However, she felt a certain degree of pressure from her sisters and mother who had already accepted him as a prospective husband. She asked them to keep out of her affairs and not try to contact her ex-boyfriend because she would try to fix things if possible when he came back from the United States. Ms. M. wanted to feel free to go out with friends without thinking she was cheating on her boyfriend. Now she had made the decision she felt relieved and happier.

Mrs. Z. indicated there was a big difference between her situation and that of Ms. M. in terms of their parents' attitude. She said her parents were quite open and respected her affairs and found it hard to believe there are families with different dynamics.

Session No. 5: Tuesday, 20th January, 2004.

Participants: Ms. M. Mrs. Z. Mrs. F.

Story: "Underwood"²⁷ by Enrique Jaramillo Levi.

²⁷The letter had taken some time to arrive. He had it in front of his eyes. He couldn't read without crying, it had been such a long time since he had allowed himself such feelings. All he could read was: I STILL LOVE YOU. I ARRIVE ON FRIDAY.

He screwed the letter up into a ball and almost immediately flattened it out again. She has been guilty of everything but it would not happen again. Then all the memories of him begging every night reappeared. He ran out to the car anticipating the embrace and feeling against his body her repentance, her shame. He waited many long hours at the station. His ideas were caught up in the most dreadful conjectures. He suddenly remembered he didn't know what time she was supposed to arrive or the means by which she

The group was more subdued on this occasion and the observer was not in attendance.

After reading the story initial comments concerned the protagonist's gender. Ms. M. thought he was gay and from that point on the other members present referred to the question of homosexuality which led the conversation down unexpected paths.

Ms. M., together with Mrs. Z., had met a woman at school who became their friend but whose sexual identity they found confusing. They became close because the rest of the group excluded her.

Ms. M. said she respected gay people but admitted that on one occasion she saw a gay couple kissing and hugging and this left her with a disagreeable impression. It wasn't so much disgust as amazement that she had felt: "Everyone is free to have the kind of life they want and gays should be more respected by society, but society is not ready for that."

Mrs. Z. added that according to what she had read homosexuality had always existed, but in the past it was not seen as it is today. With respect to her experience with the school friend, she said she heard this girl had made some sexual advances to Ms. M. The friend touched Ms. M's hand and genitals and one day asked her to kiss her and lift her skirt so she could see her 'thing'. Ms. M. furiously replied she was not going to do that because she was not crazy. The other girls in the class didn't want to hang around with her because of her weird behaviour and men were fed up with her endless sexual demands.

It was quite interesting to see how, after commenting on this topic, the discussion shifted to friendship between women. They talked about the similarities between a relationship with a partner and friendship: the arguments, misunderstandings, provocations and numerous personality differences.

Ms. M and Mrs. Z. had been friends since secondary school and they both agreed their friendship was an example of how personality differences are not an obstacle to affection. They said they are completely different but that their friendship had lasted six years. A

would come. She might even take a plane, so then, why is he waiting at the station for a bus that might never come?

In the end the woman doesn't arrive. In Enrique Jaramillo Levi. *Cuentos de Bolsillo: Antología de Minicuentos*, (Panamá: Fundación Cultural Signos, 2001), pp. 96-98 (my translation).

joyful tone was added when they told the following stories – fighting to get the first word in. They laughed a lot together with the rest of the group about all their pleasant shared adventures and experiences. It seemed their own repressed homosexuality, expressed in their stories of friendship, was relevant here.

Mrs. F. said she didn't have any friends because women are very gossipy and dump their feelings on you, but that she did maintain good relations with the neighbours. She also said she prefers to keep a certain distance from people, especially women.

Ms. M. said she felt the female character in the story was like her friend from school in one specific aspect: they were both irresponsible. She went into the school friend's story in depth: after she finished college, this woman got married and had a baby daughter but things didn't turn out very well with the husband so a few months later they separated. At the time her parents were looking after the child and that gave her the freedom to live her life as if she were single. She had a boyfriend and she preferred to spend the day with him than with her daughter.

One day the little girl got sick so the grandfather told his daughter to take her to hospital and she replied: "Okay, I'll just finish putting on my make-up." The father got so angry at this response that he drove his grandchild to the hospital just in time for her to be treated for a serious bronchial infection. Ms. M's friend was upset but hasn't changed her way of life and only rings Ms. M. if she is in trouble. Ms. M. feels her friend needs protection and support so she doesn't mind her selfishness and insensitivity.

The final comments in this session were about the difficulty of meeting people as friends and the importance of keeping them. Mrs. F. spoke about an experience she had in a public health centre. She saw how two pregnant women, one single and the other married, who were having a discussion about their rights and benefits. The married woman was entitled to receive the government's health service while the single woman wasn't. However, the single mum wanted to fight for this service but the married woman said she shouldn't and should assume her responsibilities and look for a job.

In Mexico only legal workers who have a formal employer can receive the social health service while others have to pay fees.

Mrs. F. thought it was better to ask for money instead of stealing it; Mrs. Z. argued that if the married woman did not want to give the other any money that was fine but all the telling-off was unnecessary.

Session No. 6 Friday, 23rd January, 2004.

Participants: Mrs. Z. Mrs. F and Ms. M.

Story: “El Esposo” (“The Husband”)²⁸ By: Enrique Jaramillo Levi

Mrs. Z. said she didn’t really understand the ending and Mrs. B. simply said that the story was about jealous men, men just like their own husbands. This opinion stimulated a discussion on the subject of marriage.

Mrs. Z. was concerned about how jealous men not only keep a watchful eye on their wives but also on themselves. She was trying to say that their capacity for jealousy was such that they needed someone else to control it.

Mrs. B. said she had often felt “the temptation to run away by the fast track path” but she had too many children (nine). She later said she had given advice to the wife of her youngest son because this daughter-in-law had forbidden her husband to maintain a close relationship with his mother. Mrs. B. complained that her daughter in-law was doing everything she could to keep her husband away from her. He was not supposed to sit near her, kiss her or take her by the arm. This was an annoying situation for the whole family because her daughters totally disapproved of their mother’s attitude towards their brother, but Mrs. B. argued that she liked to be treated equally, so if her son gave his in-laws

²⁸ Finally I came back after a long absence. Nothing seemed to have changed in the town. But that day I saw her walking, holding a man’s arm. It was raining. Her hair was longer than ever, reaching her hips, and it was soaked. I couldn’t see his face because she was hiding him.

I know they were married because a friend of mine told me when he saw me desperately running towards her. The couple walked along without seeing me. The rain did not seem to bother them. A new impulse forced me to follow them and I rushed after them. I had almost reached them when he stopped a taxi. I ran. Sandra got in first. I could grab him by the coat sleeve. Just as he felt he was being shaken he turned around and without thinking twice, struck me right in the face. The taxi drove away quickly.

I severely doubted she was aware of the incident. She was too caught up in her new happiness. But I remained struck, not by the blow, but by the perplexity of discovering who the man was that had taken her away from me.

Since that time I cannot stand the way the image of his face pursues me every time I see myself in a reflection, so I break every mirror that I come across. However, I must confess that it is not a good reason for hating me less. In *Cuentos de Bolsillo: Antología de Minicuentos*, p. 37.

money and attention, specifically to his mother-in-law, she didn't understand why she couldn't have the same.

Mrs. F. talked about the different tasks men and women are supposed to learn to perform in life. She did not teach her sons to do housework because they would be called "mandilones" (a term used to make fun of men who do what is traditionally considered a woman's work).

Mrs. Z. was convinced her liberated position was the correct one and affirmed that in her marriage she distributed the duties in as balanced a way as possible: one day her husband would do the laundry while she ironed and the next day the other way round. However, she had received a lot of criticism from her in-laws which she didn't take very seriously. She asked her husband to choose between her and his friends, and if he chose his friends he would have a fight on his hands.

Mrs. F. agreed with Mrs. Z.'s position and added that women's heads weren't empty like before and that women were able to make decisions about whether they wanted to continue living with a man or not.

Session No. 7 Friday, 30th January, 2004

Participants: Mr. Z. Ms. M. and Mrs. B

Story: "La Yunta" ("The Yoke")²⁹ By: Fernando Contreras Castro

The central topic of this particular session, on which all participants had an opinion, was faithfulness and the nurturing and building of a marriage.

The view of Ms. M. was that the two characters in the story had had an accident, died and that their souls had split. There was a shooting. She asked whether her interpretation

²⁹ They were not exactly husband and wife, nor partners in the true sense of that word, because even though they always went half and half, sometimes the excesses of one of them ate up the profits of one or more days. What they had was a yoke, a union, very thin and heavy as it had to hold both of their bags. Together they had long and messy hair, he was insignificantly taller than her. The yoke's job was to help them to walk, which he could do with the good fortune of having peripheral four-eye vision and four-ear sharpness, constantly alert. However, the yoke fell irretrievably one day. It was so early that they still had time to separate and to run away in different and opposite directions but not very far. As soon as the bodies were separated they did not know what to do: to run on two legs was so weird and so unfamiliar as well as looking with just one pair of eyes and feeling frightened with a single heart. In *Cuentos Breves Latinoamericanos*, pp. 55-56. (my translation).

was correct and if it was suitable or not since she felt she was being naïve. Mrs. B. replied that everyone had their own thoughts and added that she thought that even after many years a marriage can keep two people together while at the same time the married partners remain separate since each of them has their own thoughts. She then went on to tell us about her wedding day and how she got married when she was 18 and is now 66 and about the number of times she had wanted to leave her husband but hadn't done so because one of her children had made his position very clear: "if you want to separate from my father" –the son had said- "I will not go with you." Mrs. B could not possibly leave or even think about leaving her son behind.

Then she talked about faithfulness, saying that all men are 'macho' and that her husband had been unfaithful many times, spending all the money he earned on his 'women'. She had suffered a lot and felt helpless about the situation.

Mrs. Z. agreed with this last opinion even though she had not been through such a phase in her own marriage. She had only been married for two years and her husband had already left and she thought it might be difficult to live with the same person for so many years. She added she had a classmate who thought of getting married more than twenty times since she couldn't be with the same person for very long. However, this classmate was the first to get married and after five years of marriage she had changed her mind – coming to the conclusion that her husband was the most wonderful man in the world and she really loved him.

Ms. M. took part in the discussion to say that she talked about these topics quite a lot with people at work. One of them said, for example, that he was curious about older people having or not having sex. Ms. M. asked them a lot of questions about sex and women's issues, as she was trying to prove some of her theories, such as: "all men are unfaithful." Some of her colleagues confirmed the theory, adding that men think in the following way: "we don't want to lose our wives, so our affairs should always be just that."

Mrs. Z. more reflectively affirmed that she did not know why men are unfaithful but she believed it could be a cultural, social or genetic pattern. Cultural because men have been taught to do so, since they are adolescents they begin to have sexual relations and sex is considered part of their well being. For men to have plenty of women means

success and they are actively encouraged in their conquests whereas for women, having plenty of men is completely unacceptable.

Mrs. Z. believed that men are incapable of being faithful because they have a polygamous gene while women, apart from the social restrictions on their having multiple relationships, want to be with other men but feel they shouldn't. It is perfectly understandable that a woman, while walking down a street and looking at a man, can think he is cute or handsome without meaning she wants to have sex with him. She also thought that mothers are mostly responsible for this situation because they bring them up differently to girls. Boys are allowed much more freedom than girls, who are supposed to be demure.

Ms. M. said that she had not been in love for a long time but that she had no problem with that. When she was younger and was asked about what she wanted to be when she grew up, she replied that she wanted to be a single mother. Everybody laughed at her answer but she said that due to what she had heard about marital conflict, she didn't want to go through the same thing. All men are perfect 'sons of bitches' Ms. M affirmed but Mrs. B. said they aren't all like that: one in a thousand is the usual ratio. She illustrated her point with the case of a couple she met where the husband did all the washing, the ironing and the cooking while the wife simply ordered him about. Mrs. B's husband used to make a lot of fun of this man, saying he was 'gay'.

"The problem with that marriage" – Mrs. B. added- "is that they split up after a while because the wife was a drunk."

Mrs. B. concluded that if a marriage is going to last and be perfect it's because the woman takes the lead so she advised Ms. M. to wait until she finds the right man.

Before the session ended I reminded them that the following session would be the last.

Session No. 8 (final session) Friday, 6th February, 2004.

Participants: Ms. M, Mrs. F. Mrs. B and Mrs. Z

Story: "Los Ciclos de la Vida" ("Life Stages")³⁰ By: Graciela Hierro Pérez Castro

³⁰ In this fragment the author presents the most relevant experiences from different stages of her life: childhood, adolescence, youth, adulthood and late maturity. During childhood the girl feels at one with her world, at one with her mother; she is unaware of separateness because consciousness of self has not been born. She lives submerged in existence, confused amongst beings and things. Suddenly she discovers, in

As this was the final session it was significant that before reading the story, and while waiting for everybody to arrive, the conversation among those that had arrived focused on death. Mrs. B. announced that one of her brothers-in-law had died of cancer a few days previously. Ms. M. said she was very tired and Mrs. F. talked about her husband's precarious health.

Mrs. B. gathered her thoughts after the reading and said she found many similarities between her life and the character's except for the fact that she had no childhood. From a very young age she was sent out to work and the difference between one stage and the next was almost imperceptible, she was a very young adult who knew next to nothing about playing or fighting with brothers and sisters.

On the contrary, Mrs. F. said her childhood and adolescence had been great and that everything went wrong when she got married. She had to bring up a lot of children and had to secretly sell small amounts of corn in order to have enough money to support the children.

Ms. M. said her childhood had also been tough because her mother had to spend many hours a day working away from home. At some point of her childhood Ms. M. remembered that her mother rented the room next to the house to run a small grocery shop. One of the tenants at that time was an evil old man who sexually molested Ms. M. and her sisters. He used to grab Ms. M's breasts and ordered her to make her youngest sister go to him. Ms. M. was very scared at the time and didn't tell anyone what was going on until much later.

Ms. M. started to cry and added she felt very hurt by what she considered to be abandonment. She hadn't understood that her mother needed to work and this was the reason she had to leave each day. In addition Ms. M. felt a great deal of personal responsibility because she had to look after her younger siblings and that explained why,

front of boys, that she is a girl but the meaning of sexual difference will arrive later in her life. During adolescence she ignores future transformations of her face which she sees constantly reflected in the mirrors of others, she cannot manage to forget about herself. She oscillates between the images of adolescent-girl and young-woman. The mature woman necessarily faces self-consciousness; she can no longer escape to fleeting characters. She must choose from a set of images around her: the desirable mother-wife or the undesirable Eve, the dissident, lonely woman always under the gaze of men who desire her and women who judge her. Older women choose their own image. They see their faces in the mirrors and find it hard to decipher them. It is the mask of the old woman; it is the history of amorphous features that one day did emerge confusingly. In *Gracias a la Vida*, pp. 67-72 (my translation).

when she was an adolescent, she wanted to go out for such long periods as she was very resentful of her mother.

Mrs. Z. seemed to have the least troubling memories of childhood and adolescence. She said she was happy as a girl and had only started to ask important questions about her life recently.

When she married her husband she didn't know he was planning to migrate. She said she didn't like the lifestyle in the U.S.A. and since she didn't consider herself an ambitious person she was not seeking a fortune. All she wanted was a house and a car and while she did want to go back to school to study, she wasn't sure she'd have the time to do it and neither was she convinced that such a life was appropriate for a woman who already had a baby.

In order to end the session and conclude the group work experience, I asked them to express their feelings and thoughts about the process.

Mrs. B. was the first to speak. She said she wondered why she had never asked us (myself and the observer) what we thought about her stories and her life and about what she had done right or wrong.

Mrs. B. then added that what she did wrong was to have so many children without having the means to offer them a better life. However, she didn't regret their upbringing because they were all good people who cared for her and listened to her. She had decided to visit one of her daughters in the United States and leave her husband on his own for a while. She added she was glad for having met us and that she liked 'our talks'.

Mrs. F. said, in a quite determined way, that she felt happy -although the reasons she initially identified for this happiness were unrelated to the main topic of discussion- because she could do whatever she wanted. If she wanted to boil two kilos of beans and waste them, according to her husband, well she just didn't care; she would boil them anyway. She said she liked having met us because it allowed her to see how two women could do positive things for other women and she also enjoyed meeting her fellow group members. She realized that she had something to say although she had never before spoken about her feelings and thoughts the way she had in this group. Even though she knew her life would not change radically she felt satisfied.

Ms. M. said it had been very helpful to talk about things she had never discussed before, that she felt safe, had learned to organize her ideas and felt more confident about what she wanted. Communication with her mother and sisters had improved and she boasted about her accomplishments as proof to her uncles and cousins that the lack of a father is not a major problem. Although all her cousins did have a father, none of them had finished a degree and even worse, they had all become pregnant at a very early age. Ms. M., unlike her father's other children, was making an effort to get on in life and her father was proud of her and willing to support her until she finished her undergraduate studies. She thanked the other group mates for their sharing and for having listened to her because she had learned how to avoid making mistakes.

Mrs. Z. said that she would take with her the laughter of her fellow group members because they had enjoyed some good times. She said she had learned to speak her mind and felt it was fine to do so, noting in particular she had discovered she was not as reserved as she had thought. Within the group she felt confident and secure to talk openly and she was also aware of feeling less anxiety and distress when talking about certain experiences that in the past had been painful.

I concluded by thanking them all and by wishing them good luck in their future life. The observer read the final comments and we all said good-bye.