

APPENDIX C: Barbie's Story

Interview One

Interviewer

If you are feeling uncomfortable at all then just let me know.

Participant

Okay.

Interviewer

If you want to ask me anything, you are also welcome to.

Participant

Okay.

Interviewer

Why don't you tell me a bit about yourself? Um, I know I hate that question.

Participant

(laughs) Yeah, I know, a bit broad.

Interviewer

(laughs) Okay, let me be a bit more specific. With regards to ... Why don't you tell me how your family is made up of?

Participant

Okay, well we ... I stay here in my house with my mother and my sister...but she is not always here, she usually stays at her boyfriend. I used to visit my dad quite often, but then my mother ... my stepmother, once she got married to my dad it just all changed. So I see them about once a month, maybe. And yeah, otherwise I don't really see them or speak to them.

Interviewer

Does your dad stay quite close?

Participant

Um, I'd say about 20 minutes drive. So it's more Pretoria North.

Interviewer

Okay.

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

And what happened when your stepmother and your dad got married? You said you didn't visit them quite as often. How come?

Participant

She changed. I think maybe she just got more security in the way that he was not going to just leave her and you know, if he saw that she was like that with us but I'm not quite sure what happened, but she just changed her whole attitude. She used to be like ... she enjoyed when I visited there, well she looked like it. And we used to have a good relationship and it just all changed. She became ... she would ... not like literally saying like, nasty comments but she would like say it in such a way that you can pick it up. It was like, subtle, very subtle. Then it wasn't ... I didn't enjoy going there anymore, so I just went there less and that and that.

Interviewer

How long ago did they get married?

Participant

I was 16, so that was about 2 years ago.

Interviewer

Okay. What does your dad say about all of that? What was his opinion of it?

Participant

About my stepmother or about me not going there?

Interviewer

You not going there and did he ever ask you why?

Participant

Well, my dad is the type of person, he tries to 'guilt trip' you and he will say stuff like; "oh, do you still remember me?" or "do you still love me" or ... and in a way, I think he feels like I've sort of written him off or he doesn't ... he is not very important or... (coughs). Excuse me. And ... but ... So he is just ... he ... You see, my sister, she could communicate with my dad and she told me what my stepmother ... because my stepmother is not like that with my sister. And then it actually came down to people thought that I was just being insecure or jealous or I was oversensitive. And I think especially with my ... because my stepmother is very young, she's about 5 years older than my sister. So she ... my sister, I think ... it's just like, she's more ... I'll keep quiet when she says things like that, and my sister would just tell her to just shut up or something. So she never had that with my sister.

Interviewer

Your sister was more confrontational then?

Participant

Yeah, and I was more ... I kept quiet and just tried to stay nice to her.

Interviewer

It seems like you kind of came out with the disadvantage though, even though you were trying to be the most accommodating?

Participant

Yeah, in a way, but at the end of the day I feel I can feel good about myself. Because I think it irritates her more that I'm nice to her than if I'm nasty. Then she can't say anything to my dad that I'm not behaving, maybe appropriately or anything like that.

Interviewer

It's a complicated situation.

Participant

It is quite.

Interviewer

How did you cope with the sudden change in the relationship and needing to distance yourself from your father and that home environment?

Participant

Well, it was ... strangely enough, I think since my parents got divorced I was a lot...I had to sort of raise myself and I had to look after myself and so I think it just ... you know I took it just as another thing that happened in my life you know. I got, not over it quite quickly but it didn't really affect me that much. In a way, I don't know if I saw it coming or there were signs or what it was, but yeah it's actually weird. I can't actually think back of what I did or what changed or how I felt about it.

Interviewer

It sounds like it was more of a gradual process?

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

Not one initial event, like shock and then you had to adapt.

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

Like a fading out.

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

How would you describe your relationship with your dad?

Participant

Well ... my dad actually understands me quite a bit; because, he'll ... he sees things that other people don't see. He'll see if I'm really sad or that I'm unhappy, but I don't have that connection that I can talk to him about it. He can see it but I just ... I will, even though, if I'm having a terrible time or I would just always tell him that I'm happy and everything is fine. Yeah, school is fine; everything is fine when he asks. It's weird.

Interviewer

You hide what you're feeling, howcome?

Participant

I just don't feel the connection. I just feel he doesn't know me anymore. You know, it's like having a total stranger, like this and this happened to me. You know, usually with family members it's like a continual story. You don't have to suddenly start telling them about ... it just goes on into ... it's just a gradual thing and with him... it's even maybe awkward in a way, when we see each other.

Interviewer

It sounds like him being in another home is very disconnected from your day-to-day existence?

Participant

Yes.

Interviewer

The small little events that seem to build up to maybe something bigger and ...

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

To almost backtrack and tell whole story is ...

Participant

Yeah, it's too much of a mission in a way. I also feel, because they had my ... I also have a baby sister, my half sister now. And I feel he's built a new family from ... I don't feel like, rejected or you know I was always the youngest and that was taken away from me. I don't ... I think, it just happened at an age that I was sort of over that stage that I really care that someone was younger than me. But in a way I just feel, you know he's got his

life, he's happy. But I sort of, I also have my life and I don't want him to always interfere in a way into my life.

Interviewer

So you almost find it comfortable, that he's not involved in your life?

Participant

Yes, I do. I struggle a lot with any male authority or, um, in relationships I tend to be very ... I think maybe because I was ... my mother was always the stronger figure and with women always around me, it's difficult for me to ... I feel, in a way, uncomfortable. Like, if I go to a friend's house and their dad is there, I always feel uncomfortable until their dad leaves. And then I feel, I don't know, maybe also because my stepdad, um, he was very strict and things had to be done his way. It was always like you had to walk on eggshells when he was at home. So I think maybe that's why I just, I think, all the experience or the contact I've had with men in my life, they've disappointed me. So I don't exactly want to ... I don't know, I think it's something more of a subconscious thing than consciously thinking I hate men, you know.

Interviewer

You mentioned your stepfather?

Participant

Yes.

Interviewer

How does he fit into the picture?

Participant

Oh, okay ... the thing is, when I was 16, I was very depressed, I was very unhappy in that situation, because my dad is very ... he's completely opposite from my stepdad. And I was so unhappy that I didn't even feel like I had a reason to live, because everything I did was wrong. I didn't enjoy ... I had to stay in my room the whole time. I didn't have freedom, I couldn't do anything. My mother was constantly there pleasing him. Then my mother and my stepfather went through a rough patch, and then we moved into here because we were renting out this place. And then my mother bought it from him and she was still married to him, and like every night she would go visit him, like she does now. And they'll go away for weekends but we just totally separated that. It's very weird situation but it's been the best for me and I'm much happier now.

Interviewer

It works well for you?

Participant

Yes.

Interviewer

If I understand you correctly then ... I just want to get it right in my head. I just want to go through the logistics of who got married when. How old were you when they ... when your mom and your dad got divorced?

Participant

I was 10. So that was ... yeah, quite a few years ago.

Interviewer

And how long after your parents got divorced, did your mother remarry?

Participant

My mother remarried about ... or they were together for quite a while first. That was about, I'd say six months after my parents were divorced. They were together and everything and being ... it was when I was in std. six, that they got ... actually got married.

Interviewer

Okay. And then you were about 13 or 14 years old?

Participant

Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer

And then two years after that ...

Participant

Yeah, I couldn't take it anymore.

Interviewer

That was the really difficult time for you?

Participant

Yes, yeah.

Interviewer

Okay. And then...when did this current living situation develop, where your stepfather lives in another house, although your mom and your stepfather are still married, if I understand you correctly?

Participant

It's been two years since we moved into this house.

Interviewer

Okay. In that difficult period this was maybe the solution?

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

Who came up with that decision?

Participant

Well, I think ... I think it was me, in fact, because my mother took me to a psychiatrist and things and my doctor, who I have very close relationship with, I think he basically told her if she wasn't going to get me out of the environment that I was going to either try to commit suicide or ... okay, I did attempt suicide but I was ... either going to succeed with it or I would go insane. So, I think it was just the option. I think ... well, yeah that's what I suspect my doctor told her.

Interviewer

It was a very dark time for you.

Participant

Pretty much.

Interviewer

Did you only try once?

Participant

To... No, I tried quite a few times.

Interviewer

Can I ask, how?

Participant

I tried many times with tablets, like all things like antibiotics that were lying around in the house and stuff, and once I had to get my stomach pumped. Then I started also cutting myself for the release and the control. Yeah so, that's just the way I did it.

Interviewer

Do you still cut yourself?

Participant

No.

Interviewer

You stopped that...

Participant

After we moved... yeah.

Interviewer

When you ... how is your relationship with your stepfather now?

Participant

I don't see him at all.

Interviewer

No contact?

Participant

No contact.

Interviewer

And what was the most difficult? What ...

Participant

About him?

Interviewer

Yeah, what made it so difficult to be in the house with him? You said he is the complete opposite of your father.

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

So if you can explain ...

Participant

Okay well, my father is very ... he is emotional and he is very lovable, but sometimes... he is like ... his emotions are like a seesaw. The one day he will be very happy and the other day he will be very depressed. And when he's depressed, he pulls you down very low and he just ... you know, self-pity and it's sort of the idea that the whole world owes him something. And then the next day he ... you know he's really unstable in a way, but you know you love being around him also, because he was fun and he was also in a way irresponsible with money. Like he'd buy us a lot of stuff and ... So it was in a way he was like, a nice friend to have. And then my stepdad ...

Interviewer

It's interesting you call him a friend.

Participant

Yeah, you know ... yeah.

Interviewer

Is that how you see him?

Participant

Yeah, I guess in a way.

Interviewer

As a friendship role?

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

He fulfils a friendship role.

Participant

Yeah, a friendship role. And then my stepdad was quite a tyrant, because for example, my mother went overseas and I drink fat free milk and he drinks full cream milk, and my mother buys all the groceries. And then the one day he came into my room and started screaming at me for opening the fat free milk, which I anyway use and it's anyway my milk, and my mother anyway bought it. And he screamed at me and said it was his milk. Silly stuff like that. He'll try and find something like wrong in the house or ... and it just ... it was a cold environment. It's really ... you were so careful for what you did or what you said, because say like in front of other people he'll be so nice. And people would think he's like, good and such a thoughtful guy and then behind the scenes he just demands and he's unreasonable and he doesn't have a ... I don't think he has understanding or a liking of kids or teenagers. That made it, like, very difficult to accept and I didn't like being treated in that way or...

Interviewer

Was it always like that or did it change after your mom and your stepdad got married?

Participant

No, my mother said to me it was... that she also experienced the same. She was ... it was fine until they started ... we moved in together. She said then it was a nightmare, she got such a shock and I got such a shock and ... because we used to do fun things together and he was romantic and spontaneous and ... so it was ... The thing was, we knew him before because I was friends with his daughter, she's a year younger than me and we were in pre-school together and ... so I always knew him and we got to know him and he was this, like really nice guy. And then ... as soon as we moved in with him, it just changed. The whole relationship, everything just changed. It was like he had a split personality.

Interviewer

Was there a lot of conflict, a lot of fighting between you and him?

Participant

No, I'm not a person ... I try to avoid to conflict. I try to ... even if it makes me unhappy or angry, I will try to keep the peace, and keep quiet and just go to my room or ... I'm not also someone that will cry in front of other people. I will go to my room and in a way sort it out with myself and my anger, accept it in that way and I wouldn't say anything, I would just leave and go to my room.

Interviewer

What would you do once you got to your room?

Participant

I'd usually cry or I'd put loud music on. Sometimes that would make me feel better. I'd write... or I'd put some distraction on like my TV or like music.

Interviewer

What music do you like? What music helps, should I say?

Participant

Well, very heavy metal, loud music – screaming, a lot of ... for example, likes System of Down. But they're also very, in a way depressing and they talk about suicide and things, but in a way it's like ... it also makes you ... I don't know, it made me feel relieved. It's actually weird to think that someone else screaming makes you feel relieved but that's how I felt.

Interviewer

It's not that bizarre. Your mom and your real dad, you were ten years old when they got divorced?

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

Perhaps you can give me an idea of what life was like before the divorce. Tell me about your childhood?

Participant

Okay well, I think I was very blind. I didn't expect the divorce at all. We went overseas together, we had fun holidays together, and we did everything together. It was very ... you know, if I could describe it at that time, it was like the perfect family. But the thing is, I think, I don't know if I was covering it up. I never felt that there was any...like something weird or ... and now that I speak to both of them I hear of all these things and I don't remember it. I remember this ... the only problem was, my sister when she threw

a tantrum or something, like she quite often did. But otherwise I would describe it like the idea of the perfect family – we did fun things.

Interviewer

How did you feel then, in your family?

Participant

I felt safe, I felt ... I was also, I think very confident and very ... because I was like, from small they were telling me to go through things...to do what you want. It was actually...they raised me much different to the way they raised my sister. My sister was ... I think my mother always describes it...she was too young when she had my sister. Because she'd all like ... not young - the age, but she wasn't mature enough. And with me, they let me do whatever I wanted. If I wanted to wear socks on my hands, then I wore socks on my hands. And I just think my family gave me a lot of support and I was very ... I think very ... I felt very loved and secure, I would say. Yeah.

Interviewer

Freedom to express yourself?

Participant

Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer

And then what happened with the divorce? How did you find out about it? You said you weren't prepared for it.

Participant

No, no. I didn't pick it up at all. It was ... it was a very big shock. I remember I was lying in my room ... I was in private school so my holidays were different to my sister's because she was in a government school. I was lying in my parent's bed watching TV and then my mother walked in and she said they were getting a divorce. And I was shocked and I remember the first thing I asked her was who is it that wanted the divorce. And my mom was like, no she wanted the divorce. And then it was ... the end of that week, my dad moved out and it was just a shock. It just ... it happened all so fast. I think, a lot of my emotions are delayed so I ... in a way I'm shocked and then only two weeks later or a while later it ... it like sinks in and I understand what's happening.

Interviewer

How did you react to it, once the emotions had sunk in?

Participant

I wasn't angry. I was just quiet and like, I accepted it and like, you know I think I didn't know what to think in a way. I tried to pick up, like what I had left and go on at school

and ... because I was always involved in drama at school and things like that. So it always kept me busy and I ... before that I'd actually joke about it. Not that I'd mean anything. I said no this girl's parents got divorced at school and she was getting all the sympathy and then I'm like, yeah I also want that type of sympathy, as a joke. And then afterwards then I realised, I'm like wow, it's actually such a hard thing. But a while after that a few of friends' parents also got divorced and then they always came to ask me what is it like? What is it, because it's an unknown to them. So I guess ... I can't actually think of anything funny I did except go on and pretend like nothing was wrong.

Interviewer

What was the atmosphere like in the house?

Participant

Well, once my dad moved out, it was a very depressing atmosphere. No, not quite depressing, but it was like very, like a sad environment. Like, you know when someone died, that type of feeling in the house. So I think that just ... yeah it was just so dead. And my sister was, I think, she was just finished writing her matric, so she was gone and on holiday so; it was very quiet and very different from what it used to be.

Interviewer

Did you feel your father's absence?

Participant

Yes, I did. I think I did. But I like, visited him every weekend. That was before my stepmother was at all in the picture, so.

Interviewer

What was the ... your relationship like with your father before the divorce?

Participant

A friend. We were quite irresponsible together. We would always have fun.

Interviewer

Irresponsible, how?

Participant

Well, we would go to the game world and then we would play, like hundreds and hundreds of rands of games. And we would eat out at like any restaurant we wanted to and we would like, go watch movies and we had total fun. It was just absolute fun and there was no ... and I didn't get homework at that time, so it was just from when I arrived there, on the Friday until the Sunday night, it was just fun.

Interviewer

And how long did that go on for?

Participant

It went on for a long time. I think I was also too small to realise my mother or appreciate what my mother was doing financially or emotionally and I always felt sorry for my dad in a way instead of my mother who was, you know working very hard and trying to do the best that she could to keep her children in clothes and, you know just to grow up and to get to school and this and that. You know, to make sure we're all okay. I just ... I thought of my dad as this great guy... you know and we'd always have such fun together. Then it went on for like, probably I'd say...you see, I never met ... like, he probably went on dates and everything because I only went to him on every second weekend. But he never mentioned that to me or ... in a way just to try and protect me. I mean I just went with my parents ... with my mother and my stepfather on holiday and then I went ... this was basically four hours drive, so then halfway they met and that's where I met my stepmother. And that was probably when I was about ... I think I was in std. 4, the end of std. 4, the December holidays. So then it just ... it was a shock and everything. Then we used to do fun things with her as well, but then that also faded out gradually.

Interviewer

You said when you met her it was a shock. How did you feel about meeting this new lady in your father's life and now in your life?

Participant

I don't know why, I can't put my finger on it but I just remember crying and crying. I was very upset about it. I don't know exactly what it was, but maybe it started to come through that my parents weren't going to get together or that they were divorced, and this is my new life. And I think it was just the final reality... the final nail in the coffin, so to say.

Interviewer

Did you cry alone or did you cry with someone?

Participant

No, I always cried alone. I never cry in front of people.

Interviewer

Is there anyone that you spoke to during that time, about how you were feeling?

Participant

Well, my mother took me to a psychologist but the idea I got was what most psychologists did, that was obviously a Hollywood idea of a psychologist, is that everything is confidential. So I could, I thought I trust her, talk to her and tell her everything and that everything would stay between us. And then I told her how it felt

and then she told my mother, and then my mother came to me and she's like, " you know that's not how it is", this and this and this. I felt very betrayed and I felt angry, I felt ... you know, I think I lost a lot of trust and that's maybe why I don't like psychiatrists and psychologists, I'd rather sort out my problems. So probably from that time period that I just decided not to talk to anybody. Well, I have tried to speak to people, but they don't really give me the reaction that I want. They always want to know the details, like it's a gossip story, not how am I actually feeling at this point in time.

Interviewer

When you say you don't get the reaction you're looking for, what do you think you're looking for?

Participant

I don't know ... a few people have actually asked me that. I've said, when I get that reaction, I'll let them know. Whatever I say, it's just like ... I think maybe that most humans do it, they take it and turn it right back on them. Like, I'll tell a story and they would go, "Yeah, that happened the same way, I know how you feel". And it's not ... because you're not listening to what I'm saying. So I guess that's it in a way and at the time it all happened I think ... I don't think, I and my friends were mature enough to understand the concept of ... like later on, when you get to high school, people will actually understand more and process and...so I think it's just, you know, keeping it to myself. Not understanding it myself.

Interviewer

But looking for answers and understanding everywhere.

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

And not finding it.

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

And now?

Participant

Well, I have ... because I'm at home alone a lot and if I'm alone, completely alone and there's no distractions, I find it very difficult...I find I'm unhappy or ... people have told me it sounds like a feeling of rejection that I've been carrying around. And then actually it was funny enough, because this week, I actually told my best friends, because it's only

four of us who sit together, but we care about each other and speak about everything. And I asked them ... because I was thinking maybe it's not just me, maybe it's all of us. Maybe everyone is not completely happy. And they were shocked because, they were like, no but you always look so happy and ... no, but they are happy. And then I think maybe I kept quiet for so long, that when I don't have any distractions or when there's nobody here to distract me, that I have to deal with it in my mind. And I think ... I don't know how in a way.

Interviewer

How does it feel when you are alone and there are no distractions and you say you feel unhappy?

Participant

Well, it's sort of like; it's not quite depression because I've felt depression. That's more like everything is just, you know like, a tunnel of death. But this is just, maybe, it's like being uncomfortable. You know not knowing ... I think fear of the future, or fear of getting hurt again and not being sure, what's going to happen or is my past going to really influence my future? Because if I think a bit back, my past has influenced my future quite a bit. So then again, like I said before, that it makes me the person who I am. And I think if all of this didn't happen to me, then I wouldn't be ... my eyes wouldn't open to other people's problems and looking out, for people who are also hurting. So, in a way, it's got its pro's and its cons.

Interviewer

Are you afraid to be alone?

Participant

Not afraid in the sense that I'm scared something is going to happen to me, like someone is going to break in or something, but I think ... I think dealing with myself and you know, there's a lot of questions, like with any teenager there's a lot of questions in their minds but...I think I just don't want to relive my past again, through my marriage or let my kids go through the same that I had to go through. So I think it's more fear of not living in the past. But it's already starting to influence me.

Interviewer

In what way?

Participant

Well, I can't keep relationships. If a person gets too close to me then I push them away. Or not ... I talk with friends, and that's fine, but as soon as I have a guy that's interested then I can't keep the relationship. It's very difficult for me to get too deep. And also at a

stage, I also used to ... I think, I went on like a revenge. That I'd make guys like fall in love with me, and as soon as they said they loved me I'd leave them... or I would get bored with them. That's very funny. It's strange in a way.

Interviewer

Is that something that you noticed on your own or something that's been pointed out to you?

Participant

No, I pretty much noticed it on my own. It frustrates me that I can't keep a relationship. Actually, it was really bad, and then I went out with a guy for 8 months. So I sort broke that but now I'm feeling it again. We broke up at the beginning of this year and I'm already feeling it. As soon as someone's interested, I push them away again. So, it's quite difficult, but when I ... I have lots of guy friends and I'm very comfortable around them but as soon as it starts becoming more than just friendship, then it's like ... it just changes.

Interviewer

How does it change?

Participant

That's when ... I play mind games a lot. It's just in my ... I think it's basically my insecurities that ... and if I'm not 100% happy then I don't want anything to do with him. But then who is going to be 100% happy in the end? But yeah.

Interviewer

What do you mean by mind games? If you can give me an example?

Participant

Like, simple things like, I'd be affectionate but then I won't be affectionate, I'd just stop and then I'll see if they come to me, to see that it's not just one sided or if they will make the effort. Yeah, or I'll ignore them for a bit and make them wonder where I am and then suddenly I would just come back again. And that feeling that they have to have me and they can't get me. I like doing it.

Interviewer

So when you're alone in your room and you're confronted with questions about the future, is it just around relationships and a fear of repeating the past in your own future relationships?

Participant

Yes, it's definitely just relationships actually.

Interviewer

How do you feel about marriage?

Participant

I'm scared that I'm going to get married and get bored with the person or I'm not going to be able to keep the person interested or they're going to get bored with me. And I don't want ... I'm also very scared of having children. I'm scared that I'm going to raise them wrong or be too overprotective or too lenient or ... So, it's just ... I'm not sure exactly. Maybe because I haven't had a really good example of a good marriage or ... okay, no marriage is perfect, but a strong relationship is very ... I haven't had a good example. Except for watching movies but then how real are those relationships. (laughs). So I guess that's a lot of teenagers problems, especially girls, because they have an idea of this white knight and they're going to spoil you and it's this perfect match, and happily ever after. I know that's not going to happen and I know it's something you have to work at, but I'm scared I get to this point where I just can't work with it and yeah, I think it's just as devastating as getting divorced as going through it as a child.

Interviewer

Do you desire to get married though?

Participant

Yes, I do. Yeah, definitely. I want to get married. But I don't want to get married early, but yeah, definitely I want to get married one day.

Interviewer

What's your understanding of love and relationship and marriage or even just relationships now?

Participant

Well, I think ... I definitely believe in unconditional love. I believe you can still love somebody although you're angry with them. I believe they can disappoint you but you can still love a person. I think that love stretches from little affectionate kisses to, you know, like silly clichéd things like running a bath or, just being there to listen, like I said, just a story you can tell and just keep on telling it. And being able to strengthen your relationship through your weaknesses. Like, if something bothers you or you're angry with a person, to read something positive about it and making it grow, and working at it. I don't think it's an easy thing at all. It's always much easier on a person when you're related by blood because you don't exactly have a choice but I guess today it's so easy to get divorced. It's so accepted, it's like ... it's not a big deal anymore. Well, quite sadly,

it's not a big deal but no, they got divorced but they still have the pain that people have to go through.

Interviewer

Society almost allows an instant solution although it far from easy, if I understand you correctly.

Participant

Yes.

Interviewer

You said earlier that you spoke with your friends, you have very close friends ... the four of you are very close.

Participant

Yes.

Interviewer

How do you compare yourself to ... you said you wanted to know if they were as unhappy as you feel. Do you go to them often about how you are feeling or to check things?

Participant

Oh, well not actually. It's actually the first time. But being ... they helped me through my depression and they had this idea that I was over it and I was happy. And they were shocked that I was unhappy. I think in a way at least two members in my group are also unhappy but they're denying it. I can see in the things that they say and do, that they're not 100% happy. But it's like ... they think it's supposed to be like that. Because my one friend's parents divorced, and the other one, they could just as well be divorced but they don't. So it's just very ... we talk to each other but I think in way it's still...I don't want to always be the one that's depressed, that's "oh, my life is so bad" because I had a friend like that and she drove me up the wall after a while because she was never happy. She was always depressed. So, I was just always like you know, get something positive. So I don't always want to go and say I'm so sad and I'm not always ... when I'm out and I'm with people, I'm very happy and like meeting new people and I like, you know being in contact with different people. People that are weird, people that are ... you know, you don't always get to speak to. It's just the only time I'm unhappy is when I'm alone. That's the only time I'm unhappy. When there are no distractions.

Interviewer

If you have to describe that feeling – that unhappiness when you're alone, how would you describe it?

Participant

Well, if I could choose a colour I would say... it's not white and it's not black, like ...it's a dull grey. It's a tone not actually a colour. And if I had to say physically how it feels, it feels like something is hanging inside my heart, like where my heart is ... like into my stomach. This feeling of ... not quite frustration, but like ... like there's no hope or ... but it's ... it's almost ... it's not so extreme. In a way it's subtle but yet strong. Yeah but, that's how I would describe it.

Interviewer

You said you sometimes write, that it helps you to get through.

Participant

Yes.

Interviewer

What do you write about? Do you write in a journal, do you write letters or?

Participant

I write in a journal. And I write stuff there from day to day stuff, to like automatism where you just write whatever comes into your head. I also write where I actually think and then my feelings come out or when I'm upset. If I'm writing poetry, it's very eerie, very depressed, not the kind of stuff you're going to want to read at a wedding or something....(laughs).... It's more something you'd read at a funeral.

Interviewer

Does it help though?

Participant

It does and a lot of the time when I read back, I can't believe that I felt that way about those things that I did. I just ... it's ... most of it helps me at that moment but it's like sort of helps me work through it, because it's sort of like I'm admitting to it. So you know, it's like they say that in admitting something you've won half the battle. It's sort of like ...

Interviewer

You sound very frustrated with what people say.

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

Do you ever feel understood by other people going through the feelings that you're going through?

Participant

No, I don't think ... I ... it's just ... it's ... even people that go through what I felt, I can help them. They can't really turn back and help me because, they're so focussed on their pain and ... not that I'm focussing on mine, I'm more focussed on theirs with them. But that is sort of like; you know ... it's ... just, I don't know how to say it.

Interviewer

You sound more focussed on their pain and going through their pain than they are. It sounds like you are describing that you feel very capable knowing how you feel and what you have experienced, that you can assist others and that you can be there to support others and yet it sounds like they are incapable of supporting you.

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

How come?

Participant

Either I, in a way, I don't allow it or that I don't want people focussing on me... I want to help other people. I don't want them to help me. I don't think I let them. I also feel, I'd rather take on somebody else's pain from them, you know I'll take it away from them and carry it myself and suffer through it myself. That's just something, I think I didn't ... I don't know, I want to help them so they don't have to go through what I had go through, or going through ... in a way I think that brings satisfaction to myself. I think of that whole thing of pleasing other people rather than pleasing myself.

Interviewer

Do you feel you do that?

Participant

I do. I do that.

Interviewer

Is there any other example other than carrying another person's pain?

Participant

Well, it ranges from small things like, going the extra mile like, I'll ... if they need to walk somewhere, even if it's out of my way I'll walk with them. Or if they don't have notes or they were absent, I'll go get them and do it myself or ... I think to the point that people actually might especially at school, like if we are reading a book and I would summarise the whole book into notes and photocopy them for the other person who hasn't read the book. But that doesn't bother me because at the end of the day, I can't help them in the

exams, so they are actually denying themselves. So it ranges from that to if my friend's boyfriend broke up with her, although I've got homework or tests or whatever, I'll drop everything and go and try comfort her. And from that I feel, yeah, it's like I feel I'm doing something that's worth something.

Interviewer

To contribute something of value to somebody else's life.

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

Who adds to your life? Who makes a contribution to you?

Participant

Well, I think my best friend. Okay, we have this group but she just, you know, we just always talk to each other because her parents are also divorced. It's just, we just relate, we talk. Whereas with the other member in our group, she's more like a mother figure, so she'll always come across like she's bursting your bubble or she's very pessimistic. So we ... like she sent me an sms last night and she said she's shocked that I'm so sad and it kills her that I'm sad and that she'll talk to me. So in a way I think she really contributes to my life. Where, I think other people sort of, they do like a half job at it or they don't actually see that there is something going on or care enough that there's something going on.

Interviewer

Sounds like you feel that either people don't see, that your pain is invisible. Or if they do see, they don't want to see.

Participant

Yeah. That's very much it. But I think I do a pretty good job of hiding it up as well. Because I'm always the fun, party person – happy, you know not ... I don't ... I think most people think I'm also not very clever, they think I'm a Barbie that isn't two inches deep (laughs). I don't think they believe I can think a bit deeper than just having fun. But I think it comes with the territory of school. I guess the people that count in my life know that there's more to me than just a Barbie, so I think that is all that matters in the end.

Interviewer

Who would you say you're closest to?

Participant

In general or ... ?

Interviewer

In general.

Participant

I would say it is between my best friend, Kathy and my next-door neighbour, Walter. Because they're just ... I think ... Kathy is also a lot like me. She is also someone that is a people pleaser. So you know, (laughs), you can imagine the combination.

Interviewer

I wonder who pleases more between the two of you.

Participant

(Laughs) Thank goodness we're not competitive. Yeah, and my next-door neighbour, he's very different, he's weird, he doesn't care what people think. We're very comfortable around each other. But I don't really speak about my problems with him. Like my deep problems I'll speak to Kathy with, and then just above that level, I'll speak to him. You know school or general problems, you know just like normal ... but we'll go into in-depth conversations about what we think so, in a way he's like an escape ... he's almost like an irritating brother sometimes. He'll come over when I'm busy when I don't want to see him but then other times when I'm lonely or bored, he'll also come over.

Interviewer

You mentioned quite a while back now, you went to see a psychologist, I don't know how old you were when you first went to see a psychologist for the first time.

Participant

Ten.

Interviewer

And you told everything to this lady and she in turn told your mom, and your mom's reaction sounded like it was less understanding than you had hoped. What happened around that?

Participant

Okay well, to make it easier I'll say what I told the psychologist and what made my mother a bit angry. I said I feel that with my stepdad and her relationship, I don't feel that I fit in. I feel that she loves him more than she loves me. She gives him more attention than she gives me. That ... it's like she's trying in a way to just push me behind and say "just behave or do whatever, I've got other things". And then ... I don't think ... you know, it might have not been true but it's the way I felt. And the thing is, my mother said, how can you feel that way when you know you mean everything to me. But the fact is, it's not maybe what was true but that's how I felt at that time. So I think it's just ... it

just brought more fear in that I can't tell anyone my emotions and I can't say anything about my stepdad, and I can't object, I must just keep to myself and keep quiet.

Interviewer

Which you've done?

Participant

Yeah, for many years now. I'm more of a peacekeeper. But I will sometimes... I guess I get to boiling point and I will just say, I can't take it anymore, you know, and then a lot of the reactions I get is that I'm actually very happy but I'm just spoilt. So it's just ...

Interviewer

How do you feel when you get those reactions?

Participant

That again goes back to not saying anything. I think one way I've coped is in saying I'm unique, so I must just focus on that and try work it out with myself. I also think a lot, especially when I'm alone even though I'm sad. I try to put things in my mind, to make it very clear, and understand and realise what or why I am unhappy or why, you know, I feel funny. I try to reason what the person was that said that, how they feel.

Interviewer

Did your relationship with your mother change after that incident?

Participant

Well, I think my mother and I, we didn't have a relationship until we moved out into this place, when we were together. Now I feel to a certain extent I can tell her anything. I feel, if I'm at a party and in a weird situation, where I can't get a lift home or everyone is drunk or ... even if I had too much to drink, I can phone her and she'll come through for me and make sure I'm safe. She'll obviously lecture me, and still be the mother figure, not just a friend that's going to help me out. But I just feel, you know we can pretty much speak about everything.

Interviewer

It sounds very open.

Participant

It is. It is very open.

Interviewer

Do you feel understood?

Participant

No, I think to a certain extent, I think ... I don't let people know that there is more than just... you know; I sort of hide them away. I'll come upstairs, this is my place and it's like

I don't want to burden her. She's already got so much stuff she has to worry about; I don't want to go on top of everything else with my stuff. So I'll tell her nothing is bothering me.

Interviewer

You're very concerned about her?

Participant

Yeah, definitely. Also with my sister, because we also have a good relationship. But I always seem to be sorting out her problems. Well, I have tried once to tell my sister and she said, the past is the past, forget about it, go on. She's just so much like ... you know; you just missed the point there. But, I think my sister is someone that although she'll easily cause conflict, I think she's also quite emotional. She doesn't like speaking about problems if she can't handle it, like if you start to cry. She's not good at problem solving. So ...

Interviewer

But is that what you wanted? Do you want anyone to solve your problems?

Participant

No, in a way I think I solve my own problems, because I don't think I'm going to be happy with anybody else's solutions except my own. So, I just think I needed someone to listen and then it was sort of cut short. So, that's where it stopped.

Interviewer

How would you describe your relationship with sister? How would you characterise it?

Participant

Well, we ... she's 7 years older than me, but we share the same clothes and so we have a lot in common, she's also like a friend in a way. She has this idea that she's raised me and that she has a lot of control over me but I let her think that because in a way that makes her feel important and happy. But we have fun together. We can be quite silly sometimes, like poking each other and pushing each other around and ... we can also like, our ultimate is when my mother goes away on holiday and she leaves us money and we can go out to restaurants and just sit there, drink, smoke and talk and complain about men. You know, I wouldn't want it any other way. We do sometimes have a bit of competition and ... but that's also less since she moved out. I also used to socialise a lot with her friends and they were like, here's someone new and interesting. So she felt unwanted in a way. You know she wasn't the centre of attention anymore. But she landed up not being friends with them and I'm still friends with her friends. Yeah, so I'm happy to see her happy and her relationship with her boyfriend. At first they didn't have

respect in the relationship and I think that's like the basis of love and everything. You can have love but then your relationship won't be able to last. I think respect is like the foundation. So I just felt that ... they broke up for 6 months and I think from that they realised all the things actually about them.

Interviewer

How are you feeling now? We've spoken for about an hour and, how are you feeling?

Participant

Relieved. I feel actually I think I've spoken more about my problems now than I ever have really. Or ... yeah, maybe not more than I ever have...um. But I feel like with interaction, people usually just sit there and say how does that make you feel. (Laughs).

Interviewer

Well I haven't used that one. (Laughs)

Participant

(laughs) Yes, ten points. So um, so I just ... I feel relieved, is the word, yeah.

Interviewer

I'm thinking about your stepmom, and how difficult things are with her, how would you have wanted it to be different?

Participant

That's quite difficult because right now if someone asked me if you regret your parents getting divorced, in a way I don't because I don't think ... I think I've got so much freedom at the moment that if I had to imagine it being taken away from me...um...you know, the whole situation is just, with me...it meant that I would have spent more time there and they generally had more set rules. It was not compromised. I never did anything that they couldn't trust me, but they never trusted me. So it's just that frustration of you know, if they could give me that trust I could show you I'm responsible enough and ... that I'm not, but it was just ... okay, I never used to smoke, that was something I did later and they always, even though I didn't smoke, they would always be like, "You smoke...when did you start smoking?" And I felt like, it's more like interrogating me instead of, "Have you started smoking?" or "or is there anything that's bothering you" or ... it was more like ... almost like the school is with us. But you don't really want that type of environment with your parents or that type of relationship, you want that type where they trust you and that they ... it makes you feel a little bit more independent and you know ... because so that you can experience more. So I think in a way my stepmother, being this way, I have at least an excuse not you know, maybe not so that I won't feel guilty because I don't see them that often, or you know, that I have

an excuse that, instead of saying, "You know I like my friends"... "Well they were naughty". (Laughs). So I'd rather stay with my mother. (Laughs).

Interviewer

So it worked for you?

Participant

Yeah, it has.

Interviewer

In that it's been a benefit?

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

And has it changed the relationship with your father?

Participant

Yeah, I think ... I almost want to say I ... I don't know exactly what type of person he is right now and he doesn't know who I am.

Interviewer

But what ... can you almost point a time when that started to shift?

Participant

Um ...

Interviewer

Because it sounded like the two of you were very close, that you had a very close bond. He was perhaps more a friend than a father.

Participant

Yeah, ...I'd say...it was about std. 7...end of std. 7 beginning of std. 8...my stepmother already then started acting a bit funny. Like...she said, "look at that photo, that's when you were still nice". And I'd be like, what...why am I not nice now or...um...my stepmother would comment on my weight, she'd be like, "look how many rolls you've got now" or something like that and then I just sort of, because my dad...he didn't hear it or maybe because he didn't want to hear it but I felt that you know he's supposed to be my dad, when I'm with you...you know I see you every second weekend, I'm supposed to be a priority, not you know, she's not supposed to be such a big factor. And, the thing is because she's very young; I think she feels very easily intimidated by my sister and I. Like, if my dad bought my sister and I some sunglasses, then she also wanted sunglasses. Silly things like that. You know you really expected like a parent figure as opposed to...

Interviewer

She sounded like she was competing with you.

Participant

Yes, almost competing. I think the fact that my dad didn't say, "listen, this is our time, I need to give Barbie a little bit of attention, I'm with you the rest of the time, I live with you, this is now our time". Um, he didn't, it was just...I think maybe the way I was also...It wasn't just about me anymore, maybe jealousy or um, I just felt we didn't have that connection anymore where we could wake-up, roll out of bed and go and eat pizza for breakfast. Something like that. It was just so strange. And she's also very jealous of my mother. She will always say a comment about my mother, like, "Your mother is only out for money".

Interviewer

How did you feel in that situation?

Participant

I felt I had to show loyalty to them, so I would have to sit there and keep quiet while they were saying stuff about my mother because I felt, um, you know it's difficult, being divorced you feel you have to choose sides and if you're with the one you feel guilty that you're not being loyal to the other or...now I feel things are easier as I haven't seen them in a long time, especially her because my dad will rather take me out for coffee than me going to the house. Um, I have lost my track of thought (laughs).

Interviewer

Feeling pulled between and you would just sit quietly and listen.

Participant

Oh yeah, there was something I wanted to say that was quite relevant; I don't know why that came in. (Laughs).

Interviewer

You were saying that for your dad you were less of a priority.

Participant

Yeah that he wasn't that supportive...Oh yeah, I was going to say that if she says anything now, I think I would immediately say, "Stop it. Don't talk like that about my mother". I think, I just...

Interviewer

It was more difficult then.

Participant

Yeah, it was more difficult. I just, um, they, I'd always come home very depressed from my dad, nearer to the end. I would be so upset that I wouldn't be able to go to school the next day, or I wouldn't be able to eat. Because as soon as I have too much stress I don't get hungry, and my mother just realised, and she was like, "What are they doing to you that...". It was just I think, that the loyalty thing and uncomfortable and guilt about the whole situation.

Interviewer

What did you feel most guilty about?

Participant

I think, that I didn't stand up for my mother. I didn't say, "Stop talking about my mother!", I just sat there, just took it and listened. So I think, that really...especially afterwards, I felt my mother is there for me emotionally, she's there for me financially, she's there for me in any way. Um, okay maybe not so much, I don't speak about my problems but that's not in a sense her fault, its more me not wanting to because she does so much for me, I guess I don't want to...it's like a bank account, if I keep taking withdrawals, somewhere you have to deposit, otherwise you're going to run out of money. Yeah, I think, I definitely, um, well my dad doesn't contribute very financially to us, because now he's got my halfsister, and now there's another one coming, my stepmother is pregnant again and she's turning two on Sunday and she's already got a pony. She doesn't even do horse riding, my whole life I did horse riding, when I asked if I could half stable a horse, which is a ridiculous amount of R150 a month, he wouldn't do that. He's trying to do differently what he did with us, in a way, but where my mother pays for my clothes, my activities, everything, and the house, he contributes very little. So I think, also in a way, I almost...it never used to be like that, I never used to appreciate what my mother did for me, um, I used to feel sorry for my dad in a way. Um, I didn't really think of my mother. I don't know what happened but she said, "Look at what I'm doing for you but he's always the hero".

Interviewer

In what way did you feel sorry for your dad, back then?

Participant

I just, I don't know, I just felt, shame, you know he's under so much stress and...my sister and I would remark, but with a wife like that. (laughs), yeah, so my sister and I, when her boyfriend was away and my mother was away, we went out for supper and then we realised, she throws too many tantrums and confronts my stepmother too much,

and I do it too little. So we thought no, we need to stick together around her. But my stepmother is clever, she will be very nice to me in front of other people, but then she'll be like come help me out in the kitchen, then there she'll go for it. And then she'll be like, like the first time I brought, my mother always saw my boyfriends, and then I took the guy I had the long relationship with, and um, I took him there because it was like a big step for me. She then pulled me aside and gave me birth control pills. It's like, I don't even see you and then you give me this. What are you trying to tell me, that I'm just sleeping with everybody? It just wasn't her place to do that.

Interviewer

How did you feel when she did that?

Participant

I felt like that she thought I would sleep with anybody. It felt like she was almost patronizing me, like, "you don't know better, so take these". I was so angry, and yes, I still kept quiet. I still said thank you. But when I got home, I threw them away. But it was just, I think, in a way, I don't let people walk all over me but in another way they walk all over me. It just stems from different situations. Especially if I'm in a relationship with a guy he won't walk all over me but other people, I think they can easily, you know, manipulate or ...it's difficult for me to say no to somebody because I'm always trying to please them.

Interviewer

Perhaps family relationships are a little more complicated.

Participant

Yeah, that's true.

Interviewer

There's a lot more at stake.

Participant

Yeah, that's also very true.

Interviewer

I'm getting a picture in my head of the evil stepmother in Cinderella, with the wart on the nose and two evil sisters on the way.

Participant

(laughs) Yeah, except, for now my sister is really sweet but when she comes to an age where she's starting to understand, I can just imagine what my stepmother is going to put in her head about us.

Interviewer

Are you pre-empting or predicting what?

Participant

Like, she's very loveable now. But I think as soon as she starts understanding she's just going to tell her they did this and this and this, and they left your father and they didn't come visit and make us out to be like the villains. So, I'm not expecting to have this great relationship with her. You know I still love spoiling her and I always will probably give her stuff and take her places but I will always have that in the back of my mind that, you know you always listen to what your mother says, you believe what your mother says. You feel, especially at a certain age, like from about 8 to you know, a certain age until you realise, then you like, until your mother starts telling you can't go out with guys that are in bands because they take drugs. Then you turn the opposite to what your mother believes and says.

Interviewer

Is that what you were told?

Participant

No, my mother just said they all do drugs. My mother used to be very strict on me, until we got here. And then I kept pushing my boundaries. I think most teenagers do that to see how far they can push them.

Interviewer

How far did you push your boundaries?

Participant

Like I would push my curfew. I would come an hour later, then two hours later, until finally I stayed out until the next morning. Then she said she knew I was in safe hands, I can do a lot, but she's not letting me do everything as long as I'm honest with her and tell her where I am and with whom I'm with. So if it comes to the point where I haven't called, if I'm not answering my phone, then she knows where to start looking. In that way, I can't do everything, I can't walk around here and try do heroine in front of her, (laughs), or be a prostitute. She's very against piercing. In std. 7 I pierced my tongue, I hid it away from her for quite a while until I went I bit insane and started singing in the house and she saw my tongue ring. She made me take it out and now I can take it out and put it in whenever I want. She's very strict about things like that and tattoos. And she doesn't like me, especially at school, because I also push my boundaries there, like if you're not allowed to paint my nails, I'll paint my nails. So I push boundaries all the time.

And she doesn't like me doing that, she wants me to stay in the rules and be easier and more convenient.

Interviewer

How do you understand your need to push boundaries?

Participant

I think I'm a person who doesn't like being told what to do. I have very set ideas of things and very set ideas of who I am. I feel almost like a boiling kettle when someone says, "You can't do that!". Then I automatically want to say, "I want to do that". I think maybe it's a bit of rebellion. I guess a lot of teenagers experience that. I guess also, I don't like being restricted. So, if I fear something, like if I have a fear of heights, then I want to go bungee jumping or something like that. I think I'm always trying to push my limits, and test people. I think I test people a lot. Not openly, I won't even tell them, I'll just try very subtly or... I think I also, in a way, manipulate a lot of people around me. Um, if I want something, um, how can I put it, 'cos it's complicated. Um, if I have an opinion of, say a friend, and I don't like the person. When you don't like someone, you usually look for other companions to turn against them or somewhere you can talk. Which is not a very good quality, (laughs), but I am being honest here. Like I'll put things out there like, "she's pretty but she had a really short skirt on" and then I'll watch their reaction, like "Yeah, she looked really skanky", then I know I can take it a further step forward and say something about them. That was just an example. Um, I think I also have a way of, I can guilt trip someone. Um, I'm a typical Gemini because I want to help people, give them their way but then from the back row I'm trying to get my will and my opinions and my needs also across. But I do that also very subtly. Like if I want to go somewhere, then I'll be like, "I haven't done anything for so long and it's going to be such a boring weekend. I've got so much work to do, so I'm just going to be working". Then someone will immediately be like, "No, we'll come fetch you, we'll do something". So in a way, that's you know, I'm guilt tripping people. I don't know why I do it. I guess it's also that feeling of control, I like having control but in such a way that people don't know I'm controlling them. I guess it's fun.

Interviewer

If it's alright with you, can we leave it here for today?

Participant

Yeah, that's fine.

End of Interview One

Barbie's Story

Interview Two

Interviewer

How have you been since the last time we spoke?

Participant

Well, the people I've told, because obviously everyone was interested, more interested actually in feedback or analysing. But I told them I felt very enlightened, like I could just fly around, like a load has been taken off of my back.

Interviewer

So, is that a good thing?

Participant

Yes.

Interviewer

How was the weekend with your father?

Participant

Well, it was the same as it always is. My dad was fine and the men in the group, in their friendship group were fine but the women always check my sister and I like outsiders. They say we're snobs. So we just got so irritated with them. So we just sit with the men and then it's fine. They don't treat us like we're outsiders.

Interviewer

How do you know they feel you're snobs?

Participant

Well, they tell us. Well, not the whole group, but my stepmother and my dad have told us the feeling is that we are snobs, that my sister and I are snobs. That's something that comes across quite often.

Interviewer

Where do you think they get that perception from?

Participant

They think we have an obsession with material things and money but when you actually listen to what they are saying, they are the ones who are obsessed with money because they are the ones always bringing it up. Because we are not the ones who are going there

and saying, "oh, look at my shoes". They are the ones who are always bringing it up. It's more like it bothers them than it bothers us. So we just ignore it.

Interviewer

How would you describe the weekend?

Participant

Well, it wasn't a pleasant weekend but I only saw them for about four hours but in general it wasn't a pleasant weekend.

Interviewer

Did something else happen?

Participant

Yes. I will swear off all men. I had my heart broken this weekend for the third time.

Interviewer

What happened?

Participant

Well, it was all fine and then this guy says he can't see me again, and this and that. The usual thing and normal thing, over and over.

Interviewer

Do you want to talk about it or leave it?

Participant

Well, he didn't really give me reasons but I wouldn't want to listen to it either because I know I get this really bad self-esteem.

Interviewer

What do mean?

Participant

No, I just don't even want to think about what could be wrong with me because I'm getting...ugh, I think I was just really disappointed in the guy because I didn't expect it from the guy it came from. So, it's okay. You know, it's just disappointing always, I'll get over it. I think I'll get over it more quickly than I feel right now. As soon as I'm out with my friends I'm fine and joke about it and stuff. They've been quite supportive. Even my best friends boyfriend is being supportive because we usually catch the bus but they came to fetch us after school and brought me some cigarettes in the car. You know little things that really help.

Interviewer

Do you feel it's something with you?

Participant

No, not actually. I think, right now I'm really anti-male, so I'll just say it's his fault. You know, I can't say very much about it. I'm not going to think further than what it was. I'm just going to say, "okay, that was that" and not analyse it or sit there and think what did I do wrong or. He just said it was because of all his family problems and everything. Then again, you can't always trust what men say because sometimes they just say anything.

Interviewer

Is that your experience of men?

Participant

Yeah. Okay, I'm not going to say I'm an angel because I've done that to guys but that doesn't really concern me because they do it more to me.

Interviewer

You mentioned that you feel really disappointed, and you did mention previously that with your experiences with men, they have always disappointed you.

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

Anyone in particular? How have they disappointed you?

Participant

Especially this guy because we have had very similar pasts and he was always willing to listen. I just really didn't expect this from him. And it wasn't like we can just be friends, it was like I can never see you again. You know, with some guys, you can pick up signs but this just came out of the blue. From someone that was always just caring, this was a shock, unexpected. I guess men have disappointed me on different levels, ranging from my dad with my stepmother, that we don't get to see him that much or saying he'll pick me up at 7 'o clock and then going to the rugby and then picking me up at 10 'o clock that night. Stuff like that.

Interviewer

So it ranges from family relationships to personal relationships.

Participant

Yeah. And I'm not saying women haven't disappointed me but I'd say much less than men have.

Interviewer

They have been more prominent.

Participant

Yeah. Maybe I just let it slide because I relate to so many women and a lot of the women in my life help me, so I tend to overlook the women and focus on the men.

Interviewer

Tell me about your father disappointing you.

Participant

Well, it's just the fact that we were so close and in a way it slipped away. I'm not saying I also didn't play a part in it, it's just, you know you would think for a father figure, he should have taken control and made sure our relationship lasted and that we see each other more often. So, I guess in that way he disappointed me.

Interviewer

What would you have liked him to have done differently?

Participant

That's difficult. I just think it's always been, he would say to me, "Why don't you phone me more...why don't you just send an sms". But at the end of the day he doesn't do those things for me either. He doesn't phone me, he doesn't sms me. So you know, I used to send those cute sms pictures to him but then he'd still go, "You never sms me". I just felt that I'm not going to be the one who's always trying to mend that bridge or try and have that relationship with him if he's not willing to try or make an effort.

Interviewer

So you feel he hasn't made or didn't make an effort.

Participant

I think he has tried but he did it too late, you know, when it was already gone. And now how can he expect me to be all close to him when we've let that gap come, which he knows. It's there, it's visible. I'm not all of a sudden going to be like, oh let's forget about all those years that you let that slide and now suddenly try and have this great relationship. I'm not going to pretend that nothing happened. So, I'd say he's making more effort than he used to but I still feel that I'm the one who is always putting in.

Interviewer

How do you feel about him?

Participant

Off the top of my head, I can't say I feel angry with him. But when I'm in deep thought, I realise I do have anger towards him and most of the people in my life. Even my mother, my sister, there's this feeling of anger towards them. Sometimes it's more disappointment than anger. Unfortunately, I'm someone who remembers everything that

anyone has ever done to me. I'm trying to let go of small things because you can't always expect someone to always be 100% there.

Interviewer

What do you do when you realise that you feel that way about the people in your life, your family?

Participant

Well, the first thing I try and do is try and work out of it. Because...I heard this story, which sort of makes sense, that anger starts to eat away at you from the inside. Because if you don't deal with it, it's like tying a rotten body to you because you're progressing with your relationships but it's still based on that anger and how can you have stable relationships when there's just anger at the bottom that can at any moment just explode. So, I try work through it and I try to forgive them and to work things out and apply what they did to things that I've done to other people that I regret. So, now I see myself as the victim but I did exactly the same.

Interviewer

So it's very much of a thought process in trying to see their perspective.

Participant

Yeah. It's getting me to think like they did.

Interviewer

Does it help?

Participant

To a certain extent. I think there is some anger I will never get rid of unless I confront them, which I probably will never do. Because they have probably forgotten about it and I don't want them to feel guilt or to cause that conflict and say, "But this and this is the situation", and then getting angry at me for being angry at them and causing their anger. So, I think to a certain extent it helps me to sort it and so if I think about it, you know quickly, and then I'd say I'm not angry. But if I think for long about it, then I actually realise I am still angry.

Interviewer

Do you think it will ever go away?

Participant

Well, I hope so. Probably not I guess. I guess things do change. Like if a person dies, then you forget...well I guess you don't forget but other things are important, like the significance goes down. Or maybe if they move or if I don't see them for a long time,

then it makes it less significant. Maybe if I get older, I'll realise how petty it was or if I have my own kids I'll realise things aren't always so easy.

Interviewer

What is the anger towards your sister about?

Participant

I think it's the fact that I've always dropped whenever she needed me; I've always dropped everything and helped her. I'd give up my friends; like they would go out and do something that I wanted to do. Like when her boyfriend broke up with her, I would sit there, and she would just cry and cry and cry. She'd be angry and miserable to live with and I'd help her through it. But then for petty things I ask in return, like driving me to the shops then she blows her top off and says I'm always asking her to do things for me. Once I had told her about a few of the problems I was experiencing, but she said, "Oh, go on, life goes on". It feels like after I had sit and listened to her and sacrificed so much for her and she won't do certain things for me. That sort of made me angry in a way.

Interviewer

It sounds like you invest a lot but your return is...

Participant

Yeah, in a lot of my relationships I feel that way. Then, on the other hand, I'm a people pleaser so I want them to. I'm quite a hypocrite.

Interviewer

It sounds like you're in a vicious cycle.

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

I'm wondering about the time you described yourself as being depressed. That went on for 2 years...What did it feel like?

Participant

The depression?

Interviewer

What were you feeling at the time?

Participant

Well, frustration in a way... just confusion of why I'm feeling like I did. The feeling of I didn't want to go on, like I just want to lie in my bed and not do anything. I wouldn't be hungry either... I wasn't living, I was surviving in a way and I didn't enjoy normal things, fun things, I didn't enjoy going out anymore... I think my personality changed also quite a

bit...just being dull...no ambition, no nothing. It was just one level of...just 'uuugh'. I can't describe it. I was not feeling much, just going on. Yet anti-depressants, when I went off that, I realised I can actually experience emotion. The anti-depressants also made me very...like something sad, like on TV when someone died, then I'd be like, "oh, they died". And if something happened then I'd feel like, "oh, that's nice". It was always just the one level. It made me actually feel worse than any better.

Interviewer

Howcome you stopped the anti-depressants?

Participant

Well, my mother was concerned. She said, even if I smile, she could see that I'm not happy, so she took me to the doctor. Then they started to give me like something like for short-term and then also when I went to the psychiatrist they said I was a manic-depressive and gave me all kinds of pills. At a stage I was on two types of anti-depressants at the same time. So, I think the anti-depressants didn't help me at all; they just made me one level, not happy and not sad. And that's even worse because then you don't even know what you're feeling.

Interviewer

How long were you on the medication for?

Participant

Um, from std. 7 and at the end of std. 8 I was just...I decided I just don't want to be on it anymore.

Interviewer

Did you take yourself off of it?

Participant

Yeah, I did. My mother would have given me the choice but I just...you know they say you must take a little bit less, a little bit less and I just stopped it. I actually started stopping it while I was in my December holidays and because there were a lot of parties and things. You know, I couldn't feel so much, like withdrawal symptoms from it; I was just concentrating on going out. So I didn't really have time to feel anything, which I think was a good time to get off of it because there were a lot of distractions.

Interviewer

How did you feel once you went off of it?

Participant

I had emotions (laughs). I could cry in movies if it was sad and I could enjoy myself if I was with my friends. It just... it felt like...because you depend so much on those anti-

depressants, if you skip a day off of those anti-depressants, then I'd feel dizzy and nauseous and really depressed and all kinds of side-effects. But when I went off of it, it was like a new world opening up to me.

Interviewer

How did it feel to have emotions again and have this new world?

Participant

I loved it. I felt like a human being again instead of just being on this one level all the time. I could sympathise...it was terrible actually. I just felt that even when there was pain, I was like wow, I'm experiencing pain. It felt good, relieving in a way.

Interviewer

What perpetuated the feelings of depression in the beginning?

Participant

I think it was a number of things actually. Delayed shock from my parent's divorce, maybe it sinking in. Maybe just feeling not heard and...because then it was all new to me, you know, from happy family and then over the years everything just changing. I think it was delayed, it was...I think I was fooling myself into thinking I was still happy, and then I realised, I'm not. Maybe because I was in denial for so long that suddenly accepting it, you know, it suddenly opened up a door of realising what actually happened and accepting it. Especially with my stepdad, with the change of going to...living with a tyrant in the house where I was used to the gentle giant. Not having my mother around me, not having people around me that were constantly fussing about me and, you know me being the priority in the house. You know, suddenly everything disappeared.

Interviewer

In your opinion do you feel that the medication and the psychiatrists were necessary?

Participant

Well, I think in the beginning, the anti-depressants actually helped because it lifted me up from the floor, from just being in total despair. I think it just lifted me one bar higher and helped me to forget all my feelings. The psychiatrist didn't help at all. I just felt frustrated...I felt it was nonsense, the fact that someone is supposed to help you, that you pay them a lot of money to ask you questions like, "How does that make you feel?". And after a while you don't even answer it truthfully because you just want to get it over and done with and get out of there and stop feeling like you could strangle the person. You also feel, you know, I felt like who are they to ask me these questions when...they don't ask you like, "How has your day been?". They just say, "Last time we spoke about..." but it was like, we didn't speak, I spoke and you didn't listen, you just asked me

the same question over and over. I just felt that it didn't help. I just think, how can it help, because it's not like you're speaking to a person that actually gives you feedback. Even if they gave you an opinion, they could say, "this is my opinion", that would even help more than asking me the same questions. I don't think the psychiatrist helped me at all.

Interviewer

During that time, was there anyone else around you that you could speak with or confide in?

Participant

No. Especially not with my friends...I think depression was a thing that was only starting to be told and people didn't understand what it was. It was actually, if we went out with older people, then they would be like, "I'm also on anti-depressants". I could relate a little bit to that. But not someone I trusted or I could really speak to. I was pretty much to myself.

Interviewer

Did anybody try?

Participant

Um, I think my mother just gave me the anti-depressants and thought...she didn't really have time...uh, I can't really say she didn't have time but that's sort of what came across. I think maybe she was sorting out her own emotions, so she didn't really want to still deal with mine which might bring up more emotions for her to deal with. I think she tried with the psychiatrists and getting me anti-depressants in a way but not in the way that I could sit there and say, "I feel depressed because...". You know it was just not like that. With my dad I just tried to have fun and forget about it, and I didn't want him worrying over me either. My sister went to Cape Town straight after school for a while, so I couldn't speak to her, but we didn't have such a good relationship back then. I was still her little sister. And then in std. 8, she took me out one night and from then we started building, slowly but surely, a relationship.

Interviewer

How does it feel remembering how it was back then?

Participant

Difficult, in a way. I haven't actually thought about it. I guess I try to forget about it. It's something that...it's weird to think back that I...that I was the same person because everything was so different. My mother had strict rules, like you can't do this, you can

only stay out until 9 'o clock. Now all of that is gone. It feels like a dream or a nightmare, you know, it doesn't feel like it's a part of my life.

Interviewer

Is it easier to forget certain things?

Participant

I guess, in a way. But I know that if you try and forget stuff, it's always going to come back to haunt you or affect you in a way that you don't even know that it's affecting you. So, I try work back everything to the source because you can clear things in your head and at least have an understanding once you get to the source. But I think, I don't want to take everything on in one day, so most of the stuff I try and forget, just for a little while, while I'm still sorting out what's happening to me now or what's happened recently.

Interviewer

Before you saw the psychiatrist, you saw a psychologist soon after the divorce.

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

Was there any particular reason why your mom took you to see a psychologist, what prompted her to do that?

Participant

I think she just wanted to know that...to understand...she wasn't sure what emotions I was going through, um, I guess she just wanted to know that I'm not confused about things and in a way, sort it out. I mean, obviously she knows it's not just going to be sorted out in just a few sessions but I think she didn't want it to be that, you know, you don't have any emotions and you must just forget about it, that you don't have a choice in the matter. I think she just wanted me to feel that she understands I'm going through stuff and maybe she didn't know how to deal with it herself because she was also going through a lot. So she wanted someone professional, maybe someone who was more objective and used to dealing with divorces. I think she was even unsure about what was going through her own head, never mind what was going through mine.

Interviewer

Thinking back to how you felt then, was it something that you needed?

Participant

I think I thought it would help but as soon as that trust was taken away, I felt betrayed and I didn't even think of anything positive that came out of it because I was just shocked

and angry. You know, the idea I had was of someone I was supposed to speak to and it was supposed to stay that way. I guess it wasn't the psychologist's intention either to make me feel that way. I think she just felt my mother must know how I feel so that she can try and fix that. Back then; I didn't think of that, I just felt it wasn't supposed to be like that. I didn't want my mother to know how I felt; I wanted someone to make it clear in my head.

Interviewer

How come you didn't want your mother to know how you were feeling?

Participant

Because in a way I knew the stuff that I said wasn't true but it was how I was feeling. Like I said, I felt that I wasn't loved by her anymore and my stepdad came first. And although I knew it was difficult for her and that she still loved me. It's just what I felt, not what I knew. It's difficult to explain. My intention was not to hurt my mother; I just needed someone to speak to about how I was feeling.

Interviewer

How did you and your mother get through that situation because now your feelings were revealed to her?

Participant

Well, my mother...I told her the other day and she said she can't believe she reacted that way. She got angry, I think, it was because it hurt her and she didn't want me to. It was her natural reaction of, she didn't want me to feel that way and then the first reaction she had was, "You know that not true! You always come first in my life!". I think it hurt her to hear those words and I think her first reaction was not to be sad, it was just to be angry. I think there was so much on her shoulders, that maybe she felt; please don't you also give me trouble or anything.

Interviewer

How did you feel?

Participant

I felt, well, I can't exactly remember how I felt then but I think what I've carried over is the idea...I felt I wasn't being understood, I felt almost betrayed and that I was in a situation where I couldn't express my emotions or how I was feeling at the time. I got such a fright, I thought I'm never saying anything again; I'll just keep quiet.

Interviewer

And you did.

Participant

Yeah, pretty much, yeah.

Interviewer

And do you still?

Participant

Yes, I do. For the convenience of those around me.

Interviewer

It seems like it's a high price to pay.

Participant

It is, it is but that's just how things work in our house. We try and avoid conflict, we'll fight over little things like cell phones. I suppose, everything else just disappears like it never happened. We don't deal with things, we don't speak about them. Sometimes, my mother will say stuff like, "she knows the divorce had a lot of problems". I just burst into tears then and I said I can't stand being in a relationship with a guy for more than two weeks and then I have to get out. And then she said, she knows that's also from the divorce, that's carried over and she regrets having to put us through it but she had to go through it otherwise she would...So little things, sometimes she'll speak more about the divorce and that she knows it affects us but the other things, the bigger issues that bother me, it doesn't exist...it's forgotten, like it never was...like it was a dream.

Interviewer

This might be an unfair question that I'm about to ask you.

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

Is it worth it?

Participant

...What, just keeping quiet?

Interviewer

Yes...like it's all a dream?

Participant

Well...I don't think it's worth it but it's not going to change the situation because every time I try it's just once again, one big fight and then pushed back, like it never happened again. So, it's just...there's no point in even trying anymore, I just decided that I get disappointed or I get hurt, so I'd rather speak to myself or think about things than try and attempt to sort things out or speak to the people involved.

Interviewer

You mentioned relationships again and how they are difficult for you and you mentioned before as well that you are aware that you keep things distanced when they become too close. What does 'too close' entail?

Participant

Well, I think they get to know me very well but only one of my faces and one of my masks. And as soon as they get past that mask, it starts...I get the feeling of being smothered. I think it's fear of maybe not...it's not that I consciously think that I don't want them to know the real me or know any deeper than that. I think it's just...I'm scared that if they find out everything that's going on with me then if we break up or we're not friends anymore, then some people will use that against you or tell the whole world. Then that hurts. You know, when you have your intimate details and feelings broadcasted and other things get added to it...I guess I don't want to be vulnerable. Maybe it has to do with the psychologist who told my mom everything that I haven't opened that door or I don't open that door very easily. If something bothers me and people come too close then I immediately just shut down and keep quiet and people can see something is wrong but I say nothing is wrong.

Interviewer

What masks can you show them, what do they get to see?

Participant

Um, the fun person who likes having parties and entertaining and adventurous. I guess it's part of my character but it's not exactly who I am. But then if I sit down and think who am I really then I can't answer that. And I guess nobody wants to be around someone who is going to sit there all miff the whole night. You know, not participating and being all philosophical...because there are times for being philosophical and serious but you know, you don't want it in a party situation or going out and have someone like that sitting there and I don't want to be the person who just sits there. But I guess I won't ever be that person. I think as soon as people are around, that's my comfort, I love being around people and meeting new people. Almost like forgetting what's happening at home or what has happened. So, I guess it's also a cover up or defence mechanism... to escape everything.

Interviewer

What was different about your previous boyfriend because that relationship lasted longer than most of your others?

Participant

I think I just really wanted to have a long-term relationship because everyone around me was having them and I couldn't stay in a relationship for two weeks and I'd go insane. I really didn't want that, I wanted someone I could...like I said before, where the story goes on and you don't have to go back and say this is this person. You know I wanted someone to have fun with and someone I could actually open a little bit more with than I do to most people. With this guy, he was really different. He listened to a certain extent...well then I only told to a certain extent, and he was very...well it started getting boring after a while but he was very safe and very stable. Whereas most people I usually go with are very energetic and you can't always rely on them whereas he was...like a 60 year old (laughs). I mean he was young but in certain ways he was just so...I guess there were no surprises, which nearly drove me insane in the last few months and made me want to kill him or strangle him...just put some life into him. And he was very conservative, which after a while also started to irritate me. But then again he also had a stable family and a good upbringing, like a dad who was very strong figure in the house and a mother..., which also started to irritate me because he had the idea that a man controlled a woman, and I can't stand that. You know, people say to a certain extent that that's the role a man plays in the house but once he started telling me things or commenting on my characteristics, that's when I decided I can't take it. So, at least now I feel I'm able to stay with someone longer than two weeks...I just also feel it's always been that I meet a guy and it's great but then I meet another one who I find more exciting, so I would jump from the one guy to the other. It wasn't always easy with him because it's funny how once you go out with someone then all these amazing possibilities come up (laughs). And soon as you break up then you're like what happened to them, they're all gone. I guess the security I feel now is at least I have broken over that whole fear of commitment. I feel now I can be with someone because I'm pretty relaxed around people most of the time. But in other ways they don't really know me.

Interviewer

Did he get beyond the mask?

Participant

Well, in a way he did except I didn't really speak about it. But he could see it was bothering me. Like I would be emotional, especially when he told me he was going to his best-friends party, which was at a strip club. I was emotional but I didn't explain...I also didn't feel I should explain. I felt comfortable enough to show emotions without saying that this is how I feel. I think that also frustrated him a lot because I think he also wanted

to help me but I felt just comfortable being there and showing emotions. And also at the end when I stopped...when I decided I wasn't going to please him the whole time, we did get into a few arguments, not hectic but me just putting my foot down and always doing what you want me to. A lot of people described that as being like an old married couple.

Interviewer

Did that bother you?

Participant

Being an old married couple?

Interviewer

Mmmm.

Participant

No, (laughs) it was sometimes fun to fight with him because it did feel like a marriage, so, it was sort of like, when you're small and you pretend you're ironing or cooking, it was sort of one of those.

Interviewer

Playing house?

Participant

Yeah, playing house, having my own family. It was quite funny. But I have this very good friend who, when I was 16, he just always complimented me and being there and would bring out the positive. The big problem that bothered everyone except us is that he was 30 and I was 16. It bothered everyone but we get along so well and we'd talk and he said something to me, which I just love. He said he doesn't regret people who have gone out with his girlfriends before because they make them the girls they are now. He made me see things in such a different way...that you shouldn't regret your relationships because in the end you just learn so much from it even though you don't know it.

Interviewer

That's an interesting way of looking at it.

Participant

Yeah, he's just so much fun to be around. We always do fun things together. I also tend to do what someone else pointed out to me, actually the guy that disappointed me this weekend, is that I tend to go for guys that are a lot older than me and he said it might be because I don't have such a strong father figure in my life.

Interviewer

How old was this recent guy?

Participant

Twenty four, seven years older than me. So, I tend to go for older.

Interviewer

It sounds like you get a lot of feedback from everybody else with regards to your life, why you do certain things and then they relate it back to the divorce. Do you agree with what they say?

Participant

Well, actually when this guy said it, I just kept quiet. And then I thought about because we didn't really know each other that much...and I don't know how it came up. But he said, I like going for older guys. And it's actually true. I've been always going for older guys and my dad isn't such a strong figure in my life. So, I sort of agree with it, maybe...you know not the whole I want a dad to look after me but just relating a little bit more or wanting to have that kind of figure in my life. I don't see them as my dad, (laughs), that would be quite gross but I find I can talk to them more. Schoolboys are...I don't mean to generalise but I can't really or that we always have fun but on such a superficial level. I can't have a conversation with them. It might be because my sister brought me into her friendship group and so I've always had older people around me. I mean I only have four people who play such a big role that's really my age and the rest are much older than me or a little older than me. The feeling that most people get if I don't tell them my age, then they automatically ask me where do you work or where do you study. So, I think I have just taken that message and made it my own. I guess I relate more to them because I've always...maybe I don't know how to be a teenager anymore. It's just always me being older, relating to older...and having their influence. I think I forgot how to be a teenager, I don't know how it is or what I'm supposed to be doing.

Interviewer

You mentioned you like having fun and having parties. What's the extent of your partying?

Participant

Okay, well, I like going out but that doesn't mean I don't study. I say that because a lot of my friends just party and no schoolwork. But I try balance it out, which is not easy because I don't love school (laughs). So, as far as partying, we do drink alcohol and two out four members of our group smoke, including me that is (laughs). But as far as drugs go...back in std. 7 we did experiment but we got busted so it stopped there. We do get offered a lot of drugs, most teenagers do because it's all around our school but as a

group we're very against drugs. Maybe because a lot of our older friends have experienced drugs and turned their lives around just in time before they died. Also, I'm someone who gets addicted quite easily and I'm scared that once I've experienced that high, I'm not going to go back. It might be seen as escaping than rather dealing with my problems but I think I really had enough problems and caused enough problems as it is, I don't need more. So, I just stay away from, I try and stay away from the crowd of people who like taking drugs. I know myself, I will get addicted. So we just go out or go to each other's houses...we have a very strong friendship group of guys and girls, probably eight or nine of us. We tend not to go to parties much, I go to parties with my other friends but we'll go out to News Café or places like that.

Interviewer

You described your mom as being very strict at one point, then a world of freedom opened up...do you think the divorce has contributed?

Participant

Firstly, I'm not close to tears; I just blew smoke in my eyes so it's not a touchy subject (laughs). I think my mother was very controlling in the beginning with my stepdad. I think my stepdad is someone who doesn't like kids and he doesn't feel he must give kids a lot of freedom or buy them stuff or luxuries. I think he had the idea that they must stay in their room with ten books and if you're lucky, one picture frame. So, my mother used to...like she bought me a TV because I stay in my room and we didn't have like a family dinner or anything and then I'd have to put my TV on like 2 and sit right there and listen to it so that he doesn't hear the TV, and the cell phone permanently had to be on silent and hidden, and my radio also had to be covered and hidden so that he didn't catch you...to that extent. When my mother bought my sister a car, she lied for two years and said it was her boyfriend's car she was driving around. Until she just told him, so it was the extent of that how extreme he was. He had good taste in music and I used to take his cd's and when he found out and came into my room and asked where's his cd's, and I would say I don't have them. At that time I didn't really look after them, they were all scratched. It used to work if I threw tampons around the room but then he would just say, I'll pop back another time. Anyway, getting back to my mom. Well, I think my mother realised when she stayed with me in this house, that there were actually a few problems that maybe she didn't see before because she was really distracted by my really crazy stepdad. So, I think she really started realising it. Like, firstly she told me, "You can't smoke" and then I didn't really smoke that much. Then I realised, damn I'm addicted to this stuff, where I always thought I could stop if I wanted to. Then I would go

to church, to youth group, and come back smelling like smoke. Then we started joking about, am I addicted and this and that, and then, where my sister always hid away that she smoked, then one day I just took a risk and smoked in front of her. When I think back now, I don't know where I got the guts to just light up in front of her. Lucky my sister told my dad, they went out to the Dros and she just blurted it out, so that helped me. And then I just started pushing my boundaries, little by little. Like, firstly I'd push...like, Walter; my next-door neighbour helped me with that. At 3 o'clock, my mother would wake up and she'd find a house full of guys, all still busy drinking and everyone's smoking, so little by little we pushed it. I think, then she started, you know she liked the guys around and she enjoyed their characters. And then I introduced her to Darren, who's the 30 year old. I don't know how, but she was the only one who was so for the relationship but my dad said guys that age only want sex meanwhile it's the schoolboys who only want sex. And then they got along, my mother and him, and she chatted with him quite a bit. And then the one night he said he had a surprise for me, he told my mother he didn't tell me. And then we went to Jo'burg, which I've never been, you know the nightlife. Then he would tease me, like your mother phoned and she said...because it was already 4 'o clock in the morning and I had lost track of time but my curfew was no later than 2. So he was like, your mother phoned and she was very angry, and I thought, ah. And then 7 o' clock we get there because we had breakfast and everything and I walk in, waiting for it and she says, "hello, my pookie". I was shocked but it was fine. Since then, she's just like just be honest with me, tell me where you're going and who you're going with and that's okay. And then on Saturday nights, that's when she usually sleeps over at my stepdad, so that's when I have my real hectic party nights. I guess she understands she's already exposed me to student life by letting me go with my sister to places and expecting to...you know make sure my homework is done, I've bathed and cooked for myself and taken care of everything in the house...and she realised she can't expect me to...on one hand I have to look after myself but on the other side I don't get to have that freedom that goes with it. I think she just understands that.

Interviewer

You say you cook for yourself, can you elaborate on that?

Participant

Well, like I get home and I make sure I eat, I make sure my homework's done, she comes home about 4 / 5, it differs from day to day. And then, when I'm hungry, I must go stand in front of the stove and cook for myself, I don't have a mother who cooks for me or says here's the food, enjoy. It's just like, everyone just looks after themselves. It

actually led to an eating disorder in std. 8 because nobody was around when I ate so they didn't know if I was eating or not. My mother pretty much figured that out very quickly once I was very skinny. She also didn't do much about it...it was just you know, stop doing it. And then I went overseas, that was heartbreak number 2.

Interviewer

Okay, let's get a context.

Participant

Sixteen, March...

Interviewer

Were you still depressed or off the anti-depressants?

Participant

I was off the anti-depressants but the eating disorder came in.

Interviewer

Okay, eating disorder as in just not eating?

Participant

Not eating and if I do eat, then making myself throw up. So it was a mixture of both.

Interviewer

How long did that go on for?

Participant

About two years on and off. What happened was, I was quite chubby in std. 6 and 7 and then I had comments from guys saying, you know Barbie is fat and stuff like that. And then I started losing a little bit more weight, just by dieting, not starving myself or anything and then I started seeing more guys were interested in me and then from that I went totally extreme. I thought I fooled most people but one of my friends said, "You have an eating disorder". Then I met a guy who was a total asshole, yeah, he just fell in love with his own reflection.

Interviewer

How old was he?

Participant

At the time he was 21.

Interviewer

And you were 16?

Participant

Yeah. And he was just one of those guys that all the girls loved being with and that irritated me a lot because a lot of my friends would pass those barriers of, like listen, this

is my boyfriend and these are my friends. I got upset about that. And then suddenly he just didn't have enough time but after I was over him then suddenly I wasn't too young anymore. Then luckily I went overseas for a month because my mother had a conference in America and my best friend, who I've known my whole life, moved to England, so I went to visit then. So I got over it and suddenly everything just cleared up and I was like, why am I doing this to myself, making me more unhappy than happy and then when I got back, it was like new happy. Whereas I'd tried to stop before and then I'd just go back to the eating disorder but it just stopped. I don't know how it happened, maybe seeing my best friend again and having her telling me...she's quite understanding but it's quite difficult to communicate because it's far. I think I just cleared in my mind what was important and to be happy was not, you know, being extremely skinny. They pump it in our heads at the guidance centre that because a lot of the time you don't have control over your whole life, so that little bit you can control, you can control how much you eat, you can control your weight. So I just think it was just maybe because I felt I was losing control and the fact that I had comments thrown over my weight, I guess maybe also self-destructive.

Interviewer

A difficult time?

Participant

Yeah, it was. But I find that the more I tell people, like most people knew because a few people did comment on like why have you lost weight and I would just say I've started smoking or I've cut out. Some people didn't question twice. Even my sister because my dad and my stepmother were commenting about it a lot and in a way for her she wanted to protect me, she didn't want people to...she'd say, "no she's just under a lot of stress, leave her alone". So she was shocked, I told her last year and she burst into tears because she was always the one who was telling everyone that there was nothing wrong.

Interviewer

She protected you and yet she felt responsible?

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

When you look back now, from before the divorce, at the time of the divorce, and the past 7 years, how do you feel about it all?

Participant

Well, the most used thing that comes out of my mouth is, it's made me the person who I am.

Interviewer

Okay, elaborate on that.

Participant

I guess I wouldn't be so concerned about other people, you know, caring about what's going on in their lives. I would react differently to things...say, I would believe things, especially rumours much easier than I do now, whereas I question the source a lot now because I know how it feels to have rumours spread about you. So, I think the divorce also made it...in a way it distorted my relationships and my ideas of relationships but in the end...I feel that if I've had this bad part then maybe I can only have a better future. Sure, there'll always be pain in the future, everyone...pain is always part of life but through that I can learn...I can know what is going to help me and what's just going to leave me frustrated. My decision-making and my responsibility has come into my life...independence also in a way.

Interviewer

Is there anything that...if you could have had the voice, to say to your mom and your dad or anybody, and you could say that now, what would you want them to hear about that time; things they could have done differently, things they did well, that helped you through?

Participant

I would say they should listen more. Because it doesn't help if you sometimes hear but you don't listen. Another thing is that...sometimes what you're saying or doing is not what you...you know, there's underlying issues behind that. Like, for example, the eating disorder. Maybe it was just a sign of calling out, like someone help me or help me out of this situation or see that something's wrong. So, listening maybe more...or seeing more things into it...in a way maybe caring more and maybe not letting me raise myself so much. I guess they still loved me...that was a very good thing they did. It was just always unconditional love, like I could pierce my tongue, get busted for weed and do a few wild things and they would be angry but still not make feel unloved. Not total neglect...to a certain extent I felt they were caring, maybe they weren't doing much about it or implementing anything to do but at least they showed the attention of they are seeing a few signs.

Interviewer

Sitting here now, how do you feel today?

Participant

Well, at this moment I feel a lot better than I did before... I guess, only to a certain extent because of what happened this weekend with this guy but I certainly feel much better than I did before I started.

Interviewer

What has this experience meant to you?

Participant

About the interview?

Interviewer

Yeah, the chance to say what you want to say.

Participant

That there are actually people out there that care about teenagers and divorces and not just saying it's a statistic. You know, that everyone's parents are getting divorced, it's accepted and that it's not that hard. But actually, especially teenagers because there's a huge difference between a teenager and a child. If I just think of what I thought when I was younger and what I think now, it's just...we don't want to be classified as children and we don't want the same methods as you do with a child... we don't want to be patronised, especially I think that's what a teenager hates, is a parent who says, "you're a teenager, you're still a child, you live under my roof". I think we want to feel important because we feel we know enough to actually have an opinion and you know, to express it to someone. So, I think that it's very important that people listen to teenagers because they actually have a lot to say but parents' aren't always willing to listen. I think, especially what I know, is that if you want to talk to a parent, they don't listen to what you say. It's just like, for example, if I say I got drunk last night, they don't wait for you to finish the story, you're like and actually I decided I don't like it. It's just they hear immediately and they react on it, they don't listen to the whole story. I think it's very important that they listen to us because we always have something to say...every teenager has a story.

End of Interview Two

Barbie's Story

Interview Three

During the course of the first two interviews, Barbie had mentioned that as a means of coping, she would at times write poetry in her journal. Thus, the researcher asked Barbie if she would like to share a poem with the researcher that she had written in the past, something that reflects her emotions at that time. For this reason, the researcher conducted a third interview where Barbie shares a poem with the researcher and the context in which it was written.

Untitled

(Monday, 2 September, 2002)

Popped each tablet intricately on the
texturised, cushioned duvet.
Soon there was a lump of white stained oval pills
dominating the blocked surface.
I glared at it and incorporated this 'brain-child'
into my thoughts - it was my destiny.
Although the idea sliced into my conscience
like a serrated-jagged knife rips through poultry.
I clasped the tablets in my damp, trembling hands;
and flooded my mouth with water.
I slapped a handful of painkillers in my mouth
and gulped the bitter substance 'til my palate was lonesome again.
Fear enveloped my heart and churned my brain.
My eyes now a glassy stain.
My neck is tickled by heat and this slithers up my ears,
which are now dyed scarlet.
A pearl of my unkindled emotions slips
over my cheek and dries on my chin.
All that is heard is my constant heart throb
and the ironic tranquil respiration of my lungs.
Goodnight, I shall not rise again.

Interviewer

When was this written?

Participant

I did it the day afterwards when I was in hospital. I was pretty bored and tired of people asking me, "why did you do it" and telling me, "you shouldn't have done it" and so I just wrote what happened.

Interviewer

How do you feel about it, reading it now?

Participant

It doesn't feel like it was me. It really doesn't. Quite shocked actually...it's a lot of stuff. It's actually quite scary because out of all the attempts, this time that I wrote about was the closest I was...and even more scary was afterwards when I realised what was happening and I was in the hospital and they were trying to pump my stomach and everything. Even now when I take tablets just for a headache, I get very...like almost my whole body jerks and revolts, it really doesn't like it. Yeah, it's just really shocking. I guess I was very lost, the most lost when this happened.

Interviewer

When you get that revolting feeling, is it a physical feeling or does it link to...

Participant

I think it links to...I think it is physical as well because it's that bitter taste...that whole bitter...the memory of the taste and what they made me drink to get the pills out of my system. I think that whole experience, it's also linked up to emotions as well but it's also physical. I think maybe more emotional because of...just the whole idea.

Interviewer

Can you recall what you were thinking when they were pumping your stomach?

Participant

I still remember feeling like hot flushes. It felt like a dream but I guess the drugs had an influence on my mind. It wasn't like it was me, like I was standing outside looking at me from outside.

Interviewer

It's a very detached...

Participant

Yeah. It wasn't like I was in my body.

Interviewer

You said you wrote this the next day when everyone was commenting to you. What did they actually say to you?

Participant

Well, it was actually more the nurses. They came to, they're like, "don't worry, you know you're young. What possibly can make you unhappy?". I almost felt like they were speaking to me in this condescending way, like you're a little girl who has no stress, what are you worrying about. You know, you can't possibly have a reason to be in this situation. A few of them were nice to me and didn't say anything, they came and took my pressure but others took on the role of being my mother. They didn't even know me but they were like, "why did you do it" and "do you know you could have died", and I thought, yeah, thanks for stating the obvious. So, they just took on the mother role, you know, usually your mother takes on that role when you've done something to disappoint them. And I felt it was not their place to come and tell me, you know, "you're so young...". You know, I don't anyone who attempts to commit suicide if there's no reason. You're obviously going to have reasons behind it. So, for them to come tell me and say, "you're so young, how can you have problems, you know. Wait 'til you're out of school, then you'll see problems". Then it came down to people don't understand, the whole reason, I think with the attempted suicide, maybe I didn't exactly want to die but maybe just a warning sign for someone to try and help me or listen to me. So, it didn't help when they came up and said, "You must be strong because you're so young, you can still experience so much", which I did but it's not what you want to hear.

Interviewer

Not at that moment.

Participant

No, especially from someone I don't know. And it's not like they're even counsellors, it's just a nurse who came in there and decided to tell me what to do.

Interviewer

What did your mom say to you?

Participant

She said, "Don't be naughty again".

Interviewer

Was it ever discussed further after that?

Participant

No. Never. Like I said before, everything in my house is followed by like it never happened. It just disappears. That's maybe why it's like a dream because everything gets sucked up into somewhere and it's just never spoken about ever. I have spoken about it to people, like my friends but with regards to the family...my dad doesn't know, my stepmother doesn't know but it's just like it never happened.

Interviewer

How did you feel then about your mom's comment and then it's swept under the carpet?

Participant

I realised that it doesn't even help because I was trying to cry for help but it didn't help. I guess that's why I turned to so many other things for an escape...self-destructive things, I guess also cries for help...there's something not 100% right. Maybe I did then but I can't think of anything like I was angry or anything. I think it was just such a shock to reality how easily you can kill yourself. I don't know...I felt like it actually didn't happen, it was just another thing. I mean, nobody ever asked me, why did you do it?.

Interviewer

Would you have wanted them to ask?

Participant

Maybe then, I would but if my mother had to ask me now why I did it, I'd actually be very angry with her, I'd be like, what's with the concern now...it doesn't help now that you ask me why I did it. But I think at that time I also felt guilty about everything so I also didn't want it to be brought up. You know if you've lied and been caught out then you don't want anyone to bring it up. So, I think because of my mother and the shock and that, so I didn't focus on it.

Interviewer

What did you feel guilty about?

Participant

Once again, I felt like I disappointed my mother...that I wasn't the perfect child who could just be happy with my circumstances and be grateful for what I had. I know she works very hard, she's always got work, so I know she had so many problems already to sort out. When this happened I was pushing my boundaries...now I can push my boundaries and my mother's okay with it but back then there were consequences, very drastic consequences. So, it felt like I was constantly in trouble and I didn't want to always be the child who makes my mother unhappy or she has to struggle with me and with her life as well.

Interviewer

You tried to please her, not to be a bother or cause more concern.

Participant

Yeah. The reason why my mother now gives me so much freedom is she told me I've taken responsibility, I don't do crazy things anymore. It was as at that time that I was looking for a change all the time, something to do to my hair or...I mean I got busted for smoking weed, I pierced my tongue which my mother is so against, and so I was constantly doing all these things she hated and got busted for it. But I think I have realised over the years how not to get busted and I know what my mother wants to hear, I mean I tell her the truth but I edit the details out.

Interviewer

So you've learnt how to play the game very well.

Participant

Yeah. I've picked up over the years, how you don't get caught is that you must stay as close to the truth as possible.

Interviewer

So you felt a lot like a big disappointment?

Participant

Yeah.

Interviewer

And now?

Participant

No. I don't know...a lot of people describe me as weird and there's nothing wrong with that, I like being weird, I guess it makes me the person I am but my mother has sort of accepted that I am different, I will do weird things, I will eat weird foods, I do dress differently...so, I guess now she sort of enjoys me being different. It's so different to what it was like then, I can't actually compare it, it's so different.

The end of Barbie's story