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*Alienation and isolation of the
individual with chronic pain: a Marxist
literary perspective*



Alienation and isolation of the individual with chronic pain: a Marxist literary perspective

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What is pain?

- What ever the person says it is



Pain is encountered alone

but which also encompasses
an universal meaning
within a given discourse

Language

- An understanding of pain presupposes that the sufferer is able to use a language which is shared and understood by all
- Language is culturally determined and a social medium which legitimates pain as a cultural and personal experience - **that is, couched in ideology**

Ideology

- Defines what is acceptable society
- CPS stories of their pain are product of ideology
 - Pain should be acute, have identifiable pathology, can be treated and resolved in Western medicine.
 - People are commodities –they sell their ability to work

Research Aim

- To explore the experiences of chronic pain sufferers without a consensual medical diagnosis

Methodology:

The Interpretive process

Allows the researcher to reconstruct each person's experience of pain, and the significance of this experience in and to the life of the sufferer.

- Subjective “**pain is whatever the person says it is**”
- Multiple realities – truths
- **Each truth is equally valued**
- Contextual

Biographical methods

- Explore the experiences, interpretations and understandings held by a person, a group, or an organisation as constructed by this person, group or organisation
- Biographical methods include stories with a beginning, middle and endpoint

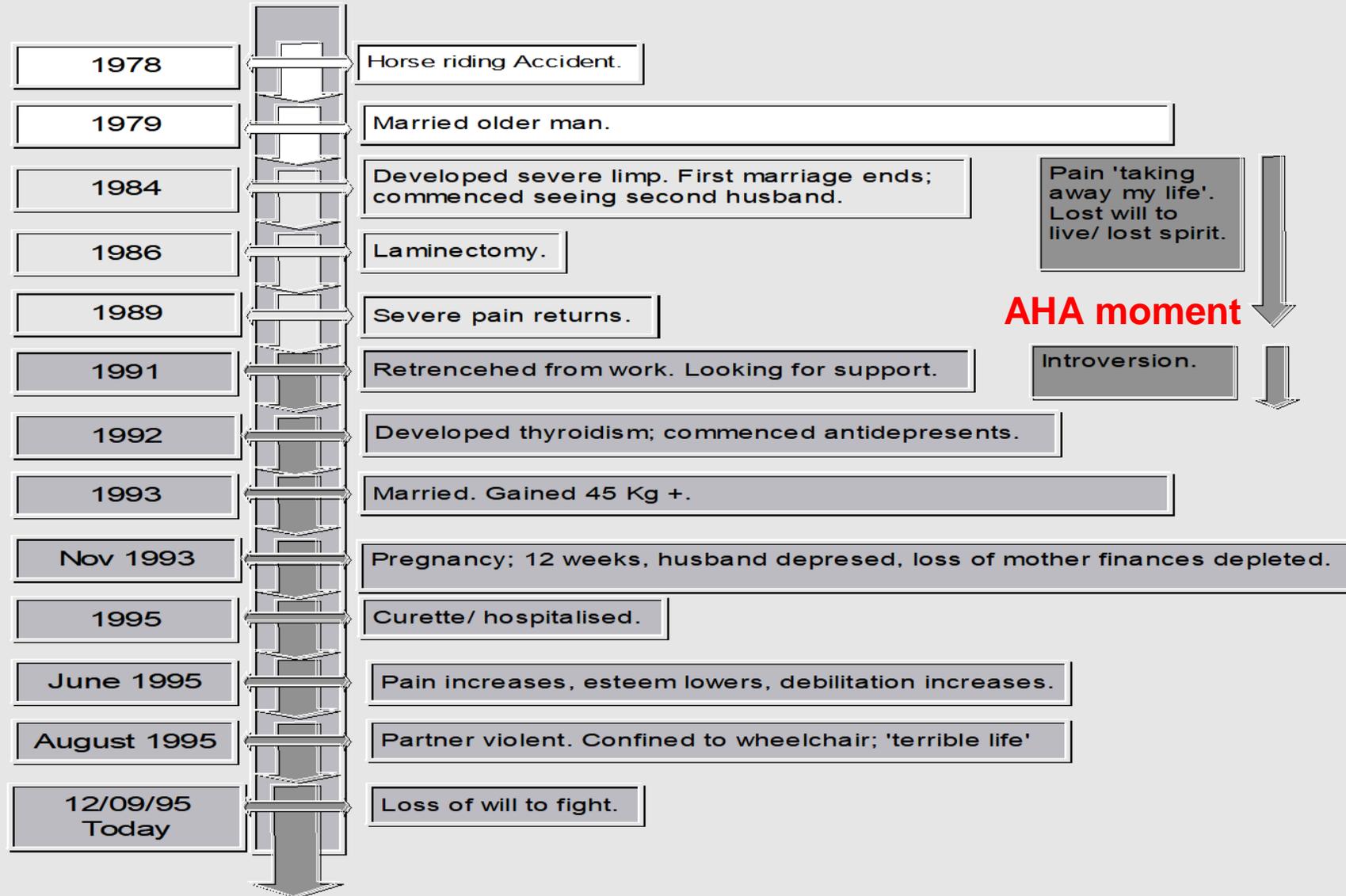
Epiphanies

- Form the basic threads of personal experience stories.
- They occur in problematic situations which need reconstruction and interpretation in order to generate personal understanding of the nature of experiences.
- An AHA moment!! **Life changing moments**



Pain Experience time-line for 'Joanne' (31 years old) from 1978 - 12/09/95

Create a pain story



Analysis -Literary theory

Calls into question the relationships between differing ways of thinking and challenges established ways of thinking and acting by reading the text (interview transcripts/stories) from a range of perspectives.

Marxist literary theory – theoretical lens

Marxist Ideas: finer points

- Dominant way of thinking (ideology/discourse)
- Class struggle – exploitation by ruling class (medicine and chronic pain sufferers)
- Base (economic) & superstructure (institutions)
- Socio-economic element created by the social relations to and of the means of production
- Employer vs. employee or
 - Nurses vs. patients

Marxist literary theory's considerations

- Reality of the CPS is shaped by a constant struggle to “fit in”.
- The meaning of pain sustained by a biomedical model which regulates or dissipate conflict and keep the beliefs and values of a particular society intact.
- Biomedicine maintain the power relations in society ensuring the views of the (ideology) dominant group are upheld and that views and experiences that do not conform are “silenced”.
- Those who live and work within the confines of a biomedical model often have a fixed way of seeing, explaining, and dealing with the world (nurses and doctors). People do not question actions and values accepting them as “given and natural”.
- Entrenched ideas regularly reinforce that pain is attached to pathology, can be fixed so the person can return to work.



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Findings

- Medical interviews – focus is to return the CPS to work
- Health is the capacity to work and return to normal life function
- Getting well means absence of /or adaptation to pain =return to work
- The CPS feels the blame from health professionals for not getting better
- CPS is a worthless commodity - can't work
- **Alienation** from self and **isolated** from others
- Continuous search for meaning of pain

What this means ..

- CPS' pain is objectified into signs (mechanical or chemical) verifiable through diagnostics; symptoms- subjective (only credible if can be verified) – maintain social control
- Patients must convince or persuade HP of their pain biomedical truths vs pain experience
- Does not conform to traditional medical ideology
- Chronic pain cycle
- The individual as commodity has nothing to sell – has no value because can not fulfil role obligations

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"And with 10 being the highest, you're sure you're only at a 6?"



Conclusion

Autonomy is lost in the market-system leaving the individual alienated from the world if they are unable to identify with the mode of production, as valued by the dominant discourse.

No labour to sell

I CAN'T
STAND IT!



The Chronic Pain Cycle

