**ABSTRACT**

Interest in single women’s management of public discourse and associated practices of systemic disadvantage motivated this project. Within a Foucauldian approach that interrogated related institutional power relations and the possibility of change, three studies were undertaken to contribute to a feminist psychology of singleness, examine the mechanisms that construct the single woman’s identity, and critique the role of psychological theory in legitimising these constructions. Inherent in the methodology, a genealogy of discourse about single women found millennia-long disparagement in cultures informing contemporary Western thought. For discursive neutrality and textual simplification, categories of marital status were replaced with the alternative *in/ter/dependence*.

In Study 1, Giles and Shaw’s (2009) media framing analysis model was adapted to analyse discourse about relationally independent women in Western Australian newspapers from 1999 and 2009. Clear demarcation was found in the construction of ‘widow’, ‘single’ and ‘divorced’ women’s identities, seemingly related to their distance from an interdependent norm. Widows and single women received more sympathetic press in 2009 than in 1999 but this was not the case for divorced women. Study 2 reports the interpretative repertoires drawn on by 20 independent and five interdependent women in discussions that provided data for foci on possible transition in the social experience of independent women and their resistance to a disadvantaged position. Psychology’s role in perpetuating public discourse of disadvantage is examined in Study 3 through the medium of two developmental psychology textbooks. Consistent with, but lagging behind the positive trend found in the newspapers, the textbooks reinforced ideological privileging of interdependence, without reference to alternative theorising.

A consistent motif that emerged in all components of this project was the relationship between women’s independence and the economy, within a context of

patriarchal interests. Ideological conflict between patriarchal and neoliberal discourses has enabled expansion of social identities available to independent women. Related psychological discourse would do well to include relational independence as a legitimate option in human affairs.