

Exploring Narratives Of Women Who Survive Intimate Partner Violence And The Process Of Their Moving On To Non-Abusive Relationships

By

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree:
Master of the Arts (Counselling Psychology)

In the

Department of Psychology
Faculty of Humanities
University of Pretoria

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February 2013

DECLARATION

I declare that **Exploring Narratives Of Women Who Survive Intimate Partner Violence And The Process Of Their Moving On To Non-Abusive Relationships** is my own work and any references that I have used or quoted have been acknowledged in a complete reference list.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to sincerely thank the following people:

- Vanessa and Rodney Mills (Mom and Dad) for your support in so many different ways throughout my studies, for believing in me, for your guidance, and for helping me achieve my dream.
- The rest of my family, especially Helen Taylor (Gran) for your endless encouragement, and Jodie (little sister) for your unconditional love.
- Anthony Saville for always standing by me, loving me, and for keeping me grounded and reminding me that God is most important.
- My fellow MA Counselling Psychology students for being a sounding board.
- Vicky Timm, my supervisor, for your hard work and your academic guidance.
- Clare Schur, language editor, for your meticulous editing and patience.
- The brave women who participated in the study for your time and for your courage in coming forward to share your stories.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the stories of women who have been trapped in abusive relationships (victims of intimate partner violence (IPV)) and the process of how they moved on from these relationships to non-abusive relationships, thereby becoming survivors. The primary research question guiding the study is; How do the women describe their experiences of the processes that they underwent in leaving an abusive relationship and entering into a new, non-abusive, relationship? The study generates a rich description of their experiences, exploring what it is that makes these women unique in changing their identities from victim of abuse to survivor. This is done by taking an in-depth look at each participant's story and uncovering the personal meanings that they ascribed to these experiences. Literature from past studies is also explored as various authors describe IPV, factors related to IPV and how their illustrations coincide or differ from the findings of this study.

A narrative research approach is used in this study. Narrative research falls under the umbrella of postmodernism and is conducted with a social constructionist outlook. The narrative approach views knowledge as generated by exploring subjective experience and how the individual makes meaning with emphasis on context. This study, therefore, focuses on how the participant's identities are constructed over time as a result of making meaning from their experiences, through self-exploration, social processes and through interactions with others. Data was gathered by means of semi-structured interviews. The tool used for analysis of the stories was the Three-Dimensional Space Approach, the specific tools being; analysis of situation, interaction and continuity. This approach allows for the data to be analysed, not as a given truth but rather, as meaning is generated from the unique perspective of each individual participant in the context, as well as how it was interpreted by myself, the researcher.

The results explore this process through the themes of a message from each participant: commitment as it preceded the abuse, identity, control and manipulation at the hands of the perpetrator, and everyone needs someone to help. These themes were then integrated with the literature.

KEY WORDS

Abuse, intimate partner violence, survivor, qualitative research, postmodernist, narrative research, three-dimensional space approach.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is violence that occurs between two people in a close relationship along a continuum from a single episode to ongoing battering. IPV includes four types of behaviour, namely; physical violence, sexual violence, threats and emotional abuse (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). As will be discussed later on in Chapter 2, “Conversations Around Intimate Partner Violence”, it is difficult for women to leave a relationship characterised by violence. According to South African based research, among the reasons for this include lack of housing, lack of support, fear of the perpetrators, isolation, economic dependence and feelings relating to social stigma (Rasool, Vermaak, Pharoah, Louw, & Stavrou, 2002). Further significant findings show that South African society often normalizes the abuse, perpetrators act as though nothing has happened and very few show remorse and the violence becomes accepted. This results in the abusive violence not being identified as a problem (Rasool et al., 2002). This chapter will deal with an introduction to IPV and provide an indication of the prevalence and impact that it has in South Africa. It also serves to provide a brief overview or indication of what the rest of this study entails.

1.2. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This study explores the narratives of women who have left relationships characterised by IPV and have entered into non-abusive relationships. The primary research question guiding the study was: How would the women describe their experiences of the processes they underwent in leaving an abusive relationship and entering into a new relationship? Therefore, this research aimed to gain insight into the women’s experience of ending the abusive relationship and committing to new relationships. The sample was obtained from both an NGO (non-governmental organization), which involves assistance to and/or

counselling of women who have been abused or are in abusive relationships, as well as from a private psychologist whose clients have experienced IPV and who meet the criteria of this study.

The study explores the narratives of women who have survived the experience of IPV and managed to move on to non-abusive relationships. The women's narratives allowed for exploration of their interpretations of their processes in moving from an abusive to a non-abusive relationship. The purpose of focusing on the process of moving from an abusive to a non-abusive relationship was to explore what makes these women unique in their ability to leave an abusive relationship and to commit to a new one. As the literature review will reveal, most women feel trapped in the abusive relationship. The literature focuses largely on external resources rather than their personal experiences when exploring women who manage to leave the abusive relationship. The purpose of this study is to explore the social constructions of IPV and the role that women, men and support structures play in these constructions.

1.3. DEFINITION OF TERMS

- **Survivors** of IPV are women who have managed to leave abusive relationships and move on to non-abusive relationships. To qualify as survivors, it must have been their decision to leave an abusive partner and actively take steps and make changes to leave the abusive relationship to end the cycle of abuse (Westbrook, 2008). At the time of the study, participants were either currently involved in non-abusive relationships, or, they had been involved in a non-abusive relationship since the abusive relationship.
- The **new relationship** is a relationship, both currently or previously, that the woman committed to that does not involve IPV.
- A **committed relationship**, for the purpose of this study, involves co-habitation, engagement or marriage (Bostock, Plumpton & Pratt, 2009). According to the literature consulted, abuse usually starts to occur when a commitment is entered

into. Commitment was defined within each interview according to the meaning of this concept as described by each respective participant.

- The **process** explored involves experiences of moving from the abusive relationship into a non-abusive relationship incorporating everything that this process may entail for each participant.

It is important to note that I recognise the possibility that any of these women may enter a violent relationship at a future stage of their lives. However, at the time of this study all participants met the criteria and had managed to end the cycle of abuse.

1.4. JUSTIFICATION, AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.4.1. Research Justification

Justification for focusing specifically on women who have left abusive relationships and moved on to non-abusive relationships lies primarily with the difficulty a woman often experiences in ending an abusive relationship. She finds herself in a cycle of abuse accepting her partner's apologies and struggling to find resources such as emotional support and assistance from friends, family and officials (Kaldine, 2007). Furthermore, women who successfully manage to leave an abusive relationship tend to repeat the pattern by often finding themselves in another abusive relationship. This occurs either through secondary victimisation, by returning to the abusive partner, or by finding herself trapped in a pattern of abuse in consequent relationships. This may possibly be as a result of a lack of change in her self-concept (Kaldine, 2007). IPV can also be considered a women's health problem, whereby, due to its consequences, a burden is placed on the health care system (Cluss et al., 2006). Therefore, more research is needed to identify women who do manage to break the cycle, end abusive relationships and manage to move on to non-abusive, supportive relationships.

The literature review reveals that the focus of existing research is on precursors to abuse, how women experience abuse and external factors that contribute to the process of

ending an abusive relationship (Bischoff, 2006; Montalvo-Liendo, 2008; Queen, Brackley, & Williams, 2009; Westbrook, 2008). A gap in the available literature is thus identified where a focus on women's personal experiences of the process of leaving an abusive relationship is needed and where constructions of abuse in society may be implicated as either assisting or hindering the relationship termination. In addition to this, entering into and committing to a new relationship after this process is also poorly researched and thus identified as another research gap.

1.4.2. Research Aim

The study aims to explore the narratives of IPV survivors thereby learning about their personal experiences and the processes that take place when leaving an abusive partner. In addition to this, the process of committing to a new, non-abusive relationship will also be explored. This process can involve many factors hoped to be uncovered from the narratives as they are influenced by context and social issues. The study aims to explore the experiences of the women. This may include, for example, internal factors and external processes such as social support and the societal view towards abuse. In order to understand the experiences of women who are empowered in the face of violence it is necessary to explore their strengths and resources including their coping strategies, self-efficacy and courage (Oosthuizen & Wissing, 2005).

1.4.3. Research Objectives

This research study addresses the above mentioned research questions and aims by:

- attending to the narratives by exploring the processes of moving from these abusive relationships and entering, at some stage, into new non-abusive relationships.
- exploring the changes they underwent and the strengths they drew on during this process, thereby gaining insight into inner and external resources.
- exploring the experience of committing to a new relationship.

1.5. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.5.1. Chapter 2 - Conversations Around Intimate Partner Violence

This chapter covers relevant research related to IPV, beginning with further definitions of the construct and a discussion on various researchers' and authors' descriptions. Research that explores different understandings of why women stay in, or leave, abusive relationships is also reviewed. Factors considered as contributing to assisting women in moving out of an abusive relationship, such as social support and shelters, are also discussed. Finally, theories around IPV are introduced and discussed as each different perspective understands the construct. Factors related to IPV such as HIV/AIDS and the role that society plays are also addressed.

1.5.2. Chapter 3 - Research Design and Methodology

In this chapter the research design and methodology are discussed. The study was approached from a narrative research perspective and involved conducting semi-structured interviews which were then analyzed according to the three-dimensional space approach. The meaning and implications of this are discussed in this chapter. Terms are also defined in this chapter and postmodernism, social constructionism and the quality of the study are also addressed.

1.5.3. Chapter 4 - Results and Discussion

Chapter 4 comprises an in-depth discussion of the findings from the analysis of the interviews. The findings are influenced by the literature review and compared to existing literature, however, new findings are also presented and discussed. The story of each participant is looked at comprehensively and discussed according to the analytical tools mentioned. A rich description of each participant's experiences is revealed. A personal message from each participant is also provided.

1.5.4. Chapter 5 - Conclusion

The study is concluded in this final chapter. Chapter 4 is brought together in a concluding and summarising manner. Individual messages from each participant are provided and common themes are discussed. Limitations of the study, as well as suggestions for future studies, are also discussed.

In the next chapter, the meaning of IPV is explored and theories, literature and other factors relating to IPV are discussed, as they are understood by the relevant authors. The literature is grappled with to generate an understanding of the women who experience IPV and the processes they go through in deciding to end the relationship. Chapter 2 begins with an introduction to IPV detailing some specifics concerning the phenomenon.

CHAPTER 2

CONVERSATIONS AROUND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses IPV as a social occurrence. This goes beyond definitions to experiences, theories, or conversations, concerning IPV. Discussions involve how IPV is initiated and maintained as a social phenomenon. This includes other factors related to IPV including risk factors and protective factors that play a role and how society contributes to the appraisal, experience and maintenance of IPV. Finally, this chapter also addresses factors involved in a woman's decision to stay in or leave an abusive relationship and what is involved in moving on from the relationship. As this study focuses on women who have survived the experience of IPV, and who have successfully managed to move on with their lives, these women are not referred to as victims of IPV but rather as survivors of IPV (Westbrook, 2008).

Intimate partner violence is a complex social problem occurring in intimate relationships, contexts which one would expect society to dictate as being cherishing and protective. Instead, IPV fosters a relationship with dynamic patterns of destructive and abusive behaviours, fear and intimidation that maintains one partner in a position of control and dominance and the other in a position of subordination (Bischoff, 2006; Gilfus, Trabold, O'Brien, & Fleck-Henderson, 2010; Meyer, Wagner, & Dutton, 2010). It is likely that victims of IPV will embark on a search for a way to make sense of the violence and for a means of handling it (Meyer et al., 2010). They will try to find ways of understanding or escaping what should be constructed as a loving and cherishing relationship. Instead it will be constructed as a power struggle and a violent relationship. IPV is multi-dimensional, multi-causal and contextual. It involves many different patterns, risks, types and intensities and affects people in all ethnic, socioeconomic and racial groups (McLeod, Hays, & Chang, 2010; Meyer et al., 2010; Queen et al., 2009; Whiting,

Bradford, Vail, Carlton, & Bathje, 2009) depending on the dominant discourses in those particular communities.

Survivors of IPV have strengths, which, when identified, could contribute to further knowledge on surviving IPV (Oosthuizen & Wissing, 2005). These strengths can possibly be identified in the ways in which survivors of IPV subscribe to new discourses where IPV is not a norm and not acceptable. For example, redefining women who have left an abusive relationship as “survivors” already shows movement towards a new discourse, implying strength, change and a new story or narrative unfolding. Westbrook (2008) explains that the cycle of abuse is maintained by the abuser through the abusive behaviour. Thus, the discourse is maintaining the abuse as long as the abuser and the woman being abused continue to behave in a way that subscribes to IPV as permitted behaviour. Bischoff (2006) also adds that those with a history of violence will be more tolerant of violence, thereby buying into the discourse of violence as a norm further exacerbating the cycle. For change to take place, this needs to be carried out by the survivor. The abuse cycle pertains to the abuser, whereas the change cycle pertains to the survivor (Westbrook, 2008). Therefore, it is the survivor who no longer tolerates the violence and the survivor who makes the decision to break the cycle maintained primarily by the abuser. This changes the discourse of violence being acceptable. The term survivor is therefore appropriate to describe the women that participated in this study as they actively made changes in their lives to leave the cycle of abuse and begin new narratives with new perspectives on violence as having no place in their futures.

2.2. WHAT IS INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

One way of explaining IPV is as abusive and controlling behaviour, that involves sexual, physical, emotional or psychological harm, inflicted by either a former or a current intimate partner (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008; Gilfus et al., 2010; Westbrook, 2008). However, it is useful to expand on this perspective by noting that not all couples experience abuse in the same way. There are a variety of forms that the abuse can take, including; isolation from others, financial control, intimidation and threats. Any

explanation can, therefore, focus on these many types of violence (Bostock et al., 2009; McCollum & Stith, 2007; Whiting et al., 2009).

Johnson and Leone (2005) make a useful distinction between two types of violence, arguing that it is necessary to know which type of violence one is dealing with before a cause or a remedy can be attributed. The first type of violence is “intimate terrorism” (p. 323). Intimate terrorism is described by the authors as being characterised by an attempt to dominate and exert control over one’s partner and the relationship using a variety of controlling tactics including violence, emotional abuse, financial control and threats. “Situational couple violence” (p. 324), on the other hand, is not seen as being characterised by a controlling pattern, with the causes and incidents of violence viewed as varying between couples and between contexts or situations. The two types of violence are not defined by the authors in terms of the severity of the violence, each perceived as being equally severe. Rather, they are defined by the contexts in which they arise. Intimate terrorism follows a pattern of control and escalation, whereas situational couple violence is less predictable and can occur in some contexts, for example, when the same issue remains unresolved. It was found by Johnson and Leone (2005) that intimate terrorism tends to result in greater damage to the victim’s physical health.

Non-physical abuse is a highly prevalent form of IPV and has been found, in many cases, to be more common and more relentless than physical abuse with no clear beginning or end (Queen et al., 2009). Outlaw (2009) provides a perspective on this by elaborating on four different types of non-physical abuse. Emotional violence involves undermining the victims’ sense of worth. Psychological abuse is aimed at making the victim feel insecure in her own logic and reason. Social abuse mainly involves forced isolation. Economic abuse involves forced financial dependence on the abuser. Research has indicated a tendency for social, economic and emotional abuse to be the most likely types of non-physical abuse to lead to physical abuse (Outlaw, 2009). They often tend to leave lingering effects such as flashbacks where the women are left to constantly re-experience the abuse even after it has ended (Queen et al., 2009). Therefore, there are various and

more specific forms of abuse, other than physical, sexual and psychological abuse, which victims of IPV are exposed to.

Another aspect of the IPV construct is that any woman experiencing this phenomenon faces the challenge of leaving the relationship. Breaking the silence of abuse is often accompanied by serious consequences and difficulties of finding safety. Women are, therefore, often unwilling to disclose (Montalvo-Liendo, 2008). This reluctance to disclose is an important challenge in identifying women exposed to IPV. However, this is only one of many challenges. Additional challenges include denial, focusing on consequences of violence rather than violence itself and insufficient training of health care professionals in identifying the violence (Whiting et al., 2009).

2.3. THEORIES AND IPV

A popular perspective on IPV is the feminist perspective. Informed by this perspective, IPV is also called woman abuse (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003). From this perspective, IPV is the result of gender and power inequalities where men expect more privilege and have more control over resources (such as finances) which, with their strength, gives them more power. This makes women subordinate (Gilfus et al., 2010). This perspective indicates one way in which the structure of society and the construction of gender roles can contribute to IPV. Men are socialised into this role. They use their power, and other tactics such as violence, to wield their power and hold control over women to protect their dominant position. Similarly, women are socialised into the role of subordination. These dynamics of power and inequality typically place women at greater risk of IPV than men (Davies, Ford-Gilboe, & Hammerton, 2009; Gilchrist, 2009; Gilfus et al., 2010). This form of patriarchal control is more likely to result in intimate terrorism where the male uses his power to control and dominate his partner (Johnson & Leone, 2005). However, critiques against the feminist perspective argue that it fails to account for women's use of violence on men and makes limited acknowledgement of oppressions that are not gender based (Gilfus et al., 2010). An additional critique, from my

perspective as the researcher, is that it does not account for communities in which these gender power imbalances do not exist but the violence does.

Another perspective is the family violence approach. This viewpoint explains that IPV is not one-dimensional. The origin of violence is attributed to the family structure where a context is created within the family for both men and women who are equally capable of using violence, usually as a response to resolve conflict (Gilchrist, 2009; Gilfus et al., 2010). This theory will better explain situational couple violence where violence is a result of a certain context with inevitable conflicts that are likely to be as a result of cohabitation or marriage (Johnson & Leone, 2005). This perspective accounts for the greater incidence of male against female violence by describing that a patriarchal society gives men greater power to use violence against women (Gilfus et al., 2010). This patriarchal society usually also condones a more lenient attitude towards domestic violence (Wallach, Weingram, & Avitan, 2009). Once again, the structure of society, and the construction of gender roles, is implicated in the cause of IPV. IPV is also constructed as a product of motivation in a context of aggression. This includes the use of violence as a self-defence tactic in response to prior abuse or as a result of personality or mental health disorders (Gilfus et al., 2010).

From the perspective of the narrative approach, violence lies within dominant stories of male power (White & Epston, 1990). A dominant story is one which is prominent in society or in an individual's life. It is a story that is grounded in events or any occurrences that give truth to, and strengthen, the story. An individual is then likely to live according to this story and will attribute meaning to his/her experiences accordingly (Morgan, 2000; White & Epston, 1990). These dominant stories will inform our roles as men and women and how we should behave (Freedman & Combs, 2002). In other words, society informs the way an individual believes he/she should live. Therefore, if society condones male dominance and the use of violence then men may behave accordingly and both men and women may view violence as normal in the context. Men buy into a dominant story in society that they are hierarchical, autonomous, strong and that they have a power over women based on the premise that their gender is superior. These

dominant stories are informed by a patriarchal society and, from a narrative perspective; men who do not live according to these dominant stories find themselves feeling abnormal of different (Freedman & Combs, 2002). These social constructions (stories formed by generations of people in social interaction) are what men will live their daily lives according to, resulting in men with a tendency to be abusive turning to violent means when asserting their privilege and dominance (Freedman & Combs, 2002) in a society that favours male dominance. Similarly, women will buy into a role of subordination in a male dominated society.

According to Boonzaier and De La Rey (2003), the South African sociocultural context can be described as baring a unique manifestation of violence against women. Women are silent about their experiences of violence and men choose their preferred method of living according to their gender identity. Much of this appears to be a uniquely African social construction in which women are socialised into baring burdens in silence to avoid scandal and to maintain pride. This is addressed later in this chapter and again in Chapter 4 as part of the experiences of the research participants. Many women find themselves at increased risk of contracting HIV as they are forced into unprotected sexual intercourse. Women express that they find abuse to be common in their communities and even a norm (Fox et al., 2007). These dynamics of violence in intimate relationships are enforced by society encouraging a belief in the innate supremacy of men, thereby, contributing to their power over their partners (Fox et al., 2007).

It appears that in South Africa there are many different constructs of violence in intimate relationships. The situation of IPV in South Africa will be discussed at a later stage, but, from the above mentioned studies, it seems apparent that domestic violence could be informed by the way in which that particular society views the use of violence. When men and women are socialized into the roles of dominance versus subordination, characterized by power inequalities, then, violence is more likely to be an acceptable means of handling conflict. However, it is also essential that the context and relationship dynamics be taken into consideration.

2.4. FACTORS RELATED TO INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

2.4.1. Risk Factors

A number of studies identify a variety of factors that contribute to the incidence of IPV which, according to Bostock et al. (2009), tend to commence when a commitment, such as cohabitation, is entered into. In fact, the lengths of a union and marriage have been indicated as being factors that determine the severity of the violence (Davies et al., 2009). As far as these factors are concerned there are different ideas as to the origin of IPV. For example, it has been suggested that social and biological factors, as well as past traumatic experiences endured by the perpetrator, can encourage IPV (Flinck, Paavilainen, & Åstedt-Kurki, 2005).

Another possibility could be the social constructions surrounding commitments, such as those mentioned. Risk factors for the culmination of IPV can also include; alcohol intake, financial dependence, drug use, unemployment, negative responses from officials (Bostock et al., 2009; Kim & Gray, 2008; Rappleyea, Harris, & Dersch, 2009; Wong, Huang, DiGangi, Thompson, & Smith, 2008), communication problems (Robertson & Murachver, 2007), jealousy (Gilchrist, 2009), lack of social support (Nurius & Macy, 2010), gender power relations and sexual ownership of women (Davies et al., 2009; Gilfus et al., 2010; Lichtenstein, 2004). It is my belief that many of these factors may appear to be external and independent of social construction, such as the effects of alcohol consumption. However, behaviour when intoxicated can still be informed by the structures believed to exist in society (such as justifying violence against women) and other factors such as past trauma that could instil certain beliefs (such as dominance over women).

Women who manage to gain some form of financial independence, and overcome the factors listed as contributing to IPV, feel an increased self-worth. However, they often still find that this is met with tension and more violence as men try to compensate for perceived loss of masculinity (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003). According to Nurius and

Macy (2010), vulnerability is also a risk factor. Women who feel psychologically vulnerable will be less able to gain a sense of self-worth or personal agency, thus exacerbating the experience of trauma and increasing the likelihood of re-victimization. Another way of viewing this trajectory is that women who buy into the social construction of being inferior may act accordingly and become more vulnerable to the abuse. A last factor to consider is intergenerational transmission of violence. Gilchrist (2009) explains this phenomenon occurs when boys who witness violence learn that it is normal and integral in relationships, resulting in the enactment of violence in their own intimate relationships. This is a clear and straightforward manner in which social constructions contribute to IPV.

2.4.2. HIV/AIDS

HIV is a serious and wide spread social and health problem in South Africa and has a close but complicated link with IPV (Campbell et al., 2008). HIV is a complication that results from IPV. The relationship between HIV/AIDS and IPV is mediated by the behaviour of both genders and involves forced sex with an HIV positive person, reduced ability to negotiate safe sex practices, increased sexual risk-taking, as well as exposure to other sexually transmitted infections (STI's), that can accompany abuse and facilitate transmission (Campbell et al., 2008). Much of this is as a result of social constructions of men dominating relationships and women having to take on the role of subordinates. This is particularly prevalent in traditional African cultures, in other words, the discourses in these cultures are related to wider social views of the subordination of women. This is discussed further when social aspects that relate to IPV are addressed.

A common finding in South African research pertaining to abused women is that men have multiple sexual partners during the course of the relationship with one woman, thereby increasing his exposure to HIV and increasing her risk of also contracting the virus (Fox et al., 2007). Women who are HIV positive and are being abused by their partners are often too poor, isolated and/or terrorised to leave the abusive relationship. Physical illness further contributes to women feeling trapped. Women also feel owned by

the men in their relationships and this lack of personal agency is detrimental to their ability to resist abuse, regain freedom or to have the autonomy to adhere to their own medication regimen (Lichtenstein, 2004).

These women feel incapable of communicating effectively with their partners to negotiate safe sex, frequently finding that an attempt to negotiate safer sex leads to a violent outburst. Therefore, not only does forced sexual intercourse spread HIV, but so does economic and emotional control when women feel powerless to refuse their partners concerning any matters including sex and escaping from the relationship (Fox et al., 2007). A feeling of being owned further traps the women, limiting their ability to reach out to friends or family in a society that holds to the belief that she belongs to the man. It is society's belief that it is his prerogative to behave as he chooses in a relationship with the choice belonging to him as to her freedom to leave. As will be discussed, women are often blamed for the abuse and disclosure of HIV status. This is one more reason men find to abuse women as they blame them for their status of being HIV positive.

A further aspect of the relationship between IPV and HIV pertains to the women who, when experiencing IPV, could be less likely to adhere to the medication regimen (Lopez, Jones, Villar-Loubet, Arheart, & Weiss, 2010). It has been found that men are responsible for their own regimen adherence but that they also influence their partners' adherence. The women seemed more concerned with their immediate safety than with taking medication. IPV has also been found to be consistent with negative HIV coping styles, specifically substance abuse for men and denial for women. This has a further negative impact on medication adherence. A cycle of abuse is also created as substance abuse further exacerbates the violence, and denial maintains the relationship dynamics (Lopez et al., 2010).

2.4.3. Perpetrators

While it may be argued that IPV is perpetrated by both men and women (Robertson & Murachver, 2007), studies have indicated that men are more likely to be the perpetrators

of partner violence and women the victims (Thomas, Sorensen, & Joshi, 2010). It has been found that in cases where women are the perpetrators of violence it is most commonly as a response to imminent danger or self-defence. Other less common reasons for women using violence include an effort to increase intimacy or as a result of emotional problems (Gilfus et al., 2010).

Reasons provided for perpetration of IPV by the study conducted by Gilchrist (2009) include; men are entitled to be in control and have power over women, violent behaviour is the behaviour of a 'real man', violence is an acceptable or normal response to certain situations, men are driven to abuse by the behaviour of their partners, women are objects to satisfy men and be controlled, men feel out of control when being abusive and are not to blame, it is a way for the man to be in charge of his domain, men have a right to satisfy their need for sex at any time, abuse is not viewed as abuse, and denial that the act was violent or an over-reaction. All of these reasons reported by Gilchrist (2009) indicate the influence of discourses that are strong in society leading to behaviour that is controlling and dominating over women and, ultimately, abusive.

A study conducted by Walker et al. (2010) found that the consequences of a perpetrator's behaviour act as the strongest motivator for change and seeking treatment. It is important to acknowledge that "domestic violence will not end until perpetrators stop abusing" (Walker et al., 2010, p. 1695). The consequences reported were; feeling bad about how they treated their partner, losing respect for themselves, being distracted at work and worrying about the effects on their children. It was also found that motivation to change was mainly the result of personal consequences rather than consequences for others. The severity and frequency of the abuse did not play a role. It is, therefore, a new discourse of how women should be treated and how men should evaluate their behaviour which needs to be internalized in order to bring about a change in their conduct.

2.4.4. Social Aspects

The dominant belief system in a society will have an influence on IPV as it will affect how families live and how social policy reacts (Davies et al., 2009). Drawing on the narrative approach, all stories exist within a context. No stories develop in isolation. In other words, the meanings we attribute to our lives and our experiences are influenced by society's stories on gender, class, race, and so forth. Thus the beliefs, ideas and practices of our culture will play a big role in the meaning we make of our lives, past, present and future (Morgan, 2000). These stories are socially constructed through social interactions within our culture, which will form a dominant story that we are surrounded with from birth, and that will colour the lenses through which we interpret our world and events in our lives (Freedman & Combs, 1996).

Many communities today are still ignorant of the impact of power structures in society on the prevalence of, and attitudes towards, IPV, in other words, many communities are ignorant of their narratives surrounding IPV. It is still a common occurrence for women to be blamed, or to blame themselves, when their partners are violent towards them (Davies et al., 2009). Not only are these power and control imbalances apparent in an individual's behaviour and the dynamics of a relationship (resulting in IPV), but they are also apparent in societal structures and institutions. There is an inherent gender disparity which privileges men in society through marriage and common law unions. This shapes individual feelings of entitlement and control, or helplessness and subordination, thereby shaping the experience of abuse both whilst abuse is present and after ending an abusive relationship (Davies et al., 2009). While these power structures influence the prevalence and incidence of abuse, they also influence how women experience the abuse and whether they are more or less likely to use active coping strategies or leave the relationship (Meyer et al., 2009).

With particular reference to the South African context, Fox et al. (2007) state that community norms were found to fuel gender power relations having a detrimental effect on violence and on HIV infection. It has also been found that when, in the South African

social context, women are empowered it further exacerbates abuse. Men feel their roles of dominance in the household are challenged and further conflict ensues (Kim et al., 2009). Women feel that although abuse is common in their communities, and many of them are either being abused or know of others that are, abuse is a taboo subject and it is a woman's responsibility to suffer in silence (Fox et al., 2007).

Religion and ethnicity play an important role in the dynamics of violence in a relationship. Religion impacts on the abuse within couples as they are advised to live according to the 'prescribed' roles of a submissive woman serving a man who is authoritative and in control (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003), this being the religious discourse. With regards to ethnicity, experiences of IPV across cultures may be similar; however, in specific cultural or ethnic groups they tend to be more unique (Montalvo-Liendo, 2008). According to Meyer et al. (2009), differences will exist in how women from various cultures experience and react to violence depending on the meaning that social discourses prescribe to the violence. Family also plays an important role regarding violence in a relationship in the South African context. In those situations where the family is not supportive or understanding, or where the family discourses prescribe violence as an acceptable norm, women are encouraged to stay silent, to accept the violence as part of marriage and to reconcile with her husband (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003).

An important component to consider when discussing the impact of IPV, and how it is influenced by society (either maintaining or discouraging), pertains to the information available about IPV in social circles. Useful mechanisms for distributing knowledge and information about IPV include; public awareness campaigns, targeting communities with a high prevalence of violence and dispensing information and, ensuring that support agencies or institutions are in place armed with correct information (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010). It is also evident that it is important for society to create new discourses describing violence against women as unacceptable and against the norm.

2.5. STAYING OR LEAVING

According to Kaldine (2007), women will often not leave a relationship after the occurrence of the first episode of abuse has occurred. One possible reason could be that survivors of IPV tend to feel trapped and confused about their situation at the time of the abuse. This tends to result in the abusive situation being maintained thereby leading to a cycle of abuse where couples who have experienced domestic violence before are more likely to experience it again (Bischoff, 2006). Research finds that the survivor's experience is characterized by a feeling of being trapped due to isolation and threat from their partners (Lichtenstein, 2004). In many cases, where women were able to leave their partners, leaving created a more dangerous situation (Oosthuizen & Wissing, 2005).

There are multiple reasons for staying in the abusive relationship. For one, survivors tend to blame themselves. Such beliefs are attributable to tactics used by the perpetrators, such as promises or denial. Another reason for self-blame involves the discourses in society supporting beliefs that women deserve abuse and that it is a man's right to abuse a woman when he deems it necessary. Women believe that the incidents are isolated, justified, or not bad enough to be considered abuse resulting in them staying in the abusive relationship (Bostock et al., 2009; Fanslow & Robinson, 2010; Hurley, Sullivan, & McCarthy, 2007; McLeod et al., 2010). McLeod et al. (2010) also found that, if women do not perceive available community services as useful, or if they are unaware of the range of available resources, or if they are prevented from accessing these resources, then they are less likely to leave the relationship. Other reasons for staying in the abusive relationship include; women still being in love with their partner, believing his behaviour will change, and other financial or practical reasons (e.g. housing) (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010). Davies et al. (2009) have found that harassment also plays a major role in the ability of women to distance themselves from the relationship and to move on. Men use harassment to exert continued power and control over women. This is evident as "the women's perception of her former partners' power and control after leaving varies directly with the intensity and presence of abuse and harassment" (p. 38). As the

harassment stops, she will then be able to feel empowered and more in control. Three important aspects that will aid in the process of leaving the abusive relationship are awareness, perceived support and self-efficacy or perceived control. However, this process may take months or even years (Chang et al., 2010). Following from the social constructionist theory, another key element, as emphasised before, is the change in abuse perceptions. Women need to believe that abuse is not acceptable and that they can be empowered in a society which has them believing they are not powerful.

Precursors to leaving a violent relationship include; regaining a sense of self and hope for the future, gaining knowledge of support structures in the community and having confidence in these structures (McLeod et al., 2010). In the study conducted by Fanslow and Robinson (2010) it was found that realistic assessments of the man's behaviour and the likelihood of him changing, were important factors in the decision to leave the relationship and the recognition of the seriousness of the violence. This realistic assessment likely involves a new discourse on the acceptability of IPV.

Consequences of abuse, including depression, trauma symptoms such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), perpetuity of abuse, physical illness, difficulty in other relationships, constant feelings of fear, victimisation later in life (Bostock et al., 2009; Ham-Rowbottom, Gordon, Jarvis, & Novaco, 2005; Lichtenstein, 2004; Pico-Alfonso, 2005; Queen et al., 2009), effects of abuse on children, seriousness of injuries sustained, lead women to actively seeking help in leaving the relationship. This may include obtaining restraining orders and counselling (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010; Grauwiler, 2007).

Another contributing factor when leaving relationships is financial independence (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010). It has been found, by Johnson and Leone (2005), that victims of intimate terrorism are more likely than victims of situational couple violence, to leave their partners and seek help. A possible explanation may be that the violence is more frequent and is experienced as less likely to cease. These women are found living in a constant state of fear. The violence interferes with their daily lives more so than those

subjected to situational couple violence. In some cases a context such as this appears to be more powerful than social acceptance of abuse as it involves women gaining power in a society which is usually ascribed to men.

As Chang et al. (2010) explain, turning points will alter a woman's willingness to tolerate an abusive situation and will motivate her to start a process of change. Turning points are "dramatic shifts in beliefs and perceptions" (p. 256) of oneself, one's partner and the situation. These turning points will also influence a woman's self-empowerment and help-seeking behaviour (Chang et al., 2010). Help-seeking is largely influenced by the woman's appraisal of the abuse and the relationship, the course of the violence and any support she may receive (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010). Turning points identified in the study by Chang et al. (2010) include; protecting others from abuse, increased severity of abuse, increased awareness of options for support, realisation that the abuser is not going to change, and partner infidelity.

The argument is repeatedly supported: women need to realize that abuse is a problem and is not acceptable (Rasool et al., 2002). This emphasises a new discourse regarding the acceptance of abuse and its importance in creating turning points. Women frequently hope that the situation will improve, justifying their continued support of their relationship (Oosthuizen & Wissing, 2005). Only once this realisation has taken place (a turning point) do women reach a point where they can begin the help-seeking processes and termination of abusive relationship (Bostock et al., 2009; Grauwiler, 2007).

2.6. MOVING ON FROM THE RELATIONSHIP

Once women become aware of the seriousness of their situation and the need to make a change, a decision making process has to be undertaken (Grauwiler, 2007). However, it is not the severity of violence alone that will lead to change, it is also the resources perceived to be available to women (Nurius & Macy, 2010). This involves the consideration of many factors. A common consensus among researchers is that the choice to leave an abusive relationship, and taking the first step to make the change, involves

obtaining information about available options. This includes legal options, restraining orders, assistance from police, assistance with jobs and children, shelters and other crisis information (Grauwiler, 2007; Ham-Rowbottom et al., 2005; Westbrook, 2008). The decision to seek help is also dependent on the woman's appraisal of the violence in terms of how she believes it is constructed, the skills or resources that she feels she can use as tools, and responses she receives from others (their constructions of violence) (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010). Research has also shown that a woman's perception of risk to herself also plays a role in her decision to leave (Harding & Helweg-Larsen, 2009).

It is important to note that leaving an abusive relationship is in fact a process that consists of multiple considerations rather than the event of a single decision (Bostock, et al., 2009; Flinck et al., 2005). Davies et al. (2009) argue that a woman's decision to move on from the relationship by making a clean break can only be understood within a broader context that positions them unequally in terms of gender-relations and power structures.

2.6.1. Coping Strategies and Protective Factors

2.6.1.1. Individual Coping Efforts

Meyer et al. (2009) conducted a study in which they explored battered women's coping strategies. They found that whether a woman uses active coping strategies such as seeking outside help, or passive strategies such as withdrawal, depends on her appraisal of the reason for the violence (or the discourse she ascribes to) and differs across ethnicity. It was found that women who blame their partners for violence, believing that using violence as a tool for expressing male dominance is unacceptable, are more willing to seek outside help and available resources. Ethnicity plays a role in that it influences the woman's experience of the violence and her evaluation of its extremity, thereby determining how she reacts. However, the more severe the violence, the more desperate the woman is to protect herself, and the more likely she is to use active coping strategies.

Several studies discuss the importance of individual factors such as, changes in self-esteem and self-care, gaining independence, regaining freedom by fighting back and developing an internal locus of control, and that these can be as important as social support (Bostock et al., 2009; Grauwiler, 2007; Kim & Gray, 2008; Lichtenstein, 2004). Meyer et al. (2009) found that self-efficacy is imperative. Women who believe they have control over the situation will employ a wider variety of coping strategies and will be more persistent and resilient in applying these strategies. In addition to this, women with a greater sense of personal agency will be better able to make sense of the violence and not make excuses for it. Therefore, these women will hold their partners accountable and will not only be more likely to employ strategies to counter the violence, but they will be more active in their methods of employing external resources (Meyer et al., 2009). A woman's appraisal of her own vulnerability also plays a role. It will further impair her sense of self-worth, personal agency and resilience. This is another area where positive social support plays a vital role as a protective factor assisting in the prevention of re-victimisation (Nurius & Macy, 2010). All of the above is an indication of the way in which women need to form new discourses surrounding violence and their own roles in society.

2.6.1.2. Social Support

Research conducted by Grauwiler (2007) highlights peer group support with peers who have had similar experiences of developing effective communication skills after abuse and the resolution of other consequences. Social support has been found to be a very powerful asset (Nurius & Macy, 2010). For example, it assists in lowering levels of depression, accurate evaluations of vulnerability and negative social relations (Nurius & Macy, 2010). Research by Fanslow and Robinson (2010) has further emphasised the importance of social support, such as that provided by friends and family. This has been established by discussing how often women have turned to family or friends first when making the decision to leave the relationship. This research also highlighted helpful responses, such as the encouragement of counselling, provision of a safe house and active intervention, as being significant in keeping women away from their abusive partners.

Similarly, Flinck et al. (2005) emphasise supporting factors, such as social relationships, experiences of caregivers, faith, and other factors that promote recovery of integrity, as necessary for moving forward from an abusive relationship.

The effective role of social support can be explained, to a certain extent, by what Nurius and Macy (2010) term “tend-and-befriend” (p. 1084). According to this explanation, women rely on positive and supportive relationships in their greatest times of stress rather than reverting to a fight-or-flight response where they either deal with the situation or flee. Lack of social support, therefore, is very concerning as it plays a pivotal role in women feeling capable of dealing with an abusive situation. Unhelpful social responses are found to stem from a lack of knowledge and skills, and lack of access to necessary/appropriate resource (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010).

Many studies touch on the importance of social support and individual factors such as self-esteem. However, they do not elaborate on the experience of these factors and how they contribute to, and become part of, the process of moving on from an abusive relationship and gaining freedom and independence. “How these women were able to retain and/or regain a high enough level of self-esteem in the face of abuse would be an important topic for further research and would have significant practice implications as well” (Kim & Gray, 2008, p. 1478). Therefore, the focus of this study is on the personal experiences of women, to address the gap in knowledge of the processes IPV survivors undergo.

2.6.1.3. Shelters

A widely used strategy utilized when leaving an abusive relationship is entrance into a shelter or a safe house. However, entering a shelter can have both negative and positive outcomes. According to Grauwiler’s (2007) findings, women struggle to obtain information on shelters and are unaware of the implications of entering a shelter (such as isolation from family and friends and the need to give up other aspects of their lives, including their jobs). Not only does limited knowledge of the range of services offered to

women pose as a barrier, but so do women's perceptions that the violence is not severe enough to enlist the help of such an aid (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010). Those who do manage to obtain information discover that isolation will be necessary. These women feel it is unfair that the onus lies with them to leave society, their homes and their lives as they know them. They feel they will be cut off from the support they have (Grauwiler, 2007). On the other hand, Ham-Rowbottom et al. (2005) emphasise the positive aspects of shelters including increased life satisfaction and being better equipped emotionally and socially to obtain employment and housing.

Nurius and Macy (2010) also emphasise the importance of shelters and similar services in mental health and violence-reduction assistance for women who are already vulnerable due to battering. They highlight the role that this can play in positively impacting women's future health, safety and well-being. In addition to this, the importance of making contact with a shelter, or a similar form of assistance, is self-explanatory. Women who make use of external sources of support will have more resources available to them compared to those women who attempt to cope on their own (Meyer et al., 2010).

2.7. CONCLUSION

An important consideration for furthering knowledge on IPV, guiding women in expressing themselves, seeking out resources and assisting others in supporting them, is the spread of IPV related information (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010; Westbrook, 2008). This type of information needs to be widely available in communities in order to raise awareness for IPV, including, what it is, if it is happening to you, why it happens and what to do if it is happening to you or someone you know. Women who are survivors of IPV need to be encouraged to disclose the abuse and to seek safety for themselves and their children (Montalvo-Liendo, 2008). The spread of information on IPV and women's struggle with it should begin the formation of a new social construction of IPV discourses as unacceptable and dangerous. Ideally this will lead to more women finding the courage to turn away from discourses of violence as a means of maintaining male dominance, and turn to discourses where women are empowered and can rise above violence.

With reference to appraisals of abuse and commitment to new relationships, as well as apprehensions or obstacles and other personal achievements, narratives are very important in understanding the dynamics of IPV and are discussed in the next chapter. These narratives are helpful in filling gaps in the literature of the termination of abusive relationships and commitment to non-abusive relationships. Couples who have already experienced violence are more likely to experience it again. A woman is more likely to return to her abusive spouse (Kaldine, 2007) or to experience other forms of victimisation later on in life (Pico-Alfonso, 2005) than to successfully commit to a new, non-abusive relationship. This is partly due to a tolerance for violence after women have already been exposed to it (Bischoff, 2006). While Ham-Rowbottom et al. (2005) found that a large proportion of their participants enter non-abusive relationships after leaving a shelter, other research that focuses on this aspect of the process is scarce, particularly South African based research. Thus, insight gained into the experiences of women as they commit to new, non-abusive relationships, is invaluable.

The following chapter addresses the approach to the study, namely the narrative approach, situated in the postmodern perspective. Data collection, sampling and analysis of data from a three-dimensional space approach will also be discussed, as will aspects relating to the quality of the study such as credibility and reflexivity.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the data collection method, sampling, the method used for data analysis and matters relating to the quality of the study. Specifically, it involves an explanation of narrative research, the epistemology of the study. In other words, narrative research was the approach adopted to describe the way in which knowledge was constructed or thought about, and the validity and reliability of this knowledge (Willig, 2009).

Narrative research involves working with peoples' stories created by linking events about one's life in a sequence across a time period which are then made sense of (Morgan, 2000). Narrative is situated within postmodernism. Briefly, this is a stance where there is no single truth. There are multiple experiences and views of the world and events resulting in multiple realities (Weingarten, 1998). This approach is relevant for this study as it aims to access the participant's individual experiences, the meanings that they attribute to events in their lives and how they influence and develop them as people. More specifically, narrative research allows for the participants of this study to share their experiences of IPV and the meanings they created from these experiences, thereby allowing them to move on. By presenting such a rich description of the participant's experiences others in a similar situation will hopefully be able to draw on their experiences making their own meaning and prompting change or development in their own lives.

3.2. NARRATIVE APPROACH

3.2.1. Postmodernism

The narrative approach is informed by postmodernism. Therefore, in order to better understand the narrative approach, one needs to understand postmodernism. Modernists, in contrast to postmodernists, privilege the scientific approach and are of the opinion that over time all knowledge being accumulated is moving us closer to one essential truth about a knowable universe (Freedman & Combs, 2002). Postmodernism, put simply, casts aside the modernist perspective that science can be objective and that a single truth can be discovered, that one's identity can be described as an entity or objectified as is done in the natural sciences (Crossley, 2007; Durrheim, 1997; McNamee, 1996). Instead of a single truth there is a meaning constructed according to, and dependent on, context (Durrheim, 1997). Postmodernists are more interested in specific and contextualised details than in generalisations (Freedman & Combs, 2002). Reality is constructed in an interactive moment, identity is created in conversation which is culturally situated, and language gains significance and meaning through use in social contexts (McNamee, 1996). This is not to say that postmodernism is anti-modernism. Alternatively, the focus is on being sceptical or curious about beliefs surrounding objective truths, knowledge and explanations of self that have been taken for granted as being true. The interest is in meaning rather than in fact (Freedman & Combs, 2002; Kotzé & Kotzé, 1997). Postmodernism simply views modernism as one of many competing discourses (McNamee, 1996).

Narrative psychology is a postmodern approach with the chief concern being with constructing one's identity and self-exploration. Narrative psychology views knowledge as generated through exploring subjective experience and how the individual makes meaning out of what has happened to him/her as the result of social processes and interactions, not as a description of external objective realities (Crossley, 2007; Kotzé & Kotzé, 1997). Hence there is no objective or single truth in this approach. Rather than searching for an objective single truth, narrative concerns itself with making meaning of a

world that is constantly changing and offering new experiences (Murray, 2008). The focus is on the individual's experience of generating understanding (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

3.2.2. Social Constructionism

The social constructionist perspective explicates reality as socially constructed. Reality is constituted through language, maintained or changed through narrative and there is no one essential reality (Freedman & Combs, 1996). This is a postmodernist theory that focuses on the use of language in informing our reality. Hence, it can be said that from this perspective the focus is more on the language used in descriptions and conversations than on the individual self (Kotzé & Kotzé, 1997). Incorporating this, the study focused specifically on how social constructions of IPV influenced the individual and the meaning she attributed to her experiences of IPV. It focused on how she seems to have risen above the discourses of her culture and patterns of submission that were addressed in Chapter 2. Accordingly, the analysis of the data focused on how participants constructed their own stories of events and made meaning, or sense, of these events in specific contexts (McCormack, 2004). The social constructionist approach was chosen to fit the purpose of the study (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002) and the method of analysis, discussed later, also falls under this approach. It is well suited to the self and the experiences, thought to be linguistically structured according to the narrative perspective.

Kotzé and Kotzé (1997) argue that according to social constructionism, reality is constructed by language. In other words, "people exist in language" (p. 31) but understanding always takes place in a certain context and cannot be stable over time or across other contexts. The meaning and understanding of the use of words depends on the shared use of that language. Words can be analogised as tools and language as a tool box (Durrheim, 1997). Similarly, our concept of self is dependent on language and context. It therefore follows that 'self' is fluid, subject to interpretation, relativity, flux and variability (Crossley, 2007). From a narrative, as well as a social constructionist, perspective, stories circulate in society thereby constituting ourselves and our lives, as the

stories of our culture influence our individual stories, and vice versa (Freedman & Combs, 1996).

According to social constructionism, one's identity or concept of self is inextricably linked to language that we use daily to make sense of our experiences and to understand our world (Crossley, 2007). Although language is a social construction, it can become imprisoning as soon as it is given the status of an objective truth. Therefore, the discourse of social constructionism is not privileged, unless, for ethical reasons, it does not pretend to be the truth and is fluid and open to interpretation (Kotzé & Kotzé, 1997). Social constructionism, however, does not deny that there are truths, only that truths are shared interpretations constructed between people that gain social meaning and constructed understandings. Therefore, the aim of the investigation cannot be to discover truth (Durrheim, 1997). Knowledge is something that develops among people and circulates through society, ever changing as new stories are told (Freedman & Combs, 1996). As explained by Crossley (2007), the essence of this type of analysis is to understand personal and cultural meanings that are shaped by language. Attention is given to how cultural stories are influencing the interpretations that participants have of their experiences (Freedman & Combs, 1996), however, the focus remains on their individual stories.

Language reflects experience and subjectivity. As such, meaning is never fixed. It is in a constant process of negotiation while actions or words of one person are supplemented by another (McNamee, 1996; Sclater, 2003). The individual has the capacity to organise experiences, make her own interpretations and contribute to interactions with social agents. The emphasis here is on the individual's active contribution to the ensuing outcomes (Crossley, 2007; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Sclater (2003) explains this concept succinctly by explaining that the human subject is "socially situated" and "culturally fashioned", while at the same time expressing "a unique individuality and agency that makes the subject, at once, quite singular but also part of ... local and global communities" (p. 320).

3.2.3. Narrative Research

Narrative research, put simply, is any research that works with material of a narrative nature, such as stories (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Stories people create about their lives are the result of a string of events that we put together in a sequence over the past, the present, and our hopes or expectations for the future. From these stories we make meaning of our lives (Morgan, 2000). In a study conducted with narratives of abused women it was found that the narratives revolved around memories of the past, discussions of the present and hopes for the future (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003). In this way, a narrative allows an individual to make sense of past experiences by shaping and ordering them (Chase, 2005). Individuals also use stories or narratives from other people's lives in order to make sense of their experiences (Kotzé & Kotzé, 1997). This approach is therefore fitting to this study as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the participants' stories and for a thorough look at their experiences and meanings attributed to them. From this, it will be possible for others to attribute meaning to their own experiences. What is also important is that stories allow for re-authoring. If stories have been told, they can be retold and new meanings can be made from experiences. In this way, stories are re-authored (Freedman & Combs, 1996).

In essence, narrative research is interested in how people construct stories about their lives in order to bring meaning to their experiences and events (Willig, 2009). As Kearney (2002) puts it, "there is an abiding recognition that existence is inherently storied" (p. 130). In terms of this study, a narrative approach was adopted by using the interview process to open a space in which participants could explore past events, provide stories to their pasts, and ultimately explore their meanings (Kvale, 2007).

Narrative research is used when the researcher is particularly interested in learning about social phenomena and how a particular social phenomenon may contribute towards shaping an individual's identity (Lieblich et al., 1998). "People often find themselves experiencing breakdowns and disintegration and are forced to make sense of events through the utilization of 'stories' or 'narratives'. The same applies when people are

undergoing important transitions in their lives” (Crossley, 2007, p. 135). This correlates well with the social constructionist ideas discussed above. Narrative research also enables an appreciation of the linguistic structuring of identity, or ‘self’, and experience, while also maintaining a sense of that which is personal, subjective and coherent to the individual (Crossley, 2007). This study works closely with the stories obtained from participants obtained through interviews. It explores their own processes of overcoming events through their interpretation of their experiences and the meanings that they have attributed to them. The stories produced by the participants allow them to reveal themselves and their realities by expressing thoughts and interpretations (Chase, 2005; Lieblich et al., 1998). The narrative approach fits especially well with this study as it explores and produces rich descriptions of the participants’ experiences and the resources that they drew on in overcoming this particular difficult life situation. This study is also an exploration of the narratives of survivors, breaking from the dominant narratives of victims of abuse (Kvale, 2007). What the narrative framework clearly allows for is a view of one’s identity as it emerges in relation to social influences which determine the new behaviour and understanding of the self (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Therefore, who we are, or our identity, is not only us as individuals but also exists in relation to others (Sclater, 2003).

In addition to this, the narrative approach allows for the actuality that narratives are not to be taken at face value, but are acknowledged to be subjective interpretations, or narrative truths, of an individual’s perspectives. It acknowledges that the meaning and experience is dependent on context (Durrheim, 1997; Lieblich et al., 1998). The narrative is also flexible and can be shaped, to an extent, by the interpretations and experiences of the audience (Chase, 2005). This is appropriate for this study as it discovers the participants’ understanding.

When using this approach it is also essential to pay attention to how I, the researcher, approach the story, concerning its features and structure, and types of questions asked (Willig, 2009). Narrative researchers consider themselves to be narrators in the sense that they develop interpretations and usually present them in the first person when expressing

their ideas about the narratives (Chase, 2005). Crossley (2007) also acknowledges this role by explaining that it is assumed that material approached from a narrative perspective, and used for analysis, will be heavily influenced by the researcher who is reflexive and not negotiable. Reflexivity, or reflecting on one's influence in the research process, is important as it allows the researcher to be aware of how he/she has engaged with the narratives and his/her role in their interpretation (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). One way for the researcher to acknowledge his/her role in the research process is to refer to himself/herself in the first person. I have done this in the current study thereby acknowledging my role in the research process and making readers aware of my influence.

McCormack (2004) provides a summary of the narrative research process as follows:

“The initial reconstruction is by the participant as she/he recalls an experience and then describes that experience for the researcher. The researcher then reconstructs this experience as she/he transcribes, analyzes and interprets the experience. A further level of reconstruction occurs as the reader reads and reacts to the experience. Knowledge constructed through this process is recognised as being situated, transient, partial and provisional; characterized by multiple voices, perspectives, truths and meanings. It values transformation at a personal level, individual subjectivity and the researcher's voice” (p. 220).

3.3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In keeping with a narrative approach, I conducted a qualitative study focusing on the collection of naturalistic data. In other words, the data are not reduced or summarised during data collection and the study focuses on the explanations and analyses of human phenomena and events (Willig, 2009).

3.3.1. Qualitative Design

This research study involves three case studies, i.e. the study provides a detailed, in-depth description of the experiences of three participants (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009). Case studies allow for in-depth analysis and insight into individual experiences which sanction the appreciation of ambiguities and complexities found in interrelationships between the individuals and their social world (Crossley, 2007). The study touches on the participants and their current relationships, however, the main focus is on their individual processes in arriving at the current point in their lives. There are no comparisons between the participants' experiences only an analysis of the experiences separately as they were significant to the participants. Thus, the focus was on the rich descriptions of each participant's experiences.

3.3.2. Sampling

The sample was drawn from IPV survivors in South Africa, which, according to Westbrook (2008), is a term that “is used to more accurately define the population [of women who have been victims of IPV]” (p. 99). The sampling method involved sampling saturation (sampling continued until I had enough rich data), a form of non-probability sampling (put simply, no random selection of participants was involved and the sample was therefore not representative of the population), and purposeful sampling (the sample was selected with a specific purpose in mind making the sample non-representative of the population). To emphasise, the sample is not likely to be representative of the population (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Kagee, 2006; Gravetter & Forzano, 2009; Maree & Van Der Westhuizen, 2009) keeping with a narrative approach to research where the focus is on rich, individual narratives and not representative samples. The sample, however, is not required to represent the population. The case studies are not intended to be generalised. The aim of this study is to gain insight into the experiences of the individuals. Representativeness is therefore not a concern as it is not one of the aims of the research. “A feature of qualitative research is that each story that serves as data is unique and that the experiences described are highly individualised” (Flinck et al., 2005, p. 390).

Similarly, as previously mentioned, this study does not aim to equate the experiences of these participants with the experiences of other individuals.

For the purpose of this study participants were required to be survivors of IPV. For the participants to qualify as survivors, it must have been their decision to leave an abusive partner and to actively take steps and make changes to terminate the abusive relationship and end the cycle of abuse (Westbrook, 2008). Furthermore, the women are either currently in committed non-abusive relationships or have been in a committed non-abusive relationship since the abusive relationship. A committed relationship can involve co-habitation, engagement or marriage. However, the relationship had to be described as a committed relationship by participants, thereby ensuring that they qualified for the study by having escaped from the abusive cycle. The relationships are non-abusive relationships, or are defined as such by participants. It is the participants' perspectives that are important. Essentially, there must be no form of psychological, physical or sexual abuse present in the relationship dynamics and there needs to be an absence of IPV, as defined previously. The participants also needed to be competent in English.

An NGO, dedicated to assisting women who are or have been victims of abuse, agreed to work with me and assisted in the recruitment of participants. Participants were also recruited from a psychologist in private practice. The participants were either previous or current clients of the NGO or psychologist. As the study aimed to access rich and in-depth descriptions of individual experiences, the broad settings from which the participants were recruited resulted in variations in race, age and socioeconomic status, further allowing for variety in their unique experiences.

3.3.3. Data Collection

This study took a narrative approach to data collection. Each participant was asked to provide a narrative on her personal experience of the process of leaving the abusive relationship. The discourses we use shape our meaning-making within a specific culture or context specifying our experiences and are a product of social constructionism. Some

focus was therefore given to the social interactions through which the language was generated and abandoned (Kotzé & Kotzé, 1997). However, not all processes of psychological agency can be described through social interactions, thus, placing emphasis on the individual (Crossley, 2007; Ollershaw & Creswell, 2002). In the data collection section I acknowledge that stories are formed and influenced by culture and social interactions which has directed the focus of the study and the analysis of data on individual experiences and meanings.

Data collection took place in the form of a semi-structured interview. The interviews took place either in private consulting rooms or in a boardroom. The questions were designed by myself and the literature review guided me to focus the interview. A semi-structured interview was used as it consists of few guiding questions with a goal of keeping the interview focused on the topic of discussion. This allows the process to unfold leaving room for the participants to create their own stories rather than having the narratives suppressed by a structured question and answer session (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003). Questions were open-ended indicating that the interviews were prepared in advance but the questions provided room for the participants to answer in their own way (Kelly, 2006). Narrative interviewing techniques were used in order to allow for participants to provide a detailed description of their own unique experiences. Interview techniques used included; probing (pursuing answers without stating specific aspects to be considered), follow-up (allowing for further elaboration on a subject that appears to be significant to the interviewee), and structuring (the interviewer must know when a subject has been exhausted or is irrelevant in terms of the aim of the interview) (Kvale, 2007). The interviews each lasted between one hour and an hour and a half. Clarification of meaning took place by asking participants to elaborate or rephrase, allowing for disambiguation of statements for the purpose of analysis at a later stage (Kelly, 2006; Kvale, 2007). The interview questions can be seen in Appendix A. The interviews were once-off, no follow up interviews were conducted.

The interview process allowed the participant to tell her entire story; beginning, middle and end (Willig, 2009), as is necessary from a narrative perspective. This also allowed for

an analysis of the journey that each participant underwent beginning when she first realised she was in an abusive relationship, to the present, even leaving room for her considerations of the future. As the study is concerned with how each individual interprets and constructs her own reality and ascribes meaning and connections to the events, this methodology is believed to be best suited to the study. The selected narrative methodology also allows for meanings and experiences of identity, life and life transitions that may be overlooked with other methodologies (Estrella & Forinash, 2007; Hoshmand, 2005; Willig, 2009). The narrative process therefore allowed for an in-depth exploration of the processes the participants underwent during these transitions in their lives.

3.3.4. Data Analysis

3.3.4.1. The Three-Dimensional Space Approach

The three-dimensional space approach was chosen for its ability to open up a narrative inquiry space that allows for inquiries into the data that travel inward, outward, backward, forward, and are situated within a place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The inward movement refers to internal conditions, such as feelings and hopes. The outward movement refers to the environment or society. Lastly, the backward and forward movement refers to a movement between the past, present and future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This approach highlights experiences and interactions of individuals emphasising the description of individual experiences and leading to a more holistic lens used to tell the story. According to this approach, one examines people's personal experiences, as well as their interactions with others (occurring within a context), in order to understand them. These experiences are continuous in terms of learning, growing and making new experiences (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

The three aspects of this approach, as explained by Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002), are:

- i. **Interaction.** This aspect involves the personal experiences of the individual as well as social interactions with others.
- ii. **Continuity.** The past, present and future will be taken into account by considering information about past experiences, actions at present and future intended actions. This is significant because determining a beginning and an end provides a sense of purpose (Sclater, 2003).
- iii. **Situation.** Specific situations, including physical places, events and contexts, will be identified.

These three terms create a metaphorical three-dimensional space in which the narrative inquiry can take place. This space allows the participant to move in a dislocated way from a remembered past, to a present moment while imagining and constructing a future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The recorded interviews were first transcribed by myself which allowed for familiarisation with, and immersion in, the story. Transcripts were then read and re-read allowing for familiarisation with the data (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Kelly, 2006). The above three aspects were then identified and considered for the temporal dimensions, the personal and social balance and the sequence of paces to be taken into account (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Once this had taken place, I distanced myself from the texts and looked for significance in social interactions and personal meaning, all the while identifying themes, tensions and patterns that emerged in the stories. This happens naturally and the researcher can analyse both descriptions of the story as well as themes (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). An understanding will also naturally be formed of how a time and place shapes the lives of the participants and their stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I then wrote interim texts, ultimately producing a narrative account of the participants' lived experiences (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). In keeping with a narrative approach, emotions, thoughts and meaning-making are presented in addition to what happened (Chase, 2005). It is important to acknowledge, however, that no step by step process can be provided. Narrative enquiries are a negotiation process, from beginning to end, where plot lines and data materials are continually revised and texts repeatedly develop and change until the language of the final product captures the holistic

story as best it can (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This is also true of the analytical tools (as is seen in Chapter 4) where a clear-cut distinction cannot be made between the three tools, for they inevitably overlap and are interconnected throughout the stories.

3.3.5. Quality of the Study

Qualitative researchers separate from positivist conceptions of reliability and validity. Narrative research breaks away from these traditional measurements and rather aims to produce rich data that cannot be separated from their context and the full complexity is appreciated and understood (Crossley, 2007). The researcher aims to have high validity concerning the quality of the study in order for the research to answer the questions that it has set out to address (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009). It can be argued that what is most important to ensure quality of a narrative inquiry is that views and conclusions shared must make sense and ring true in the eyes of the researcher, the participants and the audience (Lieblich et al., 1998). This keeps with the ideas of social constructionism.

Validity refers to an argument that is sound and justified (Kvale, 2007). Reliability in a study refers to the consistency of findings, a more difficult concept to apply to this study as narratives are filled with contradictions and socially constructed meanings are not classified by consistency. In terms of qualitative research, credibility replaces validity, transferability replaces generalisability, dependability replaces reliability and conformability replaces objectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Van Der Riet & Durrheim, 2006). Findings have to be convincing and believable and should provide a rich and detailed description of meanings that develop in a certain context (Van Der Riet & Durrheim, 2006). A valid narrative is a narrative that is well-grounded in data, supported by examples from the texts and developed by a continuously reflexive process (Harbison, 2007). From a narrative perspective, due to the wide variety of possible historical, cultural and practical contexts, it would be impossible to make any universal claim about the nature of human selves and personal experiences (Crossley, 2007). As the approach to this study used in-depth interviews of a small number of case studies, rich descriptions ensure rich detail allowing arguments to be convincing and for assessing to which

contexts the results are transferable. In addition to ensuring that the findings represent a rich and accurate description of the participants' experiences as told by them, the researcher ensured that research findings were coherent by forming a complete meaningful picture, evidencing innovation and originality (Lieblich et al., 1998).

What is important is that I, the researcher, acknowledged that the analysis carried out was interpretive which is personal and partial. In addition, I was open to changing conclusions when necessary such as when further reading shed light on new information and new interpretations (Lieblich et al., 1998). Reflexivity involves knowing oneself and one's own influence within the research and the research process (Steier, 1991). It is believed that this will add to the strength of the study as I reflected on my own role in the interpretation of the narratives, including possible bias, and the process of data analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Willig, 2009).

3.3.6. Ethical Considerations

It is essential to keep ethical considerations in mind when conducting a research study as this ensures safety and peace of mind for both the researcher and research participants (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009).

The three women selected to participate were asked if they would like to participate in the procedure and for permission to voice record the interview. The purpose of the study was explained in a way that they could understand thereby allowing them to make an informed decision about participating. The participants were also given an opportunity to ask questions and were informed that they could withdraw at any stage if they chose to do so. Participants were briefed at the start of the interview to inform them of the purpose of the interview (Kvale, 2007) and a consent form was signed. As the participants were recruited through an NGO and a private psychologist, both the NGO and psychologist asked participants if they wanted to participate in the study. Once participants agreed their contact details were not given directly to the researcher. Instead, the NGO and the

private psychologist contacted participants directly and set up appointments for interviews between the researcher and the participants.

I, as the researcher, ensured that confidentiality, as well as anonymity, was maintained (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009; Willig, 2009). Anonymity may be maintained through the provision of pseudonyms in the research report when discussing participants, and any identifying information is disguised or removed. All transcripts and tapes were kept safely locked in a cupboard where, no one other than myself, had access. Any electronic information was kept under a password in order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

The data will be stored at the University of Pretoria (UP) for 15 years according to university regulations, after which the records will be destroyed. The research process only began once approval from the ethics (UP ethics) committee had been obtained. I have maintained ethical principles regarding the research results and report. No data will be falsified or fabricated, and plagiarism will be avoided (Bless et al., 2006).

3.4. CONCLUSION

As discussed in this chapter, the perspective from which the interviews will be analysed is a narrative approach. In keeping with narrative research and postmodernism, the women's experiences will be the focus of the analysis and attention will be given to their individual stories. However, attention will also be given to how these stories have been informed by the communities they live in and how this has shaped their experiences. The next chapter will provide an in-depth discussion of the interviews with the three participants and will present the analysis of the interviews conducted from a narrative perspective using the three-dimensional space approach.

Chapter 4 provides an in-depth look at the narratives obtained from the three participants during the interview process. The women's stories are explored and their identities and meaning-making, in the face of their social circumstances, are explored and uncovered as circumstances changed and they became survivors.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter an analysis and discussion of the transcripts is provided. As discussed in Chapter 3, the analysis was done using the three-dimensional space approach. This approach involves the use of three tools, namely **interaction**, **continuity** and **situation** (or **event**) (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). More specifically, **interaction** is a tool with which social interactions are analyzed in terms of the personal meanings they have for the individual. **Continuity** is a tool that allows for consideration of the past, present and future, and how the passing of time (as well as intended actions) give purpose and meaning to the individual. **Situation** is a tool that allows for specific places, **events** and **situations** or **contexts** to be identified (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). These three aspects provided the lenses through which the transcripts were viewed, paying attention to how the stories move back and forth through time, influenced and shaped through interactions with others, the place and time, and how interactions shaped the lives and stories of the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Through this process of three-dimensional space analysis, a final product formed with the holistic story of each participant captured, as best as possible. As themes, tensions and patterns emerge, emotions, thoughts and meaning-making are drawn out (in addition to actual events) (Chase, 2005) and identities and significant personal meanings are revealed (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

4.2. ANNA

Anna's story starts in the past, about 7 years before this story was told. Her story is one of **continuity** as it moves, not only from past to present but, through the present and into the

future. What was outstanding was the insight she had into herself and her **situation** from the very beginning of her story, as told in the interview:

“It’s not easy to move out of that relationship...in that stage we need somebody to talk to. It’s not an easy thing. There you feel like the higher you go the colder it becomes...and abusive men are very clever, I should say. Whenever he realise that he has you, he’ll do by all the means to make you smile, so he can be sorry and all that. But it is not actually that they are sorry”.

Anna has the ability to reflect on her past **situation** with great awareness of her own role and impact in the story. However, at the same time, she is able to see the strength in herself and the power that she has gained through acknowledging her story and taking ownership of who she was then and how she has become who she is today, *“I just had the positive mind that I wanted to be something else. I wouldn’t say I’ve reached where I wanted to be, but I still will”*. This quote shows that **continuity** (future identity) gives purpose and meaning to the individual.

4.2.1. Interaction, Continuity and Situation

Anna’s story started with her being a victim of her **situation** (as she understood herself in her **context**), she was a victim of IPV and she let the **situation** control her; *“[the abuse] was physical. But I couldn’t take him to jail because he was the one providing food and all that”*. Here, an identity had already emerged for Anna through her **interactions** with her abusive boyfriend. She was a trapped victim of her **situation**. She describes herself as being in love with her boyfriend at the time, *“when he beat me I loved him extremely high”*, and when he left her for other women she would look for him until he returned to her and they would fall back into the same pattern of IPV. This cycle of abuse was one maintained by the abuser through abusive behaviour (Westbrook, 2008). However the meaning of the relationship was maintained by a joint understanding and **interaction** of both Anna’s boyfriend and herself behaving in a way that subscribed IPV as acceptable. *“when he beat me I loved him extremely high, so every time there’s a misunderstanding it was a bit of normal to me that we gonna fight and all that”*. So it was through their

interactions (seen in the quote as their patterns of fighting), as well as what she had learned from the **continuity** of their relationship (how it had been in the past, what it was currently like, and what she anticipated in the future), and the impact of the **interaction**, which gave the personal meaning that Anna ascribed to the abuse (*“it was a bit of normal to me that we gonna fight and all that”*). It was this meaning that both Anna and her boyfriend took to form their identities of victim and abuser, respectively. They defined their relationship as an abusive one through **events** and their **interactions**, acceptable to both of them. The meaning they attributed to their interaction was that it is “normal” which served to continue the pattern of abuse.

From a narrative perspective, violence lies within the dominant stories of male power. It is therefore these dominant stories, as dictated by society, that we shape our roles as men or women (Freedman & Combs, 2002; White & Epston, 1990). Therefore, if society condones male dominance and the use of violence, men may behave accordingly and both men and women may view violence as normal in the **context**. We can see the dominant narrative of society reflected in the quote of the victim, *“it was a bit of normal”*.

This continued for approximately 2 years and 6 months, according to Anna. However, the rate at which she told her story, she only discussed this stage (her life controlled by IPV) for a short period and quickly progressed to talking about the period when she took control of her life and became a survivor of IPV, rather than a victim (Oosthuizen & Wissing, 2005). Anna currently talks about herself as a survivor and she sees herself in the future as someone who will not be a victim again (**continuity**). Anna is someone with a continuously changing identity. The **continuity** is evident as Anna narrates her story, detailing **events** and actions of the past and present, and discussing her future with a sense of purpose (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002; Sclater, 2003):

“I didn’t have a choice, that’s what I told myself, that’s why even when I had to eat from bins and all that. I just had that positive mind that I knew I wanted to be something else. I wouldn’t say that I have reached where I wanted to be, but I still will. That’s why most of the things I do I try my very best”.

Continuity (past and future identity) gives purpose and meaning to Anna, and the pattern of future identity is evident; *“but I still will”*.

Anna’s boyfriend started abusing her shortly after the **event** of her mother passing away. She had become completely dependent on him (**situation**), *“actually this thing started changing after my, my mom’s death because all the time everything was okay and all that. After my mom’s funeral. He was the one who was supposed to provide this and that”*. It was the **event** of her mother’s passing that changed their **situation** and **interactions**, thus, changing how they defined their relationship and interacted with one another. Anna’s boyfriend was defined as the provider (**context**). Research conducted by Bostock et al. (2009) keeps with this. They found that IPV often commences once a commitment (e.g. cohabitation) is entered into. This, once again, indicates a **situation** alters the shared meanings in the relationship. She accepted the abuse and ascribed it as normal, in fact, when he abused her, she loved him even more, indicated by, *“I still wanted to be with him. I even loved him more.... it was more like normal”*.

Fanslow and Robinson (2010) explain that reasons for staying in an abusive relationship can include being in love with the abuser, a **context** of financial dependence or various practical reasons (e.g. housing). Anna’s personal meaning of abuse included these factors just described, but also that she experienced it as love and it was normal. Through these **interactions** she experienced love for him. This personal meaning of abuse being normal comes from a **continuity** of abusive **interactions** in Anna’s life (as will be discussed later under “Culture and Family”). Anna was abused by her uncle. For Anna, the abuse at the hands of her boyfriend paled in comparison and seemed a normal part of life. *“So, I think the abuse started at home, that’s why when that guy was doing it, it was better compared to...”*. As Meyer et al. (2010) explained it, victims of IPV will embark on a search for a means of making sense of the violence and for a means of handling it. To Anna, it made sense to her that this was *“normal”* and that it was love. For her, this was her personal meaning and this made it a bearable **situation**.

This, alone, demonstrates the analysis technique of the three-dimensional space approach. Her story is looked at both inwardly and outwardly, moves both forward and backward and is situated within a **context** (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Anna's inward movement is any feelings she may have had over losing her mother, as well as any hopes or feelings she may have had about moving in with her boyfriend at the time, and any feelings and personal meanings attributed to the abusive **situation**. The outward movement refers to the **event** of her mother's death, moving in with her boyfriend and the meanings she and her boyfriend created regarding the abuse. The **context** was the death of her mother, cohabitation, and perceptions of abuse in broader society that informed their **situation** and their making meaning thereof. From this analytic perspective it is evident that Anna's inward story was not just informed by her own meaning making but also by her outward story, her **interactions** and her **context**. In other words, the abuse stemmed from many things, her own personal feelings and opinions on abuse, her boyfriends opinions of abuse, her family and society's opinions of abuse, as well as her circumstance of being dependent on her boyfriend and lacking support that she would have had from her mother.

Anna's belief that her boyfriend loved her, and showed his love with his control and physical and sexual abuse, was so strong (*"when he beat me I loved him extremely high"*) that when she found herself in the **situation** of being pregnant and her partner insisting they abort the baby, she subjected herself to various methods and attempts of forcing a miscarriage. *"And when I'm four months that's when I started discovering that I'm pregnant. And I told him, he beat me, that we need to make an abortion. And of which we tried making an abortion and he was doing it with me"*. This shared **interaction** (*"he beat me"*) was maintained until a new **event** happened, the birth of Anna's son. When the various attempts did not work, the baby was carried to full term and Anna gave birth to her son. A new personal meaning of love was created for her.

The birth of her son was a very significant event for Anna and a turning point (Chang et al., 2010) in her story. The significance of **continuity**, and how it gives shape to Anna's story, is evident here as it was at this point where, despite her past acceptance of the

abusive relationship, her meaning and, consequently, her identity changed in the present (from victim to protector). Her future took on new meaning and purpose. Her new way of showing love (what she felt was a stronger and truer love) was through protection from abuse, not submission to abuse. *“I had to fight for his [her son’s] life”*. The new meaning led to new **interactions**. Consequently, the new meaning of love changed the meaning of the relationship with her boyfriend. Anna was now driven to protect her son from abuse, *“he was meaning to kill the child... but you know when you giving birth it’s something else... you can’t just kill a child.... We had to fight”*. The abuse was no longer acceptable. Subsequently, Anna’s identity changed from victim to protector, and from girlfriend to mother, as the new **interaction** with her son, and her personal meanings attached to his birth and her role in his life, became very powerful for her. Her **interactions** with her abusive boyfriend had changed. *“We had to fight physically and until I screamed there were people coming to help us.”*

Anna tried more than once to end the abusive relationship. As was mentioned in Chapter 3, the analytical tools inevitably overlap as the analysis of the stories progress. There is **continuity** as past **events** and **interactions** informed her decision to end the relationship, but when she considered her future, she felt she needed to have her boyfriend in her life. What she learned was that her attribution of love to abuse was a strong factor that kept her in the relationship. The first time she tried to end the relationship she changed her mind, believing that she needed her boyfriend and that he loved her and needed her.

“I said that’s enough. And then the relationship didn’t end there because after that fight when people came, he ran. And after he ran I had to go out and look for him... I think a month later, I hunted him until I find him back and I said to him, ‘I’m sorry I had to expose you and, and, I still want you back in my life.... So he came back to my life and we still carried on”.

All she knew was her relationship with him- her past informed her present and ideas of the future (**continuity**). The meaning she had ascribed to their **interactions** was so powerful she did not think she would be able to survive without it. *“I really loved him and he was the first boyfriend in my life.... I never thought I would move on.”*

However, the second time she left, she managed to stay away. This step required a change in personal meanings ascribed to the relationship, a change in her perception and beliefs about herself or her identity, and was characterized by other big **events** or **situations** (such as, breaking the silence surrounding the abuse, allowing other people into her life, and moving to the city).

“Four months later we had a fight. That was the last time where I said I’m moving out. We had a fight because he had to beat me and my child at the same time... There was this other lady... but when she came that day, unfortunately that same day she came was the day when we had a fight and there was, I was blood, with blood, and the child also and all that. And then the lady said to me she needs this man, we need to take him to the police station. And I said, for him to go to jail, I’d rather just run away. And, that’s when I decided to leave home and start coming to [the city]”.

Anna’s story corroborates Westbrook’s (2008) finding that the abusive cycle is maintained by the abuser and the change is initiated by the survivor. Through the abusive **interaction** with her boyfriend, Anna broke her pattern of silence by calling for help (*“and until I screamed”*). After the **event** of being discovered, covered in blood, by another lady, and that **interaction** prompting Anna to leave for good, she managed to initiate change in her **situation** by ascribing new personal meaning to the **continuity** of the abuse (how she wanted the future to be different). As Anna put it, *“that’s when life started getting better”*. An advantage I hoped this study would have was the identification of the strengths of the participants that enabled them to escape the abusive cycle and contribute to further knowledge on surviving IPV (Oosthuizen & Wissing, 2005). One of these strengths is evident in how Anna was able to change the discourse into one where IPV is not regarded a norm. Redefining her identity as a survivor and mother, rather than a victim, and leaving the abusive **situation**, already creates a new discourse of strength and change, and a new story, or narrative, which unfolds into a new possible future.

Once Anna made this change, she discovered a strength and determination in herself that she only knew once before in high school and which was also taken away by an abuser, her uncle. Before the abuse by her uncle Anna was confident, sure of herself, and had big plans for her life. However, an **event** happened, and her story changed.

“I started dating when I was in matric, because I was Christian and that’s how we believe, you don’t, you don’t behave sexually and all that. But then he went - he destroyed that. And you see that was my dream, that was my goal...he ruined it. I couldn’t stand in front of people anymore.”

This demonstrates **continuity** of the abusive story in Anna’s life and illustrates what the abuse took away from her. She was sure of herself before the abuse and had big dreams, something that she was able to take back again. *“I just had that positive mind, that I knew I wanted to be something else.”* Anna demonstrated the self-efficacy that Meyer et al. (2009) found to be imperative in women who become survivors. They believe they have control over their **situation** and are more persistent and resilient in applying any variety of coping strategies.

Anna’s story became one of fierce independence. She would rather use men than be used by them. Her story became one of doing anything to protect her son and herself. *“I think that if I didn’t have a child I would have become a prostitute. But for the sake of my child I felt I just needed to make a life”*. It can be seen again how Anna’s identity evolved into mother/protector in relation to her **interactions** with her son, and the personal meaning she ascribed to their relationship. She found a strength and capability in herself to weather the struggle, beginning by eating from dustbins, working in various stores, and currently finding herself working for a large-scale successful company. She was hoping for a promotion in the near future and was working towards a high-paying, and secure, position in the company one day. She even spoke about writing a book to inspire women who also have stories of abuse. All of these **situations**, as Anna told them, physically demonstrate the change over time (**continuity**) in her view of herself and the rebirth of her determination to make something of her life in the future.

4.2.2. Identity

Anna's identity evolved as she spoke about herself throughout her story. She started as a victim of IPV. She believed herself to be defined by an abusive relationship and no better than deserving of an abusive "love". *"When he beats me I love him extremely high, so every time there's a misunderstanding it was a bit of normal to me that we gonna fight and all that"*. This is evidence of her identity as a victim. In this **interaction** she was defined as the victim and he was defined as the abuser. *"My boyfriend started beating me.... when I started questioning about it, he'll beat me"*. However, she soon described herself as someone who was able to break away from the dominant narrative as a victim of abuse (Kvale, 2007) and able to assimilate an identity of someone who was strong, who could protect and who could stand on her own two feet. *"I started to know, okay fine I can find a place of my own, and, and, and all those things"*. This is evidence of her identity as a survivor and how the transformation in her story caused a transformation in her. What this story clearly demonstrates is the narrative perspective of identity as it emerges in relation to social aspects and **interactions** (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

Anna's identities were subject to various **interactions** and **situations** throughout her story. These identities ranged from being:

- a daughter: *"I'm sure if my mom was still there, I was going to speak to her."*
- a Christian and a person with high morals: *"I started dating in matric, because I was Christian and that's how we believe you don't, you don't behave sexually and all that."*
- an individual: *"I struggled a lot to complete my matric.... I passed it.... I was beaten up, but for the fact I that I knew I needed my matric. When I grew up I wanted to be a quantity surveyor."*

These identities then ranged to being:

- a victim: *"Well the abusive relationship, I would just shortly say, you don't like your life...because you will end up being dead."*

- dependent: *“When my mom passed away she didn’t have her house and we were staying in another area.... So I actually didn’t have a home afterwards because most of the time I was spending it at his house.”*
- unworthy: *“I couldn’t stand in front of people anymore.... I started dating because I felt useless.”*

These identities then ranged to being:

- a Christian: *“Sometimes when I think about that thing, this thing, I always say no, God had a purpose about my life.”*
- a survivor: *“I think I’m very strong and I think I know what I want.”*
- independent: *“I only had that thing that my life belongs to me.”*
- a mother: *“Me and my child, we’ve got a very strong bond. He’s still young but we talk about every. I listen to each and every thing he says.”*
- a valued woman: *“[the new relationship] tells me I’m a princess, like he calls me. So, ja, I’m a woman, I really, I could really put my feet down and say I’m a woman.”*

This demonstrates how her identity was not only about whom she believed herself to be as an individual, moving across time from past to present to future (**continuity**), but was also influenced by how she existed in relation to others (**interaction**) (Sclater, 2003) and according to **events** that unfolded in her life.

Anna found it difficult to change her identity from a victim and how this defined her, *“It’s not easy. I always felt like I could go back”*, to one where she was independent. As her life story continued, she found herself shaping herself according to her beliefs that were informed by her years of abuse (**continuity** and **interactions**), and then reshaping herself according to her new experiences and the new **situation** (having a son), and abuse became unacceptable. Today, when she speaks about her life and her son, she speaks about standing up for her son and for herself and what she believes in. *“With blacks, I will choose the husband instead of the child. But with me I won’t do it. If a man gets to be shouting or anything at my child I would never, I would never allow that”*. She speaks of herself in a way that she believes she is worthy of the good things in life and this is a value that she wants to instil in her son. Her identity has become one of good self-worth,

strength and independence. She identifies herself as a survivor (“*I always say I’m the most strongest woman, especially in my community*”) and she feels she is finding herself again (“*And also, to me, I realize I’m not a kind of person like a rough and all that, but due to the **situation**, that’s what made me that kind of person, but now I really feel myself*”).

4.2.3. Normalcy and Silence of IPV

When Anna spoke about the abuse at the hands of her boyfriend, she mentioned “*I wasn’t telling anybody*”. When she spoke about the abuse at the hands of her uncle, she said “*We not those kind of people where we will talk*”. She even expressed talking to me about the abuse as a big step. I was the first person she had shared so much with, “*Well I actually think I’m passed that [fear] because here I am speaking to you*”. Her **interactions** around abuse, and the abusive **situations** themselves, had always been characterized by silence. Fox et al. (2007) have found that this is particularly common in a South African cultural context where, although abuse may be common in a community, it is a taboo subject and women are expected to suffer in silence.

Anna grew up believing that abuse was something that should not be spoken about. She also became afraid to speak about the abuse because her experience was one where “*sometimes I feel like people will judge you because of what was beyond your control*”. Anna believed that breaking the silence around abuse could have had serious consequences for her, such as being judged or slandered in the community or implications for her safety (Montalvo-Liendo, 2008). These beliefs demonstrate the **continuity** of **interactions** and **situations** in Anna’s life that informed her that abuse should never be spoken about. This resulted in the abuse taking on a personal meaning of silence or even normalcy: “*I told my mom and she told me I was lying*” (**interaction**); “*They even shout at me, call me all those, you know those names, ugly names*” (**interaction**); “*The fact that they couldn’t believe me...it just showed me they don’t care*” (personal meaning); “*I get hurt emotionally because I think of those things I can’t talk about them*” (personal meaning). She felt like the abuse had defined her and her

worth, to a large extent. She had defined herself in terms of the abuse (the abuse shaped her identity). It became something she was ashamed of and consequently felt it was something she could never speak about, *“and you think back, you cry, and it’s just because you scared if you tell people one day they will be talking about things behind your back.... I can’t speak to anybody about it....And you can’t tell them you are being abused”*. In light of this, the abuse became something that happens to people, is not spoken about and is an accepted part of life, *“most of us, we live an abusive life and we not even aware it’s abusive”*. It became so normal.

It was speaking out that makes her story exceptional. In spite of **situations** where abuse was socially accepted as *“normal”*, and in spite of having grown up in **interactions** where abuse was characterized by silence, Anna still managed to speak out. What changed this for Anna was an **event**, the birth of her son, *“we had to fight physically and until I screamed, there were people coming to help us”*. What was also an important **interaction** was the feeling that she could trust someone again, namely, her current boyfriend, *“I know I think I need to speak to him.... we talk about everything. Even though I know I’m hiding my own thing, but I know I’m going to open up and talk”*. Her story of silence surrounding abuse is one of **continuity** which moved from remaining silent, to speaking out, even screaming.

Anna broke from the dominant story of abuse and created her own story where she was not accepting of the abuse, not for herself or her son, and where she was capable of speaking about it and doing something to change it. This is demonstrated in her bravery in speaking to me, *“well I think, actually, I am passed that [fear] because here I am speaking to you. I couldn’t do it”*, her dream of writing a book about her life and the abuse she suffered, *“I’ve got this book I written from then. It can be a book, it’s just I’m not having the confidence of myself”*, and her aspiration to one day confront her abusive uncle, *“well, with my uncle actually for now, it happened, the only thing I need is to know why did he do it”*. She is incorporating her past and future (**continuity**) by transforming her story of abuse into a story of healing. Anna is re-authoring (Freedman & Combs, 1996) her story by confronting **situations** and **interactions** that have shaped her identity

and will continue to do so. In fact, Anna now states that abused women need to talk to someone to be able to take the necessary first step and move out of the relationship:

“in that stage we need somebody to talk to. It’s not an easy thing...especially I would say for all the abused women, if they go through that they must go, they need to speak to people...I think sometimes if maybe I can just get an opportunity to stood up there and just say everything how it happened for me. It could help other people”.

4.2.4. Culture and Family

Boonzaier and De La Rey (2003) discuss the South African sociocultural context as baring a unique manifestation of violence against women where women are silent about their experiences of violence and men choose their preferred method of living according to their gender identity, often violently. Much of this appears to be a unique African social construction in which, as has been discussed, women are socialised into baring burdens in silence to avoid scandal and to maintain pride. For Anna this acceptance of abuse as normal may go years back, indicating it as a **continuous** formative process. It goes even further into her past when she was abused by an uncle (an influential **interaction**), *“my uncle is the one who broke my virginity”*, beyond the construction of abuse as acceptable in the relationship with her abusive boyfriend (**interaction**). Anna’s family taught her that women should be submissive to men and men have rights in a home that women may not question, *“when you speak a woman should not say a word... my mom doesn’t answer my dad.... so I think that was from the family”*. The meanings that she ascribed to abuse at home were based on **events** and **interactions** that she had experienced and she had given meaning to, being more painful for her than any other kind of abuse. She said that she would not have expected something like that from the people she was close to and who were supposed to love her, *“most of the abuse there is from the family. And of which that is very hurting because I wouldn’t expect something from you”*. And as may be the case for Anna, a history of violence in one’s family may make one more tolerant of violence in the future. A discourse of violence is bought as the norm (Bischoff, 2006).

The implications of this are substantial. It means that when she walked away from her relationship in which she suffered IPV, she was not only standing up against the constructions of abuse that she shared with her boyfriend at the time, but she was also standing up against a lifetime of **continuous** constructions and beliefs that had become a part of her through her family. A family echoing wider discourses found in cultural and societal **contexts/situations**. She was making entirely new personal meanings for herself that no longer rang true of abuse as love or “*normal*”. She was taking steps to re-author her life and breaking away from what she experienced to be the dominant narrative in society. Anna was standing up against discourses where men are given power and privilege and women are consequently seen as subordinate. Anna was standing up against gender roles shaped by her community that contributed to IPV where men are socialised into roles of strength and power, exercising control over women and protective of their dominance (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003; Gilfus et al., 2010). This again is evidence of the strength in Anna that enabled her to begin a new discourse and change her current story, allowing a new narrative to unfold (Oosthuizen & Wissing, 2005).

4.2.5. Money and Status

A co-constructed belief in Anna’s life has been that money makes you powerful, money makes you immune to bad things and money creates a **situation** where anything is possible. I say co-constructed because it has been through **interactions** with others that Anna has found money has a meaning of power and status. People who have money are valuable people:

“you know I go home, they, I’m one of the top people because I’m working. ...There’s this other woman who adores me, she used to work in the pie shop there where I used to take the bins and eat from the bins. She knows me. And, and I went there the other time and I told her what I am today and she’s still working there. She was like ‘Wow!’”.

As can be understood by the idea of **continuity**, Anna's family values and **interactions** with her shaped her beliefs and personal meanings ascribed to acquiring money and position. In the context in which Anna grew up, not a lot of people worked and no one had money in abundance. From a young age she was influenced by her family's attitudes towards money and believed that if she worked and earned a salary she would be important, *"The money you earn you could have a place of your own, and all that"*. This belief was reinforced as she returned to her uncle's house as time passed (**continuity**). Her **interactions** with him, and his family, are changing. Her family respects her and is more open to hearing her story for the first time, *"Only we managed to speak about it, only now, you know, because when I started working here it was something different"*. One could say her **situation** of permanent employment, with a monthly salary, has placed her in a position of powerful **interactions**. A position that she aimed for when she left home, left her ex-boyfriends house and decided to change her future, a decision that gave her future a purpose and meaning and gave her story **continuity**.

The story of money, or working to become someone, has **continuity** in Anna's life. When she was a child, her goal was to achieve her matric, *"I struggled a lot to complete my matric. ... I passed it"*. When she managed this, in spite of the difficulties she encountered, she felt that she was capable of achieving something. It is largely this **continued** and persevering story of finding a job to become someone, and to make something of your life, that drove her to the city after leaving her abusive boyfriend. This also drove her to keep achieving:

"Ja, I didn't have a choice, that's why I told myself, that's why even when I had to eat from that bins and all that. I just had that positive mind that I knew I want to be something else. I wouldn't say I've reached where I wanted to be but I still will".

This construction of money as power is a story that still holds true in her **interactions** with her family **context** today. Her money has given her status at home:

"I'm the only one's who's successful at this point, in my family, whole family. So, and, I'm looking after them. ...The money you earn, you could have a place of your own, and all that. That's when my uncle started apologizing".

For Anna, her **situation** gives her power at home and this power is her first step in addressing the pain she remembers from home. Money and status is what will make her a valuable person in her family's eyes and this is a shared construction that will help her begin her road to healing in her **interactions** with the family. It is in these **interactions** that the meaning of value and power is shared and it is in these **interactions** that change will happen. For Anna, having a job is about more than being able to pay bills. It says something about her worth as a person. It says something of her courage and her capabilities and about the **continuity** in her story in rising up from her struggles, *"I'm the only one who's successful. ... I sometimes am proud of myself, but you know, and I helped them. I won't leave them behind."*

4.2.6. Aloneness and Mistrust

Through the **interactions** with her abusive boyfriend, Anna felt manipulated and used. She said that after her experience with him *"I never trusted any other man. I never, uh, actually, I never wanted any man"*. When Anna tells her story, it is brought together **continuously** through **interactions** and **events** that are filled with betrayal, mistrust and an overwhelming sense of being alone in her battle, *"and abusive men are very clever I should say. Whenever he realise that he has you he'll do by all the means to make you smile, so he can be sorry and all that. But it is not actually that they are sorry"*. Even when she confided in her family about the abuse at the hands of her uncle, they would not believe her, *"I still don't know the reason why they couldn't believe me"*. This **interaction** only further exacerbated her belief that people she loves cannot be trusted, so, who can she trust? This left her in silence and feeling very alone, *"I get hurt emotionally because I think of those things I can't talk about them"*. This demonstrates the **continuity** of aspects of abuse across Anna's past, present and future and how she attributes meanings to the **events** and the **interactions**, in this case, the theme of silence is **continuous**. Even when discussing the possibility of talking to her boyfriend about her past she says, *"I just think he might leave me, or, something, I don't know"*. To this day she feels she cannot trust her family, *"Ja, because I can't trust them. ... I can't trust them, even towards the child"*.

Anna worked hard to create new stories and constructions for herself in order to live a better life and feel like a better person. As mentioned previously, she identified **interactions** with key people who have assisted her in her **continuous** process of change and growth. One of these people is her boyfriend. One of the ways he helped her was to teach her to how to trust again:

“We fail to love I would say. And it’s hard to see if somebody loves you because you don’t give that, but immediately you start giving, that’s when you feel different. In the beginning I was like that. But now, he’s just been there and cared and he’s supported me in so many ways. That’s when I started to trust and all that....so, I start seeing there are good men out there.... so I realize there are men with love out there. We just can’t see them because we are stuck”.

When I asked her if she thought her fear to trust would ever leave her, she said:

“Well it will. Because it was worse. Now it’s much better. It will, it just depends on what kind of a person do you meet afterwards. And the other thing I realise is that we get too close people because of what we experienced in the past, we don’t give them that chance”.

This is another testament to the long way Anna has come and how co-constructing her story through **interactions** with someone she can love and trust has helped transform her into a new, stronger, happier person. *“He showed me that he’s got love....All I need to do is just to be, to give him a chance. Not compare, don’t compare anyone with him. I must just give him a chance”.*

4.2.7. Change: Significant People and God

For the process of change to take place, a **situation** encompassing the following is necessary; awareness, perceived support, and self-efficacy or perceived control (Chang et al., 2010). As discussed previously, Anna had an awareness of her **situation** and an awareness of her role in the situation. Nonetheless, **interactions** with her boyfriend defined her situation as normal. However, a new kind of awareness came about in an

interaction with a friend of her mother's who came to speak to her about the abuse. This woman changed Anna's perspective. She brought new information to Anna's understanding, explaining that either Anna or her son, or possibly both, could one day be murdered at the hands of her boyfriend and as a consequence of the ongoing abuse:

“And then the lady said to me she needs this man, we need to take him to the police station. And I said for him to go to jail, I'd rather just run away. And, that's when I decided to leave home and start coming to [this city]”.

It was at this point, in this **situation**, that Anna began to change her definition of an acceptable relationship in **interaction** with and support from this other woman. Anna became aware that the **situation** was not acceptable and it needed to change, *“I never thought I would move on... in that stage we need somebody to talk to... that lady was pushing that I must take him to jail... so that's when I just decided I'm going to run away”*. She thought she was supposed to be living the way she was, *“up until you meet somebody. Up until I met that lady”*. It was this **event** that changed the direction of her story. Even without available resources, which Nurius and Macy (2010) identify as necessary for a woman to leave an abusive **situation**, Anna had found what she felt she needed to start her process of change.

Anna discussed the improvements in her life in relation to **interactions** with significant people around her. She believes she would possibly be dead today if that **event** had not occurred, namely, where the woman had spoken to her and *“pushed”* her to take her boyfriend to jail, or to at least leave him, *“Because she actually made me be aware that the man, the guy could go to jail for it. And if, what if I would have died from that, that thing”*. She also believes that it is her boyfriend today who makes her a better person. They have defined their relationship, in light of their **interactions**, as one of respect, commitment, support and love, *“my boyfriend now... he showed me that he's, you know, it's so different”*. One could say the **event** of meeting her new boyfriend, and the **situation** and **interactions** of their relationship, has been another aspect that has influenced the **continuity** of her story, especially its personal meaning, purpose and direction. This is a kind of relationship she never knew before. She says he is the only man she can be herself with, *“So he's actually the one who's changed my life completely.*

*I began to trust again, to love... he gave me the support, he's the one who channelled me to that". It is in this relationship, with the nurturing **interactions** and the new socially defined acceptance of what a relationship is, that she believes she will find healing through talking to him about what happened in the past, "And he treats me like a woman. Like, I've got, I'm entitled to my own opinion and we talk about everything".*

She also believes that it is through God that she will find healing. God was very significant for her in the past (when she was in school). She ascribed very strong personal meaning to what God meant in her life. She described herself as a strong Christian before she suffered abuse at the hands of her uncle, but when she accepted that her life was characterized by abuse, she no longer felt she was worthy of God. Her identity transformed from Christian to "slut". "I grew up knowing that I don't want to do anything, I want to go to school and get married and break my virginity. It just happened and that hurts me". It was when her **context** changed and she ventured out on her own, began defining her life on her own terms, felt her circumstances were improving, and was in control of her decisions and her life, that she turned to God again, "But I want my children to go to church. I just need the courage, get back to that life... Always pray and God makes it". She attributes much of her growth and the good things in her life to her **interaction** with Him, His intervention and guidance, "sometimes when I think about that, this thing, I always say 'no'. God had a purpose about my life. Now I'm with this man I love and he's, I'm happy, I'm very happy". The personal meaning of her relationship with God is found in her belief that she received much of her courage and her hope along her journey from God. For Anna it can be understood that He contributed largely to the **continuity** of her story, giving her purpose and guiding her.

Most important to Anna is her son, "Me and my child, we've got a very strong bond." It is because of her son that Anna re-authored her story and found a new meaning through **interaction**. She gave new definitions to the abuse of her past, she gave new meaning to the present, and she wrote new hopes for her future, thereby finding meaning through **continuity**. It is also because of her son and her identity as his mother and protector that she makes sure that he grows up with values of good self-worth and an abuse-free life,

“He’s still young but we talk about every.... I listen to each and every thing he says....I think it’s something that is important”. The **interactions** between Anna and her son allowed them to construct new meanings of abuse with one another. Abuse is not an option. Life is about love, support and caring, *“If a man gets to be shouting or anything to my child I would never, I would never allow that”*.

For Anna, three significant, pivotal **events** and sets of **interactions** have been those with her son, the lady and her current boyfriend. These are the people who are key characters in her story and allowed her to write and rewrite her story as she shaped it. This is in keeping with the concept of **continuity**, as it is according to these **events** and **interactions**, and according to personal meanings she discovered- along with the socially defined meanings she accepted- that she storied her life. She gave meaning to her past and continues to give meanings as she re-tells her story. She is **continuously** writing hopes and dreams for her future (Sclater, 2003).

4.2.8. Anna’s Message

Anna’s story is an apt illustration of the premise of narrative research which focuses on how people construct stories about their lives in order to bring meaning to their experiences/**situations**, **interactions** and **events** (Willig, 2009). Having been through everything she has gone through, and having grown as a person and woman, she still speaks of pain, emotional scars, fears and struggles. However, she also speaks of the possibility of healing in the future (**continuity**). This is a testament to how the meaning she ascribed to her life, and herself as a person, has transformed her into someone with strength and much to offer people who will love her in the way she now believes she deserves to be loved, *“I think they will see me as a strong person”*. This is also substantiation to how the meanings she has given to past experiences, and what she hopes for in her future, gives her story **continuity** and purpose.

When Anna speaks of what she had learned from her experiences and **events** in her life, and what she would share with women in a similar situation, she says:

“So those abusive men, they are not meant to be with any woman.... Immediately leave him. But make a case, open a case somewhere else because those people they can kill you. Ja. Open a case. For your protection order. Keep your distance, that’s it.... What if I would have not met this guy? I might end up maybe being HIV positive. Because of somebody who used my love. I would say don’t. Don’t stand for that. Leave him. Either he’s the provider or anything, leave him. You can make it. Women can make it. Ja. I did it”.

4.3. KATE

Kate’s story takes place approximately 9 years before she told me the story. It spreads over a period of approximately 6 months. She tells her story as someone who has overcome it and does not allow it to affect her anymore (for the most part). The story is **continuous** as it is situated in the past, the present and has purpose regarding the future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

In her present **situation** she is very happy and speaks of her husband with great affection and love, and of the future with hope and excitement. The only draw-back is the long standing difficulties she still **continues** to experience as result of her **interactions** with her abusive ex-boyfriend, *“My husband, ja, he gets very frustrated with me because he says I’m bringing rubbish from the past relationship”*. She describes this as her biggest challenge in putting the abuse behind her.

No matter which part of her story she is narrating, Kate does so as a survivor and a woman with strength. Her story is about a short lived abusive relationship in which she, a strong woman, found herself a victim, trapped in abusive **interactions**. She believed she had let herself down, but she overcame her **situation** and, in the context of this interview, was able to reflect on her story from a distance and acknowledge her strength. She was able to re-author her story (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Using the tool of **continuity**, one can see how, as she tells her story, it moves from the present to the future where she discusses her hopes and plans with her husband.

4.3.1. Interaction, Continuity and Situation

My first question was *“Please tell me your story of when you first realized the relationship was abusive”*. Kate answered, *“Before I even moved in with him”*. Kate experienced her **interactions** with her boyfriend as controlling, manipulative and degrading, *“Um, he just kept accusing me of cheating and everything, swearing at me, telling me I’m a whore ... and ja, things like that”*. However, it is only in hindsight that she realizes she should have seen this as a sign that he had an abusive nature, *“that was just the beginning of it, it wasn’t intense yet, but it was the start of it”*.

Kate’s story of abuse therefore begins when her relationship with her then-boyfriend began. The **interactions** were already abusive but she had not made this realization yet. She found herself making excuses for his behaviour:

“And he used to phone and start swearing at me if I didn’t answer my phone quick enough or, accuse me of being, cheating on him and being with somebody else.... And then what made me decide to move to him was because he said, well, he didn’t know where, you know, he doesn’t see me often enough, he would see me on weekends and that was it.... And that’s what made me move there, thinking it would go better”.

She decided to move in with him hoping it would improve the **situation**, however, with the commencement of this **event** *“it got worse”*. This corroborates Bostock et al. (2009) findings that IPV often commences once a commitment is entered into. He was verbally abusive before she moved in with him, but according to Kate, the abuse intensified once she moved to another city and into his flat.

Kate’s ex-boyfriend manipulated her, making it difficult to leave him, *“Well I felt bad for him because, like I said, he was really a nice guy besides for that”*, and difficult to stay away, *“Um, about a month, month and a half, before that I did try to leave as well.... Well, I did leave. I got friends from here to pick me up and we came back this side”*. Leaving was an **event** that occurred more than once as Kate found herself going back to

him, “*And he like basically came after me ‘Sorry sorry sorry, I promise I won’t do it again’ and, and I went back*”. Kate found herself being manipulated by her boyfriend to the extent that she ignored her own instincts and the advice of loved ones. And so a significant **event** took place and she moved in with him:

“You know what, I felt like I’d let myself down by moving there in the first place. Because everyone tried to tell me, ‘No, he’s already abusive on the phone, when he phones you, so why do you want to go?’ I said ‘No well I just want to go see if he won’t maybe change when I’m there like he says’”.

Ultimately, when she had left the abusive **situation** and found some perspective, she felt she had let herself down by going to live with him in the first place. However, at the time, she was blinded by the **context**.

Kate did not stay in the relationship for very long. She refused to put up with the abuse when it became physical:

“Um, that actually happened, that was the first time he hit me. I don’t know, he said something nasty to me again and I slapped him and then he slapped me back and he grabbed my throat.... And that’s when I said to him ‘No’”.

Up until this **event**, the abuse had been largely psychological and social. However, as Outlaw (2009) points out; social, economic and emotional abuse are the most likely types of non-physical abuse to lead to physical abuse. For Kate, the **situation** had become unacceptable as soon as the abusive **interactions** escalated to physical abuse. Kate’s reasons for staying in the relationship until this point could be due to a variety of factors, among which could be her appraisal of the abuse. It is possible that she believed the incidents were isolated, justified, or not bad enough to be considered abuse (Hurley et al., 2007; McLeod et al., 2010). The physical abuse was the **event** that prompted her to leave, “*When he hit me. I could take the mental abuse but not the physical as well*”. The meaning that she created from the physical **interaction** was:

“My aunt had been in an abusive relationship... and I had known all about that growing up.... I just didn’t want to be, I didn’t want to be like she was. I don’t know, just, wasn’t going to stand for it”.

Abuse was not something she was willing to live with. She had developed a construction around the meaning of abuse through her **interactions** with her family. Abuse was unacceptable and she was not going to put up with it (echoing the family discourse). This construction, or personal meaning, was **continuous** for her. It started when she was young, stayed with her through her abusive relationship and helped to drive her out of the relationship. Kate, the victim, had decided to initiate change and become a survivor while her boyfriend was working to maintain the abusive cycle (Westbrook, 2008). A further personal meaning created from the abusive **situation** concerned the abuser himself:

“there was a lot of abuse in his family I think when he was growing up. It stemmed from.... his father was a very jealous man.... I never asked him straight out but I think his father used to beat up his mother and all that”.

She believed *“it came from his parents”*. She did not blame herself.

When discussing her process of leaving the relationship she says, *“I don’t know, I don’t think many people would do it but I just phoned my aunt”*. Kate comes across as a strong individual. In fact, she describes herself that way, *“I have a strong personality”*. This does not mean that her process was without difficulties. She found the relationship, and getting out of it, as being a struggle, *“I’d given up my job, didn’t have much savings. So when I was there, okay I got a job there, but I knew nobody else in [that city]- so where did I go to”*. Kate found herself in a **situation** where she was alone and had no resources to fall back on, *“I think that’s where most of it comes from, nobody else.... nobody knows where to go to. What do they do when they do leave”*. This is corroborated by research. Findings show that if a woman is unaware of the full range of available resources, or if she is in some way prevented from accessing these resources, then she is less likely to leave the relationship (McLeod et al., 2010; Nurius & Macy, 2010). She even felt her identity was changing, *“he broke down my self-esteem”*, and she was unsure of herself. Even for a woman who describes herself as strong, this was difficult. Even with a supportive family, she had difficulty calling on them to help. This may have been because she experienced herself as independent and she found herself in a very difficult **situation**, *“You know, I even felt bad phoning a family member saying ‘Listen, I need to get out’”*. Kate did not have difficulty saying ‘no’ to the abusive **situation**, or to her abusive

boyfriend once she had decided it had become too much. Her difficulty was in changing her **continuing** story of herself as a strong independent woman into someone who needed someone else to lean on. This meant she did not feel good leaving her abusive boyfriend, *“Actually, ja, I can’t say it felt good, I really can’t. Because you still need to go look into somebody else’s house to take care of you”*. Her hardship was the rewriting of her story into someone who needed someone to lean on, even if for just a short while.

What was significant to Kate was the support she received from her family. She did not experience them as contributing to her commitment to the abusive relationship. Rather it was through their **interactions** with her that she felt they helped her leave the abusive **situation**, *“No they helped me get out of it. They were very supportive”*. Kate’s comfort in finding support from her family is a finding supported by research done by Fanslow and Robinson (2010). They found that women mostly turn to family and friends when making a decision to leave an abusive relationship. In fact, she **interacted** with more than one family member to rally support. She found that with her knowledge of her aunt’s **situation** she was able to connect with her, *“my aunt phoned me and said ‘okay, come’”*. It was the **event** of contacting her aunt, and her aunt’s offer of refuge, that Kate felt she was able to take the first step in the process of ending the abuse. When Kate had left the abusive relationship and found her way back to independence, she immediately found what felt like freedom in her new **situation**, *“Started partying and going crazy, but, ja. [laughs] Drank way too much. It was almost like break free of prison. Like freedom that you’ve never had or whatever”*. She was able to be herself again. Her story of being a strong woman **continued**, *“I don’t know if proud had anything to do with it, I felt better... I think more empowerment than pride”*. Kate had managed to change her **situation** by fighting against the characteristic control of the abusive relationship. She decided to leave the **context** rather than submit. This shows strength where, through past and present supportive **interactions** of her family, she was able to construct an identity as a strong woman and construct the meaning of abusive relationships as unacceptable. She was able to make room for a new story to unfold in her future, through new **interactions**, which materialized when she met her husband and got married. This is hopefully a

strength that can contribute to knowledge that will assist others in surviving IPV (Oosthuizen & Wissing, 2005).

Today, Kate's story shows how the effects of an abusive relationship can be **continuous**. She is happily married but still has trouble letting go of some of the emotional scars from the **interactions** with her ex-boyfriend, *"Ja, you slowly start gaining everything back again. But there are certain things that people say to you that will always stick with you forever and ever. No matter what"*. Queen et al. (2009) explain that it is often the non-physical abuse that is more common, and which can be more relentless, than physical abuse, with no clear beginning or end. It is the **interactions** with her husband and her **situation** of a loving, happy marriage that is slowly helping her to heal, *"my husband now is very very very good.... We've got 3 kids, he's a very hands-on dad. Learned to trust a bit more again....self-esteem, trust...that came with time"*.

Kate's story has a quality of an inward-outward movement and a backward-forward movement over time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Kate made sense of her situation based on her own personal experiences and constructed beliefs she had **continuously** developed over her life (e.g. a belief that abuse is not acceptable, she is a strong person) through **interactions** with her family. But her meanings attached to her **situation** were also influenced by outside **events**, such as her boyfriend manipulating her move to another city. These **events** also happened in a **continuous** matter, across time, and it was the order of **events**, as well as the cumulative **events**, that also influenced her. For example, it was only after many fights that Kate finally decided to move to *"keep the peace"*. It is the combination of this inward-outward and backward-forward movement that allows Kate's story to develop in which she takes a position and forms an identity. Although it should be noted that, just as the story takes shape, it **continues** to change and so does her identity.

4.3.2. Identity

Kate moves between many identities as she tells her story and finds meanings and significance in different **situations** and **interactions** that **continue** throughout. Firstly, she was a girlfriend. Her responsibility as a girlfriend was to move to another city to determine if the fighting would stop. But her **interactions** as a girlfriend were characterized by the role of a victim, and when she did fight back, so did he, *“I don’t know, he said something nasty to me again and I slapped him and then he slapped me back and he grabbed my throat”*. However, she experienced herself as committed to him, *“Exclusivity... ja well we moved in with one another. There was exclusivity, there was no third parties involved, there was nothing.... Although in his mind there was”*. However, this commitment was dysfunctional. Her commitment to him was in keeping with the dysfunctional **interactions** that characterized the abusive **situation**, his constructions of what is acceptable in a relationship, *“Committed relationship with my ex, because he accused me of ‘a, b, c’, I probably went and did ‘c’.... from all the accusations and everything”*.

Another strong identity was that of a family member. She was a daughter and a niece, and this strong identity was what enabled her to reach out for help even though the **interaction** made her uncomfortable, *“I think I actually did speak to my mom and then my mom actually phoned, my aunt phoned me and said ‘okay, come’”*. She also felt that her **situation** was strongly connected with a situation her aunt had been in before. There was **continuity** across their two stories which shaped Kate’s meaning making and enabled her to make a decision for herself regarding the next step, *“My aunt had been in an abusive relationship... and I had known all about that growing up.... I just didn’t want to be, I didn’t want to be like she was. I don’t know, just, wasn’t going to stand for it”*. And even when Kate speaks about reaching out to family, regardless of how uncomfortable or embarrassed she was to take that step, she acknowledges her own strength, *“I don’t know, I don’t think many people would do it but I just phoned my aunt”*.

As has been mentioned, Kate's identity moved from a strong, independent woman to a victim, dependent on family, and then back to an independent survivor, all as her **situation** changed. Even though she recognized her own strength in leaving the abusive relationship, *"No, there's not a lot of women who get out the way I did"*, she still could not revel in her choice because she had to depend on someone else, *"Actually, ja, I can't say it felt good, I really can't. Because you still need to go look into somebody else's house to take care of you"*. At the time she felt unsure of herself, *"...he broke down my self-esteem"*, and uncomfortable with the **situation**, *"More embarrassment of relying on somebody else"*. As Sclater (2003) explains, one finds one's identity in relation to **interactions** with others and across time as **situations** change. Kate had trouble with her new identity as someone who was dependent, but it was what her **context** demanded of her at the time. In retrospect, when she reflects on the process as **continuous**, she acknowledges her strength, *"Self-preservation maybe....I have a strong personality"*.

When Kate speaks about her story, as it is at present in her current relationship, she sees the significance in all her current **interactions** and identifies strongly with her role as a wife, *"Well there's love, there's trust, there's honesty, there's.... My husband doesn't believe in doing anything without the partner"*, as a Christian, *"Um, we pray a lot together.... Um, totally different just having God in your household, and in your life"*, and as a mother, *"I didn't want my kids growing up in a household where there was shouting, screaming, any kind of arguing in front of kids"*. Her current story is not without problems, however:

"It's just all the personal bits that I dragged along into this relationship....Um, ok well, it's got to do with intimateness in the bedroom and all that.... Remember what I said to you about him telling me I've got a, I stank or whatever. So, that I really have issues with, I really, I really do.... My husband, ja, he gets very frustrated with me because he says I'm bringing rubbish from the past relationship. So".

There is hope for healing in the future, as her **continuous** healing from her past to present has shown.

Kate is a survivor, both in her own story and in the **context** of this study. She was in a relationship where she was trapped and a victim, but she managed to initiate a process of change, overcome the **situation**, and **continued** to live life on her own terms. Kate's story demonstrates how identity emerges and changes with processes over time and in relation to social aspects and **interactions** (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

4.3.3. Control and Manipulation

Kate knew the relationship was abusive right from the beginning, but this insight only came with reflection. At the time, her boyfriend was controlling and manipulating her through their **interactions**, working towards a **situation** where she would eventually give up everything for him:

“He was in [another city] and I was here. And he used to phone and start swearing at me if I didn't answer my phone quick enough or, accuse me of being, cheating on him and being with somebody else and... And then what made me decide to move to him was because he said, well, he didn't know where, you know, he doesn't see me often enough, he would see me on weekends and that was it... And that's what made me move there, thinking it would go better... it got worse.”

In spite of his accusations and how the **interactions** made her feel negative, she moved to another city where she didn't know anyone else and had no family or job, *“just to keep the peace”*.

The **event** of Kate's moving in with her boyfriend resulted in the abuse escalating and she decided to leave. However, her ex-boyfriend's manipulation and control did not stop, *“And he like basically came after me, ‘Sorry, sorry, sorry, I promise I won't do it again’ and, and I went back”*, and she found herself in the same **situation** again. When Kate decided to leave the second time, she found herself in a very difficult **situation**, *“Because I'd given up my job, didn't have much savings. So when I was there, okay I got a job there, but I knew nobody else in [that city], so where did I go to”*. She had given up everything she knew and found herself trapped:

“financially it’s very difficult, for a woman who doesn’t have savings.... I actually quit my work, my job, the first time I left. So that was quite difficult because now I did have a job, um, that was the first time I left. And when I went back I didn’t have a job anymore. And then from there... I mean, where do you go? If you don’t have money, if you don’t have family, don’t have friends... or you’re too embarrassed to say to your friend, ‘Listen, can I come stay there’”.

As a result of her ex-boyfriends false promises and isolation, Kate found herself in a position of a victim and did not know where to turn, *“I think that’s where most of it comes from, nobody else... nobody knows where to go to. What do they do when they do leave”*. This was what made it hardest for her to leave, when I asked her *“were you still sort of unsure of where you’re going and what are you doing”*, her response was, *“Oh yes, definitely. That was the hardest part”*. The non-physical abuse can take a variety of forms including isolation from others, financial control and intimidation or threats (Bostock et al., 2009; McCollum & Stith, 2007; Whiting et al., 2009). All the abuse Kate’s story illustrates makes it difficult and confusing to leave. When she did leave she realized just how trapped she had actually felt, not only in the relationship, but also in the controlling **interactions**, *“It was almost like break free of prison. Like freedom that you’ve never had or whatever”*.

What was also difficult for Kate, besides feelings of being controlled and trapped in the **situation**, was being a strong woman. It was that she had allowed herself to be controlled, *“You know what, I felt like I’d let myself down by moving there in the first place”*. Kate felt trapped and controlled by the **context**. It was through her lack of finances and her ex-boyfriend’s actions that isolated her socially and financially, that he was able to create a **situation** in which he could control her. This was a new experience for her. It did not fit with her identity as a strong woman, with the story that she had been living until she entered into the relationship. However, through the **situation** of abuse, and through those **interactions** that changed her identity, Kate was able to learn how she did not want to live. The **context** shed light on the identity she did not want to have, that of a victim. Through the experience and the personal meanings she created from it, she was able to take steps to **continue** her story of living as a strong woman.

4.3.4. Constructions of Abuse as Normal vs. Abnormal

In Kate's family IPV was not accepted or considered normal. However, it is Kate's belief that it was acceptable/normal in her ex-boyfriend's family, "*it came from his parents*". This shaped their **interactions**. Even though it was not normal for Kate, he tried, through manipulation and control, to construct a relationship where abusive **interactions** were the norm and an abusive relationship was an acceptable **situation**. From the perspective of the narrative approach, violence lies within dominant stories of male power (White & Epston, 1990). This was most likely a dominant story for Kate's ex-boyfriend, most likely living according to this story and attributed meaning to his experiences accordingly (Morgan, 2000; White & Epston, 1990). This dominant story informed his role as a man and he behaved accordingly (Freedman & Combs, 2002) by trying to pull Kate into the story to live in the same way. This, however, did not fit with Kate's **continuous** story of abuse as intolerable, nor with her identity as a strong woman. So, she decided to leave, "*My aunt had been in an abusive relationship.... I just didn't want to be, I didn't want to be like she was. I don't know, just, wasn't going to stand for it*". In Kate's story, she knew IPV was wrong. Kate did not buy into a social story where gender and power inequalities exist in a way that men are more privileged and powerful, and should have more control over resources and women, and where women should be subordinate (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003; Gilfus et al., 2010).

Kate's boyfriend, at the time, sanctioned IPV possibly as a result of his family's constructions around abuse. As Kate explained, she believed his family environment was an abusive one. Flinck et al. (2005) state past traumatic experiences, such as domestic violence, that the perpetrator may have endured, can encourage IPV. Kate, on the other hand, experienced her family as supportive in her removal from the **situation**, "*they helped me get out of it. They were very supportive*". This keeps with the **continuation** of the family construction of abuse as intolerable. When Kate discusses what she believes her family would say about her story now, she says, "*they would say they're happy that I got out of it*". Kate is **continuing** this story of zero tolerance of abusive **interactions** with her husband and her children today:

“Well, we’ve got kids and, we said when I fell pregnant with the first one that we wouldn’t shout and we wouldn’t do anything like that, or... so it was good....I didn’t want my kids growing up in a household where there was shouting, screaming, any kind of arguing in front of kids”.

Bischoff (2006) explains that those with a history of violence are likely to be more tolerant of violence or to experience it as a norm. For Kate, this was by no means the case. She was going to make sure that her family had the same no tolerance policy to violence that she had.

4.3.5. Support

Kate’s story supports research by Chang et al. (2010) and demonstrates that support from a friend or a family member is integral in the process of leaving an abusive relationship. Not only this, but realizing that the abuse is serious and will not change, is necessary for the victim to take that step to reach out for the support that is perceived as being available (Nurius & Macy, 2010). Kate called on help both times she tried to leave the relationship. The first time she phoned friends, *“I got friends from here to pick me up and we came back this side”*. The second time she decided to turn to family:

“my dad and them were in Pretoria, okay my sister was still too young, my mom was in Mozambique at that time so I couldn’t phone my mom. I think I actually did speak to my mom and then my mom actually phoned my aunt, phoned me and said ‘okay, come’”.

With the help of her support base, whether she felt disconnected from them in a different city or not, she was able to take that important step to leave, *“Phoned my aunt, phoned some friends, arranged my with my aunt to go to her and that was it”*. The support did not stop there:

“Um, I was lucky, eventually, my old boss that I had left here, she said to me, I actually phoned her and said ‘Listen here, I want to come back please’. So she said to me ‘Yes, come back’. And I actually went back to her and, so I never burnt bridges there”.

What Kate's story shows is that even for a strong and independent person support is a necessary and **continuous** factor in the process of leaving an abusive relationship. Even though it was difficult for her to call on friends and family (she felt embarrassed), it was essential and made all the difference to her **situation**.

4.3.6. Vulnerability vs. Strength

Kate's story is a story of strength. In the very words she uses, one can identify **continuity** in her story that is bound by her strength. She speaks of how she stood up against an abusive **situation**, *"I don't know, just, wasn't going to stand for it"*. She speaks of how it was her instinct to be stronger than her **situation**, *"I don't think it was self-confidence. Self-preservation maybe"*. She speaks of how she has grown since then, *"Yes definitely [a lot of positive growth]... Learned to trust a bit more again"*. Lastly, she acknowledges that she may be one of the few who exhibit strength, *"No, there's not a lot of women who get out the way I did"*. Several studies have demonstrated that individual factors, such as gaining independence, changes in self-esteem, regaining freedom, fighting back and developing an internal locus of control, can be just as important as social support (Bostock et al., 2009; Grauwiler, 2007; Kim & Gray, 2008; Lichtenstein, 2004). These findings are clearly demonstrated in Kate's story.

However, Kate's story is also one of vulnerability. Kate is not ashamed to admit that she still carries emotional scars from the abusive **interactions**, *"Ja well emotionally and psychologically I was broken down, like I said. I still have issues today and that was, I think it was like 9 years ago, that I was with him"*. She was also vulnerable in the sense that she felt she had let herself down, *"You know what, I felt like I'd let myself down by moving there in the first place... I felt let down that I had to follow my own head"*. Regardless of her positive outlook, bringing the **continuous** strength back into her story, and her willingness to overcome the **situation** and grow from it, she acknowledges a vulnerable part of her that will always remain, *"Ja you slowly start gaining everything back again. But there are certain things that people say to you that will always stick with you forever and ever. No matter what"*. What is clear is that she is grateful that she got

out when she did, *“No it wasn’t very long at all so it didn’t, it’s just, it was certain things that affected me, it wasn’t, that’s why I say, I wasn’t in long enough to get the full-blown effects of it”*. Kate’s observation, that the short time she was in the relationship made a difference, is supported by research conducted by Davies et al. (2009) which states that length of abuse is indicated as a factor that determines the severity of the violence.

Kate’s **interactions** with her family and friends were what enabled a change in her story and for her to feel empowered. It is her **interactions** with her husband now that keeps her feeling that way. Even though the story changed, it was **continuous** as Kate kept living her life and kept taking steps to move towards the woman she knew she used to be and the woman she knew she could be again, a strong woman. It is in her **interactions** with loved ones and in her creating a new **context** for herself that she is able to socially construct and identify herself in this way. Kate has discovered her ability to re-author her story (Sclater, 2003).

4.3.7. Kate’s Message

Kate wanted to give a message to any woman who may be in the **situation** she was in. She wanted to share, *“They should trust their instincts from the start, if there’s the slightest bit of abuse in the beginning, it’s not going to change, it’s going to get worse”*. From Kate’s personal experience it is best to trust your own instincts and play safe rather than let yourself down and get trapped in a **situation** that is difficult to escape. As findings from the study by Meyer et al. (2009) demonstrated, self-efficacy is an important component. Women who believe they have control over their **situation** will be more likely to be resilient and persistent in applying coping strategies. These women are more likely to fight against the violence rather than make excuses for it, *“[I] wasn’t going to stand for it.”*

Kate’s story illustrates how strength can be **continuous** in one’s life, a beacon for hope and a catalyst for action. However, support is also essential. It is also clear that an inward and outward movement ranging from one’s own beliefs to how one is affected by

another's beliefs, ranging from one's own internal motivations to how one can be impacted on and manipulated by **interactions**, can shape a life story. At the end of the day, Kate learned what makes the difference in her marriage and what has helped her heal, namely, *“there's love, there's trust, there's honesty....totally different just having God in your household, and in your life”*.

4.4. LIZ

Liz's story, as she told it to me, starts about 12 years ago. She speaks mostly about the past and also about the present, but she rarely ventures into dreams for the future. Even though this may be so, Liz's story still takes on the quality of **continuity**. **Events** and **interactions** throughout her story contribute to meanings she has ascribed to her experiences and how these experiences have given her life purpose. **Continuity** has enabled her to recognize these meanings (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002):

“It was good and I was relieved because I'm getting a new, uh, another chance, but I was very scared....if I look back today I think it's the best thing I could have done and I can't believe that I ever put myself in that situation....when I left him it was almost like a relief, I knew I had to do this a long time ago”.

Liz's story relates to being stuck in a cycle of abuse. The abuse evolved and took different forms and different victims (herself and others through her **interactions** with them) through various **interactions** over the course of her story. It is a story about her fight against a **situation** as a victim in a **context** of control and manipulation:

“And a lot of people say to me, like this woman I spoke to today that told me that Allan's still got power over me...I know I've done good for myself not to live in that abuse, physical abuse anymore, but you've still got the verbal abuse....Um, everything, everything, everything is like I ever wanted except for the influence and the abuse and the control that I still get from Michael's dad”.

As Davies et al. (2009) explain, only when the harassment stops, is the victim likely to start feeling empowered and more in control.

4.4.1. Interaction, Continuity and Situation

Liz's relationship with her ex-boyfriend (Allan) became abusive as they moved in together and she fell pregnant. Before this life change he had not been abusive at all, *"Before that there were no signs, he was very charming"*. An **event/situation**, namely, moving in together and falling pregnant, changed the dynamic of the relationship. As with Anna, the research conducted by Bostock et al. (2009), explaining that IPV often commences once a commitment (e.g. cohabitation) is entered into, is consistent with this finding. The abuse continued from there, *"Ag, and then it just carried on from there"*. The personal meaning that Liz ascribed to the abuse was self-blame. It was through her **interactions** with Allan that she bought into this meaning, *"It became more and more and I thought maybe it was my fault because I'm bringing that side out of him. He used to tell me I'm bringing that side out of him"*. Meyer et al. (2009) explain that woman try to create personal meaning out of the abuse in order to try and handle it.

From the beginning, Liz did not realize that she was in an abusive situation and that the abuse was not going to stop. However, it did not take her long to realize:

"I think it was so much shock, I couldn't believe... I don't know, how I, if I did think it was abuse at first. The first time that I knew it was abuse was when, um, obviously I was pregnant and um, he, he hit me full force with a fist in my tummy".

According to research by Kaldine (2007), it is possible that Liz was confused by the first act of abuse. She did not leave her partner possibly because she felt trapped at the time or as a result of the abuse not making sense according to her construction of what a relationship should be. Liz quickly developed an identity of a victim. She was a victim in the sense that she was a victim of her **situation**. These things were being done to her, and it was him abusing her, *"Um, all the things that he used to do to me, he used to do it to me all the time"*. It was in the **interactions** with Allan, the **situations** (such as being hit while being pregnant or being made to believe it was her fault) and the **continuity** of the abuse over time (approximately 3 years), that led to Liz defining herself as a victim in an abusive relationship.

Liz ascribed her own personal meanings to the abusive situation, “*No, I knew it was wrong. No. I didn’t see it as normal*”. Even in the abusive **interactions** she still experienced the **situation** as not normal. Even though an abusive relationship dynamic had been unconsciously agreed upon through their **interactions** with one another, Allan abused her and she continued to be abused. Liz believed it was not right, she knew it was not normal, but the abusive behaviour became a pattern that was maintained by the abuser (Westbrook, 2008). Abuse was not an accepted **situation** in her family, they made this clear in their **interactions** with her, “*They always used to tell me to get out. Like my sister used to tell me ‘get out’. My brother used to tell me ‘I don’t know why you’re staying with him’*”. It also was not a **situation** she had ever believed was normal or right:

“I always used to say before that, any woman who stays with a guy that gets abused deserves it because why is she so stupid, why does she stay there? Until it happened to me... and I realized that it’s not that easy to just get out”.

Once again, her identity as a victim is evident. She was not accepting of her **situation** and while she knew it was wrong, she was stuck in the **context**.

What changed the **continuous** story of abuse from not being an acceptable part of Liz’s life to that which allowed abuse to become something she experienced daily?

“But he was good, when he, when he, when he got over it he’d, you know, he’d buy you presents you know and he’d promise you he’s gonna change and he promises you he’s gonna go for anger management and stuff like that”.

The abusive **context** was characterized by manipulation and control, “*And I was looking for reasons why he was hitting me, I thought it was my fault*”. Through their **interactions**, she was led to believe the problem was with herself, “*and I really thought that I loved him. Um, it wasn’t love, it was control*”. Therefore, she believed she loved him, a belief that could have been one of the main reasons she stayed in the relationship or she believed he would change (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010). It was only later that she saw the control and manipulation in their **interactions**. Above all else, she believed her son needed a father, whoever that father might be. When I asked her “*is there anything else that makes it just really hard for you to break away from him*”, her response was, “*No. My son is the only thing. No*”. This is another strong identity emerging from her

story, namely her identity as a mother. Therefore, it was a **continuous** story, through their **interactions**, that created a **context** of control and manipulation that made Liz feel she could not leave the abusive relationship. It was also **continuous** in the sense that it was a story that existed in the beginning of their relationship, in the present, and that dictated Liz's ideas of the future. As has been discussed, Meyer et al. (2009) found that self-efficacy, or a strong sense of personal agency, is imperative for feeling in control of the **situation**, thereby feeling capable of changing the **situation**. Liz struggled greatly with self-esteem and was lacking in self-efficacy. She blamed herself for the abuse and made excuses rather than implementing coping strategies. Liz was trapped in the relationship for almost three years.

Liz's story is characterized by an inward-outward movement, situated in **context**, (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) through which she gave meaning to her story and which ultimately shaped her story. Liz tells her story in the way that it makes sense to her. She speaks of **events** as she gave meaning to them based on her own internal thoughts and beliefs, and she speaks of **events** as they happened to her from the outside, independently of herself. All **events** and **interactions** are given meaning based on the **continuous** nature of life with past experiences, present experiences and hope for the future. This all shaped Liz's meaning making process and her behaviour. For example, Liz had never experienced abuse before and she never expected it of Allan. She also never expected to find herself in an abusive **situation**. All of these internal thoughts and expectations shaped how she interpreted the abuse (was this abuse, was it perhaps her fault), while it was outside of herself that abuse was happening (she was a victim of abusive **interactions**). It is also her inward experience of the abuse at the time that now shapes her identity as either a victim or a survivor.

It was a confusing time for Liz when she took the first few steps toward ending her abusive relationship. Her **interactions** with others both encouraged her and held her back. She saw a doctor who had told her to go to the police station and lay a case against Allan, but she was confused. As a result, at the police station she was easily dissuaded and subsequently did not lay a charge. Instead, she went home to an abusive man. Her

identity as a mother played out very strongly in this **interaction** at the police station (in this particular **situation**). However, her self-blame, and Allan's **continuous** control over her, was also prominent as she thought she loved him. These feelings of hers and her confusion carried over into many other situations that did not involve only the two of them. On another occasion Liz consulted with a psychologist. Again, Liz felt conflicted, torn between needing to save herself from the abuse and between believing that her **interactions** with Allan were love. It was Liz's **interaction** with a friend that same evening that changed everything for her. This is discussed in more detail under "Interactions with her Son and Others", but, what this illustrates is the important role that **interactions** with others can play in the decision to leave an abusive relationship or to remain (Chang et al., 2010). She got varying advice from different people, but it was when she had the support of friends that she felt she had found the means to escape her **situation** and break the **continuity** of the abusive **interactions**:

"And then one of my friends gave me money for a deposit and he actually came, which is, like I say, God's grace, because he's a massive guy and Allan wouldn't even, I don't think he hits men, I think he only hits women. And then I moved out".

It is often support from someone else that will initiate the change. This is in line with Chang et al. (2010) who found that it is an increased awareness of support and other various options available, as well as an awareness that the abuser is not going to stop the abuse, that initiates change for the survivor. Liz did manage to find the strength and the means of changing her **situation** and opened a space for a new story to unfold in her future (**continuity**). Hopefully it is this strength that can contribute to knowledge helpful to other women trying to survive IPV (Oosthuizen & Wissing, 2005).

Liz is no longer with Allan. She has moved on to a long term (8 year), committed relationship with another man, James:

"I feel valued. I feel wanted, like, with Allan I felt wanted for abuse, you know, like he was using me for abuse. But now I feel wanted for love and security, and, I feel valued and I feel for once in my life, for once... you know".

When I asked about her future, she painted me a picture in which she demonstrated her view of herself, and her future, in terms of her success as a parent. This was a bleak picture:

“Um, see it’s difficult to say because your future is your kids, if your kids are going to turn out to be criminals or women beaters or whatever the case may be, what kind of parents are you. So I can’t tell you that um, at the moment that I’m looking at a very positive future”.

This illustrates how her view of her success as a parent is socially constructed and impacted on by the **interactions** she had with Allan. This exhibits the **continuing** effects that these **interactions** still have on her self-concept, **continuing** into her view of the future. What this demonstrates is that even though Liz finds herself in a new **situation** in her life with new, positive **interactions**, her negative and abusive **interactions** from before have lingering, **continuing** effects:

“I know I’m not scared anymore. I know I’m not, well, I feel protected with James, I don’t, you know, whenever I’m with James I know that Allan can’t do anything to me. ...I still feel abused. Um, even though I left him, I still feel abused”.

As Nurius and Macy (2010) explain, psychological vulnerability is a risk factor for a woman as she is less likely to be able to regain a sense of self-worth or personal agency, her experience of the abuse will be exacerbated and her likelihood of re-victimization increases. This appears to be the pattern that has revealed itself in Liz’s story.

The **continuity** in Liz’s story is evident. Her life growing up was not tainted by abuse and she never dreamed of a **situation** where she would be the victim of abusive **interactions**. She had no tolerance for abuse. This is what led to confusion when the abuse commenced. She did not identify it as abuse, she was confused. Liz became trapped, at the time, in what was her present **situation**, not knowing whether it was love, whether it was her own fault, or how to fix it. To this day, these **interactions** have affected her self-concept:

“I don’t think I was strong at all to leave him, otherwise if I was really a strong woman I would still not have the problems I have with him. I think I’m weak, I think

he's got, you know, he, he's, he's not just uh, he's got money, he's got power, he's got everything and I feel that what am I".

The **continuity** is apparent. These **interactions** have contaminated her view of her future. She still feels abused and trapped by her past and by Allan. She had difficulty trusting James at first and she cannot seem to find a positive view of her future:

"It's felt like 3 years, it was 3 years that I was with Allan but it felt so much longer. And it felt like, you know, you can't believe that 3 years can change your life so much, the way you feel about life and the way you see things in life."

4.4.2. Identity

Liz displayed two prominent identities through the course of telling her story. These identities came about from certain **situations** or **events** in her life, through her **interactions** with others, and as a result of **continuous** experiences that had lasting effects. These identities are the identity of a victim and the identity of a mother.

In terms of this study Liz is defined as a survivor of IPV, meaning that she was able to overcome the **situation** of abused victim and moved on from that abuse, thereby becoming a survivor (Westbrook, 2008). However, in Liz's eyes, she is still a victim of her abusive past and has not yet managed to move on to being a survivor, *"I still feel abused. Um, even though I left him, I still feel abused"*. For Liz, even though she may no longer be a victim of abuse, she is all too aware of the lasting effects. She experiences herself as a victim in terms of the lasting (**continuing**) emotional effects of the abusive **interactions**, *"I wish you could drink a pill just to erase those memories....I know I've done good for myself not to live in that abuse, physical abuse anymore, but you've still got the verbal abuse"*. She also experiences herself as a victim through the bleak outlook she has of her future due to her **situation**, *"you're never gonna be able to enjoy life the way you should, because, um, you'll never look at life positive"*. As long as Allan has control over their son, he has control over her making her a victim, *"my son is my life. And he's still got all the control"*. Something else that stood out, possibly as a result of having an identity of a victim rather than an independent or autonomous woman, was the

meaning Liz attributed to all the good things in her life as luck. Liz views the good **interactions** and **events** in her life as the result of luck rather than good character or strength, *“I don’t see myself as strong, I see myself as lucky that I got away”*.

A very strong identity Liz has is that of a mother. Being a mother has driven most of her decisions in her life. She has always tried to do her best for her child through every **interaction** and in every **situation**, *“I started thinking about Michael, do I really want to give this kind of life to my son”*. Liz took on the role of protector when it came to her son *“I didn’t want Michael to see his dad getting arrested”*. Similarly, it is the roles of protector and mother that provide the reasons she believes she still finds herself being controlled by Allan, *“I still can’t tell you that I’ve had victory. I can’t tell you that I’ve, I’ve won. Because I haven’t won, he’s got my child now instead of me”*.

Another important identity for Liz is Christian. As mentioned previously, she sees herself as lucky. However, at the same time she believes that her good fortune is the hand of God, *“God’s grace...Like I say, I’m lucky, I’m blessed... I’m very very blessed”*. In addition to God, her family played an important supportive role in her story. Liz is also a daughter and a family member, *“They always used to tell me to get out. Like my sister used to tell me ‘get out’. My brother used to tell me ‘I don’t know why you’re staying with him’”*. It was also her need for approval from them that kept her silent about the abuse, *“My family didn’t really know because I didn’t want them to look down on Allan”*. With her family, Liz constructed a belief that abuse was unacceptable and this belief played a **continuous** role in her **interactions** with them. She did not want them to know, she did not want to listen to them when they told her to get out, and she wanted to prove them wrong. The abuse did not fit with how she made sense of relationships. She believed it would change, *“I thought that I can, we can make this work, we gonna get through it and we gonna prove everybody wrong, that you know, he can change”*.

As mentioned, Liz still believes herself to be a victim. But in the context of this study (an apt illustration of how **context** shapes meaning), she is a survivor. Liz’s identity emerges in relation to her **situation** and her **interactions** with others (Ollerenshaw & Creswell,

2002), in her eyes, making her a victim. From the perspective of this study, however, considering her **interactions** and her **situation**, Liz escaped the abuse by her own choices and efforts and is now in a loving, supportive and committed relationship. Liz is a survivor of IPV. Liz's identity is that of both a victim and a survivor. She exists in relation to others, across time (Sclater, 2003) and has been shaped by her experiences. It is clear that it is through **context** and one's own perspective that one determines identity.

4.4.3. Control, Manipulation and Fear

What was very clear in Liz's story was the controlling nature of the **interactions** that she had with Allan. He would control and manipulate her in various ways, depending on the **situation**:

“And every time he used to hit me he used to tell, go buy me presents and apologize, and it was really like two different personalities. He'll hit me and then afterwards he'll come and cry and tell me how sorry he was”.

It was because of the effects of this control that Liz had hope that it would change. Alternatively, she would end up blaming herself and not facing the truth of the **situation**:

“You know what, when you in a relationship like that you really do believe that you can't make it on your own. Because the guy provides for you financially, he's your everything; you can't do nothing on your own. You won't be able to get a job on your own, you feel like really nothing. You feel stupid, you feel like you... and still I feel stupid sometimes, he even tells me, Allan still tells me that. But you really feel stupid, you feel like you're not a person, he runs you, he controls you....And I had a son with him, and this man is his father and I think in the back of my head, I don't know it was almost like I didn't want to face reality”.

Eventually Liz realized what was happening, *“and I really thought that I loved him. Um, it wasn't love, it was control, it was.... He had such control over me”*, and decided to leave him. Allan's hold on her, when he **interacted** with her, was so great that he managed to manipulate her into coming back to him:

“And then eventually the first time he found out where I lived and then he locked me in the house for about 2 days and then he told me he's not gonna let me out until

I give him a second chance. And then I decided I'm gonna give him a second chance....And I realized that it's not that easy to just get out”.

When Liz did manage to leave the relationship, she soon found that the control would be **continuous**. Allan started controlling her through **interactions** with their son:

“And as soon as I started living like, when James started giving me a good life and Michael a good life and stuff, he started really interfering again....And since that happened I think he saw that he's losing control over me, and that's when he went to my son, because he knew that Michael was closest to me, and that he can get to me through my son”.

Through this control, Liz experienced the abuse as **continuous**:

“My son is my life. And he's still got all the control....I still feel abused. Um, even though I left him, I still feel abused....You know, things like that. I'll tell you now that I don't care what he says because he's my ex and he's a 'poepal' and he's the devil himself at the end of the day, but its words like that that you... It does hurt....I know I've done good for myself not to live in that abuse, physical abuse anymore, but you've still got the verbal abuse....He's never gonna stop, Allan is out to, he wants to destroy me”.

Liz's new relationship and her **interactions** with James were significant in more than one way. Firstly, it allowed her to feel wanted and valued for the first time since the abuse:

“I feel valued. I feel wanted, like, with Allan I felt wanted for abuse, you know, like he was using me for abuse. But now I feel wanted for love and security, and, I feel valued and I feel for once in my life, for once... You know”.

Her new **situation** has given her a new sense of security, *“I know I'm not scared anymore. I know I'm not, well, I feel protected with James, I don't, you know, whenever I'm with James I know that Allan can't do anything to me”.* In this way, the relationship has had significance for Liz. At the same time, however, the new relationship with James took on a meaning for Allan that Liz was moving on, Liz was happy. He had to find a new way of **interacting** in order to still be able to control her:

“And since that happened I think he saw that he’s losing control over me, and that’s when he went to my son, because he knew that Michael was closest to me, and that he can get to me through my son....Um, I mean, me and Allan hasn’t been together now 8, its 8 or 9 years, and I still can’t tell you that I’ve had victory. I can’t tell you that I’ve, I’ve won. Because I haven’t won, he’s got my child now instead of me....Um, everything, everything, everything is like I ever wanted except for the influence and the abuse and the control that I still get from Michael’s dad”.

4.4.4. Constructions of Abuse as Normal vs. Abnormal

Liz grew up with a socially constructed opinion that abuse is unacceptable, it does not happen in her family and it would not be tolerated in her family. She always believed it was wrong, *“No, I knew it was wrong. No. I didn’t see it as normal”*. But then she found herself in an abusive relationship. Consequently, her **continuous** life story of abuse as unacceptable changed. She tolerated the abuse, she blamed herself for it and it took her three years to get out of it, *“I’ve heard so many people say that some women actually want it because they feel wanted when they get beaten, or I don’t know what the hell. But I didn’t feel wanted when I was beaten”*. What Liz has focused on, when discussing whether abuse is normal in her story or not, as with other areas of her life, was the impact on Michael:

“my son sees it as, it’s not his dad’s fault, it’s the women that’s looking for it. They looking for trouble....my son’s already looking at, looking down at women. You know, men are everything and women are stupid and they don’t know anything....I must be honest with you, you know what scares me, I’m scared that [starts crying] ah no [laughs]. I’m scared that, I’m scared that Michael’s gonna hit me one day. He already doesn’t have respect for women... he’s seeing it with his dad and his dad gets away with it. And he sees it as um, as normal, you know... he gets away with it. So what, does that tell my son?”

When Liz spoke of the meaning of the abuse for her, it was less about how her views on abuse had been challenged, and more about how the abuse would become a **continuous** story in her life by impacting on Michael, his future and the type of child she and Allan

are raising. Liz was less tolerant of the abuse because she did not have a history of violence. As Bischoff (2006) explains, those with a history of violence will be more tolerant of violent **situations** in the future. This is Liz's concern for Michael.

4.4.5. Poor Self-Image, Blame and Mistrust

There could be more than one reason for self-blame. Firstly, self-blame could be due to manipulation tactics used by the perpetrator. There is evidence of this in Liz's story. Self-blame could also be due to discourses within society, or in the relationship, where women are led to believe that they deserve abuse or that the man has a right to abuse her. There is less evidence of this in Liz's case. Self-blame may lead to justification of abusive **interactions** or the making of excuses for the abusers behaviour. Therefore, the victim stays committed to the relationship (Bostock et al., 2009; Fanslow & Robinson, 2010; Hurley et al., 2007; McLeod et al., 2010). Liz feels that she is still abused by Allan. She feels he still has an emotional hold on her and the ability to hurt her deeply with his words. This is corroborated by research findings that state that non-physical abuse has been found, in many cases, to be more common and more relentless than physical abuse, with no clear beginning or end (Queen et al., 2009). Her relationship with Allan has been **continuously** characterized, from start to present, by blame, mistrust and abuse, in which ever form it may take:

“It became more and more and I thought maybe it was my fault because I'm bringing that side out of him; he used to tell me I'm bringing that side out of him. And um, I looked for reasons why he was doing it... And I was looking for reasons why he was hitting me, I thought it was my fault...I'm gonna be honest with you, the same day that I ended the relationship I still thought it was me, I wanted to fix me”.

Her self-image is low as a result of her **interactions** with Allan and the abuse that she suffered. Her self-esteem was battered and resulted in a **continuous**, and lasting, effect of self-doubt that has stayed with her until the present day:

“I could never do anything right with Allan or say anything right. He always used to make me feel stupid... even now still, sometimes I'll cook and then I'll wait for

them to say anything bad about the food, you know, so, and then James will tell me 'ah, the foods so nice' and then I'll tell him 'ag, but you lying' because I'm so used to negative things, you struggle to, you actually think they lying to make you feel better....James does try make me feel better or good, he does always give me compliments but I always think he lies".

She often runs herself down during the interview by saying things like, "*Stupid, hey*", when referring to something she thinks or does. What is outstanding is how inflexible and **continuous** this negative self-image is, even in the face of achievements and new positive **interactions**. When she speaks of James and how he makes her feels, she says:

"I feel valued. I feel wanted, like, with Allan I felt wanted for abuse, you know, like he was using me for abuse. But now I feel wanted for love and security, and, I feel valued and I feel for once in my life, for once... You know".

When she tells her story and speaks of the steps she took to better her **situation**, she says:

"I just moved out with the clothes, with my clothes, Michael's clothes, and then um, I had to buy like a fridge and you know, that, I think that was also a big thing that was bugging me, how am I going to start all over again when I don't have any money. And then I went and bought everything, obviously I bought it on credit which put me in a lot of problems, but rather that than the situation I was in before".

However, this was followed by, "*Ja and if I look at myself I'm quite a weak person, I'm not a very strong person....I don't see myself as strong, I see myself as lucky that I got away"*.

This demonstrates how serious the emotional effects of any kind of abusive **interaction** and/or **situation** can be. It demonstrates how the scars of abuse have a **continuing** impact on a victim and a survivor's life. Liz's self-esteem and ability to trust was impacted on by her past **interactions** with Allan. The present **interactions** with James does not change this, she still feels negatively about herself and her future (**continuity**). What is also powerful is the narrative's ability to allow a person to rewrite a story, to rewrite oneself through the process of gaining a new perspective on one's past experiences, thereby finding a new perspective on one's future (Sclater, 2003). This was one of the hopes I had

for the participants in this study, something I hoped the participants could achieve through telling their stories and reflecting on their experiences in a new light. Sadly, Liz still views herself as a victim and the telling of her story did not result in empowerment but rather in the same version of the same story.

4.4.6. Interactions with her Son and Others

As mentioned previously, Liz's decisions both to stay in the abusive relationship and eventually to leave the relationship were influenced by **interactions** with others. Her decision to first seek help from the police was as a result of advice from her doctor (an **interaction**), *"I went and saw Dr. Smith in [the city] and he told me, 'listen, go and lay a case'"*. Her next decision was to stay with Allan. This decision was influenced both by a **situation** she could imagine playing out in front of her son, and also by her **interaction** with a policeman:

"I went to the police station and um, I think the main thing that was on my head is that I couldn't see my son seeing his dad being arrested. So the guy told me, 'listen, if you gonna lay a case, we gonna have to arrest him... so if you want to make it work rather...'. That was the worst advice I think it was".

This influence of the policeman demonstrates how society's perception of IPV can shape an individual's perception of IPV. From this **interaction**, Liz felt responsible for her **situation** and for deciding what the outcome would be. She decided to stay put in the relationship and was trapped by an outside perspective on her **situation**. Eventually, however, with the advice of, and helpful **interactions** with friends, she decided to leave the relationship with Allan:

"And I went to one of my friends... And we went and chatted and she said to me, 'Liz can you imagine being 60 one day and you have to force yourself on a guy that been abusing you. And, he's not gonna stop'. And I think that made me think....And then one of my friends gave me money for a deposit and he actually came, which is, like I say, God's grace, because he's a massive guy and Allan wouldn't even, I don't think he hits men, I think he only hits women. And then I moved out, so ja".

These **events** changed how she viewed her **situation** and helped her make the decision to take action.

The most important person informing Liz's decisions was Michael. Her son's best interests were the only ones (**continuously**) she had at heart when making decisions. Firstly, she stayed in the relationship thinking that she did not want to expose him to his father being arrested and a fear of how that **event** would affect him, "*And the thing that I didn't want Michael to see his dad getting arrested*". Then, she began to see the **situation** in a different way, again considering what would be best for Michael, "*I started thinking about Michael, do I really want to give this kind of life to my son*". Liz did leave Allan, however, she did not disappear altogether. She kept Allan in her and Michael's, lives, again thinking she was doing what was best for Michael by allowing him to have interaction with his father, "*That was the main thing that went on in my mind. I don't want my son to one day blame me and say, who, why did you decide*". At the time of this interview, however, Liz felt torn. She was torn by the **situation**, by the **interactions** with both Allan and her son. She was experiencing her son to be more disrespectful of women and was experiencing the **continuing** control from Allan:

"I'm very glad that I've ...left Allan, it's the best thing that I could have done in my life, it's the best decision for my child's sake, it's the best decision for my sake, but I'm not rid of him, he's there, and he's making my life as worse, you know, like we were together, he's actually ten times worse now because he's out there to get me".

When I asked Liz, "*is there anything else that makes it just really hard for you to break away from him*", her response was, "*No. My son is the only thing. No*". Her **interactions** with her son are most significant and meaningful for her when it comes to how she has made meaning of her abusive **situation** and how she gauged her success, through the **continuation** of her story and in moving on to being a good mother:

"That's why I told you now now, I don't know if I'm a good mother because I let him go to his dad always, I've never kept him away from his dad. But does his dad have any good influence on him? I can't think of one thing".

What was meaningful to Liz was support, *“But to get out of there, just make sure you’ve got backup, people to help you”*. Her **continuous** support from her friends and family in the past, and from James in the present, has helped her to leave Allan and is **continuing** to help her move forward with her life. She did not find support, however, from social services, *“I really don’t feel that the law is for women that’s being abused”*. Liz’s story corroborates McLeod et al.’s (2010) findings that, if a woman does not perceive available community services as useful then she is less likely to leave the relationship. Liz was able to leave the relationship but she has not been able to escape the abuse. Her experience has been that, among other things, the legal system (including the **event** mentioned before with the policeman) has made it difficult for her to regain control over her own life. She has not been able to legally separate herself from Allan’s **continuous** control. From what she had been telling me, I reflected, *“So that system kind of makes it harder for you to get out of it and move on from it”*. Her response was, *“exactly”*. The meaning that Liz has made from her experiences and **interactions** with the legal system, is that they are not there to help her, a woman who was abused and still experiences herself trapped in that **situation**. For Liz, it is a never-ending uphill battle as far as the social system is concerned:

“And then I’ve gone to the police twice but they told me he is as much a dad as I am a mother. So what, what, what, what rights do I have. Does it make sense what I’m saying? I think that’s why I feel so powerless, even though you keep on asking me don’t you feel you’ve won the... I don’t because there’s no back up for women that’s been abused, they don’t look at it”.

As long as Michael is legally tied to Allan, Liz does not see a positive future for them:

“You want the best for your kids and you want to bring up your kids the way you feel in your heart, but then there’s a, sorry to say it, a demon on the other side and you’ve got to let your child go to him”.

Liz sees her **situation** as one that is **continuous**. She is tied to her past, trapped in the present and cannot escape from Allan in the future.

What this illustrates is the important role that **interactions** can play in the decision to leave or remain in an abusive relationship. Not only friends and family, but also services

can be leaned on as resources for support. As mentioned previously, it is often an increased awareness of support from others that will initiate the decision to change the **situation** (Chang et al., 2010). Once again, it is the survivor who initiates the change, while it is the abuser who tries to maintain the abusive cycle (Westbrook, 2008). This also illustrates how fighting against an abusive relationship is a continuous struggle from both sides. From the one side a person has to try to escape and from the other side a person has to try to maintain control, *“The same day that I ended the relationship I still thought it was me, I wanted to fix me”*.

Support gave Liz strength to take the step to change her **situation** and to stand up against the abuse. It was through the supportive **interactions** with her friends that change took place, her story changed course and her future took on a new meaning. Even though she still feels trapped in the controlling **interactions** with Allan, and even though she has lasting emotional scars, Liz’s life is different at present and there is more hope for a positive future now compared to before (**continuity**). For Liz, being with James is more than having a companion, it is about having the possibility of changing her story (Sclater, 2003).

4.4.7. Liz’s Message

What can be learnt from Liz is that abuse is complex. What kept her in the relationship and what helped her get out, was a multitude of interacting factors, not one single isolated **event, interaction** or factor, and all of this worked simultaneously and **continuously**, both with her and against her. However, what she managed to isolate as meaningful to her was taking the first step. She wants to share the following with women who are in a similar **situation** to what she was in:

“I would tell them that, you know what, um, I think most women that’s in an abusive relationship keep on thinking that it will change. I would tell them that you know what, it’s never gonna change, get out of it now because you only have one life and the more time you spend with this guy the more you’re going to be messed up. The longer you spend with him, the more messed up your mind’s gonna be,

you're never gonna be able to enjoy life the way you should, because, um, you'll never look at life positive”.

From Liz's own personal experience:

“But to get out of there just make sure you've got backup, people to help you. Don't stay alone at home, um, don't answer him back on his SMS's and stuff when he tries and phones you, because they gonna try make you soft and it's so easy for people like that to make you soft because they just know what to say, the right words to say. Just break away completely, and that's what I did, I just broke away completely”.

In the next chapter, the messages from each of the participants are summarized and common themes are found and discussed.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter brings the discussions found in Chapter 4 together in a concluding manner. Individual messages from each participant are presented and briefly discussed. Common themes that continued through each participant's story are identified. Limitations of the study are discussed and recommendations for future studies of a similar nature are given.

5.2. A LESSON FROM ANNA'S STORY

Anna's story is one of perseverance and struggle. After much suffering, she took her life in her own hands, left everything she knew and decided to re-author her story (**continuation**). She has given new meaning to her life experiences and **interactions** in a sense that she has learned from her past rather than allowed it to bring her down.

Anna teaches us that it is possible to break free from your culturally constructed story, and that sometimes this is okay when it is the only way to survive. Anna's strength is evident in how she was able to change the discourse into one where IPV is not a norm. Redefining her identity as a survivor (*"I started to know, okay fine I can find a place of my own"*) and a mother (*"I just did it for the sake of the child"*) rather than a victim, and being able to leave the abusive **situation**, already begins a new discourse, implying strength and change. A new story or narrative will unfold from this. What we can learn from Anna is that our stories do not have to be culture bound (**context**), *"With blacks I will choose the husband instead of the child. But with me I won't do it"*. We are the authors of our own lives, depending on how we choose to make meaning of our experiences (Davies et al., 2009; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Meyer et al., 2009; Morgan, 2000). Hopefully, this is a lesson that any woman in an abusive relationship can learn from Anna and can apply to her own life to better her own **situation**.

5.3. A LESSON FROM KATE'S STORY

Kate's story is one of action and overcoming circumstance (**context/situation**). She believed in herself and she believed she deserved better "*just, wasn't going to stand for it*". Kate was quick to take action to alter her **situation**. She leaned on the support of family and friends (even when she was reluctant) and saw to it that she made a better life for herself (**interaction**). Kate drew strength from the meaning made from her family stories of abuse being unacceptable, and used this to free herself from the abusive relationship (**continuation**).

What one can learn from Kate's story is that the sooner you get out, the better, "*But I mean it wasn't long [the length of the abusive relationship], can you imagine somebody that was in an abusive relationship for years*". It is not always easy to leave and sometimes you get drawn back in. Even Kate was drawn back in but, nonetheless, it is important to leave as soon as you realize the relationship is abusive (in any form or shape). We also learn that no matter how proud you are, or how strong and independent you want to be, everyone needs help at some stage (**interaction**), "*I even felt bad phoning a family member... more embarrassment of relying on somebody else... Well, I did leave. I got friends from here to pick me up and we came back this side*". We can make our new stories richer - making them more likely to stick - when we draw on others and allow them to become a part of the new story. After all, our identity is linked to those around us and how they view us (Chang et al., 2010; Rasool et al., 2002; Sclater, 2003).

5.4. A LESSON FROM LIZ'S STORY

Liz still feels trapped in abuse, to a certain extent, largely due to a lack of support from the system. This, as McLeod et al. (2010) explain, is one of the things that contributes to staying in an abusive relationship (**interaction** with wider societal discourse):

"And then I've gone to the police twice but they told me he is as much a dad as I am a mother. So, what, what, what, what rights do I have.... I think that's why I feel

so powerless... there's no back up for women that's been abused, they don't look at it."

However, even though Liz's story is one of enduring suffering and hardship, it is also a story of a woman who does not give up (**continuity**), *"I think that was also a big thing that was bugging me, how am I going to start all over again.... But rather than the situation I was in before"* and who continues to fight for what she believes in. Even though Liz was trapped in an abusive relationship for years, and even though she still feels like a victim at times (**context**), she identifies with her role as a mother, more so than with her role as a victim, *"I started thinking about Michael, do I really want to give this kind of life to my son"*. It is support from her loved one's and love for her children that keeps her going (**interaction**). Liz was, and still is, determined to change her story and to set her future on a new course (**continuity**) (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010; Flinck et al., 2005; Grauwiler, 2007; Nurius & Macy, 2010).

What we can learn from Liz is that even if abuse may seem never ending, and the abuser makes himself part of a woman's life, insisting she be a victim, it is essential to find anything and everything that you can to hold onto to give you hope and courage, a way to live purposefully for the future (**continuity/interaction**), *"And as time went past, I, I think I realized now what a good man I have. I'm so lucky to have James in my life now"*. By continuing the fight for what she believes in and what she believes is right for her children, by **continuing** to find meaning for her future and her identity as a mother (*"I wish and pray and hope that I teach him the right morals, that he will look at his dad's mistakes and say 'but that is not right'"*), Liz shows us that it is how we choose to respond to interactions and the purpose that we choose for our own lives, that defines us rather than what we suffer from at the hands of someone else:

"when I left him it was like almost like a relief, I knew I had to do this a long time ago, I just didn't have the guts.... if I look back today, I think it's the best thing I could have done". (Chase, 2005; Durrheim, 1997; Lieblich et al., 1998).

5.5. COMMON THEMES

5.5.1. Commitment Preceded Abuse

All three participants found that it was a commitment (**event**), such as cohabitation, that changed the dynamic of the relationship, which ultimately gave free reign to the abusive **interactions**. For Anna, when she became dependent on her boyfriend financially and for a place to live, she found that the abuse escalated and she was not able to do anything about it, “[the abuse] was physical. But I couldn’t take him to jail because he was the one providing food and all that” (her **situation** of being dependent kept her trapped). Kate had always found that her boyfriend could be controlling and verbally abusive, but it was when she moved in with him that the abuse escalated, “it got worse”. The **interactions** changed when he hit her for the first and last time. Liz has a similar story. Her boyfriend, at the time, hit her after they had been living together and she fell pregnant. Before this, he had not been abusive towards her, “Before that there were no signs, he was very charming”. It was the escalation of abuse, after certain **events** had occurred, that characterized these relationships and transformed the women in ways that allowed each one of them to change their **situation**. This discovery keeps with findings by Bostock et al. (2009).

5.5.2. Identities

Both Anna and Liz were led by their identities as mothers. They found that it was motivation to do the best for their children that led them to leave the abusive relationship. Anna said, “for the sake of my child I felt I just needed to make a life”, and Liz said, “I started thinking about Michael, do I really want to give this kind of life to my son”. For Liz it was more complicated because while her son was motivation to leave, it was also the reason why she kept contact and, consequently, still felt abused. However, the commonality between the two women still stands. This fits with the theme of manipulation and control. The men in their lives attempted to control and manipulate them through their children but it was this that led them to fight even harder. It was the

personal meaning that each of them gave to their roles as mothers, and their **interactions** with their children and their fathers, that led them to take action and move away from the abusive **contexts**.

Kate did not have children at the time, but now that she does, she expressed that she believes it was best that she left early, before children were involved and before she had formed the identity of a mother, *“there were no kids involved. I can only imagine how it is for women... with kids that are involved”*. Through this, we can see how **interaction** and identity are intertwined.

As has been discussed with each individual story in Chapter 4, the women’s identities were constantly changing as their stories progressed, confirming Crossley’s (2007) ideas. The most important change, however, was when each woman decided she would rather be a survivor than a victim. As Anna said, *“I only had that thing that my life belongs to me”*. In Kate’s words, *“[I] wasn’t going to stand for it.”*

5.5.3. Control and Manipulation

All three women were controlled and manipulated in some way that not only kept them in the **context** of the relationship, and that not only kept them believing he would change, but that also made them return when they first tried to leave. Anna was controlled by being completely dependent on her boyfriend at the time, *“But I couldn’t take him to jail because he was the one providing food and all that”*. Kate was manipulated into moving in with her boyfriend and was then isolated socially and financially:

“And then what made me decide to move to him was because he said well he didn’t know where, you know, he doesn’t see me often enough, he would see me on weekends and that was it... And that’s what made me move there, thinking it would go better”.

She was also manipulated into returning after she had left the first time. Liz was manipulated in more ways than one. She was led to believe she was to blame for the

abuse, “*He used to tell me I’m bringing that side out of him*”, and was also manipulated into staying in the relationship as the abuse continued.

Anna explains this manipulation well:

“There you feel like the higher you go the colder it becomes.... And abusive men are very clever I should say. Whenever he realise that he has you he’ll do by all the means to make you smile, so he can be sorry and all that. But it is not actually that they are sorry”.

Liz aptly explains the manipulation as well:

“But he was good, when he, when he, when he got over it he’d, you know, he’d buy you presents, you know, and he’d promise you he’s gonna change, and he promises you he’s gonna go for anger management, and stuff like that”.

As has been mentioned, all three participants tried more than once to leave but found themselves drawn back again through **interactions** with their boyfriends in the form of promises and/or manipulation. Anna was drawn back to her abusive partner because she was in a **context** where she was dependent on him:

“And after he ran I had to go out and look for him.... Not, I think a month later, I hunted him until I find him back and I said to him ‘I’m sorry I had to expose you and, and, I still want you back in my life’.... So he came back to my life and we still carried on”.

Kate: “*And he like basically came after me ‘Sorry, sorry, sorry, I promise I won’t do it again’ and, and I went back”*”, and Liz:

“And then eventually the first time he found out where I lived, and then he locked me in the house for about 2 days and then he told me he’s not gonna let me out until I give him a second chance. And then I decided I’m gonna give him a second chance”,

Kate and Liz were drawn back by promises to change. These repeated efforts to leave were largely as a result of tactics the men used to create a **situation** where the women felt trapped, isolated or believing the men would change.

It was also through these control tactics and manipulations that the women still struggle with **continuing** effects of the abuse today. In a way, these men still control them:

- Anna: *“Just sometimes you know, if you once experience this you’ll always have a bit of fear or something”*
- Kate: *“Ja, well, emotionally and psychologically I was broken down, like I said. I still have issues today and that was, I think it was like 9 years ago, that I was with him”*
- Liz: *“James does try make me feel better or good, he does always give me compliments but I always think he lies”*.

As is made apparent by these women’s experiences, and in keeping with research done by other authors, social, economic and emotional abuse tend to be the most likely types of non-physical abuse that lead to physical abuse (Outlaw, 2009). They often tend to leave lingering effects such as flashbacks where the women are left to constantly re-experience the abuse even after it has ended (Queen et al., 2009).

Liz’s **situation**, however, is somewhat unique. Even though she met the criteria to be a participant (a survivor of IPV as is outlined in Chapter 1), she still does not see herself as having been able to move on. The personal meaning that she has given to her **context** is that she is still being abused:

“I don’t think I was strong at all to leave him, otherwise if I was really a strong woman I would still not have the problems I have with him. I think I’m weak, I think he’s got, you know, he, he’s, he’s not just uh, he’s got money, he’s got power, he’s got everything, and I feel that what am I”.

This finding, regarding control and manipulation on the part of the perpetrator, corroborates Gilchrist’s (2009) findings.

5.5.4. Someone to Help

It is through **interactions** with others that the process of change started. The direction of Anna’s story changed when a friend of her mom’s intervened:

“And then the lady said to me she needs this man, we need to take him to the police station. And I said, for him to go to jail, I’d rather just run away. And, that’s when I decided to leave home”.

Not only was it integral to the process of leaving (to have an **interaction** with a friend to help take the initial step), but Kate and Liz needed continued support and **interaction** from loved ones. For all three women, it was finding new love and having a new and good man in their lives that kept them away from the abuser. Liz felt *“God’s grace”* when a friend of hers was able to help, *“one of my friends gave me money for a deposit and he actually came, which is, like I say, God’s grace, cos he’s a massive guy”*. Kate found a rare kind of support from her previous boss which helped her get back on her feet and stay away from her ex-boyfriend, *“Um, I was lucky, eventually, my old boss that I had left here, she said to me, I actually phoned her and said ‘Listen here, I want to come back please’. So she said to me ‘Yes, come back’”*. Of course it was also necessary that the decision be made to not stand for the abuse and not be identified as victims that was integral in finding a “good” man and committing to that relationship. Fanslow and Robinson (2010), Flinck et al. (2005), Grauwiler (2007), and Nurius and Macy (2010) have all conducted research confirming the power of social support.

This is not to say that the women have left the abusive relationships unscarred. All three of them find, to this day, that it is the emotional abuse that still haunts them:

- Anna: *“And, you know, sometimes when I’m alone it hurts so bad.... I get hurt emotionally because I think of those things, I can’t talk about them”*
- Liz: *“I think the verbal abuse hurt me more.... The physical was like he used to hit me and it was over.... and still I feel stupid sometimes”*
- Kate: *“emotionally and psychologically I was broken down.... I still have issues with that today, and that was, I think it was like 9 years ago”*.

The lingering effects of emotional abuse and the scars left by words, is a topic explored and confirmed by Queen et al. (2009).

It has become evident that an important aspect to consider when a woman who finds herself with a man with abusive tendencies, is that any form of abuse is most likely to

escalate if a commitment is entered into, especially if a woman finds that she is dependent on him. It is also important to remember that it is the personal meaning a woman gives to her **context** that will shape her actions. Therefore, only when the woman interprets the **interactions** within the relationship as abusive, is she able to realize that a change needs to be made. Only when she decides that she is a survivor and not a victim, will she be able to action a decision for change (Bostock et al., 2009; Crossley, 2007; Grauwiler, 2007; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

5.6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A limitation to this study, due to it being of limited scope, is that there were very few participants. This has been addressed in Chapter 3. In the context of narrative research and for the purpose of this study, however, the study still cannot be generalized to a wider population even though the above common themes were noted in the analysis and can be useful in applying to other similar cases. This is a limitation due to the prevalence of IPV which is widespread and would be useful to have knowledge that is generaliseable. This means that it is important, when reading this study, to keep in mind that this is an analysis of individual cases and that the findings, while sometimes common among the participants, apply only to the cases and not to the entire population of women who are victims or survivors of IPV.

5.7. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

One suggestion I would make for further research, is to vary the population. For example, it would be interesting to study men who are subjected to IPV at the hands of women, or to study women who have been trapped in a relationship characterized by IPV for a long period of time unable to leave. Greater variety could also include accounting for various race, socioeconomic and age groups. It could also be valuable to interview a larger number of people.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Question 1: Tell me your story about when you first realized you were in an abusive relationship.

Question 2: When did you realise that the abuse in the relationship was out of hand?

Question 3: What were the steps you took in making a change towards ending the relationship?

Question 4: How do you think abuse is encouraged by the way in which society sees men and women?

a. Family?

Question 5: How prevalent do you think abuse is?

Question 6: What do you see in the things around you that encourage abuse or make it difficult to break away from it?

Question 7: How would you describe your **process** of ending the relationship in terms of actions taken?

a. Emotional and psychological processes?

Question 8: How would you describe the process of change and growth that you underwent?

Question 9: How would you describe the difficulties you had to overcome to commit to your current relationship?

Question 10: What does a committed relationship mean to you?

Question 11: How do you see this relationship as non-abusive?

Question 12: What did the abuse tell you about yourself and what does your new relationship tell you about yourself?

Question 13: What would you like to tell others about your victory over abuse?

Question 14: What do others share with you about how they witness this victory over abuse?

Question 15: What kind of steps will you take in the future to further your new way of relating/your new relationship?



APPENDIX B: INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

SECTION A:

RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR ADULT PARTICIPANTS (ENGLISH)

Title of the study:

Exploring narratives of women who survive intimate partner violence and the process of their moving on to non-abusive relationships

Purpose of the study:

The study aims to explore the stories of women who have survived the experience of intimate partner violence (IPV) and managed to move on to successful relationships. The women's stories will allow for exploration of their interpretations of their processes in moving from an abusive to a successful relationship. The purpose of focusing on the process of moving from an abusive relationship to a non-abusive relationship is to determine what make these women unique in being able to leave an abusive relationship and commit to a new relationship.

Role of the participant:

The participants will be asked to participate in an interview, discussing their past experiences of abuse but focusing on their experiences of leaving the abusive relationship and moving on to a non-abusive relationship.

Information:

The experiences shared during the interviews will be used as a basis for a Masters thesis in psychology. The degree of MA Counselling Psychology is being undertaken by the

researcher, Shaylene Mills, under the supervision of Vicky Timm through the Department of Psychology (head of department: Maria Marchetti-Mercer).

Benefits:

The possible benefits include empowerment of participants as well as gaining self-knowledge. If the participants feel they need to work through any issues that may arise, the contact number of a private psychologist as well as POWA will be provided. POWA has agreed to extend their services to participants who need it.

Researcher:

All information will be kept confidential and anonymous. Information will be stored in a locked cupboard, and electronic information will be kept under a password. Any information that is included in the dissertation will not be written under the participant's real name and any identifying information will be excluded. Take note that the records will be safely stored at the University of Pretoria for 15 years for researcher and archival purposes.

SECTION B:

CONSENT FORM FOR ADULT PARTICIPANTS (ENGLISH)

I, _____, hereby freely give permission to take part in the study as explained in Section A, and I give permission for the researcher to use a voice recorder.

Participant:

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Name in print: _____

Researcher:

I have explained the study to the participant, and provided her with a copy of the participant information sheet.

Signed: _____

Date:

Name in print: _____