TEND AND BEFRIEND:
A BIO-BEHAVIOURAL CONSTRUCTION OF WOMEN'S RESPONSES TO STRESS.

By

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DECLARATION

I, Daniël Francois Joubert, hereby declare that the work presented here *Tend and Befriend: A bio-behavioural construction of women's responses to stress* is original and my own. All sources used in this research have been referenced appropriately and according to the required guidelines.

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ABSTRACT

The Tend and Befriend stress response model suggests that women have, through natural selection, evolved a different stress response reaction to that of men. It thus offers a collective, gender stereotypical reality of women's responses to stress. In this research the Tend and Befriend model is thus viewed as a dominant public discourse which informs or influences the private narratives or stories of women. It is this interaction between public (dominant) discourses and private narratives which are investigated through using the Tend and Befriend model as a discursive landscape. If gender or gender roles are flexible, there is a concern that individual women might be misrepresented and not given a voice by the dominant discourse which supports gender stereotypical models like the Tend and Befriend model.

This qualitative exploration was done by exploring the socially constructed stress responses of five professional women. To investigate this, as researcher I explored the narratives of these women in face-to-face individual interviews. The constructions explored include: How these women understand the way they respond to stress; how they view the Tend and Befriend model; and the influence of the model on them. Through the lenses of social constructionism a broader insight into the stress responses of women may be obtained.

From the data analysis, I uncovered very little 'evidence' for tending or befriending behaviour as described by Taylor, Klein, Lewis, Gruenewald, Gurung and Updegraff (2000), with the participants. In the exploration the closest response to the model which the participants reported was befriending, however in their construction of befriending they employed it as a workplace strategy. The only form of tending co-constructed in the interview process was a secondary response to stress and a unique outcome to this study: Self-tending. Additionally, as social constructionist research predicts, these participants illustrated that for them stress responses are not concrete, as models would like to suggest, rather they employed an alternate multifaceted stress response approach which was another significant unique outcome to this study.

Key terms: Delaying pregnancy, gender, power, qualitative research, social constructionism, socialisation, stress, stress response, stress response approach, tend and befriend, self-tending.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This introductory chapter will explain the context for the research, the research problem, the research aims and goals. A brief outline will be given of the various subsequent chapters.

Stress is not an unknown phenomenon in the social sciences. It is a popular topic which has gained a lot of research interest (Meyerson, 1998) in various areas to the extent that there are journals dedicated to the study of stress, such as Stress and Health; Stress Medicine; Stress: The international journal of the biology of stress, anxiety, stress and coping; Work and Stress; and Stress Management, to name a few. To define, discuss or deconstruct stress as a social construct would perhaps enrich the study, but it would equally be justifiable to make a project like that a research study on its' own if it were to be done properly. As a mini dissertation and seeing that the focus surrounds a specific model I feel this would derail the current study. I will thus briefly define stress as a reference point in further discussion. Stress in this study is referred to in general to avoid restricting the participants to discuss only work stress or stress in the workplace context. I have included two definitions about stress. This first one is states: "Stress can be described as the circumstance that disturbs, or is likely to disturb, the normal physiological or psychological functioning of a person" (Saddock & Saddock, 2007, p.813). The second definition is concerned with the interpretation of the impact of stressors and thus builds on the first definition. "There are also multiple factors that influence the impact of the stressor on the individual, including developmental epoch, coping and psychological defences, social support, the meaning of the event to the individual, prior exposure to stressors, and psychiatric comorbidity" (Vermetten & Bremner, 2002, p.127).

As with most shared social phenomena, models are created to categorise and attribute a meaning to the specific phenomenon. With stress we also find this categorisation through stress response models. These models are created by researchers from a position of the 'professional', the elite, the expert. The model is then sent out into society as an 'official explanation' or 'truth' (dominant discourse) concerning the phenomena. Thus the elite largely dictate the construction which informs the dominant discourse. Gergen (1985) explains the

social constructionist position on models aptly in the following quote: "Constructionism asks one to suspend belief that commonly accepted categories or understandings receive their warrant through observation" (Gergen, 1985, p. 267). Thus as implied in the quote these explanations then bear more power and authority than that of the 'lay person's explanation' as the phenomena was 'officially' researched (researched and reported from a specific scientific frame of reference) by educated specialists called researchers.

Taylor, Klein, Lewis, Gruenewald, Gurung and Updegraff (2000) proposed that women respond differently to stress than men. They say that due to "differential parental investment, female stress responses have selectively evolved to maximize the survival of the self and offspring" (p. 411). Taylor et al. stated that they propose an alternate to the Fight or Flight stress response model of Walter Cannon (1932), which they refer to as the Tend and Befriend bio-behavioural stress response model.

The Tend and Befriend model explains stress responses for women (as a universal collective) in the following way: "We suggest that females respond to stress by nurturing offspring, exhibiting behaviours that protect them from harm and reduce neuroendocrine responses that may compromise offspring health (the tending response), and by befriending, namely, affiliating with social groups to reduce risk" (Taylor et al. 2000, p. 411). The model will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

1. Rationale

The first two questions I am met with concerning my research are invariably: why this topic and why research on women?

I have an interest in power relationships in discourses, the psychology of gender and social constructionism. Social constructionism questions the taken-for-granted (scientific, in this case) knowledge which informs our everyday understanding (Gergen, 1985). The psychology of gender and my interest in power discourses have combined into an interest in gender power relations, discourse and constructions. The combined perspective of the social constructionist paradigm and my stated interest in gender opened my mind to the possibility of using the Tend and Befriend bio-behavioural stress response model as a platform on which to investigate the taken-for-granted knowledge and the gender power constructions of the

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Tend and Befriend model. In exploring the Tend and Befriend model I discovered that the main questions that I asked myself were: "Is that how women (and women as individuals) experience the model? What about the influence of their roles and life experiences?" It was thus specifically the idea of creating one's own reality and co-creating realities with others which seemed to be unaccounted for by the model. I also found that this gap existed in the literature on stress responses of women.

2. Research problem

Through its theoretical basis in evolutionary psychology and biology (Pitman, 2003), the Tend and Befriend stress response model constructs a biological reality that represents how women, as a collective, react to stress. "Any model that associates certain qualities with women and men respectively limits the scope of behaviour available to them and confines people into specific modes" (Gergen & Davies, 1997, as in Pauw, 2009, p. 17). The Tend and Befriend model is thus viewed from this position as a dominant discourse which informs or influences the private narratives of women. These dominant discourses in society inform our (people as social beings) private narratives, which in turn inform our discourse, and ways in which we perceive and interact with our world (du Preez, 2005). Du Preez explains this in narrative terms; she says that stories need to follow dominant rules and patterns in order to be accepted in society. According to her this is because "dominant discourses provide the meanings and values within which people are positioned" (p. 150). It is this interaction between dominant and private narratives which is investigated by using the Tend and Befriend model as a discursive landscape.

The departure point of my understanding to this research, being a social constructionist researcher, is that professional women construct their individual stress response realities socially and these constructions are influenced and, perhaps even replaced, by bio-behavioural or medical type models like the Tend and Befriend model.

3. Justification, aim and objectives

The ultimate aim of the study is not to prove or disprove any stress response model but rather co-create alternate constructions regarding women's stress response realities. This stress response debate is used as an example and platform on which to explore and challenge a

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dominant 'natural science' discourse in society in which models are invented and moulded onto society as natural irrefutable truths. As researcher, my main departure point of understanding the research is that we as humans construct our realities socially, (Gergen, 1985), we adhere to the influences of dominant discourses in order to establish our agency and to locate ourselves in space and time through gender roles (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001). As social roles and societal pressures on gender roles change so too does the gender discourse. This exploration will be attempted by exploring the socially constructed stress response realities of professional women. To investigate this, I will explore how these women understand the way they respond to stress and how they view, understand or relate to the model(s) and the influence of the model(s) on them. Through the lenses of social constructionism a broader insight into the stress responses of women may be constructed.

4. The outline to rest of this dissertation

In chapter two I explain the social constructionist theory which informs this research. The theory guides the research in terms of determining the lenses through which I approached the literature, interviews, data analysis and ultimately, the research as a whole.

In chapter three I delve into the literature to give an overview of the Tend and Befriend model, explain the model and some of the critique surrounding it. There is a lack of literature concerning how women construct their stress response realities or how they experience stress. I build on literature which gives a different view to the arguments of Taylor et al. (2000) and is done in order to determine whether the experiences and constructions of women might not be constructed from an alternate understanding to that of the Tend and Befriend model. Based on the literature, I propose that professional women fall in the periphery of the model and might even fall outside the scope of the Tend and Befriend model.

Chapter four discusses the research methodology. I thus explain the decision to use a qualitative research design, individual interviews, a limited sample and how thematic data analysis is employed to assist me qualitatively.

Chapter five takes the reader on a journey through the data analysis with the help of the five themes constructed from the interviews. These themes are: '*Tend and Befriend review*'; '*Not*

meeting the criteria of the Tend and Befriend model'; 'Stress response outcomes'; 'Self-tending' and *'Stress response didactics'*.

In chapter six the research is concluded with an integrative discussion on the results and literature. Limitations to the research are pointed out and recommendations for future research are proposed.

CHAPTER 2

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Introduction

Social constructionism is the chosen theoretical approach to this research. In this chapter social constructionism is explored by looking at the development and progression of the theory, its key characteristics and lastly the possible influence of the contrast in view between evolutionary psychology and this theoretical position.

To explain of social constructionism the history out of which it emerged will be explained briefly. This explanation will start with in Modernism. From Modernism the move towards a brief explanation of Post-modernism, out of which social constructionism progressed. Under social constructionism I explain the theory and some of its key characteristics. In this research a bio-behavioural stress response model (the Tend and befriend model) is used as a discursive landscape from which an alternate construction was uncovered. Evolutionary psychology is thus briefly explained, because it is the theoretical position of the Tend and Befriend model. The contrast in theoretical position between this research (social constructionist based) and that of the Tend and Befriend bio-behavioural stress response model (evolutionary psychological based), is further explored in this chapter. In my conclusion I state that the difference in theoretical positions between this research and that of the Tend and Befriend model causes certain critiques to arise. These critiques thus partly arise because of the difference in point of departure between this research and the Tend or Befriend model. Social constructionism has been selected as the theoretical approach of this research to better address, understand and attain the objectives of this research. Therefore social constructionism sets out to describe the discursive landscape in which both the Tend and Befriend model and alternative stress responses realities reside.

1. Modernism

Modernism was born out of the search for individualism and freedom. This was known as the Enlightenment campaign, which brought with it grand theories and the belief that there is a set 'observational reality' (Burr, 1995).

Gergen (1998) explains that constructionism came from a weakness in the Enlightenment era, which consisted of modernism, structuralism, realism and positivism. These positions claimed an 'observable reality' which states that what is believed to be real can only be real because it can be observed and measured. All of these observations form part of 'reality' as a universal totality (Parker, 1998; van Niekerk, 1999). The assumptions from these claims were that 'reality' can be captured through language. With the belief that all that exists is measurable and observable the research on atoms made assumptions about an 'observational reality' questionable (Gergen, 1998). This was because measuring atoms and seeing them for that matter was not possible, yet science 'proved' and justified that atoms 'exist'. The assumptions around 'truth' became questionable, especially in light of political backdrops to which language is subservient (Gergen, 1998). Gergen (1998) argues that these questions were largely raised due to the political climate of the Enlightenment era. The rise in the lack of ways in which to determine 'truth' brought with it the rationalisation of authority. This rationalisation of authority influenced the political positioning and critique from marginalised people, which together brought about democratic liberalism. Social constructionist terminology referred to this movement as the deconstruction of the perspective of authority (Gergen, 1998). All of these developments pushed thinking away from the modernist drive of a universal truth and singular reality (Gergen, 1998, Parker, 1998). Gergen (2009) states that this move away from singular reality motioned for the view that there are many ways of understanding and many different voices with explanations all in relation to each other, of which science was only one.

2. Post modernism

Post modernism opposes the idea of a set and universal truth. It proposes that there are no grand theories; instead there is a co-existence of situation-dependant realities (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1998; Parker, 1998). It rejects the notion of discovering structures that are underlying or apparent, because the word 'discovering' alone already presupposes that there will be something (Burr, 1995).

From a post modernistic view, modernism used language to propagate specific, often of the elite, truths. In contrast to social constructionism which came from a different political stance with its own specific questions which aims to: deconstruct truth claims, its origins,

implications and direction, as well as the notion of the expert. Social constructionism thus attempts to oppose the dominant discourse through deconstructing it and making the dominant discourse known. It suggested a co-creation of truth which is created and shared between people, more importantly by all people and not just those in power (Gergen, 1998). As Burr (1995) frames it, post modernism then forms a back drop for social constructionism.

3. Social constructionism

"Social constructionism views discourse about the world not as a reflection or map of the world but as an artefact of communal interchange", (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). Due to the ever-evolving nature of social constructionism there are a multitude of social constructionist writers and social scientists who have contributed to its conceptualisation (Beyer & du Preez, 2006; Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985; Shotter, 1993). Shotter (1993) says the focus of social constructionism is in the grey areas that lie between boundaries, where new constructions are most likely to emerge. It is not the intra psychic dynamics or the "determined external reality" that we must study, rather our focus should be on the "vague flow of continuous communicative activity" (Shotter, 1993, p. 179) between persons.

The name social constructionism refers to all 'knowledge(s)' and what is thought to be reality is socially constructed and context dependant. Reality is only as real and as true as how relevant it is to its holder. In other words there are multiple realities created socially by, between and for individuals. These realities are all equally 'true', although their conceptions of truth are vastly different (Raskin, 2002).

> Research from a social constructionist perspective is concerned with identifying the various ways of constructing social reality that are available in a culture, to explore the conditions of their use and to trace their implications for human experience and social practice (Willig, 2001, p. 7).

What is then important to social constructionism is the concept that there is no one single objective truth. This concept levels the constructed hierarchy of all truths. 'Truth' is relevant to its constructors, and only to the constructors, until the construction changes or is reconstructed differently (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985, 1994, 1999; Raskin, 2002; Shotter, 1993).

"The rules of word games determine their truth in relation to the adherence of the rules" (Gergen, 1999, p. 37). Here Gergen speaks about language and its essential role in 'truth' and even 'reality' construction. For example Gergen (1999) illustrates how scientific word games set science up as a superior truth, a superior truth evaluator and a superior truth creator. Scientists are seen from that view as superior truth detectives as they are educationally indoctrinated toward a more uniform 'truth' creation and interpretation method. The scientific word game community has a large participant population as evidenced by the abundance of universities, science faculties, schools and journals. With so many community members to contribute and support a more uniform conception of truth, the science discourse enjoys a greater following as more people adhere to it and give priority to the scientific idea of truth. This could be argued makes the scientific discourse a dominant discourse which enjoys a societal assumed superiority to other truths for some (Gergen, 1999).

Social constructionism cautions against the taken-for-granted knowledge which exists in society. Gergen (1999, p. 20) says: "You did not choose the vocabulary with which to convey your internal states; all you have is the hand-me down vocabulary available within the culture". Our taken-for-granted knowledge is transmitted by our parents, guardians and/or caretakers through language as language carries culture and culture carries language (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1999). This knowledge is taken for granted because we do not question it; it is laden in the expectations transmitted by the rules of the word games constructed in our culture(s). These expectations are things like, gender role expectations, religion, sexuality and even dietary choice.

3.1. Characteristics of social constructionism

Burr (1995) says that social constructionism is not a set formulation or recipe as it is not an empiricist or essentialist theory, rather it consists of key characteristics:

Critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge

Social constructionism opposes the empiricist notion that truth can easily be extracted from objective observation of the world (Gergen, 1985). It encourages us to be critical towards our own taken-for-granted knowledge of the world (Burr, 1995). Social constructionism thus questions the labels and assumptions laden in the world to assist in not over looking or ignoring the constructions of these things and their cultural historic value as communal

artefacts of social interchange (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985; Gergen 1998). It is these taken-for-granted 'truths' concerning women stress responses which I am setting out to question, if not to oppose. Gender and sex are examples of taken-for-granted knowledge, which will be explained further on in this chapter. This differentiation is important to the research as the Tend and Befriend is a 'sex' specific stress response model.

Cultural historic specificity

Our understanding is culturally and historically entrenched. It would perhaps even be better to say that all knowledge and understandings is context specific to the particular culture and history that it is laden in. We cannot take knowledge out of its context and make 'non'-sense of it in our culture and history (Burr, 1995). Our understanding or knowledge cannot be better than other forms of understanding or knowledge. All that we can say is that our culture and history is different (Burr, 1995). Our understanding of our 'realities' is limited by our ability to express it. Language is thus the tool through which we express our personal 'reality' perspective (du Preez, 2005). However, language itself is culturally specific as it carries culture; but culture also informs and carries language (Beyer & du Preez, 2006; Fox & Prillelentsky, 2001). In this study, the historical context dictated the value and validity of Taylor et al.'s (2000) model. Furthermore, this cultural context prescribed women's responses to be 'predictable', 'motherly', 'nurturing' and all linked to childrearing.

Knowledge is sustained by social processes

Knowledge is not derived from objective observations of the world. It is constructed through social interactions between people (Burr, 1995). Social constructionism considers our understanding of the world to be socially constructed; thus our reality derives from a meaning-making process which we call living (van Niekerk, 1999). Gergen (1985, p. 268) explains this as "the rules for "what counts as what" are inherently ambiguous, continuously evolving, and free to vary with the predilections of those who use them." This study investigated the social process of the participants with regard to their knowledge of how they respond to stress. This investigation emphasised the rigidity of Taylor et al.'s (2000) model which uses the perspective of natural selection as a past event which caused current knowledge. In the next chapter the *niche construction* argument investigates this assumption. Further more, in chapter six (*socialisation)* as continuous social process behind stress response knowledge, as reported by the participants, is discussed.

Knowledge and social action go together

Different constructions of knowledge bring different social actions. Each construction includes specific social actions and excludes others (Burr, 1995). Gergen (1985) explains that 'knowledges', interpretations and understandings inform social patterns and actions. Practically, in terms of this research if the sex as static 'natural' biological construct versus the flexible 'doing gender' construct example is used the difference would be the following. The Tend and Befriend model uses a sex description of who adheres to the model by using the terms females and males, instead of 'men' and 'women'. This view, as explained earlier, limits the sexes to set natural traits and characteristics. A view like that limits its user in such a way that the behavioural differences of persons who do gender differently to the sex criteria cannot be conceptualised as being different. To understand what it means to do gender, and because this study navigates through gender in its exploration of the discursive landscape, it is perhaps necessary to explain gender. Gender will be discussed after a brief explanation of discourse, dominant discourse and deconstruction.

3.2. Discourse

Discourse can be defined as a system of statements, practices and institutional structures which share common values (Hare-Musitin, 1994; Freedman & Combs, 1996). Stark (2004) explains dominant discourses as sets of statements within culture(s) which regulate and define realties. Dominant discourse further refers to discourse which hold authority because of its' authors, this type of discourse is positioned socially to have more power over private narratives than other discourses (Gergen, 2009, Potter, 1996). Science and scientific models form part of the dominant discourse because it positions its' knowledge socially as superior to others as Gergen (2009, p. 21) explains: "Where others have mere opinions, scientists have hard facts; where others have armchair ideas, scientists produce real-world effects: cures, rockets, and atomic power."

The Tend and Befriend model, although ideological in origin, I argue forms part of dominant scientific discourse. The reasons for the move away from only ideology for the model is multiple: Firstly the model has been used in research for a decade, this research has included people and has had discourse surrounding and concerning it as can be seen is some of the articles published for, against and concerning it (see Bekker, 2001; Geary & Flinn, 2002;

Klein & Corwin, 2002; Pitman, 2003; Taylor, 2006; Taylor et al., 2000; 2002). Secondly as part of social psychology the motive behind the model is to create an understanding of behaviour and thus inadvertently at the same time forms part of scientific discourse on how should be behaved according to this understanding.

Deconstruction in this study is understood as the disentanglement or dismantlement of dominant discourses, discourse and taken-for-granted knowledge (Gergen, 2009). My referral to deconstruction can be seen throughout the study as I have tried to employ this form of reasoning and analysis at various junctions of the study.

4. Gender

Gender is often structured and viewed as an isolated feature, identity, influence, contributor and explanation. This however ignores gender's intersections and influences with race, culture, class, sexuality, age and religion; all of which have their own constructions and rules of engagement (Grant, Hardy, Oswick & Putman, 2004). Gender and sex are examples of taken-for-granted knowledge. This differentiation is important to the research as the Tend and Befriend model is a sex-specific stress response model.

In the 70s gender or gender roles were conceptualised after the conceptualisation of sex roles (Delphy, 2001; West & Zimmerman, 1987). This conceptualisation only came about after sex and sex categorisation was questioned in its social position as natural irrefutable truth (Delphy, 2001). In her article, Delphy (2001) argues that gender (the concept of socially constructed rules, roles and values attached to masculinity and femininity) precedes sex categorisation, because sex (male or female) itself is a social construction with social attributes attached to it. West and Zimmerman (1987, p. 127) define this notion of sex from a social constructionist position: "Sex is a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males." In concordance with this Fox and Prillelentsky (2001, p. 26), say that social constructionists suggest: "it is not just psychological attributes of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' which are constructed by a sexist society – but the biological based categories of 'men' and 'women.'" West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that even a social construct like gender roles which is accepted by some as a more encompassing definition is limited, as roles imply a predestined categorisation and generalisation. This reverts gender roles to taken-for-granted knowledge.

What West and Zimmerman (1987) then argue is that we do gender, thus as social construction it is a concept which is continually created, co-created and progressing. "Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126).

5. Evolutionary psychology

It is necessary to discuss evolutionary psychology in this theory chapter for two reasons. Firstly, the Tend and Befriend stress response model which I use as a discourse platform uses evolutionary psychology as its theoretical framework. Secondly, it differs in paradigm and assumptions or principles to that of social constructionism which is used in this research. Thus, this section is meant to highlight the theoretical position of the Tend and Befriend model. In this way the difference in theoretical foundation between the Tend and Befriend model and this current research dissertation is clarified.

Evolutionary psychology sees itself as a meta-theory (Buss, 1995). As such, it sees itself as a master theory organising what Buss calls the Babel-like disarray of mini-theories in psychology. In this seemingly grandiose fashion, evolutionary psychology argues primarily that humans are the products of natural selection. This means that from generation to generation, only the strongest traits and psychological mechanisms are selected naturally and passed on genetically to the next generation. Evolutionary psychologists argue that "because all behaviour depends on complex psychological mechanisms, and all psychological mechanisms, at some level of description, are the result of evolution by selection, then all psychological theories are implicitly evolutionary psychological theories" (Buss, 1995, p. 2). The evolutionary psychology background of the Tend and Befriend model will be discussed further in chapter three.

Social constructionism, however, does not conform to the ideology of a singular reality or truth. Gergen (1994, p. 1) explains: "Controlling institutions at all levels of society may deal with the particularized problems of their constituents by invoking, elucidating, and reinforcing various idealizations of permanence." Gergen's statement can be applied to stress response models, as they try to map stress responses as a universal, stable pattern of

occurrence and behavioural traits. This is in contrast to the social constructionist notion of multiple co-created realities, 'knowledges' and 'truths' (Parker, 1998).

Conclusion

The current study places itself within the social constructionist paradigm which, as a post-modern paradigm, arose in opposition to positivism/ modernism (Parker, 1998). While this topic examines the social construction of a stress response model for women, it is important to note that much of the critique comes from a post modernist position that opposes the modernist perspective. Being part of the discursive landscape, evolutionary psychological thinking (used in the Tend and Befriend model) was thus also discussed. Social constructionism places the focus of the researcher on the possibility that multiple persons will have multiple constructions of their stress response.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Introduction

This research overview has been a challenge as I could find no similar research which matched the proposed exploration of women's experiences in response to stress.

My understanding of this research as constructed through the literature and theory of this research is that people, professional women in this case, socially construct individual stress response realities and that these women's socially constructed realities could or may be influenced, and perhaps even replace, the bio-behavioural or medical type models like the Tend and Befriend model. In this research the focus is specifically on professional women, as they are the population which seem to fall outside the scope of the Tend and Befriend model. As I explain later on in this chapter, the Tend and Befriend model uses gender stereotypical expected behaviour to group and predict women's behavioural expectations. Professional women seem to fall in the periphery and perhaps even outside this scope because they do not conform to the expectations of the model in that they delay, postpone or even abdicate pregnancy and utilise alternative stress response mechanisms. It is not the aim of the study to prove or disprove the Tend and Befriend model. As the researcher, I am aware that models need boundaries and restrictions in order to provide usable frameworks. The exploration and discourses around the Tend and Befriend model is thus used in this research as a discursive landscape to possibly illustrate how models formed by scientists influence our individual reality domains with a specific reality domain constructed by scientists with their models. However, in this process their models fail to take cognisance of alternate ways of relating which fall outside the boundaries of the models.

In order to investigate the construction of my initial understanding to this research an overview of literature is given. By virtue of the boundaried theory of Taylor et al. (2000), various literature themes have been created in order to clearly work through the research overview. Theme one: *A gender specific stress response model,* explains the Tend and Befriend model in terms of its development, promises and boundaries. Theme two: *Niche construction,* is a challenge to the idea of natural selection as being concrete, as used by the Tend and Befriend model. Their model uses this concrete form of the construct in the

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explanation of why only women qualify as members to their stress response model. In theme three: *Constructing a stress response reality for women,* I build on the niche construction argument with the social construction of a stress response reality. This position argues that natural selection can be self-directed to a certain extent. In theme four: *A difference of view,* I use the theoretical debate to add to the literature and perhaps even better explain the emphasis and background of the research. Theme five is entitled *Power*, this section looks at power in terms of its differentials and controllers. I end the chapter with a brief conclusion.

1. A gender-specific stress response model

The Tend and Befriend stress response model created by Taylor and her colleagues (2000) will now be explained.

As a result of their dissatisfaction, Taylor et al. (2000) critiqued the Fight or Flight stress response model which was first developed by Walter Cannon (1932). They found this model irrelevant to women for a number of reasons. Firstly, they argue that the model is based on research done mainly on male participants; up till 1995 only 17% of the test subjects were women. Secondly, they argued that at the time when the Fight or Flight model was developed, employment was gender-segregated in the USA, where both models originated. This, they say, left women predominantly with the task of childrearing. Women thus spent most of their time nurturing and protecting their children.

Taylor and her colleagues (2000) suggested that this caused women to tend and befriend as a way of managing stress because of the considerable emotional investment in their offspring as opposed to men. They believe that women tend and befriend in response to stressors, not only to reduce their personal risk but also that of their children, who are said to be their primary responsibility. They define the Tending response as nurturing offspring in a stressful situation to protect the offspring from harm and to reduce neuroendocrine responses which might increase risk. Essentially with tending this model suggests that when women are under threat they cope by tending to their children. Befriending then refers to the suggestion that women form new networks of association which provide themselves and their offspring with protection and resources to survive (Taylor, 2006; Taylor et al., 2000).

The model of Taylor and her colleagues (2000) take an evolutionary psychology perspective, stating that women have evolved their stress response due to natural selection. Only stress responses that aid in the survival of women are passed on from one generation to the next. Taylor et al (2000). maintain that because women have spent most of their time (for generations) rearing, feeding and protecting children, they have become genetically programmed to respond to stress in a way that not only protects or reduces risk for themselves but also their children. Taylor (2006, p. 276) summarises it as follows: "selection pressures for responses to threat that benefit both self and offspring may have been greater for females than for males—favouring social responses to stress in women especially." Men have not been exposed to this scenario, and due to the effect of testosterone on behaviour, their stress response still remains 'fight or flight' (Taylor, 2006; Taylor et al., 2000; Taylor, Klein, Lewis, Gruenewald, Gurung and Updegraff, 2002).

Now that the Tend and Befriend model has been explained from the perspective of its authors; Taylor and her colleagues, we advance on our journey into the discursive landscape by exploring *niche construction*.

2. Niche construction

The Tend and Befriend model suggests that women have, through natural selection, evolved a different stress response reaction to that of men. A way to understand this evolution more fully could be through niche construction. Niche construction, however, also poses the opportunity for further change in stress response beyond the Tend and Befriend model. As psychological research this research study only looks at the psychological aspects and implications of niche construction.

"Niche construction refers to the activities, choices, and metabolic processes of organisms, through which they define, choose, modify, and partly create their own niches" (Laland, Odling-Smee & Feldman, 2000, p. 132-133). Niche construction can be used by organisms to counteract or redirect natural selection "or they may niche construct in ways that introduce novel selection pressures, for example by exploiting a new food resource, which might subsequently select for a new digestive enzyme" (Laland et al., 2000, p. 133).

Suppose women were in an environment in which they assumed a childminding role making their emotional investment with offspring more substantial than that of men. As this behaviour is socialised and repeated for generations, these females subsequently develop an altered stress response to that of men (Taylor et al., 2000). In this way natural selection becomes redirected through niche construction.

Now suppose a new niche is constructed by a role change and a change in role demands in which men are no longer the sole or dominant bread winners. Would this not, as before, redirect natural selection and thus cause change not only in terms of stress response but also, as before, eventually on a biological level? Laland et al. (2000) suggest that 'niche-constructing' parents may alter the environments of their offspring and in this way not only influence their genetic inheritance but also create an environmental inheritance.

If we relate this to humans and to our stress response discourse we might explain it with the following example: Take a woman, let us name her Susan, from a strict patriarchal family tradition in which the father is the sole breadwinner and head of the household. The role of the mother is that of childminder who assumes an inferior role in relation to her spouse. Let us now say that Susan has children of her own, and that she a single parent and thus the sole breadwinner and head of her own household. Susan's situation and environment creates a different environmental inheritance for her children to that of her own upbringing. In this sense it is a niche construction with an alteration in natural selection patterns. This is an extreme example, but the same principle applies in the example of an egalitarian heterosexual family structure in which both parents work, the mother is the head of the household or more dominant partner, and is more consumed by her employment than the father who invests more emotionally in their children.

The example is not implausible as women have more power in marriages where they have access to income (Kabeer, 1994). Women also have a greater access to work and higher education currently in South Africa than they had before the country's 1994 Democratic elections (Pauw, 2009) because of the move toward the emancipation of women. Laland et al. (2000) suggest that human evolution is not as simple as choosing to walk upright because crouching was uncomfortable. Rather, multiple factors have been involved in human evolution. These authors suggest that it is through niche construction that we influence and

alter natural selection. To construct niches, three things need to be involved: population genetic processes, ontogenetic processes like learning or socialisation, and cultural processes like changing trends and norms of what is seen as acceptable behaviour.

3. Constructing a stress response reality for women

Stress response models, like other models, are constructions influenced by specific motivations and perceptions for different reasons and stakeholders.

In the previous section tending and befriending is proposed as an alternative to fight or flight, a new way of understanding and perceiving reality. This is important in the ongoing feminist pursuit of research in the interest of women (Pitman, 2003). Feminist scientists and researchers seek to address the concerns of women (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001). They do this by pursuing research on the concerns of women and by challenging male dominated research through the use of a female perspective on reality and research (Fox & Prillelentsky, 2001; Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001). Feminists call this mainstream male domination of science and research the 'male-stream' of science and research. They argue that the 'male-stream' marginalises women and ignores their rights, privileges and concerns. As a result the importance and contributions of women are overlooked. They are evaluated, understood and compared in male terms and in terms of male norms. This means women are [unfairly] understood through a male perception and conception of reality (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001).

From a social constructionist view, the evolutionary psychology model works on a biological evolutionary level similar to the medical model (Buss, 1995). As such, many explanations in the Tend and Befriend model are based on neuroendocrine and sex-hormonal effects, as well as the reference to evolution in terms of women's continual occupation (framed as vocation) as child-rearer. In this way, from a social constructionist view, the Tend and Befriend model creates a biological truth for its audience. What is said is positioned as a natural irrefutable fact or reality. In other words it is claimed and established in biological evolutionary terms, creating a 'natural reality'. This establishes a stress response as a trait over which women have no control; in other words, it is a law of nature which determines behaviour. As a social constructionist researcher, I challenge this construction.

3.1. Gender stress difference

The difference in stress between men and women will be explored here from a different angle to that proposed by the Tend and Befriend model, possibly opening up a few new thoughts and constructions. I will start, however, by briefly defining stress in the context of work (occupational stress) and then gender-specific occupational stressors which seem to indicate that women endure more stress than their male counter parts at work (Pauw, 2009; Swanson, 2000).

According to Swanson (2000) occupational stress can be defined as "working conditions that overwhelm the adaptive capabilities and resources of workers, resulting in acute psychological, behavioural, or physical reactions" (p. 76). Stressors in the work place range from unfair management practices, physical working conditions and work load, to sexual harassment, and conflict between work and family role (Pauw, 2009; Swanson, 2000).

<u>Professional women and stress</u>

According to Swanson's (2000) research sexual discrimination as defined in the quote below is more prevalent amongst corporate professional women than men and it is also, in most cases, the largest part of occupational stress and job dissatisfaction for these women. "Sexual discrimination is inequitable treatment and includes discriminatory hiring and promotion practices, salary differentials between equally qualified men and women, limited career advancement opportunities, and sexual harassment" (p. 77).

<u>Gender difference</u>

"An abundance of literature attributes stress-related health impairment to the individual's [<u>appraisal</u>] of the extent to which potentially stressful events are personally stressful" (Weekes, Maclean & Berger, 2005, p. 148). Stress is believed to affect us in two forms; the first is perceived stress and the second is stressor exposure (Weekes et al., 2005).

Weekes et al. (2005) found in their research that the main stress differences for men and women are that women's health is more easily affected by perceived stress than men. These researchers did, however, find that stressor exposure is the most influential contributor of negative health effects (due to stress) for both sexes. What makes their research interesting is the concluding questions which arise out of the stress form differences for the two sexes.

They (Weekes et al., 2005) pondered whether the differences are not due to gender specific stress coping behaviours. They propose that this is because various stress measures asserted that men use a problem solving approach to assess and deal with stress, whereas women tend to use an emotional based approach to assess and deal with stress. They are of the opinion that it is because of this emotional based approach that perceived stress also affects the health of women.

Perhaps this may be linked to the gender discussion in chapter two, specifically to gender roles as we are taught to do gender through our gender specific socialisation in terms of how to act and handle things in a manner suited to our gender (Delphy, 2001, West & Zimmerman, 1987). "Gender roles are traits, expectations, and behaviors associated with men and women and what it means to be "masculine" or "feminine" (Bem, 1993)" (Lee, 2005, p. 6). Doing gender on the other hand "involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126). What I am trying to illustrate is that according to the literature, gender is not as set or concrete as what some research and the dominant discourse might advocate. Rather, gender is a flexible and continuous process, which from a social constructionist position makes models and research put forward as a concrete construction questionable.

The question which arises from this is what form of stress was used by the stress response models? Can it be that the Fight or Flight stress response model was only tested on stressor exposure and the Tend and Befriend model only on the perceived stress? However interesting that this is outside the scope of the current research.

This difference and these questions indicate that there is much ambiguity in stress response realities, the responses, consequences and coping strategies of stress. Although all of these are not pursued in my research I do find further motivation for the aim of my research. It seems that stress response is dependent on the individual's appraisal. Firstly, in terms of the appraisal of the intensity and implicit harm and consequences of the event or stressor; and secondly, in terms of the individual appraisal of whether an event is stressful or not (Weekes et al., 2005). This then links to the idea of exploring individual socially constructed stress response realities as individuals react differently in different stressful contexts.

3.2. Construction of a gender-specific stress response model

As noted previously the Tend and Befriend model was created to classify the way women (not men) respond to stress. This was done in opposition to the fight or flight model which Taylor and her colleagues believed were unrepresentative of women and the way in which women respond to stress.

There is one gender related methodological problem in the Tend and Befriend stress response model which should not be overlooked. This stress response model is based on the social affiliation of women under stress. However, social affiliation under stress was only measured on female subjects and not on male subjects (Taylor et al., 2000). In so doing, the researchers reproduce the gender bias of the Fight or Flight stress response model, and may even exacerbate this effect, since research on the Fight or Flight model included at least some female participants.

Taylor et al. (2002, p. 753) stated that:

> The neuroendocrine model does not, indeed cannot, apply to men: It draws on oestrogen, which exists in very small quantities in men; oxytocin, which appears to be enhanced by oestrogen and antagonised by testosterone (a hormone that increases in men in response to many stressors); and endogenous opioid peptides, which appear to have different effects on the social behaviours of men and women.

The suggestion that tending and befriending is a natural reaction might be limiting. In binding itself to evolutionary theorising the study is confined to biological scrutiny, as evidenced by Taylor et al.'s (2002) response to Geary and Flinn's (2002) gender-based critique of the Tend and Befriend model. It may be said that the Tend and Befriend model conforms to a biological reality or paradigm. In this conformity it sees things as naturally occurring and evolving through natural selection (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001).

From a social constructionist perspective, the evolutionary explanation of the Tend and Befriend model indicates and implies that women are socially required and taught that they need to rear and nurture children. Despite Taylor et al. (2000) stating that this is not their intention, they do so by collecting data from stress-related studies on mother and child/ offspring behaviour (offspring because the data is collected predominantly from animal studies) and the attachment care giving system. "We propose that the behavioural mechanism

underlying the tend and befriend pattern is the attachment/ care-giving system, a stress related system that has been explored largely for its role in maternal bonding and child development (Taylor et al., 2000, p. 6). This makes the model gender stereotypical, perhaps even in an exaggerated way. Furthermore, it can be said that in this way women are socially led through the dominant discourse of science to respond to stress in certain expected ways. Responses to stress are thus socially constructed as a reality. Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (2001) call into question the relevance of evolutionary models assuming 'natural' stereotypical facts about men and women. They argue that, as society changes, we find a change in behaviour and gender roles. For example, how would the Tend and Befriend model play out among professional women who have no children, do not want to have children, cannot have children, or only plan to have children later in life? How would it apply to women who were raised by single mothers or even single fathers?

Linking this theme to the departure point of my understanding to this research not all women were or are exposed to the same social construction of the reality of how a woman responds to stress. With regard to the Tend and Befriend model's view of women as "mothers or pregnant beings" (Bekker, 2001, p. 269). Bekker says that in this model, "no attention is paid to possible changes in women's stress responses during the process of developing other roles and identities, neither to such changes since, for example, contraceptives have become available" (p. 269).

Now that equality for women in the work place is law (at least in South Africa), women's gender-specific socialisation as the inferior, child-bearing and childrearing housewife seems to be changing. This change is evident in the amended Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998. In this act, affirmative action places women of all races to be more employable than men. The change is evident (even though it is slow) in the way more and more women are breaking out of the gender-specific, stereotypical mould by building careers and obtaining higher education (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001). Pauw (2009) however, does warn that the policy might be in place but the practice still lags behind, especially on management level. "The knowledge required to fill these gender roles is learned through implicit and explicit gender socialization that all adolescents experience from their parent, peers, educators, and the mass media (Bem, 1993)" (Lee, 2005, p. 7). Women seem to be re-socialised to a certain extent by the previously male-dominated cutthroat corporate

environment. Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (2001) describe 'new women' as seeing work as important, planning careers and thus delaying pregnancy (if they choose it at all) in the pursuit of their professional careers. Perhaps a change in behaviour should be anticipated as a result of these changes, and how these women socialise with each other or their children as they become more dominant on the corporate and professional scene. With new men and these new women we find a broader acceptance and adoption of femininity. It seems that these new women and men exist in flux between traditional gender roles (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001).

If there is such a change in the socialisation of people it also suggests a change in the socially constructed 'multiverse' (Parker, 1998), of these people. In light of such changes, the Tend and Befriend model is probably too rigid and gender stereotypic. Furthermore, a biological reality based on bio-behavioural evolution, theorising might not be a shared reality, and may not be applicable to all individuals. With this in mind, the relevance of the evolutionary psychology Tend and Befriend stress response model should be reviewed. Given the crossing of traditional gender boundaries, men might also be found to seek more social affiliation when under stress, as suggested by Geary and Flinn (2002). Klein and Corwin (2002) agree by noting that "it also may be that some men may experience health benefits from engaging in a "tend-and-befriend" response over a "fight-or-flight" response, although women may benefit from coping with some stressors with a "fight-or-flight" response when appropriate or necessary" (p. 446).

4. A difference of view

Theory provides and determines framework of interpretation for the researcher. Here I explore this angle and some of its inherent implications not only for the Tend and Befriend model, but also for my research.

According to Fox and Prillelentsky (2001, p. 26), social constructionists suggest "that it is not just psychological attributes of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' which are constructed by a sexist society – but the biological based categories of 'men' and 'women.'" If stereotypical gender roles are inscribed in the basis of a bio-behavioural gender-specific stress response model, a new reality is shaped. This is especially so if the model is based on an evolutionary psychology perspective, which is supported by the notion that biological evolution is natural,

and an irrefutable truth (Buss, 1995). Social constructionism provides a different perspective to this position, and argues that this perspective places words in the mouths of lay people, giving them little or no voice and possibly even forcing a 'reality' onto them. To aid in explanation of this Hruby (2001) points out that socially constructed meanings are often taken at face value by members of a community. Burr's (1998) argument that social constructionism makes us conscious of the diversity and disparity in humanity, can also be added to this point:

> I believe that it rightly cautions us against assuming that 'we' (whoever 'we' are) can legitimately speak on behalf of 'them' (whoever 'they' are). This implies that when 'we' speak on behalf of 'them', we may be taking part in imposing constructions on people which may not be in their interest and which they may wish to resist" (Burr, 1998, p. 17).

Questioning the assumptions of the model may entail providing a voice for people who fall outside its gender stereotypical framework. Thus, theoretical positions also bring into question things like power differentials, let us thus move on to a discussion of power.

5. Power

When talking about realities; in terms of the construction and propagation of specific realities, the issue of power, not only in relation to things or people, but also in terms of power differentials, come into question.

In her book: *Reversed realities: Gender hierarchies in developmental thought,* Kabeer (1994) explains various modes or degrees of power. The first is the 'power-to' this refers to the power to make or participate in making decisions. What is interesting is that Kabeer found in her research that women had statistically more significant 'power-to' in marriage, in relation to their access to income. However, a more subtle yet higher degree of power which is often not taken into account still governs the 'power-to'. This is the second level and it is referred to as the 'power- over'. This level of power is not concerned with the ability to make decisions or not, rather it is the power of restricting and allowing things others may decide on.

If we use the home setting example of Kabeer (1994) we could say that although the woman who has access to income and has the 'power-to' participate in decision making, there will be 'no go' areas in decision making. In other words things that are not open for discussion, things that are almost like law and which cannot be decided on because of patrilineal command. Therefore the wife might help the husband to choose where they dine out the evening but the husband drives. In other words destination is up for debate but the vocation of driver is not up for debate or to be contested. So what? This is a rather serious implication although the example might seem trivial.

It is important to take cognisance of the above specifically with regard to the power relation of the research problem and debate thus far. It has been my argument that the Tend and Befriend model (and other similar models and approaches) using biological explanatory models and/ or evolutionary psychology use the 'power-over' and restrict decision making avenues with the use of biological and evolutionary based arguments. This is because; in order for the argument made using those models to 'work' one has to take the evidence as concrete, irrefutable and closed for debate. This is because it is framed as natural and/ or biological and thus unchangeable.

It is my construction that this type of argument is flawed and even brinks on conjecture. Again revisit the niche construction argument, which basically asks how it was that this selection occurred? The obvious answer is natural selection, and that is why it is this way and cannot be refuted. As social constructionist, I struggle with such reasoning. Natural selection (if that is all change is based on) surely does not stop merely because a model was created. It is a continuous process. If our realities are constructed socially and in this way we interpret the world and we then reinterpret the world as our realities multiply, then perhaps this also influences and changes behaviour and selection processes. However interesting, let us not be caught up in a different debate. The point is that the 'power-over' assumed and attributed to medical typed (biological) models restrict the 'power-to' of persons. Perhaps is can be broken down to the word games involved which are implied by the paradigms which influence our view of the world. "The rules of word games determine their truth in relation to the adherence of the rules" (Gergen, 1999, p. 37). With the power-over of the models we may comply and 'adhere to the rules of word games' that we are not even aware of and so it might form part of the construction of our realities without our knowledge or consent.

Conclusion

Taylor et al.'s (2000) bio-behavioural Tend and Befriend stress response model arose in opposition to the predominantly male-orientated Fight or Flight model. However, the Tend and Befriend model ironically was also found to discriminate along gender lines in that it only tested social affiliation under stress among female participants. Furthermore, the evolutionary perspective underpinning the model may be questioned in light of blurred traditional gender boundaries of new women and new men as explained by Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (2001). Pitman (2003) goes so far as to suggest that this bio-behavioural model discriminates against women instead of adding to the research of women's concerns. This is due to the way the model describes women as adhering and conforming to a reality of traditional gender roles due to their 'natural disposition' (Taylor et al., 2000). They describe women as being genetically pre-programmed to be the child bearer and child nurturer. Although at the time their research was revolutionary and opened up new possibilities for women, ultimately it confirms the very gender roles which have hampered the freedom and rights of women, and against which so many feminists have fought (Pitman, 2003).

The question thus arises of whether such a model does not put words in the mouths of women, aiding in the social construction of particular realities on their behalf thereby reinforcing power discourses in society. This has a potentially limiting effect on women's understanding of the way they respond to stress. From the arguments in this overview, the Tend and Befriend stress response model may be viewed as being gender specific and using traditional gender stereotypical values in an evolutionary theory to create a biological reality by which to understand the stress response(s) of women. Laland et al.'s (2000) niche construction argument is used to emphasise a possible way for women to construct a different stress response reality.

Models are frames in time like a photograph. It captures a moment but things change. If one takes the same picture of the same tree from the same angle four times a year for 10 years the picture will never look the same. No matter how old the tree becomes it is still the same tree, but the tree grows, becomes damaged, branches out and provides things like food and shade at certain times of the year and at certain points in its life. It is never the same although it is always the same thing. So too, I have realised with this research overview, that it seems that

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our stress response realities differ from one another, although it shares the same name, just like all Oak trees. This overview then, confirms the initial research aim and justifies the investigation of the social construction of the stress response realities of professional women and how these realities are influenced by models like the Tend and Befriend model.

The research now turns to the research methodology chapter to investigate how the research was conducted and the justifications for the methods used.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter I delve into the how and what of this research dissertation. This chapter will look at the following: Firstly, the research design to compare quantitative versus qualitative methodology and discuss why qualitative research methodology was chosen. Secondly, the sample, its composition, selection and data collection from the sample is explained. Thirdly, I explain how the data will be processed, thus from interview to recording to transcription and lastly, analysis. The preferred data analysis method and the reasons for its selection are then explained followed by the ethical considerations and a brief conclusion.

1. Research design

1.1. Quantitative versus Qualitative

Quantitative research most often operates from a modernist, empiricist, positivist paradigm, and generally works in the realm of the objective, universal truth-seeking scientist focused on counts and measures of things (Berg, 1998; Silverman, 2005; van Niekerk, 1999). Qualitative research works with smaller numbers of participants but engages in greater depth with the data than quantitative approaches. In this view the meaning of information is considered more important than the facts. It recognises the researcher as being part of the research project and as having an influence on the research, and so rejects the notion of the unaffected, objective, observing scientist (Silverman, 2005; van Niekerk, 1999). Qualitative research focuses on meanings, concepts, metaphors, symbols, characteristics and descriptions of things (Berg, 1998).

1.2. Why qualitative methodology?

A qualitative methodology is chosen for this study as it is more likely to suit and compliment the theoretical position of the research. As previously stated, this research study takes a social constructionist position based on the post-modern paradigm. "Descriptions and explanations

of the world themselves constitute forms of social action" (Gergen, 1985, p. 268), thus emphasising that reality is viewed as socially constructed and not as a universal objective truth. It is based on the idea of a multi-verse of realities; in which individuals in society co-construct their conceptions or perceptions of reality (Parker, 1998). To get the qualitative data described above a qualitative approach is necessary. A quantitative approach would give a higher quantity of data which at some level could perhaps be compared and themed into generalisations. As this research takes a social constructionist position the quantitative outcome described would be unfitting. A qualitative approach is thus best suited, as the researcher needs more in-depth information, in order to respect the context in which, and how the individual participants have socially constructed their stress response realities. Indeed as Babbie (2005) and Silverman (2005) warn, this is a tediously time consuming task that takes the exploration beyond paper and pencil as the data is actively explored and contextualised with the client.

2. Data collection strategies

2.1. Sample

To address the gender concerns highlighted in the literature study, a group of no more than six professional women between the ages of 25 and 30 were proposed to be interviewed. *Professional women* here are meant to refer to women who have completed tertiary education and who are currently employed in the field of their specialised education. This age category is chosen for two reasons. The first reason to address issues of equity and the effects of post-1994 election changes such as affirmative action, in South Africa. Participants in this age group are more likely to be representative of the 'new women' under investigation. The second reason is that people in this age group are more likely to have completed, as in the case of the participants, at least an undergraduate degree and work in that field. They would therefore be eligible for participation in this study in terms of education and career development. All of the above also qualifies the sample to fall in the periphery or outside the scope of the Tend and Befriend model because:

The model uses gender stereotypical expected behaviour to group and predict women's behavioural expectations. These professional women fall into the periphery or outside this scope because they might not conform to the pregnancy expectations of the model in that

they delay, postpone or even abdicate pregnancy. Furthermore the model places women in a different stress context to men, one which is not professional or corporate and has different stress response requirements than environments which men find themselves in, like the corporate work environment. Now that we find more and more women in the corporate working and academic environment it is even more evident that the stress environments which were once framed as being so very different for men and women are now merging. Therefore I argue that this leaves *professional women* outside the scope of the Tend and Befriend model and allows the possibility for an alternate social construction of stress response.

With such a limited sample size no generalisations are attempted for the participants or toward the Tend and Befriend model. Indeed, generalising would not be possible as it goes against the theoretical approach of this research.

2.2. Sampling

Snowball sampling was proposed to recruit the participants. The theory behind this strategy was that it would allow access to a wider range of the target group (Babbie, 2005; Whitley, 2002). Each recruited participant was requested to recruit additional target group participants. However, snowball sampling was only achieved through one of the participants and I therefore recruited others. Sampling would have taken place in Pretoria but due to the scarcity of participants not all the interviews took place only in Pretoria. Two participants were interviewed in Pretoria, one in a suburb south of Pretoria, one in the East Rand of Johannesburg and one in central Johannesburg. Although the sample is not meant to be representative of any group of people and with its small number cannot be, the location information just serves as an indication of geographical differences. To gain access to my sample, various human resource departments of various companies were approached from banks, financial institutions both state and private to law, mining, recruitment and medical companies and practices. All of this was however to no avail. I had to resort to convenient sampling by engaging work colleagues for references for people who would fall within my sample. From the details provided I selected only one from each list and contacted them, without giving the gatekeeper (people who gave the details) feedback on the participants or interviews conducted. This was done and explained to the participants to avoid any fear of any type of retribution or social reward. One example is of a participant who cancelled her

interview an hour before the scheduled time. She did so freely without any negative feedback or consequences, as promised in the consent form: "I may at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study" (Appendix B).

2.3. The participants

Interesting to note, yet totally unplanned and unintentional is that my requirements for the sample had an age range of 25-30 and the participants' were 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30 years old. Three of the participants (28, 29 and 30) were married, of which only one had children. The other two participants (26 and 27 years old) were both unmarried and single.

I decided to give my first participant, whom I conducted a pilot interview with, the freedom to choose her own pseudonym. In response to this she chose her nickname as her pseudonym. After a discussion with her on the possible negative consequences of this decision she agreed to my proposal and we agreed on the use of the neutral and technical term 'participant' followed by the number relating to the order in which the interviews were conducted. I avoided naming the participants with proper names as I was afraid I might unintentionally stereotype or give names with meanings I might not have been aware of at the time.

Participant 1 is a 30-year-old woman, she is married without children, Caucasian and her first language is Afrikaans. She has a post-graduate qualification in Psychology and is employed as a counsellor. She was in the process of studying for her Masters degree in one of the fields of psychology at the time of our interview (2009). Our interviews took place at her home after work, with each interview her husband was also at home, but not present in the interviews.

Participant 2 is a 29-year-old woman, she is married without children, Caucasian and her first language is Afrikaans. She has a post-graduate degree in accounting (chartered accountant) and is head of the financial department of the company she works for. The interview took place in her office after work.

Participant 3 is a 27-year-old woman, she is unmarried without children, Caucasian and her first language is Polish. She has a post graduate degree in psychology and was doing her internship for her Masters degree in one of the fields of psychology at the time of the

interview (2009). The interview took place in a boardroom at her place of work during a break.

Participant 4 is a 28-year-old woman, she is married and has two children, Indian and her first language is English. She is a qualified accountant and works as a senior accountant for her company. The interview took place in her office, during a work break.

Participant 5 is a 26-year-old woman, she is unmarried without children, Indian and her first language is English. She has a post graduate degree in information design and is a lecturer at a university. The interview took place in her office, during a work break.

2.4. Individual face-to-face interviews

To gather the data, individual interviews were conducted with each of the participants. The interviews were open-ended in nature. This allows the participants to express their points of view and leaves room for the exploration or clarification of answers from the interviewer (Alasuutari, Bickman & Brannen, 2008; Silverman, 2005). According to Berg (1998, p. 4) "data gathering is not distinct from theoretical orientations." Interviews as a data collection method best suited the current research as a social constructionist approach is taken. Individual interviews are facilitative to a social constructionist approach as the theory allows a focus on socially constructed perception and meaning held and shared by people. Thus in aiding the theoretical aims "the face-to-face setting allows for optimal communication, as both verbal and non-verbal communication is possible" (Alasuutari et al., 2008, p. 317). I made use of an interview guide (Appendix C) to allow questions to follow a general pattern to give the process structure as advised by Willig (2001). This structure helped me prevent the interview conversation from being sidetracked, and enabled me explore the relevant information. A basic structure also assists in limiting the number of topics discussed (Babbie, 2005; Willig, 2001). In this way the interviews were flexible and more natural as questions asked were formulated or reformulated based on the participants' responses. Due to the emergent socially constructed nature of the interview process, this interview questions changed as necessary within the context of the interview itself. Willig (2001) explains that this is why the semi-structured interview only has a limited amount of open ended questions on the interview guide.

The interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's consent (Appendix B). The language that interviewees would like to be interviewed in is important (Babbie, 2005). Since the target population was required to have a tertiary qualification, all were able to converse in English, which is currently the predominant language used for university teaching in South Africa. Three of the participants were not first language English speakers. One was Polish and the other two were Afrikaans. Although I could not accommodate the Polish speaking participant in her first language, she was willing and reported being comfortable to do the interview in English. I was however, able to accommodate the two Afrikaans participants in their first language. For the purpose of accommodating the reader and creating consistency the excerpts of the Afrikaans interviews which were used after the data analysis were translated by a language professional into English (See Appendix A for reference).

The time and place of the interviews were made convenient for the participants. The venue of the interview with each participant was left to the discretion of the participant, on condition that in this environment the interview would be possible. In other words; uninterrupted, safe and comfortable. The reasons for this were firstly gender-based reasons because being invited by an unfamiliar man (me) to an unfamiliar room in order to be interviewed alone in this room with by man may be threatening and even seem unsafe. To add to this threat or unsafe feeling, sight should not be lost that I am a man interviewing women on a topic focused on women. Secondly, it is an attempt to advance non-hierarchical relations in the interview as suggested in Alasuutari et al. (2008). By allowing the participants to choose the venue and time for the interview assisted in making the participants more comfortable and thus yielding a more favourable outcome to the interview, in terms of richness of the data. Four of the five interviews took place at the participants' workplaces, three in offices and one in a board room. The only interview that did not take place in workplace was at the particular participant's home, with her husband in the area but not present in the interview. From these arrangements I assumed that these settings were most comfortable and convenient for the participants as it was their choice.

2.5. Interview structure

Initially I decided to do two interviews with each participant (as stated on the consent form). I wanted to explore the individual stress responses of the participants in the first interview. The aim of the second interview was to explore the Tend and Befriend model after the individual

model of the participant has been established and defined. In this way I approach the model in a way that the women could still differentiate and compare the model.

I used the interview with Participant 1 as my pilot interview and scheduled two interviews with her. After the first interview with her as I prepared for the second interview with Participant 1, I questioned my decision to split the interviews because as I am not measuring or comparing anything from the first interview. I then wondered if I should not have added the second interview as a second part to the first interview. After completing the second interview with Participant 1 she asked why the interview was split, saying that she would have preferred doing both interviews on one day. She said that personally she sees no reason to split them, as nothing came out that she needed time to think about. She said I should think of combining them as it would save the logistic challenge of arranging time for two interviews with each participant.

This feedback reminded me again that the participants form part of the research (co-research) and have an influence on the researcher (me) and not only the other way around (Pistrang & Barker, 2010). The interview with Participant 1 thus served as my pilot interview to check my interview guide, which I found useful, and interview structure which changed because of her feedback and our experience. The interviews with the other four participants were all a single interview with two parts on the same day and a short break in between. I informed all the participants verbally of the change in the interview structure before they confirmed an interview date and asked them to schedule 90 minutes for the interview, although the average interview time was 70 minutes.

In the first part of the interview we only explored the construction of the participant's own stress responses. In the second part I explained the Tend and Befriend model according to Taylor et al. (2000) using their terms and definitions and including their biological explanation of the role of oxytocin. Then with the participants I explored their interpretations of the model. I did so in a manner which did not give them insight into my position on the Tend and Befriend model as I was interested in their interpretations and also to understand their experience and exposure to such a model. The Tend and Befriend model was not given to the participants in advance as this would possibly have influenced the constructions of their stress responses as they might have integrated some of the model already by the time of

the interview. Alternately some participants might not have been able to read it before the interview, which might have influenced their participation. Participants may also have felt that I expected them to adopt the model. In both cases I would ethically still probably have had to go through the model with them. Thus for consistency and to limit all of the aforementioned variables as well as to enable a better exploration of the participants constructions of their individual stress responses I decided to verbally explain the Tend and Befriend stress response model as described above. This had to be done in order to explore the discursive landscape of the Tend and Befriend stress response model.

3. Data processing

3.1. Thematic data analysis

Can thematic analysis work within a social constructionist theoretical position? Braun and Clarke (2006) warn that thematic data analysis is often linked or limited by researchers only to a realist/ essentialist approach. However, they argue that thematic analysis is not limited to this. Rather, it is free from theory and as such may be applied within any theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). They argue that depending on the theoretical background, one may formulate themes and individual realities as being either socially constructed (social constructionism) or inherent within the individual (realism/ essentialism). Thus, for Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic data analysis as a method free from a specific theory makes it a research tool that is flexible, and that allows for a rich and detailed account of the data, without losing the complexity thereof.

Thematic analysis may be used to identify, analyse and report themes in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Accordingly, they suggest researchers must familiarise themselves with the data by transcribing the recordings verbatim, including nonverbal behaviour, and checking the transcript(s) against the recording(s). In this study, the interviews will be recorded using an audio tape and note taking on the nonverbal behaviour of the participants. This is done to ensure that as little of the data as possible is lost or missed.

I used thematic data analysis as prescribed by the phases of Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87):

Phase:	Description of the process

1. Familiarising yourself with your data: Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the noting down initial ideas.

2. Generating initial codes: Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.

3. Searching for themes: Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.

4. Reviewing themes: Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.

5. Defining and renaming themes: Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.

6. Producing the report: The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Phase one: As suggested I found that transcribing the data verbatim and on my own made me very familiar with the data. As this process not only consisted of typing out the recordings but revisiting the recordings and transcripts many times, it also involved comparing the recordings to the transcripts. This, I believe, made thematic analysis of the data much easier as I spent a great deal of time working with it.

Phase two: The coding already started during the transcription process. I did this by adding comments to things said by the participants that stood out as unique and that corresponded to the literature and research questions. Additionally as part of the inductive analysis I made comments on themes shared by the participants which were alternate discourses and ways of understanding.

Phase three: I gathered all the coding and comments made during and after the transcription process. This helped me group and differentiate the initial themes. From this point on a

search of the interviews and transcripts took place to assist me in deciding whether various comments made could be added as themes or sub-themes.

Phase four: This phase helped me discern which excerpt I could leave out and which I had to keep as an essential part of the analysis. This was very important in terms of space limitations in this mini-dissertation, seeing that the initial document of coded excerpts exceeded 70 pages.

Phase five: This phase was essential as it helped me arrange and name the themes in a manner that made them easier to read. It also assisted me in viewing which and how the sub-themes supported and fitted in with the specific themes.

Phase six: This phase, for me as researcher, was concerned with the analysis and discussion chapters. During this phase I came to realise the extent of the latent and inductive nature of the analysis. This proved crucial to the research as it coerced me into elaborating more on what was done in the analysis and how thematic analysis fits into this research.

As stated above I employed thematic data analysis to assist me in the analysis of the data. However, due to the strong influence of my social constructionist theoretical paradigm on the construction of my perceptions, interpretations, point of departure and understanding(s); this was unplanned, and not surprising that this influence came out strongly in my analysis and the writing-up thereof.

Pistrang and Barker (2010) state that thematic analysis can be seen as an approach of analysis under which many theories can fall, all of which (in analysis methods) are concerned with identifying data into themes and categories. It is their concept a thematic version of narrative analysis which caught my attention. They define it in the following way: "thematic versions of narrative analysis focus on the meaning of the individuals' stories, classifying them into clusters" (p. 75). This concept of Pistrang and Barker (2010) closely resembles the nature of the end result of my analysis and made me revisit the work of Braun and Clarke (2006). This reconfirmed my decision to use thematic analysis from a social constructionist theoretical position and that this approach is acceptable in thematic data analysis. They (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81) explain that thematic analysis "can be a constructionist method, which examines

the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society".

3.2. Translating data

As mentioned earlier some of the interviews were done in Afrikaans. However, in the Data Analysis (chapter five) all excerpts appear in English. Temple and Young (2004) have found that a lot of research does not report translation, translation method or translator involvement. This they say can be detrimental to research in which the research paradigm is sensitive to language and the power hierarchies surrounding language (Temple & Young, 2004). After the journey through social constructionism in chapter two and the power relations in the research overview in chapter three the importance of language as emphasised by Temple and Young became evident to me. Working in social constructionism makes language not just important, but essential, as language carriers power, meaning and even culture (Gergen, 1999). I thus feel compelled to report the language activities as suggested above by Temple and Young (2004) in terms of the translation, the translation method and the level of the translator involvement.

I decided to transcribe the Afrikaans interviews verbatim in their recorded form, in the same way I did the three English interviews. Therefore no grammatical or language errors were corrected. The data analysis of the Afrikaans transcripts was also done in the same way as the English transcripts; through using the original texts and not translations. In writing up the research I then sent off all the Afrikaans excerpts for translation which were used in my analysis once the analysis chapter was finalised. This was done to minimise the impact and influence of the translation as far as possible. In this way the analysis was not influenced by the translation, it is only perhaps the reading of the analysis which has been influenced. The translation was done by an experienced language practitioner (see Appendix A) with the emphasis on maintaining the meaning of the original text. The translation was done to accommodate a broader range of academic audience, in consideration of the fact that not everyone who might read this dissertation is proficient in Afrikaans.

As the researcher my language background with Afrikaans also comes into question. I am an Afrikaans first language speaker; I was introduced to English at school. I completed my primary and secondary education in an Afrikaans medium school, with English as a second

language. Since then I have completed all my tertiary qualifications in English, as language of instruction and evaluation.

4. Ethical considerations

1.1. Consent

As described in the sample characteristics, only participants of consenting age were legally able and entitled to participate in the research with their informed consent. The informed consent is included for the protection of the participants and is based on the recommendations of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (2004) and Whitley (2002). It includes the following: The participants were informed that the interview will be recorded and transcribed using pseudonyms to protect their identities; these pseudonyms will also be used in the report. Secondly, the participants were informed of the possible risks and risks of harm involved in participating in the study. Thirdly, participation is voluntary and there would be no incentive or reward for participation and as such the participants were informed that they may withdraw without consequence or reason at any time. Fourthly, the purpose of the research and audience of the results were conveyed to the participants. To do all this, I made use of consent forms which contain all this information (see Appendix B).

1.2. Nature of the discourse

The types of discourses in which participants were required to engage are not of an intimate, sexual or incriminate nature. The audience of the results does not include the company which employs the individual(s), and possible incriminating evidence against the sexist behaviour of the employers or employees is not what is sought through the discussion topics. The participants were not deceived, because if participants are well informed of the topics the discussions should be more fruitful. Once participants were fully informed of all of the above, they were given the option to receive a report on the research results. This will be written and disseminated in accordance with the confidentiality requirements outlined above to ensure that confidentiality is preserved. As researcher and interviewer I tried to the best of my ability to ensure that the participants would not be harmed due to ethical negligence. Because tracking the social construction of a person's stress response might lead to deeper levels of emotion in accordance with Whitley (2002), I informed the participants that should issues rise that unavoidably upset them, counselling could be arranged. This was however explained to

the participants verbally in the interview sessions. Fortunately no harm was reported, as I enquired after the each of the two parts of the interviews and I also received no correspondence to alert me of any harm which had occurred.

1.3. Data storage

After the transcriptions of the interviews were checked against the audio recording to ensure that it is correct, the audio recordings and transcriptions obtained in and from the interviews were placed in secure storage for 15 years in the department of psychology at the University of Pretoria. All the participants were informed of this departmental requirement on their informed consent forms.

Conclusion

A social constructionist research position compels me as researcher to seek the meanings constructed by the participants qualitatively. I will explore the possible constructions of stress responses with participants who were aged between 26 and 30 years old, who have a tertiary education and are employed because of this qualification in individual face-to-face interviews. These interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by me, as researcher and interviewer. Thematic data analysis aided me in discovering whether there were shared constructions by the participants and any themes in or between the two parts of their interviews. In this way there was an opportunity for me to check the social constructions of the participants in relation to their interpretation of the Tend and Befriend model. An exploration into the participants' constructions and experiences were sought and not 'evidence' used to prove or disprove the Tend and Befriend model as it is not the objective of this research.. The data did however raise some questions which could be of interest for future research. These will be discussed in chapter six the conclusion and discussion. Firstly, however the research now moves to chapter five, the analysis, in which the emerged themes of the exploration are unveiled and further explored.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

After investigating the social constructionist theory, exploring the literature and delving into the promises of my research methodology, I now present the analysis of the interviews the five participants and I conducted. Using thematic data analysis I extracted five themes with several supporting sub-themes under each. For details on the interviews revisit the methodology chapter. The five themes were: *tend and befriend review*, *not meeting the criteria of the Tend and Befriend model*, *stress response outcomes, self-tending*, and *stress response didactics*.

In the first theme *tend and befriend review*, I reviewed the Tend and Befriend model with the participants. The sub-themes showed that the participants were not limited to the model. The emergent themes of the participants opened the possibility to different constructions of the model, as a workplace strategy and not as a stress response. The sub-themes were:

- Befriending: as a workplace strategy
- Tending in the form of fighting
- Tending: as a workplace strategy
- What does the Tend and Befriend model not account for?

I included the participants' critique of the model to gain an understanding of how they see it and whether they feel that it has any short comings.

The second theme is *not meeting the criteria of the Tend and Befriend model* this theme is linked to the first theme. However, it is a theme on its own because it is such an integral focus of this research. The sub-themes in this section came from the discussions the participants and I had about how or if they meet the criteria of the Tend or Befriend model. The following sub-themes were the emergent areas where the participants did not meet the criteria of the Tend and Befriend model:

- Delaying pregnancy
- Corporate expectations of delaying pregnancy
- Being the bread winner

I also included the sub-theme *the experience of falling outside the scope of the Tend and Befriend model*, to look at the impact of being a woman and not fitting into a sex-specific model designed for woman.

The third theme is *stress response outcomes*. This theme covers the variations in the outcomes of stress responses which the participants shared, instead of a focus on the stress responses themselves. The sub-themes include:

- A common thread to handle workload stress: Just do it!
- The role of control
- Identifying distinct types of stress reactions in specific situations
- Work as de-stressing place

The fourth theme *self-tending* is the unique outcome of this study. The sub-themes are:

- Self-tending through self-debriefing
- Self-tending through anger as resiliency agent
- Self-tending through situation comparison
- Using people close to you to let out stress

The fifth theme and final theme is *stress response didactics*. As implied by the name this theme looks at the learning or socialisation of the stress responses of the participants. In other words it is the exploration of how these participants socially constructed their own ways of reacting toward stress. The sub-themes are:

- Parental stress socialisation
- Can a stress response change?
- Consequences of reactions
- Accepting biological arguments above all
- Do models replace knowledge?
- Using a conglomeration of models

Each of these themes will now be discussed.

1. Tend and Befriend review

1.1. Befriending: as a workplace strategy

The befriending response of the Tend and Befriend model was immediately interpreted by some participants as a way to ensure co-operation in the workplace. Two participants even used the same saying, as quoted in the excerpt below, to explain this to me: keep your friends close, but keep your enemies closer. To a certain extent this does fit the reasoning behind the Befriending response in terms of befriending the stressor in order to neutralise the threat. However, in this particular case it is a conscious strategy in the workplace and not an immediate stress response.

When I explained the Tend and Befriend model to Participant 2 she identified with it saying "there is a reason for having a saying such as "keep your friends close and your enemies closer"" (Participant 2). She gave a similar scenario to illustrate how she befriended a work colleague after she had made a work error and was accountable to that colleague for the error made. By befriending the colleague Participant 2 was no longer in trouble. "Then she said to me: 'Hey, it's obvious to me that you have a lot on your plate and, well, you know, anyone can make a mistake' ...and thereafter she was nice to me" (Participant 2). She went on to explain that when she befriends people at work they are more likely to see her point of view. This, she states, made it more difficult for them to fight with her, because according to her view friends do not fight with each other. "I make friends with everybody, because then nobody can fight with you" (Participant 2). In this way Participant 2 uses her construction of what friends are allowed and not allowed to do to as well as how they may act toward each other to assist her in dealing with the people in her work place. This, she says, reduces stress that she might have to face.

> Participant 2: Usually I kill people by being friendly, even when I am infuriated. Take my boss: he would walk in here and fight with me, and immediately I'll think, 'Oh, I am guilty' and then I'll consider what it is that caused him to fight with me. And then I'll go fetch the papers ...to prove that I was not the culprit. [...] But I won't yell and scream and rant and rave. I simply keep quiet and remain calm; I admit to being guilty. Because

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at that point, when someone yells and screams at you, they are infuriated already; and confronting it won't do any good.

I asked Participant 2 if she was friendlier with people who make her stressed compared to people in general. She answered: "Yes, I am... because I guess I am trying, uhm, to get that person to relax" (Participant 2). It seemed as though Participant 2 attains secondary gain out of befriending people in this way in stressful situations. The secondary gain may be the control over her stressors in the sense that she actively attempts to manipulate the mood of potential stressors and to ensure the future cooperation of the identified individual. Although, this response sometimes has an emotional cost for her: "...sometimes I am cross with myself, because I actually should have fought. [...] Because I am too nice, people sometimes walk over me; no, not sometimes, but all the time, because I am too nice" (Participant 2).

After explaining the Tend and Befriend model to Participant 3 she said that "I guess it is accurate in some situations" (Participant 3). In her explanation it became clear that she saw Befriending as a workplace strategy:

Participant 3: There is a lot of demands on you to chill, but check on the situation or position you're trying to get your enemy closer, especially in a corporate environment its, its easier, because then people don't become the extra stressors they don't try to make things complicated for you. So yes it makes things easier. I can see it in my environment.

In both of these examples the participants construct their experience of how they strategically employ befriending in the workplace with the aim of calming down stressors or potential stressors and themselves. Firstly, neither participant befriends for the safety of their offspring, loved ones or other people around them as the nurturing motive suggested by the Tend and Befriend model. Secondly, although it seems Participant 2 employs this approach as a situational response, it seems Participant 3 explains it as a constant practice to decrease complications in her working environment. In both cases however it allows the participants to actively control their stressor exposure, in terms of managing the people in their environments.

1.2. Tending: as a workplace strategy

This theme adds to alternate constructions of tending illustrated by the participants as a finding of the study, but not to necessarily to tending as per the Tend and Befriend model's definition. Participant 2 said that she feels that she does tend. For her, there is a reason why someone is upset, thus: "... once again, you have to calm down the person in order to find out why the person is upset. And then, when you have solved the problem, there remains no reason to be cross. [...] But during that process you become friends with that person – while you tend, you befriend" (Participant 2). Thus according to Participant 2 tending can be defined as calming someone down to reduce the stress which their elevated mood might cause you.

> Participant 2: You must do something to win the friendship. So, uhm, by going out of your way to help them with something that to them is an issue, but which to you is not necessarily the end of your world. [...] Then they say, 'Gosh, thank you for having taken so much trouble to help me'. Then that is the thing that instigates the friendship. [...] In that way I make friends; because I help them, they make friends with me.

> But then I know that if I need something, all I have to do is phone and ask: 'Could you just quickly do this for me?' Because I know that when [I ask them] they will put aside whatever they are doing and help me, because I have put aside what I had been doing in order to help them.

In this way Tending in the workplace becomes a Befriending strategy. The Tend and Befriend model proposes a stress response model for immediate stress reaction. However, the strategy of Participant 2 and Participant 3 made me wonder if it is not an artefact of corporate communal interchange which is employed by individuals in their workplace environment to manage stress exposure.

1.3. 'Tending horridly'

The Tend and Befriend model defines the tending response as nurturing offspring in a stressful situation to protect the offspring from harm (Taylor et al., 2000). To tend by being "horrid" (Participant 1) might seem contradicting given the definition of Taylor et al. However, I found no 'evidence' for tending according to the definition, the only link to

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tending that could be made is this theme and the previous theme *tending: as workplace strategy.* This theme is a question more than a statement. In the literature Taylor et al. (2000), links Tending to nurturing. However, nurture is not linked to aggression, but this is contradicting to what emerged in this theme. It should be noted that who is fought with or treated aggressively in the stressful situation is not who is tended to. Rather Participant 1 illustrated how she acts aggressively in her workplace as "perhaps it is also easier at work to be horrid when you stress, because those are people whom you do not need... At work they will forgive me, because we work together." She explained that she acts out her stress at work because then "then they [her family] don't have to stress about it; they don't have to think about it" (Participant 1). This motivation behind her response is what links her response to Tending even though it is aggressive "So then I, too, am less stressed out. And, what is more, neither do I need to stress about my stress causing them to stress" (Participant 1). With this excerpt Participant 1 illustrates how aggression (acting out at work and being horrid to her colleagues) can be a nurturing response to the self and others.

1.4. What does the Tend and Befriend model not account for?

In the interviews the following question was asked to all five participants: "What does the Tend and Befriend model not account for?" This question elicited three main limits. The limitations the participants gave were: a) that the model was too gender stereotyped; b) that the model was too broad or generalised; and c) that the application of the model for different types of stress is not covered.

a) Gender stereotyped

Participant 1 felt that the Tend and Befriend model is stereotypically feminine. "Yes, I think it is, uhm, too gentle, too pretty; Tend and Befriend [*laughs*], it's so nice, you know? It's that typical thing... why can't we yell and throw a tantrum? . I think it's biased, terribly biased; it's stereotyped" (Participant 1). Even here the dominant discourse of 'thank you for the pretty, gentle model' gets displayed.

Another supporting excerpt from Participant 1 yielded further explanation:

Participant 1: I just don't think you can be gender specific, because not all women are like women; its not like that, and not all men are like that... One has a personality and all

of us are exposed to different things. My friend and I have been exposed to totally different things; I have different genes, different circumstances, I have different support systems. And all of this will influence how I would react; she might not be able to yell and throw a tantrum because they would fire her. I can, because I work with people who are like family.

Participant 1 illustrates how she does not agree to the limited, what she calls "stereotypical" and "biased" nature of the Tend and Befriend model; she feels that it does not account for individual cultural, personal history differences and influences between women.

b) To broad or generalised

Participant 5 explained that "it's broad" and further stated that "where there is a dominant way [of responding] but it is not that the others are disregarded, because again it depends on the context and the situation." Participant 4 shared this view in saying it "can't be applied to all types of stress, it depends… It will differ, from um, well in each situation… Yes is too general". The participants were saying that the model fails to acknowledge the varying working contexts and stress response demands which they face as women.

Furthermore, in this excerpt Participant 4 and Participant 5 construct the Tend and Befriend model as too broad and generalised. They construct "broad and generalised" as a limiting, static characteristic of the model which impedes the model from being applicable in multiple contexts or situations. It thus represents only one view of reality.

c) Limited scope of application

Most of the participants stated that they find the Tend and Befriend model too limiting. For some of the participants it was the various contexts of application of stress responses required for different types of stress that they felt the Tend and Befriend model could not cater for.

Participant 3: I think this model is accounting for one … one part of dealing with stress in your environment which has to do with how you deal with people, and that's once again as I've said that's one of the stressors.

Participant 4: It depends on the nature of the stress, I don't think them all, that all kinds and all levels of stress. It can't be applied to all types of stress it depends.

A consideration which should not be neglected is the change in the role of, and demands on, career women in the past decade since the emergence of Taylor et al.'s (2000) model. This could also have an impact on the model's applicability and representativeness.

2. Not meeting the criteria of the Tend or Befriend model

The participants met the required criteria of my research methodology, in terms of their age, education and careers. As suggested through the research overview (chapter 3) and the methodology (chapter 4) I found in through the interviews that the participants delayed pregnancy (expectations) for their studies or their careers and two of the participants (Participant 2 and Participant 3) were the bread winners in their households. For the above reasons mentioned above, and as proposed in earlier chapters, the participants did not meet the implied criteria of the Tend and Befriend model of Taylor et al. (2000) in terms of expectancies. When looking at their constructions, this perhaps illustrates a stress response discourse in which these participants would not adhere to the response limitations or predictions made by the Tend and Befriend model. The response limitations or predictions being that when women endure stress they will either tend or befriend, for the sake of not only themselves but also their offspring, in response to stress without scope for other alternatives.

2.1. Delaying pregnancy

Particpant 1 is married without children. She did however note that they have two dogs which are like children to them. On asking whether she would like to have children she replied with the following:

Participant 1: I, children, I think I would like to, I don't know... I am very selfish about my time. I like my time, I like my husband, I like the fact that we can do whatever we like, whenever we like. I really am very selfish in those respects, so... I want a baby, for the *idea* of it. I know that I do not necessarily feel up to raising a teenager.

Participant 1 said that at this stage she is more interested in the idea of having children; the excitement of preparing for a baby and the idea of children looking after her when she is old, than what she is about actually having children. Practically she feels that since she wants to and will be working with children she does not see herself dealing with tantrums and teenagers in her home.

She further reported that she had been married for two years at the time of the interview. I asked the reasons behind getting married later than what she had planned to and whether she had thought about having children earlier. Participant 1 said that she always thought she would be married and have children by the age of 25. It turned out that she married at the age of 26 and considering the demands of her course, could not imagine when she would have time for "morning sickness and raising kids" (Participant 1). She sees the need to have time for herself as explained earlier as including having time for her career and studies. She said that if she was not studying at the moment she would be more easily "convinced" (Participant 1) into having children. Thus the dominant discourse constructs the 'reality' that women cannot successfully have children and cope with the demands of careers at the same time.

Participant 2 is also married without children. She had been married for two years, at the time of the interview. She also noted that they have two dogs which she said are almost like children to them. She said that she delays pregnancy not because she does not want children but because of three specific reasons:

Firstly she feels that she is not able to give time and attention to the children the way her stay-at-home mom did. "My mom had been at home full time, so I know that I received attention and love from her and I know that raising children requires much attention and love, and at the moment I simply do not have the time to give attention and love" (Participant 2).

The second reason is time in the marriage to be a married couple, "The second reason is we have now been married for two years. I wanted to be married for a while; I did not want to start popping out immediately..." (Participant 2).

The third reason was financial stability "... just after I got married, my husband was retrenched, so financially we suffered more; and now our company has started retrenching.

So now I am afraid that I would have a child and I would not be able to provide for the child...” (Participant 2).

I then enquired on the impact of studies on Participant 2's thoughts of having children. She said that she never considered being a career woman instead of a mother (Participant 2). Rather, she has always thought that it is possible to be both a career woman and a mother. From a social constructionist position my understanding to this is that the dominant discourse says 'women must be mothers' and 'women must choose between having children and careers'. This dominant discourse is so entrenched in Participant 2's construction of reality that all her reasoning with regard to children is framed around it.

However:

> Participant 2: So I begin, more and more... to realise that it is impossible to be at the pinnacle of your career and be a good mother at the same time. Uhm, either of the two has to give; so unless you really earn a lot of money and you can appoint people to lavish attention, et cetera on your children... So I believe you must make a choice.

Ideally Participant 2 would like to be able to work half day and spend the other half with her children. The reality for her however at the moment is:

> Participant 2: But now... I am too tired in the evening; I cannot imagine how someone manages to bath the children... with their homework and stuff that has to be built, and going to church, and all of those things; I do not know how one would manage to do that...

In the analysis I now wonder if the dogs which she said were like children are not a substitute for having children as part of her strategy to not have children until her three specific reasons explained above have been resolved. This was however not explored in the interview and can thus not be confirmed through my interpretation. As for the specificity of her reasons; this perhaps shows how strong the dominant discourse of 'a woman's purpose is to bear children' and how 'I cannot do both' is. It is so strong that Participant 2 has to defend herself with reasons or justifications as to why she has not yet met the dominant discourse and prove that

she will not defy this discourse, by supplying a map of what needs to happen for her to follow the discourse. In the last two quotes it seems that Participant 2 is saying that in this point in time her reality is not constructed in a way that requires or accommodates the idea of having children. One could speculate whether this is her own construction or the dominant discourse imposing a construction of reality on her. Perhaps it is safe to say it is a co-construction of both.

Participant 3 is unmarried and single. Her response to being questioned on having children was: "I suppose I would have children if I had the time and the partner [*laughs*]. Yes but at the moment I presently don't have the time for children, especially because of my Masters. But I will definitely want to have children one day. Not soon" (Participant 3). In terms of the influence of work and studies specifically on her position on having children Participant 3 said that she feels she needs to finish what she started in terms of her studies and work, "I'm not going to give up everything now and have children." She said that the other concern is that she wants to have financial security and she wants the father of the children to be present. Work was the biggest influential factor for her view on pregnancy.

As stated with Participant 2 the dominant discourse does not allow for a dual role for women. Men are allowed and expected to be parents and workers by the dominant discourse. Women however, are expected to choose to either be a parent or worker and even then the latter is not the preferred option according to the dominant discourse.

Participant 4 is married with two children. She explained that she got married in her third year of her BCom degree. She had her first born during her Honours year. We explored possible contributing influences on the three-year time lapse between getting married and having children. She reported that work had an influence on her having children thus her choice for delaying pregnancy. While Participant 5 reported that not being married was the only factor for her not having children.

With both Participant 2 and Participant 3 it was clear that the dominant discourse of not being able to be a career woman and a mother was strongly ingrained into their constructions of how or what a mother should be. Participant 4 however serves as an example of the alternate construction of this idea, because she is a mother of two children and works full time.

As suggested by Gergen, Burr and other social constructionists in their literature it now becomes apparent to me as the researcher that our constructions of reality and the discourses we follow, knowingly or not, influence what is possible in our realities. Participant 1 and 2 are married but do not have children and from their excerpts it seems that being both a woman and married demands from the dominant discourse that they need to have children. Both of these participants in different ways express how their realities and contexts do not allow for this yet, perhaps even how this is not an immediate wish for them. It does however seem that the pressure of the dominant discourse is so intense that they have justifications in place as to how they have not met this expectation. Additionally both of them have two dogs, coincidently perhaps, the same number as the ideal or average number of children expected from a married couple by the dominant discourse. Participant 3 and 5 have no immediate wish for children and their realities are constructed in a way that makes it seem obvious as to why they do not (cannot) adhere to the dominant discourse, it also supports and clarifies what their focus is at the moment - their careers. Participant 4's reality is constructed as stated previously in a way that accommodates her career aspirations and her wish to have children, both of which she is able to do because her construction of reality allows for it.

2.2. Corporate expectations of delaying pregnancy

Participant 3 said that delaying pregnancy was possibly an indirect decision and she noted: "Our people around this office are actually really against children [*laughs*]" (Participant 3). When I questioned how they were against children she explained:

> Participant 3: No, I was just saying there's no time for children at the moment. I think in our environment it's quite funny, there is mostly working, um females in our office and our boss [male] says always no time for children whatsoever [*laughs*].

It is interesting how Participant 3 moves from firstly saying that the people in her office are "really against children", which fits into the dominant discourse of women having to choose between work and having children. She then moves to saying "there's no time" for having children, which defends the dominant discourse. She does however link this saying of "no time" to a "dominant discourse gatekeeper" (their boss) whose instruction on maintaining the

dominant discourse is phrased in similar words: "our boss says always no time for children whatsoever".

2.3. Being the bread winner

Of the married participants, Participant 2 was the only one who reported that she was the bread winner in her marriage. Interestingly she also has chosen not to have children yet as explained in the previous sub-theme. This is important to the study as it places Participant 2 further outside the scope of the Tend and Befriend model, because it has a direct impact on her role, available time and responsibilities.

Participant 2: ... just after I got married, my husband was retrenched, so financially we suffered more; and now our company has started retrenching. So now I am afraid that I would have a child and I would not be able to provide for the child...

In the following excerpt Participant 2 highlights her understanding and interpretation of societal pressures, in terms of religious and cultural expectations and relocates her agency as woman by translating her situation into the social context which she entertains.

Participant 2: Uhm, I believe that we were created as Godly beings and that God had intentionally created men and women to be different, and I think women should not even work, to tell the truth, if you consider it from a spiritual point of view. The man is supposed to be the bread winner: that is his punishment. We [as women] must bear children and the man must work, but now the community unfortunately does not allow it. I have to work because we need an income from my side and, uhm, honestly, I do not care what society thinks [emphasis added]. I know I have a logical mind and when we have a heated argument whilst sitting in the boardroom, some of the men would stand there, yelling and shooting a coronary, and I would say 'Okay, guys, calm down now, the point of the matter is... duh, duh, duh, duh'; so at other times I might be the emotional one and he... It all depends on what had triggered you at that moment, and so on.

In this quote Participant 2 shares the discourse of her religious socialisation and how it contrasts with her current lived experience. It brought her to a point where she could say that

the religious view is how she would like it but currently she has to do things differently because this is what society demands of her if she expects to survive. Another construction which emerges here from not having children for Participant 2 could be the dominant discourse of "the bread winner should not or cannot be the child bearer or child rearer". As with the dominant discourse Participant 2 explained in terms of what is expected of men and what of women. Only now, in her reality, she is this breadwinner and perhaps she has taken her religious construction role or cast of the non-childbearing bread winner on herself.

2.4. Experience of falling outside the scope of the Tend and Befriend model

The experience of falling outside the scope of the Tend and Befriend model was only shared by two of the participants (Participant 1 and Participant 5). Both participants started explaining their experience of falling outside the scope of the model by reacting to not conforming to the model. In our discussion on their non-conformity both participants found their own personal strength through the exploration and by referring back to their own knowledge. One construction of this shared understanding would be an understanding or interpretation of this as the participants owning their stress response models, as being developed and tailored by themselves for themselves and thus then not abnormal in a pathological sense.

Looking at the responses of the participants it becomes evident how models could be experienced as harmful. These participants fall outside the scope of the model and as seen in the text examples below this can lead to individuals in similar locations of the model to label themselves unduly or to become insecure.

After the exploration of the Tend and Befriend model with Participant 1 it was interesting that she said the following: "[*laughs*] Do you think I'm abnormal? [*laughs*] I coincide with the male stress model." These questions brought up the following question for me as researcher: Do gender-specific models which stereotype gender behaviour not, or could it not, cause damage or even cause people to alter their behaviours or perceptions of behaviours so as to align themselves to this perceived dominant gender discourse to find a sense of belonging? This is because as expressed by Participant 1 if you do not follow the dominant discourse you are "abnormal" and thus need to realign yourself or have justifications in place

and a plan how and when you will conform to the dominant discourse, as explained previously in *delaying pregnancy*.

> Participant 5: Um, it makes you a bit insecure, because you think should I be doing things a certain way or should I be... so it makes you question your own being relative to others, like you know. Like I don't act for example the way a woman should so then if there is something, I mean not that there is something wrong with me, but it just makes you question the way you are then.

> ...Women do often have the tendency to compare themselves. So I think in that sense, um or the way they're then perceived by others. So I mean it doesn't make me less of a women reacting the way I do. But it obviously makes me different from the others, which then makes me question the way that I am and I like doing. Almost like then am I doing the right thing or am I doing the wrong, you see.

Participant 5 adds here to the argument made by and for Participant 1 in that the model also made her feel abnormal. She doubts herself because the model, as with other experiences where she does not conform to the dominant discourse, makes her wonder if she is doing something wrong.

> Participant 1: I don't think it matters what number of models you have in life; you cannot yourself, you won't, you might ponder about it, why do I not act like that? But you are the way that you are.

> Daniël: So, is a model like this then disempowering or what? Because it makes you question...
> Participant 5: No it's not that, in a certain sense it can be disempowering, but otherwise not because it shows that you do, your normal, because there is, that is a specific way of dealing with it. It's just a different or an alternative way.
> Daniël: Ok so you're saying...
> Participant 5: So I don't feel disempowered, because I know the way I am and that's how I am and I'm not going to act in a different way just to comply with what the model proposes.

Participant 5 posed a unique outcome, an alternative reality, by explaining that by knowing how she is as a person and that being secure in that knowledge gives her the assertiveness to be resilient to the demands of dominant discourses; and to view models like these not as obsoletes but as alternative interpretation, understandings or approaches.

3. Stress response outcomes

3.1. A common thread to handle work load stress - "Just do it!"

This theme made me wonder if this stress reaction approach is just a characteristic of my sample, a sign of professionalism or a coping strategy that these women utilise to demonstrate their autonomy in opposition to the dominant discourse. In other words this might be the coping strategy shared by these participants which has made it possible for all these women to oppose the dominant discourse and therefore, to have come as far as they have, in terms of their qualifications and work.

Participant 2 explained work load stress as something static and non-threatening which is easily overcome by just focussing and doing it.

> Participant 2: …if it is a deadline that causes me to stress, then I would speak to no one or I… I simply focus 100%; there is no time to stress about it... I stick to it, and I focus.

Participant 2 reacts similarly when she is with the staff members who work under her in her department:

> Participant 2: ...When I stress as a result of my workload, I would sit down and think logically; for instance: 'Okay, come on, we will do this and this and then that...' And then I start delegating and then we do the things and get them over and done with.

She explained this specific reaction to this type of stress of her as follows:

Participant 2: You can control work, you see; it's [only] paper and your computer – those you can control. You cannot control another person's emotions. You cannot control how he will yell at you, or what he will do. So this is why it is different.

Similarly Participant 3 explained that her way of dealing with workload stress is "Just doing more work" and "putting more time into it" (Participant 3).

Participant 3: I would say, I will organise my time, with extra time like an extra hour, I, I suppose with trying to do my dissertation and work I tend to get extremely busy. But if I do have such a large amount of work I will take it home to catch up on things.

Participant 4 explained her work load stress as follows:

Participant 4: Look obviously it depends on the nature of stress. If it's work stress and a deadline I work like crazy till I make sure that I meet the deadline. I think I work very well under pressure if I must say... but even during my studies I was never one of the students that studied weeks or months in advance, I couldn't. I worked best under pressure [*giggles*].

This response was a unique outcome as it is an assertive stress response which poses an alternate construction and contradicts the dominant discourse of "women are dependant/ helpless, unambitious and cannot cope with work pressures". In this way this response opposes the dominant discourse and gives voice to how these women are assertive and can manage in the workplace with workload stress.

3.2. The role of control

Control is constructed as a major factor in stress for these participants. Lack of control initiates the stress for them and response behaviour is understood as being governed by situation-specific strategies to regain this control.

Participant 1 explains the link between control and stress for her in the following:

Participant 1: For me, if I have deadlines or things that put pressure on me, it is that control, I have to be able to control it, you know? So I will take it out on everything

and on everyone that comes in my way, until I have gained control of that situation. ...
. Because then I am okay; then I am calm.

Participant 1 explained why she acts out when she is stressed:

Participant 1: … I know while I am doing it I'm irrational, very often. I know it; I know it for a fact. … While I am doing it, I very often think: 'Why don't I just keep quiet?' – but I cannot.

Daniël: What drives it, do you think?

Participant 1: That need to be able to control it; to just reach a place again where I feel that I am in control. I think that drives it, you know, uhm…

Daniël: So control, and retaining control, is the big issue?

Participant 1: Is the big issue, *yes* [*drawn out*], I need to be in control of things. To me, that is tremendously important. To gain control and to retain control is for me the main objective, I think. To act in the way in which I act; and I think another reason why I do it is because I want people to leave me alone. If you are horrid towards people, they leave you alone; if they leave you alone, you can get on with your work. If you can get on with your work, you can reach your goal, and then you can be in control.

Participant 1 explained that this approach to gaining a sense of control was effective at work for her, she could influence her environment in such a way that her work colleagues left her alone. However, at home this is different for Participant 1; at home pushing her husband away takes away her sense of control so she says her behaviour is thus very dependent on the situation at hand. This illustrates how the dominant discourse functions differently within different contexts.

Participant 2 said that she treats work load stress differently to other life stresses because of the difference in the sense of control:

Participant 2: You can control work, you see; it's [only] paper and your computer – those you can control. You cannot control another person's emotions. You cannot control how

he will yell at you, or what he will do. So this is why it is different. A sheet of paper you can throw away and yell at it [*laughs*] or say: far enough and it does it. So yes.

When it then comes to people and gaining control over the situation she prefers not to take a head-on approach as with the workload stress. Taking a step back or even stepping down and taking blame only to correct it later gives Participant 2 a better sense of control.

Participant 2: ... you are not going to attain anything with that person when he stands there, yelling and shouting; he will not be able to see your point... So normally I would cut the person short and say: 'Okay, I understand precisely how you feel. Give me five minutes; I'll bring you the stuff in no time.' And then, by the time that I get back to the person, he had calmed down, and he is so shocked at the fact that you aren't being horrid – it works most of the time. It works brilliantly and fantastically, because my human relations are 100%.

We explored whether control is linked to stress and influences how she handles stress. Participant 2 said:

Participant 2: Yes, uhm, I don't like feeling powerless; in the situation, I must be able to do something…

Participant 2 explained the sense of helplessness through a work experience that made her feel helpless. She concluded that "So, uhm, yes... for me, control is a helluva thing; I must be capable of doing something about the situation" (Participant 2).

The dominant discourse frames women as helpless maidens in need of saving, who are not apt for the workplace. This is seen in these excerpts, however sight should not be lost of these participants opposition to this dominant discourse. In *befriending as workplace strategy* and *a common thread to handle workload stress "Just do it!"* the participants illustrated their opposition. In these two themes they showed that they employ personnel managing strategies (befriending) to maintain a social sense of control and a head on approach to workload to reach deadlines ("just do it!").

3.3. Identifying distinct types of stress reactions in specific situations

I found it intriguing that the participants could identify that in different situations or types of stressors their stress response reaction or stress response approach is different. They could thus identify that they had different stress response types. This is made more interesting by my finding that most of the participants generally had not given much thought to how they respond to stress previously.

Participant 2 said that there are two different types of stress for her. "The one is like work, the load, something, is too much to handle. And the other is like emotional stress, such as when somebody was nasty towards you and it did not feel good" (Participant 2). She explained that with emotional stress like when someone is mean to her she would want to cry and would be angry with herself. With work load stress on the other hand she says "then I would sit down and think logically" (Participant 2). For participant 2 the dominant discourse distinguishes different stress types, namely home and work stresses. For participant 3 the situation is constructed differently.

Participant 3 says she differentiates between types of stress based on the outcome thereof. She differentiated two types of work stress: one being work load stress "when you have just way too much to do at once" (Participant 3) and the other is more unstructured when you are dealing with things that you have never dealt with before where "someone expect me to suddenly come up with solutions" (Participant 3). "I know I don't like conflict I know I avoid it" (Participant 3).

Participant 4 also immediately said that all stress is not the same for her. She constructed it as follows: "Look obviously it depends on the nature of stress. If its work stress and a deadline I work like crazy till I make sure that I meet the deadline" (Participant 4). When it comes to stress involving her children she deals with the stress in a fight manner just as she does with work load stress. She shared a story of a traumatic car accident involving her family, in this situation she also reacted in a fight manner. However she reacts differently to family confrontational stress. In that context she has a flight response approach:

Participant 4: I myself am a walk over generally, I come from a big family, my in-laws; my husband has got four brothers and all their wives and you know how that goes. And I'm generally the quite one who won't be offending to any body and won't say things out of turn and stuff. But not with the kids, ooh no I will kill someone [*laughs*] with them. We had this situation, you know when kids fight amongst themselves, I don't take non-sense when it comes to them. There was this bully at my son's school and I went and I approached him that time. But that's a different situation.

Participant 4 opposes the dominant discourse of the Tend and Befriend model which states that women are submissive and will tend to their children to calm them down during stress. In her response she illustrates how she is able to shift in her response from being "the quite one" to an elevated response of "I will kill someone". This reiterates the flexibility of her stress responses and contradicts the stereotypically rigid responses, such as nurturing and submission, advocated by the dominant discourse.

For Participant 5 the discourses are even more intricately interwoven. Participant 5 differentiates work stress between work stress for work and work stress for her studies. With work-related stress she says "I would like to resolve the situation, maybe sooner than if it is for myself" (Participant 5). She explained that with work the deadlines are a responsibility to others whereas with her studies the responsibility is with herself. In the case of her studies she is more likely to procrastinate. An understanding to this could be constructed as work gets an assertive fight response and her studies gets a more accommodating or comforting flight response.

It seems for all the participants there are two distinct types of stress namely work related stress and personal stress. It is noteworthy that all the participants illustrate an assertive work stress response. With work being public and thus more in the eye of the dominant discourse, I wonder if this assertive stress response is not a way these women on a daily basis voice their narratives of non-conformity and opposition to the dominant discourse of "women should not work"? The theme of using different stress responses is more appropriately and further investigated in the *stress response didactics theme*'s sub-theme: *using a conglomeration of models*.

3.4. Work as de-stressing place

Participant 1 explained thoroughly how she experiences and uses work as a place to work through and release or get rid of stress. This is interesting considering how work is often identified as a stress creating factor, which spills over into personal life where it is then released.

> Participant 1: ...look, for me the highest stress is simply you get up and you go to work. That is where my stress lies. My stress is not situated in my home. ... . I do not feel my stress here as I would feel it there. You have a task [to fulfil], stress lies in the e-mails, I find the students irritating, the computer bums out and I think is simply worse there. We really work together very well; we are a close-knit department. They are like family to me. But they are not your family. In a sense it may be easier, because they don't have to like me, so if they get cross, it is fine. ... . Because if they get cross, tonight we go home and tomorrow we have to talk [to one another] again.

Participant 1 explained earlier on that their secretary at work was like family, she said that she was almost like a "second mother" to her. I questioned Participant 1 on what she said in the passage about the family/ work colleague difference with regards to this statement about the secretary.

> Participant 1: ... I know if I am going to cause my mom to stress, she will cause my dad to stress. That exact same thing I spoke about. That enmeshment, where *secretary* stresses on her own or, uhm... She doesn't stress about me, really; whether she would be horrid towards me or whether she would stress, she does that on her own; so stresses on her own and that does not stress out the other people for whom I care, so that is easier. So that I can handle, because towards other people whom I must keep happy, I must be nice all the time.

Participant 1 constructs her work place as a place which causes stress for her. At the same time she describes it as a place where it is acceptable to be horrid to the people at work as a way to ward off additional stress, because she will not be rejected. In this way Participant 1 constructs her workplace as a place which causes her stress, but where she is allowed to leave

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the stress behind and act in ways which make people leave her alone and prevent them from stressing her further. In this way it seems the workplace allows Participant 1 to behave in a manner which opposes the gender stereotypical dominant discourse. If the workplace allows behaviour from women that weakens the argument of the dominant discourse this might aid in understanding why the dominant discourse opposes the idea of working women.

4. Self-tending

4.1. Self-tending through self-debriefing

This theme can be seen as a unique outcome of this study. As the participants and I talked and explored stress responses and the idea of tending I soon realised and saw that all the participants' interpreted tending as actually tending to themselves. This could be understood social constructionistically as a unique outcome demonstrating these women's opposition to the dominant discourse. This unique outcome opposes the dominant discourse as the response illustrates how these participants are able to behave in ways which help them cope with stress in order to look after themselves. It also illustrates how not all behaviour is based around the dominant discourses prescribed constant concern for women to have or care for children. This self-tending is in the form of, what I construct as, self initiated debriefing.

Tending here was not presented as seeking children, loved ones or others to tend to when stressed, as suggested by the Tend and Befriend model. Rather, it was these participants seeking people to debrief with as a secondary response to stress. This is a self-initiated, and it seems, self-regulated debriefing (self-debriefing) of stressful events on or to a close person or acquaintance who is willing to listen. One of these participants even reported that the relevance, interpretation or interest of the person listening was not as important as having someone to use as a soundboard to debrief. The following excerpts illustrate these points.

> Participant 1: But if I know, I haven't thought about it in this way, so if I know think about it, then I think yes, if something causes me to stress at work, I immediately talk to people, you know; yes, I actually talk about it a lot, and I talk to people who can help me, who can support me and who can offer me advice.

Participant 2: ...if somebody really upsets me, I will almost always get up immediately and go speak to somebody. Whoever happens to be the first to lend me an ear will hear from me.

... Or maybe more than one person will hear about it; I would tell it to *colleague* and perhaps to *colleague* as well [*laughs*] and then tell it to *husband*, too...

Participant 2: Mmm, yes, because somebody must hear about it [*laughs*].
Daniël: All right, but it is specifically for you, it's not for them?
Participant 2: No, it was for me.

Participant 3: Because you know, whatever you say... surely if you, if you're angry or nasty about something your not going to scream at a stranger or someone you barely know, you always go to the person you feel the most, ag what's the word... comfortable with.

Daniël: Ok, but does that help you to deal with it?
Participant 3: I get calm. That is something that I do when I stress. It's not a coping mechanism; it's just a reaction to, to being stressed out.

This is not tending as per Taylor et al. (2000) definition. It is more similar to debriefing, because the participants are not talking to others to calm them down or to lower the endocrine responses of their group or offspring. The participants self-tend in these situations to calm themselves down and voice whatever has caused the stress in a non-threatening environment. In calming themselves down in this way it seems that they are not tending to others but rather that they are self-tending.

4.2. Self-tending through situation comparison

Participant 5 had a different strategy in terms of self-tending. For Participant 5 she self-tends to her stress levels by seeking other people whom she can compare her stress to. She says "but if they're in a similar situation then it also gives me something to compare my own stress with, because they are in the same situation and they are calmer then it makes me realise, that hey you know what maybe it's not so bad" (Participant 5). She said that she finds it motivating as it shows her that she can cope. We also explored the occurrence of this

behaviour in terms of how it fits into her stress response. Participant 5 explained that it is a secondary stress reaction as "I think it's after the anger".

4.3. Self-tending through anger as resiliency construction

Anger is usually framed as a destructive ill adaptive force. It is thus refreshing to note and illustrate an alternate construction of anger with a different connection between meaning and action. Participant 5 explored her construction of anger with me as a coping mechanism.

How anger helps:

"I think it lets me get over the situation quicker because then I know that I have vented" (Participant 5).

> Participant 5: Then I've had like... then that is how I deal with the situation and then it's clearer for me to see the problem. Because once that's out the way, like often in situations like say traumatic situations; I've often heard, like you know, people go... if they've been through something traumatic then they go through different phases and sometimes the anger comes later, you know what I'm saying. And with me I think the anger comes first and then that's out the way and I can deal clear headed with the situation.

> Participant5: Ja, almost like a, a defence, I don't know. Like a defence mechanism.

Aggression in women is usually underreported in literature (Chesler, 2001; Simmons, 2002), however it is still constructed by the dominant discourse as an emotion, action, reaction or response which women are not capable of or which is 'un-lady like'. This response of Participant 5, utilising anger in this way, opposes the dominant discourse of the helpless maiden even further.

4.4. Using people that are close to you to let out stress

This theme links to the theme of self-tending. It is different as the participants here fight or act out against loved ones or people who are close to them as a way of tending to the self and relieving suppressed feelings of stress.

There are two participants who share this theme, Participant 1 and Participant 3. One way of understanding this theme is that when things upset the participants they feel that they need to say it. They are however, not always in a space where they can say what they want to say without being rejected or facing harsh consequences from people around them. However, when they are with those who they feel love them, and who they think would forgive them, they may use that interaction as a space to vent these feelings through their interaction with those people. "… people whom I know I won't cause stress. Like they would be cross, but it won't cause them any stress" (Participant 1). "Let me think. My sister thinks I've got anger management [*laughs*] ... she is there immediately so when I get angry at something especially after work I would probably become very snappy with her and become a bit cold" (Participant 3). This the participants, might feel, would soothe their need to debrief, and because these people are close to them the participants know that these feelings will not stay between them as the person or people listening will soon forgive the participants. "…that's why I go that far, because I know she loves me and will forgive me again. With my mom and *husband* it's exactly the same… And I know they're strong people; they can handle it" (Particpant 1).

> Participant 3: ...if you're angry or nasty about something you are not going to scream at a stranger or someone you barely know, you always go to the person you feel the most, ag what's the word... comfortable with. And they, they, they kind of regarded, I don't know, they are trusted.

This perhaps gives the participants a sense of power and control which they could not afford themselves in their initial stressful interaction where they had to act in a self-preserving manner that is safe and has the least negative impacting consequences.

5. Stress response didactics

5.1. Parental stress socialisation

The theory chapter illustrated how social constructionism advocates the idea of taken-for-granted knowledge. Parts of our taken-for-granted knowledge are things like gender and gender role socialisation (Burr 1995; Gergen 1999). In terms of gender role socialisation the

dominant discourse proposes that same-sex parent have the greatest influence on the child. In this section it is the socialisation of stress reactions which are explored. As expected of the theoretical background it was interesting that four out of the five women saw their same-sexed parent (mother) as the greatest influence on their individual stress reactions.

Participant 1: ...in a conflict situation in which I am confronted directly, I rather see my mom; I cannot really say that I see my dad in it. But when it comes to stress, that feeling of being sick in the stomach, heart beating, I don't think I act like either of them.

Participant 5: ...being an Indian my family situation was a lot different in the sense that my parents were quite open minded and I was brought up in a way to always accept my feelings and to be straight forward. Um not always blunt, like you know. But I think it stems from there that I was always given the opportunity to have my say and I was never treated like the child. Like there was never a hierarch in our family so I was always; there was mutual respect but I was treated as equal to the adults.

a) Same-sex parent socialisation

Based on the following excerpts, I suggest that the dominant discourse utilises the same-sex identification to perpetuate the stress reactions 'taken-on' by the participants in terms of their seeking same-sex socialisation for stress reduction.

Participant 1: Yes, my mom is awfully cheeky, and she calls a spade a spade; and I am just like that, uhm, yes, I am like that, I say it like it is. She also takes offence and she, too, will a take a person head on if he angers her, and that is what I find strange: of all things, that is what bothers me most about her.

Participant 2: In some respects it is good to remain calm if people start yelling at you, but in other situations it is better to fight and hold your own. ... I become angry because I cannot ... for myself... because I cannot defend myself. I think I might have learnt it from my mom; my mom could never defend herself against my dad; maybe I learned it from her. But I don't know; I have always been like that. I am... I am no fighter; and don't like fighting, and I avoid it.

Participant 3: Probably, I think, I think my mom always taught me to obviously be strong and deal with your own issues and not to dwell on things like that and to just move on and I suppose that is my view.

Participant 4: Look my mother is a great influence in my life, uh so I would say that a lot of my advice and my guidance comes from her.

Participant 4: She's a very passive human being if there were ever situations at varsity or at school or whatever, you could react one of two ways either you go and you make a big problem out of it or you choose to be the better one *laughs* and I've always been steered in that direction. To you know always think about what God wants you to do and you know that's not what life is about, so I would say definitely my mother is the greatest influence in my life [*laughs*]

Daniël: Ok, and is that on you being more passive in certain situations?

Participant 4: Oh yes definitely, I often blame when I'm angry, that's because of her that I am like this, definitely.

All of these participants showed how a part of their stress response socialisation can be strongly linked to their mothers (same-sex parent). Participant 1, Participant 4 and, to a certain degree, Participant 2 all expressed how they are uncomfortable with the response learnt from their mothers. The dominant discourse however, helps place us in these learning environments with its discourse which says "women should be like their mothers". This theme of the dominant discourse also links to the Tend and Befriend model which says through natural selection women pass responses to stress on from one generation to the next. The discomfort these participants show with their socialisation later on in this analysis creates the context in which it is possible for them to change how they respond to stress, from the way their mothers do.

b) Opposite sex socialisation

The dominant discourse says that men and women are not the same and that because of this the same-sexed parent is the main socialising agent for the child. This theme gave an alternate construction of how these participants acquired their stress response socialisation. It

illustrated how the stress response socialisation of these participants was influenced by both parents in different ways.

Participant 1 and Participant 5 can be grouped together in the father stress response socialisation in terms of having learnt an aspect of responding, reacting or dealing with stress. For both of them this influence was not dominant however, it was substantial enough for them to mention it as a part of learnt stress response construction.

For Participant1 her father made up part of how she handled stress at one stage in terms of bundling stress up in side. In her case it is interesting that her husband also had an influence on her stress in terms of helping her change this type of response, in the next section we will look at that in more detail.

> Participant 1: He handles, he handles all of his stress all by himself. Everything; so I think I have, to a large extent, handled all of my stress all by myself for a very long period in my life. I must admit, *husband* actually helped much, to do more... stop it; it wasn't altogether your fault. Therefore I think, uhm, I don't know, I definitely shared some of his tendencies.

> Participant 5: So I think part of it stems from that. Um maybe the anger came, like maybe that's something that like, my dad is a lot alike, but he doesn't, he also expresses his feelings but not out of anger. So, so the anger is like something that maybe might not have been learnt. But that is the way I deal with the situation, but it comes from always being able to have my say.

Participant 2 is different to Participant 1 and Participant 5, in that her construct is of a learnt response is not an observational learnt response but rather a reactional learnt response. In other words instead of acting the same way her father does in response to stress, Participant 2 now has constructed her view of authoritative figures as her father and reacts in stressful situations to them as she would react to her father - by taking a one down position or by avoiding it or by assuming guilt to calm them down and prove herself afterwards.

Participant 2: I don't know, I am very scared – I think as a result of my dad – of bosses, you know, because he very often grounded me and he used to be very unfriendly towards me. Therefore I have much respect and reverence for any boss who is appointed above me. I won't take any chances and I will do my job; and when he summons me to his office, my heart goes 'thump, thump' as though I had done something wrong, and I would be scared.

5.2. Can a stress response change?

Some participants felt that their responses to stress are inherent, uncontrollable and thus also unchangeable. Others saw it as something which can be changed wilfully over time. Those that thought it was possible had examples of how they have and were busy changing their ways of responding to stress.

Participant 3: I use to close the door to my office, and speak to no one and deal with my own stress and worries. Now I'm more interactive with people and I speak probably about it more, I learnt to delegate much more as well...

Participant 4 has begun to change and is still in the process of adapting her stress response. It is interesting to note that her children were the triggers for a more assertive fight type of stress response. This is in contrast to Taylor et al.'s (2000) idea of childrearing attributing to a tending or befriending reaction. Here we see how having children helped Participant 4 decide to take a more assertive position and to actively in this way "train", as she calls it, her children differently to how her mother " trained" her.

Participant 4: ...No I just got tired of um just accepting everybody and everything and I decided now you know what I have growing kids and I want them to learn that you need to stand up for what you believe in and really you need to say what you believe in and what you mean even if it is hurtful to other people you need to be honest. You don't need to just, you know, make sure that everyone is friends with you and always say what you think they want to hear. No [*giggles*].

For these Participants there were various points that lead them to a position where they felt that the way they are dealing with stress is not as effective as they would like and that they

had to select and implement a different approach and style to reacting to and dealing with stress.

> Participant 3: ... When I started doing my internship together with my job and finishing my thesis and running my department on my own it became obvious that I needed to let go of something.

> Participant 4: It made me realise that if I don't say what I mean or whatever I bottle it up and it hurts me and upsets me. Like by the same token as I'm telling you with the in-laws, if one of me said something to me I couldn't say anything back, but it upsets me that I could have said this and I should have said that, you know. So I've now reached a new point where I've decided, obviously not all at once the change comes gradually, but I'm most certainly changing.

For Participant 5 this was slightly different in that she consciously has been adapting her stress response and reported no turning point in her response, rather just a constant "evolution" of it. "I think has been, not honed, but that evolve, uh yes that evolved over time and this is now like almost a standard response" (Participant 5).

> Participant 5: For me it is successful, it works for me and that's why I think it continues to happen *laughs*. But um it may not work for others, no.

> Daniël: ...you evaluate it because sometimes after responding like that you would check: Ok what impact did that have and what do I need to do now?
> Participant 5: Yes

Proactively changing and revising the way in which Participant 4 and Participant 5 react to stress is in contradiction with the participants who believe your stress response cannot be changed, who only had ideologies to back what they were saying. It is interesting that the belief around changeability of stress reaction seemed to correspond to constructions around sense of control and effectiveness of stress reaction. The two participants who constructed stress response as instinct which cannot be changed also experienced more anxiety and less

control in their lives, compared to the level of coping and increased coping experienced by the other three participants who constructed stress response as changeable and changing.

Participant 1: You cannot, you cannot decide beforehand 'This is what I think of stress and this is how I wish to act.' I would very much like to be much nicer when I am under stress; things like that; you cannot do it. Every time I think, 'Gee, I am going to be nicer, now,' but I don't make it happen.

Participant 2: No, no. How to act is not something that you analyse scientifically before reacting. You, I, if I would now fight with someone, and did not think beforehand, 'Will I now Fight or Flight; strictly speaking, I am not supposed to do this; I am supposed to do that.' You react solely as a result of things that have transpired in your life; how you feel and whether you suffer from PMS on that day and whether you feel hungry and like someone else had stolen your chocolate; all of those things have a bearing on how you would react at that specific moment. So no, I would not say that you would change yourself in order to comply with a model.

5.3. Consequences of reactions

In a way this section adds to the previous section dealing with the changeability of a person's stress response. It is rather interesting to note that the participants portray being able to change their stress response actions based on work-related consequences. The two participants noted in this section fall within the group of participants who construct stress responses as changeable, thus it further attests to their construction of stress responses. This illustrates how different dominant discourses act within the participants' various contexts and leads me to believe that within varying contexts different discourses are given voice while others are silenced.

In the example below Participant 3 shows how she had to adapt her stress response as her work responsibility changed.

Participant 3: Because I didn't, there was not that much at stake, I didn't have to.., cause now obviously professionally and ethically I have to ensure that everything is

fine. Where before the stakes weren't that high, so I didn't really pay attention... I'm probably a much more patient now than what I use to be.

In the following conversation excerpt Participant 5 illustrates how she is aware that she has to make an active mind shift when responding to stressful situations created by her boss.

Daniël: Who would you not respond to in that way?

Participant 5: Um, my boss for example; I would be a little more restrained *giggles*

Daniël: *laughs* Ok and how do you restrain yourself?

Participant 5: Um, I just don't say as much. I just keep quiet.

Daniël: Ok

Participant 5: I would state the case, but um in a more diplomatic manner.

This way of being more restrained when reacting to stress in front of her boss, shows how a dominant discourse becomes visible. It brings about the dominant construction which says "women must be act restrained; remain calm and collected". A boss is an authoritative workplace figure which governs the behaviour of her/ his employees and can hold them accountable for misconduct. In this construction it then makes sense that such a power differential would call for behaviour which conforms to the dominant discourse of what is appropriate behaviour, in this case for a woman to respond with restraint to stress.

5.4. Accepting biological arguments above all

In this section the participants and I explore the influence of the dominant scientific discourse represented by scientific models and whether it adds to the socialisation or construction of how these participants construct their stress responses. The aim was thus to investigate if the dominance of the Tend and Befriend stress response model 'over powers' the individual understanding of how the participants react to stress. I included this sub-theme to the *stress response didactics* theme for two reasons. Firstly, to illustrate how strongly the participants reported the dominant discourse surrounding 'biology' or 'natural science' to be in informing their constructions. Secondly, to explore the power relations between a discourse set in rigid stereotypical terms and the constructions of the participants.

Daniël: So do you find it easier to accept the model because I have now mentioned to you that the proof is of a biological nature?

Participant 1: Yes, yes, I find it easier to say: "okay, I will accept this".

I asked Participant 1 what she thought about the idea of a model predicting how she will react to stress just on grounds of her being a woman. Her response was that she could not respond in opposition to the model because I mentioned that it has biological 'evidence' as part of its argument. In this way it illustrates the subtle nature of the dominant discourse informing her construction regarding the predictive value of models and her 'not fitting in'.

Participant 1: Okay, now if there is biological proof; you have certain A, B, C hormones and they say, as a result of your blood and your this and your that, how can you really contest that, you know? ... That is empirical proof, you know, then it might surpass, I mean, biology is biology – you cannot dispute it, you know.

Participant 1 did however take a stand against the dominant discourse by explaining that she thinks that a person's personality is not biological and it influences how that person acts or behaves. Ultimately biological 'evidence' overrides personality influences for her, perhaps illustrating how strong the constructed reality as informed by the dominant discourse is.

Participant 2 had a different construction of the biological influence. She too views biological 'evidence' as carrying a substantial weight. However, she came forth with a very valuable view and critique against the Tend and Befriend model.

Participant 2: Well, I don't really feel funny about it, because I, uhm, I am no feminist. Therefore I am not going to say, 'How dare you say, you know, that it is only women who react like that?' Uhm, but if you consider it scientifically and they say, you know, the oestrogen promotes that... what is it – Osto..., what is that other thing called?

Daniël: Uhm, Oxytocin.

Participant 2: ... there are also women who have more oestrogen and women who have more testosterone. [...] Uhm, what will influence it, and that is why you will then get a woman who is more masculine, and I am probably one who now has more oestrogen... And you also get men who have more oestrogen than... so you can even manoeuvre it

from a scientific angle and maintain that a man who is more feminine will also go there; and a woman with more testosterone will lean more towards the masculine side. So I really do not feel funny about it at all; I think, generally speaking, women will rather do that.

This statement from Participant 2 meets the biological discourse on its own terms. Participant 2 asked, simply and directly "what about women who have higher than average testosterone levels?" Meeting the discourse on its own terms and in its own playing field Participant 2 perhaps uses the theory to set itself up for failure, although these considerations might be valuable it does however fall outside the scope of the current research.

The following quote from Pauw (2009) perhaps brings the biologically framed construction back to the socially natured construction of this research. In the quote Pauw is talking about the construction of sexed bodies and the discourses concerning it. This links in essence to the current theme. "The naturalisation of these differences embedding them in so-called biological nature, legitimates social power structures and inequalities whereby power hierarchies become difficult to challenge given their pre-cultural status, and so bodies acquire a natural, taken-for-granted status" (Pauw, 2009, p. 34).

In the exploration presented in this theme it became apparent to me that biological 'evidence' held taken-for-granted knowledge which both of the participants adhered to by accepting the model based on the presence of biological 'evidence'. Participant 2 however did question the biological 'evidence' on its own grounds after stating that it too holds a lot of authority. Utilising this dominant discourse which is set up as 'truth' thus seemed to make the Tend and Befriend model more dominant and thus made it more difficult for the participants to oppose, reject or take a stand against the dominant discourse.

5.5. Do models replace our knowledge?

In this theme the participants and I explored their opinions on whether models which explain behaviour alter the way they understand or interpret things. There were two types of responses from the participants. I will explain each followed by the excerpts supporting the response of the participants.

The first type of response was: no, models do not have that much power. In the excerpts below the participants explain that models are not just adopted, as they need to suit the person. Some participants said that models are not diverse enough and can thus not be relied upon solely. Other participants explained that to maintain autonomy in your thinking you cannot just accept models.

Participant 1: No, I don't think so, not for me personally, because it, I cannot say that I let go of everything because this model prescribes to me how I should think about stress. I still think personality is important. And I don't think that model takes cognisance of the fact that personalities play a part; it is basically based upon biology.

Participant 3: I won't straight away give up my thinking of something, because they now came up with a model or afraid of a model which kind of fits in with what I think, definitely not. Um, I think most of the models are designed obviously situation specific or restricting. You can't just look at one model and interpret everyone and ... take everyone according to it.

Participant 4: No, I think it depends on how strong you are in your personality is and if you choose to believe what you really think or [*laughs*] what everyone else thinks.

The second type of response was a variation on the first. In it the participants said that models do not override their understanding; rather the models get integrated into their arsenal of ways of understanding and looking at things. I use the word arsenal here to convey the sense of empowerment with which the participants explained their integration of new knowledge, existing knowledge and experience in handling stress.

Participant 3: Yes to some degree, to stop and look at the context maybe and see, maybe that would be a nice, nice uh way of using it in a coaching environment or leadership development environment to help the team interpret their behaviours or to see how they can reduce their stress by maybe understanding other colleagues. But that is definitely is not the only way of dealing with stress. Our use is more constructively other than that.

Participant 5: ...from a personal point of view no, but often the model just substantiates that, substantiates the way we do things. So for example; say the way I do if I want to read up on a particular model I'm not going to abandon that in the context.

Participant 2 related the model to her understanding of income tax law. She explained through her example that she sees models like laws because as with laws there are always exceptions to models.

In both the first and the second type of response the participants illustrated how they place value on their autonomy in their thinking and what constitutes knowledge for them. My understanding to this is that even in the second response where there is room for integration the participants frame their responses in a way that illustrates to me that they hold the power. This is in terms of what they accept and apply to their lives, thus in their private narratives.

5.6. Using a conglomeration of models

After establishing the individual models of the participants and reviewing the Tend and Befriend model it was interesting to note that a few of the participants felt that they do not subscribe to any specific model. They felt, rather, that they were using or subscribing to a conglomeration of the scientific models.

Participant 2 said that she does not think the models are so exclusive. This is in opposition to the dominant scientific discourse of the Tend and Befriend model which claims exclusivity for stress responses. She said it is not that you are a "fighter or a flighter" (Participant 2) you are rather more of the one than the other. Personally she felt: "Of all four of those, I think at one stage or another I probably do them all" (Participant 2), the four is a reference to tend, befriend, fight and flight. To sum it up, she explained, "You adapt to the circumstances in which you find yourself" (Participant 2). Compared to the exclusivity of stress response models this construction of a continuum of responses is a unique outcome.

Participant 2 stated that she reacts differently to different types of stress:

Participant 2: ... if it is a deadline that I stress about, then I would talk to no one or I... I would simply focus 100%; there would be no time to stress about it… Uhm, but things other than a deadline... such as, say, when I am worried that the company won't survive... I'd lie awake at night, thinking about it and I'd try to make plans all the time and think about what I would do, how we would survive...

In the following two excerpts, Participant 3 explains how she interprets scientific models, their use and value to her, thereby deconstructing them on a personal level:

Participant 3: Ja, it basically gives you some framework, in which you can interpret your behaviours, but I guess it will still stay the same way it just helps you kind of box your own behaviours and your own responses. It does not necessarily help you cope better.

...I usually like to combine different models and then obviously add my own interpretation to it… I think most of the models are designed obviously situation specific or restricting. You can't just look at one model and interpret everyone and put everyone... [*pauses to rephrase*] take everyone according to it.

This theme is another unique outcome as it is an alternate construction to singular behavioural models. The participants illustrated the (often reported) complexity of human behaviour in using a conglomeration of models. This theme reminded me of a quote from Gergen "Science is communal rhetoric, with scientists working within the parameters of agreements or conventions about what constitutes science" (Gergen, 2001 as in Pauw 2009, p. 13). The participants illustrate how the agendas and parameters of science is exactly that, they belong to science. In other words even though the dominant discourse influences the participants constructions and some of their behaviour, ultimately the onus of how they apply it, integrate, understand and even adapt, it is up to them.

Conclusion

In exploring the stress response models as stress response possibilities it became more evident that the participants are not and cannot be limited to the scope of a model, especially not to the Tend and Befriend model.

With regard to the Tend and Befriend model it became clear in the interviews that the participants really do, as proposed, fall outside the scope of the model. 'Testing' the model also proved problematic as it had various short comings in terms of its scope of application and the limitations set by the stereotyped nature of the model, as reported by the participants.

The limitations in the models and the continued inability to categorise the participants inside the scope of the models, despite the dominant discourses' strongest efforts, lead to a significant alternative to stress, in terms of the model. The alternative has now been unveiled and reconstructed as the unique outcome of the study: self-tending. Whether the response was related to fight or flight or tend and befriend type responses, in each case it seemed that the motive was self-tending.

Although the purposeful delaying of pregnancy is an academic theme which receives quite a bit of attention and places these participants outside the scope of the Tend and Befriend model, I have realised there is an error in the semantics of the phrase. The word 'delay' positions pregnancy as an inevitable occurrence, but this will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter in which the findings are further scrutinised.

The *stress response didactics* theme set the stage for sensitivity on the influence various things have on us and our intriguing seemingly endless trainability. It seemed that although parents did have a great influence on the foundation of the stress response approaches or constructions of all the participants, it turned out not to be the final approach of each of the participants. The participants showed how continued life exposure moulded their stress response approaches. Some even started mastering their stress response approaches in the sense that they had started wilfully directing the adaptation of their stress response approaches to ways that better suite their needs. Together the participants and I explored the idea of scientific knowledge having more authority in an individual's thinking than in their own understanding. It seemed that although scientific knowledge had an influence, and even some negative effects, the participants remained in a position to manipulate the application of scientific knowledge.

The findings constructed various unique outcomes such as a *"just do it"*, *self-tending* and *stress response approach*. These three outcomes were the major unique outcomes. As a

whole the personal narrative theme of taking a stand for themselves and opposing the dominant discourse was the shared and unique outcome of all the participants.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter serves as a witness to the participants and a further deconstruction of the dominant discourse. In this chapter I revisit and integrate themes from the research overview (chapter three) with themes from the data analysis (chapter five). To do this I have created the following themes in this chapter: *socialisation*; *tend and befriend as suppressor*; *feedback on gender differences*; and *the power-over of the dominant discourse*. I utilise the last mentioned theme as a bridging section, by revisiting literature, to the second part of this chapter in which I explain emergent themes and unique outcomes of this study. This chapter is concluded with a discussion of the limitations to this study, recommendations for future research and a concluding reflection.

1. Socialisation

In the research overview (chapter three) I explained that the Tend and Befriend model of Taylor et al. (2000) follows an evolutionary psychology perspective. They state that women have evolved their stress response due to natural selection. According to this only stress responses which aid in the survival of women are passed on from one generation to the next, arguably through social learning. Taylor et al. (2000) argue that because women have spent most of their time rearing, feeding and protecting children over multiple generations, they have become genetically programmed to respond to stress in a way which not only protects or reduces risk for themselves but also for their children.

In the stress response didactics theme in the analysis (chapter five) I illustrated how according to the social constructions and continual constructive experiences of the participants it is not only biology which determines their behavioural options. Rather for the participants there are many role players and contributors in the construction of their stress responses, from parents to the dominant discourse and stress response models.

All the participants showed cognisance of their stress socialisation and the role players involved. For all the participants except for Participant 5, the main and original socialising influence was their same-sex parent. This finding has a gender-role socialisation argument, it holds two very important factors which directly affect the original departure point of understanding to this research and lends insight into how, and perhaps why, none of these women blindly adopted the Tend and Befriend model or replaced their understandings with it.

If we follow the natural selection rationale of Taylor et al. (2000) it would make sense that women learn nurturing behaviour from their mothers, because their mothers would act in a nurturing way due to the suggested influence of oxytocin. Having oxytocin levels higher than those of men (Taylor et al., 2000), it would thus be easy to naturally acquire a learnt behaviour from the same-sex parent. For the participants in this research this was however not the case.

Two of the participants have socialisation backgrounds which fit the above. However they contradict the claims of the example because their outcome was different to that of the behaviour of their mothers. Participant 2 and Participant 4 explained maternal behaviour of submission and a childrearing focus exhibited by their mothers which could fit the dominant discourse of women's behaviour, required by the Tend and Befriend model. Participant 1 and Participant 3 also stated that their mothers were their main stress response socialisation influences. However in their case their mothers both had a more assertive stress response style and thus did not fit the dominant discourse expectations as well as the mothers of the other two participants. The diversity and similarities present in this small sample is surprising, especially seeing that both of these groupings are culturally and linguistically mixed. These two groupings of constructing influences contradict the conformity and generalisation of the dominant discourse on the 'nature of mothers' as portrayed by Taylor et al. (2000). Furthermore all five participants illustrated how they have changed their behaviour and thus respond differently to stress in ways different to that of their mothers. This they said was because they had other experiences and influences which socialised them, taught and demanded from them a different way of dealing with stress to that of their mothers.

Participant 1 and Participant 2, who argued that your stress response is not something which you can change, showed in their examples how they knowingly respond differently to how

their mothers did because it is more effective for them. For participant 1 this meant that she was more controlled than her mother when stressed and that she dealt better with situations in which the rest of her family stressed, than what her mother did. In Participant 2's case this meant she could stand up more for herself than what her mother could in a stressed context. Although it perhaps counters their arguments, it adds to the larger argument of the other participants in the sense that they are able to direct and change their stress responses. It shows that they perceive the stress demands on them as different from that of their mothers and that they know that failure to adapt their reactions can hamper their functioning and even survival. This contradicts the Tend and Befriend model's notion of natural selection. I mean this socially and not biologically, as that falls outside the scope of the research. One way to construct this would be that it socially confirms the niche construction argument used in chapter three of Laland et al. (2000) who showed that natural selection can be wilfully directed. In other words, the participants showed that they can wilfully change their socialisation and if they have children they can tailor their role in the socialisation of their children, like in the case of Participant 4.

I am thus persuaded by my interpretation of the data that for these participants this understanding of the need for contextual adaptation provides a degree of resiliency against converting to scientific models and the dominant discourse which seems to inform these models and our constructions thereof.

2. Tend and befriend as suppressor

The Tend and Befriend model proposes to stand up for the differences in the position of the stress responses of women compared to men. However, as proposed in the research overview (chapter three) the Tend and Befriend model perhaps fails in its objective of representing and not suppressing women, through the consequences which such a model holds for individuals who fall outside or on the boundary of its scope. Thereby failing, and in this way falling into the clutches of the dominant discourse and perpetuating its power.

This assumption was proven to be the case as seen in the *experience of falling outside the scope of the Tend and Befriend model* section of the analysis (chapter five). Here Participant 1 immediately considered the possibility that because she does not fit the model she might be abnormal. She tried to conclude that if she does not fall into the Tend or Befriend model then

she stresses like a man, because women are said not to fight or flight but to tend and befriend. Thus those women failing to prescribe to the model, and dominant discourse, are either classified as manly or 'abnormal'. This power that the discourse exerts makes taking a stand against the dominant discourse a very tricky endeavour. The consequence and classification of not conforming has left these participants questioning their agency as women, in the sense that seeing themselves respond to stress different to how the Tend and Befriend model suggests women should respond to stress, has the left these participants feeling abnormal.

Models need boundaries and a limit in their scope for it to be a model and to have a voice. The side effect of this is that with boundaries and limits in scope there are always cases which fall in these blurred lines and which test the boundaries. The danger lies in scopes that are too limited as this has the possibility of eventually becoming unrepresentative, irrelevant or possibly damaging. The result, however, is the marginalising of a community of people. In this study the women who did not fit the model, and discourse, are marginalised and left standing on the periphery, which is a difficult position to navigate.

3. Feedback on gender differences

In the chapter three I used Weekes et al.'s (2005) research on the sex difference in the impact of stress on health, to assist in questioning the type of stress perceived versus stressor exposure, used by stress response models. My data adds to and contradicts some of their findings.

Firstly I found that most of the participants do use an emotional approach to deal with stress, but only with certain types of stress and in certain situations. Secondly I found that the participants mostly referred to perceived threat rather than actual threat when reporting on stress. Both of these finding correspond with the findings of Weekes et al. (2005).

Weekes et al. (2005) construction of stress responses says that men have a problem solving approach to stress, in contrast to the emotional approach which they say women use. I found opposing constructions that all five the participants use a problem solving approach when dealing with work load stress. Although it should be said that this response was not as common in other forms of stress for the participants, it still poses a contradictory construction of their findings to a certain extent.

4. The 'power-over' of the dominant discourse

By using biological 'evidence' to support their claims the Tend and Befriend model imposes, perhaps unintentionally, an incontestable model. The medical paradigm eliminates or narrows what choices there are for people who fall inside or outside of their demographic (sex-specific in this case), in terms of accepting or contesting it, because of the concrete nature of biological boundaries. This can be seen in Taylor et al.'s (2002) stated biological based exclusion of men from the Tend and Befriend model. Thus it poses inherently a power-over what choices are available, (Kabeer, 1994).

In the *power* theme of the research overview (chapter three) I explained Kabeer's (1994) concept of 'power-over'. Kabeer (1994) uses the term 'power-over' to refer to the power of restricting and allowing things which others may decide on, is thus not concerned with the ability of making decisions, as we find with the 'power-to'. In that section I proposed that models like the Tend and Befriend model which employs this 'power-over' limits the 'power-to' of persons. In the process of uncovering discourse in the data analysis this theme also emerged.

What I am arguing is that instead of presenting limited choices to women it limits the choices to only itself. In the *accepting biological evidence above all* sub-theme of the data analysis chapter, Participant 1 illustrated this 'power-over' principle when she said: "biology is biology – you cannot dispute it" (Participant 1). If I rephrase it into the 'power-over' argument Participant 1 said that she has no choice in agreeing to the model as the presence of biological 'evidence' closes all alternate constructions. This is also evident in the previous argument: *tend and befriend as suppressor* where I illustrated how the participants who did not fit into the model were marginalised by its dominant discourse and left boundaried on the periphery.

5. Moving from stress response reality to stress response approach

During the analysis of the data I became aware of the difference of meaning in the two terms stress response reality and stress response approach. After I explain these two terms it should be clear that I now have moved to using the term stress response approach when speaking of the way participants respond to stress. Stress response reality should then be understood as an artefact constructed by stress response models.

A stress response reality implies a larger theoretical concept than what I had understood in the initial stages of the research. After conducting the research I can now better explain the concept of stress response reality which was used in the chapter one, the introduction and chapter three, the research overview. A stress response reality is conceptually created by the 'power-over' which biological arguments hold as part of the dominant scientific discourse in which they find themselves. This concept was revisited in the previous section *the 'power-over' of the dominant discourse*. What it thus means for the term stress response reality is that the Tend and Befriend model creates a specific stress response reality for the population (women) which falls within its scope. By using biological 'evidence' or discourse in the way which the Tend and Befriend model does it theoretically leaves women with only one choice-conformity. The participants illustrated that even with the 'power-over' present to some degree, ultimately models are integrated into the participants stress response approaches, which then broadens the variations in their stress response approaches.

The term stress response approach is a co-construction which emerged out of the *using a conglomeration of models* sub-theme of the data analysis (chapter five). I define a stress response approach as the strategy the participants use to react to context specific stress types. The strategy is the result of socialisation experience and integrated knowledge which is situated within a discursive landscape and employed to deal and cope with the stress or stressor, however successfully.

I make this emphasis on stress response approach, because in the research I have come to realise that there is no set stress response for these participants. The participants made me aware of how each of them had different approaches to their stress responses, although in some cases the approaches almost seemed to be shared constructions. It is a stress response approach, because the response is influenced by a large spectrum of variables which influence how the response is contextualised. These variables seem to be the following: the nature of the stress; the consequences of the stress; the control or influence the participant has on the stress; and the impact of the stress on the participant. These are discussed briefly:

The nature of the stress refers to the type of stress faced. In other words is it work load, financial, safety, survival, physical, emotional or other types of stress. The consequences of

the stress refer to the consequences which both the stress and the response to the stress from the participant hold for the participant. In other words what consequences does the stress or stressor hold? Such as a deadline or accident involving the participant's family. Secondly what are the consequences of the possible stress responses, for example some of the participants said that they would prefer to fight or confront people who threaten or stress them at work but in many cases this would lead to unemployment. They then actively have to take a different stress response approach to handle the situation more strategically. The level of control perceived also influences the responses. This was illustrated in a few of the participant's notions that their reactions are aimed at regaining a sense of control. To link the level of the feeling of not having control to the type or intensity of the stress response would influence the approach taken.

Constructing, implementing and reporting their stress response approaches, as defined above, the participants constructed a unique outcome against the dominant discourse. The participants did this by reporting how they use a conglomeration of ways, in terms of models and their own construction, of responding to stress. They did this in the face of strong dominant scientific discourses of how women should respond to stress. To add to the dominance of the discourse they were interviewed on this topic by a man. This is significant as dominant discourses which classify, prescribe and limit women's behaviour as a dominant discourse of its own, which states that this is the agenda of men and the 'male-stream' of science. With all of these additions to the context of the dominant discourse the participants opposed it and voiced their construction about how they respond to stress and a refusal to conform to the dominant discourse.

6. Gender traps imbedded in literature via language

I became aware of the embedded gender-stereotype of the phrase 'delaying pregnancy' after completing the analysis. To perhaps make matters worse this phrase from Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (2001) appears in a few of my data analysis titles. It is a gender trap which I found myself caught in. The phrase 'delaying pregnancy': is meant as an empowering phrase showing how women now can wilfully have a say over and delay having children and follow other ventures or aspirations. I was only alerted whilst completing my analysis of the impact of the phrase and its implications for my research. It influenced the way I phrased my questions to the participants. I realised that my questions around children

and having children or delaying pregnancy were met with a defensive feeling by some participants. I came to the realisation that the word 'delaying' in that phrase holds the key to the defensive feeling, because 'delaying' frames what is to follow as inevitable. By phrasing it as women delaying pregnancy to further their education or pursue career options or advancement implies unfairly that while the women are involved in these activities they have to put off this 'inevitable'. There are women who can and want to have children and then there are women with no wish to do so, or who choose to have children only in later adult life (Gillespie, 2003). "In Western societies, pronatalist cultural discourses establish a template of femininity whereby motherhood is perceived to be the cornerstone of adult femininity and the desire for motherhood and the role of mothering central to what it means to be a woman" (Gillespie, 2003, p. 123).

Girls are able to fall pregnant soon after the onset of puberty, yet no one speaks of an early adolescent girl as delaying pregnancy to complete school. One could argue inline with developmental psychological theory and say that the developmental needs of an (early) adolescent girl is not the same as that of a woman in early adulthood, when starting a family might become a need (Louw, Van Ede, & Louw, 1998). However, with the change in educational aspirations and requirements for certain work fields, as more women enter previously male-dominated work areas, the wish to bear children might only come in later adult life (Gillespie, 2003). I do wonder whether this developmental stage, if it is broadly applicable and still relevant, might be shifting to a later age, or at least so for some groups. Gillespe (2003) explained that the trend to choose not to have children or to only have children later in life seems to correlate with higher educational levels and socio-economic class. She speaks of 'child free couples' instead of 'childless' couples with the emphasis of not having children out of free choice (Gillespie, 2003). This trend might also be linked to the limits in the phrase 'delaying pregnancy'.

My questions around children in the interviews were aimed at establishing whether the participants follow the childrearing or offspring safe-guarding needs suggested by the Tend and Befriend model. I chose to keep this phrase in my analysis titles as those themes dealt with the participants' power-over with regards to their pregnancy decisions as well as the corporate expectations on pregnancy which Participant 3 faces. It further adds to the process of deconstruction in the reading of this study as well as future deconstructions that may take

place for each reader after reading this manuscript. I also tried to establish whether the participants deem other demands in life and indeed career aspirations as more important than having children in their early adulthood. This is done to show how women are not just nurturing beings as implied by Taylor et al. (2000) and by the dominant discourse in society. Rather, it shows that they can fight for their aspirations and indeed have the power-over their bodies where they are free to choose not to have children even whilst married. It illustrates, a unique outcome, that they can be bread winners and so choose not to follow the dominant discourses of society. Or alternately this might also show that there is a change happening in the general dominant discourse on the right to a power-over for women on topics like the body and workplace. As more women enter the workforce and attain education on higher levels, the expectations on 'choice' or rights or access or even power-over for women are also adapting and moving to a higher status.

7. Self-tending

As mentioned I could find little or no constructions supporting the tending or befriending responses with the motivation described by Taylor et al. (2000). I did however find self-tending, which is one of main unique outcomes of this study. Additionally I could find no similar research in the literature to explain self-tending. It should be said, however, that although this response seems unique and different to the Tend and Befriend model it does fit the core theme of the model which is that of forming networks of association to reduce stress and create safety for women (Taylor et al., 2000). I have to emphasise that the participants did not form networks of association to neutralise the stressor and the safety created was only feelings of safety. These last two mentioned differences are only the start of the alternate and opposing response co-constructed between the participants and me, as interviewer, analyst and researcher.

What I interpreted in the data was that all of these participants, as a secondary response to stress were seeking ways to tend to themselves. This self-tending construction can be described as a form of debriefing and self-care. The debriefing was self-initiated and inputs or listening from others did not seem to be what is sought as much as an opportunity to voice their (the participants') stress and discomfort. It is not tending but self-tending, because the participants were not talking to others to calm them down but rather to calm themselves down and to generate support in some situations.

In some cases the participants acted out their stress and tension, but only on loved ones or people which they knew could forgive them and would not reject them. It could be suggested that this acting out seems to take place only in more intense stress situations and only for participants who in general have a predominant fight type or aggressive stress response approach.

Another form of the self-tending shown was situational stress comparison. Participant 5 explained that by looking at how someone in a similar situation is calmer than what she might be motivates her and helps realise that she can be calmer. In this way she self-tends by perhaps seeking supporting stories from her peers about how what she is experiencing is not as stressful as what she perceives it to be, almost as if she is comforting herself.

Writing up the data analysis gave me the perspective that secondary responses to stress are not responses for safety in terms of neutralising the stressor or escaping the stressor. Rather, my construction of self-tending consists of recuperating reactions which recover coping resources and energy, to help the person regroup and deal with the stressor or stress event. In social construction terms the self-tending perhaps is in a bid to recover energy spent in handling stress and readying the person to be able not only to function optimally afterwards, but also to be ready to perhaps face more stress.

To link all of this back to the dominant discourse, the self-tending construct is perhaps utilised by the participants because they in many ways do not fit the Tend and Befriend model. They have perhaps, as suggested earlier constructed this response in opposition to the model as their own way of coping with stress. Opposing the model in this way reiterates their autonomy and makes a stand for these women as persons who are 'normal' in their own right and independent of models. This study, its focus, topic and approach has constructed a space to voice this and co-construct this alternate response.

8.   Befriending for an active return on investment

The Tend and befriend model describes befriending as reducing risk by forming new networks of association and affiliating with social groups during a stressful event or when confronted by a stressor (Taylor et al., 2000). The befriending response according to the model is thus a primary and immediate response to stress. The participants however

employed befriending primarily as a workplace strategy to maintain good work relations and prevent unnecessary future stress. Friendliness and courtesy was reported by one participant as the maintenance and instigator of this strategy. Befriending in this alternate way was employed in various circumstances. Firstly, it was employed before stress was present as a precautionary measure. In a second instance it was employed during workplace confrontation situations to contain the situation and reduce the risk and stress. As a third example this way of befriending was a secondary response to prevent future stress from the same source, as explained in the '*befriending as workplace strategy*' sub-theme of chapter five.

9. Revisiting the departure point understanding

I have journeyed through this research dissertation in terms of the deepening of my understanding of social constructionism, the integration of theory into practice in the interviewing process, the transcription and analysis thereof. Through this journey my departure point understanding to this research has changed. The change of position in the emergent phrase 'stress response approach' along with the deepened understanding and increased sensitivity of the "power-over" in the phrase 'stress response reality' has also been very important in my understanding.

In chapter one (the introduction) my departure point of understanding to this research was that professional women construct individual stress response realities socially and these types of individual socially constructed realities are influenced and perhaps even replaced by bio-behavioural or medical type models like the Tend and Befriend model.

From my data analysis I managed to arrive at answers to this departure point understanding which has helped me reconstruct this understanding. However, the answers pertain only to my participants at this socially constructive juncture. A summative answer would be firstly that yes, the participants' socially constructed stress responses are influenced by the stress response reality created by the Tend and Befriend model, as an example of a bio-behavioural medical type model. Secondly, no the participants did not replace their socially constructed stress responses with the Tend and Befriend stress response model. In attempting to answer this I realised the impact and importance and limit in application of the new emergent terms 'stress response approach' and 'stress response reality'. Although stress response reality has

been used since the beginning of this research its meaning is still new and emergent, as explained earlier on in this chapter.

The reconstruction of my understanding, which is informed by my participants, is that professional women construct their individual stress response approaches socially. These individual socially constructed approaches are influenced by the stress response realities created by dominant scientific discourses employed by bio-behavioural or medical type models like the Tend and Befriend stress response model.

Note that this is only an updated construction of my understanding and not a factual generalisation, as the data and analysis is only based on five women who fall within my definition of professional women. As per social constructionist theory and view on reality, this construction is mine and it may differ from reader to reader.

10. Limitations

Critique from one participant was that she would have liked to have received a copy of the Tend and Befriend model to read before the interview, as this would have made some of the questions easier for her. I explained that I did the interview in this way for the following reasons. If the participants had to read the model first I ran two or maybe three possible risks. The first would be that fewer participants would have been interested in taking part in the research. The second would be that not all the participants would read the theory. The third and the final reason was the most important for the research and my main motivation for choosing to explain the model in the interview. I chose to explore the participants' own ways of dealing with stress, to establish their own voice first. This was done to prevent the influence of the models and my exploration of the model on them before having heard their voices on stress. Doing this enabled me to explore with the participants how the model(s) influenced them. At the same time I did however run the risk of the participants not understanding the Tend and Befriend model 100%. This risk is a limitation in the research. In retrospect I wonder if gaining access to the model prior to the interview was not in opposition to the dominant discourse. What I mean to say is that this request could be seen as a way for the participant to empower herself to be knowledgeable for the research which was being conducted by a man.

This brings me to the second limitation; by explaining the models to the participants I created a power hierarchy with a scenario where as researcher, I had knowledge which I explained to the participants. However, power hierarchies in gender and research cannot be avoided as Delphy (2001) explains. This is due the dominant discourse which infiltrates every aspect from research to gender and race, creating power hierarchies in each sphere.

There is an inherent weakness in this research due to nature of the field of study and occupation of researcher: being a psychologist (intern therapist) and the research itself being a psychological study on an emotionally reactive topic: stress. A reactive topic like stress can trigger a psychologically inclined or natured conversation. This brings questions of counselling seeking as well as a naturally inclined counselling-typed response or angled questions from both the participant and the latter from me as researcher.

I tried to minimise this influence by using an interview guide to help the interviews stay on topic but as the nature of the study was social constructionist this proved impossible because the story needed to unfold. I also stated to the participants that if any trauma is triggered or brought up by the interview process that counselling would be arranged. As an extra measure I told each participant that I would check with them after the interview if the interview had brought up any unwanted or negative emotions or memories that needed attention, which I then did.

Although this was a very limited sample, having only five participants, a further limitation to this sample was that the respondents were only Indian and Caucasian.

11. Recommendations

More specific investigation into self-tending as secondary response to stress should be done with the focus perhaps on the resiliency, as this could also hold therapeutic insight in terms of counselling and trauma counselling. A focus on self-tending as a resiliency agent or on improving self-tending or self-tending strategies could assist in regaining, maintaining or reaching a sense of control for individuals; however, this too needs to be investigated in greater detail. For this type of investigation discourse analysis might lend to the analysis' richer data and a thicker description than what is obtained through thematic analysis.

Conclusion/ reflection

From this study I was taught the power of dominant discourses. An understanding was co-constructed for me by this research on how discourses which are dominant in people's lives (the Participants' and my own) infiltrate into most, if not every, aspect of the process of meaning making. And how, as suggested by social constructionism, this alters social action.

Personally this was the influence of the social constructionist paradigm I choose to follow. I delved deeper into the theory by spending time in it doing this research. In this way I integrated the theory into my construction of 'understanding'. Social constructionism became a new dominant discourse for me (this does, however not mean other dominant discourses are not still present). It infiltrated my perception, understandings and viewing lenses of my realities to the extent that it altered my analysis process. These changes lead to the clustering of stories and alternate discourses of the participants, which opposed the oppressive dominant discourses of society. Fortunately I chose a method of analysis that accommodated my theoretical paradigm. In larger and future research, as suggested in the recommendations, another approach like discourse analysis, might allow even richer inductive analysis.

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APPENDIX A

TRANSLATOR REFERENCE

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Unit for Academic Literacy (UAL)

3 August 2010

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Translation of interviewee responses

I hereby declare that the abovementioned document was translated from Afrikaans into English by Creative Language Services, the official language bureau of the University of Pretoria, and that the translation is an accurate rendition of the relevant original source text.

Yours truly

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Faculty Humanities

Department of Psychology

Research Consent Form

Tend and befriend: A bio-behavioural construction of women's responses to stress.

I, _____ understand that I am being asked to participate in the research study focusing on the construction of women's responses to stress as a platform to discuss dominant discourses in society which inform people how they respond to certain things in their lives, in this specific case stress. My participation will be in the form of two interviews at a time suitable to me.

The study is being conducted by Daniël Joubert who is a Masters student in Counselling Psychology at the University of Pretoria, under the supervision of Mrs. Ilse Ruane. Daniël Joubert's contact details are 082 674 0933 or dfjoubert@tuks.co.za, should there be any queries or concerns regarding the study at hand.

I am aware that the results of the project, including personal details regarding my age, date of birth, name and any other details that could possibly identify me will be anonymously

processed into the final report of a Master's dissertation as undertaken by Daniël Joubert for the MA Psychology degree. I understand that the information obtained in the interviews, via audio recording, will be kept confidential in the same way as all other information. I am also aware that this raw data obtained in the interview will be securely stored for 15 years in the department of Psychology at the University of Pretoria.

I am also aware that I will receive no payment or compensation for participating in the study. I may at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare that I may participate in the project.

I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant's Signature: _____

Witness: _____ Signature: _____

Researcher's Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Please note: The interview will be structured around these questions with elaboration on variety of these questions particularly the questions following the diagrammatic presentation.

Background information:

Age:

Gender:

Ethnic group:

Home Language:

English Proficiency:

Dependants/children:

Marital status:

Relationship status:

Living arrangements:

Parents/guardians (who raised you):

Profession/ qualifications:

Do you know anything about the Tend and Befriend stress response model?

(Children conversation)

Do you have children?

When did you have your children?

Would you like to have children?

Coming back to work after maternity

Have you been in a (traumatic incident) stressful event which had a major impact on you?

If yes, are you in therapy at the moment or did you go for psychological therapy for the trauma?

- Can you think of a resent event in which you experienced a direct or immediate threat?
- Were/are you in a highly stressful situation, at work? (flesh out)

- Would it be okay if we use this experience, if talking about the experience makes you uncomfortable we do not have to discuss or talk about the details of the event, only how you were feeling and how you responded in the situation?

(If the participant feels comfortable with the above)

- How did you feel in that situation?
- What is the one thing you really wanted to do in that situation?
- How did you react in that situation?
- What prevented you from acting the way you wanted to?

- How would you explain your response to a stressful situation or threat?
- How do you behave to stress or stressful things?
- How did you come to respond to stress in this way?
- How do other people expect you to react to stress?
- How do you think people expect women to respond to stress?

Stress response model related questions:
- If I told you that all women respond to stress as suggested in the Tend and Befriend model and men do not; what would your opinion be on that?
- In your opinion does models which explain behaviour to us sometimes make us discard how it is that we understand or interpret things?
- How do you feel about what the Tend and Befriend model predicts about you as a woman?
- Is there perhaps something that this model does not account for? (example, that you might not behave this way)
- As a woman what is it like to hear how you are supposed to respond to stress?