

**THE VOICES OF WOMEN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO  
EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

**by**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Women and young people who have experienced domestic violence view themselves through an abuse-dominated lens, causing thin descriptions of themselves. Research was undertaken with seven women and eleven young people to explore how they had experienced domestic violence and to co-author and co-construct new stories of identity.

This research addressed how a narrative pastoral approach guides therapeutic conversations with people who have experienced domestic violence. A narrative approach has at its heart the notion of decentred practice and an ethic of care.

Reflective letters after each group meeting played a central part of the research. The letters were structured to tell the alternative stories emerging during and between sessions. These stories were told and retold and in each telling the women and young people experienced alternative views of self and joined others in this re-writing. Participants spontaneously continued to meet beyond the completion of the research.

## **PREFACE**

I would like to dedicate this research to the seven women and eleven young people who participated in the groups. It was a great privilege to co-research with you and to witness the resistance to domestic violence.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all the people who contributed to this research:

My supervisor, Elmarie Kotzé for her wonderful support and dedication to narrative practices. Thank you for living narrative practices and assisting me to make them part of my life as well. I also appreciate the valuable input of my co-supervisor, Prof. Dirk Kotzé.

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And my Heavenly Father, for life and all the choices given to me on how to live it.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

*No safe place.*

*Nowhere to hide. No way to escape the terror.*

*No one to tell. No one to go for help.*

*Is this a war zone? A ghetto? A natural catastrophe?*

*No, this is the violence of day-to-day family life in many American homes.*

(Crawford 1994:2)

In my work as a counsellor and a social worker I have found the above true about many South African homes.

#### 2. WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

There are different terms to describe the phenomenon of domestic violence: '*family violence, domestic disputes, spouse abuse, wife abuse, woman abuse, battered wives, battered woman*' - there is a plethora of words which are used, sometimes almost interchangeably, to describe the same phenomenon (Smith 1989:1). It is more appropriate to use domestic violence, as other terms concentrate too much on the marital relationship between the victim and the perpetrator (Lockton 1997:10). Domestic violence denotes a much wider form of relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. It is difficult to define domestic violence – it is easier to see the damaging effects of physical abuse, but emotional abuse is often harder to measure. Vienings (1994:1) defined domestic violence as the '*emotional and/or physical abuse, including sexual abuse, perpetrated by a member of family on another member*'.



In South Africa the following descriptions are used in the new Act on Domestic Violence, (Act No. 116 of 1998):

- *domestic violence* means any one or more of the following forms of conduct performed by a *respondent* in respect of a *complainant* which consists of:
- a) *physical abuse*, consisting of any act or threatened act of physical violence;
  - b) *sexual abuse*, consisting of conduct that abuses, humiliates, degrades or violates the sexual integrity of the *complainant*;
  - c) *emotional, verbal and psychological abuse*, consisting of a pattern of degrading or humiliating conduct which may consist of
    - repeated insults, ridicule, or name calling;
    - repeated threats to cause emotional pain;
    - the repeated exhibition of obsessive possessiveness or jealousy which is such as to constitute a serious invasion of the privacy, liberty, integrity or security of the *complainant*;
  - d) *economic abuse*, which may consist of
    - the unreasonable withholding of economical or financial resources from a *complainant* who is legally entitled thereto or which the *complainant* requires of necessity, including the withholding of household necessities from the *complainant* or refusal to pay mortgage bond repayments or rent in respect of the shared residence; or
    - the unreasonable disposal of household effects or other property in which the *complainant* has an interest;
  - e) *intimidation*, by uttering or conveying a threat or causing the *complainant* to receive a threat which induces fear;
  - f) *harassment*, consisting of a pattern of conduct which induces fear of harm to the *complainant*, including repeatedly
    - watching or loitering outside of/or near the building or place where the *complainant* resides, works, carries on business, studies or happens to be;

- making telephone calls to the *complainant*, whether or not conversation ensues, or inducing another to do so;
  - sending, delivering or causing the delivery of letters, telegrams, packages, facsimiles, electronic mail or other objects to the *complainant*;
  - g) *stalking*, by repeatedly following, pursuing or accosting the *complainant*;
  - h) *damaging of property*, consisting of the wilful damaging or destruction of property belonging to a *complainant* or in which the *complainant* has a vested interest;
  - i) *entry into the residence of the complainant without consent where the parties do not share the same residence*; or
  - j) *any other controlling or abusive behaviour towards a complainant*; where such conduct harms, or may cause imminent harm to the safety, health or well-being of the *complainant*;
- *domestic relationship* means a relationship between a *complainant* and the respondent where they –
- a) are or were married to each other in terms of any law, custom or religion;
  - b) live or lived together in a relationship in the nature of a marriage (whether they are of the same or of the opposite sex);
  - c) are the parents of a child or have or had parental responsibility for the child (whether or not at the same time);
  - d) are family members related by consanguinity, affinity or adoption;
  - e) are or were in an engagement, dating or customary relationship, including an actual or perceived romantic, intimate or sexual relationship or any duration; or
  - f) share or recently shared the same residence;
- *residence* also include institutions for children, the elderly and the disabled; and
- *respondent* means any person who is or has been in a *domestic relationship* with a *complainant* and who allegedly commits or has committed *domestic violence* against the *complainant*.

These broad descriptions make this act one of the most progressive acts in the world.

### **3. THE PREVALENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The dynamics of violence in South Africa are complex. South Africa is often referred to as a country which has a culture of violence. Violence has become an acceptable and legitimate way of solving political conflict and of reaching certain goals:

*This culture of violence does not stop at the front door of our homes – it is incorporated into the family's way of resolving conflict. Family violence is linked to the levels of violence in society. Usually a society which is experiencing high levels of political and criminal violence, also experiences high levels of family violence.*

(Vienings 1994:3)

The culture of violence in the country has a powerful effect on domestic relationships.

It is difficult to give an accurate picture of the extent of domestic violence: '*Women are abused behind closed doors*' (Mullender 1996:30). There are remarkably few usable estimates of the problem, partly because it is hard to be accurate, but also because there has not been the political will to fund a large-scale incidence and prevalence study. Adams (1994:7) noted that in the USA: '*...based on FBI statistics, 95 percent of victims of battering are women.*' I believe this is true for the South African context as well.

Statistics for South Africa are not available in relation to criminal prosecution of domestic violence, because separate statistics are not kept for assault by a partner. In addition, women's groups believe that charges in domestic assault cases are far more often withdrawn than of cases of assault by strangers (Human Rights Watch 1995:64).

Novitz (1996:5) gives the following statistics for South Africa: '*some sources suggest that one in every six women has been the victim of violence committed by a man with*

*whom she was related to*'. According to research conducted by the South African Police Service, 80% of all serious violent crimes committed in the Western Cape Province was related to domestic violence (Novitz 1996:5).

#### **4. VOICES REFLECTING TRAUMATIC AND HEALING EXPERIENCES**

Unfortunately South Africa is a large reservoir of stories told by people who have experienced trauma, be it the trauma of tragic loss, being victim to violence, rape, extreme poverty, abuse, divorce, homelessness, forced removals, torture, and the list could continue. A considerable asset also lies in the stories of healing told by many of the survivors of traumatic experiences. Regarding the political violence, a statement of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (hereafter TRC) reflects something of the above:

*...voices that for so long had been stilled. And as it listened to stories of horror, of pathos and of tragic proportion, it became aware of the high cost that had been paid by so many for freedom. Commissioners were almost overwhelmed by the capacity for human beings to damage and destroy each other. Yet they listened, too, to stories of great courage, concluding often with an astonishing generosity of spirit, from those who had for so long carried the burden of loss and tragedy. It was often a deeply humbling experience.*

(TRC 1998:1)

I can relate to the above, as I experienced the same emotions when listening to the stories of women and young people in my work as a social worker. Children, together with their mothers can be victims or witnesses to the violence at home. Children's rights and needs are often overlooked, therefore I believe that any intervention must take account of their position of least power within the family and ensure that the children are not unwillingly held responsible for the solution or for the abuse and violence. In my research I decided to have two separate groups with women and young people who suffered domestic

violence at the hands of male perpetrators. I came to know the abuse story but was also privileged to hear the survival stories.

For a long time in South Africa nothing protected the women and children who experienced domestic violence at home. The Prevention of Family Violence Act of 1993 was implemented in South Africa, however, the police and legal system did not manage to fully implement this and the police were not perceived as trustworthy. The Human Rights Watch conducted an investigation of human rights in seventy countries around the world. They commented on the South African situation in 1995: *'Women of all races report that they are unwilling to report incidents of domestic violence to the police station due to the widespread impression that the police are often unhelpful and even hostile'* (Human Rights Watch 1995:76).

One example from the report describes Janet, a white woman who does part-time work, and who had been abused intermittently by her husband. She stated:

*The last time in December (1994), he fractured my nose by hitting me with a pipe and tried to rape me in front of our child. But I didn't bother to go to the police because they won't do anything. I'm filing for a divorce.*

(Human Rights Watch 1995:76)

Hopefully the situation will change in South Africa, since the Domestic Violence Act, No 116 of 1998 was implemented in December 1999. The Domestic Violence Act aims to protect women and children in South Africa. However, there is a long way to go before all the problems regarding the procedures and processes will be resolved.

I came upon the idea of the research when I assisted one of my clients, Frieda, to apply for a protection order against her ex-husband. I was appalled by the long wait for hours in the queue in the cold court corridors, unfriendly staff and lack of clear information about the procedures to follow. I realised the damaging effect of this on Frieda, but also

the relief on her face when she received the protection order, after all the frustration. I then decided to conduct research on domestic violence on women and their children in South Africa. Frieda and her two daughters were participants in my research and they shared their experiences regarding the application for a protection order in terms of the new Domestic Violence Act, (No 116 of 1998).

bell hooks (1989:9) suggests that moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, '*...a gesture of defiance that heals, and makes new growth possible. It is that act of "talking back" that is the expression of our movement from object to subject*'.

This prompted me to let the voices of women and young people be heard and to create a context for '*talking back*'. They are the people who are *experts* on the effects of domestic violence and alternative ways of living after trauma – as survivors thereof. The realities of their lived experiences need to be the focus. John Bradshaw wrote the story of Christina Crawford: '*...she talks from her heart. That is the place that violence can be healed. I know Christina walked the walk and experienced everything that she writes about*' (Crawford 1994:i). The voice of Christina in the book '*No safe place*' tells the story of a survivor, one who had experienced domestic violence as a child, two broken marriages and a stroke by the age of forty-two:

*Yet, once again I survived. Surviving was what I knew best about life. In coming back to life, I had already beaten nearly insurmountable odds, so determined that neither the debts nor my not knowing how to be a person were adequate excuses for giving up. If it took me the rest of whatever time I had left, I was determined to unravel the treacherous knot that kept me and so many in misery. As that understanding surfaced in my learning process, I knew I had to share it.*

(Crawford 1994:27)

## 5. MEANINGS ATTACHED TO STORIES OF THE SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A predominant theme in the literature about the effects of domestic violence is the notion of psychological damage. Some writers propose that the behaviour of the women and young people who experienced the violence may be assessed using certain criteria from traditional psychiatry. These criteria are used to discuss the 'syndrome', so that doctors and others might diagnose the level of disturbance of the women and young people (Durrant and White 1990:11). These classifications have had profound implications for the development of ideas about how therapy should be conducted. The implication of this way of thinking is that somehow the damaged personality of the client will be understood and repaired through the expertise of the therapist's interventions (Durrant and White 1990:15).

My research involved women and young people who experienced domestic violence and who deserved to explore their own strengths, skills and knowledge. With this work came a number of challenges: *How can I work with these two groups – without a teaching attitude? How can I create a space in which the community can name the socio-economic, cultural and political restraints that they are up against? How can I do this in ways that illustrate the strength of these restraints? How can we expose the 'masks' of injustice so that people's stories of survival become more visible?* I resonated with the work of the Latino people in California (Colorado, Montgomery and Tovar 1998:16), when they mentioned that they wished to create a context which facilitated the construction of personal and community narratives that fostered respectful relationships and the reduction of violence. The best way for me to create this context was through following the principles of the narrative approach.

I prefer a contextual method of viewing how difficulties may develop in the lives of women and young people who have experienced domestic violence. There are often other significant relationships, which play an important part in shaping a person's view of him/herself. The narrative approach looks at the oppressive stories authored by

perpetrators of domestic violence which influence the stories told by women and young people who were involved in domestic violence. This leads to the 'power and control' that the perpetrator has over the abused woman or child. 'Power' is always present in relationships as described by Foucault (Durrant and White 1990:22). I became interested in narrative therapy's premise that the stories people have developed about themselves are located in the context of certain ideologies, which are cultural and sociopolitical stories. Michael White has drawn on the work of Foucault in elaborating this idea and suggests that therapy can be a context for challenging the way the ideologies, or dominant knowledges, operate (Durrant and White 1990:22).

What follows from these ideas of problem development, is that the therapist and clients co-construct many new descriptions of events in order to generate '*news of difference that makes a difference*' (White 1988). The new description is co-evolved with the therapist participating actively in introducing new descriptions, often in the form of questions, and building on these new descriptions. In my research this means, responding to the women and the young people's responses.

*Clients are seen as being under the influence of a dominant story about themselves, their relationships, and the problem itself. Their descriptions of themselves are understood to be dictated by the dominant story, and the many alternative stories which they could potentially express about their competence and resourcefulness are not given space to be performed.*

(Durrant and White 1990:23)

Narrative and story are terms that are used interchangeably throughout this study. The narrative or story metaphor proposes that persons live their lives by stories. Narrative organises, maintains and circulates knowledge of ourselves and our worlds: '*We live by stories both in the telling and realizing of the self*' (Gergen 1994:186): stories that we heard as children, and that we told others; stories we heard from others about their



experiences and also what we were told not to tell. Stories are what we make up about ourselves; they are what we tell ourselves about ourselves.

The *dominant story* of violence and abuse may prevent women's success stories of survival from being told. The discourse of success in society prevents women from speaking out about their painful stories as well as their survival of these. Discourses do not simply have effects at the level of speaking, writing or thinking, they are profoundly effective at the level of practice. As Jones and Jacka (1995:172) assert: '*Discourses shape who we "are" including the activities in which we engage daily, the decisions we make, the beliefs we have about ourselves*'. Weingarten (1995:11) points out we are never subject to only one discourse. However, whether we are aware of a discourse or not, it powerfully shapes our stories, both those we tell and those we live. The discourses of gender also shape, structure and maintain inequalities within a culture.

In terms of this research project these '*activities*' include women's decisions about choice of partner, responsibilities as a wife and mother, attitudes to professionals, fear of moving out of prescribed roles, and speaking up. These practices become part of what we call a person's story or narrative.

The book, '*I have life – Alison's journey*' (Thamm 1998) tells the story of this young woman's journey of survival during and after a rape and brutal attack on her life. Alison's words bear witness to a discourse of success in society:

*At first I thought the only solution to my situation would be to carry on as if the whole trauma had not happened. I wanted to undo the damage by getting on with my life and ignoring it. Because I was so determined to believe this, at first, I missed all the other options that were available to me. I could not see them because I focused too closely on the problem and because I did not look for alternative answers.*

(Thamm 1998:247-248)

The dominant story for the women in the present research was the story of domestic violence. The alternative stories were those that had been discounted or gone unnoticed, being subjugated because of the *abuse-dominated lens* through which they were viewing themselves. The dominant story wanting to silence them, as Alison said.

In terms of the therapeutic narrative, it is the responsibility of a narrative therapist to hear and validate clients' stories. How narrative practices make it possible for people to deconstruct and take a position on many of the alternative ways of thinking and being, will be illustrated in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

By focusing on stories of domestic violence and healing, this study sought to achieve a greater understanding not only of the consequences of domestic violence, but also of the way in which people recover from this and choose to live in ways they prefer. This they did despite changing circumstances.

## **6. HAS GOD BEEN ON OUR SIDE?**

*All night long I flood my bed with weeping  
and drench my couch with tears. (Ps. 6:6)*

*My tears have been my food day and night. (Ps. 42:3)*

*Rise up, O Lord, confront them,  
Bring them down;*

*Rescue me from the wicked  
By your sword (Ps. 17:13)*

(Bible for Study Groups 1989)

*These psalms are the words of our tradition, words spoken and prayed in  
worship. They are laments and petitions uttered by victims of radical evil,*

*pain and violence. The people of God have spoken these words together across time, as if to say, 'We the congregation, will not keep silent' in the face of such violence. We will name both the pain and the enemy. We will hear and hold the victim and survivor. We will confront the perpetrator and insist on retribution. For our God is a God of compassion and justice.*

(McClure & Ramsay 1998:1)

James Poling in his book: *'The Abuse of Power – A theological Problem'* wrote mainly about the stories of the sexual abuse of women and children and how the church and faith community dealt with this. Poling (1991:14) mentions that the silence of the church and society on sexual violence raises questions about the nature of community. The structure of oppression in sexual violence raises questions about God.

*Power is a complex term with personal, social and religious connotations....[A]ll persons have some power by virtue of being alive. Some are denied the chance to exercise their power because of oppression. Others use their power to destructive ends. Society dictates how power is distributed.*

(Poling 1991:12)

Statistics tell us that sexual and domestic violence has escalated in recent years. It is likely that in most churches on any Sunday morning, there are batterers or child abusers and many victims of sexual or domestic violence. *'In a 1989 survey of various denominations in the USA, the 105 respondents reported that they had encountered a total of 885 cases within the prior year, an average of over eight per minister or priest'* (McClure & Ramsay 1998:2). My own experience as a social worker, for different church welfare organisations in South Africa proved to be similar for this country as well, or even worse. In my work alongside ministers, I have perceived that they usually keep silent or send a *'hands-off'* message to victims and perpetrators or try to ignore or minimise the abuse.

## 7. RESEARCH QUESTION

The Human Rights Watch (1995:11) urge that studies of the nature and extent of violence against women should be carried out or funded by the government in close cooperation with non-governmental organizations active in this field. I decided to take up this challenge.

In the previous sections I attended to the descriptions and statistics of domestic violence, narrative therapy, dominant and alternative stories, the way discourses shape the community and the way that the church and faith community deal with domestic violence. I focused on the practice of a narrative approach towards counselling with the survivors of domestic violence. In view of this, the research question I want to address is: *How can a narrative approach to pastoral therapy guide therapeutic conversations with people who have experienced domestic violence?*

More specifically the study aims to create a space for the participants to tell their stories as well as:

- *exploring narrative pastoral therapy's contribution and role in understanding the consequences of abuse;*
- *exploring the narrative pastoral approach to re-engage with experiences of domestic violence in a way that would give voice to stories of hope;*
- *to facilitate preferred, alternative ways of being in the world despite having experienced trauma due to domestic violence;*
- *to share these knowledges and skills within a community of other participants;*
- *to look at the participants experiences of God;*
- *to explore how (if at all) their faith influenced and strengthened their way of coping with the abuse;*
- *to reflect on the role of the church, pastors and pastoral counselling in cases of domestic violence; and*

- *to explore the role of the faith community in taking a stand against abuse and violence of all sorts and develop a safe place for women and children.*

The purpose of my study was informed by the above questions, invitations from the Human Rights Watch (1995:11), and my own experience with clients who suffered greatly. I engaged in this research with the belief that the narrative approach can enrich this research and provide recognition of the value of the expertise of the participants.

The steps that I took to assist participants in the groups to locate alternative stories about themselves will be described in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. The client is invited to '*perform meaning*' around unique outcomes which are identified (Durrant and White 1990:25). In my research I intended to focus on the qualities that the women had in raising their children as single parents, their strategies for coping all these years, the steps that they took in leaving abusive relationships and choosing a violence-free life for themselves and their children. I focused on the young people's strengths despite their circumstances.

The research involved seven female participants and eleven of their children who had experienced domestic violence. All voluntarily agreed to take part in the group sessions. Some of the participants were clients of our welfare organisation in Roodepoort, Johannesburg and some were living in an economic housing setting that previously belonged to the local council.

The sessions involved sharing their stories, reflective group letters and group work based on the narrative metaphor of therapy. Narrative therapy recognizes that it is our personal story or self narrative that determines the shape of the expression of particular aspects of our lived experience, and that it is the stories that we have about our lives that actually shape or constitute our lives (White 1997:41).

## 8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I chose to work within a postmodern, social construction paradigm, as this constitutes a narrative approach. A social construction viewpoint is concerned with the ways in which people describe, explain or otherwise account for the world in which they live (Gergen 1985:266). The focus in social construction is on the social interpretation and influence of language, family and culture on how people interact to construct, change and maintain what their society holds as true, real and meaningful. This is elaborated on in Chapter 2.

This paradigm has influenced the way I view theology. '*Participation and metaphoric language*' (Gergen 1985:266) is according to my view, part of postmodern theology. This is in accordance with my preferred contextual approach of practical theology that is described in detail in Chapter 2. Postmodern theology seeks increased meaning by deconstructing one's own metaphors and the metaphors of other believers.

It was important for me in the research to look at a broader scope of practical theology. One of the methodological issues regarding practical theological research is the relationship of the researcher to the researched. I chose a qualitative participatory research approach where the participants' perspectives are viewed as important. It was the aim of the study to give the women and young people the opportunity to tell their stories of domestic violence.

*Understanding meaning thus requires a different approach, a 'Verstehen or insider' approach. The researcher cannot enter the world of meaning, the 'lifeworld' of the research participants, through an objective stance. Only through 'entering into' the lifeworld of the researched as an insider, could the researcher hope to gain understanding of meaning.*

(Habermas 1984:108)

Denzin and Lincoln (1994:1) argue that qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right. It crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matter. This field of inquiry include the traditions associated with positivism, poststructuralism, and the many qualitative research perspectives, or methods, connected to cultural and interpretive studies. Qualitative research is many things at the same time. It is multiparadigmatic in focus – meaning there are multiple realities. *'These realities are socio-psychological constructions forming an interconnected whole. These realities can only be understood as such'* (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Qualitative research *'examines people's words and actions in narrative or descriptive ways more clearly representing the situation as experienced by the participants'* (Maykut and Morehouse 1994:2). The knower and the known are interdependent and values mediate and shape what is understood. Events shape each other. Multidirectional relationships can be discovered (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Qualitative researchers emphasise:

*The socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is researched, and situational constraints that shape enquiry.*

(Denzin and Lincoln 1994:4)

Modernism suggests that we can understand the self as something with clear boundaries, purposes, and goals – an entity that, in seeing itself as separate and distinct, constructs that which is not-self as *'other'* (Heshusius 1995:117). I realised that in my research with women and young people it was impossible to be objective. As a qualitative researcher I aimed to gain understanding of the women and young people or situations that they experienced. I needed to direct my experience to a different understanding of the self-other relationship, by seeing that listening to people is affected by the particular concept we hold about the self (Heshusius 1995: 121). When the mode of consciousness one enters is participatory, that is, when concerns with the self have been let go, total

attentiveness can occur. In my choice of qualitative research, I opted for a more '*participatory consciousness*' (Heshusius 1994:16).

Heshusius (1994:16) proposes for a '*participatory consciousness*'. In this, '*relational selves*' do not come to knowledge by separation but by way of care and love. She calls this relationship the '*self-other*' (1994:17). This connectedness may be seen by some as a spiritual experience (Andrews and Kotzé 2000:332). I believe this spiritual connectedness between the participants happened when the participants shared their experiences of domestic violence. They talked about their pain and loss. Through the tears in our eyes we experienced '*spiritual connectedness*' (Andrews and Kotzé 2000:332) when I listened to the women and young people describing their suffering.

The self-narrative is an individual's account of the relationship among self-relevant events across time, a way of connecting coherently the events of one's own life. Stories are to be thought of as narratives within narrative (Laird 1991:430). We do not only hear other's stories. We have our own stories to tell. As these stories intersect, they change. In the research, because of and through that intersection we became part of one another's stories in the women's group and young people's group. We too are changed (Ackermann 1996:48). A description of the procedures is woven into Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

## **9. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION AND VALIDITY**

In terms of ethical consideration I was committed to honour the stories of the participants by being sensitive to their life experiences and not to oppress the marginalised women and young people by acting like the expert. The reflective letters contributed to collaboration amongst the participants as they had the opportunity to read and correct or add to their '*own words*' as well as to the process as it unfolded in the groups. I took great care not to '*re-traumatise*' (Durrant and White 1990) them through the re-telling of the story.



At the first group meeting I informed the participants about the methods of narrative group work, the aim of the study, and the way in which we were going to discuss their stories. They had the opportunity to agree to take part or opt out after the first introductory meeting. Both groups set their own rules for the group meetings, therefore making it safe to share their stories, without being re-traumatised. In this research I explored the ways in which women and children could share stories of lived experience of domestic violence in separate groups. Our reflection on the effect of such sharing is found in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. The study created opportunities for the women and their children to voice their stories in a safe environment. This empowered them to be able to share their stories with the reader/s of the research report. They gave me permission to share their stories of sorrow and triumph with a wider audience, including the community and church leaders.

Janesick (1994:215) uses the metaphor of a dance to describe qualitative research. Looking at *credibility, validity and reliability* she mentioned that '*staying close to the data is the most powerful means of telling the story, just as in dance the story is told through the body itself*'. I therefore made audiotapes of our group meetings and wrote down key phrases and statements made by the participants. I tried to use at least 60% of their words in the reflective letters. The participants had time to read and correct these letters or could discuss issues further at our next meeting. These techniques and methods were used to ensure the integrity and validity of the stories. The participants had time to review the chapters of the research document as well.

*The qualitative researcher is uncomfortable with methodolatry and prefers to capture the lived experience of participants in order to understand their meaning perspectives. The qualitative researcher is like the choreographer, who creates a dance to make a statement...the story told is the dance in all its complexity, context, originality and passion.*

(Denzin and Lincoln 1994:218)

This research provided multiple perspectives from which some women and young people could view their stories, and through the use of externalizing conversations, contribute to the deconstruction of these abuse dominated stories.

## **10. CHAPTER OUTLINE**

An outline of the content and context of the research report follows:

Chapter 2 focuses on the epistemological and theological context of the research and my preferred approach for practical theology, namely a contextual approach.

Chapter 3 introduces different models and therapies to deal with domestic violence. At the end of the chapter I focused on my preferred way of working with a narrative pastoral approach.

Chapter 4 explains the group process and introduces the reader to the participants.

Chapters 5 and 6 give an account of the group experiences, the participants' voices and the voice of the researcher. The rationale behind this form of presentation is to develop the co-creation of new stories and to position the participants as well as myself, as authors in the research project.

Chapter 7 is the summary of the research project. Recommendations for practical theology and pastoral therapy are also offered.

## CHAPTER 2

# EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF THIS RESEARCH

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The epistemology or philosophy of the origin, nature and limits of the knowledge of the researcher by definition has significant implications on the research procedures and results. Since epistemology is concerned with how people know what they know (Dill & Kotze 1997:3), it refers to the basic assumptions that inform my way of knowing and my preferred theological position.

In this study, I wanted to be accountable for my epistemological presuppositions. I have chosen postmodern social construction discourse as the constitutive epistemology of this research. Deconstruction of my epistemology and theology for this study is thus of paramount importance to gain understanding of how I reached the conclusions I did.

This chapter starts with descriptions of *postmodern discourse*, *social construction* and *post-structuralism*. This will create a context for the later discussions of *postmodern theology*, *practical theology* and *pastoral therapy*. Hence the scope of this study did not allow for extended reflections of the terms and concepts.

This chapter also examines the professional discourses informing the counselling practices for survivors of domestic violence.

### 2. DISCOURSE

Foucault (1980:43) asserts that *discourses are practices, techniques and rules*. Discourses create their objects. Since a discourse is not a static theory with objective truth, a fixed definition will not be given. Instead preference will be given to a variety of descriptions.

Foucault thinks of discourse in terms of bodies of knowledge. According to McHoul and Grace (1993:26) Foucault's use of the concept moves it away from something to do with

language (in the sense of a linguistic system or grammar), and closer towards the concept of discipline. The word '*discipline*' is used in two senses: as referring to *scholarly* disciplines such as science, medicine, psychiatry, sociology and so on; and as referring to disciplinary *institutions* of social control such as the prison, the school, the hospital, the confessional and so on. Fundamentally, then, Foucault's idea of discourse shows the historically specific relations between disciplines (defined as bodies of knowledge) and disciplinary practices (forms of social control and social possibility) (McHoul and Grace 1993:26).

According to McHoul and Grace (1993:31) '*a discourse*' would be whatever constrains – but also enables – writing, speaking and thinking within such specific historical limits. Foucault's concept of discourse is very different from other (especially Anglo-American) conceptions of discourse (McHoul and Grace 1993:26).

Hare-Mustin (1994) talks about a discourse as: '*both the medium and the product of human activities, that is, the way a certain worldview is sustained*'. According to Hare-Mustin (1994) it holds that meaning is created through language (linguistic and non-linguistic) – but is not language as such, rather the way in which it is used within discourse that constitutes reality. It is thus a social process or conversational manner that becomes constitutive of our reality (McLean 1997:14).

The way most people in a society talk about and act on a common, shared viewpoint are part of and sustain the prevailing discourses. Discourses shape people's lives and relationships. We can understand power as it relates to relationships, through examining the dominant discourses in society (Weedon 1987). '*Discourses powerfully shape a person's choices about what life events can be storied and how they should be storied*' (Freedman and Combs 1996:43).

In the culture of counselling, professional discourses inform the creation of and the politics of the therapeutic relationship, and the ways these shape not only therapists but also the people who consult us (Dixon 1999:9). Discourse is a means of representing experience. Not just what is spoken but who speaks, from where, and to whom.

The professional discourses that shape the interaction between therapists and the people who consult them are constituted of rules that govern the practices of different bodies of

knowledge (Dixon 1999:11). We know that despite the best of intentions the 'helping professions' are not always helpful in meeting the needs of battered women.

*Hospitals and social service agencies have been criticised for being unprepared to provide meaningful aid to battered women; for irresponsibly prescribing psychotropic drugs as a remedy; for blaming battered women for their own suffering; for a failure to see violence as the most important problem; and for making the preservation of the marriage a greater priority than the woman's safety.*

(Ptacek 1988:150)

I consider it important to examine some of the practices and bodies of knowledge that influence and constitute the professional discourses that speak to us of 'correct' and 'true' ways of working with people who have lived alongside of violence and those who perpetrate it. These practices will be discussed later in Chapter 3.

## 2.1 Postmodern discourse

The term **postmodernistic age** refers to a certain situation and time in history but remains a vague and ambiguous concept (Kvale 1992a:1). A characteristic aspect of **postmodernistic discourse** is the '*epistemological notion*' that objective and singular knowledge is impossible and that multiple realities are preferred (Gergen 1994). The term **postmodernism** has been used to refer to the post-modern age, distinguished as a time period after modernism; the cultural expression of the postmodern age; and postmodern thought and discourse (Kotze 1994:21). The latter use will be the focus in this study.

Postmodern discourse brings '*the values, perspectives, hopes, visions, aspirations and personal faith of the person back into play, since it seeks wholeness and meaning*' by gaining perspective on the continuity between all levels of a multi-levelled reality (Herholdt 1998:217). Postmodern discourse thus also accommodates the Truth and Reconciliation Committee's recommendation that '*the values, interests, aspirations and rights advanced by those who suffered be affirmed*' (TRC 1998:13). For these reasons postmodern epistemological and theological discourses were preferred in this study.

The modernist assumption has that reality can be known objectively and that a 'true' interpretation of this reality can be made, been challenged by post-modernism. This so-called objectivity emphasises facts, replicable procedures and generally applicable rules, and therefore often ignores the specific, localised meanings of individual people (Freedman and Combs 1996:33).

Positivists have thus recently been criticised for excluding too many local, case-based meanings in their generalising theories (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:100). Due to this criticism the past century of scientific thought has seen a movement away from these modernist approaches to the postmodern discourses of critical theory, constructivism and social construction discourse. The ideals of neutral objectivity and empirical observation as set out in its criteria for disciplined inquiry are also questioned (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:100).

The defining characteristic of postmodern discourse, also in terms of theology and therapeutic approaches, is *'its endeavour to move away from modernism's fragmentary perspective of reality and its reductionism which attributed to a loss of meaning'* (Herholdt 1998:215). Modernism's reductionism is thus replaced by a holistic view that acknowledges that interrelation brings interaction (Herholdt 1998:222).

Postmodern research is mainly concerned with explaining 'the processes by which people come to describe, explain and otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live' (Gergen 1985:266). In postmodern discourse the participation of the subject is deemed essential to our understanding of the external world, since the human mind is seen as an integral part of the reality it aspires to know (Appelt 1999:8).

The critique from modernists that for postmodernists *'anything goes'*, is not true when looking at Gergen's (1994:103) statement on moral action:

*Moral action is not a byproduct of a mental condition...but a public act inseparable from the relationships in which one is participating. [A] moral life is not an issue of individual sentiment or rationality but a form of communal participation.*

Therefore I have chosen the postmodern, interpretative discourse of social construction, which places an emphasis on the constitutive effect of stories. Consequently the voices of the co-researching women, their children and their accounts of survival stories despite trauma, are of paramount importance in this study.

## 2.2 Social construction discourse

Social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live (Gergen 1985:266).

Social construction discourse moves the focus from the dualistic tradition of subject and object to treat the process of knowledge (Appelt 1999:8). Knowledge is seen as a result of social process, which develops and circulates amongst people. It is not an objective description of external realities, nor is it a process in our heads. Knowledge is the result of something people do together, since it is '*context-dependent, socially constructed and constituted primarily through language*' (Kogan and Gale 1997:102).

According to Shweder and Miller (1985) social construction theories argue that people categorize the world the way they do, because they have participated in social practices, institutions, and other forms of symbolic action (e.g. language) that presuppose or in some way make salient those categorizations. The emphasis in social construction discourse is on '*social interpretation and the inter-subjective influence of language, family, and culture; on how people interact to construct, modify and maintain what their society holds as true, real, and meaningful*' (Freedman and Combs 1996:27). What can be said about the world – including self and others – is an outgrowth of shared conventions of discourse (McNamee & Gergen 1992:4).

According to Freedman and Combs (1996:22) a postmodern view of reality holds that:

- *realities are socially constructed*
- *they are constituted through language*
- *they are organised and maintained through narrative*
- *there are no essential truths.*

An individual alone can never 'mean': *'another is required to supplement action and thus furnish it with a form of meaning'* (Gergen 1994:29). Language constitutes meaning. Life is experienced within language and how we experience it is given meaning to within the parameters of our language (Kotzé and Kotzé 1997:5).

The transition of thinking in a modernist way to that of postmodern, social construction discourse has implications for faith, religion and practical theology. The 'voices' of the abused women and young people can be viewed as a combination of aspects situated within cultural contexts, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender orientation, life stage and religion. This study only briefly explored how people's theology plays a role in their view of the 'abuse' and how experiences of God assist them in attaining skills and knowledge that help facilitate preferred ways of living after trauma. Before this can be done, it would be important to look at my own preferred theological discourses – see 2.3.

### 2.3 Postmodern theological discourses

Adopting a postmodern, social constructionist view of reality has influenced the way I view theology. Although it is not possible to make God the object of theology, it is possible to make people's language and actions, that reflect their **reality coram Deo** (cf. Kotzé 1992), the object of study. Postmodern theology accommodates plurality and a variety of views about reality and thus of God (Appelt 1999:10). Any word about God is, rather, a statement of faith. Nevertheless, although we cannot make God the object of study, we can study discourses about faith (Botha 1998:116). *'Theology consists of the critical and reflexive discourses of a believing community about its faith in God'* (Pieterse 1990).

Postmodern theology invites a *'rediscovery of the value of human participation'*, seeking wholeness and meaning by gaining perspective on the continuity among all levels of a multi-levelled reality (Herholdt 1998:218).

*Postmodern theology seeks not to focus on dogma that requires exact understanding, but favours a more poetic literary approach where the sacred can be imagined through the dimension of language, communicating relative and applied meanings to believers respective to their needs and powers to comprehend. The aim of postmodern theology*



*is not to provide a rational or exact explanation of God, but to point to coherence between our experience of God and the way we experience the world physically and morally.*

(Herholdt 1998:223-224)

Postmodernism presents Christians with new challenges as well as rich opportunities for evangelistic witness. Postmodernists would critique Christianity by claiming that Christians think they have the only truth. Postmodernists have genuinely given up on the idea of absolute truth, thus the church faces new challenges in proclaiming the Gospel to a contemporary world (Dockery 1995:14).

*Participation and metaphoric language* is inevitably part of postmodern theology. This supports the contextual approach of practical theology that I prefer. The reason why participation and metaphoric language are important should become clear when these approaches are discussed later in this section. According to Botha (1998:119) all theological discourses are built on root metaphors and depict faith-related realities in terms of historical metaphors. Deist's (1987) ideas also cast light on this. For Deist the problem of our theology lies in our view of history. We view history as a succession of fixed time settings. The church's hermeneutics have solidified and frozen the revelation of God in history.

There is a vital link between a culture's changing metaphors about everyday life and the changing metaphors in its theology (Botha 1998:120). This assumption has led Deist(1987) to state the following: *'theological discourses are always on the move, never settled, nor fixed and always preliminary'*. People's understanding of God changes in relation to the metaphorical changes in their culture.

Postmodern theology serves as an inspiration to let go of the desire for traditional certainty, while seeking increased meaning by deconstructing one's own metaphors and the metaphors of other believers. For Bosch (1991:483) this is also true, he longed for a theology that could embrace the abiding paradox of *asserting both the ultimate commitment to one's own religion and genuine openness to another's*. He endeavours to respect the Christian theological tradition while genuinely keeping the dialogue open in this pluralistic and postmodernistic world. Constant dialogue between discourses, as well as deconstruction thereof should be part and parcel of postmodern theology.

Postmodernism teaches us that *'the onus is on every generation to discover meaning for themselves by means of metaphoric reference'* (Herholdt 1998:224). Postmodern theology adheres to an open-ended historical process, reflected in the words of Gerkin (1986:48):

*The biblical story of God is an open-ended story. It does not stop with the end of the collection of biblical texts. Rather it concerns the activity of God in all of history, a story that continues in the present and is to be fulfilled in the future.*

Believers need not master abstract truth, but *'are challenged to make sense of the world by participating in the creation of a new world in terms of which the self can be redefined'* (Herholdt 1998:224-225). Faith is therefore my own experience and theology the story or account of my life. Language needs to be used creatively, making constructions of God local and not universal: *'Every person imagines God personally and differently, although this does not exclude the religious feeling that my God is also your God'* (Herholdt 1998:224-225).

According to Herholdt (1998:220) postmodern discourse seems influential enough to suggest changes on all levels of existence such as:

- theory of knowledge;
- the social dimension of language;
- the value system of society;
- our understanding of reality;
- inclusive of our understanding of God.

It has moved the focus to the particular rather than the universal; the local rather than the general; and the timely rather than the timeless; which implies that truth is no longer regarded as something with eternal, unchanging, authoritative and objective, absolute status. It becomes clear that truth is relative to the particular social context and presuppositions of the theologian.

### 3. PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

I want to address the '*political-critical*' current within practical theology, within which I situate my research. Practical theology is the '*critical theory of the praxis of the church in society*' (Greimacher as quoted by Heitink 1993:174). This current also works with terms like *hermeneutical* and *empirical*, but they are defined from a political-critical perspective – therefore the knowing subject must not remain detached from the object of the inquiry. I can relate to the preference for qualitative action research from the perspective of the participant. I tried to give voice to the women and young people regarding their experiences of domestic violence. Heitink (1993:175) adds to this: '*the aim is not just the increase of knowledge, but also a change in the oppressive situation of those with whom the researchers have established a close bond*'.

Authors, such as Pieterse (1993) and Wolfaardt (1992) have identified three different approaches of the practical theological community of South Africa, namely: **a confessional approach, a correlative approach and a contextual approach**. Each approach looks at practical theology from a different angle, which influences the definition given to it, its aims and certain issues.

A **confessional approach** views the Bible as the ultimate authority on truth and knowledge (Wolfaardt 1992:7). In applying the Scripture to the praxis, it almost ignores the contextual issues or the praxis issues (Botha 1998:137). This approach would not work in the context of my research, as it is imposing on people. Therefore it would marginalise and oppress the women and young people and become discourses that constitute the problem. It could lead to further abuse, by keeping power and control over the problem, by imposing truths on the participants without enough room for their own views and experiences.

My opinion is that a confessional approach to practical theology remains an isolated approach that has become part of our society's problems. One problematic aspect of this approach is that no questions are asked about how believers view and experience the church practices. It keeps possession of power and control and silences the stories of the oppressed. As a counsellor with a commitment to emancipatory praxis, I need to collaborate with women from different religious traditions and social locations in order to construct theological discourse, which will be informed, by the needs of those who

experience discrimination and oppression. This is no easy task, as issues of power and difference are immediately present. But Denise Ackermann (1996:44) cast light on this as she notes that we only find common ground around the theme of healing once we acknowledge our own specific needs for healing. I can relate to her words that *'her involvement in collaboration has been both exhausting and often painful, and has offered a taste of connection around the common causes of justice, liberation and healing'*.

All the women who took part in the research were divorced. I had to position myself regarding divorce and not use a confessional approach, which would suggest that divorce is sinful. Participants were given scope to come up with their own decisions. The women participants struggled with ethical questions such as the 'sinfulness' of divorce and their guilty feelings and they wondered if they needed to be blamed for their broken marriages. We discussed these issues in our group and I asked questions in the reflective letters that opened up alternative views of looking at their experiences of divorce. The negative experiences that the women had with some church and faith communities who imposed a confessional approach are described in Chapter 5.

Postmodern theologians, in contrast, do not use the Bible as the only source of knowledge or the absolute truth. Cochrane, de Gruchy and Petersen (1991:2) add that *'its important to recognize, that the person who carries out the practical theological work and reflection of the Church, is not an isolated individual being, nor a mere soul separated from his or her body'*. Postmodern theologians realise the need to express themselves in the idiom of the day, within a specific religious persuasion and socio-economic climate (Herholdt 1998:221).

A **correlative approach** in practical theology endeavours to incorporate the theological tradition and the praxis simultaneously. Fiebert was an early proponent of this approach and defined practical theology as the theory about the *'Christian-communicative action-systems in service of the gospel'*. Although the Bible is respected as source, space is left for enrichment through experiences of faith and secular sciences (Wolfaardt 1992:21).

From a social-constructionist view this approach can be criticised for not looking at the meaning given to faith, constituted in a certain context, before looking at faith actions. The question also arises as to who decides which actions can be considered to be *'in the service of the gospel'* (Wolfaardt 1992:23). A social-construction view would go further

to include not only the situation but the inter-subjective, co-constructing process of theologising taking place within a faith community (Appelt 1999:13). It is about theology co-created from the bottom up.

If the Bible becomes the sole object of theology, other ways of obtaining knowledge about God are cut off (Kotzé 1992:16). A more inclusive model that seeks to provide meaning in terms of how the world is experienced in relation to the Christian belief in a benevolent God is needed.

The emphasis on context in my epistemological and theological positions, contributed to my choice of a **contextual approach** to practical theology. A **contextual approach** emphasises the praxis. According to Cochrane (1991) *'practical theology means that disciplined, reflective theological activity which seeks to relate faith of the Christian community to its life, mission and social praxis'*.

I can relate to Poling and Miller's (1985:62) definition of the contextual approach:

*Practical Theology is a critical and constructive reflection within a living community about human experience and interaction, involving a correlation of the Christian story and other perspectives, leading to an interpretation of meaning and value, and resulting in everyday guidelines and skills for formulation of persons and communities.*

This kind of *critical and constructive reflection* will also partially be the approach to and aim of this research. According to Wolfaardt (1992:12) context plays a dominant role in this approach and an in-depth knowledge of the situation within which the practical theology is going to be practised, is essential. The focus here is more on the world (community) rather than on the church. This has made it possible for me to conduct the group work, which forms part of this research, within my work community and not within a church context.

A contextual approach seeks to leave behind the positivist pretence that theology is a pure version of the Bible (Appelt 1999:15). It fits rather with a reflexive, social-construction way of theologizing which is conscious of the fact that it is a human activity, which is socially constructed by people belonging to a particular nation, group, race and

church (Wolfaardt 1992:42). Botha (1998:138) adds to this *'the contextual approach considers a society's political, economic, developmental, ecological and medical problems to be the main focus'*.

Pieterse (1996:60-61) summarises this discussion by hoping that this contextual approach to practical theology and pastoral therapy will strive to bring changes to the South African context. Part of the aim of this study was to strive to bring some change to the participants' lives as well, in accordance with Pieterse (1996:61):

*to provide a caring and supportive environment for the members who struggle with the complexity and tiring consequences of political practice at the margin...[T]o identify and expose the complex modalities of powerful interests in society, who sophisticate and interweave distorted and prejudicial views about the 'other' into the very fabric of daily reality.*

I want to address the following statement of Pieterse (1996:62) in my research as well: *'the need for the church to think about her relationship with other social actors who are working towards more just and equitable futures'*.

### **3.1 Feminist Theology of Praxis**

*In the task of theology to understand practice itself as a source of truth; a feminist theology of praxis arises from the need to reflect on Christian praxis in specific contexts for the sake of a better and more adequate praxis mediated through changed theories. The transformed consciousness derived from 'seeing things from below' or differently put, 'seeing things from the outer circles', leads to the repudiation of that 'theoria' which has legitimated 'from above' forms of oppression that include racism, sexism, classism, imperialism and colonialism. The search for a liberating praxis engenders solidarity in this common acceptance of the priority of praxis.*

(Ackermann 1996:42)

Traditionally in South Africa the authoritative voice in political, social, academic and religious structures is that of the powerful man (Ackermann 1996:47). Telling stories

breaks the silence, which blankets the lives of women and other marginalised and oppressed people and is thus intrinsic to the healing of our diverse communities. The stories of the women and young people who were participants are seen as small but significant accounts within the greater liberation struggle.

Not all stories evoke liberation; stories can reinforce oppressive structures and patterns of behaviour. It is only when hearing and telling stories begins as a process of openness, vulnerability and mutual engagement that alienations of class, race and gender can be challenged. Engaging with stories alone is, however, not enough. There are compelling political and personal reasons to move from story to liberating praxis. The process of awareness begun by engaging in the mutual exchange of stories underscores the capacity for transformation. This change is both politically and personally transforming when we accept the challenge to act as agents for the mending of creation (Ackermann 1996:48).

Our stories and experiences are as diverse as the contradictions and contextual nature of our varied identities. While experience is not viewed as the sole arbiter of knowledge, women, marginalised and oppressed people's diverse experiences are a central category in a feminist theology of praxis. According to Ackermann (1996:48) '*once we recount our stories in community, and analyze and reflect together on their meaning, they acquire the power to move us forward*'.

#### 4. PASTORAL THERAPY

De Jongh Van Arkel (1993:69) gives the following definition of pastoral therapy, although he admits that there are shortcomings to this definition: *Pastoral therapy is the structured, knowledgeable, attentive conversation with people with problems, who are in problematic circumstances, with the aim of salvation.* How one views pastoral care and pastoral therapy is also dependent on one's theology. Within my theological position of postmodernism, pastoral care can be described as help given by a believer to others in need, so that it adds meaning to their lives. If God's love for all people and the view that therapy is also a process which occurs *coram Deo*, is taken into consideration, it follows that pastoral therapy can also occur between a pastoral therapist and a non-believer (Blake 1999:39).

For me, the pastoral nature of therapy lies in the openness and conversations with other theologies and my openness to ask questions of clients' conceptions of God and in the context of the research, those experiences of domestic violence. Contact with other disciplines serves as a reminder that although pastoral care includes an invisible dimension of faith, the focus is on a total person, living in the world (Louw 1989:5).

Simon (1990:2) describes the relation between spirituality and secular therapy:

*...the rigid divorce between spirituality and psychotherapy may no longer be necessary...the two are more compatible than we once thought...therapy is, at its core, grounded in a set of ideas that it shares with most of the world's spiritual traditions: the ever-renewing possibility of hope, the belief that the various travails of our lives have real meaning, and the faith that, in some final analysis, our existence matters.*

Since I view pastoral therapy as a collaborative process, the client will co-determine if religious experiences and spirituality mentioned by Heitink (1998:19) distinguish pastoral therapy from psychotherapy. Differences found between approaches to pastoral therapy can be greatly attributed to differences in the way humans are viewed.

I chose a **narrative pastoral approach**, since it grants me the openness to work with people from all walks of life and religions. This approach creates the space for those seeking help to choose to make God's transformative power in their lives more visible. The anthropology that distinguishes this approach from others will be dealt with in Chapter 3. One aspect that I would like to point out is that the narrative pastoral approach it allows clients to be the experts of their lives and to co-determine the content of therapeutic conversations.

This approach assumes that people's problem-dominated stories are not the only possible stories of their lives. By asking questions that do not fit the dominant story 'unique outcomes' arise, so as to help the clients co-author alternative stories about their lives and identities (White 1997:3). The therapist asks questions to externalise problems, the clients will also be asked to state the position they want to take – their preferred realities. The influence of God's voice and of the clients' relationship with God on both the



problem (such as the effects of domestic violence), and on living according to an alternative story (stories that reflect their survival from abuse), can also be explored.

In Chapters 4, 5 and 6 I will provide more detailed descriptions of the process of co-constructing alternative ways of being in the world during my groupwork with women and their children. I will continue with the exponents of narrative therapy in Chapter 3, together with the causal explanations of domestic violence and the research procedures.

## CHAPTER 3

# EXPLANATIONS AND DIFFERENT MODELS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

### 1. INTRODUCTION

*The old grey donkey, Eeyore, stood by himself in a thistly corner of the forest, his front feet well apart, his head on one side, and thought about things. Sometimes he thought sadly to himself, 'Why?' and sometimes he thought, 'Wherefore?' and sometimes he thought, 'Inasmuch as which?' – and sometimes he didn't quite know what he was thinking about. So when Winnie-the-Pooh came stumping along, Eeyore was very glad to be able to stop thinking for a little, in order to say 'How do you do?' in a gloomy manner to him.*

*'And how are you?' said Winnie-the-Pooh. Eeyore shook his head from side to side. 'Not very how', he said. 'I don't seem to have felt at all how for a long time.'*

(A.A. Milne -1926 'Winnie-the-Pooh')

Domestic violence has been a focus of research and theory for approximately thirty years. Across this period of time there have been a number of major theories proposed as to the possible causes of domestic violence. Theoretical perspectives guide research and clinical efforts directed at understanding and changing the perpetrators and consequences of domestic violence.

Stordeur and Stille (1989:23-26) have categorised the different theoretical perspectives on domestic violence as follows:

- *Individual psychopathology*
- *Family systems theory*
- *Sociological or social structural perspective*
- *Social learning and cognitive-behavioural perspectives*
- *Feminist and/or socio-political perspectives*

According to Alan Jenkins (1990:18) causal explanations of abusive behaviour may be categorised according to four levels of context:

- Those that relate to causes which are seen to be located with the individual perpetrator; some form of personality dysfunction or psychopathology (Individual theories)
- Those that relate to causes which are seen to be located within the individual's interaction with others; attempts to explain abusive behaviour within families (Interactional explanations)
- Those that relate to causes which are seen to be located within the individual's developmental history; locate explanations within the developmental history of the perpetrator, the victim and other family members (Developmental theories)
- Those that relate to causes which are seen to be located within the western culture and society; locate the abuse in a variety of contexts and have social relevance as well as clinical usefulness (Socio-cultural theories)

Research regarding the causes of violence against women has consisted of two lines of inquiry: examination of the characteristics that influence the behaviour of offenders and consideration of whether some women have a heightened vulnerability to victimization (Crowell and Burgess 1996:49). Research has sought causal factors at various levels of analysis, including individual, dyadic, institutional, and social.

The next staging post of explanation is the multicausal (Hearn 1998:30-31). Some theorists have recently attempted to combine some or all of the theories in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of woman beating. Edleson, Eisekovits and Guttman (as quoted by Hearn 1998:30) argue that *terror* is the major feature of the battered woman's life, rather than beatings, which might only occur spasmodically. In another multi-causal explanation, Straus (as given in Hearn 1998:31) identified seven interacting factors:

- *High levels of conflict inherent in the family form*
- *High levels of violence in society*
- *Family socialization into violence*
- *Cultural norms legitimating violence between family members*

- *Violence integrated into the personality and behavioural script*
- *Sexist organisation of society and its familial system*
- *Woman puts up with beatings because of various structural and ideological reasons*

This list lacks any suggestion that patriarchy plays some part (Hearn 1998:31). There are other problems with these multi-causal approaches. They can be vague and imprecise, both analytically and in moving responsibility away from individual men. The seven theories do not deal adequately with questions of social structure, including gender and social relations.

I shall focus on some of the theories mentioned above.

## 2. KNOWLEDGES ASSOCIATED WITH THE PRACTICE OF PSYCHIATRY

These knowledges often centre around the question of why women stay in violent relationships, and what it is about women that causes them to do this. Ehrenreich and English in their book: *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of The Experts' Advice to Women* (1979) outline how the legacy of blaming women has evolved over years. From the late nineteenth century the medical model of female nature was embedded in the psychology of the ovary. This time is seen as the '*sexual politics of sickness when femininity became a disease*' (Ehrenreich and English 1979:100). Medicine had insisted that women were sick and that their lives centred on the reproductive function. However as Ehrenreich and English (1979:100) point out, these are contradictory positions, if you are sick enough you cannot produce. This paved the way for the introduction of hysteria, a 'disease' of the uterus.

In the early twentieth century Freud's insight into hysteria marked off a new medical speciality, '*Psychoanalysis*' (Ehrenreich and English 1979:126). The legacy of Freud in particular has laid the pathway for asserting that women are predisposed to masochism. Mid century psychoanalytic theory repeatedly insisted on the need for female self-denial. The psychoanalytical construction of the female personality found mounting acceptance from the nineteen thirties, and by the forties and fifties the Freudian faith in female masochism stood almost undisputed. According to Ehrenreich and English (1979:127),

Marie Bonaparte (1973) was one psychoanalyst who suggested that a woman's masochism alongside her passivity in sexual intercourse predisposes a woman to welcome and even to value some measures of brutality on the man's part.

Natalie Shainess (1984) (as quoted by Ehrenreich and English 1979:127) in her more contemporary work on masochism, outlines what she sees as the '*masochistic personality*' of women who tend to seek out relationships that are abusive. She suggests that women contribute to their victimization by the way they act, that is, indecisive and vulnerable. Unlike Freudians, Shainess believed that masochism is learned developmentally and culturally. Therefore she asserts, masochism can be unlearned by being more assertive and decisive, and independent in interpersonal relations.

Today much of the self improvement literature that is available in book stores and which is widely used and recommended by professionals in the field of counselling/psychotherapy, speaks to these kinds of issues (Cassidy 1995; hooks 1993). Books like *Women Who Love Too Much: When you keep Wishing and Hoping He'll Change* (Norwood 1985) and *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus: A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting what you want in Your Relationships* (Gray 1993); are 'anti-women' in that they often diagnose 'addictive', 'dysfunctional' or 'problematic' qualities that are inherently female such as relatedness, compassion, self denial, trustfulness and friendliness (Cassidy 1995). She suggests that the writers of these works accept unquestionably the status quo and gender stereotypes that are pervasive in our society. She suggests that instead of '*going to therapy*' to cure ourselves of these conditions, women should be celebrating and validating them. The concepts of emotional dependency and independence are at the core of the stereotyped assumptions about men and women in our culture (Siegel 1988).

The notion of female masochism focuses on deficiencies in women (Gondolf and Fisher 1991). This, they suggest, may be responsible for the preoccupation with why women stay with their batterers. Some psychoanalytic thought in the 1990's can be said to be perpetuating this form of masochistic theme.

Because this is an unconscious dynamic, as far as treatment for battered women is concerned, therapists must listen for signs of growing panic accompanying each

competent achievement of the client's goals (Seagull and Seagull 1991:17). They stated that unexpressed rage and the self-expression of powerlessness are central themes in the treatment of domestic violence. Therefore the therapist need to respect the client's right to remain in a state of accusatory suffering and self-blame, without incurring the anger of a frustrated therapist.

Dixon (1999:14) criticises Seagull and Seagull by saying that they fail to take into account the social discourses around a woman within a relationship, themes about marriage and the family and its preservation. Dixon (1999:14) also adds some discourses that dominate our culture such as '*it takes two to tango*', which again implies that any relationship issue has '*two stories*' or that there are '*faults on both sides*'.

The therapists' role is to '*continue a relationship respectful of the client's strengths and to focus on the underlying issues*' and they add that clients '*will be able to find creative solutions for themselves that are best for them*' (Seagull and Seagull 1991:19). Despite the above quotations, it appears that Seagull and Seagull make out that the '*survivors of domestic violence are less able*' than other clients. This discourse of '*victimhood*' is unhelpful for women. It could also be argued that what Seagull and Seagull (1991) label '*accusatory suffering*' is the therapist's lack of respect for the mourning or grieving process of a woman at the ending of an abusive relationship. Although it was abusive, it may still require the same grieving process as the loss of an intimate relationship.

Hearn (1998:21) summarises psychoanalytic explanations regarding domestic violence. Psychoanalytic explanations of men's violence to '*known women*' have often relied on notions of '*intrapsychic conflict, personality disorders, denial mechanisms, developmental deficiencies/impaired ego, narcissism, traumatic childhood, masochism*' (Dankwort as quoted by Hearn 1998:21). The violence itself is often *not* the focus of attention; rather 'the dynamics' are. Freudian and neo-Freudian theories have analysed violence as located primarily *inside* the person (Hearn 1998:21).

Some psychoanalytic theories have been heavily criticized for reducing violence to the product of a determined individual personality outside of social relations or even for attributing violence to the personality of the victim (Hearn 1998:21). For example, abused women have sometimes been described as masochistic or of tolerating or even

seeking out abuse, following their treatment as children. Meanwhile, men's violence towards women may be explained through their own childhood experiences, and, in particular, their attempts to assert an '*exaggerated masculinity*' as compensation for their fears of femininity. Psychoanalytic approaches remain very powerful and influential. They figure in both social science explanations of men's violence toward their wives and children and professional explanations in social work, health, therapeutic and related occupations.

### 3. KNOWLEDGES ASSOCIATED WITH THE PRACTICE OF PSYCHOLOGY

Wife abuse has increasingly become a humanist issue over the years. This means that experts began to look to the '*individual make up*' of people when they were searching for reasons as to why men batter their partners and what kind of women are battered (Dixon 1999:16). A result of this kind of thinking is the '*psychologising of abuse*' and simultaneously the depoliticising of it. The abuse '*victim*' became the new population to '*treat*' rather than advocate or empower (Gondolf and Fisher 1991). Psychology concerns itself with how and why organisms do what they do.

The earliest psychological accounts of wife battering focussed on the batterer, describing him as psychiatrically disturbed in some form or another. A number of studies have found a high incidence of psychopathology and personality disorders, most frequently antisocial personality disorder, borderline personality organization, or posttraumatic stress syndrome, among men who assault their wives (Crowell and Burgess 1996, Dutton 1994; Hamberger and Hastings 1986).

Gondolf (1984) identified four types of batterers:

- *the sociopathic batterer*
- *the antisocial batterer*
- *the chronic batterer and*
- *the sporadic batterer*

Dutton (1995) has produced a profile of a batterer which he suggests has its formation in infancy and is a gradual process that builds over years. He uses the term '*abusive personality*', the seeds of which he says come from three distinct sources:

- *Being shamed, especially by one's father*
- *An insecure attachment to one's mother*
- *Direct experience of abusiveness in the home*

According to Crowell and Burgess (1996:57) batterers also seem to be a heterogeneous group as shown by research from Gondolf (1988). Because of this heterogeneity, much of the research on known batterers has included attempts to develop typologies to represent subgroups of them.

Jenkins (1990:53) categorises psychological knowledge under '*individual context*'. Many of the '*characteristics*' of abusive men observed by researchers are being understood within this context. These '*characteristics*', however should not be regarded as fixed personality traits of static aspects of the man's character (Jenkins 1990:53). They constitute patterns of habits in thinking and behaviour, which are seen as inevitable consequences of the man's high levels of social-emotional avoidance and reliance.

According to Jenkins (1990:53) these men are likely to develop restraining patterns of thinking and behaviour which may be described in terms of:

- *Social-emotional 'immaturity'*
- *Low self-esteem*
- *Self-intoxicating preoccupations and beliefs*
- *Misguided attempts to control abuse*

Jenkins (1990:53) concludes that he found causal explanations of abuse and the search to discover them, to be highly restraining for men in taking responsibility for abusive behaviour and in learning to contribute respectfully and sensitively in their relationships with others.



Although most research focuses on why men use violence as well as the conditions that support and maintain that violence, some researchers have tried to ask why a particular woman is the target of violence. This is the beginning of describing women as '*other than victim*':

*[S]tudies began to appear focussing explicitly on the psychological characteristics of women married to violent husbands, suggesting that as a group these women shared certain behavioural characteristics, attitudes, biographies, which combine to precipitate the violence that is inflicted on them.*

(McIntyre 1984:50)

Factors that have at one time or another been linked to women's likelihood of being raped or battered are: passivity, hostility, low self-esteem, alcohol and drug use, violence in the family or origin, having more education or income than their intimate partners, and violence towards their children (Crowell and Burgess 1996:70). Pittman and Taylor (as quoted by Crowell and Burgess 1996:70) state that recent studies also found no specific personality and attitudinal characteristics that make certain women more vulnerable to battering.

*There is no special deficit in a battered woman's personality that makes her susceptible to getting trapped in an abusive relationship, rather the features of the relationship itself are sufficient to account for the trapping*

(Dutton 1995:57)

He uses the psychological theory of intermittent reinforcement to account for this '*traumatic bonding theory*'. '*Intermittent reinforcement is a powerful motivator that keeps one coming back for more...the victim's hope is that maybe this time it will be better; maybe this time, he will stop*' (Dutton 1995:57).

Gondolf (1984) instead proposes a new '*survivor theory*'. He suggests that rather than decreasing help seeking, battered women increased their help seeking in the face of increased violence. He mentions that the tendency to psychologise the abuse with psychotherapies for battered women might slight the survivor nature of the clients; that is,

some psychotherapies perpetuate the abuse. For example seeing women as ‘*victims*’ gives them a message that they are somehow unable to move beyond the abuse. Gondolf (1984) suggested that we view battered women as survivors; thereby adding a new label.

Labelling women as ‘victims’ or ‘survivors’ reduce women to the abusive experiences that have challenged labelling. The process of applying these labels they say ‘*parallels the reductionistic and deterministic processes of traditional science*’ (Anderson and Gold 1994:10). Therapists need to pay attention to the language used to describe women’s experiences, and reflect on the effects of labelling.

With the psychologising of abuse a variety of therapies and treatments for women have been devised to help battered women cope with their victimization and to correct their emotional deficiencies. McIntyre (1984) points out that because these psychological models focus, by its nature on internal psychopathology; the treatment approach reinforces a particular construction of the problem locating its source in the individual man or woman. This has had the result of shifting the focus back onto the men and the women within a relationship and has led to seeing the violence as a relationship issue. It seems significant that throughout the discussions of the psychological models, the whole issue of the position of women in contemporary society is hardly mentioned (Dixon 1999:19).

#### **4. KNOWLEDGES ASSOCIATED WITH FAMILY DISFUNCTION**

The notion of the dysfunctional family can be found in a wide range of professional discourses both in relation to the causes of family violence and to treatment methods. The notion of family dysfunction developed during the late 1940’s as an off shoot of family psychiatry. Instead of a concern for individual pathology, it proposed that the family as a unit could be pathological and that abnormal behaviour was a symptom of overall current family maladjustment.

Social learning and socialization theories lead very easily, and reactive theories slightly less easily, onto theories of violence that prioritize a notion of ‘*culture*’ or ‘*system*’ (Hearn 1998:29). The system with its particular systemic characteristics can be the idea of a family system. The advantages of these kinds of shifts are that they provide a way of

moving beyond a focus on the individual and towards the consideration of social relations. The notion of 'learned behaviour' maintains that violent behaviour is passed on from one generation to another. Families are where all socialization begins, including socialization for all types of violent behaviour (Crowell and Burgess 1996:62).

An increased risk of adult intimate partner violence is associated with exposure to violence between a person's parents while growing up. According to Widom (as quoted by Crowell and Burgess 1996:62) one third of children who have been abused or exposed to parental violence become violent adults. Research results of Straus et al. found that sons of violent parents are more likely to abuse their intimate partners than boys from nonviolent homes (Crowell and Burgess 1996:62). Men raised in patriarchal family structures in which traditional gender roles are encouraged are more likely to become violent adults...and to batter their intimate partners than men raised in egalitarian homes.

Kaufman (1992:242) critiques on the latter: *'if the cause [of wife battering] is patriarchy, how can the cure be family therapy? The cure must be change at every level'*. When male violence to women is viewed from a *'patriarchal'* perspective, then women will always be seen as victims (Dixon 1999:24). It could be argued that this is a very unhelpful position. The following question arises as well: If we view women as victims, are we creating victims? This is a question I would like to address later in this research.

Many family therapy approaches view abuse as symptomatic of overall family maladjustment and dysfunction (Jenkins 1990:24). Families in which abuse has been perpetrated have been described as enmeshed, lacking individuation, closed systems, having rigid gender and relationship roles and lacking in generational boundaries (Bograd and Friedman, as quoted by Jenkins 1990:24).

Interactional explanations are popular amongst clinicians, abuse perpetrators and those influenced by abuse. Some of these explanations regard abusive behaviour as *'functional'* to continue with domestic violence or as having a **purpose or intent** (Jenkins 1990:24). Some spouse abusers regard their violence as a justifiable form of *'correction'* of their partner. These men who act from a stance of greater perceived authority, are likely to entertain thoughts such as the following, whilst engaging in violence: *'I'll shake some sense in to her'* or *'I'll teach her a lesson she won't forget'*. Some violence may be

seen to be justified by a need for vindication: *'I'll bring her down from her high horse'* or *'I'll cut her down to size'*. These thoughts are based on rigid notions of right and wrong. Some spouse abusers regard violence, as necessary for the establishment of respect and intimacy in their relationships. One such perpetrator explained: *'It's the only time we talk and have good sex'* (Jenkins 1990:25).

Explanations of consequence often lead to unhelpful patterns of thinking such as the confusion between violence and conflict (Jenkins 1990:28). Physical abuse often occurs in a context of escalating conflict between spouses (Straus et al. as quoted by Jenkins 1990:28). This theory suggests that physical violence is a natural and unavoidable progression from the verbal expression of conflict and that conflict will turn into violence once a certain threshold is reached.

*'Family systems theory'* provides a framework for examining how both parties are caught in a negative cycle of violence (Hearn 1998:29). The wife is not blamed for being the *'victim'* nor is the husband accused for being the *'victimizer'*, since neither partner may know alternative behaviours. *'Since the abusers often have been physically or sexually abused as children* (Gelles and Cornell, as quoted by Hearn 1998:29), *they are also victims of the intergenerational transmission of violence'*. *'Thus, in the recursive cycle of violence, victim becomes victimizer who is again victimized'* (Geffner et al., as quoted by Hearn 1998:29).

On the other hand, systemic theory, especially in the form of marital and family systems therapy, focuses on the interactive dynamics *between* the violator and the violated. As such, there is a danger of reducing the people, the man and the woman, to parts of a degendered system (Hearn 1998:29). Family therapists have been criticised for attributing the violence as a *'mutual problem'* rather than the *'fault'* of one partner (Dixon 1999:19). Another critique against systems theory is that in the guise of maintaining neutrality, it clearly champions existing power arrangements and fails to confront power discrepancies between men and women.

The Ackerman Institute in New York, began a *'Gender and Violence Project'* in 1986 (Dixon 1999:20). This was a pilot programme in which they decided to focus on male to female abuse. A double vision was assumed: gender and violence; men and women and a

double stance: feminist and systemic. This, they say, led them to the view that relationships in which women are abused are not unique but rather exemplify in extremis the stereotypical gender arrangements that structure intimacy between men and women generally.

The work was done with hetero-sexual couples. The therapists wanted to maintain a 'both/and' position when counselling with the couples, when they knew they would be pulled by the 'either/or' position. In the project they found that for the couples they counselled, abuse and coercion existed alongside understanding and friendship in a unique and painful way. This research highlighted the difficulty for women in abusive relationships, for it would seem that for every '*abusive*' act there will be a '*loving*' one. This is the dilemma that faces the women who want to move beyond the abuse.

In his address to the American Family Therapy Association, Kaufman (1992) made some recommendations for dealing with abuse and violence within the family therapy setting. These included always working with a co-therapist so that there is a male and female therapist present, and having supervision by battered women's advocates. For men working with women, within the area of violence this would appear to be very sound advice.

## **5. FEMINIST THERAPY KNOWLEDGES**

Feminist theoreticians seek to connect psychological analyses with understandings of the patriarchal social context, of the unequal distribution of power and of the socially structured and culturally maintained patterns of male female relations. Feminist psychologists view the behaviour of battered women as the consequences of life threatening violence rather than viewing them as contributing factors to the abuse.

Prior to the revival of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, women organised resistance to battering occasionally occurred, both in the United States and internationally. As early as 1875, Martha McWhirter opened a shelter in Belton, Texas, for battered women and women whose husbands spent the crop money on Saturday-night drinking binges. The shelter became so prosperous that the group donated money for Belton civic causes and thrived well into the 1890s (Wilson 1997:285).

Religious organisations in the United States were sheltering battered women long before the women's movement mobilised in the 1970s. Worldwide, women stopped hiding the violence in their lives and started helping each other during the 1970s. Women everywhere began to tell their stories. As they began to break the walls of isolation and shame, it became apparent that there was a worldwide epidemic of violence against women. Not only were women living with daily threats to their lives, but little was being done to guarantee their safety. Outraged at society's failure to address this problem, women activists began to take matters into their own hands (Wilson 1997:286). Battered women in Amsterdam occupied an abandoned house and established a shelter. This led the way for feminists worldwide, to do the same.

Inspired by the feminist and antirape movement's analysis of male violence against women as a social and political issue, battered women in the United States began to speak out. The feminist assertion that women had the right to control their own bodies and lives resulted in the creation of women's hotlines and crisis centres, services that provided a context for battered women to ask for help. Women's right to verbalise their pain without blame created an environment in which discussing violence was less shameful (Wilson 1997:287).

Patriarchy is the worldview that seeks to create and maintain male power and control over females. Radical feminists believe that in contemporary society men as a class dominate women as a class. The structural systems that constitute the society in which we live, for example, the health, legal, welfare, educational, economic, judicial, religious and familial systems maintain this power.

Burstow (1992:107) in her book *Radical Feminist Therapy: Working in the context of violence* says:

*Families are a microcosm of the oppressive patriarchal society in which they are located. Families are the training grounds for patriarchal capitalism and many of the larger inequalities and contradictions are found therein....It is our responsibility to look for these inequalities and temper them in so far as possible.*

Feminist studies in particular have emphasised how men's violence to 'known women' can be understood as part of the system of structured power and oppression that constitutes patriarchy and patriarchal social relations (Bograd, as quoted by Hearn 1998:31). Men's violence to 'known women' is at the very heart of patriarchy. The fundamental organisation of society locates people differentially, particularly by gender. The book of Dobash and Dobash (1979): *Violence Against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy* explains the patriarchy (Hearn 1998:32). Women are located in subordinated positions by both structural discrimination and ideologies that legitimate and rationalise the situation. This applies both in the family and in the public institutions of society. In such a societal context, violence is a means of control for men over women and indeed children.

bell hooks (as quoted by O'Toole and Schiffman 1997:281) states:

*critically thinking about issues of physical abuse has led me to question the way our culture, the way we as feminist advocates focus on the issue of violence and physical abuse by loved ones. The focus has been on male violence against women...Given the nature of patriarchy, it has been necessary for feminists to focus on extreme cases to make people confront the issue, and acknowledge it to be serious and relevant. Unfortunately, an exclusive focus on extreme cases can and does lead us to ignore the more frequent, more common, yet less extreme case of occasional hitting.*

hooks also criticises the term 'battered woman' and mentions that it is not a term that emerged from feminist work on male violence against women; psychologists and sociologists in the literature on domestic violence started using it. It must be stated that establishing categories and terminology has been part of the effort to draw public attention to the seriousness of male violence against women in intimate relationships. Even though the use of convenient labels and categories have made it easier to identify problems of physical abuse, it does not mean the terminology should not be critiqued from a feminist perspective and changed if necessary.

*A distinction must be made between having a terminology that enables women, and all victims of violent acts, to name the problem and categories*

*of labeling that may inhibit that naming. When individuals are wounded, we are indeed often scarred, often damaged in ways that do set us apart from those who have not experienced a similar wounding, but an essential aspect of the recovery process is the healing of the wound, the removal of the scar. This is an empowering process that should not be diminished by labels that imply this wounding experience is the most significant aspect of identity.*

(bell hooks as quoted by O'Toole and Schiffman 1997:283)

To summarise this, hooks (as quoted by O'Toole and Schiffman 1997:285) mentions that violence in intimate relationships seems to be increasing daily. She stated that she raised issues, as above, that are not commonly talked about, and she hoped they would strengthen our efforts as feminist activists to create a world where domination and coercive abuse are never aspects of intimate relationships.

Feminist interventions with battered women recognise the importance of providing safe emergency housing, education, and legal advocacy. It is widely agreed that organising battered women's groups that provide information, education and support is a critical component (Dixon 1999:26). Programmes for battered women such as those run in Duluth Minnesota provide a source of information, guidance and strength. The Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) is an example. The DAIP seeks to influence the way the criminal justice system and human service organisations responded to wife battering. The goal of the programme is to protect battered women by bringing an end to domestic violence. Dixon (1999:26) notes that the programme has been adopted in New Zealand and has in some measure been responsible for the small changes in government policy and in police responses. The programme takes place within the context of a feminist analysis of battering.

It could be argued however, that these programmes do not address power issues. It was not the battered women themselves who were making the changes but the people involved in the project, advocating on their behalf. It could be said that the people running the programmes are being empowered rather than the victims of violence (Dixon 1999:27). How much are the victims being empowered if they are having decisions made for them? This often only serves to reinforce negative messages that a woman carries



with her. If as feminists and as therapists, we work towards 'empowerment' then we need to be continually asking whose empowerment, ours or our clients?

Walker (1994:327) writes in her book: *Abused Women and Survivor Therapy* that this therapy has its origins in feminist theory and trauma therapy. It works to help victims become survivors by helping them to regain some control over their lives. The tenets of survivor therapy include:

*ensuring that the woman is safe, validating her experiences, identifying and building on the strengths the woman has shown in surviving her abuse, expanding her options, and understanding both her personal oppression and the oppression of all women by society.*

(Walker 1994:327)

Emphasis on the positive coping strengths of victims will help restore their confidence in their own abilities to survive. It does not minimize the harm that abuse has done to women and provides techniques for reversing some of the psychological damage. It is grounded in both empirical research and a psychological clinical tradition of two decades of treatment. Walker (1994:328) notes that *'the strength gained...will prevent the kinds of violence against women ...and as a result, the need for survivor therapy will no longer exist'*.

Black feminists have highlighted the neglect of experiences of black women in much research on men's violence. Hearn (1998:34) writes that there is a limited development of feminist work on men's violence to *'known women'* that is inspired or influenced by post-structuralism, post-modernism, and feminist post-structuralism and post-modernisms.

In summary, feminist knowledges typically suggest that all violence must be seen in the context of wider power relations. It must be placed in an entire social context. These contexts have gender inequalities at their heart. It is within the nuclear family that women are socialised into gendered behaviour and this subordination is reinforced. As Weisstein (1993) points out, two and a half decades of feminist research, analysis and

agitation have shown us the incredible violence that is an inevitable accompaniment of the interactions between the powerful and the powerless, regardless of gender. She also believes that as long as men have power over women, our gender oppression will continue. She suggests that as feminists we need to oppose male power in all its cultural, institutional, situational, interpersonal and psychological forms.

According to Hearn (1997:33) the combination of structural and contextual approaches has been very influential in the development of women's organised responses to violence, policy debates and research, particularly in the United Kingdom around the operation of housing, legal, policing and welfare services. It is important to notice that the response of state and related agencies to men's violence is crucial in constructing violence over time. Women and men may *make* history but not in conditions of their own choosing (Hearn 1998:33). *[W]omen actively attempt to stop men's violence through various strategies until they find a combination of assistance that finally works* (Gondolf 1985:33).

## 6. NARRATIVE THERAPY KNOWLEDGES

Therapy from a postmodern, post-structuralist viewpoint is often termed narrative therapy. In part this is because of the groundbreaking work produced by Michael White and David Epston (1990) in their book *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*, where they have drawn on the notion of '*narrative texts*'. The authors start with the assumption that people experience problems when the stories of their lives, as they or others have intended them, do not sufficiently represent their lived experience. Narrative therapy then becomes a process of '*storying*' or '*re-storying*' the lives and experiences of these people. I agree with the authors that therapists need to think how we can enable the writing of personal and collective stories that liberate and heal. This is especially true when working with survivors of domestic violence. '*The re-storying of experience necessitates the active involvement of persons in the reorganization of their experience*' (White and Epston 1990:63).

White (1995:19-26) drawing upon the theories of Foucault, presents some ideas about therapy: that if, as Foucault contends, power and knowledge are inseparable, then therapists are unable to take a benign view of their practices, which are, indeed, inevitably political. '*Narrative therapy is also a political stance*' (Dixon 1999:36). '*To*

*organise therapy around the narrative metaphor is to accept the political nature of social relationships*' (Freedman and Combs 1996:46). Taking a political stand (e.g. against abuse and oppression) has become synonymous with narrative therapy.

As Madigan (1996:48) points out: *'without considering the influence a community discourse has in the shaping of the politics of identity, the use of externalising internalised problem conversations would be considered very limited'*. I had to keep the following in mind, when I listened to the problem stories of people who suffered domestic violence:

*We need to be aware of the cultural weave of our community discourse, otherwise externalising conversations might only prove to enhance and support pathologising descriptions of persons. Persons are not viewed as fixed within problem identities; a person's identity is viewed within the politics and power play of a culturally manufactured and constituted self.*

(Madigan 1996:49-50)

The therapist becomes a collaborator, a co-constructor of meaning. Therefore there is not a metaphor of pathology, prognosis or cure. According to Gergen (1994:250) the therapist sees her task as *'facilitating a transformative dialogue in which new understandings are negotiated together with a new set of premises about meaning'*.

In order to create new narratives or stories, old entrenched dominant narratives need to be deconstructed. This is done by the use of *'externalising conversations'* which for example in terms of this research project, enable women and children to see themselves as separate from the abuse dominated story. For example guilt, fear, self-blame, and over-responsibility are common dominant narratives in women who have been battered. These stories often speak to the women of failure, weakness, and dependency, and promote what can be referred to as a *'victim lifestyle'*. Once the problem is clearly separated from the person, one can look at the interaction of people and problems, asking such crucial questions as: *'Is the problem gaining more influence over the person or is the person gaining more influence over the problem?'* (White and Epston 1990:38-42).

Another tool for working from this perspective with clients is the way the therapist views the client as '*competent*', rather than a '*victim*' or '*helpless person*' (Durrant and Kowalski 1990). When working with men who batter, in the same way we view them as '*competent*', we can then inquire as to what is preventing this competent man from treating his partner in a respectful way?

## 6.1 Narrative therapy with violent and abusive men

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Alan Jenkins (1991) works in Australia with violent and abusive men. He argues that the context for most violent behaviour is: '*one in which the initiator experiences a sense of entitlement which exceeds his sense of responsibility for the welfare of the other*' (Jenkins 1991:186). The abusive man also relies upon the battered woman's deference and acceptance of responsibility for his actions. My opinion is that our society has reinforced this idea by labelling the woman. The discourses about women perpetuated by our society, may have been recruited into responsibility from an early age, as having some type of weakness (gender discourse) or co-dependent behaviour (pathology discourse). Therefore placing the responsibility for '*lack of responsibility*' on the woman. This in turn reinforces the notion, which the abuser was perpetuating, that is, blame of others for his abusive behaviour.

As Jenkins (1991) points out, abusive behaviour thrives in an atmosphere of causal thinking, therefore his interventions do not focus on reasons *why* the abuse may have occurred. His work with violent and abusive men centres around the premise that our support systems, in particular the justice system, actively increase avoidance of responsibility of abuse perpetrators. It actually adds to the burden of responsibility that victims of abuse carry and even increase the risk of abuse further.

Jenkins invites his clients to take responsibility, thereby facilitating a less authoritarian approach, with more respect and less bullying and abuse of power. Confrontational approaches in treatment often perpetuate the same kind of dominance that the man employs in his intimate relationships (Jenkins 1991). Jenkins asserts that therapy is a political process, that is, one, which pertains to the administration and distribution of power. As therapists we have an obligation to recognise and carefully monitor the use of

power. The notion of power and expert roles is an important aspect when working within a social construction paradigm.

## **6.2 The client is the expert**

Anderson and Goolishian (1992) wrote much about the importance of a ‘*not knowing*’ stance for therapists. They see therapy as a process where we are moving toward what is ‘*not yet known*’. Therefore the therapist moves away from the ‘*expert role*’ and the people in therapy are viewed as the ‘*experts*’ of their own lives. As Freedman and Combs (1996:44) put it ‘*this implies not asking questions from a position of pre-understanding and not asking questions to which we want particular answers*’.

*I do not want my not knowing position to be misperceived as knowing nothing or withholding knowledge. Rather, it is related to what I do with what I know or think I know. I too am entitled to have a preference or to express an opinion about theoretical content, clinical process, or learning format...What I am preoccupied by or value is submitted with humility, tentativeness, and openness to alternatives. I expect myself to remain as open to change as I expect a learner to be, whether that is through challenge or disregard.*

(Anderson 1997:247)

Particular relevant to my research project is her further comment:

*[A]ll participants are learners and are subject to change as they share and explore each others voice, as voices connect and intertwine constructing something new and different for each.*

(Anderson 1997:247)

## **6.3 A Narrative pastoral approach with women and young people who have experienced abuse**

A narrative pastoral approach aims to move away from the stigmatising burden of restrictive myths that pathologising models have perpetuated. They offer an alternative

way of looking at abuse and trauma, which could lead to alternative ways of living. With narrative pastoral practices people will find themselves standing in alternative territories of their lives. In these territories they can get in touch with different and more positive stories of their identity, which makes it possible for them to give different meanings to their experiences. This in turn enables them to express these experiences in ways that are not likely to be '*re-traumatising*' of them (White 1995:86).

Narrative pastoral practices allow the therapist and client to experience both sadness and joy, to be joined both in outrage and hope (Appelt 1999:32). It creates a context in which alternative stories of people's lives can be celebrated and honoured; in which other accounts of their identities are being powerfully authenticated. It draws inspiration from the steps people take to *dispossess perpetrators of their authority* and in reclaiming preferred territories of their lives. It thus sees people *having the "last say" about their lives* (White 1995:86). The questions asked in an externalising conversation can be considered as '*deconstructing*' conversations (White 1995:88).

White (1995:90) suggests that women who have been abused need to look at the abuse as similar to torture. He argued that it helps for people to know that torture is not a test that establishes someone's moral worth:

*...[R]ather its purposes relate more to breaking down identity, to breaking down a sense of community, and to isolating people from each other, to destroying self respect, and to demoralising, to depersonalising the world in people's experience of it and so on.*

(White 1995:90)

In many psychotherapeutic practices related to dealing with abuse, it is an imperative to *work through one's feelings*. Traumatic recall in therapy can re-traumatise people and stresses the importance of being sensitive to cultural and community beliefs, values and resources of clients (Harvey 1996:9). Narrative practices also challenge the notion that dominant psychotherapeutic models are universal and applicable everywhere. It aims to be sensitive to beliefs and values; rests on the premise that '*there is no excuse for people to experience re-traumatisation within the context of therapy. Distress yes, re-traumatisation no*' (White 1995:85).

It is important to look into the woman's gendered assumptions about being in a relationship, when working with women who have been abused by their partners. White (1995:90) also reminds us: gender stereotypes give a message that it is '*not OK*' for women to show anger and because of this women sometimes are under the impression that they are harbouring pits of unresolved anger, that anger once resolved will help them move forward. He raises an interesting point when he suggests that we can view anger in a way where it is not a feeling, but see it as an '*outrage*' or '*passion for justice*'. If we saw it within its context, then we could separate it from the person and see it as a way of '*addressing injustice*'. I believe, what White is referring to, is moving women away from the double bind that sees them afraid to express anger as it has been constructed as '*unlady like*'.

#### **6.4 Narrative pastoral therapy with young people**

As I was working with the children of abused women in the groups, it was necessary to look into narrative practices with young people. Some of the young people who were involved suffered domestic violence themselves and some observed the violence being done to their mothers. The narrative therapy approach involves the whole family and especially young people by '*respecting their unique language, problem-solving resources, and views of the world*' (Freeman, Epston and Lobovits 1997). These authors stated in their book *Playful Approaches to Serious Problems* that when the grown-up talk becomes serious and focused on analyzing problems, it is likely to turn young people off. Case examples in the book show that young people who might be labelled belligerent, hyperactive, anxious, or out of touch with reality are found to be capable of taming their tempers, controlling frustration, facing fears, and using their imaginations to the fullest. '*Narrative therapy encourages children and their families to use resources that have been overlooked to turn the tables on the problems they face*' (Freeman, Epston and Lobovits 1997).

I agree with the authors that it is a challenge for family therapists to find ways to motivate and inspire children in relation to the problems they face. '*Language can shape events into narratives of hope*' (Freeman, Epston and Lobovits 1997:xv), when we listen to the stories and telling and retelling of young people's stories. '*Children's attributions about the causes of family arguments affect both their interpretations of the meaning of and*

*their adjustment to such events*'. To gain an understanding of young people's views and stories of domestic violence was important for this research.

Weston, Boxer and Heatherington (1998:35) did an exploratory study where they examined young people's attributions about family arguments. This study provided an overall map of the '*stories*' young people tell about the causes of family arguments, and showed that, in general, they are more likely to endorse multiple, interacting causes than internal, blaming attributions. It is interesting to mention that there was a gender/role difference in young people's endorsement of trait-based attributions. They made different attributions concerning mothers vs. fathers in marital arguments.

The study showed that circular questioning and interventions such as externalising (White and Epston 1990), elicit different constructions of the problem than problem- and blame-focused questioning (Weston, Boxer and Heatherington (1998:45). Poling (1991:27) cast more light on the power discourses in a family where domestic violence is present, in his book '*the Abuse of Power – A Theological Problem*'. The power that is intended by God for everyone who lives is used to destroy relationships in exchange for control.

*This describes the dilemma of the abusive parent within the social circumstances of parental privilege...[T]he evil of unilateral power can be seen in abusive parent-child relationships. In our society, where the isolated nuclear family is considered more important than the rights of children, parents have almost god-like power over the development of their children. Yet, in the long run, the exercise of unilateral power by a parent over a child destroys the parent's future as well as the child's.*

(Poling 1991:27-28)

Social power inequalities become occasions for the abuse of power. Those who are powerful can organise societies in such a way that those who are vulnerable are denied the full resources that life has to offer. '*Abuse of power relies on institutions and ideologies. The family is an ideological construct and institution in society that structures domination in certain ways*' (Poling 1991:29). An example is a father that continued physically abusing his daughter for many years, if he can prevent outsiders



from finding out. Even symptoms in the child or outside evidence will be ignored if the family is respectable and well socialised. Power brings fear to the sufferers and tends to silence them. This is still true even after the abuser has been separated from the family – as in a divorce. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This chapter set out to deconstruct the professional discourses that have influenced counselling/psychotherapy in relation to domestic violence. The conceptions that I prefer differ from those that are grounded in pathologising the abuser or the women and children who suffer domestic violence. These conceptions do not fit with the social construction view I hold of reality, since it does not allow space for multiple realities and the new possibilities created by attending to neglected stories of people's lives. I also prefer to differ from therapy approaches of trauma as consequences of domestic violence, which are based on the theory of catharsis. It does not fit with the narrative approach to pastoral therapy as the above could be seen as re-traumatising.

The telling and retelling of people's stories of domestic violence brings unique outcomes forward that are part of people's lived experience despite traumatic experiences. These stories/voices are often not privileged because of the dominance of discourses and self-narratives related to the negative effects of domestic violence. Social power inequalities within a family and society tend to silence children's voices in families where violence and abuse is present. Narrative therapy can be used in playful ways to listen to the unique language and problem-solving resources of children as well.

Seagull and Seagull (1991:19) suggest that the therapists' role is to '*continue a relationship respectful of the client's strengths and to focus on the underlying issues*' and they add that clients '*will be able to find creative solutions for themselves that are best for them*'. I tried to work with this discourse in my groups of the research project.

Social construction and narrative therapy knowledges underpin this research project, the theoretical basis of which is presented in Chapters 4 and 5. Descriptions of pastoral therapeutic group conversations guided by the narrative metaphor and narrative practices follow in the next chapters.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO GROUP WORK WITH WOMEN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter focuses on a brief overview of the process and use of pastoral narrative practices in a group setting as a means of helping a group of women and young people explore alternative, preferred ways of living after their experiences of domestic violence. The group setting allowed families to connect with other families in similar circumstances. It provided the opportunity to challenge the isolating effect of abuse. It helped members to develop initiatives for action to address their concerns and those of the group.

I used traditional group methods such as creative visualisation sessions, psycho-educational methods, namely the presentation and discussion of the power and control wheel, the presentations by the young people, alongside the ideas of reflection and externalising conversations. I also experimented with group letters as a means of reflexivity. The use of narrative practices such as externalising the effects of abuse, the ritual space for the telling of the dominant story, an invitation to begin a co-exploration in search of talents and abilities that are hidden by a life problem, letter writing and the voices of the participants are included in this chapter, alongside my account of the process.

#### **2. INTRODUCING THE GROUP PARTICIPANTS**

The seven participants in the women's group were Amanda, Carina, Des, Frieda, Liz, Maureen and Olivia. Some of these women's children took part in the young people's group. I invited only the older children of each family because of various age differences. There were eleven participants in the young people's group, namely

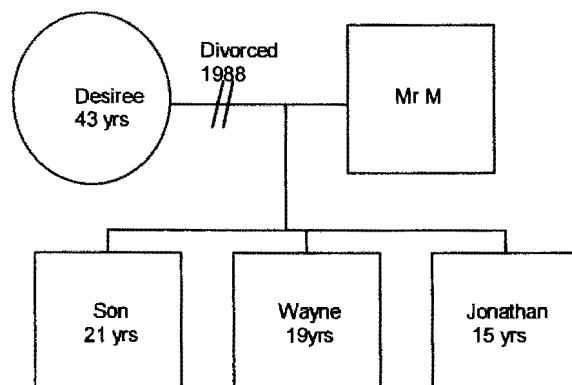
Chantelle, George, Georgie, Jaco, Jonathan, Juan, Laurika, MacGyver, Tania, Willem and Wayne. All women in the group had something in common namely; they had all been divorced from their abusive husbands. The compilation of the two groups then worked out to be women and their children who happened to have experienced similar circumstances. Therefore they could easily relate to one another's circumstances and feelings. Some of the children were still young when their mothers had left their abusive partners and could not remember much of the domestic violence. Though they easily told stories of abuse that had been told and re-told by their mothers and elder brothers or sisters. During the group meetings it became clear that all the women and young people were still experiencing many forms of abuse after the divorce, for example the lack of maintenance money as economical and emotional abuse.

Five of the women participants had been single mothers since the divorce. Olivia was the only one who had been married while the project was running and Maureen stayed with a partner. Some participants chose to use their real names, others used a pseudonym. All other names have been changed to protect the identity of people mentioned in the groups' stories. A disadvantage of the group work is that not all the members could take part in every group session, due to personal circumstances.

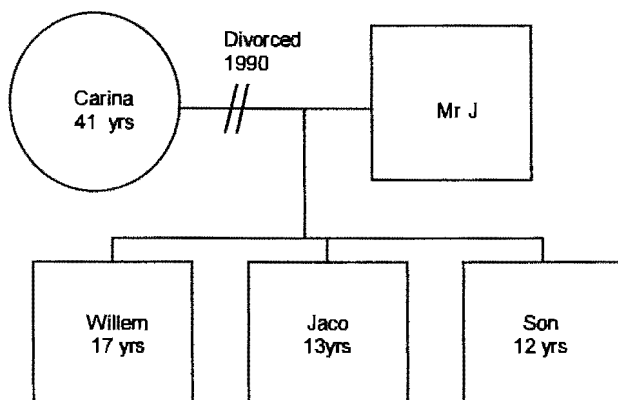
It was the first time for all the participants to join in a group process discussing the abuse they had suffered. Sharing what they had experienced gave voice to what previously remained unsaid.

The following genograms introduce all the families who took part in the research: (Please note that the blocks that do not include a name, are family members who did not form part of the groups because they were very young or had already left home).

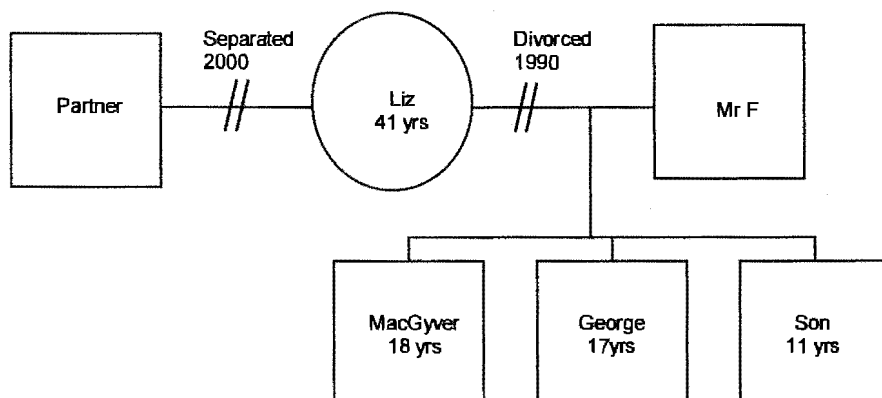
### GENOGRAM 1



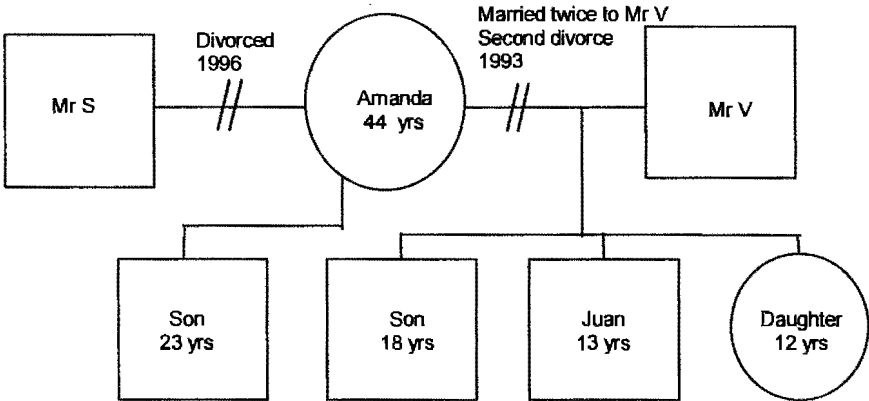
### GENOGRAM 2



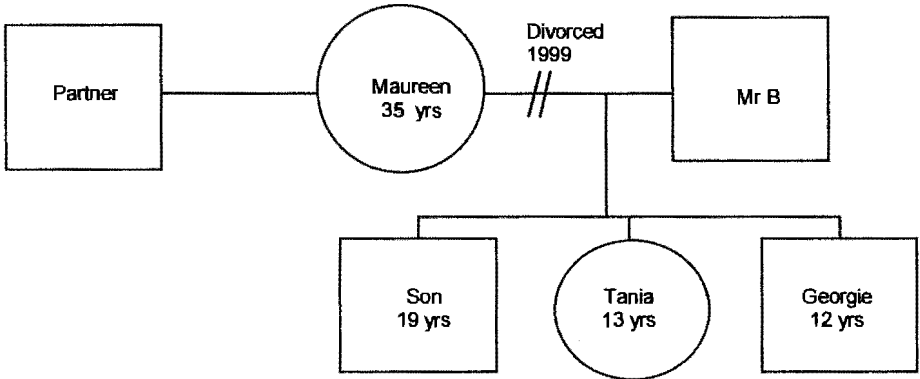
### GENOGRAM 3



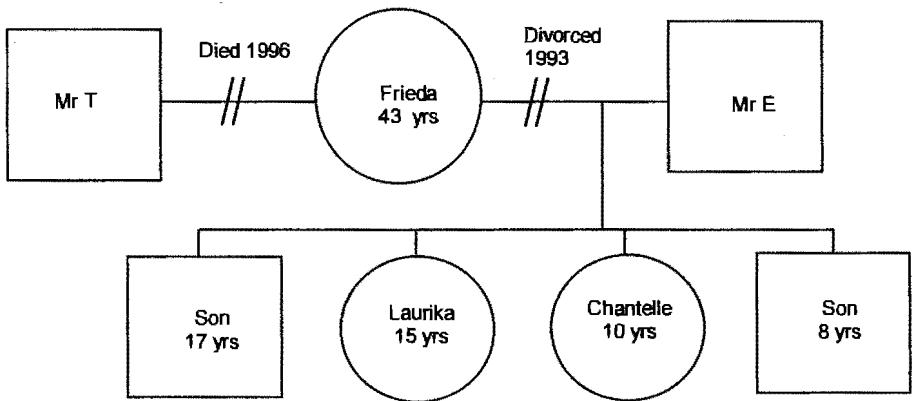
**GENOGRAM 4**



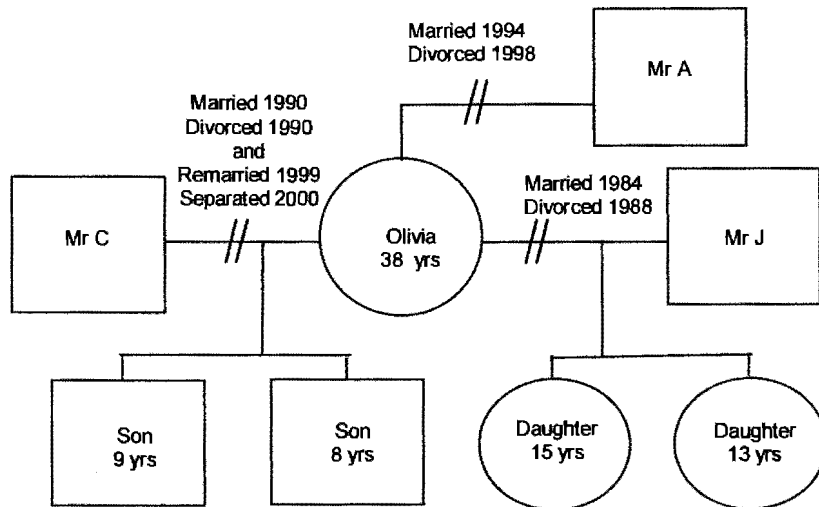
**GENOGRAM 5**



**GENOGRAM 6**



## GENOGRAM 7



### 3. INVITATION TO JOIN THE GROUPS

The following invitation was given to people who said they would like to take part in the research. The aim of this letter was to encourage the women and young people to begin thinking about what they might want, if they wanted to contribute to the group meetings and to encourage their thinking in terms of unique outcomes and alternative stories.

24 May 2000

Dear.....

I am writing to confirm the beginning of our group. It will be on Friday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2000 at 3pm for the women and at 4pm for the young people at Gembou, Groblerspark.

Our first meeting will be an introduction, explaining the narrative process and to make arrangements for future meetings.

As a starting point I would like you to consider the following questions:

- How would you like to introduce yourself to the group?
- What do you expect will make it easier for you to tell your story in this group?
- What made you decide to join the group?
- What expectations do you have of the group?
- What would you like to contribute to the group's story of domestic violence or abuse?
- How do you think the new things that you are going to discover, will be able to change your story?

Thanks for your willingness to participate in the group.

I am looking forward meeting you at the first meeting.

Best wishes

Anmar

#### **4. SETTING**

The group meetings took place every alternative Friday at a room of the community centre at Groblerspark. This was a central place as four of the women and their children lived in the flats nearby. I arranged for two women participants and their children to be picked up and taken back after the meetings, as they had no means of transport. The location was not without difficulties though. We had to move to three different rooms for our meetings during the project, as they were building an extra-classroom for the crèche. One room overlooked the building site and I had trouble to get the young people's attention during some of the meetings.

We had a three week break during the school holidays, as some participants were away for the holidays. The meetings were held every second week to give me enough time to compose the letter for each group, for my supervisor to read it and make

recommendations. I tried to hand out the letters personally on Tuesdays so that the participants had enough time to read them before the group meeting on Fridays.

The final meeting took the form of a picnic at a park and lake nearby. I took the young people to go there first. Jonathan's mother mentioned one day that he could bake wonderful cakes. I asked him to bake us a cake for the picnic and supplied the ingredients. The young people played soccer games in the park and I gave them the certificates afterwards. I took the women participants to the same place afterwards and we had our picnic in the park as well. I handed the certificates out and we concluded the meeting by sharing what the group had meant to them.

## **5. GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER**

After a brief introduction of each participant and of the research I was involved in, I began with a relaxation exercise using a creative visualisation. The women were invited to put aside the things they had left behind in order to come to the session that afternoon. The women and young people's groups were respectively asked to think about how we were going to talk together and about guidelines they wanted us to adopt. These ground rules were written up on a flip chart in both groups.

Confidentiality within the women's and young people's group was important to all. I explained that their ideas fitted well with the narrative practices that I hoped to bring into the group: *practices of respect; of positioning myself to the people that I meet; of enrolling people in their own knowledges; of forming communities of concern; of honouring people; of celebration and joy and of alternative histories* (Epston 1999: Workshop). I asked the participants' permission to use their stories in my research report. They gave consent and the women and young people had the opportunity to make adjustments to the reflective letters. This practice served to clarify that the participants and I co-constructed the shared stories.



*Narrative therapy encourages a sense of authorship and re-authorship of one's life and relationships in the telling and retelling of one's story; and acknowledges that stories are co-produced and endeavors to establish conditions under which the "subject" becomes the privileged author.*

(White and Epston 1990:83)

I had an introductory talk to both groups about the different types of abuse. The two groups respectively named the following types of abuse and I wrote them on the flip chart: sexual abuse, molestation, physical abuse, verbal abuse and emotional abuse. The young people came up with an interesting discussion about animal abuse. According to them animal abuse happens when people are frustrated and take it out on their animals. I also read about this type of abuse in my literature study. I also read about another type of abuse that was not specifically mentioned by the group namely: economic abuse. I made copies from the book: *When Violence begins at Home*, edited by Wilson (1997:17-18) and brought it to the groups to have a discussion about this. Maureen mentioned at one of the meetings that she had never known about the different types of abuse and said she thought it was important to mention this in my research.

I briefly explained narrative therapy to the participants as well. I mentioned that people using narrative ideas believe that we interpret our lived experience as stories. By doing so we select events from our lives and give preference and weight to certain events over others, thus forming our identities. *'Our dominant stories about ourselves could sometimes be filled with problems and they tend to exclude problem-free, more preferred experiences of ourselves. The dominant stories of abuse could be discussed in the groups. Narrative therapy helps persons re-author their lives and uncover those neglected qualities, strengths, actions and thoughts that lie in the shadow of the dominant story. It helps a person's hidden talents and resources, deprived of significance by problems, to blossom and come to light'* (Kecskemeti 1997:3).

At the conclusion of the first session each group member of the women and children's group was asked to think about a metaphor that described her/his experience with domestic violence. We discussed these metaphors in our second meeting. Maureen called her metaphor a '*close circle*', like something that held her too tight, with no freedom. For Frieda it was like '*suicide*', with a heavy tiredness and for Amanda men who abuse their partners are like '*silent murderers*', due to the emotional trauma that victims suffer. Desiree could think of two metaphors: The first was that domestic violence was like an '*oyster*':

*You have to delve deeply to find the pearl. You have to delve through all the mess-up to find the pearl deep down. But you can't break a pearl – it's very hard. I'm like this now. I can stand up for my rights now'.*

The second metaphor for living with abuse/violence was to be like a '*prisoner*'. '*I used to be like a prisoner when I was with my husband, but now I'm free, like an eagle!*'

In their group the young people came up with metaphors or symbols of abuse. Wayne brought a placard to our second meeting and mentioned that abuse is like an '*addiction*'. One could get addicted to sweets and drugs and an abuser cannot stop abusing, so his abusive behaviour becomes an addiction. Willem brought a clown-doll that was in a bad shape. He told us the story about a son who worked with his father in the circus. One day he had been assaulted by his dad and was chased away. Willem said that when abuse enters one's life, '*you can sometimes feel there is no hope and there is no way out*'. Jaco and Georgie did an interesting role-play about an assault that they witnessed. Tania had a magazine picture to present her view of abuse. It was a person who was beaten. She mentioned that a person who suffered abuse might: '*feel scared, useless, alone and don't trust people*'. Laurika had a drawing that demonstrated a dad who was drinking too much and swearing at the mother. The mother was yelling back at him and the baby was crying. She said the child in the picture '*hates her dad and she is scared that the mother might get hurt and she felt afraid*'.

The meetings were not structured according to what I decided beforehand. The participants had the opportunity at the beginning of each meeting for comments on the reflective letter of the previous group meeting. They came up with issues that were important to them and we discussed these issues around domestic violence in seven group sessions. *'The narrative mode of thought would take a form that privileges the person's lived experience'* (White and Epston 1990:83).

## **6. THE RITUAL SPACE FOR TELLING THE DOMINANT STORY**

I wanted to maintain a ritual space for the women and young people to tell their dominant story. Because stories of abuse are often silenced, my rationale for the time spent on these was to encourage women to speak about the abuse. It was necessary that the women and young people did the talking and that they did that without interruption. The group was not only a place for co-authoring new stories; it was also a place to give testimony to past and present injustices. I agree with Dixon (1999:122) when she noted that she values the healing power of talking freely of the abuse with women who suffered violence.

I wanted everyone's story to be heard with the same respect. That is why the sessions began with a space for each member to say what he or she wanted to say. Sometimes I would specifically ask what their response was to a question I had asked in the reflective letter or would give time for amendments. A therapist attempting to move too quickly with people's stories of abuse can *'be yet one more violation and disqualification by a powerful other'* (Freeman and Combs 1996:92). The ritual space also helped to keep the dominant story contained. The dominant stories of abuse were powerful and convincing and had the habit of overshadowing alternative stories of counter-plots.

Narrative therapy opens up new possibilities to overcome the problem story. *'The narrative mode centers around linguistic practices...to create a world of implicit rather than explicit meanings, to broaden the field of possibilities, to install "multiple perspectives" and to engage "readers" in unique performances of meaning'* (White and

Epston 1990:81-82). The therapists '*not knowing*' attitude means that the client is viewed as the expert. This involves '*respectful listening*' – listening in an active and responsive way. The therapist needs to listen in a way that shows the client that she has something worth hearing. I brought this value to the group and expected each participant to subscribe to this.

I tried to honour the participants' shared experience and to the finding of their own ways of healing. Ritual space was given when a participant could speak without interruption testify to the abuse. For most of the participants this was the first time they had shared their story in public. It was important that as a group we bore witness to the abuse that each woman had suffered. This was part of '*mapping*' the influence of the problem on their lives (White and Epston 1990:82). Having each person take a ritual space for his/her story was also a way to confine the dominant story of abuse to that specific space, because it became increasingly difficult to '*contain*' the dominant story of abuse during group sessions. During the sessions I often felt overwhelmed by the stories I heard, so the idea of the ritual space gave the stories '*voice*' while at the same time '*kept them in place*' [my italics].

Here is part of Amanda's story that she told in the ritual space:

*I have been struggling to get away from this problem (abuse) for more than 13 years. It does not mean that I am looking for it, but the problem always follows me. The thoughts of this man (ex-husband) who destroyed my life are with me 24 hours a day. When I looked at the letters that I have written the past thirteen years, I saw that it is full of pain. My body is also aching and I take painkillers for this. (Starts crying) The only way I can think of to get rid of these problems is to wipe this man out. I wanted to kill him. This is a weird and terrible thought. I carry so much hate and bitterness inside me. God must forgive me for this, but I still feel he must be removed from society.*

*I remembered that my life changed dramatically since 1982 when I had married Mr. V. Our eldest son was born, but he wanted to drink and be with his friends all the time. He was part of this motorbike-gang. When I confronted him he used to pull and twitch me around, kicked me with those boots of him and hit me. Afterwards when he was sober again he used to say he was sorry and promised not to do it again. This soon became a habit; I got so nervous and had nowhere to go. He refused to let me work, as he stated: "A wife's place is at home".*

*When I was eight months pregnant with my second child I decided to file for a divorce and applied for legal assistance. I moved into a flat with my children. But the divorce didn't help that much as Hano still continued to harass us and usually came to my flat when he was drunk. One day we had an argument in the flat, he got so furious that he lifted me and threw me against the wall. I just sat there and cried after he left, my neighbour came over and offered some assistance. I went to the police to make a complaint against Hano for assaulting me. He threatened not to pay maintenance for the children if I didn't withdraw the case against him.*

Willem's (17) story of domestic violence that was told in the ritual space is as follows:

*My dad abused my mother. He had a drinking problem; he was involved in affairs; he was unreasonable; ordered all of us around to do things for him. When we refused to do this he used to swear at me and assault my brothers and me, as he was too afraid to tackle someone of his own size.*

Willem read some books about abuse and told the group that the following symptoms are identified with children who had been abused: 'anxiety, fear, depression, loss of memory, psychosomatic complaints, dissociation and regressive behaviour'. We discussed these symptoms and most of the young people acknowledged that those feelings were sometimes part of their lives.

The participants decided that each person would get a chance in future meetings to share their story. At the end of their telling, the group was encouraged to reflect on what they had heard. My role was to facilitate and identify '*unique outcomes*' (White and Epston 1990:56). We developed an account of survival strategies. '*Once details of the effects of the problem have been established, it becomes easier for the persons to specify their own influence in relation to the problem*' (White and Epston 1990:56). The identification of unique outcomes and the performance of new meaning around these help persons to identify their resistance to the effects of the problem or its requirements. Thus, in the process of forming new meaning around unique outcomes, participants in these two groups revised their relationship with violence.

## **7. EXTERNALISING THE EFFECTS OF ABUSE**

The idea of externalising conversations (Winslade and Monk 1999) emphasises that the person is not the problem, but the problem is the problem. Externalising conversation is a practice supported by the belief that a problem is something operating or impacting on or pervading a person's life, something separate and different from the person (Freedman and Combs 1996:47). Externalisation is more important as an attitude than as a technique (Roth and Epston 1996).

Externalising conversation is central to escape from the clutches of a victim story. Abuse stories (however real) are powerful – they take away hope and bring despair into victim's lives. Sufferers can then begin to internalize the effects of abuse and become its victim. The narrative therapist can ask questions that externalize the problem and that can promote the counter-plot, the alternative stories (Dixon 1996:121).

In the group I tried to create a context in which externalising conversation could take place about the effects of abuse. '*The process of engaging in externalising conversations is a form of resistance to the culture of pathology that often pervades professional conversations*' (Roth and Epston 1996:5). I tried to create a context in the groups in which externalising conversation about the effects of abuse could take place. Here is an

example of the way externalising conversation and resistance to abuse was done in the reflective letter after the second meeting of the women's group:

*Amanda, you said that you have been struggling to get away from this problem for more than 13 years. You said about violence: 'It does not mean that I am looking for it, but the problem always follows me'. Amanda, did Abuse want to convince or brainwash you that it needed to be in your life? I wonder if Abuse wants you to believe that you can never be without it? Can you remember times in your life, when you made it clear to Abuse that you do not want it in your life? Amanda you call men who abuse their partners 'silent murderers', due to the emotional trauma that you suffered. Does Abuse try to convince you that you are dead inside and that you have been murdered by the abuse? Can you remember times when you stood up against this 'silent murderer' and hung onto life? When did you manage to go on and keep living despite emotional trauma?*

*Maureen, you said that you had experienced people's disbelief, when you told them what happened. They said: 'This can't be true, your husband is such a nice person'. Olivia you mentioned that people didn't believe you as well. Maureen and Olivia, did the people's disbelief want to convince you that you are the 'wrong one'? Did doubt want to ask you: What did I do wrong to deserve this? Do you think ideas of womanhood and machoness tried to convince you that you have failed or did something wrong to deserve Abuse?*

*Frieda, you mentioned that domestic violence is like 'suicide' to you and that you felt very tired. Frieda, does Abuse try to convince you that you do not have energy to fight back? Does it tell you to give up? Can you think of times in the past, where you managed to keep going? Where did you tap into reserve energy to keep you going? Where did you find the energy to work and raise four children on your own, despite the effects of Abuse in*

*your life? Which personal strengths helped you to manage this? Do you have any support that you can use to make you stronger against Abuse?*

The reflective letters are helpful for externalising the concerns clients bring to these conversations – in other words, assisting clients to see that their problems are separate from who they are as people. ‘They’ are not the problem themselves, but are beset by a problem that is external to their personhood (Epston 1994:32). Here are snippets of the third letter that I wrote to the young people and this letter is an example of how I dealt with externalising conversations and resistance:

*Wayne, you mentioned that you have a friend at school, who decided against Abuse in his life. He was abused by his father and couldn't take it anymore therefore he left home. He rents a room in the yard of another friend's house. He goes to school three days a week and works part-time the other days to support himself. Your friend used to say: 'Everyone gets dealt a set of cards, mine is not the best, but you can play with what you've got'. Wayne, what does it say about your friend as a person that he took these steps? I was touched by his courage to take such a stand all by himself. Does it tell you something about his self-respect and courage? Or would you call it something else? Would you say that your friend's words are true for your life as well? Does this mean that young people have the right to make decisions about their own lives? Can one therefore choose to stand up against Abuse and break the cycle of Abuse? What does it mean to you, to see that your friend could take a stand against the abuse of his father?*

*Wayne, you also mentioned that your mother and eldest brother decided against Abuse: 'My mother and brother used to speak up against the abuse of my father, when we were still living with my father'. Do you think it took a lot of courage from your mother and brother to do that? Does your brother have some qualities that he uses to resist Abuse coming into his*



*life? Wayne, you mentioned that Abuse is only 2% part of your life at present. Can you tell how you manage to keep it such a small part of your life?*

*MacGyver, you stated that a person could change the cycle of Abuse. It does not mean that you, your mother or brothers need to be abusive, when your dad had been like that. You said: 'Everyone has a choice'. MacGyver, does Abuse want to convince family members to be abusive like the perpetrator, when Abuse controls their father? Did you and your family manage to outsmart the tricks of Abuse? Which decisions did you take to get this right? What ways did you use to get away from Abuse? What made you believe that everyone has a choice regarding the influence of Abuse in your life?*

Other narrative practices are woven into Chapters 5, 6 and 7, namely:

- Unique outcomes;
- Taking-it-back-practice;
- Permission to make the stories public; and
- Making the stories public to the:
  - Church community
  - Legal community.

I experienced different reactions when sharing these stories with the community. I received much needed money once for one of the participants, after I shared the needs of these single mothers. A broader description of this follows in Chapter 7.

## 8. DOCUMENTS

### 8.1 Letter writing

Since I wanted to co-create documents that could be circulated amongst participants and edited by them, I was given permission by both groups to write reflective letters about each of our group sessions.

*In a storied therapy, the letters are used primarily for the purpose of rendering lived experience into a narrative or 'story', one that makes sense according to the criteria of coherence and lifelikeness. [I]n a storied therapy, the letters are a version of that co-constructed reality called therapy and become the shared property of all the parties to it.*

(White and Epston 1990:125)

The advantage of a letter in narrative therapy is that *'the words in a letter don't fade and disappear the way conversation does...they bear witness to the work of therapy and immortalizing it'* (Epston 1994:31). A client can hold a letter in hand, reading and rereading it days, months and years after the session. Epston (1994:31) wrote that he had clients telling him that they regularly reread letters that he had sent them years ago to remind themselves what they endured, how far they had advanced their lives and the extent to which they considered themselves to have changed. The participants could not wait to read the reflective letters that I delivered a few days before the group meetings, especially the women. They usually read their own letter and that of the young people's group. The women gained knowledge of how their children viewed and reacted towards the violence they experienced at home and got a better understanding of their children's strengths as well.

What distinguishes a narrative letter is that it is literary rather than diagnostic; it tells a story rather than being expository or explicatory. The letter engages the reader not so much by developing an argument to a logical conclusion as by inquiring what might

happen next. Structured to tell the alternative story that is emerging along with the therapy, it documents history, current developments and future prospects (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:112).

Letters played a central part in my research project with women and young people who experienced domestic violence. I found that by writing a letter after each meeting I was able to:

- *Say many things I had wanted to say during the meetings, but never had the time;*
- *Collect my thoughts and reflect on these;*
- *Bring alternative stories to attention so that they had a wider audience of success;*
- *Use letters as a transparent form that all the group could share;*
- *Provide a group sense of making the personal political by picking up on the themes that were emerging; and*
- *Help to develop a sense of group cohesion and community.*

*(Dixon 1999:122)*

The latter was important to the group as many women participants mentioned what the group cohesion meant to them throughout the research project. The following was part of the second letter to the women participants:

*Desiree, you said that you didn't feel alone, because 'we are a group where the same thing happened to everyone'. Desiree, does this mean that the communal voice of the group can be stronger than violent individual voices? Will this make you feel stronger?*

The letters were an important way of communicating and sharing community in the group when group members couldn't attend a meeting. Each participant received a letter even if he/she had not been present. Letters often play a role in a narrative way of thickening the counterplot at the expense of a problem's plotting of events. When depicted in a letter,

the protagonist of the alternative story becomes the reader of her own story. Her voice reverbrates through the verbatim quotes, questions and plot twists, which iterate and reiterate her heroics (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:115).

The letters included in the text could serve to show how narrative pastoral therapy could contribute and play a role in understanding the consequences of traumatic experiences with violence. The letters also included the healing voices of the women and young people who experienced violence and it became clear how such therapy could contribute in changing the meanings attached to traumatic experiences. Examples of the therapeutic letters of the groups will be given throughout Chapters 5 and 6.

## **8.2 Certificates**

If in our world, language plays a very central part in those activities that define and construct persons, and if written language makes a more than significant contribution to this, then a consideration of modern documents and their role in the redescription of persons is called for (White and Epston 1990:188).

*Documents are a vehicle for the presentation and display of the author's worth according to moral criteria that have been established in a particular discipline. And in so doing, such documents shape the author's life as they do the subject's.*

(White and Epston 1990:189)

There are those practices, situated in the domain of alternative local, popular knowledges, that have the capacity to redescribe and specify persons in ways that emphasise their special knowledges and competencies, as well as their place in the larger community of persons (White and Epston 1990:190). The bestowing of awards is one example of these practices. Graduations and confirmations are examples of rituals that take place when significant transitions occur in the lives of people (Freeman et al. 1997:140).

The women's group and young people's group meetings ended with a celebration where I handed out certificates to participants (see appendix 1). I tried to honour the steps that every participant took during the meetings and wrote those down on the certificates. The certificates served as a summary of their accomplishments and could incorporate a wider audience to witness their strengths. The celebrations took place at a nearby lake and are described in Chapter 6.9.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

My research of a narrative approach with the participants as a way of addressing the dominant story of abuse has been a spiritual experience. Most of the group participants spoke up about abuse for the first time while the other group members bore witness to these stories. The letters helped to externalize the problem and gave me the opportunity to ask questions to show that resistance to the problem often goes unnoticed.

It was important to me that I did not take control of these meetings in a way that replicated a hierarchical power structure. Though I recognised my power as the co-coordinator of the research, I was constantly working at recognizing and deconstructing that power.

The possible implications that can be drawn from the descriptions of the types of abuse and metaphors of domestic violence for practical theology and pastoral therapy are numerous. The co-constructing process initiated in the women and young people's group is continued in Chapters 5 and 6 but cannot be reduced to the words in these chapters.

## CHAPTER 5

### VOICES AGAINST ABUSE: THE BEAUTIES VERSUS THE BEAST

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on further exploration of the use of pastoral narrative practices in a group setting as a means of helping women and young people live in alternative, preferred ways after domestic violence/abuse. The narrative maps of audiences and re-telling which fits with the contextual approach to practical theology that I prefer, initiated the idea for the groups in the community.

#### 2. NAMING THE GROUP

I asked the women if they wanted to come up with a name for the group. Maureen suggested that we call ourselves: 'Magrietjies', this is the Afrikaans name for a flower called 'Daisies'. She once read a book that used the metaphor of 'Daisies' to describe women who are strong and could recover after trauma. Maureen stated: '*These flowers are strong, they usually recover quickly and they don't need much water to survive*'. I suggested that the rest of the group think about this and decided on a name at our fourth meeting.

I referred in the third letter to this:

*I thought about what the 'Daisy' metaphor said to us about the resilience of this group – that you keep on going even in the face of abuse and hardship. Does it tell us something about your drive to survive, to triumph above the abuse? Does it speak of a will to live? Does it speak of who we are and what we stand for?*

The rest of the group decided on 'Daisies' as the appropriate name for the women's group.

### 3. ALTERNATIVE STORIES - NAMING THE COUNTERPLOT

The counterplot that takes a story in one direction or another, describes its intent, and shapes its meaning. Because it serves these functions one could say that the counterplot connects events together into a meaningful story (Freeman, Epston and Lobovits 1997:94). If a new narrative of hope in a dire situation is to be co-authored, then the plot of the problem-saturated story has to be available for critique and revision. This is tricky because plotting is so ingrained in shaping the meanings we make of experience that we usually take its formative role for granted.

According to Freeman et al. (1997:94-95) problematic stories have an advantage:

*They've been around for a while. Their plot is thick. Like a snowball, they have packed together certain incidents and episodes in the family's life, finally freezing them into solid mass. These problem-saturated stories can be very persuasive. The trouble is their effects are negative and discouraging. When these stories take us in, experiences that do not fit their narrow confines are overlooked and any hints of hope and possibility are obscured.*

Since the problem-saturated story has mass and considerable evidence to support its momentum, a simple positive statement or reframing by the therapist is easily discounted. An alternative story must be established in which the characters, their intentions, and their circumstances are as well developed, colorful, and convincing as the problem's (Freeman et al. 1997:95). With the two groups I tried to use narrative practice, which made the problem's plotting thinner, and thickened the alternative story's counterplot. A major focus of narrative therapy is the '*relationship*' between the person and the problem. If and when the problem is personified, it may be regarded as having its own traits, values, and *modus operandi*. One way to initiate an alternative story is to contrast the person's qualities, abilities, and knowledge with the characteristics of the problem.

According to Freeman et al. (1997:95-96) therapists and family members alike find themselves protected from burnout and pessimism when they join together to analyze the pathological '*values*' and '*intentions*' of the problem instead of the pathology and

pathogenic history of the person. White and Epston (1990:39-40) add to the above mentioned that naming the problem plot and alternative story's counterplot:

- *opens up new possibilities for persons to take action to retrieve their lives and relationships from the problem and its influence;*
- *frees persons to take a lighter, more effective, and less stressed approach to 'deadly serious' problems; and*
- *presents options for dialogue...about the problem.*

Professionals can fall in the trap of pathologising the person and then can not get around the pathogenic history of the person. One of the participants told such a story during the group session and I responded in the letter following the discussion:

*Amanda you mentioned that you went to see your psychologist again since our last group meeting. He took your old files and after he had a look through them, he mentioned that he couldn't see any improvement as you are still occupied with the same problems as a few years ago. Amanda, do you agree with this statement? In our previous sessions you mentioned the things you had done to manage your children as a single parent. Don't these things prove that you did take steps forward? Isn't this proof of your inner strength? Does Abuse want to blind the psychologist for the steps you have taken as well as the improvement? Do you think he has an idea of how difficult it can be for a single mother to raise three children on her own? Does it say anything that you were willing to join this group to speak up against Abuse? You told us that you had survived chemotherapy for skin cancer a few years ago, after your divorce. 'I did overcome this on my own, with my children at my side'. What does it say about your inner strength or willpower to overcome these obstacles on your own, without the support of a husband?*

The alternative story's counterplot is revealed by questions and comments that weave back and forth between the influence of the problem, with its effects on various aspects of family members' lives. The dominant stories of abuse were at times very overwhelming especially when all the group members joined in. The letter writing (as discussed in Chapter 4, section 8) came in very helpful to thicken the counterplot. I did this by asking



questions to thicken the alternative story/counterplot in the letters I wrote after each group meeting. I asked the group to be on the lookout for signs of the alternative story success. Group members sometimes answered the questions at our next meeting.

The child and family become protagonists in an engaging story of overcoming the problem or of living with it in the way that suits them best. I used the letters to thicken the alternative story between the mothers and their children (*taking it back practice*) as well:

*To the Daisies: I told you during our session that your children spoke with praise and dignity of their mothers at the young people's group meetings. Jonathan called his mother a hero-like figure because she was always there for them and managed to protect them from Abuse.*

During the sessions the voices of the young people and their mothers spoke of a preferred story outside of the abuse. I tried to be on the lookout for 'unique outcomes' and to thicken the counterplot of these stories that had been coming up in the group meetings. After a discussion in the young people's group I asked the following questions in the fourth letter to the young people:

*Jonathan I asked you how you managed to cope with the abuse experience all these years? You stated: 'I've got friends and family who love me. We are independent and learn to cope without my father's support'. I wanted to know if you had any support from other people and what did you and your brothers do, to overcome these hardships? You said: 'My brothers and I used to cut the grass in front of the flats for pocket money. We used to stay at my uncle's house. The family supported us – my mom's family and my father's twin brother'. Would you say that your family and friends are on your side, against Abuse? Does support and love from people make Abuse smaller?*

*Jonathan you added the following: 'My mom is the hero-like figure, if it wasn't for her, we would have stayed on the street. She supported and cared for us'. I've asked you if there was something inside yourself, some qualities, which enabled you to cope through all these years? Jonathan,*

*you mentioned that you are an excellent chess-player and you got a scholarship, which helped your mom with the school fees. Jonathan would you say that your mom can rely on you, for making your own plans to work against economic abuse in your family? Do you think that your father can actually learn from you how to be 'economically responsible'?*

I also tried to ask questions that raised the positive outcome of a divorce following a marriage with domestic violence in the following story from Laurika in the young people's group:

*Laurika, you joined the conversation when Jonathan mentioned he suffered emotional and economical abuse, after his parents got divorced, although he was still very small. You said: 'I was cross and sad when my parents got divorced when I was in standard 1'. In reaction to the divorce you refused to study and failed your school standard. You mentioned that your dad used to beat your mom, yourself and your brothers and sister as well; therefore you were glad for your mom's sake when she could leave this situation. Laurika did Abuse try to convince you to give up on schoolwork? Did it want to blind you for the positive things that could come from a divorce – like peace, happiness and freedom? Or do you think divorce is portrayed to be the answer and it is only a small answer to this big problem? How did you manage after your parents' divorce and re-gained control over your life? Which decisions did you make and what steps did you take not to let Abuse or Divorce rule your life?*

#### **4. DECISIONS – LABELLING AND RESISTANCE**

In the writing of this research report I had to reflect on nearly all the sessions to weave the responses of the group meetings together. I used extracts of the letters that I constructed after the meetings.

During the meetings with the women I used the terms 'victim', 'resistance' and 'survivor'. At the sixth meeting I verified the validity of these terms with them. I did not want to label them and we spoke about the terms and labelling of women who had

experienced and survived domestic violence. I was curious to discover how the women and young people viewed their own actions in terms of survival or resistance. Those actions sometimes went unnoticed and I tried to reflect on them through narrative questions during the meetings or by asking questions in the reflective letters. The letter opened up opportunities to discuss some of the ideas about divorce during the next meeting.

I shall enclose the last part of my sixth letter to explain the above mentioned:

*Maureen, you mentioned that the term 'victim' sounds negative, you prefer the word 'survivor'. Desiree agreed that the word 'victim' is labelling. 'It is the same as divorced woman. People think bad of you'. Desiree, does Abuse try to steal your confidence because you are now a 'divorced woman'? Does it try convincing you that you are guilty? Is it fair that society labels people and stigmatises divorcees? How can we start to change this culture and perceptions? Can you come up with some ideas? Do you think the other Daisies have been through the same injustice of labelling?*

*Carina, you mentioned that you don't like the term 'battered women', but would rather speak of 'rehabilitated battered women' in our group. Maureen you mentioned that you think the words 'battered women' sound humiliating. You used to think that battered women are pathetic and they won't resist the circumstances and they allow the abuse to happen. It wasn't until you joined the group that you realised there are many women who've been through similar situations and that - they haven't asked for it and it's not their fault. You mentioned that you view Carina as such a 'strong woman - she has been through a lot and managed to cope with it all with such dignity and strength.'*

*To the group: I thought a lot about this ... Would you all agree, that the above statement is true for every one of you? Are you able to view yourselves as women with courage and strength, who could overcome*

*obstacles in the past and would be able to go around obstacles in future as well?*

*Carina you said: 'One must remember the abuse and the divorce took place ten years ago. I've suffered for six years. I've managed better the last four years since I've found a permanent job. I didn't use to speak about the abuse that I've suffered.' Carina did Abuse try to silence your voice? Did it try to scare and bring fear into your life? How did you challenge it to speak about the injustice that you and your children were suffering? Which personal strengths helped you to break the fear and raise your voice?*

*To the group: Does Abuse sometimes try to convince you that you are 'born to suffer'? Does Abuse sometimes try to blind you for all your success in the past? Do you want to remember the alternative stories are always present, because you decided not to let Abuse dominate your lives! Can you look back at everything you have managed in the past as single parents and all the decisions you made to step away from Abuse and give yourself some credit? Where would you all prefer to be in one year or five years from now? Do you want to keep in mind that every one of you chose to lead a NON-VIOLENT life?*

We spoke about every person's decision to choose a violent free life for themselves and their children. When I listened to the voices of the women and young people in the groups, it inspired me to move forward despite hardships in my own life, as I drew courage and strength from these survival stories.

Recently I had read another survivor story, the story of Alison. I told the women and young people about Alison's book, *'I have life'* that moved and inspired me. I admired her for her courage to defy death and deny her attackers and rapists the satisfaction of destroying her life. I ended the women's and young people's group letters with Alison's code of life, her own ABC. Alison struggled to overcome severe depression and she managed to recover in the end, by living her own ABC. *The A for attitude, the B for belief and the C for choice.* The most important part of her three-step solution is the C – which stands for choice.

*The instant I realised I had a choice in the manner in which I dealt with what had happened to me I reached a turning point...although it hadn't*

*been my choice to be attacked and raped, everything after that was within my control.*

(Thamm 1998:249)

It is admirable that all the women in the group decided to stand up against Abuse and face the unknown. They had chosen to leave the abusive relationships and not to return, despite hardships and numerous problems with finances and single parenthood. These actions speak of resistance and I tried to explore the importance of the steps they had taken with them.

Liz spoke about the choices she had made during the two weeks following our fourth meeting. Liz had been on her own for five years after her divorce. She had a partner thereafter for nine years and the relationship had broken down a few months before. She struggled to come to terms with that and missed his input and discipline in her three son's lives. Her family didn't approve of any contact with him, since the relationship had broken down. Here is an extract from the letter that followed the fifth meeting:

*Liz you mentioned that you thought a lot about the group discussion and reading from Alison's book about 'choices that we can make in our lives. Liz you mentioned that you went to speak with a pastor about your restlessness regarding family matters and your friendship with your ex-partner. 'The pastor encouraged me to start with one thing at a time, and to start with my uncertainty about the relationship with my ex-partner'. You then decided to phone your ex-partner and told him that you made a decision and would still like him as a friend, although your family doesn't approve of this friendship. You asked him to reach a decision and to let you know what was going to happen.*

*Liz is this how you decided to start making a decision? What does it say to you that you have the courage to reach a decision about your life and to confront your ex-partner, as it was bothering you for a long time? Would you call it something other than courage? Which steps did you take to help you to reach this decision? Was it a difficult decision? Would you*

*prefer this way of thinking about choices in the future or do you want to try yet another strategy?*

Various questions can be introduced that assist persons in engaging in this ascription of new meaning, questions that actively involve them and Meyerhoff (as quoted by White and Epston 1990) puts it as the ‘*re-authoring*’ of their lives and their relationships. Encouraging persons to identify those expressions about aspects of lived experience that would have previously gone unstored and to review the real effects of these expressions in their lives and relationships can facilitate alternative stories. Recruiting an ‘external’ audience can also enhance the endurance of new stories, as well as their elaboration. This is what I tried to accomplish through the group discussions. The advantages are that the audience contributes to the writing of new meanings and in addition, the person of the story ‘*reads*’ the audience’s experience of the new performance. Through speculation about these experiences or by more direct identification, he or she engages in revisions and extensions of the new story (White and Epston 1990:17).

#### **4.1 Breaking the ‘circle of Abuse’ and Resistance**

The young people’s group discussed whether a child could choose to break the vicious circle of Abuse at our fourth meeting. Jonathan mentioned that a person could sometimes act out of rage. I asked the group what stopped a person from doing just as he/she wanted or liked to do. We spoke about the rules that exist in every house, school and at work. George mentioned that a person needs a driver’s licence to drive a car and that is a South African law made by the government. I asked who decided that was the way something ought to be, or that was the way things work – therefore specific ideas/prescriptions (discourses) exist in society. Jonathan mentioned that the media played an important role in the ideas that were brought forward in society. Although he also mentioned that the media could tell lies and negative ideas could be brought forward as well. We discussed choices and making choices not to continue the abuse cycle.

Resistance against violence was visible in the young people’s group. I asked Laurika to share her story with the group – it was a story of her courage to raise her voice against the abuse that she had experienced while living with her dad. Laurika told the group about the protection order under the Domestic Violence Act, No 116 of 1998, that her mother

got to stop her dad from abusing her and her family. Laurika spoke about the court case that took place after her dad had assaulted her during May 2000. The social worker helped her mother to apply for a protection order under the new Act of Domestic Violence. Laurika told the group that she had been in her mother's custody since the divorce of her parents in 1993. She had agreed to go and stay temporarily with her dad since the beginning of 1999 when she went to secondary school, as he had promised to pay for her school fees and would provide for all her needs. She described the violence as follows:

*I made a big mistake to go and live at my father's house, because he lost his temper when he read a note from a friend of mine that I had started smoking at school. My dad broke my jaw and I had severed bruises in my face and all over my body due to the assault. A children's court case followed and I was removed from my father's care and went to stay with my mother again. My father has not yet come to our house again, that is quite a relief, as he had used to threaten to kill my mother and our whole family many times before. Although he did make quite a nasty remark when he bumped into me at our local supermarket the other day.*

I responded as follows in the fourth reflective letter to the group:

*Laurika, did Economic Abuse want to convince you that there is no way out of being stuck? Did Abuse try to convince you that you are responsible for the outcome of the temporary stay with your father or did it try to tell you that you made mistakes? What does it say about you that you tried to help your mother and therefore agreed to go and stay with your father? Laurika does Abuse sometimes leave you no choice but to take drastic steps like getting a protection order? Are the laws in South Africa successful in protecting children's rights? Can the new Act of Domestic Violence help a vulnerable family to find peace at last?*

*Laurika, the group discussed the choices that young people have, to stop the cycle of Abuse. Did you manage to do this, when you spoke out against the assault from your dad? Did you choose to make an end to*

*Abuse in your own life? How did you reach this decision? Which steps did you take to free yourself from the vicious circle of Abuse? Do you think you set an example for your younger brother and sister as well, to stop this Abuse and therefore protect them from further harm as well? Would you call this a courageous act or would you call it something else?*

During therapy with women and young victims I continued externalising abuse and the effects of abuse because I wanted to avoid the strong blaming language that was being aimed at men (See Jenkins 1990). On an ethical stance I support the notion of men taking responsibility for abusive behaviour no matter who the protagonists are. Women who have experienced abuse tend to feel responsible for it and by externalising abuse it does shift abuse out of the domain of 'ownership'. I chose to externalise abuse in order to avoid the strong blaming language that victim stories invite women to use.

MacGyver (18) told the young people's group about the violence that he and his family had suffered when they were still living with his father. The steps he took illustrated his resistance to domestic violence in a very creative way. Here is an extract of the letter that followed the discussion:

*MacGyver, you mentioned that you and your brothers audiotaped your father one night, when he came home drunk as usual. You took this evidence of the shouting, swearing and the physical abuse that you, and your mother and your brothers had experienced to your local police station and laid a complaint. Your father was arrested soon after that. He received 5 years in jail for this violent behaviour. Your mother divorced him, while he was doing his sentence. I asked you how you came on the idea of getting evidence for the police? You mentioned that you had had enough of your father's abusive behaviour. Where did you gain your strength and creativity to gather this evidence?*

It was inspiring to listen to the young people's stories of courage and strengths to overcome domestic violence.



## 5. THE FAITH COMMUNITY RESPONDS TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

I did not want to have a theological discussion regarding dogmatic issues, but attempted to 'story' the experiences of the participants regarding their experiences with the church. During our fourth meeting I asked the women to think about their experiences with the church, faith community and pastors/ministers/priests so that we could discuss that if they wanted to. The women grabbed the opportunity to raise their voices about those issues. It was like a floodgate that opened in the group and the women immediately began to share their experiences with one another.

The following literature is relevant to the discussions of the women that follow. The Domestic Violence Task Force (hereafter DVT Force), together with the Anglican Social Responsibilities Commission developed a programme for clergy and key workers in the Anglican Church of Western Australia to help them deal with the issues of domestic violence. When the clergy or church pastoral workers have to respond to the issue of domestic violence, they have to consider the Christian perspective. According to the DVT (1993:60) sometimes we are very sure of our theology, until a living example of a particular crisis comes before us. Our hearts may be going out to the violated woman, longing to encourage her to leave the situation, but strong messages about the sanctity of marriage, for example, persuades us to respond differently. Clergy and key workers then run the risk of giving advice that runs counter to what is reasonable or humane.

I agree with the DVT Force (1993:61) that:

*when we pause to consider what the Christian view is, our minds are often bombarded with conflicting messages. We realise that our Christian perspective comes from a variety of sources taught to us, modelled for us or gleaned from our own reading. The Bible and tradition are the main sources, but are we clear as to the specific source of our beliefs and attitudes? We are often very hazy about what is actually presented in the Bible about such things.*

The important point is for each church member or clergy to decide what the present priorities are in accessing appropriate knowledge for their present role in ministry or

pastoral practice. I had to consider this as part of my pastoral narrative therapy with women and young people who experienced domestic violence. Some stories of the women have been abusive and according to me not compatible with the gospel message, which is good news for all alike. Hopefully these stories will be a resource for those who seek to support and encourage those who are abused, and to help those who exert inappropriate power, to change. Above all it is hoped that this will confront and dispel the notion that abuse and Christianity are in any way compatible (DVT Force 1993:69).

The following are extracts from the letter that I wrote after the group meeting when the women talked about their experiences with religious institutions:

*Desiree you mentioned that you had received pastoral counselling 'that was wonderful'. You stated that the counsellor helped you a lot in gaining perspective on your marriage that was falling apart due to abuse. You admit that you 'had a certain sense of guilt' [about the marriage not working], but the counsellor understood that you could no longer stay in the marriage where your husband had abused you. Would you say that the pastoral counsellor managed to put real care into pastoral practice, which is to listen, learn and love unconditionally?*

*Desiree you said, 'God equipped you' for the separation from your husband. You held onto a Bible verse, namely Proverbs 17:1 – 'Better a dry crust with peace and quiet, than a house full of feasting, with strife'. This verse sustained you when you left your husband. Can you think of other difficult times in the past when you used your knowledge of the Bible and God to sustain you? Where did you gain this knowledge? Are there other people that played an important role in your Christian life? Can you recall their words or deeds? Desiree you stated that your faith is your salvation. Would you say that your faith in the Lord sustained you, when you suffered abuse in your marriage and when you struggled being a single mother? Were there any personal qualities that you have used to strengthen this faith or put it into practice?*

*Desiree, you mentioned that you had a negative experience with an Anglican minister. He spoke to you regarding your divorce and mentioned*

*that you were not allowed/permitted to take part in the communion after the divorce. 'I was very upset then and said to him, I'm not the adulterer and you are not my God, therefore I shall not obey you!' After this incident you left the Anglican Church and joined a charismatic church where you've been accepted. Desiree, would you call this judgmental attitude of the minister a form of Abuse or would you call it something else? Do you find that the church sometimes plays an abusive role, instead of a caring, loving and supportive role for people who suffer? Will you call your standing up to the Anglican minister a resistance force that you have or standing up for what is right or addressing the injustice done to you?*

Adams (1994:72) in his book: *Woman-Battering* stressed the importance for the clergy to acknowledge that the destruction of the marriage had already occurred; the husband's battering behaviour had destroyed the covenantal nature of the marriage. Separation to achieve safety acknowledges that the covenant is broken, but it is not the act that breaks the covenant. The battered woman should be encouraged to see her right to be free of violence as a theological imperative.

Here is Carina's story with a faith community:

*you said that the 'grace of God' sustained you as well. Carina, you said that you have had different experiences with ministers from the Dutch Reformed church. You are a member of the Dutch Reformed church, however you find it difficult to speak to your present minister, because he does not understand you and the Abuse-circumstances that you have experienced in the past and that are still continuing at present. 'When I speak to my local minister he tells me: 'You don't know what you are talking about' and then keeps telling me about the severe cases of abuse that he deals with in his congregation. He ignores my abusive past and the verbal and economic abuse that I'm still suffering and he is known to be a pastoral counsellor as well'. Carina, does this minister's ignorance violate you further? Is there something that you want to teach the church or the minister regarding sensitivity for abused women and children?*

*Have you thought of any steps that you would like to take to inform ministers or a congregation about abuse?*

*Carina I was deeply moved when you described the circumstances that you had to endure, when your marriage ended. I thought about your strength and the qualities that made you cope with this trauma. What would you call these qualities you have? You said: 'I've always experienced domestic violence in my marriage; my husband used to swear at me and threw my clothes outside. When my youngest son, Nico was in hospital for heart surgery it all reached a climax. I've stayed with my son in hospital day and night, with no support from my husband. I was so traumatised when my son's heart stopped beating and the medical staff thought he was dead. Eventually they pulled him through'.*

*While you were attending to your son's needs in hospital, your husband filed for divorce. One of the reasons for the divorce stated as follows: 'I have not done my domestic duties at home'. Carina how did Abuse try to convince you that you had been at fault when you were caring for your son and were anxious about him living? Did it try to make you feel guilty and worthless at a time that you needed support? Later on you were told that your husband and his mistress were having an affair, while you were with your son in hospital. Did you experience anger, hate and despair? If so, how did you manage to control your anger, hate or even despair? Which steps did you take to carry on, despite all these lies from your husband? How did you keep on living for yourself and for your son? Was it your determination to hang onto life that gave him back his life?*

*Carina you had a bad experience with the minister from your local church at that time when your marriage was breaking down. Apparently your husband never attended church with you and the minister was aware of the violence that you suffered at home. A few weeks after the separation your husband and the minister came to see you. Your husband wanted to get together again. You mentioned that you were so shocked at the minister's attitude as he expected you to accept your husband's plea and return to*

*him. Especially when he knew of all the abuse that you had suffered! The minister said: 'You need to forgive and to forget'. But you had enough of your husband's unfaithfulness and decided to end the marriage. You had given him another chance, when he was unfaithful the first time, but were not prepared to do that again. Do you feel that the minister was victimising you? Did Abuse blind the minister to the consequences of violence in your life and those of your children? What role did Power and Gender play in the words of this minister? Is there anything you would like to tell the church, so that they can learn from your negative experience with someone from the faith community?*

According to the DVT Group (1993:43) the '*clergy person*' is in a unique position to relate and minister in a pastoral manner to abused women. The complexity and difficulty of the many issues for abused women means that long term counselling should not be entered into unless the '*clergy person*' is a professionally trained counsellor or, there are no other options available. The DVT Group (1993:44) stressed that it is important to listen to the abused person, affirm the woman's right to her feelings and encourage and affirm the expression of feelings. Being heard and believed is the most powerful healing experience to enable the woman to address what is happening to her, and to take appropriate action.

This is Amanda's story of the faith community:

*Amanda you spoke about the rejection that you experienced from the Dutch Reformed church. They forbade you to baptise your children after your divorce. At a later stage the elder of the church said he would ask the church how long that censure was applicable, but never came back to you with an answer. Amanda did you find unconditional love and acceptance at the church, or did you find that they blamed you for the divorce? Is that another form of Abuse that you experienced from the church and faith community? Did you find that the preaching in the church helped and supported you or that it condemned you?*

The Christian church has a valuable opportunity to be a strong, healthy force helping to end family violence. The survivors of family violence bear powerful witness to the pull of faith. In spite of suffering cruelty and abuse, often at the hands of other Christians, these courageous people still turn to the Christian church hoping to find healing. Faith becomes one resource enabling them to heal (Miller 1994:130).

The local church can help or hinder that healing process as in Olivia's story. Olivia had a healing experience with her church and priest from the Old Apostolic church:

*You went to see the priest, when you had trouble with abuse that got the better of your husband. He told you to bring your husband along, so he could speak to both of you. The priest spoke to your husband about the abuse and told him that this was not right and against God's will. He prayed for your husband and bound this sin in the name of the Lord. He warned your husband that something bad would happen to him, if he continued with that abusive behaviour and violence. The next day at work your husband had an accident with the machinery he was working with and injured his hand. Because of that incident you believe in the power of prayer and in the Word of the Lord. Olivia does this mean that God can also punish people? Olivia although your husband refused to attend church meetings with you, you mentioned: 'I continued to believe in God, to pray and to read my Bible, as this is a weapon that helped me'.*

*Could this mean that your personal relationship with God sustained you, during difficult times? Is your faith in God and holding onto these words stronger than the voice of Abuse, because you did not stop to pray and read your Bible, although you were scolded and got resistance from your husband?*

*Olivia you mentioned that your dad was a priest in the Apostolic church as well and you were brought up with strict Biblical guidelines. You found that this Christian upbringing was useful later in life. You found that the pastor at Mother's Nest (a refuge where you stayed after you left your husband) was very supportive. He said that you need to forgive the Abuser*

*and yourself to be able to carry on with your life. Do you agree that you need to be forgiven for something or not? If so, what do you think you needed to forgive yourself for? Olivia, do you want to take some of these positive experiences with the church and the pastor/priest back to the church? So that this can help other women in the same situation in future or do you have other ideas that can contribute to their (the priest/faith community) understanding of Abuse?*

Miller (1994:118) mentioned that responding to family violence includes getting the whole picture. We can observe and respond to individual cases of family violence, yet we also must understand how the churches and our larger culture support power abuse.

*A true analysis of the full dimensions of family violence entails removing the blinders. As frightening and overwhelming as that is, our consideration of family violence leads to consideration of all the factors that set up and encourage abuse. However, we do such analysis so we can experience God's renewal. Our willingness to name the sins of family and sexual violence will lead us to healing and new life.*

(Miller 1994:118)

The stories of the women participants bear testimony to the churches' responses to domestic violence. Most anywhere we look in our culture, we observe the themes of oppression (Miller 1994:124).

*Those with the balance of power use it in ways that are harmful. Men dominate women. Adults dominate children. Whites dominate people of color. Other vulnerable groups...are subject to oppression by the dominant groups. The church has the potential to offer a different perspective. In fact, the church is intended to be a counterculture. The Bible is a wonderful testament to God's invitation to create an alternative to our oppressive dominant culture. We must confess the church's susceptibility to the dominant culture.*

(Miller 1994:124-125)

Here is part of the letter in which I reflected on Frieda's story of her local minister's support whilst experiencing domestic violence:

*Frieda, you mentioned that you are a member of the Dutch Reformed Church. You got a lot of support from your minister. Frieda you explained to the group that you had a long and difficult path and had left your husband eight times during your marriage but returned many times after he said he was sorry and promised to stop abusing you. Your minister was aware of this, but didn't judge your decision, but kept supporting you and respecting your choices.*

*When your marriage ended, he supported your choice again by saying: 'God implemented marriage and meant that husband and wife must become one, but in your case it didn't work out'. Frieda did this attitude of the minister help you to accept that this marriage was not meant to be, as Abuse destroyed it? Did you find unconditional love and support from the minister when he helped you to carry out your choices? Was this helpful or not? What does it say about you that the minister knew you could make your own decisions? Did he trust you to make the right decisions for yourself and your four children? Was it something that you said or did that made him trust you? What made you strong enough in the end to separate from this abusive relationship? Did you gain support from the church community when you did this?*

I shared these stories, with the participant's permission at a general meeting of the welfare organisation, with clergy and social workers. I received a request to come and address the church regarding domestic violence.

The DVT Force (1993:40) comes up with the following constructive responses to domestic violence:

- Acknowledge the reality of violence in families. There is a conspiracy of silence in many families, as well as a normalisation and minimising of violence. The church and society can often be co-conspirators in this silence and normalisation. Acknowledging that violence occurs in families, including in religious families, is



an important step towards prevention, and to empowering people to change the pattern;

- Take a strong public stand against the use of force and violence in families;
- Be available for women in abusive relationships. Clergy may find that battered women turn to them as a first step, possibly because they lack the financial resources to go elsewhere;
- The relationships clergy may have with all parties involved in the domestic violence – the victim, the abuser, relatives and friends – means they are in a good position to challenge the violence and to encourage the family members to seek professional assistance; and
- Create and support a network of service providers, both secular and religious, that could be mobilised to help victims, abusers and their families in crisis.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The search for a name for the women's group led to a symbolic start for the group. The metaphor of '*Daisies*' described women who were strong and could recover after trauma. Looking back this was the first step in naming the counterplot or looking for alternative stories. During the conversations with the women and young people I tried to reflect on their stories and questioned certain issues to name the problem plot and to look for alternative stories.

The reflective letters were a great source of help to be on the lookout for '*unique outcomes*' and to thicken the counterplot of their stories. The group discussions also led to the groups' experiences of labelling and resistance. Most of the women had experienced labelling as divorced women and experienced feelings of guilt regarding their decisions to end their marriages.

The position of the ministers/pastors, psychologists and social workers are important in the way they react towards people who have experienced domestic violence.

We also focused on '*resistance*' to domestic violence and the young people's choices not to continue the abuse cycle. My narrative pastoral approach of working with the women and young people gave the participants the opportunity to share their experiences with

one another, to gain strength and be empowered by the decisions they took in taking a stand against abuse.

## CHAPTER 6

### HEARING THE SILENCED VOICES

#### 1. INTRODUCING THE POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL

At the first meeting with the women and young people, time was spent looking at violence and abuse and the forms they take. The need arose during a following meeting to be clear about what violence encapsulated, because it can comprise a lot of different aspects. Copies of the Power and Control wheel and Equality wheel (Appendix 2 and 3) which was generated by the Duluth Domestic Violence Intervention Programme from Minnesota USA had been distributed and viewed by the women and young people's groups. The women expressed a sense of relief when we discussed all the different aspects of power and control. It was almost a collective sense that this abuse was not something specific to them as individuals, it was a practice that others had experienced and that people had documented as being '*not OK*'.

The Power and Control Wheel (Appendix 2), identifies aspects of abusive behaviour and its underlying motivation as emotional power and control. A variety of coercive methods may be selected in an attempt to establish or maintain this control. Physical and sexual abuse, the outer rim, help to establish or maintain this control; once established, however, physical battering may not be needed to maintain the emotional hold. '*What matters to the controller is not what he does but what he gains by doing it*' (Jones and Schechter as quoted by Adams 1994:17). A mere look from the batterer serves to control her, once battering has been established in the relationship, in the same way that a parent can simply look at a child to reinforce authority.

I mentioned to the groups that for a controlling partner, there would always be something '*wrong*'. Such a person needs to demonstrate that he is in control. '*His abusive behaviour is simply a show of power over you. That's why if you correct your "mistake" today, something else will upset him tomorrow. You can't win*' (Jones and Schechter as quoted by Adams 1994:23). The women all nodded their heads in agreement. We spoke

about Olivia's story that she had told us about earlier, about all the things that she tried to do to prevent her ex-husband from losing his temper and taking it out on her. But at the end she realised that nothing would satisfy him, he would always find something to go on about.

The women's group returned to discussing the Power and Control wheel and Equality wheel (Appendix 2 and 3). Maureen joined us at our sixth meeting. She mentioned that she recognised a few aspects of the power and control wheel that were present in her marriage:

*You told the group that your ex-husband started assaulting you after you had mentioned you wanted a divorce. He also used threats, emotional abuse and isolation to put you down. Maureen what courage did it take to put it to your husband that you wanted a divorce? Where did you gather the strength to go through with the divorce, after he started assaulting you? Would you say that you are a very responsible mother, that you could stop this Abuse from going on by divorcing your husband and therefore protecting your children? Maureen you mentioned that there is equality in your present relationship with your current partner. What does it say about you that you could manage to replace Abuse with Equality in your relationship with men? How did you manage to do this with so much grace? What is it about you that helped you to get around these obstacles? What would you like to teach your children about gender roles in a marriage? Would it be possible for you to share this with them?*

Adams (1994:100-101) uses two Bible verses namely Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 13 to demonstrate that abuse is wrong. He mentions that batterers use Ephesians 5 to justify their behaviour and therefore it needed to be discussed with a perpetrator and made clear that Jesus' relationship with the church is not controlling and abusive, but inviting and

loving. Adams (1994:102) suggests that ministers could introduce the Equality wheel to demonstrate that men and women need to treat each other as equals and as independent human beings. Men need to respect women more than their need to control them. He suggests that ministers need to give proactive responses to men who hurt women. Ministers need to say that they are not going to abandon them, but they are going to hold them accountable. Only with accountability can there be new life.

## **2. THE POWER OF ECONOMIC ABUSE AND THE INJUSTICE OF THE LEGAL SYSTEM**

The women's group continued the discussion regarding the Power and Control wheel at our sixth meeting. All of the women could identify with many of the aspects that were explained in the Power and Control Wheel. Although they were no longer part of violent relationships at that stage, nearly all of them suffered due to economic abuse. Desiree spoke about the unfairness of the legal system in our country, especially in financial matters after divorce. Desiree shared her anxiety with the group, because she had to go back to the Maintenance court the following week. I reflected on the injustice been done to mothers who have to support children on their own, without any support from the fathers in the following letter:

*Desiree you mentioned that it is a 'crying shame that my husband doesn't pay maintenance for his three sons'. You stated that you have to pay all the school fees and you can't keep up with everything. Desiree you were in tears when you told us that the school phoned you to congratulate you on Jonathan's achievement of a 100% for Maths for the term. This is the first time ever in the school's history! You felt so miserable and guilty because you could not buy him something as a reward, because you promised your children that you would reward them for an achievement of 80% more. Desiree I know that you feel miserable and sad, because you cannot keep your promise, but do you have another way to celebrate this achievement? Are there other things that you can do that do not cost a lot of money to show that you are very*

*proud of him? Can you think of times in the past where you succeeded in rewarding your children on your low income? How can the group be witnesses to these achievements? Will it make a supportive contribution if they witness your achievement? Have you got a way in which you celebrate your parenting when you hear this commitment from your child?*

*Desiree you mentioned that you could not take it, when your ex-husband lied under oath in court. 'He sits and eats steaks at home and we suffer'. You mentioned that the prosecutor at Roodepoort's court is not encouraging and she once said to you: 'We win some, we lose some'. Desiree you were very discouraged when you said to the group: 'We fight a losing battle in court'.*

*I can see that economic abuse is very difficult and unfair, a real injustice done to mothers who experience their children suffering because of lack of funds. However, your children mentioned in their group that they are proud of their mothers, because you all chose to stand up against Abuse, leaving all the security and comfort behind.*

*Desiree you explained to the group that you tried for more than 13 years to get your husband to pay maintenance, and you were only successful a few times. Does this mean that you have a fighting spirit? Does it mean that you are a mother who will not give up fighting for her children's needs, even if it means doing it for all these years? What does it say about you that you can go back to court year after year facing an unsupportive legal system and your husband's legal team? When you think about the road you have travelled – what does it tell you about yourself? Does this mean that you are very courageous and have a fighting spirit? Does it say that your children are your first priority? Does it say that you will not give up?*

I was surprised by Desiree's positive attitude in the end, despite all the hardships that she had been facing to get maintenance for the upbringing of her three sons. The following is part of the alternative story; the resistance to the problem story:

*Desiree you mentioned towards the end of the group that your ex-husband missed out on a lot of things, as he was never there to see the children grow up and he didn't take part and have pride in their activities and achievements. You mentioned that your children managed to achieve a lot despite their poor circumstances. Does this mean that your children saw something in your life that spurred them on? Desiree I was moved by the story of your eldest son, Andy who bought you a China tea set with his first pay of his part-time job he was doing at age sixteen. On the card he wrote: 'Ma thanks for all the sacrifices'. Does this gift speak of the special bond with your children, despite the fact that you could not meet all their needs financially? Can we let Andy know that we have heard of his gift to you and that it touched us but also gave us hope for young men being sensitive to the need of others?*

The discussion of the Power and Control wheel (see appendix 2) led to the women sharing their stories about the injustices that had been done to them for such a long time. I was moved by the stories of courage and fighting spirits that were told in the group and my disbelief that fathers could neglect their children for so many years. As I mentioned earlier most of the women in the group had been divorced for a long time, (13 years, 11 years and 9 years). Their struggle to keep up with increasing costs to raise three or four children on their own, without any support from their ex-husbands or the legal system was heart-breaking.

We discussed this issue further at our sixth meeting and Carina shared her story with the group as well, because she wasn't present at our previous meeting. The letter refers to this:

*Carina you spoke about your worries as a single mother with the increasing school fees that you need to pay, without any support from your ex-husband. Carina you mentioned that you couldn't keep up with the rising school fee and next year you will have two son's attending secondary school. The school will hand you over to creditors if you cannot pay and you need to go and explain your situation over and over again. I wonder if any of the other Daisies had similar experiences and if they have suggestions for this dilemma? Carina can you think of difficult times in the past, when you managed to survive financially? Which personal strengths helped you to overcome these obstacles? What does it say about you as a single mother that you don't take the easy route out by saying that your son should finish school, because you cannot afford the school fees anymore? You try to motivate him daily to finish standard 10 and make all sorts of plans to pay the education bills. Carina I thought about the courage that it took you, to go and face the vice-principal at school to discuss your personal situation with her. Where did you gather the strength to do this?*

*Carina you told the group that your husband went on early retirement in 1998 and received a package deal, he gave you R30 000 and refused to make any contribution towards the children ever since. You used this money to buy the flat so that you and your children have a place to stay. Carina where did you get the wisdom to use this money for a home that will bring security and stability for your children? Did you receive any help or advice from important persons in your life in order to make this decision? Does this tell you that you are a responsible mother that wants the best for your children?*

*Carina you shared with the group your trouble with the medical costs of your three sons. The divorce order states that your ex-husband is liable for the medical costs till the children reach 21 years. Your ex-husband*



*removed the children from his medical aid two years ago without notifying you. Willem had injured himself during a rugby match and you took him to your local hospital for treatment. You signed the consent form at hospital and your husband's medical aid refused to pay the bill. The hospital held you responsible for the bill as you had signed the form and you are still paying that bill in monthly instalments.*

*Carina you were so upset about the injustice that has been done to your youngest son as well: 'Nic is a heart patient and needs to go for regular check-ups and needs to be on chronic medication; however he is not taking any medication because I can not afford this'. Carina, I thought about your concern to get the best medical treatment for your son. In a previous letter I wrote about your 'being-there' for your son in hospital, when your husband was not there. What does it say about you as a mother that you tried your best to address your child's medical needs? How did you manage to cope in the past without any support from your ex-husband? Could this help you in future to help carry you through this time?*

All these stories illustrated the women's courage in fighting back against their husbands' irresponsibility towards their children. Their struggles with procedures in maintenance court became clear as well. As the women shared their stories there was a collective spirit rising and I raised the issue of taking a political stand against the legal system and gender issues. This will be discussed in the following section.

### 3. BRING JUSTICE AND EQUALITY BACK

I thought we needed to bring some justice and equality back to women and made a suggestion in my reflective letter to the group:

*To the Daisies: Do you all feel that 'you are fighting a losing battle in the maintenance court'? Does the maintenance court and the struggle with the court try to steal away your power and/or your commitment? Does it try to leave you without energy and will power? Do you have any suggestions how we can put an end to this? We did discuss that all of you must try to do a joint effort and bring a summary to the group regarding all the problems you have experienced in the past with the maintenance claims for your children. We spoke about writing a letter to Roodepoort court to raise our voice as a group against our legal system and procedures that victimise us further. What do you think about this?*

I suggested that our group write a letter to the chief magistrate of Roodepoort Court about the injustices of the legal procedures that most of them had been struggling with all these years. Especially for the treatment they received from the maintenance officer and maintenance court, while they were only trying to get the necessary finances for their children's needs. The women all agreed that this was a step forward and we discussed that everyone would bring the necessary information of their efforts in the past and the reactions towards these, so we could put everything together in our joint letter.

Amanda couldn't attend our fifth and sixth meeting, but joined us at our seventh meeting. She brought a subpoena from Roodepoort Court with her that showed that her ex-husband opened a case where he asked the court to write off all the backlog on his maintenance as he claimed to be jobless. Amanda had two children in her care and had not received maintenance the previous two months either. During a group session Amanda told a story of courage that followed after she received a subpoena to the maintenance court; I reflected on the story with more questions in the letter.

*I put my 'brave and strong' suit on and asked him to come and see me, so that we could discuss this issue. He came to my place, but refused to enter the yard, as he is afraid of the owner of the house where I stay. I put my briefcase with all the documents on the fence, there was only a small wall-fence that separated us, and spoke to him about this maintenance claim. Luckily there was a wall separating us, so that he could not see how shaky my legs were! But I challenged him and told him that I would fight him in court! I told him he needs to go on a diet before the court date, as he doesn't look like someone who is unemployed and hungry. The judge would just look at his overweight body once to realise that he has a very good life!*

*Amanda, the group laughed at your triumphant attitude and were amazed at the courage you had to face your ex-husband and that you could discuss this issue with him, as he wished to ask the court to exempt his accumulation on maintenance as he claimed to be without work. Some group members said: 'Amanda has guts!' You thought that you had courage to face him again. Amanda you told the Daisies that you had sent a copy of the 'Power and Control' wheel to your ex-husband in the post a couple of weeks before, to show him all the wrong things he did to you. He confronted you about this and asked you if you had sent this to him and you replied: 'Yes I did'. What did your action speak of when you admitted it?*

*Amanda would you say that you accomplished a lot of things the last couple of weeks? How did you overcome the anxiety and fear that you had experienced before? Which personal qualities helped you to stand up against Abuse? Where did you get the 'brave and strong' suit from to face him? We wondered how you managed to challenge him about the maintenance claim against you, although your 'legs were shaky'. How did you manage to minimize Abuse and Intimidation's voices in your life?*

*Can you remember times in the past when you had courage to confront your ex-husband on such issues? Which steps did you take then to overcome the fear that Abuse tries to bring into your life? Would you call it Fighting Spirit to challenge him about this maintenance claim? The group mentioned 'you had guts'. Would you call this 'guts', healthy stubbornness or would you call this something else? The confrontation seemed to be working well, as you mentioned that your ex- husband had not even sworn at you or tried to fight back. Do you think you brought some equality to the unrighteous power/male privilege he previously had in your relationship?*

#### **4. THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF POWER AND CONTROL VERSUS EQUALITY**

I introduced the Power and Control wheel and Equality wheel (see appendix 2 and 3) to the young people during our fifth meeting. We spoke about men and women's roles in relationships. In my letter that I wrote after the session I recaptured the discussion:

*Wayne mentioned that he sees women on television and in videos as 'pregnant and chained up in the kitchen, cleaning the house, washing dishes and making food'. Wayne do you think we can always trust the media to teach us the right stuff? Is the media the only way that our culture is shaped? Or do we learn from our families or other institutions, like the church as well? Do you see 'male privilege' being used when a man acts like the 'master of the castle' in your family? How would you like to bring respect and shared responsibility to your relationships? Wayne you told us that your aunt enjoys making food and she likes to be in the kitchen. Everyone enjoys her food and it is great to visit her. Wayne when people share responsibility, does it mean that people can mutually agree on a fair distribution of work? For example if a woman likes to*

*cook and be in the kitchen, then can she and her partner agree if she wants to do the cooking?*

Later on we discussed the Power and Control wheel and Equality wheel in more detail. I asked the young people to think about the different ways in which children can show respect in their families. I asked them which aspects are present in their family: equality or power and control? The following letter touched on a discussion in the group:

*Wayne you mentioned that children show respect when they help their parents and the parents can show appreciation when their children do things for them. Wayne is there respect in your family or is there things that you would like to change? Wayne you said children would respect their parents when the parents teach them to do so; 'therefore my mother must be there to teach me wrong from right'. Wayne you told us that you can respect your mother, because 'my mum is like a good friend to me – when there is something wrong at school I can discuss it with her'. Wayne would you say that respect comes easier when you are friends with your parents, than when they are very strict and autocratic?*

*Laurika, you said that your family does respect one another. You mentioned that if you asked your sister, Chantelle to help you with the dishes, she would do so. Laurika does this mean that brothers and sisters can show respect by helping one another with household tasks? Can you help your mother with certain tasks to show respect and share responsibility? Does this bring more equality in the family relationships? Laurika you add 'children can show respect to their parents by not smoking and drinking when their parents are present'. Laurika does this mean that you cannot do things that you know your parents would not approve of? Was there something that you sacrificed in the past to show that you do respect your parents?*

*Laurika you mentioned that your granny taught you to show respect through the language you use. She usually tells you to use the words 'thank you' and 'please'. Does it mean that she taught you not to let abusive language slip into your life? Can you think of times when your family stood up against Violence and Verbal Abuse? I was wondering if good manners and non-abusive language bring more equality, instead of power and control? Laurika you said 'that parents must not ignore a child when he asks something from them, if they wish for the child to respect them. A mother has to be like a friend to her child.' Laurika do you expect a parent to set the right example for a child? Do your father and mother do this? Do they show respect to you? How do you know this?*

*Laurika towards the end of the meeting you told us: 'I wish my mother would give me more freedom. I am only allowed to go to school, church and to these group meetings'. Wayne answered you on your request for more freedom by saying that it is not safe for girls to go out on their own, therefore your mother probably wants to protect you. He said that parents act differently with boys, but are usually more protective with daughters. Laurika can you remember times in the past where you and your mother reached an agreement and when you received more freedom? How did you do it? Did you use a 'negotiating skill' in order to do this? Is it something you would like to try again or do you have other skills now? Can you negotiate on this matter in order to reach an agreement that is fair to both? How will you start doing this?*

*Jonathan you mentioned that 'a person can show respect with one's language, the words you use, your attitude and how you act'. Jonathan does this mean that you can stop Abuse (power and control) with your language, attitude and behaviour? Can you think about past experiences in your family where the family outsmarted Abusive language and behaviour? How did your family go about ensuring that Abuse is no*

*longer part of your life? Was it a mutual decision? Did somebody in your family talk about it? Did it happen overnight or did it take a long time to outsmart abusive behaviour and language? I would be honoured if you could let us in on the above secrets to outsmart Abuse.*

*Willem agreed with Laurika that children could show respect when they learn to say 'thank you'. Do these words only apply to children or to the parents as well or to everybody in South Africa? Can a child learn to say 'please' and 'thank you' if his/her parents do not set the right example? Can we tell the group's mothers about this expectation of respect being returned? Do you need to show respect to one's brothers and sisters as well? Willem you said that: 'I wish my mother showed more interest in my sport activities, but my mother is only interested in my school marks, she moans every day about my academic achievement'. Willem would you be able to tell your mother what your needs are? Could you ask her to come and watch your sport games or tell her that you need her to be more interested and talk to you, about your sporting dreams? Would you like me to address this to her in the letters? Willem do you know what are your mother's interests? Do you discuss it with her?*

*Jaco you mentioned that your family does show respect to one another. What makes you say this? In which ways can you see and hear that respect is present in your family? Would you say that equality is more present now than power and control?*

*Chantelle you mentioned that you and your sister help each other to do the dishes and share responsibilities. This is the way you show respect to each other in your family. Chantelle would you say there is respect between you and your brothers as well? Can you remember times when the 'power and control' had the better of you? If so, how did you free yourself of its hold?*

*Juan you agreed with Laurika and Willem, that a family can bring equality and show respect through their language, like to say, 'thank you'. Can you think of other ways your family have shown respect and have broken down the "power and control" stronghold?*

*A Voice for Equality*

*Anmar*

## **5. MORE IDEAS FROM THE YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT ABUSE AND EQUALITY**

George was not present during our fifth meeting. George and Jaco did a presentation to the group during our sixth meeting. They spoke about the reasons 'why men abuse women'? What follows is an extract of my reflective letter after this discussion:

*George stated, 'Men like to be the boss in a relationship with a women'. Would you say that this is the trick that Abuse plays, to tell a man that he has power over a woman? If you looked at the 'power and control wheel' you would have seen that Abuse makes men believe that they have 'male privilege' that they can use, like 'acting like the master of the castle'. What is the opposite of this, or what can bring equality to a relationship? Can it be 'shared responsibility' where a man and woman make decisions together, or would you choose to call it something different? Can you add something to this list? Do you know people who act in a respectful way – sharing equal rights? What does it look like to you, when you observe them?*

*George and Jaco mentioned one of the myths, that is: 'an Abusive man views a woman as a person with no feelings, and sees her as a thing or possession'. Would you say that Abuse tries to convince men that women cannot feel the pain, fear and isolation of Abuse? Can one change this*



*situation when you view women with respect and trust? Can you bring equality to a relationship? George you told the group that you 'look for trouble with your sister, Tania sometimes when you are frustrated'. George can you remember times when you didn't act out in an abusive manner, although you were frustrated or cross? Jaco mentioned that 'he watches TV or goes to his room' when he feels frustrated. His brother, Willem added that Jaco usually slams the door, when he's cross. Jaco does this mean that you outsmarted Abuse, 'when you managed to find peace, by watching TV or go to your room'?*

Willem used abusive language while we were busy with our fifth group meeting. One of the rules in the group was that one needed to be punished when he/she is abusive towards others. The group therefore decided that Willem needed to do five push-ups as punishment for his abusive words. I reflected on this, in my letter following the group meeting:

*Willem, you used abusive language, when the small girl entered our meeting room and you said: 'Go out of the room, Stupid'. Does abusive language sometimes sneak in, when you feel frustrated? Can you remember a time when you took control of Abuse and did not call someone names? Where did you outsmart abusive language in the past? How can you and your family make one another aware of abusive language when it tries to sneak in? Willem, you mentioned that a person can break the 'circle of abuse' and bring more 'equality' in future relationships with women, when 'one prays and goes to church'. Has your faith and prayers helped to sustain you in the past? Did the pastor or minister play an important role to support your family when you suffered Abuse? Did the church support your mother as a single mother to raise her children? Do you think these things influenced your attitude towards religion? Would you see this as something on your side?*

MacGyver and Wayne added something to the discussion regarding 'Power and Control' and the 'Equality' wheels (see appendix 2 and 3) and I summarised this in a letter:

*MacGyver you mentioned that you hit your brother, when he makes you cross. Would you say that Abuse tries to sneak into your life, when you get angry with someone? Do you want to have anger in your life or can you decide to get rid of anger? Which personal strengths could you use to overcome this physical abuse? How would you like to deal with anger? You mentioned that you like to play soccer, would you agree that soccer is a more playful way to sort your anger out or get away from it? You also mentioned: 'Some of my friends use alcohol to get rid of stress'. Do you want to tell them about the ways to deal with stress that we had discussed in our group? Could you add something else to this list?*

*Wayne you suggested that two people can communicate about a problem, when they are frustrated. Can you remember times when you used these strategies? I personally prefer to hang onto my beliefs that open and honest communication makes Abuse become smaller. We talked about parents arguing in front of their children – we would like parents to take responsibility for their arguments and not let it get out of hand. This also goes for all of us – taking responsibility for our actions and not to give in to the power of Abuse on our lives. We talked about how it takes guts to make a stand against Abuse. We have all experienced how easy it is to give in to the stranglehold of Violence and Abuse, and that it takes a lot more guts to follow our decision to stand against Violence and Abuse.*

*To the group: I asked you how you would like to break the 'cycle of Abuse' in future relationships with a person from the opposite sex and referred you back to the 'Power and Control wheel and Equality wheel'.*

*Jonathan you and Willem had a joint effort and came up with the following answers:*

- *Partners need to respect one another (listening non-judgmentally; valuing each other's opinions);*
- *Partners need to trust and support one another's goals in life, feelings, friends and opinions;*
- *Negotiation is a necessity e.g. being willing to compromise;*
- *Economic partnership e.g. making money decisions together;*
- *Mutual agreement on a fair distribution of work; and*
- *Making family decisions together.*

*Have you witnessed these golden rules work in any relationship – at school, on the sport field, at work, home or amongst your friends, your parents, etc? Can you remember times when you managed to do this in your relationship with your mother or brothers? Do you want 'equality' in your relationship with your girlfriend or boyfriend / wife or husband someday? Do you think you can start to work towards equality even now as young people? Can you think of any obstacles that could hinder you in bringing equality to the relationship? Do you have any ideas about what would help you get around these obstacles?*

I was surprised about the honesty and the creative ways in which the young people responded. I began to see the benefits of written responses and reflections. I realized in reflection that Abuse stole my voice in many sessions and marginalised my thoughts. However, I became more energized when I wrote down my thoughts and gave myself time to reflect on what I was hearing during the session. It was easier for me to concentrate on counter-plots when I was responding in writing. The dominant story of abuse had less power in letters.

## 6. GENDER ROLES AND NON-VIOLENCE IN FAMILIES

We spoke about gender roles in the women's family of origin and the ways that might have influenced group members. Michael White (1991:27) defines deconstruction more actively and politically, when saying:

*According to my rather loose definition, deconstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices: those so-called 'truths' that are split off from the conditions and the context of their production; those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and prejudices; and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating of person's lives.*

Throughout the meetings I tried to listen deconstructively, and asked deconstructive questions. *Deconstructive questioning invites people to see their stories from different perspectives, to notice how they are constructed, to note their limits, and to discover that there are other possible narratives* (Freedman and Combs 1996:57). As people begin to have ideas about how the narratives they are living have been constructed, they see that those narratives are not inevitable, that they do not represent essential truths. Instead, they are constructions that could be constructed differently. I tried to deconstruct gender roles and 'machoness' that tried to get the better of them:

Desiree mentioned that she had only been seven weeks old when her dad passed away. Her mother remarried when she was six years old. She mentioned that her stepfather was a wonderful person and very accommodating. She had not experienced any violence between her mother and stepfather, but her stepsister gave her mother a very hard time. In my reflective letter I asked her some questions regarding this:

*Desiree do you see it as a privilege to be brought up in a non-violent home or would you call it something else? Is there something that you learnt from your family of origin that you try to bring into your own family? Are*

*there some ideas regarding gender roles that you would like to pass on to your own sons?*

I commented and questioned the rest of the women's stories of gender roles in their families as follows:

*Maureen, you mentioned that there was a definite distribution of 'gender roles' in your family of origin, which seemed to be working for the family. You told the group the following: 'I became pregnant when I was only sixteen years old. I married Jan and believed that he would be able to provide in all my needs, as my dad did for my mom. My mother never needed to work outside the home. After a few years I realised that this gender role distribution as it had been for my parents, was not going to work in my marriage. My husband could neither provide for my financial or emotional needs and I had a too strong personality for him'.*

*Carina, you mentioned that your parents were 'church people' and devoted Christians. You were brought up in a non-violent home. You told us that you saw your parents' neighbours the previous Sunday at church; they told you that your parents would have been proud of you today for all you've managed on your own. Carina I thought a lot about this and would like to know how these memories could help you to carry on in future? Could the voices of your parents motivate you to keep moving forward, although you may feel disheartened sometimes?*

*Liz you mentioned that there was No-Abuse in your family. 'My parents had a happy marriage, although there is a twenty-one year difference in age between them.' Liz do you want to bring some of your parents' non-violence into your family? Could you teach your children some of these non-violent gender roles?*

*Olivia you said: 'my dad was a priest in the Apostolic Church, however it didn't mean everything was right at home. My mom and dad used to fight a lot. My dad used to spoil me a lot, but he spoke in a negative manner about my mother with me. I tried not to do the same with my children, as I know how it feels to be in the middle all the time'. Olivia you managed not to make the same mistakes as your parents. How did you manage to do this? Which personal strengths helped you to stop this kind of Abusive language to continue? Olivia you suggested that our group needed to stand together, to raise our voice for women's rights. Olivia does this mean that we can have a collective strength that is much stronger than our individual voices?*

According to Freedman and Combs (1996:57) there are also subjugating stories of gender, race, class, age, sexual orientation, and religion that are so prevalent and entrenched in our culture that we can get caught up in them without realizing it. Deconstruction in White's sense can help us unmask the '*so-called truths*' that '*hide their biases and prejudices*' behind the '*disembodied ways of speaking*' that give an air of legitimacy to restrictive and subjugating dominant stories (Freedman and Combs 1996:57).

In adopting and advocating this type of deconstruction we are taking a political stand against certain practices of power in our society – like the words of Olivia. Not taking a stand supports the status quo. Therapists have a responsibility to cultivate a growing awareness of the dominant stories in our society and to develop ways of collaboratively examining the effects of those stories when we sense them at work in the lives and relationships of the people who consult with us (Freedman and Combs 1996:58).

I believe I was successful in terms of deconstructive listening, but my scope was limited in assisting the women to deconstruct set ideas about gender roles.

## **7. REFLECTING ON THE JOURNEY OF RECOVERY AFTER TRAUMA**

I thought the concept of a journey and questions asked by McPhie and Chaffey (1998:7) as used for a group of young women who had been sexually abused, could be helpful to the women's group. However, it was important to me that the image should fit for them, and not be my idea imposed on them. I thus introduced this idea tentatively to the group at our sixth meeting, and they said they would like to discuss the metaphor of their journey at our seventh meeting. It is important to note that a narrative approach puts the client(s) at the centre, and allowed me to let the group determine what would be discussed and when it would be – I tried to do this throughout the study. Sometimes they decided on their own topics and sometimes they waited for initiation from me.

The group was invited to draw maps of their journeys (McPhie and Chaffey 1998:7) and wrote their answers at the back of the maps as I read the questions to them. Here are some of the questions that I used that were applicable to the women's circumstances:

*If you had to describe your journey beyond abuse or problematic experiences:*

1. *What would you call the starting place?*
2. *What was it like? Can you name that place?*
3. *What would you call this place where you are now?*
4. *Where is this journey taking you?*
5. *Where would you prefer to be?*
6. *How will you get from where you are to where you want to be?*
7. *What personal strengths will help you to keep moving forward?*
8. *What might get in your way?*
9. *What is it about you that will help you get around these obstacles?*
10. *Having glimpsed what's at the end of the tunnel, how might this group help you keep moving towards this?*

I hoped that the metaphor of a journey could invoke a sense of movement and possibility at the end of our meetings. I hoped that the image would give the group a clearer view about what stood in their way. I was moved by what they all came up with at the end. The following reflective letter gives a summary of the women's view of their journey and obstacles and how they had overcome these:

Desiree drew a path through hills and fairly bumpy at times.

*The last part is 'fairly smooth sailing'. Desiree, I've learnt a lot about your life. It is great to see that you could look back at your life and say: 'I have been at such a low ebb (after your divorce), I've been through the wilderness and have now reached Gods window, waiting to see where to now!' It seems that you have come a far way and have lived through many difficulties. Did Abuse form part of the 'wilderness'? How did you manage to tame the 'wilderness'? Which skills did you use to do this?*

*Desiree you also had words of wisdom that I would like to share with the group if I may? You would prefer to be 'in God's will – whatever/wherever that may be'. You answered question 6 as follows: 'with contentment – be strong; have faith; give thanks in all things'. Desiree I believe these words are true, as you walked the walk and talked the talk from your heart. How do you manage to 'be strong and have faith' when the going gets tough? Do you have a role model or are you becoming your own role model? Would you like to pass this wisdom on to your children as well?*

Frieda's journey had 'ups and downs' for the first twenty-one years, followed by a smooth path for nearly fourteen years. Then there was a big explosion that she named 'hell'; a path filled with thorns for nearly eight years with lots of tears and misery.

*Frieda, you named the starting place after trauma/abuse 'total frustration and one big nightmare' and you experienced 'torture and agony'. Frieda*



*I found it inspiring that you always remain positive, and believe that you will find the answers to your problems in the near future, although you still feel 'lost' at the moment. Frieda did your 'faith and prayers' help you to hold onto the future and to keep motivating yourself to stay positive, no matter what? Frieda did it take a lot of courage to stay positive while you had to raise four children on your own? Was this difficult at times? How did you manage to overcome the Abuse that you suffered? When did you realise that you are 'better off' at present, than I was during my marriage'?*

*Frieda, you mentioned that 'self-confidence' helped you to get around these obstacles. When did you identify 'self-confidence' to assist you? Is there something else that you know assists you?*

Amanda had drawn her life as the heart rate of a person; up and down all the time.

*Amanda, you described your journey like a heart-machine – 'stormy, traumatic and full of stress'. Amanda is it very positive that you realise that you can make a stand for yourself and that you can even fight back and raise your voice to stop women abuse? How did this inspire you to move forward? How did you manage to come this far? Which obstacles did Abuse try to put in your way all these years? You mentioned that your 'self motivation and self confidence' helped you to overcome these obstacles. Your faith in God and support from professionals helped you to cope as well. How did your faith sustain you, when you experienced speed wobbles along the road? You mentioned the group taught you to stand together.*

Olivia's path was fairly smooth up to sixteen years, when she had a few ups and downs, followed by a smooth path up to twenty-four years. There was a very low ebb; that was her divorce and she had experienced a downhill road ever since.

*Olivia you called the starting place of your trauma a 'waterfall or candle burning out'. You named the place where you are at present 'a mud pool'. You mentioned you would prefer to be 'on the cleaner side of the water, where it is safe and I would like support from other people to help me out'. Olivia can you remember times in the past when you received support from others that helped you through? What were those times like? Are there times when you have been on 'dry land' before? Olivia you mentioned that you 'will swim to where it is safe and will pull myself out'. Olivia does this mean that you have strong will power? Or would you call it something else? Does it mean you know you have what it takes to get out?*

*Olivia it was inspiring to hear that you have personal strengths that will help you to move forward in life, namely: 'my own willpower, courage, God's love and my children'. Can you remember times in the past when you used these personal strengths to help you to get onto 'dry land'? What did these times speak of? Was it wisdom? If so, how would you like to pass this wisdom on to your children?*

Liz had drawn a bumpy road when she had been with her husband, followed by a fairly smooth path, with one low ebb while she has been with her ex-partner. This is followed with arrows in the wrong direction, which she described as 'stumbling-blocks' and footprints on the sand, where she had been lifted up 'by the love of God'.

*Liz you mentioned that the starting place of your trauma is called 'the gutters', but I'm delighted to hear that you've been able to change it to 'gateway' at present. Liz you mentioned that your 'faith in God' led you to level roads again. You add that your 'self-confidence' helped you in the past as well. Have you combined your 'faith in God' with your 'self-confidence'? Liz are there other personal strengths that you could add to this list? You would prefer to be able to overcome hardships and to trust people more.*

*I want to thank you all for sharing your stories of courage and strength with me. I feel privileged to hear your words of wisdom that have come out of your experiences of trauma and Abuse.*

*Glad to listen and learn*

*ANMAR*

This metaphor of a path helped the women to understand the nature of change and identify resources available to negotiate transitions. These ideas were continually brought back into reflections, for example when participants were invited to think about the obstacles they had overcome and what that said about them, and also about the obstacles that might lie ahead.

*This metaphor helps people to create a view of change as fluid and ongoing. It also helps clients begin to identify the resources that have prepared them for change. Through the identification of obstacles, the ritual concretizes the restraints, which have contributed to the maintenance of the problem. The view of the future with many potential directions punctuates the notion of choice.*

(Adams-Westcott and Isenbart 1990:50)

## **8. YOUNG PEOPLE SHARING THEIR STORIES OF COURAGE**

Our second last group with the young people took the form of two of the members who shared their story of Abuse and the steps they took to stand up against the injustice done to them. George and Tania gave me permission to share a letter with the group that they had written to their dad a few months before. This letter was written with my help as their social worker.

Tania and George had experienced a lot of bad things since alcohol took control of their father. Their parents divorced and the court order stated that they had to visit their father

every second weekend and alternative holidays. They came to see me, as they no longer wished to visit their father, due to the terrible experiences that they had when he abused alcohol. We agreed that it was best to write a letter to explain that to him, without blaming him. They thanked him for all the good times they had and mentioned the reasons why they love and appreciate him.

*We saw what alcohol did to you, Dad, even before the divorce. Too much booze lead to fights between you and mom and we felt really bad about this. We can remember that the booze-monster also made Dad assault mom. We feel that this behaviour is not acceptable. George feels that this could lead to him doing this to women as well. We know that the booze-monster is controlling Dad's life and that led to the break up in our family.*

In my reflective letter after they told the group, I responded as follows:

*George and Tania, I thought a lot about the courage that you had to stand up to the unrighteousness that you had suffered. Did it take a lot of courage to write this letter to your dad? Or would you say it took something else? Would you say that you had learned from an early age to face hardships in your family life? Would you say that the Abuse did not scare you to take these steps? Which personal strengths did you use to help you to overcome these hardships and obstacles?*

*George and Tania you also thanked your father in the letter for all the nice things he did for you, namely the time you spent with him during the December-holiday and Karaoke-evenings on weekends. You mentioned that the booze-monster made your dad use too much alcohol and spoil everything. Does the booze-monster try to convince your dad that he can't go without alcohol? Would you agree that the booze-monster stole your time, happiness and fun with your dad? Tania and George you mentioned that the booze-monster led to disputes with your dad and he used to*

*threaten you and your mother on the phone at night when he was drunk. You put an ultimatum to your dad that you would stop visiting him every second weekend, if he did not stop the booze-monster from taking over. I take it that this was a very difficult decision to make, because you love your dad and miss him since the divorce. What are your ideas on this? Do you know these words: 'Sometimes you have to be cruel to be kind'? Do you agree that this may be true for the situation you found yourself in?*

*Tania you told the group that the social worker discussed the letter with your dad and he agreed to stop harassing you and your mother on the phone. You hadn't seen him for two months and later decided to visit your dad for a day, to see if any change was visible. Your dad at first stopped drinking when you visited him for weekends, but according to other family members he still drinks when you do not visit him. Does this mean that he managed to take control of the booze-monster the weekends when you were visiting him? I wonder how your dad managed to do this? Are you surprised to hear this or did you always believe he could do this? Do you think you motivated him to take this step?*

*Tania you are very cross with your dad and George, for the incident that took place a couple of weeks ago. It seemed that George was visiting your dad on his own one weekend and it happened that your dad asked if he could drink and George gave him permission to drink and didn't realize the consequences of this. Tania, you said that if you give your father permission to drink once, he won't know when to stop and then the letter would be of no use at all. Would you prefer it if your father takes responsibility for his own drinking? Do you want to explain this to him in a next letter? Would you prefer it if he would rather not ask permission to drink? Or do you believe an adult can ask a person under the age of eighteen (who is not allowed to drink himself) to answer such a question?*

*To the group: We discussed the problem which Tania and George face and Wayne said that: 'One doesn't lower one's standards for no-one'. Does this mean that even a child can stand up to his parent (although it is difficult) if she/he knows something is not right? How did you come upon this 'truth'? Does this idea speak of who you are? Wayne did you have to face similar incidents in the past that made you say this?*

It took a lot of courage for George and Tania to share their story with the group, but it was worthwhile as it explained a lot to the other participants to witness that two group members could stand up against abuse.

## **9. CIRCULATING THE NEW STORY WITH THE GROUP**

I believe it was necessary at the end of our meetings to discuss the ways that Abuse will still try to sneak into the young people's lives and about preferred ways of being in the future. I gave them the opportunity to raise these issues in the group. The narrative map of audiences is especially significant if one prefers a social construction view of reality. Accordingly, new identities need to be performed, circulated and co-constructed by others so as to become real (Adams-Westcott and Isenbart 1990:57). Participants were afforded opportunities to circulate new stories about themselves by serving as consultants to others in the group.

The following extracts are part of my reflective letter about one of the participant's story:

*We also spoke about the ways that Abuse tried to sneak into your lives the past two weeks. Willem, the group spoke about the abusive language that sneaked in the other day with the nursery school children. Willem, would you say that Abuse tries to sneak in with the language we use at home, at school or with our friends? How can you outwit/outsmart Abuse in your life? Have you done it in the past? Which steps can you take to prevent Abuse from sneaking into your language or the things you do to other*

*people? Can you remember times in the past when you managed to overcome Abuse? Which decisions did you take?*

*Willem you said that your little brother, Nic really annoys you and he does things that irritate you and your friends Wayne and Jonathan. Willem how does Fighting want to destroy peace in your family? How does Fighting make you forget what is really important to you? Does it overshadow your love for one another? What would happen if family members united against Fighting instead of being divided by it? How does Fighting get in the way of fun?*

*I asked the group to help Willem with this. Tania, you said Willem needs to ignore him (his brother). Do you think Abuse tries to convince Willem that the only way to deal with an annoying little brother is to swear at him or assault him? How does Abuse then try to steal your creative ways of solving a problem? Do you think Willem's family can call a family meeting where they can discuss different ways of dealing with this, ways that are non-abusive; or do you have other suggestions? Can any of you testify to Willem's non-abusive behaviour?*

All the group members mentioned their preferred ways of being for the future. They agreed that they preferred lives that were free from Abuse. Some of the dreams were as follows: Jonathan would like to become an international pilot who flies a Concorde; Wayne would like to stay in Jamaica one day and would like to travel around the world. Willem and his brother, Jaco would like to become sports-stars in cricket and rugby. George dreamt of living on his own and Tania mentioned that she wanted to become a marine biologist; Chantelle wished that her dad would stop drinking. A constant reinforcing against any abusiveness trying to sneak into their lives may be needed to sustain the young people.

## 10. CELEBRATION AND CERTIFICATES

Our final meeting - a celebration meeting (Adams-Westcott and Isenbart 1990:58) was arranged as a ritual based on a '*rites of passage*' metaphor. The celebration served to bring the group meetings to an affirmative conclusion, at which transformations could be celebrated and confirmed. The separate celebration party of the young people and women took place at a lake and picnic area nearby. I arranged for food and drinks and had arranged for a special cake to be baked for the women, with each one's name written with icing on top. The groups thoroughly enjoyed the outing, as the single parents and their children seldom get the chance to go out. The young people and I played soccer at the lake and ate the cake that Jonathan had baked for us. Unfortunately not all the young people could attend the last meeting, but I handed their certificates out at a later stage.

To acknowledge the participation and contributions as well as steps taken by each participant, they were awarded certificates at the party. This took the form of a ceremony. These certificates certified that the participant was chosen to participate in the women's group or young people's group and I described what was especially acknowledged about that person during the sessions. All the participants who acknowledged these qualities in the others were invited to sign the certificate. A few examples are included in Appendix 1. The women and young people were proud of their certificates and immediately started to share them with one another. I asked them to comment or make changes if they wished to do so. They were all satisfied and agreed with everything that was written on the certificates. It was noticeable that the group didn't want to say goodbye at the last meeting, they talked outside for a long time after the meeting was concluded. The women participants made arrangements to get together in future and exchanged phone numbers. This was a sign that there was group cohesion and that they wanted to reach out and support one another in future and would not let go of the special things that they had in common.



## **11. CONCLUSION**

Both groups were so open and honest in sharing their stories with one another and with me. Many times I was so surprised by the creativity of the young people and the presentations they brought to the group. The introduction of the Power and Control and Equality wheels (see appendix 2 and 3) led to interesting group discussions, as group members could identify with the injustices that they had suffered and we could discuss future relationships based on equality.

The narrative approach used in these groups aimed to uncover supportive values, beliefs and traditions that are used to stand-up against abuse, whilst at the same time deconstructing some of the discourse informing diverse aspects that are not supportive. That is why we looked at the gender roles and ways abuse tries to sneak back into our lives. It was important to me that I did not take control of these sessions in a way that replicated a hierarchical power structure. That does not mean I did not recognise my power as co-ordinator of the study, but rather that I was constantly working at recognizing and deconstructing that power.

The co-constructing process initiated in these groups is continuous and cannot be reduced to the words in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. The women's group decided to get together on a monthly basis, as they needed to share stories and needed the support of the other women as well. I plan to catch up with them in a few months' time, whenever it is possible to do that. The voices and recommendations of the group participants and other people consulted in the course of this study hold significant ideas for practical theology and pastoral therapy. The recommendations and reflection on the study as a whole follow in Chapter 7.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **REFLECTIONS**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In this final chapter, as in those preceding it, I attempt to adopt a reflective position by looking back at the study as a whole, and on the questions it addressed. New questions are posed and some of the possible implications and suggestions both for therapeutic discourses and for practical theology and pastoral therapy discourses will also be reflected on.

The research argues that we live storied lives, and these lives are constructed through the self and society. It suggests that alternative stories of self from which the participants can gain strength can be co-constructed. A key element is the multiple perspectives in which this co-construction takes place. The approach of the research holds that there is no one '*true*' story or '*real*' conversation. Through developing conversations it showed there are multiple realities and therefore multiple voices and multiple stories. This is in direct contrast to the thin descriptions that the women and young people had formed about themselves due to the abuse-dominated lens through which they viewed themselves and the totalizing discourses that they as women and their children had been subjected to.

This chapter reflects on the practices used to achieve the outcome of alternative stories of self and discusses the contribution this study makes to the therapy and the research carried out with women and young people who have experienced domestic violence and abuse.

#### **2. THE CHALLENGES OF THE STUDY**

A major challenge in this study was the joining of voices - so that the voices of the women and young people might have power equal to the academic voices of the literature. I also wanted to create a ritual space in the groups, to listen to their stories and

not to let the participants voices be marginalised by the researcher's voice. Another challenge of this study has been to create a way whereby voices can be woven into a richness of description. It is in the gathering and positioning of each colour that the picture is painted and it can be changed to form different perspectives, like a kaleidoscope of colours.

The basic aims posed at the outset of this study (chapter 1) focused on an inquiry as to how a narrative pastoral approach to therapy could guide conversations with women and young people who have survived domestic violence. Chapter 2 provided an epistemological and theological framework for my preference of a narrative approach to pastoral therapy. Chapter 3 provided an overview of some explanations and models of domestic violence, as well as my preferred stance in this regard. The latter part of chapter 3 focused on narrative therapy knowledge in relation to women and children who have experienced domestic violence. My preference can best be captured by my desire to honour the narrative practices of *'respect, of positioning myself to the people that I meet, of enrolling people in their own knowledges, of communities of concern, of honouring people, of celebration and joy'* (Epston 1999: Workshop). I trust that the processes described in this study reflect the above practices. I hope Desiree's words rang true for each participant when she said:

*It sure is a blessing to know that there are people who care. We have truly learnt a lot – not only about violence, but it is wonderful to know that I am not the only one suffering...You have really been an asset to us and we really appreciate what you have done for each one of us.*

The descriptions of the group meetings through the reflective letters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) illustrated how the narrative process was used to externalize the effects of abuse. The group setting provided multi-opportunities to allow the women and young people to become visible and *'enhance reflexive consciousness'* (Myerhoff 1982:101). As Myerhoff (1982:103) says, *'unless we exist in the eyes of others, we may come to doubt*

even our own existence'. These words of Myerhoff came true for some group members. As Carina described:

*the group helped me to keep going; to know that other women have also suffered, I am not alone and the group's support made me realise for the first time that I had the strength and guts to move forward. The knowing that somebody thinks I am strong is very inspiring (one of the group members had comment that she sees Carina as a very strong person, to have overcome all these hardships).*

The abuse-dominated view of events in their lives had led the participants to withdraw from their communities. They had arrived at thin conclusions of their lives and identity. Those thin conclusions saw them as women and young people who stood aside, - women who had 'failed' in their role of 'wife' and 'mother' and for the young people as children who had been 'failed' by their fathers, being part of the 'suffering' single parent families. The group meetings provided an arena for speaking out about the abuse: giving testimony to past and present injustices. Through the use of the voice and richness of story, they joined other women and became visible once again as part of a community. The group members formed part of the audience. Bearing witness to the testimonies was a way of building community, but also a first step in externalizing the abuse. Liz agreed with this:

*the groups were informative and I gained a better understanding of all that I had to endure. It is nice to know that I made friends for life and that we will be there to support each other. Anmar, thanks for all the support, you are a true hero.*

Telling stories breaks the silence which blankets the lives of women and other marginalised and oppressed people and is thus intrinsic to the healing of our diverse communities. *Engaging with stories alone is, however, not enough. Once we recount our stories in community, and analyse and reflect together on their meaning, they acquire the power to move us forward* (Ackermann 1996:48).

### 3. REFLECTIONS: LETTERS, NARRATIVE THERAPY AND GROUP WORK

The reflective letters that I wrote after each group meeting, firstly gave me the opportunity to facilitate the process of co-authoring alternative stories. The dominant plot that trauma had painted in the participants' lives was exposed through the letters; whilst preferred ways of living were honoured. I used externalising conversation and as a result moved towards internalized success of each participant. Secondly, the letters gave the participants the opportunity to read and re-read the discussions, therefore separating the problem from their lives. It gave them the opportunity to internalise their own preferred stories.

The reflective letters had inestimable value in the study and I was sometimes surprised by the fast progress of the groups. Although it took a lot of effort and was time consuming to write a letter after each group meeting, I tried to reflect on each participant's contribution. The value of reflective letters has been shown by informal research that was done by Epston and White (as quoted by Freeman et al. 1997:113) whereby clients responded that a letter had the equivalent value of 4.5 sessions. *'For beginners, letter writing can seem daunting and time-consuming....and yet such therapeutic documents (letters) are highly effective'* (White as quoted by Freeman et al. 1997:113-114).

In my research I experienced that the participants couldn't wait for the letters to arrive on Tuesdays, usually a few days before the group meeting. The young people told me that their mothers usually read the young people's group letters, as well as their own. The young people did not complain that their mothers read their letters, although only at a later stage did I ask their permission to share information with their mothers. I thought about the respectful practices of narrative and was able to critique my own practice. I believe children have the right to privacy, and I am not sure if we respected this enough. On the other hand I believe this practice formed part of outsider witnesses to the young people's group and vice versa. It also meant a *'taking it back practice'* to the mothers. However, more thinking and discussing could have gone into establishing procedures to suit everyone and not marginalise the young people's voices or invade their privacy.

Reflecting on my experience as a listener in the group meetings I was profoundly affected by the women's and young people's stories. At times I had to justify again to myself, why I would want to do research in such a complex and troublesome area of study. I discovered the answer in that I was driven by a need to be able to validate in some way the stories of strength and success that went unnoticed; by both the women and young people who had experienced abuse and by those on the outside, who can only wonder about the horror that those kinds of experiences might bring. I've experienced the 'self-other' as explained in Chapter 1, in practice. *'When the mode of consciousness one enters is participatory ...the boundaries between self and other blur. The self and other are not, by definition, separate and distinct'* (Heshusius 1995:121). I have experienced that the boundaries of the self dissolved, making complete attentiveness to other possible and in turn opening up access in new and unanticipated ways (Heshusius 1995:121).

I've also experienced that outsiders can be caring and supportive as well when sharing the women's and young people's stories with them. Soon after Desiree cried with the group and mentioned that she didn't have money to reward her son for his outstanding performance in Mathematics, I had the opportunity to speak with ministers and supervisors at our annual meeting regarding my project. I told Desiree's story to them and one of the supervisors donated R200 for Desiree to use as a gift to Jonathan. Desiree was delighted and very grateful for being able to buy him a special gift of appreciation.

Externalising the effects of abuse, such as fear, over responsibility, confusion, silence and a victim lifestyle was, I suggest a key feature of the success of this research, but as important was the externalising conversations of abuse itself. Externalising conversations were important as a way of minimizing blaming conversations. However I think it is important that externalising of abuse does not take place too soon, not until the women had had enough time to have their stories of the experiences and injustices of the abuse heard and witnessed. I have also noticed that the women needed more time to tell their stories of abuse, than the young people. The young people were ready to move away from the problem-story more easily than their mothers.

When I reflect on my research methodology, my ethical commitment was to ensure that the participants really gained from the research and my practice. I would like to mention that the reflective letters made a huge contribution towards the narrative process and progress of both groups. I noted that the relationships between the mothers and their children improved; the participants had been empowered because the secrecy (of many years) had been broken.

The women also decided to take a political stand against the injustice of the legal procedures at their local court, by addressing a letter to the chief magistrate. I shared these stories of injustice with a woman attorney in Roodepoort and she offered to attend a group meeting where she listened to the women's stories of battling maintenance matters and offered free legal advice to them. Assistance, free of charge was offered from another attorney but it had not realised by the time the research was documented.

The attorney who listened to their legal problems with maintenance claims, gave them advice and was part of empowering the women with knowledge about the procedures. I tried not to be in a controlling position, although I had been in a power position. I deconstructed the power and control - through the questions that I asked; by proposing the '*power and control*' wheel; I suggested the discussion of the '*journey*' with the women but tried to act in a respective way throughout the study.

I did not deconstruct the gender roles completely, because the women were very set in stereotypical ideas about gender roles. They were just prepared and willing to deconstruct in a small way as described in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5 had more descriptions of the group process. It was an exciting idea when the women's group came up with a name for their group – the Daisies. The Daisy metaphor said a lot about the resilience of the group and that they kept on going even in the face of abuse and hardship. Rich descriptions of resilience were co-created through landscape of action and landscape of identity questions, which facilitated the process of co-authoring alternative stories. In Chapter 5 it was shown how the counterplot was further thickened

by various maps of re-telling, such as *re-membering*, *taking-it-back practices*, *audience retelling and definitional ceremonies* (White 1998: Workshop). The group members formed the audience who was invited to join in the co-constructing of the participant's preferred self-narrative.

Some of the aims at the outset of the study centred on how pastoral narrative therapy can make a contribution to support skills and knowledges of '*resilience*' and healing. The purposes were to explore how a pastoral narrative approach could find new ways of increasing understanding about the effects of trauma, how narrative therapeutic practices could assist people in living in alternative, preferred ways and how these knowledges and skills could be shared within a community or church. These purposes were met through the therapeutic group process as described in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. The women participants described their own experiences with the church and the faith community in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 was a further exploration of the effects of abuse on the lives of participants, such as the power and control of abusive relationships in families, the economic abuse and the injustice of the legal system. Stories of courage and success were shared and voiced in the groups such as breaking the cycle of abuse, the journey of recovery and celebrations.

Another aim of the study was to look at ways in which stories of '*speaking up*' about the domestic violence they experienced and healing in the face of trauma can be shared, and to explore the effects of such sharing. This was partially met in the group meetings as well as in the way participants were able to find audience to these changes both inside and outside the group. All the women and some young people spoke with gratitude at the end of our meetings about what the group had meant to them.



Amanda wrote the following letter to me:

*It is a pity that this is our last meeting today, when I think of everything we have achieved. It was difficult at the beginning to talk about the violence I've experienced, however when I realised that I was not alone it became easier to share my experiences...The group helped me to see myself as a different person. We have shared the bitter and the sweet with each other, we have cried and laughed at times, however that was all worthwhile as I feel that I am of value for other people. I've learned to trust people again. I've realised that we are not to blame for all the mistakes and the abuse. Thank you for really listening to us and thanks for your understanding.*

Frieda mentioned that the group meetings helped her to:

*gain more self-confidence, as I realised that I am not the only one who has suffered abuse. I've gained hope when listening to how others could overcome obstacles and realised that I could do the same. I'm very proud of my children and appreciate their understanding and that they have never blamed me for the past. I am so glad to be free from the fear of living with abuse on a daily basis.*

Here are some of the young people's responses:

Laurika said that she learned '*not to be so shy anymore*' and she gained more self-confidence. The group discussions helped her to gain strength for '*standing up against abuse*'. She wrote a letter to me in which she wished for her mother to '*trust her more*' and would like to have more '*freedom*'.

Willem mentioned '*the group was fun most of the times and we must do that again*'. Wayne commented that the group was great, '*we bonded like superglue, because we all had one thing in common*' (the experiences of domestic violence). What did he learn

from the rest of the group? *'Abuse can change you, or you can tackle Abuse and win the battle'*. He would like to thank his mother *'for being the mom and dad in the house'*. The only thing he would like to change in his family is *'the financial situation, but other than that nothing'*.

When I reflect on the group work processes I need to mention that the young people drew up their own rules at the first meeting, we tried to adhere to these rules. If someone did something wrong he was confronted and had to serve his/her sentence as decided by the group. Willem had used abusive language during one of our group meetings and I addressed this immediately. The group reminded him of serving his sentence, as he did not obey the rules. We had a discussion afterwards about the way that abusive language infiltrates our lives and even our group. The young people come up with solutions to be aware of this and to fight against abusive language in our families and suggested ways of showing respect to each other instead.

It is important to note that there was a vast difference between the women and young people's groups. The women's group meetings tended to be more serious and very emotional, although we had some good laughter at times. The young people's group meetings tend to be more fun and they were very creative in their way of presenting the topics and group discussions. I thought about this and wondered how many things the women took on themselves, so that their children could still be *'free'* and *'enjoy'* life.

#### **4. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND PASTORAL THERAPY**

I raised questions at the beginning of the study regarding the *role of the church, the pastors and pastoral counselling* in cases of domestic violence. I asked the women participants *how they experienced their local church, pastor/priest/minister* at their time of need and *their experiences of God*. And to explore how (if at all) *their faith* influenced and sustained their way of coping with the abuse? The narratives that were voiced as part of this study support efforts to develop the role of the church (and practical theology) as

described by Pieterse (1996:61). He proposes that within a postmodern cultural-political context, where cultures and identities can never wholly separate, the role of the church (both in terms of mutual care and pastoral care) is linked to an appreciation of *the power of difference* and to a re-discovery of our religious legacy which is *to listen, learn and love unconditionally*.

These words echo those of the participants in Chapter 5, who called for less judgemental attitudes. Some of the participants were confronted by the church to ignore reality, as well as the facts of abuse in their marriage and therefore divorcees were condemned. I therefore preferred to work with a contextual approach regarding divorce. As the confessional approach is inclined to be blaming it could contribute to further abusive practices. Through the sharing of stories it became clear that the confessional approach did not work, as the women experienced it as further violation.

I agree with Pieterse (1996:61), when he suggests that the church should create space for different groups to share and express subjective understandings with a view of fostering critical alliances. The church should provide a caring, supportive environment and should renew theology and spirituality so that people from different sectors can meet and have cross-identity cultural experiences that can be part of religious praxis. These recommendations are especially relevant to the South African context and he warns that the church has to resist the temptation of returning to an inwardly focused stance (Pieterse 1996:60). I therefore agree with Pieterse that *being in the world* means that we need to *roll up our sleeves and get into the thick of everyday politics and development*, as domestic violence is part of everyday life for many families. A narrative approach to pastoral therapy makes this a real possibility.

This view could be linked to an emphasis on a move towards social transformation in practical theology. Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen (1991:90) say that *critical reflection on the church leads directly to a discussion of how one can change and transform it to become a prophetic agent of transformation*. They looked at how developing basic Christian communities can *take the gospel out of the possession of those*

*with power and formal authority and how such communities can take it for their own, to struggle in faith and out of their life experience with the meaning of Christian existence* (Cochrane et al. 1991:91). Some of the women's experiences with the pastors/priests/ministers of their local church described their disappointment and further abuse that had been suffered, instead of getting help which they desperately needed at that time. Desiree, Frieda and Olivia's stories with pastoral counselors and their local minister/priest had been positive and supportive. They experienced unconditional love and support in helping them to carry out their choices when experiencing domestic violence. All the participants spoke openly about *their faith* that sustained them through difficult times in the past and they mentioned many times that their faith kept them going through all the hardships. Carina said: '*My faith and prayer helped me to move on even in difficult situations*'.

I believe this study supports the notion that training guided by the narrative practices of respect and honouring people and enrolling people in their own knowledge could provide the tools needed to facilitate an effective service to people who have experienced abuse at home. The church and faith community need to relate to public life and to participate in crisis and therefore need to understand what people who have experienced abuse at home are in need of. I tried to listen to the voices of women and young people without being judgemental and to take this information back to the church and outsiders so that they can gain a better understanding of domestic violence and its effects on people's lives. I listened to the ways people are constituted through the faith communities' behaviour and attitude.

## 5. CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

I agree with Pieterse (1996:60) that the *open-ended and tentative character* of post-modern research should compel one to appreciate

*...the contradictory, ambiguous, conflictual, risky, insecure, peripheral and creative dimensions of everyday life. In short, it allows space for my*

*humanity and simultaneously injects restlessness into any moment of contentment, because any configuration of people, environment and resources usually excludes or marginalises someone's voice and/or identity.*

(Pieterse 1996:60)

I hope that this study is not read as a final answer to the questions, which inspired it, but would rather serve to inspire more questions about the taken-for-granted.

The study inspired me to ask:

*How can the voices of the perpetrator be incorporated in such a study? How can we get the fathers of these neglected children to take responsibility and be accountable? Which discourses within faith communities are sustaining of its members who have had traumatic experiences and which discourses are alienating? How can a narrative approach to pastoral therapy facilitate the development of more sustaining discourses within faith communities? How can postmodern theological and epistemological discourses assist the church to develop more concrete and action-defined understandings of our roles in society and also in a differentiated 'community of believers' (Pieterse 1996:60)? How can we take these stories further to the community so that they can understand domestic violence and reach out to these people who need help? These questions arose from my study and I hope to add to them or revise them in collaboration with future co-researchers.*

## **6. AN OPEN ENDING**

However, I will have to end my writing here. Fortunately this does not imply that the story ends, as I hope that all the stories that were included in the study will speak well enough for themselves. The multitude of stories generated by the continuous co-constructing process could not be captured between the pages of this study. The stories in the study will continually re-invent themselves with each new reading.

*You chose the bulb; you planted it.  
In the spring it started to grow,  
to push through the snow and ice.  
'Look at me, I want to be beautiful for you.'  
You put your foot on the tender buds before  
they ever bloomed.  
You stomped, you smashed, you destroyed.  
'Look at me, I'm ugly, I'm broken. I am no more.'  
I slept. I withdrew. I was nurtured within  
A safe, warm womb. Spring came and you weren't there.  
I pushed and fought my way through the ice and snow.  
I saw the sun. It warmed my face, it warmed my soul.  
'Look at me, I'm beautiful and I'm alive and I will  
not allow anyone to stomp or smash me again.'  
This is the first spring of the rest of my life.*

Beth Sipe  
March, 1990

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THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

**AMANDA**

HAS PARTICIPATED IN THE  
"STOP DOMESTIC VIOLENCE" GROUP

**THE DAISIES**

WE HEREWITH ACKNOWLEDGE  
THE STEPS SHE IS TAKING IN GAINING  
TRUST IN PEOPLE,  
OF GAINING MORE CONFIDENCE

AND

GETTING OUT OF THE MUD ONTO A PATHWAY  
LIT BY A SHINING LIGHT

1 SEPTEMBER 2000  
ROODEPOORT

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

**CARINA**

HAS PARTICIPATED IN THE  
"STOP DOMESTIC VIOLENCE" GROUP

**THE DAISIES**

WE HEREWITH ACKNOWLEDGE  
HER SKILL IN IDENTIFYING OBSTACLES,  
HER HONEST WAY OF SPEAKING ABOUT INJUSTICE  
DONE TO HER

AND

BEING TRUSTWORTHY

1 SEPTEMBER 2000  
ROODEPOORT

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

**FRIEDA**

HAS PARTICIPATED IN THE  
"STOP DOMESTIC VIOLENCE" GROUP

**THE DAISIES**

WE HEREWITH ACKNOWLEDGE  
HER SKILL IN BEING A GOOD LISTENER,  
BEING UNDERSTANDING

AND

STAYING POSITIVE  
DESPITE HARDSHIPS IN HER LIFE

1 SEPTEMBER 2000  
ROODEPOORT

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

**JONATHAN**

HAS PARTICIPATED IN THE

"STOP DOMESTIC VIOLENCE" GROUP

**FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

WE HEREWITH ACKNOWLEDGE  
HIS SKILL OF MAKING PEOPLE LAUGH,  
HIS FUN-LOVING ATTITUDE

AND

HIS MOTIVATION TO MAKE A BETTER  
LIFE FOR HIMSELF

1 SEPTEMBER 2000  
ROODEPOORT

SIGNED : \_\_\_\_\_  
(On behalf of the ANMAR VAN DYK  
group)



THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

**LAURIKA**

HAS PARTICIPATED IN THE  
"STOP DOMESTIC VIOLENCE" GROUP

**FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

WE HEREWITH ACKNOWLEDGE  
HER CHOICE FOR LIFE,  
HER COURAGE TO CONFRONT ABUSE

AND

GOING FORWARD WITHOUT THE  
HEAVY BAGGAGE OF THINGS IN THE PAST

1 SEPTEMBER 2000  
ROODEPOORT

SIGNED

(On behalf of the  
group)

: \_\_\_\_\_  
ANMAR VAN DYK





THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

**MACGYVER**

HAS PARTICIPATED IN THE  
"STOP DOMESTIC VIOLENCE" GROUP

**FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

WE HEREWITH ACKNOWLEDGE  
HIS SKILL AT IDENTIFYING OBSTACLES,  
HIS SKILL AT PROTECTING HIS FAMILY

AND

HIS HONESTY

1 SEPTEMBER 2000  
ROODEPOORT

SIGNED : \_\_\_\_\_  
(On behalf of the ANMAR VAN DYK  
group)



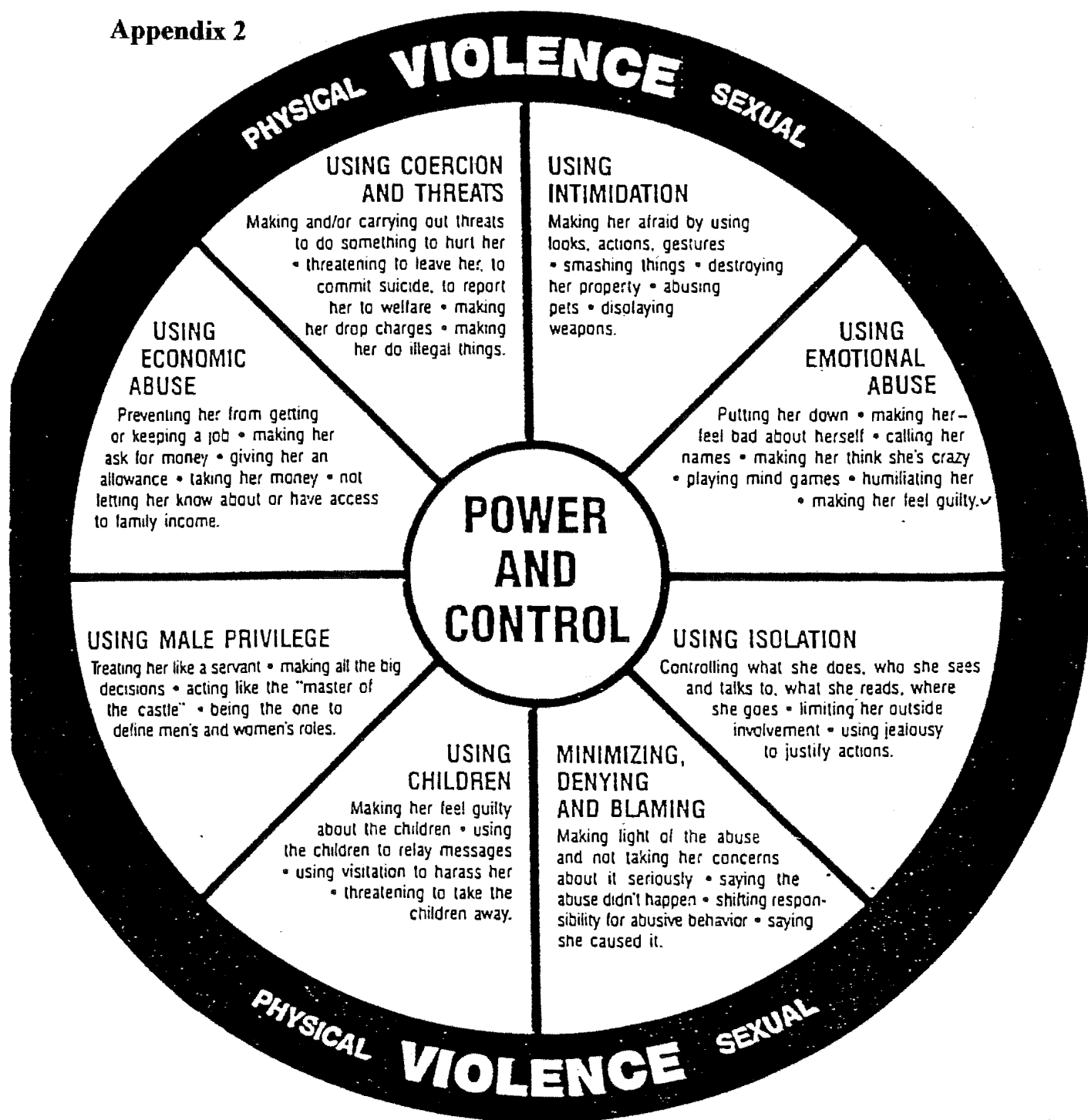


Figure 2. Power and Control Wheel. (1980) Used with permission of Domestic Abuse Intervention Project 206 West Fourth St Duluth Minnesota 55806.

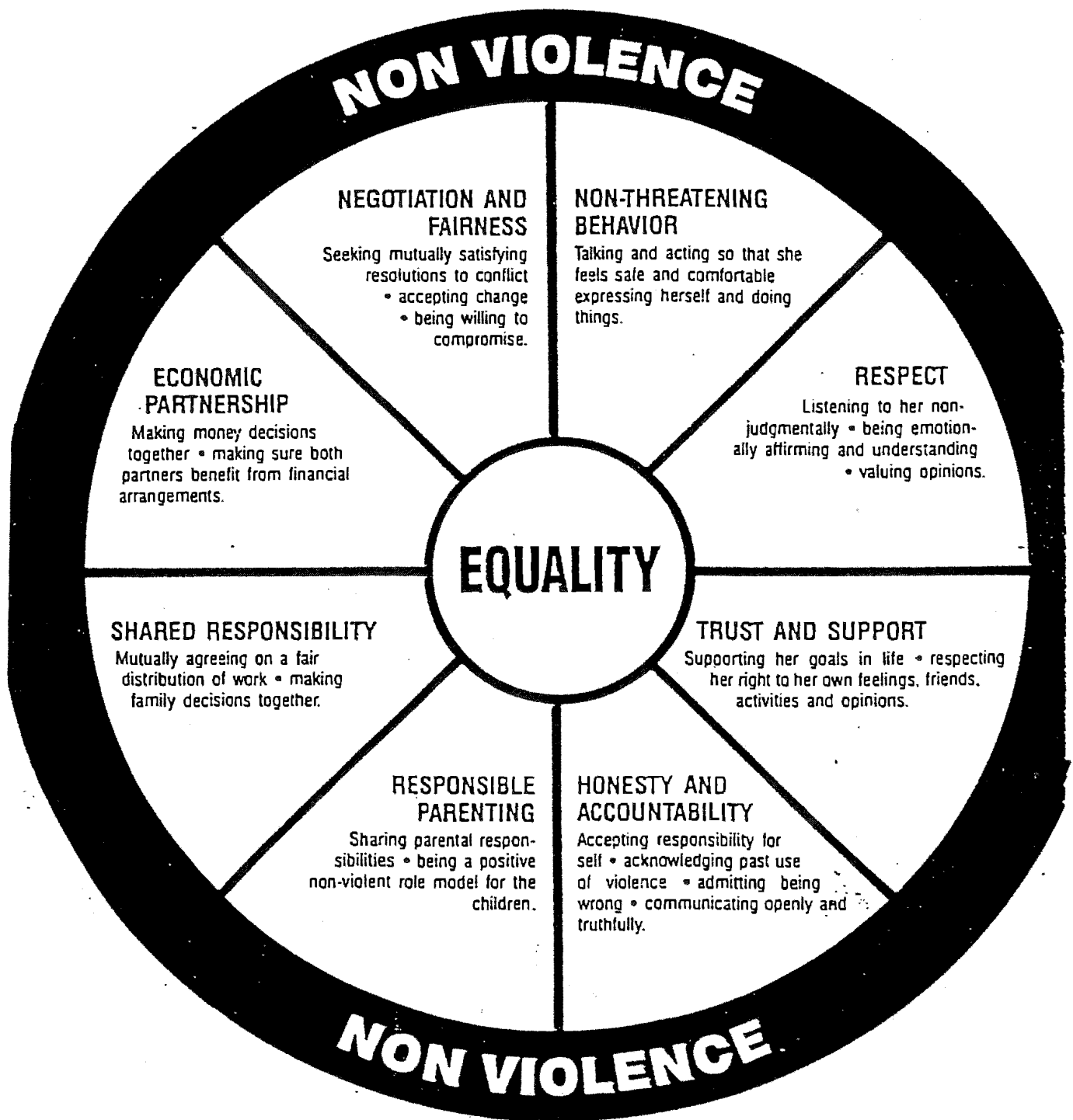


Figure 3. *Equality Wheel*. (1980). Used with permission of Domestic Abuse Intervention Project 206 West Fourth St Duluth Minnesota 55806.