

**EMOTIONAL ABUSE IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS:
ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES AS
EXPRESSED IN A THERAPEUTIC SETTING**

by

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You came into my life
and nothing has ever been the same since.
You touched a special part of me
that no one had ever touched before.
The vulnerable me that longs to be loved.
You lit up my life with laughter,
shared my hopes and dreams,
dried my tears and loved me.
You were a treasured person in my life.

Then things began to change.
The man I knew and loved began to leave,
and in his place was a cold distant stranger
who seemed to want to crush and destroy me.
Where there had been love, warmth and acceptance,
there was coldness and hostility.

Confused and bewildered,
I tried so hard to make things right,
searched for an answer to the question 'why.'
For a long time my memories of what once had been
fed my hope that tender times would come again.
That hope died slowly,
replaced by piercing sorrow
as I descended into the darkness
of total despair.

Leaving you was the hardest thing I ever did,
but I knew I had to do it to survive.
Bewildered, alone, afraid,
I turned my back on all I believed in,
and began the quest
through the darkness, toward light,
to reclaim me.

It takes a long time to pick up the shattered pieces,
and to painstakingly rebuild.
Deep wounds may heal,
but I am not the same. I am changed.
I struggle to come to terms with that.
Will the woman who eventually emerges
somehow learn to trust again?

But there are unexpected gifts.
Sorrow has carved new depth in me.
There is greater understanding and compassion.
and I now know
that the most precious person in my life is me.
I am receiving myself back,
and that gift is all the more precious
because it is truly mine.

Kay Douglas in *Invisible Wounds* (1996)

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When in need the perfect guide appears

Minette, Elaine, Karen, Berna, and all my most valuable clients: I often struggled and felt the doubt creeping up and then a new client would make an appointment. Yet again I heard the story of emotional abuse in yet another amazing woman's life. I would have been blind not to see the message, deaf not to hear the voice

Thank you for sharing your valuable lives with me ...

Thank you for growing and showing me the way

Dr. Gertina van Schalkwyk: Thank you for the investment you were willing to make. Thank you for the loyalty shown when you had the chance to pull out and you did not. Not being able to repay you in kind, I will keep it in mind when the opportunity presents itself, and I can step in and show someone else the way.

Thank you to all those I can still call my friends after all that we have been through. Each of you carried me in your own special way. Especially so to Dr. Rita Kellerman, as sometimes a friend can also be your intellectual mentor and emotional support system. Thank you for you sharing nature and all the advantages I benefited from.

My parents, Jock and Charlotte Malherbe, blindly supported me from the word go. When in despair, they did not even hear my pleas. When in doubt, the only answer I got was, "You will; we know." Sometimes this maddened me, but mostly it humbled me: I am truly blessed.

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EMOTIONAL ABUSE IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS: ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES AS EXPRESSED IN A THERAPEUTIC SETTING

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SUMMARY

Although the focus of the study was the emotional abuse of women in close relationship, I argue that the patterns and processes in the abusive relationship, the positioning of both players show a close resemblance to abuse and violence on a macro-political scale. When I as a psychotherapist was continuously confronted with an increasing number of female clients relating stories of emotional abuse in close personal relationships, I started questioning the historical context, culture, societal beliefs and time-frame that constructed women to be in such a position. World wide voices are heard questioning the constant abuse of the other, the weaker, the different, and the marginalized, and much has been written about physical abuse, but the question was as to how this macro-phenomenon informs upon the emotional life of the individual woman.

When it comes to abuse in close relationships, the victim usually is the female and not the male partner, which makes abuse a woman's problem. As a result, I was interested in the truths of the woman in the abusive relationship and approached this research from the position of *the other* and not the oppressor. Feminist standpoint theory formed the basis of my epistemological and methodological thinking. This I practically implemented in my choice of method and my approach to interpretation of the research information. I undertook a qualitative study, utilizing descriptive methods to represent the stories of women from emotionally abusive relationships. The research was historical and location-specific, and led to the description of what I termed the Traditional Afrikaans Family and a legitimizing ecology for emotional abuse against women in close relationships.

The experiences collected tell about emotional abuse as relayed by more than forty women in therapy. The data formed the background for the reconstruction and representation of four case

studies and a thematic analysis pertaining to the positioning of both partners in an emotionally abusive relationship. A critical deconstruction of the mechanisms of power, domination, and control are explained. In doing so, emerging patterns in the abusive relationship were noted and described. Of particular interest to psychotherapists will be the description and analysis of the process of emotional abuse as played out in close relationships.

In conclusion, I argued that emotional abuse in close interpersonal relationships is constructed in the interactions between the partners and within a legitimising context that warrants the male to dominate. The abusive behaviour emerges as a result of the patriarchal male wanting to establish or re-establish his dominant position while the female partner attempts to position him as someone that respects her as a person in her own right.

KEY TERMS

Control

Domination

Emotional abuse

Feminism

Feminist standpoint theory

Patriarchy

Patterns of abuse

Positioning in an abusive relationship

Power

Processes of emotional abuse

Thematic analysis

Traditional Afrikaans family

EMOSIONELE TEISTERING IN INTIEME VERHOUDINGE: ONTLEDING VAN DIE ERVARINGE VAN VROUE SOOS WEERGEGEE BINNE DIE TERAPEUTIESE OMGEWING

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OPSOMMING

Die fokus van die studie was die emosionele teistering van vroue binne intieme (nabye) persoonlike verhoudinge. Tog voer ek aan dat die patrone en prosesse van emosionele aftakeling, sowel as die posisionering van beide vennote in die verhouding noue ooreenkoms vertoon met teistering en geweld in 'n breëre makro-politieke speelveld. As psigoterapeut het ek meer en meer bewus geword van die toenemende aantal vrouekliënte met vertellings van emosionele teistering in hulle nabye verhoudings wat my belangstelling rakende die historisiteit, kultuur, tydvak en sosiale oortuiging wat vroue in so 'n posisie in die verhouding konstrueer, geprikkel het. Alhoewel daar wêreldwyd stemme opgaan teen die voortdurende teistering van die ander, die swakkeres, die andersdenkende en die gemarginaliseerdes, en alhoewel daar baie navorsing oor fisiese mishandeling is, word die *hoe* van emosionele teistering in die lewe van die vrou en die wyse waarop dit deur 'n wyer sosiale konteks gekonstrueer word, onbevredigend in die literatuur aangespreek.

Die slagoffer in die emosioneel teisterende verhouding is merendeels die vroulike vennoot en juis daarom word sodanige teistering oor die algemeen gesien as vrouens se probleem. Omdat ek hoofsaaklik belanggestel het in die waarhede van die vrou binne hierdie verhouding, was dit vir my belangrik om die navorsing vanuit die oogpunt van die sogenaamd *ander* te benader en nie vanuit die oogpunt van die onderdrukker nie. In hierdie opsig het ek die Feministiese standpuntteorie gebruik as die epistemologiese en metodologiese onderbou van my studie wat ek dan weerspieël in die keuse van die metode en interpretasie. My navorsingsmetode is dus kwalitatief van aard, daar ek die beskrywende metode wou aanwend in my verteenwoordigende voorstelling van die vertellings van vroue binne emosioneel afbrekende verhoudings. Die navorsing word ook histories en lokaal-spesifiek gerig en gee aanleiding tot 'n beskrywing van

die Tradisionele Afrikaanse Gesin (familie) en die konteks-spesifieke legitimerende ekologie van emosionele teistering teenoor vroue in nabye verhoudings.

Data is verkry oor die belewing van emosionele teistering van meer as veertig vroue soos aan my vertel tydens psigoterapie. Hierdie inligting vorm die basis vir die rekonstruksie en aanbieding van vier gevalstudies en 'n tematiese ontleding van die posisionering van beide vennote in die emosioneel afbrekende verhouding. Dit is opgevolg deur die kritiese dekonstruksie van die meganismes van mag, oorheersing en beheer wat die basis vorm van aftakelende gedrag. Vanuit die dekonstruksie tree patrone te voorskyn in die vroue se beskrywings van emosionele teistering. Vir die psigoterapeut is die belangrikste wat hieruit voortspuit egter die ontleding van die prosesse van emosionele aftakeling in intieme verhoudinge.

Ek kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat emosionele teistering in intieme interpersoonlike verhoudings in die interaksies wat afspeel tussen die twee vennote in die verhouding, gekonstrueer word. Emosionele teistering is die gedrag van 'n patriargale man wat poog om sy posisie van oorheersing te vestig of te hervestig, terwyl sy vroulike vennoot poog om hom te posisioneer as iemand wat haar respekteer en sal behandel as 'n as persoon in eie reg.

SLEUTELTERME

Beheer	Emosionele teistering
Feminisme	Feministiese standpuntteorie
Mag	Oorheersing
Patriargie	Patrone van teistering
Posisionering in 'n afbrekende verhouding	Prosesse van emosionele teistering
Tematiese analise	Tradisionele Afrikaanse gesin
