

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG ADULT FEMALES

by

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I declare that “**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG ADULT FEMALES**” is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Nicola Themistocleous

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## **ABSTRACT**

There has been a vast amount of research regarding domestic violence. However, the literature is centered on a linear, cause and effect approach. This study aimed to explore domestic violence from the experiences of young female adults, and will be approached from a postmodern perspective. The participants were selected based on purposive sampling and willingness to participate. The sample consists of two participants and the data was obtained through their written stories and semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Themes were then extracted from the data and were explored through hermeneutic analysis which is consistent with the postmodern approach. A qualitative methodological design was used in order to allow meaning to emerge. The results were then presented in an interpretive and descriptive manner.

Key words: experiencing domestic violence, domestic violence, young adult females, postmodernism, Domestic Violence Act (no 116 of 1998), ecosystemic epistemology, qualitative research, hermeneutic analysis.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### **CHAPTER 1:**

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction .....	1
Domestic Violence.....	2
Aim and Rationale of the Study.....	7
Research Design.....	10
Chapter Outline.....	11
Conclusion.....	12

### **CHAPTER 2:**

#### **FAMILIES AS SYSTEMS – ECOSYSTEMICS: A HIGHER ORDER**

<b>EPISTEMOLOGY.....</b>	<b>13</b>
Introduction.....	13
Epistemology.....	13
From Modernism to Postmodernism – The shift.....	14
Ecosystemics: A non-linear approach.....	16
First-order Cybernetics.....	18
Second-order Cybernetics.....	20
Wholeness and Self-Reference.....	20
Autopoiesis.....	22
Structural Determinism.....	23
Structural Coupling and Non-purposeful Drift.....	23
Epistemology of Participation.....	24
Reality as a Multi-verse.....	25
Recursion, self-reflection and context.....	26
Social Constructionism.....	27
An Ecosystemic Perspective on Violence.....	30
Conclusion.....	34

**CHAPTER 3:**

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ..... 35**

Introduction..... 35

Domestic Violence in South Africa..... 36

    Violence, Poverty, Culture and Patriarchy..... 38

    Interpersonal Context Risks for Partner Violence..... 41

        Interpersonal Relationships.....41

    Individual Characteristics and Temperament of Abuser.....41

        Role of gender.....42

        Educational Level and Age.....43

        Alcohol and Drug dependency.....43

    Violence in the /family of Origin.....44

Conceptualizing Domestic Violence..... 46

A developmental Approach..... 52

    The Infant..... 53

    The Preschool Age..... 54

    School Age Children..... 55

    The Adolescent..... 58

    Effects on Adults and Long-term Effects..... 59

Conclusion..... 61

**CHAPTER 4:**

**RESEARCH DESIGN..... 63**

Introduction.....63

Research Design..... 64

    Paradigms.....64

        The Positivist Paradigm and Quantitative Method of Inquiry.....65

        The Naturalist Paradigm and Qualitative Method of Inquiry.....67

        Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research.....71

Reliability.....	73
Validity.....	74
Ethical Considerations.....	76
Informed Consent.....	77
Confidentiality.....	77
Beneficence and Non-Maleficence.....	77
Research Method.....	78
Sampling.....	78
Data Collection.....	80
Data Analysis using the Hermeneutic Approach.....	80
Conclusion.....	84

**CHAPTER 5:**

**THROUGH THE EYES OF THE PARTICIPANTS..... 85**

Introduction.....	85
The Story of Mary.....	86
In Context.....	86
The History.....	87
The Violence.....	87
The tattoo – Imprint of Violence.....	91
Interpersonal Relationships.....	91
Independence.....	94
Generational Cycle.....	95
Love and Hate.....	96
Life and Death.....	97
Loss.....	97
Gaining.....	98
The Moral of the Story.....	100
The Story of Claire.....	102
In Context.....	102
The History.....	103

The Violence.....	103
The Tattoo – Imprint of Violence.....	106
Suicide, Drugs and Loss.....	106
Love and Hate.....	105
Independence.....	108
Life and Death.....	108
Loss.....	108
Connections and New Life.....	109
The Moral of the Story.....	110
Conclusion.....	112

**CHAPTER 6:**

**FINDINGS BASED ON THEMATIC ANALYSIS..... 113**

Introduction.....	113
Reflections Based on Themes.....	113
Conclusion.....	113

**CHAPTER 7:**

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....121**

Introduction.....	121
Reflecting on the Study.....	121
Strengths of the Study.....	122
Limitations of the Study.....	124
Recommendations for Future Research.....	126
Personal Reflections of the Research.....	127
Conclusion.....	128

**APPENDIX A..... 130**

**APPENDIX B.....132**

**APPENDIX C.....138**



**REFERENCES..... 143**

**LIST OF TABLES:**

Table 1: Past year and Lifetime Prevalence of Partner Violence.....6  
Table 2: Number of Applications made for protection orders over five years.....8

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*No safe place.  
Nowhere to hide. No way to escape the terror.  
No one to tell. No one to go to for help.  
Is this a war zone? A ghetto? A natural catastrophe?  
No, this is the violence of day-to-day family life  
in many [American] homes.  
(Crawford, 1994, p.2).*

#### Introduction

*“On Saturday I spat out a bloody front tooth along with another piece of what little life I have left in me. I have a wonderful father who turns into a monster when he drinks. The rugby this weekend made him very excited and he drank a lot. I have a wonderful mother who turns into a mouse when my father becomes a monster. He hit my mother again this weekend. She always tried to protect my little brother and me. But on Saturday she probably just gave up and wasn't around when the monster hit and kicked my brother. She also wasn't there when I tried to help him and the monster turned on me instead.*

*I later discovered my mother had been knocked unconscious because when she came to she didn't even know why my brother and I were full of blood. My father left Saturday and hasn't come back yet. It's Wednesday today.*

*I hope my father comes back and leaves the monster behind somewhere because I hate the monster, not my dad. In time I'll probably learn to hate him too. My wish is for my dad to read this letter because when he isn't the monster I feel too sorry for him to speak to him about it and when he is I'm too scared.*

*My brother is only six years old and all I want is for him to laugh and play like other little boys. I think my mom is pretty even though the monster calls her ugly things. The*

*thing is, in my head I'm planning the monster's murder because I can no longer look at my mother's bruised face and my little brother's fear.*

*I don't want to do it daddy...*

*Lots of love, Mientjie”*

*(YOU, 23 September 2004, p.14)*

This is a letter written by a 13 year old girl called Mientjie (not her real name) who experienced domestic violence in her home. She wrote the letter in the hope that her father would read it in a popular magazine and return home.

Throughout my training as a Clinical Psychologist, I have been exposed to a significant amount of violence in families, between couples and towards children such as that described in Mientjie's story. Thus this letter became the impetus to begin my research, to try and understand better those who have experienced domestic violence, their perceptions of themselves, their relationships with the perpetrator, and how they create their understanding of a topic that by any definition can destroy their trust, belief and will for life.

### **Domestic Violence**

Violence against women has been one of the most prominent features of post-apartheid South Africa. While estimates of the extent of violence vary, the issue has dominated public debates and galvanized community-based activism and non-governmental organisation (NGO) intervention (Vetten, 2005). Domestic violence and the extent of the problem was recognized by the ANC government from relatively early in its tenure.

Nelson Mandela's opening sentence in his state of the nation address at the opening of South Africa's first non-racial parliament highlights the value he placed on the youth: "The time will come when our nation will honour the memory of all the sons, the daughters, the mothers, the fathers, the youth and the children who, by their thoughts and deeds, gave us the right to assert with pride that we are South Africans, and that we are citizens of the world" (Van Zyl Slabbert, Malan, Marais, Olivier & Riordan, 1994, p. 9). He further went on to say: "The youth of our country are the valued possessions of the nation. Without them there can be no future. Their needs are immense and urgent" (p. 10).

Despite these words, many South African citizens are plagued with fear. Even after the elections in 1994, violence has remained endemic in South Africa. The youth have been brought up in a society that has steadily become more prone to violence. Violence has become a widespread phenomenon in schools, in the community, in the homes and has etched itself into the mind-sets of people. Van Zyl Slabbert et al. (1994) say "One can only speculate about the psychological and behavioural effects on young people" (p.9). Unfortunately, South Africa is riddled with violence in the community, and is often referred to as a country with a culture of violence.

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

(Vienings, 1994, p. 3)

Many of us are exposed to, or have known, someone who has been affected by violence either directly or indirectly. Violence in our society has become a common social ill and we have naturally become desensitized to violence to the point where it has now become normal. South Africa is a violent country. We have experienced political violence as early as the 1960's where violence became an upsetting factor within the socio-political realities of South Africa in the struggle against apartheid. However, almost five decades later, violence is still a widespread phenomenon in the news. But what happens about the violence that we do not see, and often do not hear, the violence that occurs behind closed doors?

Family violence has been described as a recent phenomenon which has been attributed to a breakdown in the moral structure of a family. It has, however, been part of family life for decades. Researchers acknowledge that exposure to domestic violence is a non-specific risk factor for developmental harm, but efforts to research this topic have only become rigorous since the 1980's (Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre-Smith & Jaffe, 2003). Recently, child witnesses to domestic violence have been labelled the 'forgotten victims' and consequently have been overlooked by researchers and clinicians (Diamond & Muller, 2004). The damage done to these children's psychological and physical health, however, is immense. Morgentaler (2000) have proposed that witnessing domestic violence is more destructive than actually being physically abused.

One of the greatest problems in the literature is that the majority of studies have confounded the effects of witnessing domestic violence with the effects of experiencing direct child abuse (Edelson, 2001). A reason may be that children who witness marital violence also experience other risk factors. Child sexual abuse and physical abuse are two forms of maltreatment that often coexist in families with domestic violence

(Maker, Kemmelmeier & Peterson, 1998). Other confounding risk factors include parental psychiatric disorders, neglect, verbal conflict and parental substance abuse. “Despite the comorbidity and the parallel symptoms of sexual abuse, physical abuse, domestic violence and parental substance abuse, most researchers examining the impact of the witnessing of domestic violence have failed to assess the potential confounding presence of these other childhood risk factors. Omitting co-existing risk factors that have similar debilitating ramifications thus presents a serious challenge to the emerging literature on the psychological effects of experiencing domestic violence. It is also unclear whether specific symptoms associated with witnessing marital violence that are exhibited in the short term have a sustained impact on the course of developmental maturation” (Maker et al., 1998, p.576).

Literature regarding the personal experiences of individuals who have experienced domestic violence, in particular in a South African context, is limited. The prevalence rates of domestic violence are unclear and research tends to be narrowed down to the effects violence has on individuals at different ages. A study done by the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa (2003) found that 20% of the sample involved had experienced violence in their relationships. Of this group, 12, 5% reported such assaults in the last year. Between April 2002 and March 2003 there were 52 425 reported rape cases and 4 798 cases of child abuse and neglect (SAPS Crime Statistics, 2003). This is almost 25% higher than in the United States of America (Dawes, 2004). Novitz (1996) says “Some sources suggest that one in every six women has been the victim of violence committed by a man she was related to” (p.5).

The following is a table depicting prevalence rates of violence in South Africa as found by the Human Sciences Research Council (2003):

**Table 1:**

**Past year and Lifetime Prevalence of Partner Violence**

	LIFETIME INCIDENCE	PAST YEAR INCIDENCE
COUPLES	19.2%	12.5%
<b>PERPETRATORS TOTAL</b>	16.5%	10.4%
MALE	8.3%	4.8%
FEMALE	8.2%	5.6%
<b>VICTIMS TOTAL</b>	14.9%	10%
MALE	5.4%	3.3%
FEMALE	9.5%	6.7%

(HSRC, 2003, p.48)

The most frequently cited long-term effect of having experienced domestic violence as children is focused on violence in adult relationships. Granted, one could not expect problems to subside or disappear once one enters adulthood, especially given the range and severity of the trauma (Von Steen, 1997). The vast majority of literature examining the effects in adulthood has focused solely on the relationship between exposure to domestic violence and later adult relationship violence (Diamond & Muller, 2004).

Further, the majority of the literature available refers to the prevalence, effects and psychological and behavioural problems of those who have experienced domestic violence. These findings are valuable; however, the focus of this study will be to explore and give a voice from a post-modern framework to young female adults who have experienced domestic violence. The intention will not be to add to the statistics, but to allow

individuals the freedom to share their unique experiences, which will be beneficial not only to research, clinical work and intervention programmes, but to the participants and other individuals who find themselves in a similar position.

### **Aim and Rationale of the Study**

As mentioned previously, and which will be explored further in Chapter 3, the literature available tends to be linear in nature, and highlights the effects of being exposed directly or indirectly to violence. The majority of the literature is aimed at providing statistical data and describes the cause and effects of experiencing domestic violence. Investigations tend to reduce the process of a study into separate units of analysis. Further, there is a significant lack of investigation of experiencing domestic violence from a postmodern framework.

Since 1994, there has been a significant amount of attention placed on protecting women and children in South Africa. This tends to focus on specific areas of abuse, namely rape and molestation of women and children. The realm of women abused within their home, however, has been neglected. The first legislation to specifically address domestic violence in South Africa was the Prevention of Family Violence Act (PFVA) (no 133 of 1993). The PFVA has since been revised and the Domestic Violence Act (DVA) (no 116 of 1998) was passed in 1998 and became operational December 15, 1999. One of the key innovations of the DVA is its broad definition of domestic violence which includes a range of behaviours within its ambit (Vetten, 2005). The DVA is applicable to a range of familial and domestic relationships and covers both heterosexual and same-sex relationships. A victim of domestic violence may apply for a protection order to stop the abuse and to stop the abuser from entering



the mutual home, victim's residence or the victim's place of employment. A protection order is literally a document that a magistrate signs directing an individual to abide by certain conditions. The purpose of this document is to offer legal protection to victims of domestic violence. Protection orders are available from the domestic violence offices in the Magistrate Court and from some police stations. Once the paperwork has been completed, the court clerk will then take the documents to the Magistrate who will decide if the temporary protection order should be issued. Thereafter a court date may be set for a hearing to make a decision regarding a permanent protection order. Information obtained from several Magistrate Courts in South Africa indicates the increase in the applications for protection orders (personal communication with court clerks). Apart from figures obtained from Cape Town and Durban, the figures infer that the rate of domestic violence is increasing and the need for legal protection is escalating. However, the number of finalised cases and cases that were withdrawn are unknown. The following is a table depicting the number of applications made for protection orders in five Magistrate Courts over five years.

**Table 2:**

**Number of applications made for protection orders over five years**

	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>
<b>Pretoria</b>	4349	4578	5001	5086	5259
<b>Roodepoort</b>	2654	2656	2855	2902	3051
<b>Krugersdorp</b>	unavailable	unavailable	1799	1653	1984
<b>Cape Town</b>	2314	2515	2455	2448	2271
<b>Durban</b>	3092	4151	4059	3834	3515

(Personal communication, 2008)

A second key innovation of the DVA is its attempt to introduce statutory monitoring of police enforcement. Legislators placed particular emphasis upon police in an effort to challenge their long history of neglect of domestic violence. Vetten (2005) says that police services still prefer to remain uninvolved with cases of domestic disturbance. She also goes on to say “Interviews with 23 women who had obtained protection orders highlighted police negligence and incompetence...” (p. 6). The lack of involvement from authorities, as well as society’s reluctance to speak openly about domestic violence as a social ill exacerbates the problem. In earlier research Parenzee, Artz and Moulton (2001) found that unwillingness to intervene in ‘household disputes’ remained pervasive in the SAPS (South African Police Service) and that domestic violence was rife among police officers themselves. They concluded that progressive legislation combined with unprogressive attitudes among law enforcement agents created negative attitudes towards complainants, resulting in secondary victimization of abused women. Negative attitudes towards complainants were to be related to complainants’ withdrawal of charges. Although the DVA (no 116 of 1998) stipulates police involvement, a report released on March 8, 2006 by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, indicate that “Societal attitudes and a lack of infrastructure, resources and training for law enforcement officials hampered the implementation of domestic violence legislation” (p.10). It is the aim of this study to highlight the urgency of recognizing domestic violence as the crime it is. If authorities were adequately equipped and resources made more freely available, clinicians and health care workers will be able to provide more effective services. Further, victims of domestic violence and those who experience domestic violence will be protected and provided with services that support healing. It is believed that through this study, the participants may be exposed to information and resources that could possibly aid in empowering and helping them. The particular approach of this study will

allow the participants to develop new insights and understandings, in order to create meaning of their situations.

In this research participants will be afforded the opportunity to explore their experiences within a safe environment. This will create a space for them to reflect on their growth and this could possibly lead to healing. New ideas and understandings may emerge that may lead to individuals making sense of their stories and therefore possibly finding closure.

Therefore, the aim of this study, which falls within a postmodern framework, is to give a voice to the participants to share their stories of having experienced domestic violence. The letter written by 'Mientjie' reflected the violence and the outcomes of a violent environment that many South African's are exposed to. After reading the letter, I was overwhelmed with the idea that there are people who have experienced much trauma and suffering, yet manage to pull through. I was also aware that many individuals tend to experience violent circumstances and never seek out legal help. This motivated my research and allowed me to expose myself to vulnerabilities and to an area that is considered as 'hidden'. It is the hope that this research may create a clearer understanding of domestic violence in order to enrich and equip health care workers to provide an effective service.

### **Research Design**

This study will be done in accordance with a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research embraces a cyclical rather than a linear method and indulges in the lived experiences of participants under the notion that an objective reality cannot be known. Any description is inherently subjective and only represents a partial reality (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). This is consistent with the postmodern tradition which

guides this study. Meanings are seen to be co-created within a conversational domain where the stories are not seen as a fixed and objective reality.

This study aims to focus on the personal experiences of young female adults who have experienced domestic violence in their family of origin, and to allow a space for their stories to be told and in so doing, to create new meaning. The research will involve two young female adults, aged 20 and 21 respectively, who have been selected through purposive sampling, and who will portray their experiences in both written format and semi-structured face-to-face interviews. These individuals have given consent and agreed to participate on a voluntary basis. The research design will be explicated in detail in Chapter 4.

### **Chapter outline**

The contents of the dissertation will be as follows:

Chapter 2 will provide the underlying epistemology of the study. It will compare the modernist and postmodernist stances. This chapter will highlight the ecosystemic epistemology as well as the social-constructionist approach which form part of the postmodern tradition. Domestic violence as seen from an ecosystemic perspective will also be discussed.

Chapter 3 will highlight the body of literature surveyed. Reference will be made to South African literature, and I shall address the issue of defining domestic violence and related factors. Effects of witnessing domestic violence will be included.

Chapter 4 will describe the research design used in this study.

Chapter 5 will give a voice to the participants. This is where their vulnerabilities and strengths will be portrayed through the reconstruction of their stories. Careful data analysis will aim to abstract themes in order to co-create and give new meaning to their experiences of domestic violence.

Chapter 6 will draw the study to a close. It will provide the concluding chapter where an overview of the research will be given, as well as the limitations and recommendations for further studies.

### **Conclusion**

The following chapter will explore the underlying epistemology of the study, after which the relevant literature will be examined in Chapter 3.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **FAMILIES AS SYSTEMS**

#### **Ecosystemics: A Higher-Order Epistemology**

##### **Introduction**

The epistemology of the origin, nature and limits of knowledge of a researcher has significant implications on the research procedures and results. Therefore it is important to begin with an explanation of the epistemology that guides this research. Further, an attempt will be made to explain the nature of violence according to this approach.

##### **Epistemology**

According to Anderson and Goolishian (1992), the nature of the world as we see it is determined largely by our theoretical perspectives, and that different therapists approach problems in different ways. As views of therapy have changed, so too have the descriptions of the therapist's role and expertise. Keeney and Sprenkle (1982) emphasize that "one relevant distinction to make is whether therapists consciously know the relation between their epistemological base and habitual patterns of clinical action" (p. 5). Auerswald (1985) defines epistemology as a "set of immanent rules used in thought by large groups of people to define reality" (p.1). Epistemology, therefore, is the study of the nature of knowledge – what is knowledge as distinct from mere belief or prejudice (Held & Pols, 1987). This suggests that we need to be aware of the epistemology we use in research, therapy and clinical work in order to understand and explore effectively that which faces us, and avoid heading blindly into an unknown territory.

Epistemology, therefore, is the study of the nature of knowledge, how we know what we know, and can be elaborated on and understood in terms of two distinct traditions, namely the modernist/ linear tradition and the postmodern/ non-linear tradition (Keeney, 1983). The main premises of each tradition will be discussed below as it is important to be aware of from which tradition one's assumptions and epistemology are formed.

### **From Modernism to Postmodernism – The Shift**

“Most of us have been socialized into a world whose philosophical assumptions (basic epistemology) are firmly rooted in a Western, Lockean, and scientific tradition” (Becvar & Becvar, 2000, p.3). The Lockean perspective supports the notion of unidirectional, linear cause and effect thinking. Reality is considered to be separate from us and meaning comes from external experiences. Further, reality can be reduced into its smallest possible components (reductionism) and the world is seen as deterministic – operating according to law-like principles. “We as individuals are seen as reacting to our reality rather than creating it” (Becvar & Becvar, 2000, p.4). This premise embraced the notion of a mind/body dualism – thus the *I* (subject) can view objects/ reality from a distance. The Lockean view believes that both objective measurement and a value-free science are possible (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

A postmodern or non-linear perspective is classically referred to as “systemic, ecological, ecosystemic, circular, recursive, or cybernetic” (Keeney, 1983, p.14). Ecology and the wholeness of a system are important, and value is placed on the interconnectedness of individuals and on context. Keeney (1983) suggested that ecology can be regarded as the fundamental assumption that all things in nature are related to one

another in a complex yet systematic manner. By recognizing the broader contexts within which theories are developed, the postmodern tradition asserts that no theory or described reality can have validity outside of a particular historical context and value system (Doherty, 1991). This tradition can thus be seen as instrumental in revolutionizing ways of demarcating and approaching the world. Reality and knowledge are seen as tentative and contends that all meaning attached to art, literature and experiences are open to re-evaluation and seen as not-static within universal theories. This suggests that as a researcher, I cannot assume an objective stance and 'see' reality, but rather need to keep in mind my own context and the context of my participants and the uniqueness of their experiences in order to share in their understanding of witnessing domestic violence through the use of language.

To summarize this notion, the postmodern view undermines the modernist perspective, and reality is seen inevitably as subjective. We dwell in a multi-verse that is cooperatively constructed through the act of observation and language. Thus, the research interest is in understanding the process of domestic violence in families from an individual's perspective, and how individuals make sense of their realities. Although the individual is the focus of this study, one cannot ignore that the individual is part of an ecology, in which s/he interacts with other family members, the community, and culture. Postmodernism has a greater acceptance of a higher order of awareness, or of an epistemology that has a conscious awareness of itself (Keeney, 1983).

The postmodern epistemological framework of this study is ecosystemic in nature and is seen to form the foundation for the way I will conceptualize the study. In remaining consistent with ecosystemic thinking, my view is not presented as a fixed reality, but instead as one way to frame an understanding of an epistemology and its applications to



the research. This infers that the theory and literature, as well as my assumptions, are a version of the topic at hand. This approach therefore recognizes different realities and that different meanings can be attached to experiences. The idea that a person will attach meaning to everything s/he experiences suggests that this meaning will represent 'reality' for that individual. The idea that different realities exist is an important assumption in the ecosystemic approach, and therefore for this study as well. Ecosystemic epistemology has evolved dramatically and can be understood to form part of the postmodern tradition (Hoffman, 1985). Drawing from the assumptions of the postmodern tradition, the ecosystemic epistemology will be described in the following section in order to illuminate the lens or framework that directs this research.

### **Ecosystemics: A non-linear approach**

Ecosystemic epistemology stems from cybernetics, ecology and systems theory (Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982), and in order to have an adequate understanding of the ecosystemic framework, the following section will be dedicated to placing it in context and exploring its origin and emergence.

Cybernetics originated from early research in engineering and was thought by Keeney (1983) to be the major context within which to study epistemological issues. The forerunners in this area who applied the cybernetic principles from biology to the family therapy field were Gregory Bateson, Heinz von Foerster, Humberto Maturana, Francisco Varela and Ernst von Glasersfeld (Hoffman, 1985). Cybernetics is the science of discerning and managing patterns of organization and plays a vital role in providing an appreciation for ecosystemic epistemology. It

proposes that the interactions within and between systems should be seen in terms of patterns that connect (Bateson, 1972, 1979).

As a biologist, von Bertalanffy (1962) formulated the General Systems Theory – wanting to account for the organization of parts of the organism and how an organism maintains and regulates functioning. General Systems Theory is known by many family researchers as the guiding framework for describing families and assumes that family organization consists of patterned activities of the individual. Systems Theory, ecology and cybernetics, is attuned to holism, relationships, complexity, patterns and contextual interconnectedness (Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982). Systems theory directs our attention away from the individual viewed in isolation and towards relationships and relationship issues between individuals. Subjectivity is seen as inevitable as the observer creates his/her own reality. This view emphasizes the importance of a holistic perspective that takes into account the context of interaction. The focus, therefore, is holistic and person-centred, and subjectivity is inevitable. Reality is not external to us, but is constructed by us. Understood in this light, a problem does not exist until it has been languaged (Efran & Lukens, 1985).

Although not originally developed for this purpose, General Systems Theory has been applied to the understanding of social phenomena: “A whole which functions as a whole through the interdependence of its parts is known as a *system*” (Vetere & Gale, 1987, p.18). However, cybernetics goes beyond General Systems Theory, in that cybernetics’ main concern lies with pattern and form rather than parts and wholes. Keeney (1983) supports Bateson’s work which considered cybernetics to be the appropriate epistemological foundation and language for talking about personal and social change. Doherty (1991) said that cybernetics was understood to give the field of family therapy a metaphorical language by

which family processes could be analyzed without reference to discovering underlying truths or insights.

Within the cybernetic premise, one can differentiate between first-order and second-order cybernetics, both emphasizing pattern and form; however each having some differentiating characteristics. According to Keeney (1983), Heinz von Foerster made the first distinction between first and second-order cybernetics. A description that attempts to demarcate one as superior as the other would imply an *either/or* dichotomy which would be inconsistent with the advocated cybernetic epistemology. Following this approach, it stresses complementarity of relationships moving away from an *either/or* dichotomy towards an inclusive view of a *both/and* position (Keeney, 1983). The cybernetic premises have been presented in order to provide a basis from which to contextualize first and second-order cybernetics, which in turn form the fundamental threads that form the ecosystemic epistemology. What follows will be a discussion of both first-order and second-order cybernetics, which will move us closer to the understanding of an ecosystemic epistemology.

### **First-order Cybernetics**

From a first-order (simple) cybernetics position, the therapist is seen as an observer who exists outside of the system being described. However, instead of focusing on the individual as in the modernist tradition, the observer views a system and describes the system and the way in which patterns are connected to create the uniqueness of each system (Keeney, 1983). Becvar and Becvar (2000) suggest that first-order cybernetics is concerned with identifying recurring patterns and then designing interventions to interrupt and redirect behaviours to achieve an optimum or healthier goal. Some models which ascribe to first-order cybernetic principles include strategic, structural or communication models and they

typically focus on objectively perceived interactional patterns and dysfunctional structures within an observed framework. First-order cybernetics has been likened to a 'black box' where a system interacts with outside systems, and asserts that feedback processes involve inputs and outputs which serve to control the system by "reinserting into it the results of its past performance" (Keeney, 1983, p. 66). While it may often be useful for a therapist to operate according to the first-order perspective, it has been criticized for its failure to describe higher-order processes which include the therapist him/herself. As observers of the 'black box' we think of systems, or families, however, we also need to be aware of ourselves and define ourselves as part of the system. Keeney (1983) says: "The inadequacy of applying simple cybernetics to human phenomena was that it failed to prescribe higher-order punctuations that connect the therapist or observer to the client or observed" (p. 158). Further, Keeney (1983) criticized first-order cybernetics as being reductionistic, for breaking systems into parts and looking at them separately. Instead, we should be viewing a system holistically as Bogdan (1984) said: "...the behaviour of each member of a family is related to that of every other member" (p.387). Thus, a system (e.g. a family) is seen as an 'ecology of ideas' where a person's perception and definition will shape his/her behaviour and ideas, as well as support or sustain the ideas and behaviours of every other member belonging to that system. This suggests that people behave according to how they frame, define or punctuate the situation in which they belong (Bogdan, 1984). Accordingly, it is appropriate to move on now to a discussion of cybernetics of cybernetics, or second-order cybernetics, which came about through reconceptualizing the epistemological stance towards systems and the way in which interaction takes place.

## **Second-order Cybernetics**

Second-order cybernetics encompasses both the system and the wider ecology (Bateson, 1972), and therefore is also referred to as ecosystemics. Second-order cybernetics moves up a level of abstraction, and we are no longer merely observing the ‘black box’ with its inputs and outputs, but rather we look at a larger context that includes the black box as well as the observer (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). At this level, the observer becomes part of, or a participant in, that which is being observed, “Whatever you see reflects your properties” (Varela & Johnson, 1976, p.30). “Since a description always implies an interaction, and since the describing systems describe their components via interaction through their components, there is a constitutive homomorphism between descriptions and behaviour in general, and the operations of the system they describe. Therefore, we literally create the world in which we live by living it” (Maturana, 1978, p.61).

So based on this premise, during my research I cannot ignore myself as part of the system, part of that which I am researching. My frame-of-reference and all that comes with that will be portrayed in the meaning I attach when interpreting the stories of the participants. What follows will be a brief description of second-order cybernetic principles, where the focus shifts from a behavioural analysis based on inputs and outputs with an emphasis on the environment, to a recursive analysis that emphasizes the internal structure of the system and the mutual connectedness of the observer and the observed (Varela, 1979).

### *Wholeness and Self-Reference*

As a means of describing, we make distinctions based on our own frame of reference and as systems exist in the eye of the beholder, we punctuate

reality according to these epistemological premises (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). We create our reality, which “is domain specified by the operations of the observer” (Maturana, 1978, p.55). It is this self-reference, this mutuality of interactions, that gives whole systems their sense of organizational closure, or autonomy. This suggests that a system must be described without any reference to the outside (Keeney, 1983), that is, a system is viewed with no reference to its outside as any aspect is inclusive in that which is being described. This implies that systems are informationally closed and objectivity is not available. The organizational closure means that the structure of a system is constituted so as to preserve its organization, or identity. This suggests that the autonomy of a system forms the basis for self-correction. The effects of any perturbations are therefore limited and the system is deemed to be structurally determined (Maturana & Varela, 1980).

In autonomous systems, each participant is both subject and object simultaneously and everything that can be described is recursive and self-referential as each participant influences and is part of the interactional cycles in what is now referred to as an observing system. Autonomous systems are interactive and changes may occur at this level. However, changes involve structure and therefore interactions of systems at the level of autonomy must be referred to as perturbations rather than inputs (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). “As used systemically, structure refers to the relations between the parts as well as the identity of the parts that constitute the whole. Organization refers to the relations that define a system as a unity as well as determine its properties, with no reference to the identity of the parts” (Becvar & Becvar, 2000, p.80). Organization is invariant, that is, it cannot change or else it will cease to be that system, therefore implying that all living systems are organizationally closed. Structure on the other hand refers to actual relations and actual components. Structure can change without the loss of organization. So,

for example, a family belongs to a system of a particular class, the organization remains unchanged, that is being a family remains unchanged. However, the structure of a family could include a mother, a father and two children; or a mother, a step-father and one child. These structures are different, but still form part of the class called a family. This implies that structure can be defined as the way that the parts relate in order to maintain the overall organization of the system. In other words, the structure changes in order to maintain the organization; the relationship patterns may change in order to maintain the family homeostasis.

### Autopoiesis

Maturana and Varela (1987) said “the most striking feature of an autopoietic system is that it pulls itself up by its bootstraps and becomes distinct from its environment through its own dynamics in such a way that both things are inseparable” (p. 46-47). They suggested that all organisms are autopoietic systems. That is, they are self-generating systems that are formed in relation to their environment through a series of dynamic interactions with that environment. In other words, a boundary is necessary in order to distinguish a family from the larger context. As Maturana and Varela explain: “it is not that first there is a boundary, then a dynamics, then a boundary, and so forth. We are describing a type of phenomenon in which the possibility of distinguishing one thing from a whole depends on the integrity of the processes that make it possible...” (1998, p.46-7). Therefore, it is the way the parts relate rather than the nature of the parts that generate a unity with particular properties by means of which we define that unity.

A product of an autopoietic system is always itself, "...the being and doing of an autopoietic unity are inseparable, and this is their specific mode of organization" (Maturana & Varela, 1987, p.49).

### Structural Determinism

At the level of autonomy, we can say that systems are structurally determined. "They can be perturbed by independent events but the changes that they undergo as a result of these perturbations, as well as the relations of autopoiesis that these changes generate, occur, by their constitution, as internal states of the system regardless of the nature of the perturbation" (Maturana, 1974, p. 460-461). This suggests that the system is limited, by virtue of its structure, and the organism can do or become whatever its structure allows (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). This infers that nobody is capable of determining precisely what is going on in another person, that is, no one is able to carry out instructive interventions on a structure determined system and to determine with exacting precision how that system will behave when confronted with insight or experience (Maturana & Poerksen, 2004). This suggests that reality is then subject to your structure determined lens. We then become the observing system where both therapists and researchers are actively participating in the construction of reality. Within an observing system, non-objectivity applies to both a system's (family) construction of the problem and the observer's construction of these perceptions (Hoffman, 1985).

### Structural Coupling and Non-purposeful Drift

Given the notion of structural determinism, a system will do whatever its structure allows, and therefore is always correct. An error can only be defined as such from an observer's perspective. However, a system does



co-exist in an environment with other systems, and therefore the degree to which these systems are able to co-exist is defined by the concept of *structural coupling*. This suggests that organisms will survive by fitting with one another and with other aspects of their contexts; therefore change is a process of structural transformation in the context of organizational invariance (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

The context within which a system exists is not deterministic; there is no cause and effect. Rather the life of a system is a process of *non-purposeful drift* and even though there may be continual perturbations, such interactions are not determined. In other words, “systems interact with each other in a given context, how they interact in that context is a recursive process (circular causality) of mutual influence/ feedback/ adaptation within a range determined by the structure of their respective systems. This structure exists as a function of such mutual influence/ feedback/ adaptation interactions in previous instances of structural coupling” (Becvar & Becvar, 2000, p.83).

### *Epistemology of participation*

Efran and Lukens (1985) say that, “we create new and different ways to co-ordinate our actions with one another” (p.25) that we cannot merely act as observers who delineate more accurate representations of reality. Instead, the notion is that the observer and the observed are inextricably bound and that objectivity is impossible. This way of thinking is referred to as an *epistemology of participation*. Thus, understanding is possible only from the perspective of the subject who is doing the explaining, questioning or describing (Becvar & Becvar, 2000), suggesting the existence of a multi-verse of realities.

### Reality as a multi-verse

As has been mentioned, living systems operate in a consensual domain generated through structural coupling in the context of a common language system. Thus, in the process of observing, we are inevitably interacting with, and therefore creating the reality of, the consensual domain we are attempting to describe. This means that each of us lives in and creates our own reality; for each of us this reality is unique and equally valid. As Maturana (1978) said, “Since a description always implies an interaction, and since the describing system describes their own components via their interaction through their components, there is a constitutive homomorphism between descriptions and behaviour in general, and the operations of the system they describe. Therefore, we literally create the world in which we live by living it” (p.61). From this perspective, we no longer speak of a universe, but rather a multi-verse of many equally valid observer-dependent realities, there is no objectivity. The process now is one of construction, where the environment in which we live is invented by us as we perceive it to be. “As therapists, we are confronted with the tasks of helping our clients create, via their own perceptions, a reality within which they may operate more effectively...” (Becvar & Becvar, 2000, p. 85). And so, during the process of this research, the participants will relay their experiences and describe their reality, which will be told by me, according to my own reality. This requires a *double look* (Maturana & Poerksen, 2004). This infers that if I do not integrate myself into a system to a certain extent then I will not be able to listen properly, but at the same time I need to keep a certain distance in order to maintain a position to see the context of what is happening.

### *Recursion, self-reflection and context*

According to Keeney (1983), recursion implies that there is no consideration of inputs or outputs due to the system's organizational closure. The circularity of a system should be acknowledged in order to reflect on the recursive processes involved in maintaining a system's organization (Dell, 1985). Second-order cybernetics, or ecosystemics, moves away from linearity and towards the recursive description, thus creating awareness of the circular nature of behaviour. The focus then is not on linear causal descriptions, but rather on interactions. Further, reflexivity refers to the ability of a system to reflect on itself, and implies that all descriptions are based on the describer's own epistemological premise (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). The self-reflexive stance suggests that therapists and researchers remain aware of their own perceptions, and through language one becomes conscious of the self and in this sense, self-reference and language are intertwined (Efran, Lukens & Lukens, 1990). What becomes significant is to acknowledge the context in which meaning emerges. Keeney (1983) suggests that in order to achieve a higher order view of relationships, one must move up a level of abstraction from behaviour to context. Ecosystemics asserts that the term 'context' has many applications in that it draws attention to placing events and experiences in a broader perspective.

In summary of the second-order cybernetic approach, or ecosystemic perspective, rather than keeping the observer and the observed separate, we now include both systems, that is, connecting the observer and the system being observed which leads to a higher level of abstraction. There is no external environment that inputs into the system, because the system is seen as organizationally closed; whatever is 'seen' as out there is only

a reflection of our own properties, so there can be no objectively valid or invalid descriptions. Meaning is actively constructed in language from within a particular consensual domain. The therapist/ researcher, therefore, does not discover the reality about a participant/ client, but rather creates it in language. As Maturana says: “A system can generally be specified as a network of relations... And systemic understanding will always be necessary because every action is embedded in a dynamics of relations” (Maturana & Poerksen, 2004, p. 274-275). Therefore, we all carry with us a network of relations to which we attach meaning.

### **Social Constructionism**

The ecosystemic epistemology is coherent with social constructionism, which is also construed as a postmodern approach. The focus regarding ecosystemics is now on the process of construction, in which the environment and interactions are invented by us as we perceive them to be. What follows is an explanation of the social constructionist paradigm, which will be linked to the underlying premises of the ecosystemic epistemology to highlight the coherence.

Social constructionism is a reminder that all values, ideologies and social institutions are human made (Gergen, 1985). In terms of social constructionism “we socially construct reality by our use of shared and agreed meanings communicated via language, that is, our beliefs about the world are social interventions” (Berger & Luckman, in Speed, 1991, p.400). This approach claims that the content of our consciousness, and the mode of relating we have to others, is taught by our culture and society (Owen, 1992). This belief, however, does not exist in an objective sense but is constructed within interactions with others and is informed by the society and culture in which we exist. People are seen as actively

constructing their experiences in relation to their historical and cultural contexts. Research then is viewed as a process of obtaining knowledge by describing the experiences of people within their social and historical contexts. Social constructionism involves questioning, searching, clarifying and checking in the light of new data. “It is a view that theories map reality but that the descriptions contained in theory are not that reality, but are, rather, only accounts of real phenomena” (Owen, 1992, p. 386). The perspective then is that the individual’s experiences are constructed in a unique way, and are influenced by the culture in which they exist, where knowledge and belief systems are regarded as collective. Social constructionists see people as a process of relationships in context (Owen, 1992). This is consistent with the ecosystemic approach where attention is placed on interactions between people; one does not exist in isolation but rather in a context where we live and create reality through inter-subjectively shared meaning.

Social constructionist inquiry is primarily concerned with explicating the process by which people come to describe and explain their world. “It attempts to articulate common forms of understanding as they now exist, as they have existed in prior historical periods and as they might exist should creative attention be so directed” (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). The stories of the research participants are a description of their experiences based on their social and cultural contexts. Each story is unique but is created through intersubjectively shared meaning which is influenced by the culture in which the participants exist. “Social constructionism concurs with postmodernism in asserting that all stories are not equally valid and that in fact some stories are not respectful of difference, gender, ethnicity, race or religion” (Doan, 1997, p.130).

Language, then, is not a reporting device for our experiences, but is rather a defining framework. Thus emphasis shifts from a focus on mind and the

constructions of individuals to the world of intersubjectively shared meaning (Gale & Long, 1996, p.17). As with ecosystemics, the process is now one of construction, where the environment in which we live is invented by us as we perceive it to be.

Anderson and Goolishian (in Hart, 1995, p.184) state: “We live with each other in a world of conversational narrative, and we understand ourselves and each other through changing stories and self descriptions.”

As shown elsewhere, witnessing domestic violence has vast psychological, emotional and behavioural effects. The social constructionist approach is appropriate for this study as it allows for the interpretation of the unique experiences of the research participants regarding the violence within their homes and the meanings they attach to them within their particular context. I will create a space for their stories to be told, a space which allows their narratives to be reconstructed to find meaning. The body of literature exists within a linear, positivist arena, where cause and effect thinking is prominent. As discussed, reality cannot be objective within a postmodern tradition, therefore, this approach allows for their story to be told where there is no ‘objective truth’ but rather a world of intersubjectively shared meaning where the stories of the participants will be told by the researcher. The role of the researcher will then be to participate in the construction of meaning regarding domestic violence as experienced by the participants. The stories told through this study will then be the stories of both the participants and the researcher.

Therefore, to conclude the discussion, social constructionism looks at the way we story our experiences in language. These stories arise from social interchange and are expressed through language. That is, as we interact we organize, order and structure our experiences into stories which then become the framework for organizing our experiences. Thus, the

construction of reality is active and language is not merely a way of reporting events or representing phenomena, but also defines and creates such events and phenomena. These meanings are never fixed and immutable, but are instead negotiable and fluid, capable of changing and evolving. Knowledge then does not exist internally, but rather it exists in dialogue, and is something that people do together in social discourse. Knowledge is not objective and is not subjective, but is inter-subjective and participatory.

Both the ecosystemic and social constructionist perspectives fall under the postmodern umbrella. They assume that we do not exist in isolation and can never know an objective truth. Rather, the researcher becomes part of the system where meaning is constructed by all involved. As ecosystemics is coherent with the social constructionist premises, both these approaches will be used in this study, and will form part of the epistemology that will guide this research.

The following section will take a look at the available literature regarding the ecosystemic approach to domestic violence.

### **An Ecosystemic perspective on Violence**

The vast majority of literature regarding violence is linear and portrays a modernist view, therefore, the following section will take a look at violence through an ecosystemic lens.

According to Flemons (1989), “An epistemology which separates self and 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 relationships” (p.1). Bateson (1972) says that if one wants to understand some phenomenon

one needs to consider the phenomenon within the context of all completed circuits which are relevant to it. "Looking at a family apart from its social context is like studying the dynamics of swimming by examining a fish in a frying pan. The result is intervention without perspective" (Minuchin, 1984, p.118).

Geles and Cornell (1985) conclude that people are more likely to be killed, physically assaulted, beaten up or slapped in their own home by other family members than anywhere else, or by anyone else in society. "Some observers have proposed that violence in the family is more common than love" (p.12). However, violence is a strikingly lineal concept that is difficult to address from a systemic perspective, and has previously often been swept under the carpet by family therapists. The small body of literature that inspects violence from a systemic point of view focuses on one particular characteristic; that of power. Dell's (1989) opinion is that the systemic perspective, with its emphasis on circular causality, has made it difficult for family therapists to know how to speak about such lineal phenomena as power, violence, abusers and victims. However, Bateson (1972) inferred that no one part of a system can have unilateral control over the remainder of the system or any other part. In the field of psychiatry, the family is a cybernetic system, and usually when systemic pathology occurs, the members blame each other, or sometimes themselves. Bateson argues that both these alternatives are fundamentally arrogant, "either alternative assumes that the individual human being has total power over the system of which s/he is a part" (p. 438).

Dell (1989) looks at power and dissects the different perceptions regarding power and violence. Two main poles were highlighted - on the one hand, there is the 'Haley' corner which agreed that power exists as a fundamental aspect of individuals, as well as being central in



relationships. He points out that people organize themselves into a hierarchy and that a central issue in human life is how much power one has or allows others to have over them. "I think power is at the centre of psychopathology and the best way to think of symptoms is an expression of a power struggle" (Haley, 1963, p.33). On the other hand is the systemic corner, where Bateson claimed that power is a lineal, epistemologically incorrect idea that is completely inconsistent with the systemic view. By power, Bateson was referring to "the attempt to maximize any given variable, hence to increase and control that variable" (Dell, 1989, p. 7).

Systems theory has been critiqued by many feminist writers who felt that it did not adequately address the issues of violence and male domination in families. From a feminist perspective, cybernetic conclusions have been rejected because they are seen as 'blaming'. Bograd (1984) says "...a systemic formulation is biased if it can be employed to implicate the battered woman or to excuse the abusive man" (p.561). Many feminists, for example James and McIntyre (1983) criticize the systemic perspective as being unable to speak of power, and suggest that dismissing power in fact dismisses inequality. There are as many forms of feminist critique as there are writers, and these feminist writers in general argued that the concept of circular causality fails to account for the fact that the object of aggression is not a willing participant (McConaghy & Cottone, 1998). Critics have argued that a failure to address power dynamics contributes to an assumption that each individual within a violent family system shares equal responsibility and power (Babcock & La Taillade, 2000). According to Bograd (1984), the feminist position emphasizes four main ideas:

- The distinction between the verbal expression of anger and physical retaliation

- The belief that men and women can control their behaviour
- The rights of men and women to physical safety,
- The ways in which blaming the victim shifts attention from the patriarchal context of battering (p.561).

Bograd (1986, p. 38) mentions some of the systemic viewpoints that feminists oppose:

- The sexual or physical abuse serves a functional role in maintenance of the family system
- With equal influence, each family member actively participates in perpetuating the dysfunctional system
- Violence against women occurs in family systems characterized by certain relationship structures
- Incest or battering is the product of an interactional context characterized by repetitive sequences of transactional behaviour.

According to Cottone and Greenwell (1992), however, it is essential to view the abusive incident as a wrongful act that is not excused by any function it may perform in the system.

Although Dell's (1989) article looks particularly closely at power and control in relation to violence particularly closely, one of the important ideas that was brought in to focus was the different uses of the term 'violence', and for the purpose of this research, these will be briefly mentioned. When viewed from a systemic perspective, power is seen as inconsistent and 'not belonging' to the theory. However, Dell uses the term 'violence' from an experiential perspective, that is, one is able to use it to describe an interaction from one's own experience, as one sees it. In other words, from a systemic perspective, power cannot exist because it would destroy the system in which it operates, inferring that all causality

is circular. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, power will not be seen as an underlying human characteristic fundamental to all interactions, but rather, the term power can be used when viewed through the lens of personal experiences where individuals may observe power (e.g. when describing feelings of powerlessness, or power), which then can be defined as real, and existing in their reality.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has explained my underlying epistemology as ecosystemic, as well as the use of social constructionism as they both form part of a postmodern way of thinking. My inclusion in the research has been highlighted as that which I see and 'observe' is an extension of me. It also looked at the difficulty in explaining violence in ecosystemic terms with particular reference to power, as well as the criticism from feminist theories. In the next chapter, violence will be looked at more closely, it will be conceptualized and described from within a family context and will also look at the effects of violence on individuals and their functioning.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

#### **Introduction**

As explained in Chapter 1, my interest in this topic came about after reading an emotionally touching letter written by a 13 year old girl who witnessed domestic violence. However, during my survey of the literature, I became aware of the lack of information regarding domestic violence from a postmodern epistemology, the epistemology from which I work. There is a vast amount of literature regarding domestic violence on children, adolescents and adults, but it is limited to a linear, cause and effect approach. There is very limited research regarding individuals and their experiences from a non-linear, postmodern perspective. Further, research particular to the South African context is scarce.

Domestic violence, partner violence, family violence, intimate violence - these are all terms referring to violence between people who are considered family, or between people who are in an intimate relationship. There is a vast amount of literature involving child abuse and the effects thereof, however, there is very little referring to those who are not physically abused themselves but who have witnessed violence in one form or another, in their 'home'. Further, the literature obtained is linear and deterministic in nature which has fuelled the interest of this study in that the aim will be to approach the stories of the participants from an ecosystemic, postmodern framework. This chapter will comprise of a brief overview of the literature surveyed.

## **Domestic Violence in South Africa**

“Ideally, we define the family as the social group to nurture us, instruct us in social and moral values, and protect us from harm” (Witt, 1987, p.291). However, Gelles, Straus and Steinmetz (1980) suggest that the statistical reality is that 20% of American families stand an estimated 20% chance of becoming the stage for violence. Therefore, it appears that domestic violence is still a social phenomenon that remains prevalent in many societies, and which is currently a topic that has not been given the necessary attention.

Literature, in particular in a South African context, is sparse regarding the prevalence of domestic/ partner violence, and even more so regarding those who witness domestic violence. The Human Sciences Research Council conducted a study in 2003 titled “Partner Violence, Attitudes to Child Discipline and use of Corporal Punishment: A South African National Survey” – apparently the first of its kind to be conducted in South Africa. “Ten years into democracy and following a broad range of constitutional and other legislative moves to protect women and children from violence in the home and the community, through the current study, we have an opportunity to begin to investigate the extent of intimate physical violence to women and children – committed in the confines of the domestic sphere” (p.12). In this study, partner violence is defined as “...the use of violence (an act carried out with the intention of causing physical pain or injury to another person) between two persons who are either married (in terms of law or custom), unmarried and cohabiting or who are not cohabiting but consider themselves to be a couple” (HSRC, 2003, p.12). Overall, this study found that 20% of the sample who had partners has experienced violent physical assault.

Although the incidence of domestic violence in South Africa is very high, according to crime statistics in South Africa, there are no official figures that testify to the prevalence of such abuse. Prior to the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act of 1998, the justice records did not keep a separate category of criminal behaviour for domestic violence; rather the wives who had been maltreated by their husbands had to lay criminal charges (Van der Hoven, 2001). Dissel and Ngubeni (2003) state that domestic violence is often not a single event but rather a continuous series of events. However, this is not recognized by South African Criminal Law which focuses on isolated individual events.

In a study done by Artz, Bollen, Vetten and Louw (1999), results suggested that 90% of the 269 women interviewed had experienced some form of physical abuse. In 59% of these cases, the perpetrators were partners, lovers or spouses. In another study done at the Technikon Southern Africa (2001) regarding the attitudes and responses to domestic abuse among their employees, results indicate that out of 230 respondents, 70-75% of the female participants stated that they had never been victims of domestic abuse. Approximately 80-85% of the male participants indicated that they had never physically abused their partners (Singh, 2003, p. 34). Although there are few studies of rural women, Artz (1999) found that on average 80% of the 168 rural women interviewed in her research were victims of domestic violence.

The following section will highlight various South African studies focusing on socio-cultural and economic factors that are associated with domestic/ partner violence.

## **Violence, poverty, culture and patriarchy**

The socio-cultural and economic contexts in which families are embedded influence the way individuals interact within the family, and the norms and values that are transmitted to children through socialization. This suggests that in many ways individual behaviour is structured by the socio-cultural context and economic contexts in which individuals are situated. Jewkes, Levin and Penn-Kekana (2002) indicate that ideologies related to the normative value of violence have been identified as significant risk factors in South Africa. They emphasize that any model that attempts to understand intimate partner violence “needs to present it as a web of associate and mediating factors and processes which are centrally influenced by ideas about masculinity and the position of women in a society and ideas about the use of violence” (p. 1615). Peacock (2002) argues that intimate domestic violence, levels of violence in the wider society and tolerance for violence are inter-related. This suggests that violence in society contributes to violence in the family, which is exacerbated when levels of economic inequality and the stresses associated with poverty are high.

Jewkes et al. (2002) stress the importance of ideologies of male superiority, particularly in economically stressed communities. Norms held by individuals and communities hold some power and can be evident in data collected in the United States of America. Straus, Kaufman and Moore (1997) indicate that rates of assault on marital partners decreased between 1975 and 1985 and again between 1985 and 1992. They argue that the decrease in the violence over the years reflects a change in cultural norms that place a high value on violence and aggression as the way to deal with interpersonal problems. However, no such change in social norms has been witnessed in South Africa. The term ‘culture of violence’ has been used to describe the high prevalence rate in South

Africa and suggests that violence is a means of resolving conflict and problems. In South Africa, it is part of our history; it was pervasive in African Tribal society, white colonial settlements, Apartheid's system of oppression and today, in social, economic and political spheres. Jewkes et al. (2002) reported that 75% of the women in their three province community study believed that it was "sometimes or always acceptable for an adult to hit another adult" (p. 1609). With such perspectives, it is not surprising that violence has come to be regarded as normative in the South African context.

The transition to a majority government has done little to resolve high levels of endemic violence. As the political process appeared beyond the reach of the average person, there were no accessible targets for aggression and frustration (Maitse, 1998; Simpson, 1992). According to Marchetti-Mercer (2003), Afrikaner men experienced a pervasive sense of loss of control, which was reinforced by high levels of unemployment, thus adding to the rising levels of intimate femicide among the Afrikaner community. "This stress and frustration was and is still being diverted to women and children in the private sphere of the homes as a means by which men try to regain some form of control and power in a society characterized by rapid change, uncertainty and extreme economic stress" (HSRC, 2003, p.19). Singh's (2003) study indicated that 35% of women and 24% of men recognized the link between violence and financial stress, suggesting that unemployed men are more likely to abuse their wives. Given the social perception of men being the breadwinner, unemployment can be experienced as a failure at a personal level. This constitutes a loss of power and control that is socially used to define masculinity (Vogelman & Eagle, 1991). In South African literature, patriarchy has been identified as a significant risk factor behind intimate partner violence. It is argued that women in South Africa exist in a situation of powerlessness or subservience given patriarchal beliefs and their



precarious positions in the labour force (HSRC, 2003, p. 21). Kistner (2003) argues that at the onset of the new South Africa, women possess legal citizenship, yet they lack the rights associated with this status, given ideological and structural constraints.

In numerous communities and particularly in rural areas, Black African women are regarded as a form of property. Women are seen as assets in the marriage contract, the value of which is determined by the men in their families of origin (Van der Hoven, 2001). In a study conducted by Jewkes et al. (2002) at the Medical Research Council, it was shown that a significant proportion of South African women believe that it is appropriate to obey their male partners because these men have the right to discipline them. Where these beliefs were evident, women were more likely to be assaulted (Dawes, 2004). Paranee and Smythe (2003) suggest that violence in South African farm worker communities confirm that violence is often justified by men as they are heads of the households. South African men are excused for resorting to violence as this is seen as a masculine way of dealing with extreme situations whereas women are held responsible for some provocation or failure (Vogelman & Eagle, 1991). Van der Hoven (2001) adds that in conservative Christian and Afrikaans communities, wives also tend to agree that women should be submissive and assume traditional passive roles.

In summary, socio-cultural predictors of spouse abuse include the co-occurrence of low male socio-economic status (SES), male approval of violence as a mode of conflict resolution and support for male power over women. Many of the authors have explored certain factors that are seen as risk factors that may contribute to domestic violence; these include both individual and interpersonal factors that will be explored.

## **Interpersonal Context Risks for Partner Violence**

### *Interpersonal Relationships*

Dixon and Browne (2003) argue that the factors behind intimate partner violence differ according to interactions between the individuals in the context of a marital or cohabiting partnership. In US surveys, Straus (1990) suggests that highly stressed men with low marital satisfaction endorsed higher rates of violence towards their wives. Singh (2003) agrees, and says marital satisfaction is a risk factor behind intimate partner violence in South Africa. Out of 230 interviews scheduled, 39% of the female participants and 32% of the male participants in her study stated that men resort to domestic violence because they are unhappy in the family or marriage relationship. Some reasons include partner unfaithfulness and an unexpected pregnancy. Abrahams, Garcia-Moreno, Jewkes, Penn-Kekana, and Watts (2000) conducted a study in three Cape Town Municipalities and found that men who had had only one partner in ten years were significantly less likely to report abuse, while men who reported having more partners were more likely to report being abusive.

### **Individual Characteristics and Temperament of the abuser**

In the 1980's and 1990's research was aimed at personality profiles or typologies of male perpetrators (Guille, 2003). The perpetrator was generally characterized by low assertiveness, low self-esteem, poor impulse control, cognitive distortions and poor social skills. Antisocial narcissistic, dependent personality disorders and mood disturbances (e.g. depression and anxiety) were also common (Dixon & Browne, 2003). In South African literature as mentioned by the HSRC (2003), psychological functioning and temperament have also been highlighted as risk factors.

In the Victim Offender Conference project, 116 conferences were held between intimate partners. The women were asked how they understood the violence, to which many responded that their men were violent people or short-tempered. Hence most regarded the violence as a result of the actions, behaviours and temperament of their male partners (Dissel & Ngubeni, 2003). Singh (2003) found that 52% of the female participants believed that violent men lacked confidence and were insecure about their competencies and abilities. However, many of these studies were derived from clinical populations, thus limiting the ability to generalize the findings. Feminist researchers further objected to the focus on abuser psychopathology which ignored the need for an understanding of the contextual and individual risk factors that mediate or moderate abuser behaviour (Dixon & Browne, 2003; Guille, 2003; Hotaling, Straus & Lincoln, 1990).

### *The role of Gender*

Studies have generally focused on unidirectional forms of violence where male partners are always positioned as the perpetrator and the female partner as the victim (Dixon & Browne, 2003). Research on domestic violence in South Africa suggests that while perpetrators are overwhelmingly male, perpetrators may also be female (Artz et al., 1999). Recent studies in the United States of America show that both men and women are involved in partner violence. Hines and Malley-Morrison (2001) report approximately equal rates of partner assaults by men and women. These findings are controversial and critics have stated that the scales used to measure partner violence do not allow for an assessment of the context of the violence, and of who initiated the conflict. They argue that it is likely that women are more prone to respond to male violence rather than instigate it and that their behaviour is a form of self-defence. Further, women consistently face greater physical and psychological

injuries from partner violence, and any arguments to the contrary simply ignore the patriarchal structure of society that sanctions violence against women (Dobash, Dobash, Daly, & Wilson, 1992). Whether women's behaviour in conflictual relationships is responsive or not, they do act with violence (Singh, 2003).

### *Educational Level and Age*

Research suggests that more educated couples engage in less conflictual and negative interactions than do less educated couples (Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2001), particularly because less educated spouses with low status jobs may face greater levels of stress and frustration. In addition, education is seen as a coping resource, which reduces the risk of depression and further provides individuals with the skills needed for effective problem solving. These individuals will therefore be less likely to resort to violence. In South Africa, low educational levels has been identified as a risk factor. Thus, low education is likely to co-occur with the stressor of poverty and cannot be seen out of context.

In addition to education, Artz et al. (1999) identified age as another risk factor in the South African context. They found that 69% of their 269 female participants were between the ages of 20 and 29 years at the time of the most serious incident. Kistner (2003) identified an age gap between men and women partners of six years or more (men being older) as an indicator for predicting violent outcomes.

### *Alcohol and Drug Dependency*

Several studies have identified alcohol and drug misuse as a factor in intimate partner violence (Dixon & Browne, 2003; Kaufman, Kantor & Straus, 1987). Fundamentally, it is argued that excessive alcohol intake

lowers inhibitions, alters judgement and reduces moral restraints on violent behaviour. Additionally, alcohol can act directly to stimulate aggression. In South Africa, studies agree with this argument. More than 60% of abused women report that their partners were intoxicated during an assault (Singh, 2003). According to Paranze and Smythe (2003), alcohol abuse is deeply embedded in farming areas in South Africa, and although not a direct cause of violence, alcohol is an amplifier of an already conflictual situation.

### **Violence in the Family of Origin**

It has been suggested that perpetrators of domestic violence are likely to have experienced violence in their families of origin, including witnessing violence between their parents or experiencing regular harsh punishment or abuse as children. In part, this pattern of generational repetition or cycle of violence which is particular to males, stems from Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory. This suggests that children who grow up in violent homes model the behaviour of their significant others. These children who witness violence between their significant others then become desensitized to the consequences of violence and regard violence as legitimate. According to this perspective, observational learning is the most important learning method, particularly in the acquisition of complex and aggressive behaviour. In this way, violence may be transmitted from one generation to the next. In other words, "...the approach to conflict shaped in violent childhoods leads to the risk that the future adult male will engage in intimate partner violence to achieve certain outcomes or as a means to resolving conflict. And for girls, who are reared under such conditions, the expectation is that her partner will be abusive" (HSRC, 2003, p. 27).

According to Cano and Vivian (2001), these developmental antecedents to violent behaviour may be released by life stressors, and the everyday conflicts that attend on adult relationships. Thus men experiencing high levels of stress are more likely to engage in violence towards their partners when they have been brought up in violent families. Witnessing or experiencing violence as a child is also regarded as a risk factor in South Africa, according to South African studies. In a study by Abrahams et al. (2000), it was found that on average there was a 50% greater risk for reporting abuse among participants who had witnessed the abuse of their mothers or sisters during their childhood. In Singh's (2003) study the participants believed that their abusive partners had either seen violence or abuse happening, or had experienced violence and abuse in their home growing up. This supports the conclusion by international studies that intimate violence is a learned form of behaviour.

To sum up, the incidence of intimate partner violence is associated with a complex interplay of risk factors. Included is the socio-economic status, male approval of violence, and support for male power in a context in which interpersonal relationships are embedded. Low levels of marital satisfaction may manifest in intimate partner violence in the presence of severe stressors and the absence of formal and informal social controls. Individual tendencies towards aggression include psychopathology and mood disturbances, alcohol and drug dependency, low levels of education, low SES and the presence of violence in the family of origin. Thus, risk factors at various levels interact in a complex manner to increase or decrease the likelihood of partner violence in relationships. "There is a dearth of information on these risk factors in the South African context. However, where they exist, the findings highlighted above tend to be supported by international literature" (HSRC, 2003, p. 28).

As mentioned previously, there is a limited amount of research dedicated to those who have witnessed domestic violence as opposed to those who have been victims of violence. This section has highlighted violence between two people who consider their relationship as intimate; the following section will now address this and attempt to conceptualize the term ‘family violence’ as contrasted with the term ‘child abuse’, and bridge this with literature regarding those who have experienced domestic violence.

### **Conceptualizing Domestic Violence**

Child abuse, as defined by the Collins English Dictionary (1986) is “...physical, sexual or emotional ill treatment or neglect of a child by its parents or other adults responsible for its welfare” (p. 275). However, this phenomenon is inclusive of a more complex set of highly interrelated experiences which may include childhood abuse or neglect, parental alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, parental marital discord and crime within the home (Dong, Anda, Felitti, Dube, Williamson, Thompson, Loo & Giles, 2004).

Pagelow (1984) suggests that child abuse has been narrowly defined as having only physical implications; however, child abuse includes any act of omission or commission that endangers or impairs a child’s physical or emotional health and development. This includes:

- Physical abuse and corporal punishment
- Emotional abuse
- Emotional deprivation
- Physical neglect and/or inadequate supervision.
- Sexual abuse and exploitation

This suggests that child abuse is an all-inclusive phrase for both physical and emotional abuse as well as physical and emotional neglect (Pagelow, 1984). It has been suggested that the psychological and emotional maltreatment is more closely tied to negative outcomes than is physical abuse (Jellen et al., 2001). The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) has accepted the concept of Psychological maltreatment to mean a repeated pattern of caregiver behaviour in which the message is conveyed to children that they are: “worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered or only of value in meeting another’s needs” (Jellen et al., 2001, p.625). Children who are exposed to these experiences are denied their individual rights to develop their human potential to the fullest (Pagelow, 1984).

Although the violent victimization has been examined extensively, attention has only recently been devoted to the question of whether exposure to community and family violence increases the risk for childhood and adolescent problems (Eitle & Turner, 2002).

The concept most commonly used in reference to child maltreatment is child abuse, however Pagelow (1984) conceptualizes abuse and neglect as distinct entities. Abuse includes physical and psychological acts of commission whereas neglect involves physical and psychological acts of omission. This position suggests that when both abuse and neglect are present they are subsumed in the concept of maltreatment.

The home is often idealized as a haven of security and happiness, but domestic violence (violence in the context of the home) is part of the experiences of many. Domestic violence is not a new social ill; violence towards women was a common aspect of marriage as far back as medieval times. Violence within the family setting is primarily a male domain, however it is occasionally claimed that women are almost as violent as



men in the home towards both spouse and children (Giddens, 1993). According to sociological theory there are a few influences:

- The first influence is the combination of emotional intensity and personal intimacy characteristics of family life. Family ties are normally charged with strong emotions, often mixing love and hate.
- A second influence is the fact that much of the violence within the family is actually tolerated, and even approved of.
- Although it is less clear cut, there is also a social approval of violence between spouses, almost as if marriage and parenthood provides a licence to 'hit'. A cultural acceptability of this form of domestic violence is expressed in the old ditty:

“A woman, a horse and a hickory tree,  
The more you beat ‘em the better they be”

(Giddens, 1993, p.417)

Children who witness domestic violence are often overlooked. However, the damage done to their psychological and physical health is immense. Many authors have proposed that witnessing domestic violence is more destructive than actually being physically abused (Morgentaler, 2000). These children are subjected to many different experiences and feelings such as confusion related to gender roles, conflicted feelings towards abuser and victim, and adjustment difficulties (Morgentaler, 2000). These child witnesses are often portrayed as the ones giving an ‘eye witness account’ or if not visually observing a traumatic violent event, at least having heard it. However, Gangley and Schechter (1996) highlight several additional ways in which children can experience domestic violence.

These include:

- Hitting/threatening a child while in his/her mother's arms
- Taking the child hostage to force the mother's return to the home
- Using a child as a physical weapon against the victim
- Forcing the child to watch assaults against the mother or to participate in the abuse
- Using the child as a spy or interrogating him/her about the mother's activities (Ganley & Schechter, 1996).

Any definition of experiencing domestic violence must include all these various ways in which children can experience a violent event. Children may see the violence, or be used as part of it, but more often they may hear the violent event and experience its aftermath (Ganley & Schechter, 1996).

Pagelow (1984) defines family violence as any act of commission or omission by family members, and any conditions resulting from such acts or inactions which deprive other family members of equal rights and liberties and/or interfere with their optimal development and freedom of choice.

The Domestic Violence Act, Act No. 116 of 1998 (published in Government Gazette no 19513 of 27 Nov 1998) signed by the president, Assented to 20 November 1998, states:

“RECOGNISING that domestic violence is a serious social evil, that there is a high incidence of domestic violence within South African society; that victims of domestic violence are among the most vulnerable members of society; that domestic violence takes on many forms; that acts of violence may be committed in a wide range of domestic relationships and

that the remedies currently available to the victims of domestic violence have proved to be ineffective.”

“In accordance with the South African constitution, domestic violence means:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional, verbal and psychological abuse
- Economic abuse
- Intimidation
- Harassment
- Stalking
- Damage to property
- Entry into the complainant’s residence without consent, where the parties do not share the same residence; or
- Any other controlling or abusive behaviour towards a complaint, where such conduct harms, or may cause imminent harm to, the safety, health and wellbeing of the complainant...” (Domestic Violence Act, Act No. 116 of 1998, p.137).

The content of the Domestic Violence Act states: “It is the purpose of this Act to afford the victims of domestic violence the maximum protection from domestic abuse that the law can provide; and to introduce measures which seek to ensure that the relevant organs of state give full effect to the provisions of this Act, and thereby to convey that the State is committed to the elimination of domestic violence” (Preamble to the Domestic Violence Act No 116 of 1998).

USAID (2006) however, reports that many South African communities have come to accept violence as part of their reality. In a South African study, Gibson (2004) emphasizes concerns regarding domestic violence which seems to persist unabated more than a decade after the end of apartheid, the institution of a liberal constitution which emphasizes women's rights and protection, and the implementation of a Domestic Violence Act. Bourdieu's (2004) work on gender and symbolic violence has been used extensively by researchers on gender violence. Bourdieu (2004) analyses the pervasive, yet largely unseen violence that is exercised through everyday practices in social life where political, educational, religious and economic macro-structures are based in the ideology of gender differences. Similarly, "South African anthropological literature on gender violence often analyses it in relation to masculine and feminine discourses and practices with men perceived as active and potentially oppressive, aggressive, violent and unable to control their sexual urges. Women are assumed to be more passive and oppressed, and unable to safely negotiate their own sexuality" (Gibson, 2004, p. 134).

Gibson (2004) suggests that the influence of macro economic, political and historical processes as contributing to violence is particularly salient in South Africa, "... where the notion of a 'culture' of violence looms large" (p.4). Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) suggest that while violent relationships in which the women find themselves could be seen as the result of the discourses and practices of the state and dominating institutions, the women themselves were sometimes doomed to repeat it. These women also interpreted the violence as simultaneously "saying something" about belonging and even concern within their specific context. "Through violence, the interconnectedness between family members and between families and the wider community was maintained, patrolled and rectified. Through their own violent actions, the shortcomings of negative behaviours of family members could be

recognized and even addressed without necessarily affecting other relationships which were more impersonal, volatile and difficult to control” (Gibson, 2004, p.16).

Having defined child abuse, and family violence, how can we interpret the meaning of ‘experiencing family violence?’ Pagelow (1984) has defined family violence as any act of commission or omission that deprives other members of equal rights and interferes with their optimal development. And so, any definition of experiencing domestic violence will include all of the abovementioned ways in which children experience a violent event. This in effect suggests that children may see the violent event or be used as part of it, but more often they may hear it and experience the aftermath (Ganley & Schechter, 1996). However, up until now, the literature has still focused on an individual as the receiver of abuse. Let us now move on and look at those who experience violence first-hand, as well as those who are described as the silent witnesses of such violence and abuse. As many would say as a defence “at least the children were not hurt.”

### **A Developmental Approach**

Awareness of the impact of domestic violence on women has grown in recent years; however, recognition of the needs of children who witness such violence has lagged behind. The literature reviewed thus far has focused on domestic violence and the prevalence around South Africa. The following section will look closely at the effects of ‘*experiencing*’ domestic violence at different developmental ages.

Domestic violence has been associated with behavioural, psychological, emotional, social and cognitive problems in children. Symptoms differ according to age where younger children show neurologic sequelae such

as irritability, poor feeding and developmental delays, and older children demonstrate more provocative risk-taking behaviour. Along with age-related differences, there are also differences between genders, with boys demonstrating more aggressive tendencies and girls appearing more withdrawn (Mahony & Campbell, 1999).

## **The impact of Witnessing Domestic Violence at Different Developmental Ages**

### *The infant*

Children as young as 12 months show physiological and psychological reactions to witnessing verbal conflict between parents or caregivers. The child's distress is exacerbated if the verbal conflict is coupled with physical attacks (Von Steen, 1997).

The emotional attachment between the mother and child is essential for survival, but this mother-infant bond may be threatened when a child is subjected to domestic violence. The relationship is characterized by periods of inattention to the infant and a limited emotional attachment. When the nurturing source (caretakers) is unable to meet an infant's needs, the child may respond with extreme anxiety, be fearfully attached, unwillingly or anxiously obedient and apprehensive (Mahony & Campbell, 1999). Infants exposed to this environment may display problems with eating, poor health and poor sleep patterns, and a considerable amount of screaming and irritability (Mahony & Campbell, 1999).

Disorders in this age group range from depression to aggression. "The child's lack of positive responses to the mother's infrequent attempts to nurture and attend to the infant further contributed to the stress of an

abusive home by providing the mother with negative feedback on her abilities in this role” (Mahony & Campbell, 1999, p.364).

From a biophysical perspective, when an infant is traumatized, the central nervous system reacts to any form of stress in an ‘all or nothing’ way. The infant’s anxiety will manifest as an uncontrolled aggression or an emotional withdrawal, remaining in a state of under- or over- arousal which can lead to lifelong psychological trauma (Mahony & Campbell, 1999).

### *The preschool age*

Some preschoolers tend to display behavioural problems, experience a more negative affect, respond less appropriately to situations, are more aggressive and have more ambivalent relationships with teachers (Levendosky, Huth-Bocks, Shapiro & Semel, 2003). “Preschool children were more severely affected than older children, suggesting that younger children may be particularly vulnerable to the impact of domestic violence” (Levendosky et al., 2003, p.275).

In a violent home environment, this age group is characterized by signs of absolute fear as evidenced by yelling, irritable behaviour, hiding, shaking and stuttering (Mahony & Campbell, 1999). Somatization and regression to earlier stages of development are also common. When the safe environment of the home is violated, the toddler’s state of terror or fear is perpetuated, and the child may display outbursts of aggression and verbalization of stories of irrational violence. In contrast, others may display withdrawal and lack of interest in the environment. This initiates concern in that this withdrawal may negatively affect the preschooler’s sense of curiosity and interest. This withdrawal and lack of interest is seen as an attempt to cope with the violence and can be seen as a

contributing factor in a child's development of a negative self-concept. Behaviours of some children are "so severe that they are diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder" (Mahony & Campbell, 1999, p.364).

Levendosky et al. (2003) proposed an ecological model to examine the potential mediators for the effects of domestic violence on preschool children and based their model on four hypotheses:

- Domestic violence directly affects maternal psychological functioning and indirectly affects parenting and attachment
- Mother and child variables influence children's behavioural functioning
- Domestic violence has both a direct and indirect effect through the mother-child variables on children's behavioural functioning
- Life stress, social support and maternal childhood trauma affect maternal psychological functioning.

### School Age Children

Children who experience domestic violence have greater than expected levels of problematic behaviours and social competence deficits.

These children are characterized by emotional problems as a result of feeling torn between a desire for help and the need to maintain the family secret (Mahony & Campbell, 1999). They begin to feel a sense of responsibility for the violence and believe that if they were better, the 'bad' behaviour would stop. "The common factors of isolation and male domination that are characteristic of domestic violence serve to prevent children from developing their own interests in school, or with friends" (Mahony & Campbell, 1999, p.364).



Pizzey (1977) uses a good-bad dualism to explain effects of violence on children. She speaks of how the good-bad confusion of the relationship leaves no peace within the child. She says; “When a parent is good, the child feels guilty for the hatred they feel during periods of abuse. This is further complicated by strong feelings of compassion and pity because parents look helpless and in need of the child’s love and affection. When the parent is bad, the child becomes full of hatred and contempt for the parent and for himself for being fooled yet again by compassion” (Pizzey, 1977, p.69).

Mahony and Campbell (1999) suggest that differences between genders begin to manifest at this age. Males often display overt aggressive behaviour as seen by temper tantrums and non-compliance in a very disruptive manner. Alternatively, the internalizing effects of experiencing domestic violence are manifested by frequent crying, sadness, withdrawal and somatic complaints.

Females, on the other hand, develop signs that are less obvious, such as changes in relationships with friends, poor academic performance, somatic complaints, eating disorders and signs of withdrawal.

Several mechanisms have been put forth to explain the connection between experiencing domestic violence and behavioural and psychological difficulties. The most commonly used mechanism is Social Learning Theory (Diamond & Muller, 2004). Social Learning Theory ascribes the aggression and withdrawal exhibited by children of school going age to behaviours learnt through modelling, observational learning or by direct experience and practice (Berk, 2000).

The social learning theory suggests that family violence is a learned phenomenon (McKenry & Price, 1995, p.270). This approach emphasizes the role of modelling, or observational learning in the development of behaviour, that is, children acquire favourable and unfavourable responses or behaviours by watching and listening to those around them (Berk, 2000). Therefore, as children, the primary source to observe is the family, where the parents become the agents children learn from. For example, a parent who remarks, “I am glad I kept working on that task even though it was difficult” displays hard work and persistence to the child. Further, children who are exposed to violence, either by experiencing it themselves or witnessing violence, are more likely to use violence when they grow up. McKenry and Price (1995) go further to say that not only do people learn violent behaviour, but they also learn how to justify the violence.

“Therefore, behaviours in the family, in social situations with their peers or in the media can be learned and demonstrated in children’s responses to their environments both within and outside the home” (Mahony & Campbell, 1999, p.95).

By the time children have reached school age, they have learned that violence is an ‘appropriate’ way of resolving conflict, as modelled by their significant role models (Von Steen, 1997). At this age, the stereotyped differences of sex-roles emerge; the male child who experiences violence exhibits externalizing behaviour problems (for example aggression and disobedience) while females more often experience internalizing problems (for example anxiety and depression) (Von Steen, 1997). Both genders, however, exhibit lower levels of social competence and vacillate between eagerness to please and feelings of aggression.

### *The Adolescent*

According to Erikson's (1963) psychosocial theory, the adolescent phase starts with the onset of puberty and ends with the beginning of early maturity. During this phase, adolescents explore their self-identity which is a vital part of their development. The quest for identity often leads adolescents to clash with the rules of society and with people who are close to them. The achievement of one's identity enables individuals to share their identity with another person, to have ongoing relationships and to develop the ethical strength to continue relationships. However, one of the dangers is that an adolescent may become confused in his/her search for identity and a suitable social role. Because this is an important phase of development, one can imagine the compounding effects that experiencing domestic violence may have on an adolescent and the impact this may have on his/her identity formation and future relationships.

Von Steen (1997) points out the limited research focused specifically on adolescents and the impact of experiencing domestic violence. Indications suggest that adolescents experience a heightened level of aggression towards peers and parents, delinquency, depression and somatic complaints. Von Steen (1997) also highlights the results of particular studies and the conflicting results. Most researchers suggest that male adolescents tend to display more aggressive behaviour while females suffer more from depression. Cummings, Davies and Simpson (1994) found that adolescent males experience sadness about the violence while adolescent females tend to feel anger.

Often, this age group uses aggression as a means of problem solving. Truancy, running away, and poor academic achievement are issues that have been identified with a higher incidence among boys. Running away serves as a method of self-preservation. Witnessing adolescents seem to

display a significant amount of anxiety, somatization, a need to blame others and manipulation within the home environment (Mahony & Campbell, 1999).

Some experience a sense of responsibility to protect their mothers and refuse to leave the home; others abuse their mothers and internalize the aggressive behaviours displayed by the abusive parent (Mahony & Campbell, 1999). From a social perspective, females tend to view the chronically violent home environment and abusive male-female relationship as something to be expected.

These children and those with younger siblings, often assume household responsibilities and child care in an effort to attain a sense of security and peace (Mahony & Campbell, 1999). As a consequence of years of abuse, the mother becomes more and more broken down and so the older girl of the family then tends to take most of the responsibility for any other younger children. The daughter becomes a household drudge; the miniature adult assumes responsibility at home and takes care of the family from a young age (Pizzey, 1977).

### *Effects on Adults and Long-term Effects*

During the early adulthood phase of Erikson's (1963) psychosocial theory, the achievement of ego identity (through adolescent phase) enables individuals to share their identity with another person – to have an ongoing relationship and to develop the ethical strength to continue the relationships despite the sacrifices and compromises they might demand. In most cultures, the most intimate relationship is marriage. The evasion of such experiences is the result of identity confusion, which stems from a failure during the previous stage. "This leads to a feeling of isolation and

preoccupation with the self. Young adults find themselves in a crisis having to choose between the two extremes” (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 1999, p. 219). In my opinion, the adolescent and early adulthood phases are trying times for any individual. I am thus interested in young adults who have just recently experienced both phases, and who have experienced domestic violence. My interest lies in the participant’s perceptions of themselves, relationships, marriage, their future outlook and how they see their world.

One of the common long-term effects of having experienced domestic violence as children is the tendency toward violence in adult relationships. Von Steen (1997) says, “Given the range and severity of problems exhibited by these children, one could not expect their problems to subside once they enter adulthood” (p.479).

Another defining characteristic of adults who have experienced domestic violence as children is their impaired level of interpersonal functioning. These relationships are characterized by mistrust, low-self esteem, fear of abandonment and especially anger. During their plight in anticipating the feelings and thoughts of others, these adults tend to lose sight of their own needs and levels of responsibility in relationships (Von Steen, 1997).

Furthermore, the adults struggle with expressing their feelings about their caregiver’s part in the violence that occurred during childhood. These adults have conflicting feelings regarding both the abusive caregiver and the victimized caregiver. The most prominent feeling is anger and these children tend to hold both caregivers responsible for the trauma they experienced as a result of the domestic violence (Von Steen, 1997). The feelings that can be experienced range from empathy to resentment for a caregiver.

Another long-term effect is the interpersonal struggles between siblings. Siblings are often reminders of the past and so some adults may adopt avoidance patterns of anything that may act as a reminder of the violence they had experienced as children (Von Steen, 1997).

Diamond and Muller (2004) suggest that domestic violence during childhood may impair one's interpersonal and psychological functioning during adulthood. "...the direct effect that interpersonal violence may have had on the parent-child relationship has been proposed as a possible mechanism to explain the effects of experiencing domestic violence on the development of pathology" (Diamond & Muller, 2004, p. 296). However, given the complexity of family dynamics, it is unlikely that any single theory can fully account for the relationship between experiencing domestic violence and symptoms of psychopathology. Diamond and Muller (2004) suggest that domestic violence during childhood may impair one's interpersonal and psychological functioning during adulthood.

Experiencing domestic violence has serious consequences for children. However, difficulties in studying this topic include studying various forms of maltreatment (e.g. physical abuse, sexual abuse); lack of integration of research findings and a lack of definitions and concepts (Jellen et al., 2001).

### **Conclusion**

It is clear that the literature found described domestic violence and the causes and effects thereof. It also narrowed down certain developmental, cognitive, emotional and behavioural problems identified with those who have been abused, or have witnessed abuse at different ages. However,

there is a significant lack of literature regarding personal experiences of those who have witnessed violence. The literature available tends to generalize findings to all populations, however, the postmodern approach highlights the meanings we attach to experiences, and that these meanings constructed by us cannot be generalized. This study will therefore attempt to address these gaps. Although the literature surveyed is valuable, the aim of this research will be to extend this by creating meaning with participants regarding their personal experiences and by giving them a voice to describe their violent homes and not categorize them into a universal experience.

The following chapter will discuss the research design used in this study. It will also highlight the manner in which the research was approached and the method of data collection and analysis that was used.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH DESIGN

*“My father did not tell me how to live.  
He lived and let me watch him do it.”*

(Unknown Author)

#### Introduction

Whether we are aware of it or not, we are surrounded by social research, and in many ways, research is like taking a snapshot of a phenomenon. And just like the photographer who chooses an appropriate lens and camera for a particular picture, so too should the researcher select his/her methods in relation to the particular phenomenon in question. “Social research is a collection of methods and methodologies that researchers apply systematically to produce scientifically based knowledge about the social world” (Neuman, 2006, p. 2).

In Chapter 2 the underlying epistemology was discussed in detail. This influenced and guided the choice of methodology and methods of inquiry. Thus, the research fits with the naturalist paradigm and the method of inquiry is qualitative. This chapter will discuss the research design and methods used and will also highlight the coherence with the ecosystemic epistemology and social constructionist approach.



## Research Design

“A research design is a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution of the research” (TerreBlanche & Durrheim, 1999, p.29). It is the designed and planned nature of observation that distinguishes research from other forms of observation, creating a guide for a researcher to collect and analyze data in a manner that aims to bring relevance to the research purpose.

### Paradigms

Paradigms are all-encompassing systems of interrelated practice and thinking that define for researchers the nature of the enquiry along three dimensions: ontology, epistemology and methodology. **Ontology** specifies the nature of reality that is to be studied, and what can be known about it. **Epistemology** specifies the nature of the relationship between the researcher and what can be known. **Methodology** specifies how the researcher may go about practically studying whatever s/he believes can be known (Terre-Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p.6).

Paradigms are systems of interrelated ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions that act as perspectives that provide a rationale for the research. Further, it commits the researcher to particular methods of data collection, observation and interpretation. “Paradigms are therefore central to the research design because they impact both on the nature of the research and on the manner in which the question is to be studied” (TerreBlanche & Durrheim, 1999, p.36). From these descriptions, a paradigm is understood to refer to an approach that employs certain principles which serve to influence a researcher’s attitude and perspective towards research. A paradigm therefore recursively influences and is influenced by the epistemological lens of the researcher. Paradigms help

to determine the questions researchers ask and how they go about answering them. Crabtree and Miller (1992) suggest that an investigator must decide what assumptions are acceptable and appropriate for the topic of interest, and then use methods consistent with the selected paradigm. What follows will be a description of the positivist and naturalist paradigm and the respective methods of inquiry. As this topic was discussed at length in Chapter 2, I will provide a brief summary in order to position the following sections clearly.

### *The Positivist Paradigm and Quantitative Method of Inquiry*

The positivist paradigm suggests that what is to be studied consists of a stable and unchanging external reality. The researcher then adopts an objective and detached epistemological lens and employs methodology that relies on control and manipulation of reality.

Positivism can be regarded as an organized method that combines deductive logic with empirical observations of behaviour. The aim is to discover and confirm causal laws to predict activity (Neuman, 2006). Positivists assert that natural laws govern reality and that empirical methods of inquiry allow researchers to observe the world independently and to arrive at a stable and predictable truth. The law-like predictions are made tangible by isolating and measuring cause and effect variables in order to assert the truth. This approach purports that research should be scientific by way of objectivity, control and validity. Reality is divisible into its smallest elements and can be studied separately; this is referred to as reductionism. In a positivist community, research according to this paradigm is highly acclaimed and any knowledge gained is seen to be a truthful explanation of a phenomenon (Greenberg, 1991). The positivist paradigm “values progress, stresses the primacy method, seeks an ultimate truth of reality and is grounded in a western tradition” (Crabtree & Miller,

1992, p.10). Methods of inquiry that are consistent with the positivist approach are quantitative in nature.

Conversely, most quantitative researchers rely on a positivist approach to social science (Neuman, 2006). These researchers use logical positivism and employ experimental methods and quantitative measures to test hypothetical statements. They apply ‘reconstructed logic’ and follow a linear research path. The emphasis is on measuring variables and testing hypotheses that are linked to causal explanations. Quantitative research focuses on the measurement of causal relationships between variables, the value-free nature and objectivity of the work, and the ability to generalize the results (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In this paradigm, quantitative research (1.) seeks facts and causes of behaviour, (2.) provides information in the form of numbers that can be quantified and summarized, (3.) employs mathematical processes which are the norm for analyzing the numeric data, and (4.) expresses the final results in statistical terminologies. Through the assumption that social facts have an objective reality, and that variables can be identified and relationships measured, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) indicate that quantitative research “is supported by the positivist or scientific paradigm, which leads us to regard the world as made up of observable, measurable facts” (p.6). A quantitative researcher therefore attempts to fragment and delimit phenomena into measurable or common categories, thus such a researcher needs to construct an instrument to be administered in a standardized manner according to predetermined procedures.

Although quantitative research is generally the more popular approach, it has been criticized for several shortcomings. Research within the positivist approach ignores the subjectivity of the researcher and does not take into account the researcher’s participation and influence. Further, it

reduces complex human phenomena into discrete variables and ignores people's humanity and unique human experiences.

Although quantitative and qualitative research differs in many ways, they also complement each other. Both approaches are needed within research; however, for the purpose of this study the positivist paradigm and quantitative method of inquiry do not fit with the underlying epistemology and therefore do not form part of this research.

### The Naturalist Paradigm and Qualitative Method of Inquiry

The positivist, modern era, or Newtonian thinkers ascribe to a view of the world as understandable, predictable and controllable. This was based on the assumption of universal truths, and language is seen as faithful and unbiased. This infers that there is a truth which is known to all, and all truths have an explanation.

The naturalist paradigm, in contrast, highlights the meanings of certain actions as the focus, rather than objective units. The aim of research is to explore these meanings as unique to the individual. The context in which action takes place influences the meaning-making process and the relationship between the researcher and participant is acknowledged. Lincoln and Guba (1985) present several underlying assumptions of the naturalistic paradigm:

- The ontological position of the naturalistic paradigm is that there are multiple constructed realities which are co-created in relationships with others, and which must be studied holistically. The aim of the research therefore shifts from control and prediction to that of discovery.

- The relationship between the researcher and participants is recursive, suggesting that the researcher cannot be ignored in the research process.
- Circular causality is supported and eradicates the prospect of linear causal predictions.
- A variety of factors such as gender, cultural background, epistemological framework etc. influence a researcher's lens and cannot be avoided during the research process.

The premises of this approach are coherent with the ecosystemic and social constructionist principles. Circularity and multiple realities constructed through language and which are shared by individuals who are in a relationship, are tenets that underlie both the ecosystemic epistemology and the social constructionist approach. Further, these are consistent with the postmodern approach of this study. It is therefore appropriate to use the naturalistic paradigm and qualitative research methods which are consistent with the ecosystemic epistemology.

Qualitative research provides a rich source of information and instead of trying to prove a theory, it aims to understand the meaning of naturally occurring complex events, actions, and interactions in context, from the point of view of the participants involved (Moon, Dillon & Sprenkle, 1990, p.358). Qualitative research uses a naturalist approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings where the "researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2001, p.39). It has been said that one of the most important strengths of qualitative research is that it is generative, that is, it constructs new ways of understanding (Gergen, 1985). Unlike quantitative researchers who seek causal determination, prediction and generalization of findings, qualitative researchers seek to understand real life settings where the phenomenon unfolds naturally (Patton, 2001). Reality is seen as

subjective where human behaviour is explained through interpretations and meanings attached to communication. The aim is to explore or describe the meaning attached to experiences by the participants. In general, qualitative research is defined as “any kind of research that produced findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Straus & Corbin, 1990, p.17). It has been suggested that quantitative researchers tend to dissociate themselves as much as possible from the research process (Winter, 2000); qualitative researchers on the other hand have come to embrace their involvement and role within the research (Patton, 2001). This approach will allow me to share in the understanding and the perceptions of others, and to explore how the participants structure and give meaning to their experiences of domestic violence. Building a context is important and the researcher is seen not as an expert, but as a learner. The researcher does not take a one-up position but is rather interested in collaborating with the participant in order to understand phenomena in a holistic way. A qualitative research design includes the following:

- It is informed by theory where a specific epistemology guides the researcher giving him/her a lens for looking at the world.
- The purpose of the research is discovery-oriented and does not focus on ‘why’.
- Both the researcher and the participant are involved more actively than in positivist research.
- Qualitative researchers prefer to look intensively at a few cases which highlight differences and contexts.
- The analysis of information allows for patterns and themes to emerge from the information instead of being imposed on information, and so the results are in the form of a discovered theory.

- The goal is to co-create a meaning of reality through language.  
(Moon et al., 1990, p.358)

Interpretive researchers access reality through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared phenomenology. Thus, this approach is consistent with the ecosystemic and social constructionist approach and is therefore appropriate for this study. Based on this approach, I will not attempt to solve problems or describe the domestic violent homes of the participants with tables and percentages. Rather, I will be interested in how the research participants make sense of their world and how the young female adults construct and attach meaning to their personal experiences of being exposed to domestic violence in their homes. Andreozzi (1985, p. 196) says “There is a need to bring our data analysis procedures into line with the conceptual reality of family and systems therapy”.

To summarize, the postmodernist approach rejects the notion of a universal and objective truth. Lynch (1997, p. 353) says that instead, knowledge is “an expression of language, values and beliefs of the particular communities and contexts” in which we exist. And so, postmodernism brings about scepticism to those who claim a sole truth, because many possible explanations and interpretations can exist. However all stories do not have the same validity. Postmodernists assert that knowledge and reality are tentative and that all meanings attached to art, literature or experiences are open to perpetual re-evaluation and thus move away from the static (Kellner, 1988). By recognizing the broader contexts within which theories are developed, the postmodern tradition asserts that no theory or described reality can have validity outside a particular historical context and value system (Doherty, 1991).

“Postmodernism is a broad term for many different approaches that set themselves up in opposition to the coherence and rationality of the modern world” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p.462).

Reality is then understood to be “constructed as a function of the belief systems that one brings to bear on a particular situation and according to which one operates” (Becvar & Becvar, 2000, p.89). Reality cannot exist outside our relationships, it is not fixed and unchanging, but rather always changing and is created in language, with a multi-verse of realities.

The aim of this research is to understand domestic violence as the reality of the research participants. I will not focus on categorizing their stories into a universal truth regarding the violence, as knowledge can never be fully known and is always changing. And so I will explore the experiences of domestic violence as an expression of the particular context in which the participants exist, and their stories will then be told by me.

### Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research

“Reliability and validity are tools of an essentially positivist epistemology” (Watling, as cited in Winter, 2000, p.7). However, both quantitative and qualitative researchers need to test and demonstrate that their studies are credible. While the credibility in quantitative research depends on instrument construction, in qualitative research, the “researcher is the instrument” (Patton, 2000, p.14). Thus, when quantitative researchers refer to research validity and reliability, they are referring to a study that is credible, while the credibility of qualitative research depends on the ability and effort of the researcher.

In quantitative research designs, reliability refers to the reliability of the measuring instrument and it’s validity in measuring what it intends to



measure. Reliability within the quantitative approach can then be defined as “the extent to which results are consistent over time and which gives an accurate representation of the total population under study ... and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered reliable” (Joppe, 2000, p.1). Traditional criteria for validity also find their roots in a positivist tradition, and can be defined as: “Validity determines whether the research truly measures that which it intends to measure, does the research instrument allow you to hit the ‘bulls eyes’ of the research?” (Joppe, 2000, p.1). Some researchers, such as Stenbacka (2001) argue that since reliability and validity concern measurement, they no relevance in qualitative research. However, reliability and validity are two factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study (Patton, 2001). And since these concepts are rooted in the positivist perspective and are common in quantitative research, they should then be redefined for their use in a naturalistic approach (Golafshani, 2003). Further, the quality of a study in each paradigm should be judged by its own paradigm’s terms (Healy & Perry, 2000).

Reliability and validity have several definitions within qualitative inquiry. Winter (2001) says that validity is described by a range of terms and is not a fixed or universal concept. As a result, many researchers have adopted what some regard as more appropriate terms such as trustworthiness. Although reliability and validity are considered separate terms within a quantitative approach, these concepts are not viewed as separate in qualitative studies, “instead, terminology that encompasses both, such as credibility, transferability and trustworthiness are used” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600). For the purpose of this study, each concept will be discussed in order to add clarity and understanding. Although both reliability and validity refer to trustworthiness, Stiles (1993) suggests that reliability refers to the trustworthiness of observations of data whereas

validity refers to the trustworthiness of interpretations and conclusions. But how is this tested in qualitative research?

### Reliability

Stiles (1993) has offered several guidelines that involve good practice in reports of qualitative research and which may assist in creating a more trustworthy study. These include disclosure of orientation, context, a description of internal processes of investigation, intense engagement with the material and iterative cycling and grounding of interpretations. These concepts will now be discussed as methods which were used in this study to allow for as high a standard of trustworthiness as possible.

The first is *disclosure of orientation* where the researcher discloses his or her expectations, preconceptions, values and orientation for the study. Despite inevitable limitations, disclosure can help readers infer the meaning of observations and indicates a starting point for gauging how the study can change theory. “Having their orientation in mind, whether or not we share it, helps us put their interpretations in perspective” (Stiles, 1993, p.602). Another guideline is *Explication of Social and Cultural Context*. This refers to orienting the readers to the perspectives from which phenomena were viewed and to emphasize that all research derives from a particular perspective. Full explication of one’s cultural context is not possible, but an attempt can at least alert readers to ways in which results may be culturally bound. *Description of internal processes of Investigation* is also part of the investigation’s context. This refers to the importance of the investigator’s internal processes while conducting the research. Again, researchers may be unaware of their internal processes; however good practice dictates that the internal processes we are aware of should be shared with the readers as they constitute a part of

the meaning of the study's observations and interpretations. In contrast to the idealized detachment sometimes advocated in positivist research, qualitative research seems facilitated by the researcher becoming immersed in the material. This involves personal contact with the participants and intimate familiarity with the text. This intense *Engagement of the Material* is another of Stiles's (1993) guidelines. Further, engagement requires establishing the trust of the participants and seeking to understand each participant's perspective in depth. Engagement fosters an internal and thus compassionate view of human experience, and it deepens understanding aesthetically and emotionally as well as cognitively (Atwood & Stoloro, 1984). Good practice also favours recycling, which refers to having repeated encounters of theories or interpretations with the participants or the text. This may also involve checking the accuracy of empathy and giving the participants an opportunity to correct or negotiate the meaning of the observations. This is called *Iteration* which refers to cycling between interpretation and observation. "Interpretations change and evolve as they become infused with observations" (Stiles, 1993, p. 605). *Grounding of Interpretations* also acts as another guideline. This involves researchers linking their more abstract interpretations with their more concrete observations. Often this includes presenting readers with selected text that became salient to the researcher during iteration.

### Validity

Stiles (1993) offers further guidelines with regard to validity. Asking "*what*" questions as opposed to "*why*" questions elicits material of which participants have direct knowledge. "*What*" questions often call forth stories and allow a greater opportunity for interpretation. One way to apply validity in qualitative research is through *triangulation*. This simply means seeking information from multiple sources. "Triangulation has

raised an important methodological issue in naturalistic and qualitative approaches to evaluation in order to control bias and establishing valid propositions because traditional scientific techniques are incompatible with this alternate epistemology” (Mathison, 1988, p. 13). Patton (2001) says triangulation strengthens a study by combining several methods of data. Convergence across several perspectives represents a stronger validity claim than does any one alone (Stiles, 1993, p. 608). A solution to misinterpretation is to ask many questions and expose oneself to multiple perspectives and sources. *Coherence* refers to the apparent quality of an interpretation, and includes internal consistency, comprehensiveness of the elements to be interpreted and the relations between elements and usefulness in encompassing new elements as they come into view. Another method is using *empathy* as an observation strategy. Researchers use their understanding of participants’ reports of inner experiences as data and may make inferences about participants’ experiences based on observed behaviour. By using empathy as an additional channel of information, qualitative research encompasses the study of meanings (Stiles, 1993).

Stiles (1993) goes on to discuss types of validity in qualitative research that will add credibility to the study.

*Testimonial Validity*: which refers to checking the accuracy of the researcher’s interpretations by asking the people whose experience it purports to represent.

*Catalytic Validity*: this refers to the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants. “A catalytically valid interpretation produces change or growth in the people whose experiences are being described” (p. 611).

*Reflexive Validity*: this refers to how the theory is changed by the data. The underlying notion is that interpretation is in a dialectical relationship with observation, by making use of the hermeneutic circle, and re-visiting the data, interpretation should change.

Like all research, qualitative research is not immune to bias. The foregoing validity criteria are vulnerable to distortion by investigators, participants and readers. The idea is to be aware of these: “The strategy of revealing rather than avoiding involvement is consistent with the broader shift in goals from the truth of the statements to the understanding by participants and readers. It is an approach that requires a degree of trust that the investigator and the research consumer will work responsibly toward understanding, even while pursuing personal commitments” (Stiles, 1993, p.614).

In this study, it was the intention to create a safe environment and space for the research participants to be able to explore meaning, while using the abovementioned criteria to ensure as high a level of credibility and trustworthiness as possible.

### Ethical considerations

The qualitative research approach probes human experiences in detail, provides access to subjective experiences and allows a researcher to describe intimate aspects of people’s lives. Consequently, it is necessary to take note of ethical considerations while doing such research. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic at hand and the age of the participants, the following ethical concerns were an integral part of the planning and implementation of this study.

- **Informed consent**

Informed consent involves obtaining verbal and written consent from the participants. At the outset of this study, participants were informed of the research aim and process; and received a full, non-technical and clear explanation of what was expected of them. This allowed participant's to make an informed choice to participate. An important aspect of informed consent is that it should be voluntary and informed (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Informed consent requires two-way communication between the researcher and the participants, and the researcher should be available to answer participant's questions even after the research has started. Furthermore, because the interviews of the participant's were audio-taped, permission to do so was also required. Verbal and written consent was obtained from the participants (refer to Appendix A, p.128).

- **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Confidentiality means that participant's disclosures are protected against unwarranted access and is a way of ensuring their privacy. Participants were assured of confidentiality and the limits thereof were discussed. Participants were informed of how the data was to be collected and processed as well as to whom the information was to be made available to. Further, participants were given the option to use pseudonyms in order to protect their identity and assure anonymity. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time thus respecting their autonomy.

- **Beneficence and Non-Maleficence**

Beneficence refers to the outcome of research as being beneficial, if not directly to the participants then to other researchers and communities (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Non-maleficence means that the research should do no harm to the research participants or any other person. This requires the researcher to consider the potential risks that the

research may hold. During this study, care was made to avoid and limit emotional and psychological harm as the topic of study was sensitive in nature. Participants were debriefed at the end of the study and should the participant have needed psychological intervention during or after the research, arrangements were in place. Telephonic and face-to-face counselling services were available at a NGO or alternatively referrals would have been made to clinical psychologists in private practice.

## **Research Method**

### **Sampling**

Sampling is a part of research design which is concerned with the selection of the participants for the study and involves decisions about which people, settings, events, behaviours or social processes to observe. Unlike the quantitative researcher who uses a pre-planned approach based on statistical means, the qualitative researcher selects cases gradually with the specific content of a case determining whether it is chosen. For qualitative researchers it is the relevance to the research topic rather than their representativeness which determines the way in which participants are selected. Neuman (2000) says that qualitative researchers are focused on how the sample illuminates social life, thus the purpose of sampling will be to collect certain participants who can deepen the understanding around the phenomena in question. Naturalistic sampling is very different from quantitative sampling and its purpose is to maximize information rather than to facilitate generalization of information. Large sample groups are not required as the goal is to produce in-depth information rather than quantifiable data.

As this is a qualitative study aiming to describe the subjective experiences of the research participants, the selection of respondents is based on specific considerations that allow the researcher to select those that meet the criteria for the purpose of the study. As used in exploratory research, the sampling procedure for this study was *purposive*, implying that the respondents were chosen because they met the criteria of the study and that the selection took place with the purpose of inquiry about their experiences of domestic violence. “Purposive sampling is appropriate for selecting unique cases that are especially informative” (Neuman, 2006, p. 222) and is used when selecting participants of a difficult-to-reach or specialized population, the aim being to allow for in-depth investigations. The sample selection was also made on the basis of *convenient sampling*, implying that participants were selected on availability and willingness to participate.

A sample of two young female adults was selected aged 20 and 21 years respectively. The sample group was sourced from local social workers and colleagues. This age group is appropriate for this study because as Erikson (1968) described, adolescence is an important stage in one’s psychosocial development, where one develops one’s self-identity that leads to shared relationships in early adulthood. Further, when one reaches the young adult stage, individuals enter into intimate relationships leading to commitment, e.g. marriage. This research is interested in the perceptions of young females and their outlook on life and relationships after having experienced domestic violence in their family of origin. As the research has shown, females tend more often to be the victim of violence, and thus the research is interested in the stories of females and how they interpret their experiences.



## **Data Collection**

Initially both participants were contacted telephonically, after which individual face-to-face interviews were scheduled in which the purpose, goals and process of the study were explained and discussed. Thereafter, both participants were asked to provide their experiences in written format, as both participants were literate. After the written format, the research process and data collections were continued through several unstructured, face-to-face interviews and by electronic means, in order to elaborate on their stories. It is believed that a more structured approach limits the research participants' ability to express their stories. The interviews took place at a location convenient to both researcher and participants. With the permission of all participants, the interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed according to a hermeneutic process. This means that the data was transcribed through an interpretive method where the researcher moved in and out of the data in order to elicit themes. As interpretive researchers "we want to understand the world from the inside out and from the outside in" (TerreBlanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 402). According to both the ecosystemic and the social-constructionist perspectives, the researcher and the participant are seen as partners in the co-construction of meaning. Further, the meaning which emerges will also be seen as a product of the larger social system in which the participants live (TerreBlanche & Durrheim, 1999).

## **Data Analysis Using the Hermeneutic Approach**

Analysis of information is the process whereby order, structure and meaning are imposed on the mass of information that is collected in a qualitative study. A philosophical base of interpretive research used in this study is hermeneutics, therefore, for the purpose of this research, a hermeneutic approach, which is coherent with an interpretive, postmodern

approach, will be used to analyze the data. According to Neuman (2006), hermeneutics is a method associated with interpretive social science that originates in religious and literary studies of textual material, in which in-depth inquiry into text and relating its parts to the whole can reveal deeper meanings. It is largely found in the humanities and emphasizes a detailed reading or examination of a text, which may refer to a conversation, written words or pictures. The hermeneutic approach focuses on the interpretation of meaning (Bleicher, 1980, p.268), the aim being “to discover meaning and to achieve understanding” (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991, p.266). Hermeneutics is coherent with an interpretive approach and one of the central theoretical concerns in qualitative research is ‘interpretation’. Hermeneutics involves entering a hermeneutic circle which is a process of interpretation conceived of as a circular movement between the parts and the whole. That is, in the interpretation of a text, the meaning of the parts should be considered in relation to the meaning of the whole, which itself can only be understood in respect of its constituent parts (TerreBlanche & Durrheim, 1999, p.479). When studying a text, the researcher tries to probe the viewpoint it represents as a whole, and then develop a deep understanding of how its parts relate to the whole. In other words, “True meaning is rarely obvious on the surface, one reaches it only through a detailed study of the text, contemplating its many messages and seeking the connections among its parts” (Neuman, 2000, p.88).

The Hermeneutic approach allows the researcher to be a part of the research, to discover new meanings with the participant, as opposed to a top-down approach where the researcher is seen as an expert. It allows the researcher to create a space where s/he can become immersed in the experiences of the participant and at the same time reflect on this role during interpretation.

Addison (1992) explains that people give meaning to what happens in their lives, which can be expressed in different ways. Giving meaning is influenced by the immediate context, social structures, personal histories, shared practices and language. The meaning of human action is not fixed, but is constantly negotiated and evolves over time.

The focus will not be to find meaning based on the literature regarding domestic violence, but rather to allow the themes of the experiences of the research participants to emerge. This will allow both researcher and participant to discover new meaning and to achieve understanding while co-constructing a new story. The following represents the steps involved in the hermeneutic analysis of data.

#### STEP 1: Familiarization and immersion

Step 1 involves becoming immersed in the text rather than the lived experience and so, in order to make sense of the participant's world, I will immerse myself in the world created by the participant through the written stories and face-to-face conversations.

#### STEP 2: Thematising

This involves a bottom-up research approach whereby the researcher will allow themes which underlie the research material to emerge. During the immersion in the text, thematic analysis will be used, to allow dominant themes that underlie the data to emerge.

### STEP 3: Coding

Step 3 involves grouping together similar themes. Stories, events and feelings that contain similar themes will be grouped together.

### STEP 4: Elaboration

While maintaining a constantly questioning attitude, the researcher will explore the generated themes more closely, looking for any misunderstandings and deeper meanings. This will be done through a circular progression between the parts and wholes, foreground and background, understanding and interpretations, and research and narrative accounts (Addison, 1992, p.113). This will further be explored through conversations with colleagues, supervisors and participants.

### STEP 5: Interpretation and Checking

This last step involves the researcher immersing herself in the world of meaning and freely associating on what the meanings stand for. Thematic analysis will be used in order to identify common themes from the information using excerpts to substantiate themes. The researcher will then be moving in and out between the story as a whole and the constituent parts, making up the whole, allowing reflection on her role in the research process while co-constructing meaning.

Following the process detailed above, themes will be inferred from the material and consequently coded and elaborated on. As the researcher, my account of the analysis will incorporate my own meanings and perceptions. Human action is not fixed and is constantly being negotiated.

Therefore my interpretations do not represent a fixed reality or an objective truth, but rather I will represent my interpretations and meanings of the stories of my participants. Reference will be made to both the literature reviewed and direct quotes of the participants where necessary.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter addressed the research design and research method of the study. The qualitative method of inquiry was explained as appropriate and coherent with the postmodern tradition. Reliability and validity as seen from a qualitative perspective was discussed. The research method was explained and elaborated on. The chapter that follows will be the analysis of the data according to a postmodern, interpretive perspective.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Through the Eyes of the Participants**

#### **Introduction**

In Chapter 4, the research design and methods of data analysis were discussed. In this chapter, these methods will be applied to the written data and transcribed interviews that made up the data collection. The stories of both participants will be discussed individually and significant themes will be highlighted. These themes and the overall analysis are not seen as a universal truth or fact, but rather as a co-construction of both the researcher and the participants. Each section will begin with a brief description of the participant's current context so that the reader can be oriented towards the current situation of the participants.

Much positivist research has been done on the effects of experiencing domestic violence and results tend to spread over many areas: emotional, mental, cognitive and psychological. The effects tend to differ according to age and gender and can include behavioural problems and emotional difficulties that manifest in a variety of ways. This section will give the participants a voice to expose the imprint of experiencing domestic violence. The method of analysis used was hermeneutics and so the themes extricated through this process will be discussed here. Their full stories and transcribed interviews are attached as Appendices B and C.

## **THE STORY OF MARY**

### *In Context*

Mary (pseudonym) is a 21 year old student who has lived with her three older sisters and mother for approximately the last eight years. In 1998 Mary's mother filed for divorce and in 2000 her father moved out of their home. She has recently moved into a communal home in another city in order to be close to university. Since the divorce of their parents, all the children have been raised to be independent people, vary rarely needing others to depend on. Mary drives her own car, and on weekends she returns home to her family. Mary is single and has an active social life.

### *The History*

In her written story, Mary describes the travels and immigration of both parents. Her father was born and raised in Europe, and at 13 years old he immigrated to South Africa from a rural life overseas. Life in a rural European country is vastly different from what life was like in South Africa in the 1970's. She describes her father as an "enigmatic 31 year old male". Her mother came from a sheltered environment characteristic of Mediterranean families where the upbringing of children is strict. In 1975, at the age of 19, Mary's mother married this mysterious man from overseas. Mary recalls times when she was curious as to her parents' courtship: did her mother love her father, how did they meet etc? Her mother simply replied: "My father approved". This scenario has been played out by many who would find a better life here in South Africa, away from the hardships of some European countries. But what was to turn out as Mary's family life, didn't quite have a happy ending. By the age of 30, Mary's mother had four daughters and had had almost five

years of marriage counselling. In 1998, Mary's mother filed for divorce, but it wasn't until 2000 that her father moved out of the house. During those two years, her parents lived in the same house but led separate lives. The divorce proceedings from then were long and painful. Mary speaks of her mother's journey with both sadness and respect; sadness for the difficulties her mother had, and respect for her strength to face them. As part of an ecosystemic perspective, it is important to be aware of the history and culture of a family. From Mary's story, it is clear that Mary's mother was raised to accept and obey men in a patriarchal family system. Her family was governed by the male who was the head of the household and he was the one who harboured power and control. From an interactional point of view, it can be inferred that Mary's father was the aggressor and the family member with the power, while her mother assumed the passive dedicated wife role. It is through understanding the context and interactions that we are able to make sense of the violence.

### *The Violence*

*“Do you feel like a man, when you push her around?*

*Do you feel better now, she falls to the ground?”*

*“Red Jump Suit Apparatus”*

Mary was exposed to violence from a young age. It was part of her family life and she grew up not knowing anything different. She describes this part of her life as “before”. She admits in her written story that as she got older, the memories tended to fade: “they distort and merge and create an effect of ‘before’.” These memories tended to fade specifically regarding the time before the divorce, before her father left and before she became aware of the life she was living. After her mother found letters strewn around the house written by Mary's sisters describing their life as a ‘hell -



hole', she filed for divorce. This is about the time when Mary realized that the life she thought was normal was not so normal after all. Mary believes her mother did not file for divorce sooner for two reasons. The first reason is her religion. As practicing Catholics, divorce is frowned upon and a couple is encouraged to stay married even in the more trying times. The second reason for staying in the marriage came from extended family. Her mother was told to stay married and to work out the problems. Mary's mother had nowhere else to go and no other source of income. For these reasons, Mary's mother tried to make her marriage work, and hoped things would get better. It was only when she found the letters that she realized the situation was not going to change and that her children needed her to make a change. This scenario gives suggestion to Mary's context. The violence she experienced was not limited to a system that included her immediate family only, it also included religion, the extended family, culture and her community. The belief that one should remain married is a belief system that possibly maintained the violence. The more Mary's mother looked for help outside her marriage, the more she was told to stay, which in turn reinforced her role as a dedicated Catholic wife. Simultaneously, the more Mary's mother portrayed the dedicated wife, the more the violence occurred. The pattern of violence in the family was disrupted when Mary's sisters went against the family norm and complained through letters. This fits with Straus's (1973) opinion that family violence was not the result of individual pathologies but rather a systemic pattern. This suggests that one needs to examine both the family as a system and the environment (which includes the subsystems culture, religion, community and extended family) as a system, and the ways in which the two interact.

It was at this time that Mary's mother obtained a restraining order against her father; she did not need to be afraid anymore. But at that stage, Mary had no idea what that meant: "Afraid of what? A restraining order for

what? For what?" wrote Mary. These are the questions an innocent 12 year old was asking when her mother sat her down one day and explained the divorce and restraining order. She says, "The experiences I had confronted were my own and they were normal. I didn't know anything different, and had nothing to compare it to... I lived the only life I knew as best I could". As a child, Mary was not allowed to visit friends and friends were not allowed to visit her. The only companion she had was a young girl who came from the same culture and similar family background. Their lifestyles were similar and so Mary had no reason to question whether her family life was 'normal' or not. In an interview, Mary said she felt that because her culture was different from that of her peers at school, she always thought her family life would be different anyway. So discussing her life at home was not something she felt was necessary, particularly because her only friend experienced a similar lifestyle. Traditionally, family was viewed as a private entity and in the patriarchal family, the hierarchy of power meant that children were afforded an inferior status. One of the characteristics of a family experiencing violence is being part of a closed system with little or no outside interaction. A family operating in isolation is more likely to continue to use violence. Being part of a closed family system where interactions with others are restricted, as well as being exposed to domestic violence, suggests that an individual's emotional, psychological and mental development may be hampered. In some closed families, members may experience ambivalent feelings and may use violence as a means to gain distance in the relationship. This violence also acts as a means for one family member to gain control over another (Glick, 2000). Mary was never allowed to socialize with friends and remained isolated within the family. Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre-Smith and Jaffe (2003) suggested that being exposed to episodes of violence and abuse within the family "may prompt efforts on the part of the child to accommodate to such events and form a hypervigilant and insecure approach to

relationships, often marked by strong emotions (e.g. frustrations, disappointment, hostility and fear)” (p.172). This will be elaborated on when discussing interpersonal relationships.

Further, Mary had little peer group interaction which is an important factor for healthy development during the formative years. This may have contributed to her not discussing her family life with others, as well as her ability to discern what behaviour was acceptable and unacceptable. Her self-identity was shaped from her experiences and her culture alone with little influence from peers.

This paints a picture of how violence becomes part of a family, part of how a family functions, and how this can be seen by family members as normal. Growing up in an environment coloured by aggression was all she knew. Friends were never allowed home when her father was home and she was rarely allowed out, so how could she compare her life to someone else's? The 'normality' of her life consisted of violence towards her mother, her siblings and herself. She says that although she never saw the domestic violence towards her mother, she knew it happened. "I was lucky to never witness my father hit my mother, though I know he did." She did, however, see the violence towards her sisters, and experienced it first hand on herself. Although her memory of events is choppy, as if she had blanked out at certain points, she clearly remembers several episodes - one of her father dragging her by the arm from a friends house....blank....and then being crouched in a corner at home being beaten with a fist. Or the time when they got a pet dog and Mary's father decided the dog needed some discipline, so he bought a "stiff, black plastic whip". In her words: "I don't think I ever saw him use it on the dog, but I did see him use it on my sister. How convenient that the whip had so many uses..."

It was only in 1998, when Mary's mother filed for divorce and applied for a protection order, that the violence stopped. A protection order is a legal document providing protection for those who experience domestic violence and in Mary's situation the protection order was effective and prevented her father from being abusive at home. Should her father have violated the stipulations of the protection order, the police would have been obliged to arrest him and remove him from the home.

Mary's recollection of events was, at times, unclear and she was unable to remember events in totality. When this was discussed, it appeared that her inability to recall clearly was due to several reasons. The first reason is age. She was young when the violence occurred and so the forgotten memories may be due to age. The other reason may be as a means to protect herself. The trauma and experiences of domestic violence may have been forgotten as her attempt to remove herself from the memory and re-experiencing of the violence.

### *The tattoo – Imprint of Violence*

A tattoo is a permanent marking on the skin. Even after removal, some trace of it is still visible, perhaps not with the eye, but with the memory of having it done.

### *Interpersonal Relationships*

"I will never completely be free of my father." These are Mary's words. She attributes many areas of her life to her experience of domestic violence. "He's affected so many areas of my life." The first aspect she mentions is her relationship with other males, and the difficulties she has with trusting them in relationships. She opens up and writes, "I can never

completely trust men, always expecting the worst from them.” A confirmation of this was that when one of her previous boyfriends did lie and cheat on her, Mary’s reaction to this was: “I’m never completely surprised.” It appears that her experiences have influenced the way Mary approaches relationships and possibly how she interacts in relationships. Research (Von Steen, 1997) suggests that adult females who have witnessed violence as a child tend to enter into abusive relationships themselves. Although none of her boyfriends have been physically or verbally abusive towards her, Mary enters into relationships already mistrusting and expects to be disappointed. Wolfe et al. (2003) suggest that children adapt to their harsh environments which has significant impact on their personal development and compromises their ongoing development. As previously mentioned, a child who experiences domestic violence may accommodate such events by forming a hypervigilant and insecure attachment in other relationships. This is evident in Mary when she explains how she approaches intimate relationships with men. She assumes a mistrusting and guarded pattern of interaction and relies on her experiences to make judgement. Her perception of a dominating male has now altered into a perception of mistrust, betrayal and negative expectations.

Trust is a central issue here and growing up in an environment where the only male figure was the bearer of pain, betrayal and hurt, how can one expect to know how to deal with these issues when entering into a romantic relationship? As mentioned in Chapter 2, adolescence is the time when one develops a self-identity which will aid in one’s connecting with another. It was around this time that Mary realized her father was not just strict but was abusive. Mary’s identity regarding herself and her family and relationships was then negated, and as Mary entered her pre-puberty and early puberty years, she was forced to redefine herself and her relationships. Although her abusive environment was unhealthy, the

transformation created a sense of inner insecurity and a lack of trust towards others. These experiences led to Mary having difficulty creating a secure attachment with others, particularly with men. During the early adulthood phase (based on Erikson's (1963) Psychosocial Developmental Phases) we begin to explore intimate relationships and develop certain characteristics that lead to long-term commitments like marriage. But what happens when this is interrupted by other factors, such as violence? In Mary's situation, she has difficulty allowing men the opportunity of knowing her completely. "I do realize that the reason that most of my relationships have failed is due to my own insecurities and inability to let myself get fully involved in the relationship, to let another person in. Trust is something that I'll have to learn". Mary does mention that while growing up she was surrounded mainly by women, and so she was able to develop close and secure relationships with them, however, her security with male figures seems to be fragile and unstable. "It's hard having to let go of these emotional walls that you build around yourself to prevent the inevitable pain and disappointment." During subsequent interviews, Mary still acknowledged her difficulty in relationships, however, she says that she is getting better. She says she has learnt that not all men are like her father, but she is not ready to enter into a serious relationship at the moment. She is still protective of her space and her time to grow. It was during these interviews that Mary was able to explore these feelings further and was able to gain a better understanding of her vulnerabilities.

One of the defining characteristics of adults who have experienced domestic violence as children is their impaired level of interpersonal functioning. These relationships are characterized by mistrust, low self-esteem, fear of abandonment and especially anger. As we have voyaged through Mary's experiences, we see that her encounters with men fit with the picture painted by the literature. As mentioned in Chapter 3, those who experience violence tend to have difficulty in expressing their

feelings towards the abuser, and as Mary says, “I see my father once a year. After each visit I wonder why I still bother. My father doesn’t hit us anymore. And he tells me now that he loves me (usually sniffs it out as he cries, feeling sorry for himself).” She then goes on to say, “He has changed to some degree...I don’t know.” This is consistent with the literature. Von Steen (1997) indicates that adults tend to have difficulty in expressing their feelings about the caregiver’s part in the violence. Although Mary harbours no anger towards her mother, her feelings towards her father tend to be conflictual. Mary still to some degree wants to see her father, hoping to see a change, but at the same time she feels uncertain and resentful.

### Independence

Although briefly and indirectly mentioned in her writings, Mary gives some reference towards a sense of independence.

Mary describes many instances of independence. She, along with her sisters, was brought up to be able to sort out her own problems, to make her own decisions and rely on no one. Their mother proved she could do this by divorcing her husband, on whom she was dependent. She then became a single mother who began to work and care for her children without any assistance from her ex-husband. So, Mary has adapted the same thinking. She is assertive and speaks her mind. She manages her own finances and lives in a communal home away from her family of origin. Mary admits in the interviews that her relationship with men has been affected by her independence and unwillingness to show her vulnerabilities towards men. She tends to be emotionally distant and men often feel threatened.

Another area Mary feels has been affected through all this, is her financial status. She mentions that her father kept them in debt most of her life and she never had the comfort and relief of having some financial security. This has been a large reason why Mary describes herself as being “so crazy responsible and obsessed with my own financial status it scares me.” These feelings have made her so insecure and unable to enjoy certain hobbies for fear of falling into debt, a nagging feeling that reminds her of the hard times she had growing up. She even hates shopping for clothes, an enjoyment for most young ladies. “I’m a 20 year old student! I don’t want to worry about how I’m going to put food on the table.”

### Generational Cycle

Another area that was prominent because of the honesty and unconcealed way Mary spoke is her fear of herself. She feels that most abusers have come from families where there was abuse. Mary fears that she may one day follow in her father’s footsteps. Kurst-Swanger and Petcosky (2003) say that family provides a ‘training ground’ for violence and they perceive that abuse is transmitted from one generation to the next. They confirm that research supports the notion that children who experience abuse are more likely to abuse or be victims of abuse as adults. Mary describes herself as bossy and assertive, but admits that she can at times cross that line of being assertive, to being downright rude and aggressive. Perhaps this is her way of regaining the power that was lost in the relationship with her father. “I don’t want to become my father. I don’t want to fight or be aggressive. But I know I have it in me.” Mary recalls getting into childhood arguments with her siblings and her first response would be, “I’m going to hit you.” This is a scary memory for her as it highlights how easily one can fall into violence when angered. “I have his genes and I’ve seen what it can do.” As mentioned in Chapter 3, it has



been suggested that males tend to become the aggressor whereas females tend to become involved with men who are aggressive. However, Mary tends to identify with the aggressor rather than the victim of violence. As Louw, Van Ede and Louw (1998) suggest, children who grow up in violent homes model the behaviour of their significant others.

### Love and Hate

Love and hate are paradoxically strong emotions that create an emotional tug-of-war which is characterised by feelings of love towards a father, and at the same time, being completely uncomfortable and fearful around him. In addition to this, is the love for a mother which is coloured by anger during the violent episodes.

This is Mary's situation, especially when she meets her father on a yearly basis. She describes the idea of one day forgiving him, but her reluctance and hesitation are the outcome of knowing the hurt he caused. No matter how much she would like things to be different, she is cautious and unsure. "There's more than one kind of abuse, and my father knew some tricks. He was both a physical and an emotional bully. I sometimes think he's still just playing games."

"I guess the knowledge that anybody that has to resort to beating their family just isn't well. This allows me to still have contact with him whatsoever. He's sick, I know that now. It doesn't make it easier though." This describes the coping mechanism Mary uses, that is, believing her father to be psychologically ill. During one of the interviews, Mary expressed her need to believe that her father was ill to have been violent towards the family. The thought of his being aggressive for any other reason is too painful, and suggests to her that he just did not care about them. It is clear that Mary has unresolved feelings and her words portray

her pain and ambivalence: “Have I forgiven him yet? Honestly I don’t think so. But I’m getting there.”

This theme has highlighted the tug-of-war of emotions, the pain and suffering of loving the one you hate, and hating the one you love.

### *Life and Death*

Throughout my reading of the data, a theme that stood out quite predominantly is that of loss and connection. Although these terms seem contradictory, in Mary’s story these concepts are described both directly and indirectly.

#### Loss

The story of Mary has a tinge of the heartache and grief of losing precious people or ideas. Mary lost the concept of having ‘parents’ when her mother divorced her father. And although this had a meaningful and almost enriching spin-off, she lost, along with that, some vital aspects. Firstly, she lost the family identity that she had known, albeit not always comfortable or happy, but it was all she knew. Later on, she lost her openness on forming intimate relationships with men. She describes being mistrusting from the start and not allowing men to get to know her; she protects herself from the pain she assumes will eventually happen.

The majority of her experiences after the divorce have an almost uplifting ring, but there is one episode that Mary recalls that creates a sense that the trauma and life ‘before’ really has not gone away. She describes one day when she was visiting her friend and was unfortunate enough to witness this friend being beaten by her father. She says “...and I watched.

I froze. I am so ashamed of my behaviour and that will be a sight I will never forget. And I am aware that I'm still that little girl being bossed around by my father.” Could this signify the loss of the reality she had created for herself, the reality of being ‘free,’ of not being scared anymore. Perhaps she has not resolved all her feelings regarding the violent outbursts that were part of her childhood.

This theme relates to the section that discussed the generational cycle. Although it is more common for male children who have experienced domestic violence to become the abuser in adult relationships, Mary is aware that she can be bossy and at times pushy. She is, however, fearful that, should she be in a situation where she is being abused, she might freeze like she did when witnessing her friend being beaten. In the face-to-face interviews she expressed her uncertainty regarding how she would react now, as an adult, should she be the victim, or a witness to abuse. These are concerns that, according to her, she has no answers to. She even becomes quite emotional and quickly wants to distract herself from the topic because she feels it is “getting too much, talking about it.” This portrays the emotional distress Mary experiences and is a reflection of how experiencing domestic violence has coloured many aspects of her life.

### Gaining

Amidst all the abuse and suffering, Mary speaks of certain aspects that she describes as gains in her life. These aspects have helped her cope and have possibly allowed some healing.

Von Steen (1997) says that one of the long-term effects of experiencing domestic violence is the interpersonal struggles between siblings. Siblings

can often be seen as a reminder of the violence. However, Mary's experience was different and is not consistent with this literature.

In her writings, Mary describes the close relationship she had, and still has with her siblings, her sisters. The house-hold was largely female, but was dominated by a male. This close tie between mother and daughters, and between sisters, may have been the cement for the new foundation they built after the divorce. As Mary contemplates, "Maybe I thought the reason why I never really had a connection with my father was because I was fundamentally female." Mary explained that although her relationships with her siblings have always been close, she believes her experiences of domestic violence brought them even closer. In an interview, Mary agrees that the relationships between her, her siblings and her mother could even be described as enmeshed. "Practically all family decisions are discussed among us five before a decision is made. We all have input in decisions and rely on each other to solve problems." Traditionally, enmeshed families are seen as dysfunctional in clinical practice. In Mary's situation, it appears that the support and close relationships formed between the females in the family led to support and nurturing. The single parent home that came about through the divorce ultimately became the source of love and personal growth: "I realize that what we have (a single parent home) has been the closest thing I've ever come to experiencing what family life should really be like." Mary even says, "I don't think that anybody could express the relief I have known since the divorce. You have to experience it, the 'before' and the 'after'." This part of Mary's story is in direct contrast to the previous patriarchal family she was part of. Now, her family is made up of a different structure and denies the societal discourse that divorce will be the more traumatic option for the children. In Mary's case, divorce turned out to be a healthy alternative to a violent household.

Mary adds another aspect she has gained through her experiences of domestic violence. She feels that even through the hardships, this process has created a space for attaining more insight into who she is. “I constantly evaluate my choices and decisions.” Mary feels that she is learning more about the person she is becoming through personal growth that she receives through her constant introspection.

### *The moral of the story*

Even though her father has not lived with them for the last eight years, and many people offer condolences because of it, Mary feels that her current family structure is the closest she has felt to having a family. She says the life she has now is her own, and life at home is pretty normal. “The change at home is amazing,” she writes. Like any ‘normal’ family they have their occasional arguments and pressures, but, “there isn’t that strained tension that fills the air when someone walks into the house. We’re not scared. It’s as simple as that.” Through the story of Mary, we can see the pain, even through what she considered to be a normal childhood. Mary feels she needs to learn to trust men, and is cautious in relationships. She has many unanswered questions regarding her father. Mary elaborates and creates a scenario of one day receiving a phone call with the news that her father has passed away. “Do I cry? Am I sad? Am I relieved? Imagine not feeling any loss when your father dies? Am I a monster? Thank God I never had to put that theory to the test.” Mary admitted to feeling anger towards her father. She also says that a part of her wants to confront him and question why he did what he did. Another part does not want to know. She feels that maybe one day she will be able to, but not now. Still, many unanswered questions, many uncertainties lie ahead. In a certain way, this idea that life is more pleasant and peaceful after the divorce challenges the dominant narrative that many hold on to,

that a couple should remain married despite possible irreparable pain, for the sake of the children. Society debates this, where some believe parents need to stay together for the sake of the children, teaching them commitment, and a moral value that marriage is sacred. But what does it teach children who come from a violent and abusive household? In Mary's case her mother decided not to stay in the marriage, for the sake of the children. And when you speak to Mary, she gives the impression that this act was filled with love and concern for the well-being of the children. From this, Mary has learnt to rely on herself, to be strong and not need to depend on a man, as her mother and many from that generation did. This possibly is a catch 22, to trust or not to trust. Either way, Mary feels she would be taking significant risks.

Mary and her siblings were exposed to counselling after the divorce proceedings started. The family currently has open communication should anyone feel the need to discuss the violence. This appears to have had a significant influence in the healing process, and allowing those affected to make sense of what was happening.

When asked to reflect on her participation in this study and the sharing of her experiences of domestic violence, feelings of guilt surfaced. Mary at times felt as if she might be exaggerating and that her experience "really wasn't as bad and that I should just get over it and stop feeling sorry for myself." When asked if her recollections and her feelings would be any different from her sisters', she answered, "No, I don't think so. They would probably be the same." These feelings tend to be common with children who have been brought up in violent homes. Pizzey (1997) explains "the child often feels guilty for the hatred they feel towards the parent..." (p.69). She also felt guilty because she thought she was not only telling her story, but was also telling other people's stories, that she was telling her sisters' stories as well. Through the research process and

the face-to-face interviews, we agreed on the idea that the story she is telling is hers, and that together, we are creating a shared meaning.

As mentioned, her participation in this research led to conflicting feelings. Mary says at times she felt as if she was far removed from her experiences and was just writing a story. At other times she would get quite upset and felt “a little morbid going through everything again.” She admits this is not a task she would readily repeat again.

In summary, although Mary was exposed to violence and aggression as a child, she was eventually removed from the violence when her mother filed for divorce. The children were exposed to counselling and the violence in the home was not treated as a taboo topic, instead the home was open to discussing each other’s feelings and experiences. Mary also had the support of three older sisters and her mother to reinforce the notion that no one deserves to be placed in harm’s way as are members of an abusive family.

## **THE STORY OF CLAIRE**

### ***In Context***

Claire (pseudonym) is 20 years old and is currently employed. She has lived the last two years away from her mother and regards herself as a very independent person. She put herself through matric, bought her own car and supported herself financially, working as a manageress at a local restaurant. Due to financial reasons, Claire moved back to her mother for a few months. However, since the start of the study, Claire has moved out again, is involved in a committed relationship and is expecting her first child.

### *The History*

Claire began her written story with the histories of both her mother and her father, but wrote of her experience in a reserved and cautious manner. Her mother was placed in an orphanage until she was approximately five years of age after which Claire's great-grandmother then adopted her mother. Claire speaks of the depression her mother suffered throughout the years, the antidepressants she took and the difficulties she had in dealing with living in an orphanage. Claire mentions that her mother is not open to talking about her experiences. The only mention of her father was that he was the last born of his siblings, he loved sports and in 2002 he passed away, leaving behind two daughters, 16 and 14 years old. Claire feels that her father must have had a lot of patience during the marriage because her mother would accuse him of having extra-marital affairs, and she describes her mother as someone who was never really self assured or self confident: "My father must have had lots of patience". However, even with these problems, Claire still described her family life before her father died as "Heaven on Earth", explaining that they would do everything as a family. After her father's death, Claire describes the breakdown of her heaven on earth.

### *The Violence*

As described previously, Mary was exposed to violence from the start of her natural life. Claire on the other hand was exposed to violence at a much older age. Before Claire's biological father passed away, there was no violence in her family, and her family life was relatively stable and happy. After her father died in 2002, according to Claire, her mother began abusing alcohol and anti-depressant medication as a means of coping with her husband's death. Along with the abuse of alcohol, came the abuse of Claire. She reports times when her mother would not only hit her at home, but also in front of her friends when they were out visiting.



Claire writes: “She would slap me in front of my friends and at home if I didn’t dance according to her tune.” Each time this happened, Claire would not speak to her mother for days at a time. Claire says when her mother drank she became a different person, “a mother which no 16 year old daughter would like to have.” So at age 16, Claire not only lost her father, but in a sense, lost the mother she knew as well. She feels the stress of her father’s death, the violence and the pressure of school examinations were too much for her. She would cry and become angry, eventually seeking escape with thoughts of suicide: “I wanted to feel the pain and suffering until I exhaled my last breath. At that stage I thought it was my only escape.”

Claire’s story continues from the abuse she herself experienced. Four years after her father died, her mother got re-married to an abusive man. Claire’s mother is no longer physically abusive; it is now her step-father who is the abuser, both physically and verbally. Claire says that her step-father regularly, even daily, abuses alcohol and then beats her mother. This is consistent with the literature. It is estimated that 60% of abusers tend to abuse alcohol as well (Singh, 2003). Excessive alcohol intake lowers inhibitions, alters judgement and reduces moral constraints and although alcohol is not a direct cause of violence, it acts as an amplifier of an already conflictual situation and exacerbates violent episodes (Parenzee & Smythe, 2003). Claire and her sister do not intervene anymore, because when they do try stopping him, he turns on them. So they sit helplessly watching, or listening to the violence and abuse. Mary thought her experiences were normal, not pleasant, but normal. Claire, on the other hand, knew they were wrong, but could not do anything about it. Suicide eventually became an option. Claire moved out at approximately age 17, after her father died, and became relatively independent. However, due to certain financial reasons, she moved back with her mother and step-father three months before the start of this study. She

says that was extremely difficult and stressful, because she was exposed to the violence daily and experienced the pain and helplessness involved. During the research process, however, Claire has moved out of her mother's home again and admits that even though it is much better since she does not live there anymore, it is still upsetting when she returns home for a visit. Further, Claire does not discuss the violence with her mother. She says her mother becomes angry towards her and does not listen to Claire or discuss the violence. The violence at home is only discussed between Claire and her sister where they discuss their feelings and concern for their mother. It appears the lack of communication regarding the violence has maintained the pattern of violence in Claire's family. Claire inevitably finds herself in a paradoxical situation. If she discusses the violence her mother becomes angry, and if she remains quiet, the violence continues anyway.

During her first marriage, Claire's mother was using prescription anti-depressant medication. It seems the death of Claire's father became the catalyst for abuse and violence. Claire's mother abused alcohol and the prescription medication and then became violent towards Claire. Interactions between mother and daughter were characterised by aggression where Claire was the powerless child while her mother harboured power and control. Perhaps this was an attempt on her mother's part to regain some control after her husband died. It was also at this time that Claire's immediate family became withdrawn from the extended family members and friends. Later, after Claire's mother re-married, the role of controller shifted to the step-father. Relationships were still characterized by aggression and violence and the family was governed by fear and anger. Even with the structural changes, the family functioning remained the same.

The next piece of the story will look at the influence experiencing domestic violence has had on Claire.

### *The tattoo – Imprint of Violence*

#### *Suicide, drugs and loss*

In contrast to Mary, Claire spoke of suicide and her intentions of taking her own life as her way to escape. It appears Claire experienced a greater sense of hopelessness and powerlessness. Claire expresses her protectiveness over her sister, and says when times were violent she would go and sit with her sister in bed and hold her. Her love for her sister was the force that kept her alive. “At that stage I thought it (suicide) was my only escape. I immediately thought of my sister, and thought I couldn’t leave her to handle the pain alone and then she would give up at the end of the day and take her own life.” She goes on to say, “There is one thing, I love my sister very much.” Claire’s description of her feelings of responsibility towards her sister, and the role she takes on as the miniature adult, echo what Mahony and Campbell (1999) found. They describe the eldest daughter who tends to take on the burden of caring for other, younger siblings. However, at the same time Claire chose to leave the home and move out on her own as an attempt to escape the violence and unhappiness. During this time, she worked part-time, managed to support herself, pass Grade 12 and buy herself a car. It was also during this time that she had an older boyfriend, and began to delve into the world of drugs. She says after a year-and-a-half in the relationship, and continuous drug use “at that stage it was nice, but the drugs had a big influence on our relationship. Our relationship ended, and so did the drug use.” It was at this time that Claire moved back home and tried to work on the relationship with her mother. However, the violence at home still continued, and was still very hard to accept, because she did

not grow up with it. Claire mentions that the time with her biological father was 'heaven on earth,' and now, it is not. "I lost my dad, friends, trust in people, trust in myself, respect for my mom, and for people like her."

### Love and Hate

Claire speaks very clearly of her love for her family, and for her mother. She also speaks of her anger when her mother became violent towards her. "I told my mother that I will never forgive her for what she has done to me." During the face-to-face interviews, Claire disclosed her ambiguous feelings of currently seeing her mother being abused, being beaten with a fist and having objects thrown at her. Claire described feelings of anger, and at the same time complete helplessness. She watches the violent episodes, unsure of how to intervene. And when she tries to intervene, she is threatened with violence herself and is pushed around. Von Steen (1997) says those children who experience domestic violence have feelings ranging from empathy to resentment towards caregivers. Again the child is placed in a paradox. This paradox is also evident when Claire experiences financial difficulty because the place she feels the least safe is the same place she finds a safety net. This is shown when she returns home when she is unable to provide for herself financially.

As Mahony and Campbell (1999) suggested, some children who experience domestic violence experience a sense of responsibility to protect their mothers. Von Steen (1997) said that as adults, these children often have conflicting feelings towards both the abusive caregiver and the victimized caregiver. The anger Claire feels tends to be directed not only at her step-father, but also at her mother. She says she feels anger for the abuse on herself by her mother, but also for the helplessness she feels in watching her mother being abused.

### Independence

Claire speaks of how she left home at a young age because of the unstable home environment. It is a common occurrence for teenagers to run away from home during violent times. She quickly became both financially and emotionally independent, a miniature adult with a world of knowledge under her belt, but yet with so much still to learn. She managed to find part-time work to sustain her financially. She managed to put herself through her last years at high school, and passed Grade 12 on her own. She became involved with an older man and together they took drugs. Although not ideal, Claire says she learnt a lot while away from home. For some time she moved back home, which she says she was not happy about. For one the abuse was as bad as ever, but also because she was back under her mother's roof, almost as if a part of her independence has been taken away. Currently, she has again left home, and is happy to report that she is in a committed relationship and is expecting her first child.

### *Life and Death*

#### Loss

In Claire's story, the terms *loss* and *gaining life* were significant themes. Loss represented *death*, as well as a symbolic loss of identity. The term *life* represented the support of others, and the dependence on her inner strength, and a new life that has brought meaning to her.

Claire speaks of loss, both literally and figuratively. The loss of her father was a real and physical loss that Claire and her family suffered. He was not there anymore. With him went her foundation, her security. Claire lost not one parent, but in a sense she lost her mother as well. Her mother

began drinking and became abusive; she was no longer the mother Claire had grown to know. At age 16, when most girls are celebrating their sweet sixteen birthdays, and preparing for the late adolescent journey that does not ask for permission before unleashing its emotional insecurity and self-identity creations, Claire was grieving the loss of her mother and father, relying on no one else but herself to deal with the emotional upheaval. There was no support from extended family and the family members did not receive counselling or any therapeutic intervention. The cycle of violence continued.

Later on, when Claire and her mother had eventually started to mend some of the wounds, her life was turned upside down once again. Her mother remarried, and Claire moved back home. The father figure did not represent a stable and safe character, but rather an abusive and violent man who becomes wild when intoxicated. Again, there was the loss of expectations, of having a family, of a stable foundation. Drugs and alcohol became common place which usually precipitated violence.

Throughout her story, Claire also mentions losing her family. During the time her mother was taking anti-depressants and drinking heavily, Claire says they lost contact with many of her family members to whom they were once close. After her father's death, they also lost contact with his side of the family. Claire says this was upsetting and she still misses them very much.

### *Connections and New Life*

As did Mary, Claire speaks of some positive attributes that she has gained through this. Claire speaks of her close relationship with her sister. This connection helped Claire lift herself out from a suicidal dungeon into an older sister, protector mode. This is common with an older female sibling

who tends to become the protector and take on a more adult role in looking after younger siblings. Claire sees this role as her rescue from suicide.

She also speaks of her experiences with drugs and friends. At some point Claire became disheartened and gave herself over to drugs and a 25 year old man. Although the relationship was characterized by what some people may view as negativity, Claire described it in a positive way, as a growth and learning experience “I learnt a lot from him, we used drugs fulltime and enjoyed each other’s company. At that stage it was nice.” However, the relationship lasted only a year and a half, after which Claire gave up drugs, which in turn had a chain reaction. Claire said that: “more people began to like me and I made more friends of my own age.” These connections revived her belief, even a tiny bit, in people, and she writes about the hope of having healthy relationships where “we don’t need to hurt all the time”. Her new connections also included working on her relationship with her mother. Claire is able to form close relationships with men as is portrayed by her current relationship with her baby’s father. This could be explained because she was only exposed to violence at a later age and had already established ideals and values regarding intimate relationships.

She has also gained new life through her unborn child. During interviews, she expressed her excitement and happiness about her current situation.

### *The moral of the story*

When Claire speaks of how she has dealt with the abuse, it is coloured with unbelievable positive sentiments, and at the same time, an almost overwhelming sadness, because the abuse is still continuing. Another

dominant narrative in society that tends to be reinforced is the idea of having respect for one's elders, that we should not disrespect, or back-chat them in any way. The question, however, is how do children manage this when the caregiver to whom the respect ought to be directed, is the one acting out the violence and aggression? On occasions when Claire attempted to intervene during physical altercations, she was threatened with abuse herself. Claire described her struggle in watching the abuse, and feelings of being helpless and angry. She even finds it difficult to explain and tends to close up. This could possibly be linked to her experiences of domestic violence as well as the fact that the violence is still continuing. Perhaps because she fears that voicing her feelings may lead to pain, which she has been used to. Maybe insecurity and fear are common allies in her life.

However, even through these struggles, Claire manages to speak of what she has gained. She says that although her foundation has been shaky, she does realize that people will not always agree all of the time, and that at times people do argue and get angry. But, she stresses that "a person does not have to hit someone else, or throw things at them, and words hurt just as much." The literature described in Chapter 3 tends to suggest that one of the effects of witnessing and experiencing domestic violence during childhood could lead a female adult to enter into relationships in which violence is prominent. However, Claire disagrees, "I will never do it to my children, and more importantly, I will never allow someone to do it to me." Claire did not grow up with violence in her home; she was exposed to it during her late teenage years. One possible explanation for Claire's ability to recognize that violence is unacceptable, and to empower herself is due to her having a non-violent upbringing before that. Being exposed to loving parents who did not resort to violence and aggression could have created a blueprint of what relationships in a family should be like. Another aspect that has been beneficial in helping her make sense of her



experiences is counselling. During the research process, Claire decided to seek counselling. She feels this has helped her make sense of everything and create some perspective. She is encouraging her sister to attend counselling as well.

Claire also believes that she will make a success of her life. She has tasted independence, and says, “I learnt that things that have happened to me in the past will not affect my future, no matter how painful. I’m still smiling, still staying positive. I have many plans for my future and there is so much to look forward to.”

### **Conclusion**

Looking at the themes described above, many may find solace in the idea that they are not alone, some may find hope, and some may find inspiration. Whatever the emotions and reactions to these stories, these are the voices of two young female adults who have experienced domestic violence. They do not conform to other people’s expectations by keeping the family secret, the voices are the non-dominant narratives that hold so much meaning. In the next chapter, similarities between Mary and Claire’s stories will be highlighted, along with reflections on the study.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **FINDINGS BASED ON THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, a discussion of the themes that emerged from both participants' stories will be provided. Throughout the articulation of these themes, a comparative analysis with the existing body of literature will also be provided. Thus, this discussion will present the findings of the study.

#### **Reflections based on the Themes**

Addison (1992) explains that people give meaning to what happens in their lives, which can be expressed in different ways. A philosophical base of interpretive research used in this study is hermeneutics. The themes extracted in the previous chapter will be further discussed here and linked to findings from the relevant literature.

The age of onset of abuse appears to be significant. Experiencing domestic violence is likely to influence individuals differently at different ages. Mary was exposed to violence from an early age whereas Claire was exposed to violence at an older age. It appears that Claire was able to develop a more stable moral code and her self-identity had time to develop more securely. In Mary's situation, the violence was part of her up-bringing and formed part of her family blueprint, as well as her inner blueprint. It could be inferred that experiencing domestic violence from an early age may be a predictor for certain future problems. At an earlier age, a child will tend to be more accepting of the violence and violent behaviour becomes learnt. This suggests that children who grow up in

violent homes model the behaviour of their significant others (Bandura, 1977). Further, the child's self-identity and development is then shaped by the violence. Thus, children who are exposed to violence at an older age may be more resilient. The age of onset then has significant implications regarding the psychological and emotional capacity to heal, to form effective coping strategies as well as to develop an effective and stable moral code.

In addition to this, intervention and effective help play an important role in curbing situations of domestic violence. As mentioned in Chapter 1, a protection order is a document that a Magistrate signs directing an individual to abide by certain conditions. The purpose of this document is to offer legal protection for victims of domestic violence. Mary's mother obtained a protection order against her father which effectively stopped the violence from occurring and subsequently protected the family members from harm. Claire's mother, however, has not applied for a protection order and the violence in the home is still continuing. It seems protection orders are effective and often necessary to stop domestic violence. Vetten (2005) said that the lack of involvement from authorities, as well as society's reluctance to speak openly about domestic violence as a social ill, exacerbates the problem. It appears that protection orders are an effective resource, however, the process may be improved through effective training for those in positions of authority. It is important to recognize the severity of the problem. If authorities were adequately equipped and resources were made more freely available, clinicians and health care workers would be able to provide more effective services.

Further, it appears that counselling services proved to be beneficial to both participants. Mary's family was exposed to counselling after the divorce proceedings were initiated and Claire decided to attend counselling during the research process. Both participants reported that

counselling had a positive influence on their healing and that it afforded them an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and work towards attaining meaning and understanding.

According to Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, children who grow up in violent homes tend to model the behaviour of their significant others. Children who witness and experience violence between significant others tend to become desensitized to the consequences of violence and regard the behaviour as legitimate. However, both Claire and Mary have not yet been violent themselves. Mary did, however, voice her fears that she may have her father's genes, and acknowledged her tendency to be bossy and somewhat aggressive at times. Neither participant condones violence as an acceptable means of behaviour. Both expressed an awareness of the consequences of abuse and are of the opinion that neither one would resort to violence. The HSRC (2003) report states that "...the risk is that the future adult male will engage in intimate partner violence...and for girls...the expectation is that her partner will be abusive" (p.21). In both participants' situations, they are against violence and refuse to let someone treat them the way their mothers have been treated. If anything, both young ladies use their violent families as an impetus to have a better relationship with their future spouses. As mentioned previously, this could be attributed partly to both participants receiving counselling.

Domestic violence has been defined in many different ways; however, as mentioned in Chapter 3, the definition used here incorporated several forms of physical, emotional and mental abuse. The definition of domestic violence thus includes the criteria stipulated by the Domestic Violence Act (Act No. 116 of 1998) and includes any acts of omission and commission as mentioned by Pagelow (1984). This definition applies to both Claire's and Mary's situations. Both participants have seen and heard

the violence. In addition, both of them have been physically abused themselves, hence it is difficult to separate the concepts of witnessing domestic violence and being abused. It appears that witnessing domestic violence is closely connected to being the victim of violence as well. Thus, the term *experiencing domestic violence* appears appropriate when discussing the participants' stories.

Giddens (1993) mentioned that violence in the home is predominantly a male domain, and in both the participants' lives this runs true. However, Claire also experienced domestic violence where her mother was the abuser. Although abusers in the home tend to be male, this is not exclusive. South African research suggests that while perpetrators are overwhelmingly male, perpetrators may also be female (Artz et al., 1999).

Singh (2003) says that more than 60% of abusers in South Africa tend to abuse alcohol. As mentioned in the literature review in Chapter 3, several studies have identified alcohol and drug abuse as a factor in domestic violence. The alcohol tends to amplify an already conflictual situation. Claire's mother was abusing alcohol when she was violent towards Claire. Now, Claire's step-father also abuses alcohol on a daily basis, and when intoxicated is more likely to become violent. In contrast, Mary makes no mention of any alcohol abuse during periods of violence. It appears that alcohol may not be the cause of violence in a home, but rather exacerbates an abusive situation.

Based on the social learning perspective (Bandura, 1977), females tend to view chronically violent homes and abusive male-female relationships as something to be expected. This theory states that family violence is a learned phenomenon and children who are exposed to domestic violence will more than likely model the behaviour of their significant others.

McKenry and Price (1994) suggest that not only do children learn violent behaviour, but they also learn how to justify the violence. Girls tend to model the role of victim more often while boys identify more with the abuser. Although Mary expects to be betrayed and hurt in relationships from the start, neither Mary nor Claire feel that any form of aggression and violence is acceptable or deserved. They both admit that violence will not be part of their discipline techniques and have voiced strong objections to being the victim of abuse.

In addition, Kurst-Swanger and Petcosky (2003) say that a family provides a training ground for violence and that abuse tends to be transmitted from one generation to the next. According to Bandura (1977), children who grow up in violent homes tend to model the behaviour of their significant others. It is through observational learning that violence is transmitted from one generation to the next. Although both Claire and Mary were exposed to violence, neither of them is abusive or currently in an abusive relationship. This could be due to several factors including the role of gender, the onset and disruption of the violence and possibly also due to counselling. A positive characteristic in Mary's family is the open communication channels which currently exist in her immediate family. She says that should any family member feel the need to talk about the abuse, they are able to. Claire, on the other hand, is unable to speak to her mother about the situation and this tends to frustrate her more and may lead to unresolved feelings.

Often the eldest female in the family will take on a more responsible role and care for younger siblings. Claire did have some inclination to become the miniature adult that Pizzey (1977) mentions. Claire felt responsible for her sister and would often physically comfort her, as she was the elder. Mary, however, was the youngest, and so more likely received the comforting from an older sister. Another aspect that seems to be

consistent with the literature is the struggles one faces with interpersonal relationships. Diamond and Muller (2004) suggest that experiencing domestic violence during childhood may impair one's interpersonal functioning during adulthood. Von Steen (1997) indicates that one of the defining characteristics of adults who have experienced domestic violence as children is their impaired level of interpersonal relationships. This is clearly evident in Mary's recollection of her relationships with men. She described feelings of mistrust from the start of her relationships and never allows men really to get to know her. She says she expects to be betrayed and hurt. Claire, however, seems to have a more stable and secure level of interpersonal functioning which could be attributed to her experiencing the violence at an older age. Wolfe et al. (2003) say that children adapt to their harsh environment in a way that impacts their personal development. Being exposed to violence in the home may lead to children developing a hypervigilant and insecure approach in other relationships (Wolfe et al., 2003).

A significant theme that was extricated from the study is the ambivalence the child feels towards the abuser. Pizzey (1977) describes the ambivalence a child feels as a 'good-bad' dualism. She indicates the guilt, resentment, anger and compassion a child feels towards both caregivers. Von Steen (1997) also says that children struggle with conflicting feelings towards the abusive parent and the victimized parent. Feelings tend to range from compassion, pity and anger for the victimized parent to anger and hate for the abusive parent. When the abusive parent is not being aggressive, some children may also experience guilt for the hatred and anger they had previously felt. Claire's ambivalence towards her mother is clear. When her mother was the abuser, Claire felt anger and resentment towards her, but also love and compassion during non-violent times. Later when her mother became the victim, Claire felt pity and helplessness as well as anger. Mary's ambivalent feelings tend to be focused towards the

abusive parent, her father. She experienced anger towards him and throughout her story she also expressed feelings of pity and guilt.

One of the contradictions with the already existing literature is the relationship with siblings. It has been suggested (Von Steen, 1997) that siblings tend to have interpersonal struggles because they act as reminders of the violence. However, both Claire and Mary have close relationships with their siblings. They believe that the experiences they had at home brought them closer. It is interesting to note that the siblings are all female; it would be particularly interesting to investigate whether having a brother would have different implications.

A theme that was prominent in the research involves the extended family. In both Mary and Claire's situations, during the violent times, extended families played a significant part in maintaining the violence. Mary's extended family encouraged her mother to stay in the marriage. At the same time, Mary's family was distant and isolated from the community and other social groups. Claire's immediate family was also isolated from extended family and had no means of support. Straus (1973) defined systems as being open or closed. In an open system, the family and the environment interact whereas in a closed system, there is no interaction and the family remains isolated. Being part of a closed family system is a characteristic of abusive families and tends to reinforce the patterns of abuse and maintaining the violent system. A family operating in isolation is more likely to continue to use violence because of a lack of repercussions for the perpetrator and a lack of support for the victim (Kurst-Swanger & Petcosky, 2003).

During face-to-face interviews, the themes extricated in this study were discussed with both participants, during which time Claire and Mary expressed their opinions and feelings regarding the themes. The



collaboration between the researcher and the participants is reflected in Chapter 5. Both Claire and Mary stated that these themes accurately described their experiences. When asked to reflect on their participation in this study, Claire and Mary had conflicting feelings. They felt that it was beneficial in that they had the opportunity to talk about their experiences and work towards finding meaning and understanding. However, they would be hesitant to be part of a research project again. Mary felt that it had brought up many unresolved feelings that she had believed she had dealt with. Claire's feelings were related to the violence that is still continuing. However she feels positive because this process motivated her to seek out counselling to deal with her current situation.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter highlighted the co-created narratives that emerged through this study. These themes were linked with the relevant literature and served to highlight the findings of the study. The following chapter will discuss the possible strengths and limitations of the research and will also include recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will include the reflections on the study, and will highlight both its possible strengths and limitations. As we draw to the end of this study, this chapter will serve as the concluding juncture for the stories of two young female adults who have experienced domestic violence. Recommendations for future research will also be made.

#### **Reflecting on the Study**

The aim of the research was to provide a holistic and rich account of young adult females who have witnessed and experienced domestic violence. Participants were asked to describe their experiences in written format, after which several semi-structured face-to-face interviews were done. This research attempted to provide potentially valuable contributions to research, clinical work, and the field of human sciences

The study was described and positioned from within an ecosystemic epistemology. No claims to objectivity were made which allowed for multiple ideas and perspectives to be put forward as equally valid. In accordance with the ecosystemic epistemology the researcher was seen as a member of the system who had a profound influence on that which was observed. This involved being aware of myself within the study, and being sensitive to the idea that I am unable to be separate from this study. Meaning was created through language, which is consistent with the postmodern, social constructionist perspective. In accordance with the

ecosystemic epistemology, my role was understood as being a part of a system, and therefore I had a powerful influence on that which was being described. This implies that I was unable to provide objective and value-free information, but rather, described the participants' stories through our shared meaning. Therefore, the aim was not to generalize the findings to a larger population, but rather to add another voice and enrich the understanding of domestic violence. Further, the data analysis was done using hermeneutics, which is compatible with an interpretive approach. The hermeneutic approach allows the researcher to be a part of the research, to discover new meanings and to achieve understanding (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991).

### **Strengths of the Study**

This study was based on an ecosystemic epistemology which represents a shift from a positivist conceptual framework. Unlike many quantitative studies, attempts were not made to create lawful connections between particular variables. The aim, rather, was to create a space where these young female adults who have experienced domestic violence can voice their experiences. Employing a qualitative methodology is thus regarded as a strength of the study. The topic was investigated from the perspective of the participants involved, which allows for the validity of the study to emerge from the participants themselves. Qualitative research is a fitting method to explore the experiences of the participants from their own viewpoints. Moon et al. (1990) claim that qualitative research is well suited to investigations aimed at exploring processes, changes and outcomes in the field of psychology.

This topic has been researched in abundance from a quantitative outlook, however rarely from a qualitative perspective. The literature that is available focused solely on the relationship between violence and power.

Little research has been done that focuses specifically on the perspectives of those individuals who have been exposed to violence in their home. This study therefore afforded two participants the opportunity to voice their experiences, and in so doing, added a unique and valuable contribution to the body of literature already available.

By employing a qualitative approach, participants were better able to be informed of the intentions and the processes of the research. This is contrasted with positivist research where the tendency is to allow little or no disclosure to participants. In this study, participants were informed of the nature of the research which allowed the researcher to eliminate deception which may have been present in an empirical study and create a safe and trusting environment for the participants.

By ensuring the confidentiality of the participants, an ethical issue has been addressed. Participants were informed not only of the research aim and process, but were also ensured of confidentiality and anonymity, hence the reason for pseudonyms being given to each participant. Further, participants were given the option to withdraw at any time, should they feel the need. Results will also be made available to the participants. Due to the emotional and sensitive nature of the topic, I also used clinical judgement and put into place structures which would allow the participants further debriefing after we had ended the interviews.

An additional strength of the study includes using hermeneutics as a method of data analysis. This provides the reader with in-depth descriptions and also the opportunity to create his or her own distinctions from the data.

The findings of the study are considered trustworthy in accordance with the ontological assumptions of qualitative research. Accordingly,

TerreBlanche and Durrheim (1999) suggest that it is more important to have a study that is credible, meaning that the study “produces findings that are convincing and believable” (p.204). By continuously describing the research process and how interpretations were made by referring to the participants’ written text, credibility and validity were achieved.

Reliability from a quantitative perspective focuses strongly on the quality and nature of the measuring instrument in determining whether the results will be reliable, or replicable. In qualitative research, reliability refers to the degree to which the researcher’s observations can be trusted (Rapmund, 2000). According to TerreBlanche and Durrheim (1999), having a dependable study is of more significance than trying to obtain the same results. During the research, I was aware of my own influence over the interpretations, and so would continually justify and check my interpretations with the data, and with the participants. Furthermore, I engaged in self-reflexive dialogue with the material which enhanced my understanding of the information. I also entered into dialogues with colleagues and mentors in order to explore alternative aspects of the study which helped open up narratives and establish credibility. Using extracts from the written stories and transcribed interviews was another way I attempted to legitimize the assertions in the reconstruction of the young adults’ experiences. This research is thus considered to be dependable and therefore trustworthy.

### **Limitations of the study**

One of the main limitations of this study is the limited sample used. Despite the small samples preferred in qualitative research, this could be a limitation in that results cannot be generalized. Of the many possible

participants who were approached, the majority were reluctant to participate owing to the sensitivity of the topic.

Another limitation specific to this topic is the difference between experiencing and witnessing violence. Although the initial aim of the study was to explore the experiences of those young female adults who have witnessed domestic violence, as mentioned in the literature, it is often difficult to separate witnessing violence and being abused directly. Both participants in this study were physically and emotionally abused themselves, therefore the concepts of witnessing and experiencing domestic violence cannot be easily separated.

Although individual experiences were used in this study, the postmodern approach recognizes that individuals belong to a system, and cannot be viewed in isolation. Although the family was not used as a participant, the research design does acknowledge the family as a system. Thus, the study focused on one family member's experience of domestic violence. If the whole family had been used as the participants of the research, findings would most likely have been different.

A retrospective account of the experience of domestic violence can be regarded as a limitation. This could be ascribed to the participants' having, over time, forgotten factors that may have added value to the research.

As mentioned before, many potential participants were reluctant to be part of the research because of the nature of the study. I therefore recognize that the nature of this topic is sensitive and elicits emotional vulnerability, which could have guided the research participants' stories and construction of meaning. As a clinician, I had an ethical

responsibility to remain sensitive to the participants and the sensitive nature of the research topic.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Recommendations for future research are suggested on the basis of the areas of concern as recognized in the literature, as well as on the basis of the findings of the research.

There appears to be a shortage of qualitative research with regard to those who have experienced domestic violence. Qualitative research would produce in-depth descriptions from which theorists, therapists, and other health professionals could benefit. Using alternative forms of qualitative methods, for example case studies, participant observation and so forth, could yield different outcomes and consistently supplement the growing body of knowledge.

As mentioned in the limitations of this study, one of the difficulties of attaining participants was the reluctance of the participants to be a part of the study. I found this true at the social work services, the Victim Empowerment Programmes that are part of the South African Police Department and colleagues I approached. The reluctance of the potential participants to discuss domestic violence is a particularly interesting phenomenon and further investigations could be beneficial. It appears that domestic violence, although a common phenomenon in many societies, still appears to be an unspoken topic. Exploration into this could be useful and may lead to useful research.

An additional area that needs exploration is researching domestic violence in a qualitative way to include the experiences of different genders, ages and cultural groups, particularly in a South African context. This study

was limited to young white female adults who were literate in either English or Afrikaans. However, there are many more people who are exposed to domestic violence who need a voice.

As this study was approached through ecosystemic lenses, the family is recognized as an important system. Further research could be done aimed at the family as a whole, rather than looking at only an individual's perspective. The aim would be to understand a family's functioning, coping and tolerance with regard to domestic violence.

A final recommendation would be aimed at exploring the networks that exist between authorities, health care workers and victims of domestic violence. As mentioned previously, domestic violence still remains a taboo topic and at times authorities remain reluctant to get involved. Although the Domestic Violence Act (no 116 of 1998) stipulates and ensures that police services have an obligation to intervene, large numbers of victims fail to be protected. During my visits to the domestic violence offices of several Magistrate Courts, it was clear that the case load is exorbitant and staff often struggle to cope with the demands. Investigating these problems and possibly working towards developing effective working systems could benefit authorities and victims of domestic violence.

### **Personal Reflections of the Researcher**

Throughout my journey as the researcher, from the conception of the research topic through to writing the concluding sentences, I have found this an emotional and challenging task.

I was privileged enough to have been able to enter into the personal lives of two unique and strong individuals. Their stories were real accounts of



pain, trauma, confusion, love and hope. Even as therapists, social workers and the like, we do not always understand the plight of those who are exposed to violence in the home. Working through this study has afforded me greater insight and an appreciation for those who are brave enough to speak out.

I am also aware of the extent to which domestic violence still occurs in our society. We are exposed to countless stressors, yet so many people who are the closest to us are being abused and neglected. This has encouraged me to be a better therapist. I am honoured to have had the opportunity of being the keeper of vulnerability, and of witnessing the strength that shone through both my participants.

If anything, my biggest lesson can be explained through the popular proverb: “People who live in glass houses should not throw stones.” We are all unique, but no matter who we are or where we come from, we can all be loved, and we can all be hurt; we are after all only human.

## **Conclusion**

This study has enriched the researcher, the participants and the academic field. This research is applicable to anyone who has experienced domestic violence, or those working in this area. The strengths and limitations of this study highlight many issues which could be elaborated on in the future.

However, as this comes to an end, I reiterate that the stories generated through this study and by continuously co-constructing meaning, do not end here. The story will continually be reinvented with each new reading.

And so, I end my written part of this journey, dedicating this study to the participants, Mary and Claire.

## APPENDIX A

### INFORMED CONSENT

I, Nicola Themistocleous am a Masters student in Clinical Psychology at the University of South Africa. I am currently involved in a research project aimed at exploring the experiences of young adult females who have witnessed domestic violence. Your participation in this Master's research project will be greatly appreciated

I hereby agree to give my consent to participate in this research project titled: "Domestic Violence: The experiences of young adult females". I agree that the clinical information generated during the process may be utilized for research purposes. I also agree that the interviews may be tape recorded and then transcribed for the purpose of maximizing the usefulness of the information obtained from the interviews.

Please note that the information obtained will be treated with strict confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and assured by the researcher.

I agree that my participation is voluntary and will be without compensation. The dissemination of the results will be made available to the field of psychology through the library at the University of South Africa.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

PARENT/ GAURDIAN: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### THE STORY OF MARY

As I get older the memories fade. They distort and merge and create an effect of “before”. It’s as simple as that. My life “before”. Before the divorce, before my father left, before I was aware of the life I had lived. I think that the first time I was aware was when my mother told me she had filed for divorce. “I have a restraining order against your father. You don’t have to be afraid any more.” Afraid of what? A restraining order? For what? She sat me down and had to explain that the past ten years of my life (I was in grade four at the time), was not normal. Growing up as I did, the experiences I had confronted were my own and they were normal. I didn’t know anything different, and had nothing else to compare it to. I hadn’t had a normal family life. I guess there were some clues to that effect like never hearing him say he loves me, never having friends over if he was home, dreading the time that he would be home from work. I was ten years old!! I don’t read into that kind of stuff! I lived the only life I knew as best as I could. I know better now.

I think the story truly starts with my mother. She was a Portuguese, sheltered nineteen year old woman in 1975 when she married my father. He was an enigmatic 31 year old male who had only met his own father when he was 13 years old and had immigrated to South Africa from his rural life in Madeira. I remember asking my mother how they had met, did she love him? She answered “My father approved”. Her story is sadder to tell than mine but thank God I have her in life. So she married him and by the time she was thirty, she had four daughters and nearly five years of marriage counselling to show for it. Her only thought was for us. She filed for divorce when she found letters written by my sister strewn across

the house. “We live in a hell-hole”. If that wasn’t a sign, I don’t think much else could be.

Life at home was pretty normal to me. I had a good relationship with my sisters and my mother and I got on really well. We were, and are still, very close. Maybe I thought that the reason why I never really had a connection with my father was because I was fundamentally female. Three sisters, my mother, all my friends (at that age), were all girls. Honestly, I can’t remember much about “before”. I sometimes wonder if I’ve blocked it out.

There are a few memories that really stick out though. I remember spending the day at my best friend’s house. And I just wasn’t ready to go home by the time my parents had come to pick me up. So being kids, we had a brilliant plan to keep me there. We locked ourselves in the room. The memory is choppy and there are a lot of blank areas but the parts that count, I remember clearly, like I remember writing this. So, after locking ourselves in the bedroom, a blank area surfaces and then I remember my father with his big, fleshy fist around my upper arm and he’s leading me out the gates and towards our car. I remember being scared, really scared. And quiet. Never cry. Then I go blank again. Next thing I’m crouched in the corner of my bedroom floor, covering my face from the blows coming from the same fleshy fists. The most influential memory, which is as choppy as the ocean and as misty as the fog that covers it in the mornings, has to be The Bathroom Memory. I say it’s influential because that was the time that I decided that I would never cry in front of him again. I was young, younger than in the previous story. My sister and I had just finished having a bath together. As we come out of the bedroom, fully dressed in our pyjamas, my father was waiting outside our door. No preliminaries. No discussion. He just started whipping us repeatedly with his centimetre-thick, leather belt. We had long, red welts on our backs for

days. He could've broken skin, I don't remember. But I do remember why he did it. We hadn't put our dirty towels on the rack.

I was lucky to never witness my father hit my mother, though I know he did. I suppose the only physical violence I witnessed was my own and that of my closest sibling. We used to own a bull terrier. Max. He was quite aggressive and on countless occasions would chase out of our own yard. My father, being who he is, decided to discipline Max. He bought a stiff, black, plastic whip. I don't think I ever saw him use it on the dog but I did see him use it on my sister. How convenient that the whip had so many uses...

The life I lead now is the one I consider to be my own. My father hasn't lived with us for nearly 8 years and the change at home is amazing. I'm not saying that we don't fight and that we have the most perfect family life but there isn't that strained tension that fills the air when some one walks into the house. We're not scared. It's as simple as that.

I realize now that what we have (a single-parent home) has been the closest thing I've ever come to experiencing what family life should really be like. People often give me condolences when I tell them that my parents are divorced and that I don't get on with my father but I don't think that anybody could express the relief I have known since the divorce. You have to experience it, the "Before" and the "After".

I see my father once a year. And after every visit I wonder why I still bother. My father doesn't hit us anymore. And he tells me now that he loves me (usually he sniffs it out as he cries, feeling sorry for himself). He has changed to some degree but... I don't know. There's more than one kind of abuse and my father knew some tricks. He was both a physical and emotional bully. I some times think that he's still just playing games. I

guess the knowledge that any body that has to resort to beating their family just isn't well allows me to still have any contact with him what so ever. He's sick. I know that now. It doesn't make it easier though. I want him to apologize. He won't. I know. But I still want him to. Have I forgiven him? Honestly? I don't think so. I'm getting there though. Sometimes I imagine that I get a phone call, it's my sister, and Dad's passed away. Do I cry? Am I sad? Am I relieved? Imagine not feeling any loss when your father dies? Am I a monster? Thank God that I never had to put that theory to test.

I will never completely be free of my father. He's affected so many areas of my life. I can never completely trust men, always expecting the worst from them. And when they do lie or cheat (my ex!!) I'm never completely surprised. It's hard having to let go of all these emotional walls that you build around yourself to prevent the inevitable pain and disappointment. I do realize that the reason that most of my relationships have failed is due to my own insecurities and inability to fully let myself get really involve in the relationship, to let another person in. trust is something that I'll have to learn.

Other areas of my life have also been affected by him. I'm so crazy responsible and obsessed with my own financial status it scares me. My father kept us in debt for most of my life and I never had any form of financial security. It's made me so insecure and unable to fully enjoy certain past times because I have this nagging feeling in the back of my head that I'm going to fall into debt and I'll never be able to pay it all off. I'm a twenty year old student! I don't want to worry about how I'm going to put food on the table when I'm financial okay. I can't fully explain the fear I have, it's strange. I hate having to go shopping for clothes, even when I need them, because I always feel that I'm carelessly throwing my money away.



I'm also scared of myself. Most abusers have come from families where there was abuse. I don't want to become my father. I don't want to fight or be aggressive. But I know I have it in me. I'm very bossy and assertive and every now and then I'm aware of how I just step over the line from being assertive to down right aggressive and rude, maybe even threatening.

I remember when I was younger and every time I got into a fight with one of my sisters. The first response out of my mouth was "I'm going to hit you". It wing. Still scares me how I could so easily fall into that when I'm angry. I've hit some one out of anger too. Not exactly my proudest moment. I have his genes in me and I've seen what it can do.

Another thing that gets to me though is for all my anger and assertiveness and the ability to look after myself, I still falter. I was put in a situation about four years back where I witnessed a friend of mine being beaten by her father. And I watched. And I did nothing. I froze. I am so ashamed of my behaviour and that will be a sight that I will never forget. And I am aware that I'm still that little girl being bossed around by my father.

I'm older now. I'm more aware of who I am and how I become me. But I'm still learning. Still growing. Still coming to terms and accepting.

## Transcribed Data

Questions asked via email to clarify because participant 1 was unable to meet face to face.

1. I know you mentioned that you often did not see the violence that occurred in your home, but from what you did hear, see or was told about, can you describe what kind of abuse occurred and how it occurred.
2. What was it like for you to write your story down?

Reply from participant 1:

Um...from what I can remember, nothing was ever thrown or smashed. He mostly hit with his fists, open or closed. And his leather belt and the plastic whip (with my sister).

I don't know, I'd be lying if I said that I enjoyed writing it. Sometimes it felt like just a story, as if I was removed from it and at other times I'd get quite upset and a little morbid going through everything again. I'm not really sure if I'd do it again. Oh yeah, sometimes I felt guilty as well, as if I was exaggerating and that it wasn't really as bad and that I should just get over it and stop feeling sorry for myself.

## APPENDIX C

### THE STORY OF CLAIRE

My family structure fell apart the day my father passed away. It was the 19 March, 2002. I was only 16 years old at the time. My sister was 14 years old, she is 2 years younger than me.

My mother began drinking and just like what any alcohol or drugs do, you blame the people who are closest to you, and this was the result. When she drank, she was no longer my mother, she became completely someone else, a mother which no 16 year old daughter would like to have. She wasn't only aggressive with me at home, but also when I was with friends and we were visiting somewhere. This was embarrassing. She would slap me in front of my friends and at home if I didn't dance according to her tunes.

Every time this happened, I didn't speak to her for days at a time. This made my soul unhappy, I thought she didn't love me anymore. My reaction to the violence was very dramatic, the reason being was that my father had passed away, I was still at school and was busy with exams, and the pressure was just too much.

I cried a lot, and later on I became angry. Eventually I thought about taking my own life. I'm not sure if I should be writing this, but I wanted to take a knife and stick it through my heart. I wanted to feel the pain and suffering until I exhale my last breath. At that stage I thought it was my only escape. I immediately thought of my sister, and thought I couldn't leave her to handle the pain alone and then she would also give up at the end of the day and take her own life. The reasons I thought like that was after we lost our father at such a young age, and after a good childhood

just to loose it, a person begins to think of funny things. So that which you have left, you must appreciate it.

There is one thing, I love my sister very much, and she was on that stage and still is, up until today.

I told my mother that I will never forgive her for what she has done to me. Today things are different between us. The reason things are right between us is because for 2 years I lived on my own, I looked after myself and bought my own car. I became very independent in those 2 years on my own, I saw my mother maybe once a month. During this time, I completed my matric year on my own and in my spare time I would work. After a while, I became disheartened and gave myself over to drugs and a 25 year old man. I learnt a lot from him, we used drugs fulltime and enjoyed each others company.

At that stage it was nice, but the drugs had a big influence on our relationship. Our relationship ended and so did the use of drugs. I gave up using drugs after a year and a half of continuous use. I gave it up immediately and moved back with my mother. I was and still am the same person, the old me before the use of drugs.

More people began to like me and I made more friends that were my own age. My mother and I began working on our relationship. I always say that there are very good things in life, if you just sit back and allow it (Brighter side of life).

There are still so many things I want to do in my lifetime. I am still young and can do a lot with it. I am now a pretty healthy girl and I take every chance that comes to me. My perspective on life has grown a lot and I am

willing to tackle any task no matter how hard it is for me. I'm enjoying life together with family and friends, and people who I love very much.

Us as people don't always agree with each other, no relationship is perfect. I won't bring up my children like that. I will bring them up the way my mother and father brought me up, with self-confidence and ambition in life. I will not put my children last, after alcohol or drugs, and even a man. I will always put my children first and I will always be there for them, no matter what.

A person must be able to trust your family and home, and make time with them if you need to talk about any problem. I always think that if I have a daughter one day, our relationship must be like the "Gilmore Girls", to be friendly and at the same time be a mother to your daughter. We need to appreciate those people around us more because life is too short.

### **Transcribed Data**

Researcher: Can you please clarify when your mother started the antidepressants. Was it in her first marriage or the second?

Claire: My mom was in an orphanage until the age of 5, then she was adopted by her mother.

Researcher: Your grandmother?

Claire: Yes. My mother has been taking anti-depressants for a very long time, even in the first marriage because of the orphanage. After my father dies, she began drinking heavily and became abusive.

Researcher: So what you saying is that there was no violence while your dad was alive?

Claire: Yes.

Researcher: You have explained in your written story how your mother would be abusive towards you, can you explain the violence in your family at the moment.

Claire: My step-father is physically and verbally abusive towards my mother. When me or my sister try to stop him, he becomes aggressive with us and threatens to hit us. So we back off. He drinks alcohol daily and doesn't allow my mother to work. He even uses objects and throws them at us.

Researcher: Are these the times you sit with your sister in her room?

Claire: Yes, because otherwise he will become aggressive towards us.

Researcher: It must be difficult watching this happen.

Claire: It is. I only moved back home 3 months ago, so it's very difficult because I have lived on my own for many years.

Researcher: So during the really tough times, who is there to support you?

Claire: (Silent) well, when I was on my own it was my friends and boyfriend. Now it's hard.

Researcher: I can imagine how difficult it is for you, how was it for you to write your story? What was the hardest thing to write?

Claire: It was ok, but the most difficult thing about writing this was the flood of emotions and feelings that came up.

Researcher: If you could describe that by giving your story a name, or a title, what would it be?

Claire: (Silent for a long time) I don't know.

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