TOWARDS A SYSTEMS-BASED PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC TREATMENT PROGRAMME FOR COUNSELLORS OF ABUSED WOMEN

By

ANTONETTE HANNAH NAIDOO

Submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

in the

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

Supervisor: Professor D.P. Fourie

June 1992
Do give your heart to this, please; human beings are destroying each other through violence, the husband is destroying the wife and the wife is destroying the husband. Though they sleep together, each lives in isolation with his own problems, with his own anxieties; and this isolation is violence (Krishnamurti, cited in Roy, 1982, p.143).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to the following people who have contributed to the preparation of this thesis:

1) My supervisor, Prof. David Fourie, for his patience, wisdom and support;
2) My husband, Paul, and son, Gabriel for their understanding, love and concern;
3) My parents, for all their support and encouragement;
4) Sally Dyson, for her expert editing and friendship; and
5) Charmain, my wonderful sister, for the generous loan of her computer.

Finally, assistance rendered by the Human Sciences Research Council towards the cost of this work is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed or conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not to be regarded as those of the Human Sciences Research Council.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.</td>
<td>A brief historical review</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.</td>
<td>From social 'fact' to social problem</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.1.</td>
<td>The influence of the feminist movement</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.</td>
<td>Intervention into spouse abuse in South Africa</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.1.</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.2.</td>
<td>Problems inherent in the present modes of intervention</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.</td>
<td>Aim of the dissertation</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.1.</td>
<td>Definitions</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5.</td>
<td>Definitional and conceptual problems</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6.</td>
<td>The incidence of spouse abuse</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7.</td>
<td>Conclusion and dissertation outline</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>THE NEWTONIAN WORLD VIEW</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1.</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.</td>
<td>The Newtonian world view</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1.</td>
<td>Linear causality</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2.</td>
<td>Reductionism</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3.</td>
<td>Dualisms in thought and neutral objectivity</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3. The limitations of Newtonian thinking 44
2.4. Discussion and conclusion 47

CHAPTER 3  THEORETICAL STUDIES OF SPOUSE ABUSE 50
3.1. Introduction 50
3.2. Intra-individual theories 52
  3.2.1. Introduction 52
  3.2.2. Violence 'caused' by the male partner 52
  3.2.3. The influence of the Newtonian thought-frame 53
  3.2.4. The woman is to blame 54
  3.2.5. Problems with the linear concept of 'masochism' 55
  3.2.6. Discussion 57
3.3. Social psychological theories 59
  3.3.1. Introduction 59
  3.3.2. Frustration-aggression theory 60
    3.3.2.1. Problems with the frustration and aggression theory 60
  3.3.3. Social learning and role modelling theories 62
    3.3.3.1. The man is to blame 63
    3.3.3.2. Learned helplessness 64
    3.3.3.3. Discussion 66
3.3.4. Exchange and resource theory 67
  3.3.4.1. Discussion 67
3.3.5. Conclusion 68

3.4. Socio-cultural theories 69
3.4.1. Introduction 69
3.4.2. Feminist theory 70
3.4.2.1. Limitations of the feminist perspective 71

3.4.3. Systems theory 73
3.4.3.1. Introduction 73
3.4.3.2. Straus's systems view of spouse abuse 74
3.4.3.3. Linear limitations of Straus's view 75
3.4.3.4. The function of abuse 76
3.4.3.5. Problems with the systems views on spouse abuse 77
3.4.3.6. Who has got the power? 79

3.5. Conclusion 81

CHAPTER 4 MODES OF INTERVENTION INTO SPOUSE ABUSE 83

4.1. Introduction 83

4.2. Non-programmatic sources of intervention 84
4.2.1. Police intervention into spouse abuse 84
4.2.1.1. Problems with police intervention

4.2.1.2. Conclusion

4.2.2. Legal and judicial services

4.2.3. Medical services

4.2.4. Friends, foes and clergyman

4.3. Programmatic sources of intervention

4.3.1. The role of shelter services

4.3.1.1. Programme goals of shelters

4.3.1.2. Crisis intervention

4.3.1.3. Group counselling

4.3.1.4. Individual counselling

4.3.1.5. Conflict between counsellor and client

4.3.1.6. Peer counselling

4.3.2. Children in shelters

4.3.3. Shelters in South Africa

4.4. Intervention with the abusive partner

4.4.1. Types of programmes for men

4.4.2. Types of counselling

4.4.3. Success of men's programmes

4.4.4. Problems with men's programmes

4.5. Family therapy and spouse abuse

4.5.1. Commonalities between systems approaches
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.5.2</td>
<td>Conjoint therapy</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.3</td>
<td>Addressing the violence</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.4</td>
<td>Court mandated therapy</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.5</td>
<td>Empowerment of clients</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.6</td>
<td>Problems with a systems approach</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Problems with agency responses to the abused wife</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6.1</td>
<td>Fragmentation of services</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6.1.1</td>
<td>Turf protection</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6.1.2</td>
<td>Poor communication between agencies</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6.1.3</td>
<td>Discontinuity of services</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6.1.4</td>
<td>Lack of accountability</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6.2</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Bateson and the family therapy movement: The ever widening field of therapeutic vision</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1</td>
<td>Disenchantment with the linear world view in psychology</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2</td>
<td>The influence of the double bind theory</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.3</td>
<td>The growth of the systems movement</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.4. Discussion

5.3. The influence of first-order cybernetics in family therapy

5.3.1. Introduction

5.3.2. The homeostatic view of family functioning

5.3.3. The limitations of the concept of homeostasis

5.3.4. From system stability to system change

5.3.5. Problems with the black-box approach

5.3.6. Beyond power and control

5.3.7. Discussion

5.4. Second-order cybernetics: Towards an ecosystemic therapeutic approach

5.4.1. Introduction

5.4.2. The ecosystemic viewpoint

5.4.3. What is a system

5.4.4. Second-order cybernetics meta to first-order cybernetics

5.4.5. From either/or to both/and

5.4.6. Cybernetic complementarities

5.4.7. Double description

5.4.8. Semantics and politics

5.4.9. Dormitive principles

5.5. The meaning of symptoms
SUMMARY

A critique of pertinent literature reveals that the majority of theoretical understandings and modes of intervention in the arena of spouse abuse are limited by their adherence to a linear epistemology. It is contended that when intervention efforts are framed solely in linear terms, the abusive couple is perceived within a dichotomous logic of attribution, thereby engendering solutions of dismemberment. It is suggested that an ecosystemic perspective, which is grounded in cybernetics, ecology and systems theory, can offer a means of overcoming the limitations that currently plague helping institutions. Such a perspective expands intervention options as the helper, the helping system(s), the client and the context of the client’s problems are viewed as interrelated rather than distinct systems. Some of the interlinked variables which need to be considered when planning an ecosystemic programme for spouse abuse are also presented.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1. A Brief Historical Overview

How vast is the number of men, in any great country, who are little higher than brutes... This never prevents them from being able, through the laws of marriage, to obtain a victim... The vilest malefactor has some wretched woman tied to him against whom he can commit any atrocity except killing her and even that he can do without too much danger of legal penalty. (Mill, cited in Dutton, 1988, p.1).

Beating one's wife is an old and honoured tradition that has until recently been winked at rather than censured in our male dominated society. Certain cultures have encouraged it, and others have regulated it. When spouse abuse is seen in historical context, it becomes evident that it has always been a feature of most societies in the world, and further, that it is not the symptom of a modern breakdown in a formerly nonviolent family structure (Okun, 1986).

The status of spouse abuse as a legal and formally accepted institution in Western society is believed to date back to 753 B.C. - the time of the reign of Romulus, the founder and ruler of Rome. Romulus set forth laws governing domestic relations, which consolidated the
husband's position as sole head of the household. The so-called 'laws of chastisement' gave the husband the legal right to physically discipline his wife for (generally unspecified) offences (Okun, 1986). This history of permitted and condoned abuse seeped into the legal systems, religious teachings and societal norms in most of the Western world (Roy, 1982). After the Punic wars which ended in 202 B.C., there were changes in the family structure which influenced the role of the Roman woman. By the fourth century A.D., excessive violence by either spouse was considered to be sufficient grounds for divorce (Okun, 1986).

Just as Roman law was beginning to move towards a more liberal attitude with regard to women, the rise of Christianity reestablished the traditional extent of the husband's patriarchal authority (Okun, 1986). Early Christian teachings not only permitted violence against wives by their husbands, but often encouraged it. The latter trend is evident in the religious advice given to husbands by a fifteenth century Italian monk, Friar Cherubino:

it is better to punish the body and correct the soul... Readily beat her, not in rage but out of charity... for her soul, so that the beating will rebound to your merit and her good (cited in Okun, 1986, p.3).
Husbands were given legal authority to abuse their spouses in a variety of countries in Western Europe. A famous example of such a ruling is Blackstone's codification of English common law (after which American laws were patterned) in 1768, which gave husbands the right to chastise their erring wives. The so-called 'rule of thumb' law, which was upheld in 1828, referred to the right of the husband to beat his wife with a stick 'no thicker than his thumb' (Gellen, Hoffman, Jones & Stone, 1984). There was flagrant spouse abuse in Britain during the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries. A section of Liverpool, for example, was termed the 'kicking district' due to the extreme violence of men towards their spouses (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the beginning of reforms in the treatment of women in both England and America. The 'rule of thumb' law was repealed in 1874. However, the court ruling stated that if:

no permanent injury has been inflicted, no malice, cruelty, or dangerous violence shown by the husband, it is better to draw the curtains, shut out the public gaze, and leave the parties to forget and forgive (Steinmetz, 1987, p.726).

In practice therefore, although spouse abuse was no longer legally sanctioned, the general societal trend has been to look the other way so as not to interfere with a
'private' domestic matter. This respect for domestic privacy was so strong that the early British and American suffragettes tended to avoid the issue of spouse abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). It was not until the late 1960s in Britain, and particularly in America, that spouse abuse was focussed on as being a major social 'problem' rather than being just an unpleasant 'fact' of married life.

1.2. From Social 'fact' to Social 'Problem'

America in the 1960s was in a state of social and political upheaval. This decade was marked by visible violence in the form of race riots, political assassinations and the unpopular Vietnam war which drew attention to the 'problem' of violence. An important factor which influenced public awareness on the issue of family violence in general, and spouse abuse in particular, was the feminist movement (Gelles & Straus, 1979). Problems which were previously considered personal were brought to public attention. The tradition of domestic privacy and the resulting conspiracy of silence had effectively kept most of society ignorant of, or hesitant to acknowledge, the prevalence of abuse against women within the home. Spouse abuse became a major political issue for the feminists who perceived it as being caused by patriarchal social life. Thus, spouse abuse was framed as a powerful symptom of the lowly position of the woman both within the home and within society.
1.2.1. The Influence of the Feminist Movement

Prior to the feminist 'discovery' of the problem, abused women were unable to acquire effective aid from traditional social services. The scarcity of helping resources for the abused women was the product of the combination of a number of factors. These included:

a) Spouse abuse had not been classified as a serious social problem;

b) there was the implicit societal tendency to 'blame the victim';

c) helping the woman by providing her with resources and life alternatives was often perceived as being tantamount to helping break up family life (Roy, 1982; Steinmetz, 1978a).

As a means of moving away from the popular 'victim blaming' stance adopted by society at large, feminists concentrated all their energy on meeting the needs of women. Working at grassroots level, with the use of women volunteers and private funding, shelters or safe-houses sprang up both in America and in Britain. The emphasis was on securing the safety of the woman, helping her leave her abusive partner and giving her both emotional and temporary financial support. As the male was perceived as the sole perpetrator of the abuse, he became the sole target for rehabilitation and/or intervention from agents of social control (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

'Treatment' was (and still is) framed in terms of
separating husband and wife by means of temporary refuge in shelters, or more permanently by recourse to legal prosecution or by divorce (Hill, 1991). The abusive man was (and still is) generally sent for "state-sanctioned group punishment, treatment, education and/or rehabilitation" (Lipchick, 1991, p.60). There was thus a sharp separation of intervention efforts based on gender. Lipchick (1991) explains that the rationale behind this approach to therapy rested on:

the not unreasonable fear that the abused woman might be killed if she stayed in the relationship, and the belief that the man was probably seriously disturbed, if not psychopathic, and in need of major rehabilitation. Feminist therapists also tended to give more value to the woman's point of view to counterbalance the way society, including many mental health professionals, automatically assumed that she somehow provoked the abuse and was somehow to blame for it in the first place (p.60).

The early efforts of the feminists tended to set the trend for most current intervention efforts in the Western world. In fact, the feminist conceptualisation of spouse abuse has become standard practice in the therapeutic community, and has become influential in the shaping of government policy decisions in this area as well.

The present situation in South Africa appears to
mirror the pioneering efforts of the feminists and other helping agencies in the Western world. It is therefore important to ascertain whether the 'Western' approach to spouse abuse is truly effective and/or appropriate.

1.3. Intervention into Spouse Abuse in South Africa

1.3.1. Introduction

South Africans are currently facing social evolution of major proportions. Apartheid, which was probably one of the worst types of structural violence ever to be systematised into government policy, is now officially dead. This dramatic legislative change has ushered in new hope for the majority of South Africans who are expectant of great improvement in the general standard of living. Unfortunately, the road to the 'new' South Africa is far from smooth and the country is in a state of political, economic and social turmoil. Crime in South Africa is currently at its highest level ever (Sunday Times, 24/11/1991).

Against the backdrop of an increasingly unstable and violent society, there is the added dimension of further violence within the home. Figures released recently by the Co-ordinated Action for Battered Women (CABW) reveal that one in six South African women are abused by their cohabiting partners (Sunday Times, 24/11/1991). In a radio interview a spokesperson for the CABW noted the above statistic as a conservative one, since most abuse is
unreported (Hill, 1991). According to the CABW, a more realistic figure of spouse abuse would be in the region of one in four, or even, a frightening one in three! (Hill, 1991). If these figures are accurate representations of the current situation in South Africa, then evidently something needs to be done to redress this state of affairs. The difficulty is in deciding on how service providers should respond to this major social problem.

Unlike the situation in the Western world, it is only recently that South Africans have begun to focus on spouse abuse as a prevalent social problem. The CABW claims that it is an increase in public awareness which has led to more and more battered women coming into the open (Sunday Times, 24/11/1991). The heightened focus on the issue of spouse abuse appears to stem from the growing political influence wielded by women within the democratic movement (Bazilli, 1991). In the not too distant past, the major political issue in the country was the demand for racial equality. As that issue is now being addressed, other social issues are coming to the fore. Feminist organisations which are aligned to political organisations like the African National Congress, are beginning to focus on particular areas of functioning which are problematic for women. Some of these are: equal rights for women both in the workplace and at home, paid maternity leave and freedom of choice with regard to abortion (Bazilli, 1991).

While the presence of violence within the family may not be a new phenomenon, what is beginning to change is
that these behaviours no longer have social sanction in South Africa. As noted earlier, the modes of intervention into spouse abuse in South Africa to date appear to imitate the intervention efforts in other parts of the Western world. The CABW, for example, was formed in 1989 when twenty women's and welfare organisations joined to tackle the problem of spouse abuse, from grassroots community level to the highest legislative level. In a similar manner to the feminists in America in the 1970s, the group has initiated a number of projects under the campaign 'Women battering is a crime'. This has included the building of more shelters for victims (there are at present only five shelters in South Africa), educating the public and developing community based support networks (Hill, 1991; Sunday Times, 24/11/1991). Spouse abuse is perceived as being the instrumental foundation of men's power. Family violence then, is seen to be as pervasive as patriarchy itself, unchanging and omnipresent.

1.3.2. Problems Inherent in the Present Modes of Intervention.

As evidenced by the high rates of recidivism (where violence continues unabated, and at times even escalates), the present mode of intervention into this area is proving to be largely unsuccessful (Barnhill, 1982). In fact, it could be argued that these help systems in general not only fail to meet the needs of the average person in the street,
but may also inadvertently exacerbate the problem.

It appears that a particular shortcoming that is common to most, if not all helping agencies, is that they ignore firstly, the interrelationship between the presenting problem and the context, and secondly, the interrelationship between the helping system and the context. Hoffman and Long (1969) describe the effects of the helping system on the context as follows:

In particular we are learning that many of the systems we have created to deliver services are, in the name of 'progress' and 'civilisation', contributing to the conditions of human distress they were designed to alleviate (p.211).

They ascribe this state of affairs to the fact that most of these helping systems fail to take into consideration the "problems of a single person in terms of his total life space, his 'ecology' " (Hoffman & Long, 1969, p.211). The avoidance of an ecological view of problem management appears to stem from the adherence of most helpers to frameworks based on reductionistic and linear thinking which is the hallmark of the Western/Newtonian view of reality. Helpers who are hostage to this type of thought system mostly confine their efforts at problem management to just one of three possible levels. These include the individual level, the family level or the societal level of analysis and/or
intervention.

When spouse abuse is perceived in linear terms, helpers must begin to feel that the odds are against them in effecting change. For example, the popular feminist conceptualisation of spouse abuse as caused by patriarchal social life, or as the logical product of sex-role socialisation, tends to freeze political thinking, rather then increasing the number of options open for effective action. Indeed, this type of reasoning creates a sense of immutability about social institutions.

There is the underlying assumption that this is the way men are and there is very little that anyone can do about it. There is thus the reliance on assumed inherent psychological or ideological characteristics which men per se are seen as possessing. If all the men who abuse women are perceived of in individual terms, then the vast majority of men appear to be dangerous psychopaths, or if abuse is solely caused by the cultural sanctioning of the patriarchal society, then South African society is inherently disturbed and is largely ruled by a sick gender. Further, if separation and rescue is the only means of intervention, then a sizable proportion of society would land up in prison or in divorce courts.

The foregoing statements may appear to be simplistic and ludicrous until it is realised that within the traditional linear thought framework modes of intervention for helpers are extremely limited. Helpers are further
limited by the now popular view that intervention into spouse abuse can only proceed along the route which was mapped out by the feminists in the 1970s. In fact, any deviation from this approach is criticised as being "unethical, incompetent, and insensitive to women's safety" (Lipchick, 1991, p.59). This reliance on one fixed recipe for effective treatment is potentially hazardous as it ignores individual differences in the client population. Further, there is very little or no attention paid to the impact of the interventions on the client population. For example, how does the orthodox treatment approach impact on those women who do not see leaving their husbands/male partners as a viable solution to their distressing situation? What about the vast majority of women who leave the shelter to return to their partners? What happens to the way in which they view themselves and their relationships; do they see themselves as beyond help - an agency 'failure'? What about the impact on the male? How does the narrow view of who and what he is, and how he should be treated affect him? Does he begin to believe that his behaviour is really beyond his control, and that he is beyond help?

Unfortunately, when delving into the highly emotive arena of spouse abuse, questions of the above nature are seldom asked.

In the light of the above mentioned problems, it is apparent that the existing modes of intervention in the field of spouse abuse are, at present, far from
satisfactory. What appears to be needed is a new approach to spouse abuse which allows the helper more flexibility in the problem management process.

1.4. Aim of the Dissertation

The aim of this work is twofold. Firstly, it attempts to examine the impact of the linear framework of thought on both the theoretical and treatment approaches that are popular today. It is argued that adherence to a linear conceptualisation of spouse abuse limits both the helper's view of the problem, as well as narrowing the range of his/her intervention options.

The second intention is to suggest an alternative understanding of spouse abuse; one that would open up possibilities of new options for the helper.

No clinical understanding or intervention exists in a vacuum. Such comprehension is grounded in an epistemology which reflects what Hoffman (1981) terms "the rules one uses for making sense out of the world" (p.342). There are numerous definitions of epistemology. The definition that has been chosen for use in this work is one of Bateson's (1979). For Bateson, epistemology attempts to specify "how particular organisms or aggregates of organisms know, think and decide" (Bateson, 1979, p.228). The fundamental act of epistemology is to draw a distinction which organises events/patterns in certain ways. As Bateson (1977) explains:
All descriptions are based on theories of how to make descriptions. You cannot claim to have no epistemology. Those who so claim have nothing but a bad epistemology. Every description is based upon, or contains implicitly, a theory of how to describe (p. 84).

This dissertation aims to provide an understanding of spouse abuse from an ecosystemic perspective, which is grounded in cybernetics, ecology and systems theory. The examination of the shortcomings of the linear conceptualisation of spouse abuse will reveal that what does appear to be needed is a frame of thinking which is semipermeable, and which includes both the family and the larger social ecology. It is argued that the ecosystemic perspective provides such a framework, and that it provides a way of thinking that can offer a means of overcoming the limitations that plague the helping institutions at present.

The acquisition of a conceptual framework within the ecosystemic perspective is no easy task, as it requires the ability to conceive of reality in a circular or nonlinear manner. From the outset therefore, it is important to briefly clarify what an ecosystemic view comprises.

1.4.1. Definitions

Presently, the term 'ecosystemic therapy' does not
refer to an organised school of therapy with a single, coherent body of theory and a common set of procedures. The ecosystemic viewpoint is often lumped under the broad headings of either 'family therapy' or 'systems therapy'. The terms 'family therapy' or 'systems therapy' may in fact be misleading in that they refer to such a diverse body of therapeutic methods and theories. Keeney's (1983) reference to family therapy as: "those approaches to human dilemmas that are most directly connected to a formal consideration of human relationship systems" (p.5) offers a useful conceptualisation of the field. For Keeney, 'family therapy' refers to those approaches to human dilemmas which are embedded within a nonlinear or circular epistemology which is differentiated from a linear worldview in that ecology, relationship and whole systems are emphasised. A circular epistemology is further attuned to context, interrelation and complexity (Keeney, 1983).

Auerswald (1987a) goes further than Keeney. He offers a succinct paradigmatic breakdown of the field of family study and treatment which surfaced in the 1950s. A 'paradigm' refers to a set of rules used by a particular group of people to define a sub-unit of reality (Auerswald, 1987). Auerswald (1987a) advocates that the different paradigms that emerged were based on different definitions of the family. His outline is as follows (Auerswald, 1987, p.321-22):

a) a psychodynamic paradigm is one in which the 'family'
is defined in terms of the interlocking psychodynamics of its members;

b) a family system paradigm, in which the family is defined as a system which operates independently, and from which individual psychodynamics emerge;

c) a general-systems paradigm in which a family is defined as a system that shares isomorphic characteristics with all systems. Systems are viewed as being hierarchically arranged in terms of complexity;

d) a cybernetic systems paradigm which defines a system in terms of information flow and regulatory mechanisms;

e) an ecological systems, or 'ecosystemic', paradigm which defines a family as a coevolutionary ecosystem located in evolutionary timespace.

Auerswald (1987a) maintains that paradigm a) has been largely abandoned by family therapists. Paradigms b) to d) have been amalgamated under the heading of 'family systems therapy', and paradigm e) represents a radically different approach which is rooted in an alternative reality system. The term 'ecosystemic therapy' ties together the thinking and endeavours of a growing number of practitioners who are beginning to apply concepts drawn from what is variously called the 'new science', or 'second-order' cybernetics in clinical practice.

As both 'new science' and 'second-order' cybernetics will be discussed in Chapter 5, suffice it to say at this point that when adhering to this alternative reality system, there is a shift in:
a) the focus from objects to relationships;
b) the view of reality as being independent of an observer's attempts to organise it;
c) the focus from how systems maintain their organisation to how systems change their organisation.

A 'system' is defined as "any unit containing feedback structure and therefore competent to process information" (Bateson, 1971, p.243). Thus, the social unit which is identified for intervention is punctuated entirely by the observer. The therapeutic situation can also be seen as a system, which would include both the client and therapeutic systems. The scope of analysis is therefore no longer limited to the identified problem, but also includes the wider social ecology, the treatment agencies and the therapists themselves. Such a view frees the helper by giving him/her a metaview, and by protecting the helper from punctuating in a blaming way. Flemons (1989) explains that:

An epistemology which separates self from other is a breeding ground for exploitation and engenders solutions of dismemberment. Connective (contextual) solutions require an ecosystemic approach that pays heed to the recursive nature of the relationship (p.1).

There has been a noticeable reluctance on the part of systems thinkers to enter into the arena of family
violence. A major stumbling block with regard to the latter is the difficulty of addressing phenomena that are apparently linear from a perspective that is grounded in a circular view of reality. This difficulty is poignantly illustrated in the apocryphal tale among German family therapists which states: "I didn't believe in lineal causality until the night my wife shot me" (cited in Dell, 1986a, p.513). Dell (1986b) went so far as to assert that the circular systemic paradigm is "simply incapable of addressing violence, power and control" (p.528).

Other criticisms stem from feminists who contend that circular/systemic formulations of spouse abuse contain biases which obscure and perhaps even obliterate the experience of the women victims, thus freeing the abusive male from sole responsibility for his actions (McIntyre, 1984). It should be noted that criticisms of the above nature are regarded in a serious light, as they contain moral undertones about the appropriateness of the application of the systems view in the realm of family violence.

This work does not have as its stated purpose the desire to disregard, or to denigrate other schools of thought, as there is no one 'correct' conceptualisation of the phenomena under study. It merely suggests a way of thinking about spouse abuse which may extend the effectiveness of clinicians and other helpers in their approach to treatment. The underlying premise in this
dissertation is that when the linear blinkers which could limit the vision of the helper are lifted, the treatment options available are expanded.

When entering the problematic arena of spouse abuse, the would-be helper encounters a morass of conceptual difficulties which in themselves need to be overcome. A particular problem constitutes what precisely spouse abuse is?

1.5. **Definitional and Conceptual Problems**

I wouldn't call it physical violence. He hit me once or twice. He used to give me a bash. Nothing serious. Just temper. He used to give me a good whack across the face, or something like that. Oh yes - I didn't like it... but I was married. It wasn't continuous, it wasn't everyday or anything (Housewife, aged 41; cited in Borkowski, Murch & Walker, 1983, p.41).

'Marital violence' is an extraordinarily imprecise term, both from the practitioner's point of view, and, as the above quotation illustrates, from the client's perspective. What constitutes violence has been debated over the centuries, and there is still considerable theoretical controversy concerning the conceptual definition of the term today. A central problem is that violence refers to many actions, processes and conditions.
The concept of violence has both literal and figurative meanings; it may refer to actions causing injury or it may figuratively emphasise intensity of feeling and of words. Which of the aspects is included or excluded in a given definition has significant import to the range of human experience examined and the kind of conclusions drawn (Bulhan, 1985).

The literature on family violence reflects little interest in the development of an explicit conceptual definition of marital violence, and the term acts as a blanket expression covering a wide range of behaviour. It is thus imprecise and ambiguous, with the consequence that people can easily think that they are talking about the same thing, when in fact they are not. This ambiguity and imprecision might conceal the extent of disagreement about whether or not certain types of behaviour such as slapping or shoving should be socially acceptable.

Behavioural scientists who study the problem of violence tend to offer definitions that are individual-oriented and fit the canons of a (neo) positivist tradition. This approach narrows violence to what is measurable and quantifiable. Straus's (1979) Conflict Tactics Scale, for example, categorises violent acts on a continuum from least to most severe, treats male and female equally, and makes no allowance for the context within which violence occurs. Severe assaults are defined as actions with a relatively high likelihood of causing injury to the victim. Hence kicking, biting or using a weapon
against a victim are all actions regarded as severe assault. These actions are likely to carry medical consequences for the victim, and they are actions that in practice are considered grounds for arrest. Less severe assaultive acts like slapping, pushing, shoving, grabbing and throwing objects at the victim are less likely to invoke medical or criminal justice consequences. The Conflict Tactics Scale assumes that all violent acts are comparable and can be ranked because: violence differs only in degree; violence can be ordered linearly and implicitly, that any pushing or throwing is worse that any amount of verbal or emotional expression, no matter what pain the latter may inflict (Breines & Gordon, 1983). Researchers argue, however, that while not discounting the cruelty nor the coerciveness of psychological forms of violence, social agents rarely become involved in the use of coercion in families unless that coercion involves physical force or threats of physical force (Dobash & Dobash, 1977; Steinmetz, 1978b). It is further contended that by concentrating on the physical aspects of spouse abuse, explanations can be developed that will have the greatest utility for intervention into family dysfunction.

Violence is thus an omnibus concept that can be defined in various ways and can be viewed from different perspectives. Social values play an important part in the way definitions are formulated, and in what is conceived to be assault, battery or abuse. Social values also enter
into considerations of whether acts that involve less severe physical consequences for the victim should be included in definitions of marital violence.

When considering where to draw the line separating what is from what is not an act of violence, it is important for the helper to be flexible in his/her assessment, so as to be open to the clients' definition of what they are prepared to put up with. Individuals may in fact come to expect family violence as a predictable or an unavoidable occurrence when people live together, and may be more accepting of the use of violence as a means of conflict resolution. The definitions that are given below are, therefore, to be viewed as broad guidelines as to what constitutes a violent act, abuse and battery, and are not to be interpreted as hard and fast proscriptions which will apply to all situations, regardless of the particular context in question.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the term 'family violence' refers to "those households where violence of an interpersonal nature has become a regularised feature of daily interaction" (Denzin, 1984, p.483). Gelles (1980) distinguishes between violence and abuse. She defines violence as "an act carried out with the intention, or perceived intention, of physically hurting another person" (p.875). Abuse is seen as a subset of violent behaviour, and is defined as:

"physical aggression that can or does cause injury and also to non-physical acts of maltreatment which are
considered to cause harm" (Gelles, 1980, p.875).

Researchers differentiate between abuse and battery, in that battery refers to repeated, severe, deliberate and habitual abuse of one spouse by another. 'Habitual' is defined as occurring more than twice (Gayford, 1979).

Eekelaar and Katz (1978) focus more on the victim's own construction of reality concerning the abusive acts, and remind the researcher that:

Perhaps a definition is not really important, since the limits of unacceptable violence, at least among adults, can define themselves. A call for help by the wife to any outside body should be taken as unassailable evidence that the violence suffered was unacceptable to that wife, and therefore to society at large (p.120-21).

This statement reminds the practitioner that when it comes to the operationalisation of the terms of abuse and violence, the most usual point of reference are the victims who identify themselves as such, and "become publicly known and labelled by an official or professional" (Gelles, 1980, p.875).

For practical reasons, the terms 'victim', 'victimiser', 'perpetrator', 'battered woman', 'batterer' may be used. It is conceded that these terms are linear in that they imply blame. It is important therefore for the
reader to bear the circular nature of spouse abuse in mind.

An issue which is closely related to the obscuring effects of the unclear definitions and conceptions of what spouse abuse amounts to, is that of just how widespread or prevalent the phenomenon is.

1.6. The Incidence of Spouse Abuse

Once I made an appointment to see the doctor but I never kept it. I felt too embarrassed and ashamed to go really. I was badly bruised and had a cut underneath the eye. My legs were aching quite a bit - he's got a truncheon (Housewife, aged 40, cited in Borkowski et al, 1983, p.11).

A major research aim in the field of family violence since its 'discovery' in the 1970s has been to arrive at reliable estimates with regard to the incidence of spouse abuse. Concern with measuring the incidence of abuse is perhaps best viewed as a reaction to the general belief that it is really quite rare, is generally a working class phenomenon and is confined to a few mentally disturbed people (Steinmetz & Straus, 1974). Most of the statistical data compiled by researchers in this area is incomplete, however, if not inaccurate, because of a variety of data-gathering obstacles.

Due to the veil of secrecy that still disguises the extent of abuse in many families, disclosure often comes
from sources outside the family, such as the police, personnel in emergency rooms and neighbours. Reports from intermediaries inevitably reflect their professional as well as personal values and experience. This influences what they notice in the first place, and what they choose to report. A major difficulty in this regard is related to the definitional and conceptual ambiguity of the terms abuse and violence.

Straus (1980) noted that the national 'speed limit' on marital violence is that it must be severe enough to cause an injury requiring medical treatment for police intervention to lead to an arrest. Actions such as slapping or shoving are less likely to produce injury than are punching or using a weapon. In practice, therefore, police in most jurisdictions would not consider 'abuse' to have occurred, unless an action corresponding to the Severe Violence Index on the Straus Conflict Tactic Scale had taken place (Dutton, 1988). Similarly, to the extent that the woman does not consider the action criminal, she is less likely to report the act to the various police services.

Problems may also arise from having to rely on other people's perceptions of interpersonal relations, particularly in the highly emotive area of violence. Some women protect their spouses by minimising the seriousness of what happened, and others may exaggerate. Data is generally obtained from the victim, which has contributed to the confounding of data, as partners in the conflict may
have very different views about the dispute.

Despite the problems experienced by data gatherers, research in this area has revealed that spouse abuse is prevalent in most industrialised countries. Indeed, some researchers consider the family, with the exception of the police and the military, to be the most violent social group (Gelles & Straus, 1979). Research has also indicated that spouse abuse occurs in all social strata, thereby dispelling the myth that abuse is a working class problem. The higher reports of incidence in working class families could purely be a reflection of the greater probability of working class women to publicly acknowledge that violence has occurred in their marriage (Borkowski et al, 1983). Surveys conducted in America cite figures of likely abuse to occur in the region of a third to half of the married population, and surveys in Britain reveal that abuse was likely to occur in two out of every five couples (Borkowski et al, 1983; Straus, 1977). However, these figures have to be treated with care, and should not be used without qualification as they are not based on hard and fast evidence, but are more speculatory and in need of further investigation (Steinmetz, 1977).

No reliable estimates of the incidence of spouse abuse exists at present in South Africa, because of inadequate record keeping by helping agencies, and due to the police documentation of abuse under the general heading of 'family disturbance', or documenting spouse abuse in conjunction
with other common assaults. As noted earlier, the Co-ordinated Action For Battered Women, an activist group launched in 1989, assert that one in six South African women is abused by her partner. Statistics reveal that only one in ten women report this abuse to the police (Sunday Times, 24/11/1991).

If this is indeed the current situation in South Africa, then effective intervention into this social problem is urgently required.

1.7. Conclusion and Dissertation Outline

The curtains which have shut out the public gaze from the ‘private’ event of spouse abuse are beginning to be drawn back, with researchers and social scientists starting to peer in and focus on abuse as something problematic and therefore in need of understanding. It is apparent that the field is permeated by numerous difficulties and biases which serve to complicate and colour effective intervention. When faced with the popular conceptual linearity of wife abuse, it is almost impossible to achieve a metaposition and confront the issue in a circular manner. It is suggested, however, that this is precisely what is required if truly effective intervention is to be attained.

The traditional linear view of reality is discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 offers a brief coverage of what the author considers to be the most pertinent of the theories of spouse abuse that are current today. The deficits of the linear conceptualisations of these theories
will also be highlighted. Chapter 4 reviews a selection of
the most widely espoused treatment options that are
available. The ecosystemic perspective, which is discussed
in Chapter 5, appears to expand the number of options open
to the practitioner, so that he/she is not trapped by the
linear picture which violence so enticingly presents.
Chapter 6 attempts to offer a new perspective of what could
be helpful when intervening in spouse abuse in a South
Africa which is undergoing such a major social and
political upheaval.
2.1 Introduction

At the beginning of the last two decades of our century, we find ourselves in a state of profound world-wide crisis. It is a complex, multi-dimensional crisis, whose facets touch every aspect of our lives - our health and livelihood, the quality of our environment and our social relationships, our economy, technology, and politics. It is a crisis of intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions; a crisis of scale and urgency unprecedented in recorded human history (Capra, 1982, p.1).

A glance at the headlines of any daily newspaper in South Africa, and indeed, in any country worldwide, will lend credence to Capra's vision of impending destruction. The average man in the street is aware of the possibility of nuclear and/or chemical warfare, worldwide economic recession, poverty and starvation, daily acts of violence... the list is endless. Capra (1982) ascribes this picture of gloom to an overemphasis on the scientific method and on rational and analytic thinking which has led to attitudes that are "profoundly antiecological" (p.25). Prior to Capra's warning, Auerswald (1971) suggested that
"we seem hell-bent on a course of self-destruction" (p.263). Both men seem to attribute the present 'antiecological' state of world affairs to the influence of the Newtonian heritage which has held sway in the natural sciences for over two centuries.

2.2. The Newtonian World View

Newton (1642-1727) was a mathematical genius who built upon and expanded the theories of the visionaries who preceded him. He developed a complete mathematical formulation of the mechanistic view of nature, and thus synthesised the works of Copernicus, Kepler, Bacon, Galileo and Descartes.

2.2.1. Linear Causality

Newton's world was a material one which resembled a huge machine in that it was governed by immutable laws. The mechanistic view of nature is therefore closely related to a rigorous determinism with the idea that the cosmic machine is completely causal and determinate. The mechanistic model encouraged emphasis to be placed on relationships between phenomena, using empirical investigation to determine cause and effect. A linear view of causality thus rose to prominence; all that occurred was seen as having a definite cause and effect, and the future of any part of a system, could, in principle, be predicted with absolute certainty. One of the difficulties with the
cause and effect view of reality (particularly in the social sciences) is that it is difficult to concede the complexity of what is being examined (Capra, 1982).

Keeney (1983) describes a linear epistemology as atomistic, reductionistic and anticontextual, using analytical logic concerned with combinations of discrete elements. As will be seen in Chapter 3, the majority of the theories on spouse abuse have been concerned with this form of analysis.

2.2.2. Reductionism

Within the Newtonian world view, it was believed that complex phenomena could only be understood by reducing them to their basic building blocks, and by looking for the mechanisms through which they interact. This attitude, known as reductionism, has become so deeply ingrained in Western culture that it has often been identified with the scientific method (Auerswald, 1985). The reductionistic framework has its roots in the analytic method of Descartes. Capra (1982) asserts that this method of reasoning was possibly Descartes's biggest contribution to science. It proved to be invaluable in the development of scientific theories and in the operationalisation of complex technological projects. However, a particular pitfall with the concept of reductionism is that entities are seen as separate from the systems of which they are part. The temptation is to perceive the entities as possessing intrinsic characteristics which are then seen as
being independent of contextual factors.

2.2.3. Dualisms in Thought and Neutral Objectivity

Another Cartesian concept which Newton and other thinkers adopted, was that of the dualism between mind and matter. Descartes based his whole view of nature on this division between two separate phenomena: the mind (the 'thinking thing') and matter (the 'extended thing') (Capra, 1982). As a consequence of this dualism, the scientific method was perceived as providing the pathway to 'truths' which could be described objectively without mention of the human observer. The observer is perceived as being independent of that which is observed, implying a 'true' reality which can be known through observation. The mechanistic view of the universe, coupled with Cartesian dualism, paved the way for a manipulative doctrine in the interests of scientific rigour.

The mechanistic and reductionistic views of classical physics were so successful that the other sciences (which included the social sciences of psychology, sociology and economics) accepted the Newtonian view as the correct description of reality. Newton's genius was one of the major driving forces which spurred mankind into the industrial and technological realm. His thought system had and still does have an important role to play, but what was realised during the first decade of this century was that Newtonian thinking, although compelling, offered limited insights into reality (Auerswald, 1971; 1974).
2.3. The Limitations of Newtonian Thinking

One of the major stumbling blocks that face helpers in present day South Africa is that of overcoming the traps that are inherent within the linear/Newtonian view of reality. This is no easy task, as this view has held sway for so long, and forms the framework for most of the helping institutions in the so-called developed world. It is vital therefore that helpers are aware that although governments may change, it does not necessarily follow that there will be automatic transformation of societal restructuring. There is the temptation to view change in terms of the establishment of new trappings within an existing overarching thought-frame. What is necessary therefore is a clear delineation of the basic rules which form the framework of the traditional Western thought-frame, and the possible limitations of the latter. What follows is a useful shortlist of some of the underlying rules of Western thinking (Auerswald, 1974; 1982; 1985; 1987a).

a) Rule of a single fixed reality;
b) rule of objectivity;
c) rule of separate and infinite time and space;
d) rule of separate mass and energy;
e) rule of linear time;
f) rule of linear causal process;
g) rule of understanding by analysis;
h) rule of hierarchy;
i) rule of name as thing;

j) rule of idea as thing.

Thought-rules such as the above have filtered into so many fields of investigation that they have come to be associated with scientific rigour. Further, they are regarded as providing a means of arriving at 'truths' which are perceived as being independent of the perceptual lenses worn by the investigator (Auerswald, 1985).

The behavioural sciences have evolved their body of theory largely as a result of the focus on the primacy of the individual as directed by the Western epistemological framework. Indeed, the latter, coupled with the notion of a single truth and the concept of dualistic polarities, have formed the basis of Western thought. For Minuchin (1984), the violence humankind is experiencing is inherent in the dualistic epistemology. Situations are either this or that. For example, people are either victims or victimisers. The either this/or that type of thinking feeds into the belief that only the strongest survives. This leads to side taking and the creation of societal rules that are largely held together by blame systems. When deciding on policies to be followed, dualisms are created between options, in such a way that alternatives are discarded in a reductionistic fashion where every idea which does not 'fit', is discarded. In this process, valuable information is lost and the choreography of events become meaningless (Auerswald,
Institutions which function within the limits of these rules of thought are limited by the underlying assumption that there is an objective reality out there which can be discovered by a process of decontextualised analysis. The universe is viewed as being filled with things, whether the latter have substance or not. Labels are attached to descriptions of relational processes, and concepts assume a 'thinglike' reality which is further entrenched by the process of institutionalisation which then results in viewing concepts as having fixed properties. When relational processes like 'power' and 'work' are perceived of in hierarchical 'thinglike' terms, systems are then viewed as being based on power differentials. This view results in the dualistic/linear belief that those at the top are more powerful than those occupying the bottom rungs of society. Specialisation is the logical outgrowth of this type of reasoning and people are divided into 'experts' and 'lay-people'. The hierarchical up-down structure of organisations shapes the clients' input in predetermined ways. The experts are seen as having all the answers in a circumscribed field, which then necessitates the creation of so-called 'multi-disciplinary' teams which have to work together when faced with complicated areas of human functioning. This collaboration between fields is not easy, as the 'experts' in each field cling to their own definitions of the problem as the 'true' reality. The
'problem' that is tackled, is spliced into different aspects, with a different 'expert' handling a particular section of difficulty usually in isolation from the input of other 'experts' (Auerswald, 1971; 1974). As Auerswald (1974) comments:

Each discipline gradually assumes a vantage point which diverges from those of other disciplines and at the interfaces between disciplines, there is overt or covert war. Complex 'problems' seldom get solved. Instead, 'progress' is made (p.18).

2.4 Discussion and Conclusion

It is apparent that there are numerous difficulties which are contained within the Western thought-rule system. The adherence to such a frame need not be necessarily unproductive. Humankind's adherence to this framework has witnessed astounding developments in the realm of technology. Difficulties arise, however, when the traditional thought-frame is used in the understanding of phenomena in the realm of human experience. In the latter, the restriction to one mode of thinking is limiting, as it prevents the helper from attaining a wider view of the problem situation.

In the area of spouse abuse, both research and clinical practice to date have been dominated by a linear approach. As discussed in Chapter 1, the majority of interventions have been directed either at the 'victim' or
at rehabilitating 'batterers' with little regard to the social ecology. Intervention appears to be framed within a dichotomous logic of attribution, which could result in the perpetuation of the "symmetrical, adversarial context between men and women" (Lane & Russell, 1987, p.52). Further, Auerswald (1982) contends that the adherence to this thought-frame could lead to increased fragmentation, territorial chauvinism and duplication of effort. These difficulties are particularly evident in the various modes of intervention into spouse abuse, as problem management in this field requires the input of various helping agencies. The appropriateness of the Western thought-frame in this realm of human intervention must be questioned when it is realised that the structure of intervention at present compounds an already difficult situation.

Keeney (1983) stated that it is unlikely that anyone has fully realised a non-linear epistemology. One of the greatest obstacles to this way of thinking is within ourselves; due to our own inevitable linguistic conditioning (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967). As language is static and linear, the notion that reality exists organised according to a linear base, is reinforced.

In the process of moving towards a nonlinear epistemology, it becomes apparent that the traditional manner of viewing and treating spouse abuse proves to be inadequate when explaining what is occurring contextually. If the shortcomings inherent within the existing helping
systems are to be overcome, it is necessary to explore the influence of the Newtonian/linear view of reality on the majority of the theories of spouse abuse. An awareness of the linearity of current theoretical endeavours is vital when it is remembered that the treatment philosophies of institutions invariably set the tone for clinical treatment administered. The help which is offered in turn frames the impact on the client in a particular manner.
3.1. Introduction

Although there are numerous theories on spouse abuse, a review of the literature reveals that a single theory which adequately explains the issue simply does not exist. It is revealed further that despite the many disparate views on spouse abuse, the vast majority of theories adhere to a Newtonian or linear view of reality. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, explanations of abuse therefore tend to be limited to one of three possible levels of analysis: namely to the individual level, the family level or the societal level.

This Newtonian type of understanding with the concomitant trend toward atomisation pervades the theoretical field. Each theory has acquired a label, and a separate and usually fixed view of what the various 'ingredients' of spouse abuse amount to. Moreover, as Gondolf (1985) notes, there is considerable conflict between perspectives. This conflict has led to a factionalism that may be undercutting the theoretical progress in the field.

Overall, the myriad of theories on spouse abuse could be viewed as a double-edged sword for the field as a whole. On the one hand, competing perspectives could promote a creative tension that propels and enriches the field of study. On the other hand, the search for general
explanations by aggregating individual cases and proximate causes of abuse has at times, ironically, led researchers to disaggregate normative experiences in ways that make them even less susceptible to explanation, management and/or change.

Even though valuable information can be gleaned from the vast majority of the theories, there is the tendency to view each understanding in isolation from other analyses. The difficulty is that as the emerging stereotypes of abused women as 'powerless victims' and of batterers as multi-problem deviants are disseminated to the public, a pervasive sense of estrangement results. Victim and abuser are viewed as isolates and grotesques, and not as persons for whom recognition is a first step toward a collective solution (Stark, Flitcraft & Frazier, 1979).

It is important to examine the Newtonian influences on the theories of spouse abuse, as this will reveal the limitations which then feed into problem management in this area. It is not the intention in this chapter to examine in detail all the available theoretical studies on spouse abuse that exists at present. The aim herein is to present an overview of the central theories that emerge from a review of the literature, so as to acquaint the reader with the prominent frameworks of thought in the domain under study. The broad outline offered below will adhere to the systemisation developed by Gelles and Straus (1979).
3.2. Intra-Individual Theories

3.2.1. Introduction

John Stuart Mill's (cited in Dutton, 1988) attribution of wife assault to the 'mean and savage natures' of some men typifies nineteenth-century explanations of human behaviour. Actions were attributed to an inferred construct residing within the person, referred to as 'nature'. Explanations of wife abuse disappeared for a century after Mill's essay which was published in 1869, possibly for the reason that if no social problem was detected, there was nothing to explain.

The few cases that were brought to the attention of the authorities were exceptional in that nothing short of extreme abuse was regarded as noteworthy, or else the issue of marital violence was revealed in the psychiatric treatment of individuals who presented with other psychological problems.

3.2.2. Violence 'Caused' by the Male Partner

The theories that were formulated on the basis of this selective viewing tended to explain violence in terms of some characteristics of the individual actor. The focus on individual causative deficiencies could have been further influenced by society's search for 'abnormal' scapegoats as a means of explaining the 'incongruence' of violence in the supposed sanctuary of the family (Steinmetz, 1987).

Theories discussed psychopathological violence caused by factors such as poor impulse control, sadism,
psychopathic personality types, brain maturation lag, genetic predispositions to violence and temporal lobe epilepsy (Elliot, 1977; Lederberg, 1973). The role of alcohol and/or drugs as disinhibiting factors that release the violent 'tendencies' in men are also stressed within single-factor explanations of abuse (Snell, Rosenwald & Robey, 1964).

3.2.3. The Influence of the Newtonian Thought-Frame

It is apparent from the above section that the intra-individual theories of spouse abuse adhere to a Newtonian/linear thought-frame. The various quests for particular 'causes' within the individuals under study are problematic in that:

a) They offer a linear view of the male actor. For example, it could be argued that the ascription of causal power to alcohol and/or drug misuse in the arena of marital violence is too simplistic a view to be of much theoretical value. Surely, not all men who drink/use drugs abuse their partners. Gelles and Straus (1979) state that rather than seeing alcohol as being the direct cause of abuse, they suggest that "some men get drunk to give them an excuse to hit their spouses" (p. 561);

b) they are reductionistic. The complexity of the abusive male is lost in the process of reducing him to a number of internal mechanisms which operate largely beyond his control;
c) they offer a decontextualised view of the male actor. As noted in Chapter 2, when entities are viewed out of context, it becomes easy to view them as having causal attributes (Bogdan, 1984). The external observer may, for example, view a pattern of communicative behaviour which he/she terms 'sadism'. However, when this descriptive term is removed from the context of a relationship pattern, the temptation is to view violence as being directly 'caused' by 'sadism'. In this usage of the word, 'sadism' takes on a thinglike or concrete existence. There is in effect logical mistyping, where a higher order explanation (sadism) is offered for lower-order behaviour (a man hitting his wife). The difficulty is that in most of the theories presented, the researchers act as if this confusion of logical types has not occurred. Therefore, the explanations are presented as if they are, in fact, the behaviours (Keeney, 1983; Stulberg, 1989).

3.2.4. The Woman is to Blame

Newtonian influences of the above type are not limited to the research on the abusive male, as researchers attempted to investigate the personality profiles of the abused women themselves. The search for 'defects' in the abusive man, and then later in the abused woman, is in itself indicative of the adherence to Newtonian logic. As discussed in Chapter 2, the either/or logic of the linear epistemology leads to the creation of blame systems. When adhering to a dualistic thought-frame, it follows that if
the 'fault' for the violence does not reside 'in' the male perpetrator, then the violence must be caused by the woman.

After observing that women repeatedly returned to their abusive husbands, only to receive more violence, psychologists concluded that there must be a flaw in the women's personality development (Walker, 1981). The picture that emerged from personality studies on the abused woman was that of a cautious, subdued, isolated, inadequate, timid and indecisive woman who had a 'disordered personality' (Gellen, Hoffman, Jones & Stone, 1984). Findings of this nature could degenerate into confusing and circular reasoning due to the near impossibility of determining whether the identified attributes of the women played a causal role in the abuse, or alternatively, could be seen as behavioural effects that arose from the trauma of the violence.

The feminists contend the focus on the abused woman is unwarranted, as it could lead to victim blaming, and exonerate the male from responsibility for the abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

3.2.5. The Problems with the Linear Concept of 'Masochism'

The psychodynamic concept of masochism is particularly controversial as it appears to sanction violence against women by the implicit insinuation that women remain in violent relationships because of a motivational need for punishment. The underlying
assumptions of the theories of masochism include the following:

a) A battered woman both enjoys and needs to be abused;
b) the woman provokes attacks and/or capitulates to assaultive relationships because of her need to suffer;
c) abuse is endured because of deep intrapsychic conflicts common to all women. Thus the woman who engages in a sustained battering relationship is thought to be manifesting neurotic conflict (Koslof, 1984).

This type of psychodynamic rationalisation clearly adheres to a mechanistic view of reality, which implies a rigorous determinism. In fact, Capra (1982) noted that in Classical Freudian psychology, every psychological event has a definite cause and gives rise to a definite effect, and the whole psychological state of an individual is uniquely determined by 'initial conditions' in early childhood. The 'genetic' approach of psychoanalysis consists of tracing the symptoms and behaviour of a patient back to previous development stages along a linear chain of cause-and-effect relations (p. 189).

Capra's (1982) contentions are clearly borne out in the psychodynamic view of masochism. The process in which the woman is injured is generally described within a field over which she is presumed to have decision-making responsibility, as if it resulted from her deliberate
praxis. In the same breath however, her praxis is defined as pathological, as a 'weakness' that must be treated, suppressed or otherwise removed. Following a Newtonian logic, the woman is split up into various parts, which then impact on each other in a predictable cause-and-effect chain of events. In a sense, the woman's personhood is acknowledged as itself symptomatic of a more profound disorder.

Pressure from outraged feminists led to the removal of the diagnosis of 'masochistic personality disorder' from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. It is debatable whether the new label of 'self defeating personality disorder' will prove to be a less provocative term which does not lead to similar problems experienced with the misuse of the previous label (Steinmetz, 1987).

3.2.6. Discussion

The mental illness explanation of wife abuse is still popular today, despite greater public understanding of the complexity of the problem. Underlying the interest in compiling profiles of the actors in the violent relationship appears to be the linear thought that if the cause of this violent 'disease' is made apparent, then a cure would quickly follow. Most clinicians working in this field no longer hold out such hope, understanding instead that when a high proportion of the population exhibits a behaviour, it would be simplistic to reduce the 'cause' to
individual aberrations. What is perhaps needed is a more complex understanding of the spouse abuse than is offered by reductionistic explanations of marital violence.

Steinmetz (1987) noted that a major drawback to intra-individual explanations is that they have generally been based on small non-representative clinical samples that lack control groups. Further, the focus on the individual has resulted in a decontextualised view of abuse (where violence has been abstracted from social settings), which could in turn result in victim blaming. For Gelles and Straus (1979), the drawbacks of the intra-individual approach can be summarised as a combination of inadequate scientific evidence to support the theory and the confusion which arises as a result of the inability of the theory to adequately explain which abnormal personality traits are associated with violence, as well as the circularity of using acts of violence as indicators of mental illness (p.561).

Dissatisfaction with the intra-individual theoretical approach as an adequate explanatory model, has lead to increased research in the social-psychological theoretical sphere.
3.3. Social-Psychological Theories

3.3.1. Introduction

Social-psychological explanations of violence and abuse examine the interaction or interdependence between individuals and their social environment, which include interpersonal relationships and interactions with groups and organisations (Gelles, 1980; Viljoen, 1987). In contrast to the intra-individual approaches to violence, the underlying assumption of this theoretical model is that an understanding of abusive relationships can be achieved by an examination of the nature of the social settings or situations within which the abuse occurs.

The majority of the social-psychological theories are based on learning theories, also referred to as behaviourism. As applied to spouse abuse, approaches based upon learning theories explore factors which reinforce violent behaviour and which makes violence more or less likely to occur. Further, there is an investigation of factors which induce the abused woman to remain in abusive relationships (Okun, 1986). Although important facets of the abusive relationship are explored, this section will reveal that the adherence to a behaviourist framework is limiting as it is entrenched within a linear and reductionistic epistemology.

The major theories to be discussed in this section emphasise frustration-aggression, social-learning, role-modelling, exchange and resources.
3.3.2. Frustration-Aggression Theory

Frustration-aggression theory views the expression of violence as a means to release the anger that the individual feels when some goal or intentional behaviour is blocked. Aggression is perceived as a response to frustration and therefore, as the product of learning rather than of an innate drive (Steinmetz, 1987).

The family is viewed as a likely arena for violence because of the presence of many frustrating events. Examples include uncertainties about child rearing, the allocation of roles and responsibilities, the intensity of involvement of the family members with each other and the 'right' of family members to influence each other (Viljoen, 1987). Stress which emanates from society at large also contributes to frustration, which in turn leads to aggression.

In sum, according to the frustration and aggression theories, the anger which is aroused in the individual because of the experienced frustrations, causes some 'unpleasantness' which the individual must remove (Viljoen, 1987).

3.3.2.1. Problems with the Frustration-Aggression Theory

The frustration and aggression theories are important in that the scope of analysis is extended to include the individual personality, family tensions and
societal problems. However, they are inherently reductionistic in that complex patterns of relationship are reduced to the presence or absence of 'anger', 'frustration', 'aggression' and 'stress'. As discussed earlier, the difficulty with the reductionistic analysis of complex behavioural phenomena is that it offers a decontextualised view of the marital relationship system. The explanations for violence are presented as if they are in fact the behaviours themselves. Thus, rather than just using 'frustration' as a description of what was perceived in the ongoing relationship between family members, it is viewed as 'causing' the violence to occur. A descriptive term therefore attains a concrete existence with causal attributes.

As will be seen in Chapter 4, treatment models which ascribe to this type of thinking have developed a variety of anger control treatments to aid the batterer in dealing with his anger. 'Anger' is again dealt with as an attribute which exists in its own right, rather than as referring to a pattern of communicative behaviour.

Another difficulty with the frustration-aggression theories is their inability to explain under what circumstances frustration leads to aggression. Perhaps a factor which hampers the outlook of the adherents of the frustration-aggression theories, is the lack of a clear delineation of what precisely amounts to 'frustration'. Moreover, although 'stress' may be hypothesised as a mediating factor between psychological and social levels,
it does not explain why similar stress affects people differently. When the issue of stress is approached theoretically, without an evaluation of concrete experience, the results verge on the tautological. Breines and Gordon (1983) note that such reasoning may lead to hypotheses with the following type of rationalisations:

a) The family encounters a high amount of stress;
b) it tends to be poorly equipped to handle stress; and
c) there is thus a great potential for frustration within the family (p. 514).

When violence is framed in the above terms, there is the tendency to view spouse abuse as the outgrowth of a somewhat impulsive linear process. In addition, when spouse abuse is defined in such narrow terms, valuable information is lost in the process of discarding information which does not appear to be 'appropriate' to the area under study. Complex phenomena are reduced to combinations of stimuli and responses. As will be seen in the next section of this chapter, the aforementioned problems appear to be inherent within the behaviourist approaches to human phenomena.

3.3.3. Social Learning and Role-Modelling Theories

Violence in men is viewed by social learning theorists as largely attributable to the interactional styles in the men's families of orientation, rather than as an innate personality characteristic. Bandura's (1973) theory of
modelling is frequently cited to explain the occurrence of violence within families, with the hypothesis that individuals learn the behaviour from being abused or observing abuse in their childhood homes. They then later reproduce these behaviours as adults. The social learning explanation suggests that abusive behaviour is influenced primarily by its social consequences. Those actions that are allowed and that elicit desired responses are maintained, while those that fail to elicit attention or reinforcement decrease in frequency (Bandura, 1973).

Walker and Browne (1985) contend that men who commit violence against their wives may have seen it successfully used as a coping mechanism by a male authority figure in childhood, and have developed learned behaviours that lead to the perpetuation of violence as a personal style of relating in adulthood. The witnessing of violence in the home is an implicit communication to the child that violence as a method of conflict resolution and/or as a coping mechanism is socially acceptable. The correlation between violent behaviour in adults and growing up in a violent home, is referred to as the cycle of violence or the intergenerational transmission of violence (Kalmuss, 1984).

3.3.3.1. The Man is to Blame

The difficulty with the above type of analysis lies again in the adherence to a dualistic epistemology in which someone has to be blamed for the violence. Following on
from this logic, the man is then singled out as the sole perpetrator, which in turn leads to an investigation of what 'causes' his behaviour. While the early experience of violence may indeed be a factor in the abusive male's praxis, the emphasis on the historical roots of his behaviour could result in the view that complex human interaction can be reduced to conditioned responses to external stimuli. Spouse abuse can thus be framed as a type of automatic response (without volitional control) on the man's part. A major difficulty with this mechanistic view of humankind lies in treating people as preprogrammed robots who respond in a predictable manner under certain conditions. The complexity of human phenomena is lost, and a meaningful choreography of events is reduced to predetermined outcomes (Auerswald, 1982). Unfortunately when adhering to a dualistic epistemology, it becomes all too easy to focus on just one of numerous possible variables, and in the process to neglect other issues which may also be useful in problem understanding and management. In the next section, the focus shifts away from the man, onto the woman. Again, the thrust of the research is on only one-half of an abusive relationship (Auerswald, n.d.).

3.3.3.2. Learned Helplessness

The family and society at large acts as a further training ground in traditional sex-role socialisation,
which leads to the justification of violence against women in order to maintain the traditional distribution of power. Sex-role socialisation also encourages a belief system known as learned helplessness on the part of the abused woman. Sex-role training that encourages girls to be passive and dependent seems to create a tendency toward a sense of helplessness. Learned helplessness refers to the process of learning to believe that nothing one can do will bring about a predictable positive result. Like the dogs in Seligman's (1975) laboratory experiments, a physically, sexually or psychologically abused woman who has experienced a series of painful, noncontingent attacks begins to perceive fewer and fewer options for dealing with and escaping the violence. Her major focus is on minimising injury and coping with pain and fear, and she does not have the opportunity to develop appropriate skills to escape the violence more proactively (Walker, 1984). Although Seligman's concept of learned helplessness does offer a metaphoric understanding of the plight of the abused woman, Walker's (1984) theory is a behaviourist one which is based on animal experimentation, and similar research has not been conducted on humans. Further, the theory relies on an over-simplified view of human learning and personality formation (Breines & Gordon, 1983).

Following the behaviourist approach, the abused woman is perceived in stimulus-response terms. In this way the woman is viewed as a passive recipient who is shaped solely by outside forces. When ascribing to a mechanistic view of
the abused woman, the perception of the woman as the 'victim' is realised. In fact, many feminists today regard this perception as being harmful to woman and have suggested that the term 'survivor' is more apt a description (Gondolf, 1988).

3.3.3.3. Discussion

Although social learning concepts such as modelling portray how deviant behaviour is learned and help explain the transmission of violence from parent to child, they do not fully explain why some men who witness violence as children do not grow up to batter their intimates, while others who did not come from abusive backgrounds later became violent. Breines and Gordon (1983) make the astute observation that the research which seeks to test the transmission of violence often fall prey to the 'clinical fallacy', where generalisations about abuse are based on studies on identified male abusers, with no control groups. Yet another criticism is lack of control for class and other variables which may well coexist with previous experiences of violence. Previously abused subjects in these studies are very likely to be poor, and to be classified as coming from 'multiproblem' families, and any of these other problems may in fact correlate with continuing violence more than with previous violent experience.
3.3.4. Exchange and Resource Theory

Another argument about conditions conducive to spouse abuse uses exchange theory which asserts that (marital) interaction is governed by the attempt to maximise rewards and minimise costs. Violence occurs when the costs are perceived by one individual as exceeding the rewards. In terms of exchange theory, women remain in abusive relationships because the cost of leaving the relationship is greater than the cost of staying.

Resource theory uses a similar market metaphor to understand spouse abuse. According to this theory, violence is assumed to be a more 'costly' resource which will be avoided unless 'cheaper' resources of power, such as prestige or wealth, are absent or depleted (Goode, 1971). This theory would explain why poor or low-status men are more often identified as wife beaters than are the wealthier and/or high status men.

3.3.4.1. Discussion

It is apparent from the above that both the exchange and resource theories are characterised by a fragmentary and reductionist approach that typifies Newtonian understandings of human phenomena. Again, complex phenomena are reduced to variables such as 'costs' and 'rewards', which are then assumed to govern the everyday transactions of people. What the adherents to the above theories forget, is that these variables are mere fragments of a whole ecological and social fabric. In addition, to
speak of people solely in terms of specified transactions tends to move towards inferring that there are particular traits within people which motivate them towards particular actions.

The above theories are difficult to operationalise, as resources and costs are difficult to compartmentalise from other factors and differences in families. These factors include personality, culture and degree of family conflict. The concepts of resource and exchange tend to view personal characteristics and aspects of relationships as commodities; as alienable and exchangeable possessions. Resource theory also legitimises the comparison of dissimilar factors, as it compares income against emotional dependency, for example (Breines & Gordon, 1983).

3.3.5. Conclusion

The social-psychological perspectives discussed above are important in that the focus of analysis includes the interaction between the individual and his/her environment. However, it is apparent that there are numerous shortcomings which are inherent to these perspectives due to the adherence to a linear epistemology. Spouse abuse is discussed in reductionistic and mechanistic terms, which again results in a decontextualised understanding of the issue.
3.4. **Sociocultural Theories**

3.4.1. Introduction

The review of the literature so far has concentrated on how violence has become part of the behavioural repertoire of the actors involved in a marital relationship. What follows in this section are perspectives which ascribe to the sociocultural, or sociological model of spouse abuse. According to these theories, violence is considered in the light of socially-structured inequality and cultural attitudes and norms of family relations. The concept of structural violence, for example, is used to explain socially structured inequality, where

on the societal level, institutional patterns and dynamics may be established and legitimated, resulting in phenomena such as poverty, discrimination, unemployment, illness, et cetera, which inevitably inhibit the development of some individuals and groups (Eekelaar & Katz, 1978, p.14).

It is apparent from the above quote that the sociocultural perspectives offer a broader level of analysis than the views discussed earlier in this chapter. Further, it will become increasingly evident from this section, that while the focus is no longer limited to the individual actors, the following understandings of spouse abuse are limited by their linear conceptualisations of the
problem under study.

Although there are numerous sociocultural perspectives on spouse abuse, only those considered by the present author to be the most pertinent have been selected for discussion. The major perspectives to be reviewed in this section are the feminist and systems views of spouse abuse.

3.4.2. Feminist Theory

As discussed in Chapter 1, the women's movement was largely responsible for the 'discovery' of spouse abuse. The feminist critique therefore occupies a central position in the theoretical and treatment field.

While no unitary definition of feminism exists, a basic tenet common to the range of feminist theories is that male-female relationships are structured by the unequal distribution of power based on gender (Bograd, 1984). The feminists contend that as the dominant class, men have differential access to important material and symbolic resources, while women are devalued as secondary and inferior. Male oppression is considered to be fundamental to violence against women. The batterer abuses his wife/partner, not so much to release his anger as he has been taught to do (as the empiricist position implies), but rather, for the same reason men exploit women in larger society and have beaten and discriminated against them throughout history - to keep them in their place (Lesse, 1979). Thus, the man abuses women to exert his
privilege of power. Dobash and Dobash (1979) noted that "The family historically has operated and continues to operate for the benefit of men and the state, and rarely for women" (p.21). A relationship of super subordination has therefore been institutionalised in the structure of the patriarchal family, and is supported by the economic, political and belief systems that make such relationships seem natural, morally just and sacred. Klein (1981) encapsulates the feminist position regarding spouse abuse in the following assertion:

As long as families remain microcosms of male domination and deposits for the injuries of class and racial domination, they will absorb social ills, converting the energies into personal and painful battles between women and men, thinly concealed by veneers of domestic harmony and romantic love (p.76-7).

3.4.2.1. Limitations of Feminist Perspectives

There is no doubt that the feminist movement has made, and is still in the process of making, a valuable contribution toward the elevation of the subordinate position of the woman in society throughout the world. While recognising its very worthwhile contributions, it must be noted that the feminist view offers a limited conceptualisation of marital violence. As discussed in Chapter 1, in their efforts to move away from a victim
blaming stance, the feminists focussed on the male as sole perpetrator. While this view may have achieved a useful political function at the time, the continued adherence to such a viewpoint is limiting in that

a) The focus is on only one side of the relationship. The feminists offer a decontextualised view of spouse abuse. The emphasis on the woman as the 'victim' may have the unwanted effect of ascribing a defeatist label to the very person who appears to be in need of empowerment. Further, the woman as the 'victim' does not explain why some women are able to leave the abusive relationship and turn to various helping agents, whilst others remain without ever leaving. In a sense the feminists obscure the women's own coping strategies;

b) the view is firmly locked within a system of blame, which (as seen in Chapter 2) is indicative of an adherence to a dualistic or linear epistemology. The difficulty with an either/or type of logic is that there is the tendency to take sides. This type of reasoning is very evident in feminist criticisms of systemic formulations of spouse abuse, where interactional understandings are dismissed as siding with the man against the woman, and therefore condoning the man's abusive behaviour (Bograd, 1986). What the feminist thinkers fail to realise is that a fixed view of the male feeds into the competitive, adversarial stance that the feminists contend exist between man and woman. Moreover, the consideration of both sides of the relationship does not necessarily mean condoning violence.
against the woman, or assuming that women in general have the same privileges or opportunities that men enjoy in patriarchal societies worldwide;
c) underlying the feminist perspective of spouse abuse is the reductionistic and objective view of power. When 'power' is discussed in decontextualised terms, the word begins to assume a thinglike existence which exerts a causal influence independently of relationship and ecological variables. Therefore to argue that sexism and/or power is the cause of abuse may be helpful in addressing polemics against the victim blamers, but does not advance theory or strategy. In addition, feminists are unable to answer why some men are able to avoid becoming batterers. Neither do they explain the (albeit more rare) occurrence of husband battering.

3.4.3. Systems Theory
3.4.3.1. Introduction

Spouse abuse has only recently been addressed in the major works of the family systems literature. It would appear that systems theorists tend to stay clear of this particular facet of human phenomena because of the very linear presentation of the manifesting problem. The few theorists that do venture into this field tend to be identified under the general guise of 'family systems approaches', and are eclectic in nature and lack conceptual rigour (Bograd, 1986). The views expressed tend towards
discussions of family structure and process, without being contained by an explicit overarching theoretical framework.

A review of the systems theoretical literature on spouse abuse reveals there are a number of general assumptions which inform most of the work in this area. The term 'systems theories' in this section of the dissertation, refers to the views which adhere to paradigms c) and d) of Auerswald's (1987) paradigmatic breakdown that was presented in Chapter 1 (p.27).

In general, systems theorists in the field of family violence view the family as a goal-seeking, purposive and adaptive social system. Violence is seen as serving a functional role in the maintenance of the family system, and family members are perceived as being equally influential participants who perpetuate the dysfunctional system. Violence is seen as occurring in family systems which are characterised by certain relationship structures, and spouse abuse is viewed as the product of an interactional context which is characterised by repetitive behavioural sequences. As most of the systems theories on spouse abuse are framed within the above parameters, only a few have been selected for more detailed discussion.

3.4.3.2. Straus's Systems View of Spouse Abuse

Straus's (1973) general systems model of family violence was the first theoretical application of a systems perspective in this area. He outlines a 'general system'
for domestic violence in the form of a flowchart that illustrates the interactive effects of conflict in the family, violence in society, family socialisation in violence, violence integrated into personality, cultural norms legitimising violence between family members and sexual inequality in society. He attempts to move away from the then popular focus on individual pathology, and views violence as a system product or output, mediated through positive feedback processes which produces escalating spirals of violence. The factors which could influence the escalation of violence include the following:

a) Whether the act of violence is consistent with the actor's and systems goals;
b) role expectations of the victim;
c) high community tolerance for violence;
d) low power of the victim.

Negative feedback processes, such as public knowledge of the violence, are described in terms of either dampening or maintaining the occurrence of violence.

3.4.3.3. Linear Limitations of Straus's View

Straus's theory employs a homeostatic view of family functioning, and is thus a first-order cybernetic view of human functioning. Although his work is important in terms of widening the focus away from the individual actors, it has a mechanistic quality which is characterised by:
reducing each factor to a variable with unique and nonambiguous meaning and then representing the linear interaction of these variables in graphic form (Breines & Gordon, 1983, p.509)

An obvious difficulty with Straus's broad systems analysis is that it tends to obscure individual differences. For example, if society condones violence, then why do some violent men feel guilty about hurting their wives, and why do other men ignore the problem completely? Another difficulty with his theory is the conceptualisation of violence in terms of serving a kind of homeostatic function. When individuals are perceived as operating in 'service' of family homeostasis, it becomes easy to think of homeostasis as a concrete entity which exerts a causal influence on family members. Thus, while ostensibly working within a non-linear epistemology, the use of the concept of homeostasis in this manner paves the way for the perception of causal dualisms, and reifies a descriptive concept.

3.4.3.4. The Function of Abuse

Hoffman (1981) also looked at family violence in terms of its functionality to the family system. Still firmly entrenched in first-order cybernetics, she attempts to link battering with the relational structure of the overadequate woman with that of an underadequate man. Violence in this context is seen as a means of
re-equilibrating the relationship.

Weitzman and Dreen (1982) in a similar formulation to Hoffman's, suggests the abused woman and the abusive man are in an enforced complementary relationship in which one partner is superior and primary, while the other is inferior and secondary. Again, violence is seen as a homeostatic mechanism that re-equilibrates the relationship system.

3.4.3.5. Problems with the Systems Views on Spouse Abuse

A review of the above, and indeed other systems theories of spouse abuse reveal a reliance on a homeostatic conceptualisation of the family as a means of explaining the manifestation of regularised violence within the family (Cook & Franz-Cook, 1984; Erchak, 1984). Although these perspectives were intended to be representative of systemic or circular analyses of the problem under study, the views contain linear conceptualisations indicative of an adherence to the traditional, mechanistic epistemology. Causal attribution is given to factors that are temporally prior to the violence and defined as having a unidirectional influence on its occurrence (Bograd, 1984). Hoffman's (1981) description of the man and woman in terms of predetermined roles, for example, is reductionistic and further presumes that the relationship structure between men and women operate in very narrowly defined ways.

Systems theories of spouse abuse have also received
widespread criticism from the feminist quarter. The feminists accuse the systems theorists of being reductionists. Their contention is that a broad-based historical social problem is reduced to a matter of family dynamics. The focus on the relationship structures of the family, and/or the construction of violence in terms of its functionality, is slated on the grounds that firstly, it minimises the battering as an act of unacceptable violence towards women; and secondly, women are implicitly blamed for the violence. Feminists question the systems description of family interaction as that of transactions between equal participants. As Breines and Gordon (1983) notes:

The empiricist sociologist's differences with many feminists begin with their reluctance to make a synthetic interpretation of the role of male supremacy in establishing conditions for violence (p.510).

Central to the feminist's understanding of wife battering is the belief that men abuse women primarily because of the socially sanctioned male need to exploit, control and oppress women. The 'neutral' descriptions of the systems theorists is therefore perceived as evidence of gender-bias which clouds a full understanding of the problem.
3.4.3.6. Who has Got the Power?

This question forms the crux of the contention between the feminist and systems thinkers in the area of spouse abuse. Some systems theorists, following Gregory Bateson (1972) have tried to do without a concept of power. According to Bateson (1972), lineal control is impossible. He explains:

... usually when systemic pathology occurs, the [family] members blame each other, or sometimes themselves. But the truth of the matter is that both these alternatives are fundamentally arrogant. Either alternative assumes that the individual human being has total power over the system of which he or she is a part (p.438).

Systems thinkers following Bateson thus maintain that a complementary system should never be described in terms of the relative power of its constituents (Luepnitz, 1988). For Bateson (1972) the notion of power amounts to an error in thinking, in that it generates pathology and harms the flexibility of an ecosystem.

On the other hand, feminists hold the view that the man hits the woman because he is more powerful both physically and in terms of societal sanctioning of his behaviour. Dell (1989) notes that feminists contend that the failure to address power differences in a patriarchal
society is "to deny inequality" (p.3).

Dell (1989) addresses the systemic notion of power from another perspective. He argues that when Bateson spoke of power and lineal control, Bateson was speaking in the domain of scientific explanation, whereas most people (the feminists included) speak in the realm of description and experience (Dell, 1986b). The difference between experience and explanation according to Dell (1986a) is as follows:

Explanation takes place in a metadomain with respect to experience. Explanation provides reason for, or cause of, that which we experience. As such, explanation must always be meta to experience... experience is constitutively instructive or lineal (p.517).

Therefore, according to Dell (1986a, 1989), from a experiential point of view, it is valid to say the man has power over his spouse. However, from an explanatory point of view, this reasoning would be invalid. Dell (1989) notes it is important that the mutual - causal, systemic explanations of spouse abuse do not obscure the reality of the violent acts of family members. According to a feminist writer perhaps a 'non-linear' statement of the 'power' problem might be stated best as follows: "Women do participate in their own abuse, but not as equals" (Luepnitz, 1988, p.73).
3.5. Conclusion

It is clear that since its discovery as a social problem in the 1970s, the arena of spouse abuse has been under scrutiny from numerous quarters. Attempts by various research fields to paint a unified picture of battering by aggregating familial and personality characteristics into portraits of 'typical' actors in the violent marital dyad have been largely linear, reductionistic and unrewarding. It would also seem that the actual variety of abused women is simply too great to fit the profile that emerges from personality research of the 'victim' as helpless, ineffectual, and masochistic. The image of the typical 'batterer' as an inarticulate, frustrated man who is unhappy at work, economically insecure and easily angered, who resents his wife and children, abuses alcohol and was severely battered as a child, amounts to a parody of what a batterer should look like.

Aside from the methodological problems that attempt to generalise from discrete data, the high statistical incidence in the general population of problems associated with abuse, such as divorce, alcoholism, drug addiction, depression and so forth, could suggest what the researchers call the 'violent family' is really not the aberrant subtype it is made out to be.

The search for factors peculiar to 'violence' has made the theoretical, and, as will be seen in the next chapter, the field of treatment and intervention, a highly
specialised one that has still not 'hit' on the correct recipe for resolving the problem under scrutiny. It will be seen that the shortcomings of linear conceptualisations of spouse abuse feed into the area of problem management.
4.1. Introduction

Although slow in coming, there is a growing recognition of the important role health care and human service providers can play in family violence. Social services, family counselling agencies, as well as private practitioners, are beginning to treat the battering couple in ever-increasing numbers. Service providers have begun to search for effective intervention programmes as a means of meeting the particular needs of battered women and their families. Although there have been improvements in intervention strategies, the field is still developing.

Because society has largely ignored the problem of wife-beating, community services are often not available for either battered women or their abusive partners. When community resources do provide for formal intervention, the trend in most cases is to focus primarily on the emergency needs of the 'victim' and secondly, and more rarely, to attempt to rehabilitate the 'abuser'. Most interventions, however, occur on a nonprogrammatic basis carried out by various human service professionals. The latter include the police department, personnel working in hospital emergency rooms and emergency contacts such as friends, clergymen, family, family doctors and psychologists.
4.2. Nonprogrammatic Sources of Intervention

The prominence of the nonprogrammatic sources of intervention is hardly surprising when it is realised that most cases of spouse abuse are brought to public attention when families are in crisis. It is usually the woman who motivates for external intervention, only to be frustrated by the standard forms of legal, judicial and medical assistance. Of all the nonprogrammatic sources of help to which the women turn, it is generally the police who are most likely to be contacted first.

4.2.1. Police Intervention Into Spouse Abuse

Law enforcement officials are often the first resource contacted by women who are in need of protection from their abusive husbands, assistance in obtaining medical services, or information on their rights and on relevant legal procedures (McShane, 1979). The police are often called on for help in cases of family violence because they are the only agency available on a 24-hour basis with a supposedly good response time when other agencies are closed. Further, the police are the only professionals with the requisite legal authority to remove an offending party if need be (Freeman, 1980). There is also the notion that it is easy to talk to policemen who tend to accept the conflict situation at face value. The abusive couple may prefer a 'matter-of-fact' approach to the more probing approaches of social workers or psychologists, for example (Gondolf, 1988).
4.2.1.1. Problems with Police Intervention

Unfortunately, despite this apparent reliance on police intervention, police have traditionally regarded instances of domestic violence as private disturbances, and are reluctant to intervene when called upon to do so. Their role (if and when they do arrive) is generally to pacify the situation, and recreate domestic order (Banks, 1984). Banks (1984) notes that there are several other factors which tend to deter police from more effective intervention. These factors include police awareness that:

a) Family disputants often assault the responding police officer. McGrath (1979) notes that a large proportion of police fatalities and injuries occurs while handling family violence situations;

b) often, one or both of the disputants will drop charges. Police therefore feel that intervention will be futile;

c) the courts traditionally move toward reconciliation. The underlying philosophy at work appears to be one which encourages the protection of the family unit at all costs.

The police are also required to make a clear assessment as to whether the situation constitutes a family 'dispute', or 'domestic violence'. A family dispute does not legally constitute a crime, while the latter does. As a lieutenant-colonel of the South African Police notes: "If somebody is giving his wife a hiding and no crime is involved, the policeman's hands are tied" (cited in van Wyk, 1984, p.46). The problem with this type of
rationalisation is that it is not legally correct as the law of 'moderate chastisement' (provided for in common law), was scrapped in 1950 and is no longer acceptable. In fact, the current legal understanding is that "even the threat of force accompanied by a reasonable fear that the threat will be carried out is sufficient to amount to the crime of assault" (van Wyk, 1984, p.46). The way for police action is therefore legally open, but arrests are not only rare, but also appear to be deliberately avoided by most policemen. Langley and Levy (1978) note that in fact police are trained not to make arrests in cases of family violence, and view intervention in this area as an unwanted part of their jobs. McShane (1979) asserts that many officers fail to provide women with accurate information regarding legal procedures for pressing charges. Women are often advised that pressing charges will just lead to further trouble.

4.2.1.2. Conclusion

The nature of police intervention, as it currently exists, is therefore fraught with difficulties, not the least of which is the threat of increased violence once the police leave the family. The precise function of police intervention in family violence is poorly defined. They seem to assume the ambiguous role of law enforcer who is called to the situation as an agent of social control, and who then dons the cap of lay therapist. Perhaps they should concentrate on the criminal aspects of family
violence and refer the disputants to helping agencies specialised in dealing with conflict of this form. Another alternative which is currently becoming increasingly popular is to augment the traditional training of police officers with specific skills which would enhance their effectiveness when dealing with domestic violence (Banks, 1984).

4.2.2. Legal and Judicial Services

In addition to law enforcement services, abused women often seek legal and judicial services for assistance with separation or divorce proceedings or to prosecute husbands for battering. A frequent difficulty experienced in this area is a financial one. In most cases, free legal aid services are refused on the grounds that the husband's income makes them ineligible. Their only alternative here is to hire a private attorney, an expense few women can afford.

Van Wyk (1984) notes that the woman may also turn to the court for protection. She may, for example, request a Magistrate's Court to enforce that her husband keep the peace in terms of Section 384 of the Criminal Procedure Act of 1955. If the man ignores the court order, then he may be charged with contempt of court. If he is arrested for the latter or charged with assault, he may be released on bail pending the hearing. If he is found guilty, he may be given a fine or a suspended sentence (Van Wyk, 1984). It
appears that in most instances, the legal system does not seem to consider domestic violence as a serious crime which requires the husband be placed behind bars. Women therefore usually drop charges against the husband when they realise the legal system offers them little protection.

4.2.3. Medical Services

This avenue of intervention is generally closed to the abused woman, as she tends to avoid medical assistance because of embarrassment and/or fear of revealing the source of her injuries. On the other side of the coin, medical professionals may either fail to explore the cause of injuries sufficiently, or even try to play down the seriousness of the situation (McShane, 1979).

The hospital emergency room provides the abused woman with another venue for possible identification and referral. The problem is that most medical institutions lack specific policies of how to deal with spouse abuse, and thus tend to patch her up and send her home without further investigation (Higgins, 1978).

4.2.4. Friends, Foes and Clergymen

Another important nonprogrammatic source for both of the abusive couple are members of their family, friends, family priests, or even just acquaintances in their neighbourhood. Research suggests, however, that the woman is often isolated from family and friends, because of her partner's efforts to keep her isolated and dependent.
(Mitchell & Hodon, 1983). The woman may feel hesitant and embarrassed about approaching friends and family. Even if her social circle is aware of the situation, the woman's apparent reluctance to 'open up' may reinforce the belief that her difficulties form part of a 'private' matter between her and her partner. Family members and friends could also become frustrated with the woman when she does not leave her husband/mate.

Frustrations with the woman could in turn lead to 'victim blaming'. For example, 'she probably secretly enjoys being beaten up'. Women may confide their problems to their clergymen, who may lack adequate training with regard to effective counselling in this area, and may in fact add insult to injury by framing the untenable situation as the women's particular 'cross to bear' in her marriage (Higgins, 1978; Mcshane, 1979).

4.3. Programmatic Sources of Intervention

Neidig, Friedman and Collins (1985) assert that the vast majority of the treatment and rehabilitation programmes found in this area, are "devoted largely to rescue, separation, and individual rehabilitation" (p.465). A common feature of the bulk of intervention programmes in the treatment of spouse abuse is the segregation of the client population by gender. Intervention, then, is conceived of in individual/sexually-separated terms. Indeed, the conceptualisation of treatment in
relationship /contextual terms is not only frowned upon, but also considered irresponsible and sexually prejudiced (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

As seen in Chapter 3, transactional analyses of the battering duo are criticised primarily on the basis that such a view tends to lead to victim blaming and minimisation of her experience. As the woman is portrayed in terms of her 'victim' status, programmes designed to empower her are viewed as crucial to her 'recovery'. The male partner is viewed as the sole perpetrator of the violence, and therefore it is he who is singled out as the variable which needs to change in the family equation. When the field of treatment is pervaded by such assumptions it is small wonder that family therapists have tended to keep a low profile. The latter situation is slowly beginning to change, however, with more and more family therapists coming out of the treatment closet.

Of all the programmatic interventions that are currently available to abused women, it is the shelter movement which is given the highest priority.

4.3.1. The Role of Shelter Services

One of the most important outcomes of the feminist 'discovery' of spouse abuse in the 1970s, was the creation of the shelter movement. Once the private suffering of the women was transformed into a public problem, it became increasingly evident that battered women had special needs which traditional social resources could not meet. Some of
the objectives are becoming broader in that the 'victim' services include temporary financial assistance, day care for children, counselling and protective services. Feminists contended that the most urgent requirement of battered women was a place of refuge which protected them from further violence. To this end, shelters or places of refuge were established in America in the 1970s. They were set up primarily by grassroots activist organisations (Tierney, 1982).

Shelters initially operated on the premise of women supporting women as women, rather than professionals helping clients find solutions to problems. In fact the shelter movement was essentially founded on the notion that building an 'alternative community' for the isolated battered women was a 'treatment' in itself (Gondolf, 1988). While each shelter has unique characteristics, most operate with a female, feminist-oriented staff and/or volunteers. Abuse is perceived as being a deeply embedded social problem that could only be redressed by social change. The thrust of intervention therefore is not only the provision of care and emotional support to the woman, but also aimed at increasing her awareness of the social circumstances of her abuse. Ultimately, the feminists contend that what is needed is for the women to be 'empowered'; that is, mobilised to challenge their subjection and take charge of their lives.
4.3.1.1. Programme Goals of Shelters

The current programme goals of most shelters today include:

a) The provision of immediate and effective relief. The use of crisis telephone services fulfils the woman's need to be able to reach out to someone in a time of trouble, even if this just amounts to the ventilation of her distress;

b) The provision of a safe and secure environment for abused women and their children. Shelters may or may not provide all of the women's material needs. In those cases where these are not available directly, the shelter staff attempts to provide ready access to the social services available in the community;

c) The provision of self-development programmes for women, in the form of emotional support and peer counselling, that will encourage their self-determination;

d) The provision of information on women's legal rights, welfare and court advocacy, and to explore future life goals. The provision of information is important in that the woman is able to determine her own future by considering all the options open to her (Gondolf, 1988; Lewis, 1983; Neidig & Friedman, 1984; Van Wyk, 1984).

4.3.1.2. Crisis Intervention

Most shelters also run crisis hotlines as part of their service. Counsellors attempt to frame the caller's situation in ways that promote rapid and constructive
intervention, and the quick mobilisation of community resources. Another aim of the crisis hotlines is to help the clients focus on the stressful situation, and during a short time of intensive intervention, to learn new coping methods (Gondolf, 1988).

4.3.1.3. Group Counselling

Self-help, or peer counselling groups are important components of programmes for abused women. The rationale underlying group work is that the abused woman needs to make meaningful contact with other abused women. This contact will help to reduce her feeling of isolation and helplessness, as she begins to realise she is not alone; other women have experienced and overcome similar problems. Another important aim of group work is the hope that the women will form an emotional support system which they can fall back on in times of need. Such a support system can also fulfil material needs, like babysitting, or cash assistance in times of emergency (Roberts, 1984).

4.3.1.4. Individual Counselling

Individual counselling is used extensively by lay volunteers. Emphasis is placed on the development of short term realistic goal setting. The woman's life options are explored. Essentially, the woman is seen to have three options:
a) She may sever the relationship with her male partner;
b) she may remain in the relationship, and maintain the status quo; or
c) she may remain in the relationship, but want to change it (Lewis, 1983).

Together, the counsellor and the woman explore the various options that appear to be most viable.

4.3.1.5. Conflict between Counsellor and Client

The problem is that there is often a discrepancy between the views of the helpers and the clients, as to what goal the woman should strive toward. While the ostensible purpose of the shelter itself is the provision of a 'free space' for battered women (that is a place where the woman can reach a non-pressured decision about her alternatives), both the radical and liberal feminists in the shelter movement stress divorce and separation in their writing and political work (McGrath, 1979; Neidig et al, 1984). Therefore, the woman's decision to return home to her husband is viewed by helpers as a 'failure'; in fact some shelters have a policy of not admitting women who seek help at the shelter a second time. As McGrath (1979) notes:

For a woman who is confused and frightened, the feeling that the shelter movement's 'hidden agenda' is the destruction of the nuclear family in favour of a separatist 'women's autonomy' only worsens a bad situation. Calls for armed self-
defence and retaliatory murder, while rhetorically stimulating and for some women truly the last resort, are in general alienating and wildly impractical (p.26).

The conflict between the clients and the helpers is then a semantic one; namely, that most of the clients view the shelter as a place for temporary refuge, while the helpers view the shelters as a means to permanent independence. The description of the shelters as a 'free space' then is essentially a misnomer, as they are structured within an overarching (feminist) epistemological framework.

4.3.1.6. Peer Counselling

Another contentious issue is the use of peer counsellors in the treatment of battered women in shelters. Many of these counsellors are abused women themselves. Some service providers hold the view that the emotional trauma of the battered woman is so severe that she needs professional intervention. On the other side of the coin is the view that peer counselling is more effective as the women view each other as equals, and through the sharing of fears and strengths empower each other (Roberts, 1984). In most shelters worldwide, however, there is increased intervention from family service and mental health professionals rather than the reliance on peer counselling.
According to Gondolf (1988) the "abuse 'victim' has consequently become a new population to 'treat', rather than advocate for or empower" (p.1-2). This new development appears to have been spurred on by the needs of the clientele who have tended to 'resist' the feminist approach. Also the increased pressure for funds and accountability forced a number of shelters to adopt a more conventional agency structure. Many shelters in both Britain and America have begun to evolve into multiservice centres with professional staff assuming leadership in place of feminist lay counsellors (Gondolf, 1988).

Before moving on to look at interventions aimed at the abusive partner, a brief discussion ensues of the emergence of a 'new' treatment population in shelters. This population constitutes the children of the battered women who seek refuge in the shelters. Very little attention has been given to the needs of these young people, as most or indeed all of the interventions have been aimed at the women.

4.3.2. Children in Shelters

The children are all too often viewed as 'uninvolved' bystanders. Studies have revealed, however, that children in shelters are in a state of crisis. Their normal coping patterns and support systems are disrupted. They have experienced the loss of the significant male figure in their life, as well the loss of friends, school and home environment (Pfouts, Schopler, & Henley, 1982). The
children in shelters have been variously described as anxious, withdrawn and depressed (Hughes, 1982; Pfouts et al, 1982). The women may be anxious and afraid, but at least have the opportunity to make informed choices, a luxury denied to the children who are kept out of the decision-making process.

Some shelter programmes have begun to design interventions specifically for children. There are, however, a variety of problems which arise when working with children in shelters. They include:
a) The treatment population is transient; families vary in their length of stay;
b) there is a large variation in the ages of the children;
c) there is generally a shortage of suitably qualified staff;
d) appropriate locations for treatment is difficult to find (Hughes, 1982).

The most popular treatment choice is group work, as it allows shelter workers to deal with a large number of children in a brief period. Group work also allows children to express fears to others who are facing similar difficulties (Walker, 1979). Broadly, the goals of treatment are to provide the children with an opportunity to:
a) Experience emotional support from others to enable them to come to grips with the difficulties they face;
b) learn to identify and to express feelings;
c) learn problem solving skills; and
d) learn modes of healthy coping behaviours (Hughes, 1982; Pfouts et al, 1982).

The unhappy state of the children in shelters seems to lend credence to the necessity of conceptualising wife abuse as an indicator of dysfunction that affects every member of the family. A particular limitation of the shelter approach to treatment is the splitting up of the family into different treatment populations, which are then manoeuvred in a number of predetermined ways. The very way in which the interventions are structured, frames family members into fixed roles; the woman is seen as the helpless victim, the man as the dominating violent perpetrator, the children as uninvolved bystanders. The exclusion of the man from the shelter programmes sends the clear message to both the women and the children; namely, that the man is the problem in their family. Exclude him from the family equation, and all will be well.

4.3.3. Shelters in South Africa

As noted in Chapter 1, there are at present five shelters in South Africa. The shelters are run along very similar lines to those in the Western world. The shelters are privately funded, and generally run by lay volunteers. Crisis hotlines are run by trained counsellors, and women are provided with temporary refuge, and financial and emotional assistance. One of the major aims of the CABW is
to increase the number of shelters, and to provide more
effective support structures for the abused woman in the
community. Unfortunately, the emphasis is still on the
woman, with no equivalent support or counselling service

It is apparent that the emphasis on rescue and
separation as the most effective means of intervention into
family violence is underpinned by another important belief;
namely that the man is to be left out of intervention
strategies because he is incapable of change. This
assumption was apparently supported by the abusers’
resistance to any type of therapeutic intervention. In
fact most abusers denied that there was a problem at all
(Roberts, 1984). Recently, however, there has been a
general move by social workers and psychologists towards
the recognition of the abuser as being capable of change,
if he is motivated enough to enter a counselling programme.

4.4. Intervention With The Abusive Partner

Society’s response to men who batter has historically
been to condone, ignore or conceal their behaviour (Roy,
1982). In comparison to the many interventions designed
for the abused women, there are extremely few equivalent
programmes designed specifically for men. Roberts (1984,
p.86-8) lists a number of factors which could have
hindered the emergence of treatment programmes for abusive
men. Namely:
a) Since the 1970s, abused women have turned to public resources for help. Typically, abusive men have not only been silent about their role in family violence, but have also denied the problem exists;
b) until recently, there has been very little research done on the needs of abusive men. In fact, most of the information about abused men was gleaned indirectly from interviews with their spouses;
c) many of the feminist groups which established shelter programmes for women, were determined to give priority to meeting the needs of the victim. Shelter service providers began to realise, however, that the vast majority (40-69%) of shelter women returned home to their husbands. This realisation spurred some of the helpers to provide counselling for the men, or to refer them to an appropriate treatment programme.
d) some shelter staff were afraid that if men's treatment programmes were initiated, they would be competing directly with the women's programmes for financial support;
e) women's shelters were established within an already existing feminist infrastructure. The men's movement had to start from scratch, and thus, it took a lot longer for the self-help approach of men to surface;
f) it was difficult to overcome the prevailing societal view that the abuser was incapable of change, as the violence was 'built' into his personality structure.

Prior to the growth of specific treatment programmes
for men, the majority of interventions aimed at the abusive male have been of the nonprogrammatic sort that were discussed earlier in this chapter. Interventions were primarily directed at insuring that police and legal actions were available for speedy intercession during violent episodes. Effective intervention was thus perceived in terms of adequately punishing the man for his actions. However, clinicians began to recognise that punishment in the form of fines and/or imprisonment tended to result in increased stresses on the family and resentment in the abuser who then resorted to violence as a retaliatory measure (Waldo, 1987). It became apparent that what was needed was a less punitive, and more therapeutic approach to dealing with the abusive partner. In the latter half of the 1970s in America, the lack of appropriate services for men was further criticised by the emerging men's movement. This movement disdained the 'macho' view of the male sex, and asserted the right to express their feelings and emotions. They also demanded the right to participate with social agencies in the formulation of policies and treatment alternatives for men (Bern & Bern, 1984; Roy, 1982).

4.4.1. Types of Programmes for Men

With the impetus of these various forces at work, a number of programmes aimed at treating the abusive male came into being. Gondolf (1987) suggests there are
currently three major types of programmes, based on differences in affiliations, formats and orientation. This includes counselling under the auspices of mental health and family services, adjuncts to women’s shelters, and self-help organisations or men’s anti-sexism collectives. The grassroots self-help programmes have similar goals to the feminist organisations, in that they stress anti-sexist analysis and resocialisation of the batterer. The family service programmes tend to be more clinically orientated, and emphasise psychological assessment and anger management. There has been increasing support for the latter type of programme (Roberts, 1984).

While a variety of methods exists, the principal model is based on Social Learning Theory of Aggression. This framework suggests that as violence is a learned behaviour, people are capable of behavioural change by acquiring non-violent methods of coping with anger and stress. Most programmes for abusive men believe that the facilitation of timely crisis intervention is necessary. The broad aims of most of the men’s programmes include the following (Gondolf, 1988; Roberts, 1984):

a) The development of an explicit treatment goal, as this provides a foundation on which the counsellor and client can formulate a plan for change, and a means of measuring progress;

b) there is a stress on client accountability, that is the man must take responsibility for his actions. This practice conveys the message to the client that he does have control
over his behaviour, and can therefore change it of his own volition;

c) the acquisition of improved communication skills, to enable non-violent conflict resolution. The format of most programmes is very structured, with the counsellor taking a very directive stance. The latter is considered to be important as the counsellor is perceived as fulfilling the dual function of setting limits, and serving as a role model;

d) the education of men regarding the dynamics of battering and the volitional control of anger; most programmes use various forms of anger control techniques, (for example, the 'walkout' rule, where the man leaves the stressful situation rather than resorting to violence), and stress management skills (Bern & Bern, 1984).

4.4.2. Types of Counselling

Although most programmes do encourage individual counselling, group treatment is stressed as the most important part of the treatment. Group work is perceived as providing the individual with the opportunity to decrease his social isolation, and to enhance his usually poor interpersonal skills. Moreover, group treatment sensitises men to the fact that their experiences are not unique, and that change is possible. While there are variations between groups, the most common techniques used are role-play and gestalt exercises, to assist the men in
identifying and expressing feelings; cognitive restructuring (practising new 'internal' dialogue) and homework exercises such as 'time-out', the anger diary, and individualised relaxation techniques (Roy, 1982). The salient feature of group process is to move the men toward accepting new norms such as 'it's o.k. to be angry, but it's not o.k. to be violent'. Other presenting problems such as alcohol and drug abuse are referred elsewhere. The entire focus of group work is on issues which relate to the use of the violence.

4.4.3. Success of Men's Programmes

It is difficult to estimate how successful men's programmes are in combating family violence, as very little longitudinal research has been conducted in this area. Stulberg (1989) states that many therapy groups for men who hit their wives report low rates of effectiveness and high rates of recidivism.

4.4.4. Problems with Men's Programmes

A common aspect of all the programmes for abusive men is the stress on identifying the man as the source of the violence, because he has either internalised societal norms which perpetuate his behaviour, or because of internal character traits. Their analysis of spouse abuse is thus in individual terms, where the violent behaviour is discussed and 'treated' in a decontextualised framework. Relationship issues are rarely touched on, and 'anger' is
seen as a 'thing' which exists separately from the man in
that it is measurable and subject to his control. There is
the linear conceptualisation that a change in one variable
(for example, the man's 'attitude' towards women in
general) will result in the change of another variable (for
example, the cessation of violence). This mechanistic view
of the situation ignores the possible influence of other
aspects of the treatment situation. No-one seems to
question what effect the counsellor has on the clients.
How does his/her definition of the problem (which then
frames his/her intervention in specific ways), help to
shape the behaviour of the clients? Is the term
'responsibility' merely a polite way of allocating 'blame'?
Further, no-one seems to consider whether the man is in the
programme voluntarily, or attends only because of duress
from either his wife, or by a court mandate. The failure
(that is, continued violence) of the client is generally
assessed by focussing on personality 'flaws' contained
within the individual. Perhaps, attention should be paid
to the possibly problematic nature of the intervention
itself.

Considering the frequently dangerous nature of many
battering situations, it is understandable that there is
this strong pull to intervene 'at the point of violence',
which results in the focussing on the violence, and
adopting a victim/victimiser dichotomy when considering
treatment options. However, separation and rescue,
although important and necessary forms of interventions in certain instances, ignore the bilateral nature of violence in battering relationships.

4.5. **Family Therapy and Spouse Abuse**

For the most part, marriage and family counsellors have been surprisingly silent and uninfluential concerning the treatment of violent couples. In fact, family therapists often steer clear of violent cases (Shapiro, 1986). The strong tendency to reject an interpersonal orientation in favour of the male-as-sole-perpetrator seems to be based on several factors.

Firstly, there was an urgent need to move away from a view which could lead to blaming the woman for the abuse. This led to the emphasis on the female/victim–male/perpetrator dichotomy. Secondly, the impetus for treatment stemmed largely from the feminist movement which framed spouse abuse in terms of gender political issues. Thirdly, the causes of abuse were understood primarily from interviews with abused women, who punctuated their experience in a personalised fashion. And finally, society tends to perceive events in terms of dichotomy—good/bad; fat/thin; easy/hard; victim/aggressor—this process of division makes for a less complex understanding of the world. It appears as if people need to blame someone when anything untoward occurs, and to apply some kind of retaliatory form of punishment. An interpersonal
orientation seemed to let the 'bad' guy off the hook too easily.

Despite these various constraints, family therapists have begun to venture into the spouse abuse treatment arena. There is at present no systems treatment model that is designed specifically for intervention into family violence per se. Therapists currently working in the field ascribe to various systemic approaches, for example, structural family therapy, strategic therapy and Milan-type systemic therapy. Commonalities between the various approaches do exist, however.

4.5.1. Commonalities between Systems Approaches

Family therapists perceive violence as occurring within the context of ongoing relationship systems, such that the behaviour of each individual is contingent on the behaviour of the other. The behaviour of each actor is therefore seen as both a cause and effect, depending on how the interactional sequence is punctuated.

Systems therapists argue that this shift from the focus on intrapsychic characteristics of individuals to the interactions between them, opens up a way for the assumption of personal responsibility by the actors (Mathias, 1986; Neidig et al, 1984). The emphasis on societal conditioning as the chief 'cause' of spouse abuse has the negative effect of increasing the sense of helplessness in both the man and the woman. The individual
actor is able to change his/her own behavioural response under certain conditions, but is powerless when it comes to changing societal perceptions of particular issues.

Neidig et al (1984) argue that a more interpersonal perspective to therapy opens up the practitioner’s treatment options. A systems perspective to treatment avoids the labelling of the actors into fixed roles. A fixed ‘victim’ role may entrench the woman’s self-image as helpless and dependent, thereby closing off her potential for self-growth. If the transactional nature of human relationship systems is ignored, the danger is that violence may appear to erupt spontaneously; that is, beyond the volitional control of the participants. Such a view tends to suggest that family violence is best settled in a divorce court, or behind prison bars, but not in therapy.

4.5.2. Conjoint Therapy

As therapists began to think systemically about spouse abuse, conjoint therapy has emerged as a popular treatment modality. Seeing the couple together is viewed as only applicable however, in cases of ‘mild’ to ‘moderate’ violence (Cook & Franz-Cook, 1984). Conjoint treatment in cases of ‘severe’ to ‘life-threatening’ violence is considered dangerous and therefore to be avoided. Bograd (1984) asserts that this type of quantification is misleading, in that the degree of trauma experienced by a battered woman cannot be directly correlated with the nature of the abuse. Further, to take a strong clinical
position only against 'severe' violence implies that 'mild' violence is acceptable. Gelles (1974) contends that the importance of intervening in 'mild' cases of violence, is that if left untreated, the couple's behaviour can escalate into severe or life threatening forms of violence.

The potential danger inherent in conjoint marital or family therapy for abusive families is well recognised by family therapists. Therapists agree, that under no condition will they tolerate ongoing violence in the family (Neidig, 1984; Shapiro, 1986). Generally, therefore, the first goal in treating abuse is to provide a safe environment, which requires an initial decision as to which members of the family to see together. It must be stressed that thinking systemically about the problem does not mandate working with the couple or the whole family together. As Salvador Minuchin (1984) comments:

I'm enough of a pragmatist to know that it is sometimes necessary to start by separating a family and taking the perpetrator out of the home. But I know that's not therapy. It's just containment. If I am going to be anything more than a lackey of the judicial system, I need to devise something that transcends just containment (p.4).

Minuchin's statement highlights the importance of flexibility when deciding on how to intervene in spouse
abuse. At times, regardless of how the therapist wishes to structure therapy, opposition arises from the clients themselves. The wife may insist that she wishes to see the therapist alone, or the husband may refuse to participate in a situation in which he anticipates blame either from his spouse or from the therapist. The therapist then has to deal with the situation accordingly. The bottom line is that unless the therapist can meet with all the family members involved, he/she will not be able to fully understand the presenting problems, or decide on the best course of treatment.

4.5.3. Addressing the Violence

Once the structure of therapy is determined, most systems therapists agree that the violence needs to be addressed in specific terms. Shapiro (1986) comments that the best way to achieve immediate results is for the clients to agree to some simple rules:

a) Either partner can call a 'time-out' break when he/she feels about to lose control; and

b) the other partner has to allow this break.

It may be necessary to establish a written contract stipulating that if violence does occur, one partner must leave the house and stay away for at least a few days. Shapiro (1986) notes that just the prospect of separation is very effective as a deterrent.
4.5.4. Court Mandated Therapy

Another thorny matter which therapists have to contend with is that of how to deal with court mandated couple/family therapy. In fact, most of the family violence cases that are seen by family therapists are of this nature. This is an area which is surprisingly not addressed by most therapists in the field. It is essentially an issue of maintaining neutrality, while being in the enforced role of a social control agent. Lane and Russell (1987) argue that it is vital for the systems therapist to extricate him/herself from this ambiguous position. They note:

Our position on working with court mandated couples is that punishing people for criminal behaviour is the court's business. As therapists we are careful not to intervene in that process. A marriage between social control agents and therapists can blur important distinctions: therapists begin to view themselves more as agents of social control and social control agents begin to view themselves more as therapists (Lane & Russell, p.52).

Therapists often find it difficult to deal with clients under these circumstances, as the abusive man will appear to be on trial in the therapeutic situation. Thus, court mandated treatment already frames treatment in a particular way, and usually pressures the therapist to
intervene within a limited time period. Minuchin deals with the issue of coerced treatment by making it clear to all of the family that he is everyone's friend, and that he is on everyone's side. He notes:

I address them in ways that define me as a friend, as someone who can help them deal with the misery that underlies the violence (cited in Mathias, 1986, p.27).

4.5.5. Empowerment of Clients

A second goal of systems therapists in the treatment of spouse abuse, is to provide all the clients with a sense of empowerment. Empowerment in this context is viewed as teaching all family members to take care of themselves, to know their options, their resources and their limitations (Mathias, 1986). If it is obvious that the family's problems appear to be insurmountable, then the therapist should help the family to break up as peaceably as possible. The feminists contend that systems therapists view the breakup of a marriage as a treatment failure. They suggest that in a therapeutic context where the preservation of the marriage is viewed as being of paramount importance, the battered woman may not be able to explore her ambivalent wishes to leave the relationship or to obtain the skills leading to her economic and psychological self-sufficiency (Bograd, 1984). As a way of
avoiding this situation, recent family system intervention models now include structured separation as a crucial initial stage in the conjoint therapy of battered women and abusive men (Bograd, 1984).

4.5.6. Problems with a Systems Approach

While family therapy has provided clinicians with new and more contextualised views of spouse abuse, the systems therapists discussed earlier tend to be limited in their approach in that they do not extend their analyses of battering to include the relationship between the family and the broader social, economic and political context. Abuse is still largely perceived in terms of dysfunctional family structures or processes. It seems as if most family therapists have not adequately extended their analyses to view the family as a system embedded in a larger system (McIntyre, 1984).

4.6. Problems with Agency Responses to the Abused Wife

It is generally the woman who attempts to elicit external aid in order to remedy her untenable position. Most helping agencies therefore are likely to come into contact primarily with the abused woman, and only occasionally, her abusive partner.

The following statements made by an abused woman clearly illustrates the confusing array of often contradictory 'help' that any abused woman is likely to encounter in her search for effective intervention:
I have been kicked in the abdomen when I was visibly pregnant... I have been slapped, kicked, and thrown, picked up again and thrown down again. I have been punched and kicked in the head, chest, face, and abdomen more times than I can count.

Early in our marriage I went to a clergyman who, after a few visits, told me that my husband meant no real harm... I was encouraged to be more tolerant and understanding.

Next time, I turned to a doctor. I was given little pills to relax me and told to take things easier.

I turned to a professional family guidance agency... I had to defend myself against the suspicion that I wanted to be hit, that I invited the beatings.

I called the police one time. They not only did not respond to the call, they called several hours later to ask if things had 'settled down'. I could have been dead by then!

I have nowhere to go if it happens again... Everyone I have gone to for help has somehow wanted to blame me and vindicate my husband... I have learned that no one believes me and that I cannot depend upon outside help (cited in McShane, 1979, p.35).
Much has been written about the multiple service needs of the battered wife (Higgins, 1978; Pfouts & Renz, 1981). A prevalent belief in the literature is that those who provide the diverse services aggravate rather than ameliorate the problem. One reads, for example, that women who turn to traditional agencies "are more often than not disappointed" (McShane, 1979). As society has largely ignored the problem of wife beating, community services are often not available for abused women. Within the traditional services, there are gaps in both actual service provision and the knowledge of helping professionals about available services. The lack of contact persons, and the general absence of consultation concerning services can be significant factors influencing referral and follow up (McEvoy, Brookings & Brown, 1983). Services for abused wives may also be particularly prone to fragmentation because the women generally need assistance of several different kinds.

4.6.1. Fragmentation of Services

Many of the services designed to assist the women often involve professionals who are specialised in particular fields, and therefore operate under different auspices. There is thus often a failure to co-ordinate treatment plans for clients involved with several agencies simultaneously. Such problems can impact on the referral process in several ways.
4.6.1.1. Turf Protection

An absence of interagency co-ordination can promote 'turf protection' and even mistrust of staff professionalism in other agencies. The competition that may exist between agencies is not necessarily overt competition. It may be that because there are many agencies that provide the same services, the personnel in an agency will not see the need to look for assistance for their clients elsewhere. Further, they will tend to classify problem areas by fitting them into their agency's service repertoire, rather than identifying an area that their agency does not deal with (Bass & Rice, 1979). At times, there is the tendency of 'dumping' cases that pose special difficulties onto other agencies (McEvoy et al, 1983).

4.6.1.2 Poor Communication Between Agencies

The lack of effective communication between agencies complicates the client's quest for aid. For example, the woman may contact the police several times over a short period of time, and find that her call is handled as a new case each time. In this way information about the woman's history slips through the cracks of the system. It is also frustrating for the client who has to constantly give the same information over and over again. The poor co-ordination and record keeping of the agencies feeds into her belief that she is isolated and beyond help. Similarly, even if she deals with one agency, she has to
deal with different departments and therefore different
helpers. She may, for instance, contact a particular
agency for financial assistance, day care for her children
and counselling services. All of these matters may be
dealt with as independent issues (McShane, 1979).

4.6.1.3. Discontinuity of Services

Another problem with agency responses to the woman is
that of discontinuity, which in certain respects resembles
the problem of fragmentation. As all the services the
women need are not provided in one place, the woman who has
been abused must move through a network of service delivery
systems to obtain the help she needs. These systems do not
necessarily pertain to one another, and there is therefore
often an absence of coherence and integration of services.
The general lack of referral compounds the woman's
confusion as she attempts to move through the helping
systems (Davis, 1984).

4.6.1.4. Lack of Accountability

McShane (1979) raises the important point that
another (often overlooked) defect of helping systems is
their lack of accountability. When the woman does
experience problems with the agencies, or when agencies are
unresponsive to her needs, there is no opportunity for the
woman to provide the agencies with feedback about her
negative experience. The flow of information is thus from
the top (the 'expert' or the professional) - down (the client). This lack of accountability results in problematic areas remaining within the organisations whose structure and ways of dealing with problems remain static and unchanging.

4.6.2. Discussion

From the foregoing it is evident that abused women do not receive the maximum benefits that professionals in human service organisations have to offer. It is often not the legal or organisational policies which obstruct the delivery of services, but rather the operational procedures followed by organisations or professionals.

It is apparent then that if service delivery is to improve, professionals and agencies need to work together to develop and co-ordinate the needed services. Although the latter may be glaringly obvious to most professionals in the field, the reality is that coordination of services is much easier in theory than in practice. One of the major problems which impedes the helping process are the disparate definitions of the problems of abuse, which then feeds into what is perceived as the appropriate course of action open to the women. If agencies and professionals view the course of treatment in very different terms, then it follows that the likelihood of collaboration between helpers is doubtful. The perceptions of different kinds of professional emphasis (for example, legal versus therapeutic versus medical, or family counselling versus
individual counselling) influence the referral rate. As Anderson and Goolishian (1986) comment:

When people hold different views, each feeling his or her own view is the total reality, struggles will surely ensue. These multiple views may totally block the capacity of one member of the system to communicate with another as they begin to try to negotiate a working relationship and to validate their positions vis-a-vis the problem. This process can maintain and escalate the very problems they are trying to remedy. A tug-of-war can ensue (p. 286).

The difficulty is of course that the clients are caught in the middle of such conflict, which compounds the original 'problem' that initially brought the family to the public's attention. This type of situation only exacerbates the woman's feelings of helplessness about her situation. Thus, the helping agency not only has to consider what form of intervention is required, but also what impact the proposed intervention will have on both the clients and the other helping agencies concerned. Such questions need to be asked of every helping agency who wishes to be effective in a changing South African context.

Another factor which feeds into poor delivery service is the political differences between the various helping agencies. The feminist organisations may view family
counsellors with suspicion, and vice versa. There may be
disagreement about the priorities of treatment. Should the
family be maintained as a unit, or should there be
immediate recourse to legal intervention? The feminists
may perceive that the hidden agenda of family oriented
treatment agencies is the maintenance of the family unit at
all costs. Family therapists and social workers may
likewise regard the feminist organisations with suspicion.
Several questions can be raised concerning the implications
of the feminist perspective in a service context. Firstly,
what does feminism mean in the realm of individual or
family therapy? Secondly, are clients counselled in such a
way as to serve some larger political goal rather than
their individual needs? Thirdly, when providing a service,
what impact does a feminist ideology have on staff
recruitment, training, retention and staff perception of
other service agencies (McEvoy et al, 1983)? It goes
without saying that every agency should be aware of the
impact of its services on the clients it attempts to help.
Unfortunately, as most of the helping agencies are firmly
entrenched within a linear understanding of reality, self-
reflexivity is considered to be a luxury rather than an
epistemological necessity.

It is thus apparent that the abused woman is a
fragmented person when viewed reductionistically by the
various individuals or agencies to whom she may turn for
assistance. Some provide her with legal aid; some treat
her physical injuries; some provide her with temporary
financial assistance; some put her up in a refuge for a while to lick her wounds; and some may attempt to offer her counselling of a particular kind. Often the male partner is not even seen or consulted. The focus remains on the woman.

4.7. Conclusion

Currently, it is apparent that intervention into spouse abuse is still disorganised and fragmented. This is not to say that no-one is doing anything about the problem. To the contrary, everyone who is aware of the problem has ideas on what to do, and there are numerous institutions which are mandated to take care of parts of the problem. This includes the legal system comprising the police and the courts; community-based grassroots organisations manned primarily by social activists, and more recently, family therapists who are called in to 'treat' the distressed systems.

Unfortunately, the 'problem' of abuse still continues unabated despite this flurry of activity, and the helpers in the field are beginning to become frustrated and find various faults within the clients themselves in order to explain this impasse. Abusers are described as 'incapable of change', 'resistant' or 'psychopathic'. Their spouses receive labels as well; they are viewed as 'helpless victims' or 'overly dependent'. Perhaps it is the very nature of violence which compels helpers to take sides, and
to resort to retaliatory forms of punishment to get even.

The most obvious difficulty is that everyone is talking and intervening, but there is little integration of effort. It is apparent that if anything is to be accomplished with abusive families, there must be collaboration with a network of helping professionals. Further, instead of pointing fingers at the clients themselves, or resorting to rhetoric about who is most epistemologically correct, professionals in the field need to begin to examine their own formulations of the problem, and to question the effectiveness of their own interventions. Various groups in the current intervention arena appear to have become so entrenched in particular meaning systems that this self-appraisal may be impossible.

It is suggested that one way of overcoming the current difficulties is to view the entire arena of spouse abuse in ecosystemic terms. It may well be that such a formulation may be useful in the development of more effective clinical programmes to treat spouse abuse.
5.1. Introduction

At the turn of the century, the work of Max Planck, and more importantly, that of Albert Einstein revealed the limitations of the Newtonian conceptualisation of the universe. Planck and Einstein's findings in their work in the physics of the microsphere suggested new rules for thinking about time, space and motion. Their work revealed that the world of science does not deal with unshakeable 'truths' but rather offers limited and approximate descriptions of reality (Auerswald, 1985; Capra, 1982). One of the major outcomes of the findings of these and other thinkers was the creation of the skeleton for a new epistemology, a view of reality which no longer ascribed to the mechanistic giant machine concept, but rather viewed the universe as a

harmonious indivisible whole; a network of dynamic relationships that include the human observer and his or her consciousness in an essential way (Capra, 1982, p.32).

Intrinsic to the new epistemology is a shift in focus from objects to relationships. This shift has had far-reaching implications for science (including the natural sciences) as a whole, and the emerging body of thought that
arose from this shift became known as the 'New Science'.

The questioning of the very basis of their conceptual framework must have been both dramatic and very painful for physicists during the first quarter of this century. Their very way of knowing the world had been irrevocably shaken. A similar feeling of both excitement and confusion must have been felt in the early years of the family therapy movement which was similarly involved in the shift from the old to the 'new' epistemology. The early pioneers were fortunate indeed to have the genius of Gregory Bateson to guide them into the new way of thinking.

5.2. Bateson and the Family Therapy Movement: The Ever Widening Field Of Therapeutic Vision

5.2.1. Disenchantment with the Linear Worldview in Psychology

One aspect of anatomy which has been widely commented on in family therapy literature, is Bateson's 'nose' (Hoffman, 1985; Keeney, 1983). His nose, with its keen sense of smell must have wrinkled with distaste at the mechanistic odour that pervaded the psychological field prior to the 1950s. Coming as he did from a background in anthropology, Bateson viewed most of psychology and the social sciences as being completely misguided.

The three paradigms which dominated the field of psychology prior to the rise of circular thought in therapeutic theory and practice were structuralism,
behaviourism and psychoanalysis. Although these paradigms appear to represent autonomous systems of thought, their shared premise of a material world which consists of physical objects obeying the laws of force and energy implies that their conception of reality was a Newtonian one.

During the 1950s there was growing disenchantment with the linear worldview in the social sciences. There was a growing need for the field of perception to be widened to include the context. The field of psychology was no exception to this new urge, and the development of family systems theory was seen to take place in various centres in the United States. Prior to this development, the focus of diagnosis and treatment was the decontextualised individual who was perceived as being the site of pathology. This was the time of the rapid expansion of psychodynamic theories having a major focus on the intrapsychic functioning of the individual. In certain circles there was increasing dissatisfaction with the individual approach as it was beginning to be realised that the success of therapy was in some way related to the patient's family relationship system. As a means of resolving this dilemma, a new therapy system evolved, namely family therapy (Hoffman, 1981).

5.2.2. The Influence of the Double Bind Theory

The development of systems theory (which was based on cybernetics and communication theory in mental health) is
generally credited to Bateson and his colleagues at the Palo Alto Mental Research Institute in the 1950s and 1960s. Their work included a broad investigation of the nature, etiology and therapy of schizophrenia. One of the major outcomes of their research was the concept of the double-bind (Bateson, Jackson, Haley & Weakland, 1956). Dell (1980) asserted that the double-bind concept was a revolutionary way of conceptualising pathology in that the focus shifted from discrete elements to patterns of interaction. This work was free from the constraints of individual theory and the language of individual psychology. "It is a systemic epistemology that subordinates 'elements' to the organisation of the whole" (Dell, 1980, p.323). According to Zawada (1981) the impact of the theory was twofold. Firstly, the idea of the family as a unit of dysfunction was affirmed. Secondly, the models and language of cybernetics and information theory were introduced into the behavioural sciences and the therapeutic arena.

5.2.3. The Growth of the Systems Movement

In spite of the difficulties of a hostile therapeutic community, the complications posed by the lack of a theoretical model, and concomitantly, an inadequate descriptive jargon to convey new understandings, the movement flourished and produced new insights into the world of pathology. The unit of observation was in
continual fluctuation, with the initial focus on the nuclear family which involved a movement from the individual, to the dyad, and then to the triad. The focus then expanded even further to include the extended family. The importance of the social context then became apparent and the unit shifted to the even larger ecological network (Hoffman, 1981).

5.2.4. Discussion

Prior to the rise of the systems view, the field of psychology ascribed to the dominant mechanistic trend that was popular in the scientific world. Pathology and treatment were perceived in linear and decontextualised terms. Just as the developments in physics posed new questions and understandings for the scientific field, the systems view provided psychologists with an alternative to the linear approach to human behaviour. Capra (1982) notes that understandings of 'new science' and the systems world-view are in fact very similar. Capra (1982) noted that the 'new science' is comparable to the systems view in that it

emphasises relationships rather than isolated entities and, like the systems view, perceives these relationships as being inherently dynamic.

Systems thinking is process thinking; form becomes associated with process, interrelation with
interaction, and opposites are unified through oscillation (p.288).

After the rise of the systems view in psychology, there was no turning back for the emerging body of family therapists. A bewildering variety of theories and techniques blossomed over the years, and new ideas regarding the complexity of the realm of human relationship systems continued to emerge. Auerswald's (1987a) succinct paradigmatic breakdown of the field of family therapy has already been presented in Chapter 1 (p.27). This breakdown offers a useful indication of the various developments in family study and treatment since the rise of systemic thought in the 1950s.

The author espouses to the ecosystemic paradigm - paradigm e) of Auerswald's (1987a) breakdown as it appears to offer a way of viewing reality in a manner that increases the options open to the practitioner.

Ecosystemic thinking has its roots in the new conceptualisation offered by 'new' science, and was further influenced by 'second-order' cybernetics. As the concepts of new science have already been briefly dealt with, it is now necessary that an understanding of the field of cybernetics be reached. This will involve a sequential understanding of the influence and shortcomings of 'first-order' cybernetics, and then a perusal of second-order cybernetics.
5.3. The Influence Of First-Order Cybernetics in Family Therapy

5.3.1. Introduction

Bateson (1972) maintains that "cybernetics is the biggest bite out of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge that mankind has taken in the last 2000 years" (p.476). Cybernetics was the brainchild of Norbert Wiener and was formally baptised in 1948 (Speer, 1970). Wiener referred to cybernetics as "the science of communication and control in man and machine" (cited in Hoffman, 1990, p.1-2). The science of cybernetics involves a shift away from material processes to explanations which encompass concepts more apt to the biological world which included information, purpose, context, organisation and meaning (Keeney, 1983).

The research that led to its inception was connected with experiments (with guided missiles and rockets) that began during World War II. One of the major aims of the researchers was to reach an understanding of the general principles of how systems of all kinds are regulated. First-order cybernetics (or Cybernetics I) which involves the study of deviation-counteracting/negative feedback processes, emphasises that the elements of the system and the relationships among those elements interact in such a way as to maintain equilibrium or to go in cycles. Systemic stability means that change is allowed within limits or constraints. This then requires the system to act in a way that restricts fluctuations, and the mechanism which is called into play to achieve the latter
is termed 'negative feedback' (De Shazer, 1982). Feedback is defined by Wiener (1954) as a "method of controlling a system by reinserting into it the results of its past performance" (p.84). The ability of the system to survive depends upon what types of processes are available to the system and are balanced within it. The system relies on feedback or information relevant to the homeostatic mechanisms at play. Von Bertalanffy (1968) illuminates this principle through the rule of Van't Hoff in chemistry. According to this principle, chemical reactions slow down with a decrease in environmental temperature. However, with warm-blooded animals, metabolic rates are found to increase with a simultaneous decrease in temperature. The concept of feedback explains this phenomenon as follows: The effect of cooling is to stimulate the thermogenic centres in the brain which in turn stimulate the heat producing mechanisms of the body. Thus, feedback serves as a regulating mechanism in the system (Von Bertalanffy, 1968).

5.3.2. The Homeostatic View of Family Functioning

Drawing from the ideas of cybernetics, Don Jackson in 1957 introduced the term "homeostasis" to the field of psychotherapy and suggested that families were like closed information systems, in which variations in output or behaviour are fed back in order to correct the system's response. It must be remembered that what is designated as
a system, that is where the boundaries between a system and the environment are drawn, is a question of definition. The boundaries of a closed system do not allow information to penetrate into the system. Therefore, closed systems are largely incapable of change. An example of a relatively closed system are families who have erected a 'rubber fence' between themselves and their social environment (Simon, Stierlin & Wynne, 1985). Only information which confirms the family's view of the world is allowed in.

The essential mechanisms that enable the system to regulate its internal structure are negative feedback loops. Early family theorists accentuated this aspect of the system above all others. This was because therapists perceived that pathological systems were characterised by excessive rigidity (Jackson, 1957). Researchers at the Mental Research Institute began to speak of families as error-activated, self-correcting systems that act to keep the status quo and help to keep the patient sick.

Building on his observation of families as homeostatic entities, Jackson (1965) then suggested that the recurrent corrective cycle could be understood by positing that the family had rules. These rules acted as homeostatic mechanisms which regulated what happened (for example, the man in the house is never wrong). Although Jackson later argued that these rules did not exist per se, but were just a useful way of describing a system's functioning, family therapists latched onto the concept, and began to describe
behaviour as having particular systemic 'purposes' (Dell, 1982). An example of the latter would be 'mother is ignoring son to protect father's role in the family'.

5.3.3. The Limitations of the Concept of Homeostasis

Dell (1982) noted that a fundamental problem with the notion of homeostasis during the first wave of cybernetics is the manner in which the concept was used. Homeostasis began to be viewed as an entity in its own right rather than as a metaphorical or descriptive concept. Further, linear causality crept in as homeostasis was perceived as possessing causal properties. The idea of a system's 'purpose' or 'rules' further entrenches the idea of causal dualisms.

5.3.4. From System Stability to System Change

It became increasingly apparent that one of the major pitfalls of the application of simple cybernetics in the arena of human phenomena was the definition of homeostasis as a process of stability, when it was noted by therapists that families can and do change. Speer (1970) realised the concept of homeostasis was limited in its conceptualisation of the functioning of systems. He proposed the term morphogenesis be used to describe the process by which systems undergo structural change. Morphogenesis describes the phenomena whereby positive, deviation-amplifying feedback, by exaggerating a minimal

132
deviation (change) in the system, can induce a disproportionately large change in that same system (Simon et al, 1985).

5.3.5. Problems with the Black-Box Approach

Another application of first-order cybernetic ideas that proved problematic in the field of therapy was the black-box approach to the complex arena of human relationships. When family therapy was looked at with homeostasis in mind, an artificial division arose between the therapist who desired to bring about change and the client system, which in the interest of maintaining its status quo, resisted these change attempts. Techniques and strategies were developed and introduced as input into the client system. Efficacy of input would then be assessed by output of behaviour on the part of the client system. The therapist was perceived as being outside the system which was being treated, and resistance to change was viewed as an intrinsic property of the client system. It is clear that these views were not only inherently reductionistic, but also opened up a hierarchical dualism between client and therapist systems respectively. As noted earlier, the 'objective' analysis of phenomena 'out there' rationalises the use of manipulation by the more 'powerful' (therapist) system. In effect, a war-like situation is set up between therapist and external client system, not only with reference to resistance to change but also with regard to the definition of change and direction.
which the change process would take.

5.3.6. Beyond Power and Control

The above view of the therapist/client relationship is problematic in that it presupposes that one aspect of a system can have unilateral control over others. Bateson (1971, 1974) was adamant that the use of the concept of power in the complex realm of human relationships was epistemologically flawed. As discussed earlier in Chapter 3, Bateson (1972) asserts that no one person can exert unilateral control over the system of which he/she is part. The reason why this control is impossible is that human relationships are always embroiled in cybernetic circuits in which each participant is an inevitable part of a circular or recursive dance vis-a-vis other participants.

In the late 1950s, the language of the first family therapy models (Haley's 'strategic' approach is a particular example of this trend) was imbued with a vocabulary based on war (Hoffman, 1985). Therapy was portrayed in adversarial terms like 'power-tactics' and 'strategies'. Bateson (1972) feared that the use of power concepts in therapy could in practice result in ever-increasing escalations for control. The cybernetic view surrounding the so-called 'myth of power' is a very controversial one in that it tends to slide over the human experience of hierarchical inequality which is prevalent in most societies today. An example of the latter is the purported existence of unequal 'power' relations between family
members, which is often used as an explanation for the occurrence of family violence. Indeed, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, it is the circular description of relationships which underlies most of the feminist critiques on systemic formulations of spouse abuse.

5.3.6. Discussion

There was a gradual realisation within the family therapy field that the concepts that had emerged from first-order cybernetics had only limited applicability with regard to the area of human relationship systems. The first wave of cybernetic investigation had been with simple phenomena, and there was a growing awareness by researchers in the field that higher orders of feedback came into play when more complex phenomena were studied. There was a move towards a view that included 'second-order' cybernetic concepts.


5.4.1. Introduction

The 1970s and early 1980s proved to be a period of conceptual spring-cleaning for the family therapy field. Many concepts which were basic to family theory and therapy were challenged by new developments in several fields outside the domain of psychology. These challenges arose primarily from the work of a seemingly disparate group of
men. These included two Chilean biologists, Humberto Maturana and Francesco Varela; a linguist, Ernst von Glasersfeld; a cybernetician, Heinz von Foerster; and the physicist, Ilya Prigogine. From within the psychological field itself, Bateson began increasingly to vent his discontent with first-order understandings of family dysfunction. Chief amongst his criticisms were the concepts of homeostasis and morphogenesis; he perceived them as being inadequate for describing living and changing systems. Another major source of dissatisfaction was the conceptualisation of therapy in terms that viewed the therapist system and the client system as separate from each other (Anderson, Goolishian & Windermund, 1986). The latter trend in therapy had its roots in the Newtonian concept of 'objectivity', and the related 'black-box' approach to the study of phenomena. Bateson was not alone in his aversion to this input-output model. Indeed, it was one issue which was focused on by all of the disparate groups of researchers identified earlier. As their thinking began to filter into the family therapy field, there was increasing dissatisfaction with the observer-independent model, and a number of therapists began to move to a view that included second-order cybernetics concepts. The term 'second-order' was coined by Von Foerster (1981), to represent a view which placed the observer in that which was observed in such a way that the notion of separate observed systems became nonsensical (Keeney, 1983).

Prigogine's (1984) findings in quantum mechanics lent
credence to a second-order view when he asserted that the world which is perceived is observer-dependent and that it changes with the observer’s participation.

5.4.2. The Ecosystemic Viewpoint

De Shazer (1982) noted that once the therapist moves from observer to participant, the necessity for ecosystemic thinking arises. The inclusion of the therapist as 'part of the ecosystem' means the entire view of the therapeutic process had to be assessed in new terms. The ecosystemic approach to therapy was introduced to the therapy field by Bradford Keeney in 1979. He was greatly influenced by the new developments in the field of cybernetics, and what emerged was a therapeutic approach which was rooted in the ideas of (second-order) cybernetics, ecology and systems theories.

5.4.3. What is a System?

One of Keeney’s major criticisms of the family therapy field regarded the inappropriate manner in which the term ‘system’ had been used (Keeney, 1979, 1983). He contends that a number of therapists associated systemic therapy with seeing larger units of social organisation. However, thinking systemically or ecosystemically has very little to do with the size of the unit of observation. Rather, what is of importance is the lens which is worn by the observer; in Keeney’s words: "Seeing systems is a function of one's
epistemology" (Keeney, 1979, p.119). He offers two basic rules for discerning a cybernetic system. Firstly, recursive organisation must be perceived, and secondly, the recursive process must involve self-correction; in other words, the system must have feedback structure (Keeney, 1983). Following these principles an individual may be perceived as a cybernetic system. A system in ecosystemic terms is defined as: "a cybernetic network that processed information" (Keeney, 1979, p.119). This definition is similar to that of Bateson who views a system as "any unit containing feedback structure and therefore competent to process information" (cited in Keeney, 1979, p.119-20). In terms of these definitions, the therapeutic situation can be viewed as a system.

The cybernetic network within the therapeutic situation refers to the context of recursive relationships in which the relevant information processed includes symptomatic and therapeutic communications. Keeney (1979) refers to this type of system as an "ecological relationship system" (p.120). The latter includes the therapist, the patient, the symptoms and the larger social context. All that occurs in the therapeutic context is viewed as communications in an informational network of human relationships. Thinking ecosystemically, therefore necessitates thinking circularly, and in this way it moves away from dualistic and linear traps which are inherent in human language and experience.
5.4.4. Second-Order Cybernetics Meta to First-Order Cybernetics

When Von Foerster introduced the term 'second-order' cybernetics, he was referring to a thought system that was meta to, or inclusive of first-order cybernetics. Thus, cybernetics of cybernetics, as it is sometimes called, is concerned with higher orders of recursion such that the wholeness of a given realm of phenomena is recognised. This view is similar to the old systems axiom of nonsummativity which contends that observation of isolated parts cannot be viewed as being representative of the whole. The freedom which is offered by the second-order cybernetics view is that observers are free to speak in the language of simple cybernetics, and chop the world up into parts for pragmatic purposes. However, this can be done only when it is remembered that the distinctions drawn represent parts of a larger recursive whole. Therapists can therefore speak of 'interventions', 'symptoms', 'therapists', 'families', but only within the wider frame of patterned contextualisation. The ecosystemic perspective thus ascribes to a self-referential, participatory epistemology which respects the wholeness of phenomena (Keeney, 1979).

5.4.5. From Either/Or to Both/And

From the above, it is apparent that the manner in which distinctions are drawn by the observer is of great
importance in ecosystemic thinking. One of the dangers of abstracting from relationships without contextualisation is that it becomes easier to think in terms of either/or distinctions which moves away from a both/and position. As discussed in Chapter 2, the concept of dualistic polarities is inherent within a linear epistemology. In the process of analysis, information is discarded in a reductionistic manner. Polarities are created between options, such that a choice must be made between options. In other words, choices are made between 'either this or that'. When ascribing to the new epistemology, however, the emphasis is on the understanding of both sides of any delineation drawn. There is thus a move away from an atomistic understanding of phenomena (Auerswald, 1971, 1974).

5.4.6. Cybernetic Complementarities

When the relationship between both sides of any distinction that is drawn, is to be considered, then it is useful to introduce the idea of cybernetic complementarities. What is emphasised here is an examination of how the observer participates in the observed. An implication of this view is that any description of the therapeutic situation says as much, if not more, about the therapist's punctuations as it does about the client system being described.

Varela (1979) offers a useful means of perceiving cybernetic complementarities such that dualisms are comprehended in terms of relationship rather than as
either/or polarities. He suggests both sides of a distinction drawn by an observer may be viewed as 'the it'/
'the process leading to it'. The relationship between the sides of these distinctions is self-referential where one side is (re)cycled out of the other. For example, to view systems as being either stability oriented (morphostatic), or change oriented (morphogenetic) is limited when a second-order cybernetic understanding is reached. As noted earlier, second-order cybernetics is meta to first-order cybernetics, and is concerned with higher-order processes. Rather than viewing systems in these either/or terms (for example, either stability or change), second-order cybernetics is concerned with how processes of change are connected with processes of stability and vice versa. To focus on one side of any dualism leads to an incomplete view of the relationship between the two.

Keeney (1983) offers a useful list of such complementarities, a few of which are listed below (p.93):

a) form/process;
b) describer/described;
c) mind/body;
d) recursive/lineal;
e) aesthetic/pragmatic;
f) context/simple action.

What is apparent from the foregoing is that cybernetic complementarities involve different orders of recursion, which demonstrate how each side of the complementarity is
related and yet distinct. This frame offers a means of reconceptualising the victim/victimiser polarity which is extensively used in spouse abuse literature. As with the first-order trend of leaving the observer outside of what was observed, this dualism chops up the wider ecology, and leads to a separation of the various aspects of everyday experience.

5.4.7. Double Description

Bateson’s principle of double description is invaluable in that it provides a means of arriving at a holistic description of an interactive system, without fragmenting the wider ecology. Double description means that:

in order to get from one level of description to another, an act of double description is required, or, views from every side of the relationship must be juxtaposed to generate a sense of the relationship as a whole (Keeney, 1983, p.41).

The notion of double description is embedded in the idea that mental process works in terms of the perception of difference. For Bateson, double description is the relationship. Keeney (1983) explains:

Fundamentally, double description is an epistemological tool that enables one to
generate and discern different orders of pattern... As two eyes can derive depth, two descriptions can derive pattern and relationship (p.38).

Family therapy has the added advantage of providing the therapist with a diversity of views in that each family member presents his/her own perceptions to the therapist. For an understanding of the whole ecology, the therapist must be able to connect these diverse views. He/she is able to do this by moving up several levels of description, until a higher order pattern of social choreography emerges.

5.4.8. Semantics and Politics

Keeney and Ross (1985) describe several levels of therapeutic realities in terms of the recursive dialectic of semantics and politics. Semantics refers to the description of the communicational frame of reference wherein meanings are requested and constructed by both therapist and client system. Politics refers to the interactional frame that emphasises the social organisation of communication. Both semantics and politics provide different means of viewing communication at different orders of recursion. The initial semantic frame that is offered by clients provides the therapist with an understanding of the client's view of the etiology and
definition of the problematic situation. In order to help the client system, the therapist and client system must coevolve other semantic and political frames that are of different orders of abstraction than the simple frames presented by clients. This entails widening the focus from behavioural description, to the interactional context which frames the problematic behaviour, to an understanding of the wider social ecology which requires descriptions of the patterns of social choreography. Such a frame will contextualise behaviour in a manner which constantly increases the number of options that are open to the therapist for effective intervention (Keeney, 1983).

5.4.9. Dormitive Principles

Bateson holds that dualisms arise when experiences of interaction are abstracted from relationship. Traditional explanations of behaviour could result from what Bateson (cited in Keeney, 1983) terms 'dormitive principles'. The latter operate when the cause of a simple action is said to be an abstract word derived from the name of the action. For example, the raising of a fist may be labelled as being 'caused' by an aggressive or sadistic 'instinct' 'in' a person. Treatment would then be perceived in terms of changing particular personality characteristics of that individual. As seen from Chapters 3 and 4, this type of reasoning is common in the theories on spouse abuse. Unfortunately, such labelling could result in an escalation or maintenance of a problematic context. The difficulty is
that the action is focused on, and extracted from the relationship network in which it is embedded, and a reified entity posited as the cause of the action. Penn (1982) notes that the use of double description opens the way for the therapist to use language in a coevolutionary way in which new orders of difference, relationship and context may emerge.

5.5. The Meaning of Symptoms

The shift toward an ecosystemic perspective therefore involves an understanding of the recursive nature of phenomena. This is by implication a move away from blaming the identified patient for his/her 'sickness' and/or blaming etiological factors for causing symptoms (Keeney, 1979). Keeney urges that symptoms be viewed rather as metaphorical communications about the ecology of relationship systems. This is a difficult concept to grapple with, especially in a world where blame is very much part of society's mores, it is as if people need a target for punishment and revenge. However, this view is meaningless within the frame that it is simultaneous interactions which identify, define and constitute whole systems. To focus on one part as either having a causal influence on another part, or as being the site of illness, is tantamount to "chopping up the ecology" (Hoffman, 1981, p.257). Keeney (1983) notes that when 'pathology' is identified in any social setting, it is likely that other connected members
are sites of pathology. Each family member can be viewed as being symptomatic in a way which is related to the symptoms of other family members.

5.5.1. 'Wholeness' of Systems

The request to respect the 'wholeness' of a system has been expressed by Varela (1979) who also questions the inherently dualistic input-output model as being the appropriate approach for the study of living systems. He proposes that the control, or as he terms it, the 'allopoietic' model be replaced with an 'autopoietic' or autonomy model, which respects the wholeness of systems, rather than viewing them as objects to manipulate.

5.5.2. Structure Determinism

Varela's (1979) request for a new approach to systems emerged from his and his colleague Maturana's research on the organisation of living systems (Maturana & Varela, 1980). One of the major outcomes of this research was Maturana's theory of structure determinism which challenged fundamental beliefs therapists had held probably since the inception of the modern field of psychotherapy. This theory has important implications for the ecosystemic approach to therapy. Before reviewing these implications, it is necessary to outline the central constructs of Maturana's (1980) theory as summarised by Efran & Lukens (1985):
a) Living systems are 'structure determined'. This means that their behaviour is a function of how they are put together;
b) living systems are 'informationally closed'. This means that a system is viewed with no reference to its outside environment. It is impossible therefore to speak in terms of instructive interaction or external causation;
c) organisms survive by fitting with one another and with other aspects of the surrounding medium. In other words, they become structurally coupled. When there is an inadequate 'fit' between an organism and its medium, the organism will die;
d) the career of a living system consists entirely of a purposeless 'drift' in a medium;
e) humans are languaging, observing systems. Without the observer, nothing exists;
f) the concept of objectivity is questioned. It is seen as merely one possible punctuation drawn from a myriad of choices.

It is clear from the above that when Maturana refers to the closed organisation of a system, he is speaking the language of second-order cybernetics. Wholeness or closure of a system refers to the simultaneity of its interactions, such that the system is viewed with no reference to its outside environment. It is important to remember the external environment which is discerned is a matter of punctuation on behalf of the observer. As noted earlier,
cybernetics of cybernetics provides a way of constructing and discerning more complex cybernetic processes through higher orders of recursion. Keeney (1983) uses the example of systems and feedback loops as resembling Chinese boxes engulfing themselves, such that the individual is part of numerous orders of organisation. He notes:

A cybernetic dialectic may be applied to any system an observer (e.g., a therapist) happens to distinguish. Individuals, couples, triads, families, neighbourhoods, and entire societies may each be punctuated by the observer as autonomous systems. It is also possible to see the whole ecology of all imaginable (and unimaginable) punctuated systems as belonging to a larger autonomous system (1983, p.89).

As the system is informationally closed, external instruction is impossible. This in effect rules out the whole notion of external causation in the input-output sense. Therapists therefore cannot be viewed as directly effecting change in their clients. It is the structure of the system which determines its response; this means that living systems will behave as a function of how they are built. At its highest level of recursion, the family is an autonomous system. The wholeness or the closed organisation of the family cannot change or there would be no family. What can and does change is its structure or the way of maintaining its organisation.
5.5.3. Therapist Interactions

Given that the organisation of an autonomous system is closed, then the only way that a therapist can come to know the properties of that whole system is by interacting with it. Varela (1976) suggests that "We interact with a system by poking at it, throwing things at it, and shouting at it and doing things like that, in various degrees of sophistication" (p.28). No actions on the part of the therapist will get 'inside' an autonomous system, but rather the therapist interacts with the wholeness of the system. Therapist interactions, therefore, do not affect any one part of the system, but affect the whole organisation of the system. One of the implications of this view is that a small fluctuation in a system at any one time can become the basis for an entirely different arrangement of the system at another time. Although the therapist may 'bump' the system from its present stability, it is the family who will figure out which way to jump, and in so doing, come up with a new pattern of organisation. The therapist and the client system are therefore in a recursive dance with each other as they attempt to relate in a way that coevolves the therapist-family ecology.

5.5.4. The Problem of 'Resistance'

This idea of coevolution leads to a new conceptualisation of the 'problem' of 'resistance' which is extensively written about in therapeutic literature.
Resistance is usually perceived as being a property which is located in the client system. Keeney (1983) contends that resistance is actually a symbolic description pointing to the phenomenal domain of a therapist's relationship with the client. Anderson and Stewart (1983) widen the focus even further, as they see resistance as a property which belongs to the 'therapeutic system' which includes all actors who are involved in the therapeutic process. The latter would include the client system, the therapist(s) and the agency or the institution in which the therapists practice.

5.5.5. What Can the Therapist Do?

Prigogine's (1978) research on dissipative structures reveals that although it is possible to interact with a system, it is impossible to control its reorganisation, its change and the timing of its change. Nothing then is predictable, and therapists do not bring about change in the sense that a particular intervention will result in a predictable outcome. All that a therapist can do, is to perturb the system, the outcome of that perturbation will depend on how that system is put together. Efran and Lukens (1985) note: "It is arrogant of us to think that we 'control' other people's lives. Even court-adjudicated cases and other so-called 'unwilling' clients, cannot be sold anything against their will" (p.72).

One issue that is patently clear from the foregoing is that unilateral control by the therapist is not possible.
from an ecosystemic perspective. Therapy can be viewed as a succession of what Maturana terms 'structural couplings' such that both the client and therapy systems are seen to shape each other. One aspect that is puzzling, however, is that if the organisation of the system is closed, and communication is necessarily indirect, then how can a therapist interact with a client system and vice versa? Both Varela and Bateson respectively, offer useful reconceptualisations of the therapeutic arena which allows for interactions between autonomous systems.

5.5.6. The Conversational Domain

One of Varela's main concerns was to discover a means of broadening the concept of autopoiesis to systems representing larger orders of inclusion. He came up with the term 'autonomous system' which refers to "any composite unity formed of elements that may or may not themselves be autopoietic" (1979, p.53). The aggregates which fall into this category would include social groupings like the family and managerial systems, and also organs like the brain. In describing the processes of interaction that define these aggregates, he introduced the term 'conversational domain' (1979, p.269). Hoffman explains that this term brings in the idea that "at a level above our own individual minds there is a mind-like activity, and that higher-order unities at this level, though not directly accessible to consciousness, are instances of
autonomous systems" (1985, p.386). Participants in this domain interact through descriptions and descriptions of their descriptions. For Varela, these interacting systems are systems of meaning, and since perceptions are mediated through the lens of culture, family and language, the resulting product represents not something private and self-contained, but an 'observer community' (Boscolo, Cecchin, Hoffman, & Penn, 1987). The 'higher-order' unities that he talks about, are not confined to delineating groups of material bodies, but more pertinently, to use Bateson's (1972) terminology, to 'ecologies' of ideas.

5.5.7. Mind as a Cybernetic System

In a similar vein to Varela, Bateson invalidates the lines drawn between delineated units like observer and observed and therapist and patient, by proposing that these units and their contexts represent a larger circularity called Mind. He was referring to 'nested circuits', which were never less than two. Examples include DNA-in-cell, cell-in-body, organism-in-environment (cited in Boscolo et al, 1987). As seen earlier with reference to cybernetic complementarities, it is impossible to speak of one part without reference to the other. For Bateson, 'mind' is a cybernetic system, in that it is an aggregate of interactive parts with feedback structure. The complexity of this system ranges from simple feedback to a concept which is similar to Varela's conversational domain, which
Bateson refers to as ecology of mind (Keeney, 1983). Within this view, wherever there is feedback, mental characteristics are evident. For Bateson, the behaviour of an organism is governed by the codifications or representations it makes of reality; in other words, the world of communication and context is a mental construct. It is the ecology of ideas that determines who does what with whom. The realm of communication is therefore comprised entirely of ideas. This means the unit of therapy is not confined to social aggregates, whether the latter refers to individuals, couples, families, communities or societies. Rather, the focus is on mental process, and on the ascription of meanings. Mind in therapy may be immanent within and across a wide variety of social units including individuals, family subsystems, and whole families. The focus then, is on seeing these underlying patterns of feedback process. Bateson (1972) argues that psychotherapy would not exist if it were not for the fact that behaviour is dependent upon the meaning of events, rather than upon the events themselves. People will behave according to how they frame or punctuate the situations in which they are involved. Bateson summarises his position by noting:

The individual mind is immanent but not only in the body. It is immanent also in the pathways and messages outside the body; and there is a larger Mind
of which the individual mind is only a sub-system. This larger Mind is comparable to God and is perhaps what some people mean by 'God', but it is still immanent in the total interconnected social system and planetary ecology (1972, p.461).

5.5.8. Discussion

Bateson and Varela's ideas thus provide the observer with a means of considering both the autonomy and the interdependence of whole systems. Their views have important repercussions in ecosystemic therapy. Perhaps one of the most important implications of their thinking concerns the definition of the problem in therapy. The traditional medical view located the problem 'in' the identified patient. Family therapists then widened this view to the family system which was perceived as 'creating' the problem. Varela and Bateson's contentions go one step further. In their view the problem is "in the heads or nervous systems of everyone who has a part in specifying it" (Hoffman, 1985, p.386). Thus it is the problem which creates the system, rather than the other way around.

The problem can be perceived as the meaning system which is created by the distress, and the treatment unit can be defined as everyone (the family, professionals and anyone who is connected to the problem situation) who is contributing to that meaning system. The problem therefore could be viewed as an ecology of ideas, and therapy could be thought of in terms of a conversational domain. The
focus of treatment would no longer be limited to the client system, but rather would view all the participants as an "evolving meaning system" (Hoffman, 1985, p.387).

The notion of widening the focus of treatment is a vitally important one, particularly with regard to the treatment of spouse abuse. The traditional focus was on the individual as the problem; this view was then widened to viewing the family as pathological. This focus on the interior of the family is also limited, however, as there is further dismemberment of other aspects of the family's reality. As discussed earlier in this section, the family is a self-corrective system in that it embodies a recursive organisation of feedback processes. The cybernetic system that emerges when a therapist joins a family will also be self-corrective. Therapy becomes a context wherein a system finds its own adjustments. One of the ways in which a system begins to adjust itself is by generating symptomatic behaviour. This behaviour will act as a magnet that pulls in the attention of a variety of people. With reference to spouse abuse, the symptomatic behaviour (the violence) will begin to involve extended family members, neighbours, concerned members of the community, the police, the judicial system, welfare and feminist organisations, mental health professionals and so forth. All or some of the latter may attempt to be helpful, and their attempts will organise the problem either as part of a process of self-correction, or runaway and oscillation. A particular
difficulty which arises with these various influences is that there is no common language spoken to the family under the spotlight, as there are various definitions of the problem situation, and concomitantly, various 'solutions' which are offered to family members. The isolated family is placed in the centre of a tug-of-war of various meanings, which could result in an escalation of symptomatic behaviour. The family therapist's message to the family may be confounded by an opposing message from other agencies, for example. A therapist must therefore not only consider him/herself as a participant in the therapeutic process, but must also be aware of the various other influences at work (Anderson & Goolishian, 1986).

5.6. Conclusion

It is apparent that when human dilemmas are approached from an ecosystemic viewpoint, and when second-order cybernetic concepts are applied, the non-linear interconnectedness of living organisms becomes evident. Further, it becomes clear that the traditional linear understandings (with the emphasis on single causes) are highly problematic. If Auerswald's (1971) and Capra's (1982) respective visions of impending destruction (which were cited earlier in Chapter 2) are to be averted, then obviously something must be done to redress this unsettling state of affairs. The great strides in thinking about reality that were discussed earlier in this chapter will amount to nothing if these concepts are not translated into
tangible and pragmatic measures.

As discussed in Chapters 1, 3 and 4, the field of spouse abuse is, at present, dominated by an individual approach to both problem description and management. Now that the shortcomings inherent within the traditional approaches are evident, and the framework of the 'new' epistemology has been discussed, it is possible to explore an alternative approach to problem management in the area of spouse abuse. The move towards such an alternative is attempted in the following chapter.
CHAPTER SIX
TOWARDS AN ECOSYSTEMIC UNDERSTANDING OF ALTERNATIVE INTERVENTIONS IN THE REALM OF SPOUSE ABUSE

6.1. Introduction

The prevalence of spouse abuse in South Africa places an enormous amount of pressure on service providers to respond in as effective a manner as possible. Without any doubt whatsoever, service providers must feel greatly challenged in their attempts to intervene in a society undergoing such rapid and substantial transformations. Hope for truly effective intervention, however, lies in this very process of change as it presents the opportunity to search for new and innovative means of responding to this problematic social phenomenon. Helpers are therefore in the fortuitous position of being able to examine the deficits in the existing structures, not only in the South African context, but worldwide.

The limitations of the linear conceptualisations of spouse abuse, as well as the difficulties inherent in linear approaches to treatment have been discussed earlier. Suffice it to say at this stage that what is needed is an alternative means of understanding and intervening into spouse abuse. It is suggested that the ecosystemic thought-framework that was outlined in Chapter 5, provides a way of thinking which opens up intervention options for helpers involved in the area of spouse abuse.

It is important at the outset to remember that the
adherence to the both/and view of reality moves away from a
dualistic, predetermined approach to problem management.
Therefore, there is no set means of approaching spouse
abuse, and as such, there is no fixed 'recipe' for
successful intervention. What is discussed in this chapter
are merely the author's punctuations of what she deems to
be important considerations when intervening into spouse
abuse.

6.2. The Helping System as an Ecosystem

When a helping system is in the planning stages, it is
important for helpers to perceive the helping system itself
as an ecosystem. Auerswald (1971) notes that a major
stumbling block limiting the effectiveness of intervention
is the tendency on the part of helpers to look into what
they are doing. This means a great deal of attention is
paid to theory and technique. Auerswald (1971) contends
that it would be far more worthwhile for the helper to
broaden the field of investigation by looking at the
context in which the helper is operating.

As reviewed in Chapter 5, the ecosystemic view
perceives the helper, the broader helping system, the
client and the context of the client's problems as
interrelated rather than distinct systems. The context of
a helping system is therefore of vital importance, as the
helping system in ecosystemic terms is an ecosystem. The
latter punctuation requires the further understanding that
the helping system is a sub-system of the community (which

159
is also an ecosystem) which it serves.

The helping system is therefore part of the larger community, and cannot be defined as an isolated entity which is connected to the community only through the services provided. Thus, it is vital that the helping service 'fits' with the community in a way which supports the viability of the community at large.

Inherent within the view of the helping system as an ecosystem is the perspective of the helping system as a living, cybernetic system, which is capable of adapting to changing environments and still remaining functional. As Auerswald (n.d.) explains:

A cybernetic system is a circular system that includes in the circle a sensor which extracts information from within and/or without the system which is used to regulate the system's actions (p.4).

It follows then that the helping system is not designed to operate in a static, predetermined manner. Rather, on the basis of external and internal feedback, the operations of such a system are both continuously created and reassessed.

6.2.1. What is the Meaning of 'Community'?

When considering the meaning of community, the question arises as to whether community is tied to place,
or process. For centuries, the idea of community was tied to place (Dunham, 1986). However, following the industrial revolution and the concomitant increase in both scientific knowledge and in the speed of communication, community is now tied to process. For the average person today, a community must inspire a sense of belonging, a sense of mattering to each other and a shared faith that all members' needs will be met (Chavis & Newbrough, 1985; Dunham, 1986). Some common core of values must thus exist before any community is possible.

6.2.2. Goals of an Ecosystemic Spouse Abuse Programme

Once the helping system is viewed as an ecosystem, embedded within the larger community ecosystem, the goals of such a system will be shaped accordingly. They would include the following:

a) Community involvement: There should be ongoing collaboration between service providers and the community at large. Rappaport (1981; 1987) argues that helping agencies should be locally centred rather than centrally controlled. This means essentially that helpers should collaborate rather than dictate on what needs to be done in order for the problem to be resolved. Care in the community requires the development of strong communities of caring institutions, and a level of client advocacy that frequently exceeds the concepts of traditional psychotherapeutic models. This would entail sharing of information with the larger community in the planning and
development of the helping agency. Helpers need to be sensitive to the culture and traditions of the individuals and the particular contexts in which they are intervening. From the start, therefore, the resources of the community need to be assessed, and the helping agency must be developed in accordance with the need requirements of that community. To enhance empowerment in the community, cognizance should be taken of available support systems and the existing potential for self-actualisation of the community.

Community involvement will be important in the following: fund raising, resource identification, public education regarding factors in spouse abuse, programme monitoring and programme evaluation (Baxter, 1987). Variables to be considered with regard to improving quality of life for clients include the availability and the nature of social networks within the community, the availability of employment, the availability of housing (which would, for example, feed into determining the need for safe houses if required).

b) Acceptability of the services provided by the agency: This is an important consideration, as the image of the agency needs to be defined in such a manner as to be acceptable to the clients that it attempts to reach. An influential aspect which feeds into the way in which the agency is identified and perceived by both the community at large, and other helping services is the agency’s name.
What the agency is called, conveys information about its objectives and principles (Anderson & Goolishian, 1986). How the agency is perceived, will in turn have implications for treatment. Terms like 'shelter' and 'refuge', for example, are often linked with feminist ideology. The usage of these terms could lead to decreased involvement of men in intervention programmes (Neidig, 1984). Therefore, the choice of a name must only be made in collaboration with members of the community.

There must also be a clear definition of the role of the agency, whether it is a supportive and therapeutic agency, or an agency of social control. However, definitions can only be made after investigation of the other resources in the community (Auerswald, n.d.).

c) Awareness of other resources: Other agencies and services in the community which deal with family violence need to be identified. As numerous agencies are involved in treatment of spouse abuse, it is important that there be linkages between the various helping agencies. This could be problematic, however, depending on the epistemological base of the other institutions. Nevertheless, if effective intervention at all levels is to be carried out, other systems must be joined in such a way that it maximises communication and co-operation. The types of services which could already be involved in intervention into domestic violence could include the following: criminal justice services, human service systems, medical intervention services and religious service systems. The
functions of these various alternative resources must be clearly defined, so as to maximise efficient utilisation of services. Some of the functions of these various groups include the following:

1. **Criminal Justice Services.**

Law enforcement agencies which could be called on for:

   i) crisis intervention;
   
   ii) arrest of the abuser;
   
   iii) as a referral source (Baxter, 1987).

Civil courts may be called on for the provision of:

   i) orders for medical/psychiatric care;
   
   ii) protective/restraining orders;
   
   iii) mediation between family members
   
   iv) hearings concerning assault, separation, and divorce (Baxter, 1987; Roy, 1982).

Criminal courts may include the provision of:

   i) an arrest warrant;
   
   ii) trial for assault;
   
   iii) imprisonment;
   
   iv) probation.

Legal services may include the provision of:

   i) legal consultation;
   
   ii) court representation;
   
   iii) legal mediation between clients and other service providers.

2. **Human service systems**

Existing social services may provide:
i) counselling;
ii) financial assistance;
iii) payment for temporary emergency shelter;
iv) day care facilities.

Mental health agencies may provide:

i) counselling (for example, crisis, marital, family);
ii) psychiatric outpatient services;
iii) psychiatric assessment.

Employment agencies may provide:

i) adult education;
ii) career counselling;
iii) job training and placement.

Alcohol and drug abuse programmes may provide:

i) counselling;
ii) family services;
iii) support groups.

Volunteer agencies may provide:

i) crisis hot-line services;
ii) support groups and peer counselling;
iii) emergency provisions and shelter for the abused woman.

3) Medical Intervention Services: may provide for:

i) emergency hospital treatment;
ii) private medical treatment.

4) Church organisations: may provide for:

i) religious counselling;
ii) support groups.
There must be collaboration with these other services in order to avoid fragmentation of services. Rappaport (1987) urges attention be paid to structures which mediate between the client system and the helping institution. These structures would include the extended family, the neighbourhood, and the service structures listed above. New meanings need to be coevolved with these various structures so as to promote cooperation and communication.

d) Social networking: The greater the knowledge of resources in the community, the better the performance of social networking. 'Networking' is essentially a process of linking a number of support pieces to form an entire support system (Roberts, 1984). Social networking is a vital goal for helping agencies, as these networks provide their client population with social support. Further, social networks provide clients with the opportunity for personal development (Rappaport, 1987). For their own-well being, the abusive couple require meaningful social roles, adequate income, and a level of support from kin and community which goes beyond the offerings of the most progressive treatment oriented facility. The helping service therefore needs to have well defined links with forces within the community itself.

e) The agency must be accountable to the community: Attainment of this goal will entail constant feedback from the community as to whether the agency is fulfilling the needs that have been identified. This would also require
feedback from the clients themselves as to the various inputs from the agency. If the stated objectives fall short, then new structures need to be developed to overcome deficiencies. This goal is in accordance with the ecosystemic principle of human participation, which entails that the helpers' activity in any chosen domain is in turn defined by the confines of that domain. Helpers therefore both affect and are affected by the confines of any realm of which they are part (Keeney, 1983).

f) The creation of a multi-disciplinary team:
Intervention into spouse abuse requires the input from a variety of disciplines: medicine, law, social science, psychology, law enforcement and the judicial system (Roy, 1982). An objective of any spouse abuse programme is to have representatives from these disciplines under the same roof, or if this is impossible, then to be in close co-operation with them. Multi-disciplinary collaboration will ensure the free flow of information, and as such prevents clients from receiving fragmentary bits of input which could indirectly exacerbate the problem situation. Such a team should not reflect inherent hierarchical specialisations, but should be organised horizontally with all participants having equally important input (Auerswald, 1982).

Further input will be needed from indigenous staff drawn from the community. Input of this nature will facilitate a smoother joining and co-evolution with the community itself. Skills therefore need to be devolved.
through the ranks of indigenous helpers. Such helpers could provide information about the various facets of community functioning, prevalent community beliefs, values and presence of support networks, for example. Further, as there are so many different languages spoken in South Africa, indigenous staff could act as interpreters when necessary.

g) Training in the ecosystemic perspective: The creation of an ecosystemic programme necessitates that all helpers are educated in ecosystemic thinking. If helpers work from different epistemological premises, conflict of ideas about intervention plans could arise from both within and outside the organisation itself which will mitigate against effective service delivery.

Within an ecosystemic approach it is inconceivable to approach any problem without due consideration of the ecology. This means that rather than viewing the problem in narrow linear cause/effect terms, the helper needs to be trained to widen his/her vision to explore all the different intertwining facets of the client's life. Factors to be explored will include the couple's relationship, family (nuclear and extended) relationships, the influence of the larger economic and socio-environmental context and the role of physical and/or physiological factors.

h) The creation of a mobile team: The manner in which help systems are designed at present restricts the ability
of the helper to fully explore the choreography of events as they unfold. Helpers are generally locked away in an office, and clients are seen in a specified time period. Information is often gained indirectly (through police reports, from social workers, from the abused woman only) with the result that the helper cannot gain insight into the various ecological factors which shape the family in question. One way of becoming more in tune with what is going on, is for the helper to become more mobile, that is helpers move out of the office and become personally acquainted with the phenomena 'out there'.

Mobile teams could be comprised of a psychologist, a doctor (or nurse, or paramedic), a social worker, an indigenous worker, and a member of the police force (if necessary). Such teams can make house calls, intervene in crisis situations and can do on-the-spot therapy. As the mobile team works in the client's environment, helpers are able to act as ecological detectives by taking cognizance of the client's social-environmental structures (Auerswald, 1982). Information gleaned by the mobile team can then be added to other information from other sources. As the choreography of events emerge, interventions can be planned accordingly. If other agencies need to become involved, the team will contact them and give them a breakdown of the situation. Even if other agencies become involved, the initial agency continues to have contact with both the family and the other agencies.

In a crisis situation, the mobile team can assess the
situation and intervene to prevent further violence. If the situation remains explosive, then mobile workers can decide on separating the family temporarily. Temporary accommodation may be found with the help of indigenous workers, or in temporary housing offered by the agency itself.

i) No-violence contracts: As a means of ensuring family safety, 'no-violence' contracts need to be co-evolved with the abusive couple, which will stipulate what should occur following violent episodes. During a crisis situation, the mobile team should be aware of the contract stipulations, and plan interventions accordingly.

j) Temporary housing: If alternative housing in the community is not available, emergency housing which forms part of the agency needs to be established. Trained helpers from the agency should run these homes in close collaboration with others involved in particular cases. There could be housing for both men and women, depending on the requirements of that particular community.

6.2.3. Agency Programmes

6.2.3.1. Case Planning

When planning on which interventions are most appropriate to a particular case, information needs to be collected from a variety of people. The view that the violent couple is socially isolated, is really a misrepresentation (McShane, 1979). Numerous people from a
variety of walks of life (neighbours, priests, extended family members, social workers, shelter workers, policemen, lawyers, friends, etc) are all involved on one level or another. All of these people have their own ideas on what should be done to solve the problem. The large variety of different and often conflicting opinions could be confusing to the abusive couple who may be at a complete loss as to whose advice they should follow.

Auerswald (1982) suggests there should be a case conference where everyone who is involved (directly or indirectly) in the particular family should be present. In the conference a definition of the problem is reached by everyone present and a plan of action in concrete terms is worked out. This type of approach makes the various influences explicit, and has the added advantage of hearing what the average person in the street has to say about problems. There is also the indirect influence of empowering both the client system and those 'others' involved to discover their own strengths and realise that their ideas are useful.

Instead of the top-down relationship structure that is found in most of the 'traditional' organisational structures, the treatment unit is defined more in terms of comprising fellow investigators, or collaborators. 'Diagnosis' is understood in terms of choreography rather than a reductionistic breakdown of events. What is considered important, is how all the 'facts' fit together
as this provides the helpers with invaluable information as to how to intervene. In this manner, 'violence' is redefined in ecological rather than individual variables, and problem management is framed in pragmatic terms. There is thus a move towards the co-creation of problem definition and problem remediation (Auerswald, 1982).

A 'chairperson' is appointed who keeps track of task assignment and who mediates between the various levels of input into problem management. As there is one person coordinating problem management, services to the client system are not fragmented. There is constant exchange of information and assessment of how the situation is progressing. If difficulties do arise, then amendments are made to the original plan of action (Auerswald, 1982).

6.2.3.2. Modes of Treatment

Treatment is defined by Baxter (1987) as "any measure designed to relieve or cure abnormal or undesirable conditions" (p. 124). Treatment is far more than protection from further abuse, and should not be aimed at just one member of the family. As discussed in Chapter 4, children in abusive homes are also in need of emotional care and support, and should therefore not be excluded from therapy. As there is no right or wrong way of doing therapy, and no set 'recipe' for successful outcome, the choice of techniques and style are a personal choice for the particular helpers involved. What is discussed below are various options of types of therapy which may be
incorporated into a spouse abuse programme.

i) Crisis intervention: Three forms may be incorporated; intervention by the mobile team (which was discussed earlier), a round-the-clock hot-line service, and a walk-in crisis centre. All three forms of crisis intervention will be manned by agency workers, and all information pertaining to cases will be given to personnel in charge of that particular case.

Both the hot-line and walk-in services should be able to offer clients crisis counselling. In addition, information needs to be supplied to clients regarding agency programmes, other service alternatives, referrals, and arrangements for follow-up at a later date. All the hot-line staff should receive training in ecosystemic thinking, so as to be able to counsel and report on events in an ecological manner. A professional back-up consultant should be available to assist with emergencies, and to decide whether to call in the mobile team for further input.

ii) Individual counselling: This form of counselling may be useful in: a crisis situation where one family member needs help to make immediate decisions; situations where other family members are reluctant to participate; situations where it is mutually decided (by both client and helper(s)) that individual therapy could enhance other forms of therapy (Baxter, 1987).

iii) Marital counselling: This form of therapy could be useful in: the exploration of relationship difficulties;
the development of behavioural alternatives; and in decreasing the couple's isolation from each other by developing a personal support system (Baxter, 1987; Lane & Russell, 1987).

iv) Family counselling is preferable once the intensity of violence has lessened, so as to allow the free flow of information without fear of reprisal (Baxter, 1987). Family sessions are useful in the exploration of other areas of family dysfunction (if these have been identified), and also allows for increasing the interaction between family members. If alcohol or drug abuse has been identified as a problem in the family, then referrals should be made to community services specialised in this field.

v) Group counselling: Depending on the requirements of the community, groups can be divided on the basis of gender to start off with, then into couples. It may be useful for children to also enter into group work, as this will enable them to explore their feelings with other children who have had similar experiences (Hughes, 1982). Group counselling may be useful in providing family members with a support system, and the opportunity to improve social skills and decision making.

6.2.3.3. Other Agency Interventions

If there are stressors emanating from outside the family, these need to be attended to. Such needs would
include assisting the clients with employment difficulties and mobilising the social support network to provide aid in the time of crisis. The providing of social contact will also be important to overcome the isolation of the abusive family (if this is identified as being problematic to the family in question).

Other problematic areas could include lack of parenting skills, which could lead to increased levels of family stress. Another possible alternative for a spouse abuse agency is to include an educational component which covers a large variety of aspects of family living. Such a component could include parenting-skills training, sex education, non-violent problem resolution, social skills training, and education on gender related issues (Auerswald, 1987b; Baxter, 1987; Lipchick, 1991).

6.3. Community Education

This is an important facet in prevention. Information should be given out by the agency to other services in the area. It is important that the community is aware of the prevalence of spouse abuse, and that spouse abuse is an unacceptable social problem which should be combated rather than concealed. Further, information should be made available to the community at large in the form of conferences, brochures, posters and public speaking engagements. The agency could link up with institutions like hospitals, schools, churches and youth centres which
should also offer information about the various causes, consequences and means of intervention into spouse abuse. Skills on managing violence could also be devolved through community social networks to widen the impact of the agency's objectives.

It would be advisable to develop resources within the community which offer immediate support and aid for couples/families under stress. Such facilities could include therapeutic day-care centres, drop-off facilities, homemaker services, job allocation and advice services, and immediately available person-to-person contact with an identified therapist, or a trained volunteer (Paulson, 1975).

6.4. Conclusion

Spouse abuse is a major social problem in South Africa today. When intervention is viewed from a meta-position, it is apparent that the field is fraught with difficulties, which affect both client and helping systems. Indeed, when problem management is viewed against the backdrop of a violent society, the remediation of the problem situation appears to be impossible. The temptation is to resort to coercive measures as the only possible means of effective intervention. However, as seen from the situation in the Western world, the use of linear control models for intervention not only fall short of the predetermined goals, but could inadvertently exacerbate an already difficult situation. Thus both helper and client
are caught in the untenable situation where on the one hand, failure to intervene results in violence, and on the other hand intervention within the traditional framework also leads to violence.

The difficulty which helpers face, lies in their ascription to a dualistic epistemology, which organises problem management in a divisive manner, where only one end of the relationship is focused on. The problem is that this is precisely where violence resides, in the "dichotomous logic of separation and control" (Flemons, 1989, p.6). As Sampson's (cited in Flemons, 1989, p.6) ecological metaphor further explains:

In the single-minded pursuit of mastery, the pursuer becomes the pursued, trapped by the very lures and snares established to catch and dominate the presumed 'enemy'. The very tools and institutions established in the first place to achieve mastery become the source of new problems that humanity confronts. What is called for, therefore, is a different relationship between humanity and nature, one that partakes less of mastery and more of participation and receptivity.

What appears to be needed is a perspective that moves away from the obvious head-on-head solutions, to one in which the entire field of intervention is expanded to include various levels of interrelated systems, such that
the number of possible options are increased. Hoffman (1985, p.393) offers a shortlist of guidelines which should be included as part of any ecosystemic therapeutic endeavour:

i) An 'observing system' stance and inclusion of the therapist's own context;

ii) a collaborative rather than a hierarchical structure;

iii) goals that emphasise setting a context for change, not specifying a change;

iv) ways to guard against too much instrumentality;

v) a 'circular' assessment of the problem;

vi) a nonpejorative, nonjudgemental view.

It would be worthwhile for any helper to keep these guidelines in mind when intervening in the area of spouse abuse.

It is suggested that helpers working in a transforming South Africa are in the privileged position of being able to free themselves from their hostage position both aesthetically and pragmatically, unlike the position in other countries where the traditional institutions are so firmly entrenched that new ways of structuring helping organisations act as radical threats to the established way of doing things. In a country undergoing major forms of transition, however, it is possible that new alternatives may be welcomed.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Violence, 2, 95-108.


Family, 44, 277-86.


American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, 6(3), 322-34.


