

PART 1: THE VOICE OF THE RESEARCHER

CHAPTER 1: PREAMBLE AND PURPOSE

...psychology has nothing to say about what women are really like, what they need and what they want, essentially because psychology does not know
Naomi Weisstein (2000, p.185)

It has been my experience that most issues that play themselves out within the parameters of a given society or culture eventually find their way to the consulting rooms of the psychologist. I therefore was increasingly perplexed by the escalation of women stumbled upon within the therapeutic setting, who described a similar-sounding pattern of emotional hurt and abuse. Within the safety of the therapeutic relationship and the empathic listening of a therapist, women were telling the story of the emotional abuse they experienced in close relationships.

Time and again I was confronted with similar-sounding situations and stories, until such time when I found myself anticipating the next incident or occurrence in the client's story. The realization dawned that I was not dealing with randomly occurring behaviour, but a pattern of behaviours and processes that all had something to do with the concept of emotional abuse. The belief grew that these interlinking patterns could be grouped together under an umbrella phenomenon of emotional abuse. Nevertheless, I struggled to understand whether emotional abuse was a separate phenomenon in the true sense of the word, or a branching-off from the patterns and behaviours typically to be found within a relationship fraught with all types of violence. I needed to establish whether the emotional abuse was, above all, a reflection on a violent society.

At social get-togethers, in the papers, and as a therapist I was constantly confronted with situations where women were verbally abused and degraded, emotionally belittled and run-down, and where people turn a blind eye and a deaf ear. Then, and now, the written and electronic media daily overflow with reports on war and violence occurring at the macro level of societies. The occurrences leading up to and following September 11, 2001 in New York, March 11, 2004 in Madrid and July 7, 2005 in London have yet again proven to what extent power games are played out on a global scale. But violence and the misuse of power are no new occurrence and have been with us since the beginning of time as we know it.

The Constitution of South Africa is depicted as one of the most progressive in the world, especially when it comes to the rights and protection of the rights of women and children and yet the history of the 1994 elected African National Congress government in South Africa is internationally acknowledged as one of oppression, and shows the subtleties and sufferings of domination. We have the Commission on Gender Equality and the Women's Charter defining discrimination against women and recommending steps to be taken (Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women: First South African Report, 2005). The progressiveness of the constitution does signal reference to the preceding struggle against oppression and domination but even so, political thought, no matter how progressive or archaic, does not directly reflect the reality of the people's day-to-day experiences.

How else is one to account for the statistical facts that in South Africa a woman is raped every 26 seconds, that one out of four women are in relationships where they are abused, and that every six days a woman is murdered by her partner (People Opposing Women Abuse, 2005). A research project undertaken by the Human Sciences Research Council found that 20% of South Africans report violence in their relationships and 57% still physically discipline their children, 33% thereof with a rod or a belt (Dawes, Kafaar, Kropiwnicki, Pather & Richter, 2004). According to Liz Walker (2005) as high as fifty percent of women in South Africa experience some form of domestic violence on a regular basis; either physical, emotional, or financial.

I grew up in a white middle-class, Afrikaans neighbourhood (concepts I will at a later stage come back to) and therefore I cannot speak for women from all races and classes in South Africa. I can only give my version and the versions of the women in the present research, as all truth lies within the historical and social location of the time. Each year in celebrating Women's Day, and especially in celebrating ten years of democracy in South Africa in 2004, I noticed a specific trend in the local Afrikaans newspapers; a trend I take to be more or less the same throughout the country. Firstly, those women who have risen to the occasion and became an active and largely equal political and social force are celebrated. Secondly, there is the call-up to white women who still hover inside a comfort-zone of letting the others or the men do whatever needs to be done (Rabe, 2004). A well-known South African female theologian describes women to have "identities of failure". Rabe quotes an equally well-know historian depicting South African women as having sacrificed their womanhood to the ideal of Afrikaner Nasionalisme (Afrikaans Nationalism), implying a special breed of conservatism and patriarchy.

Rabe calls on women to awaken from their imprisonment within the corsets of their past and the stereotypical beliefs about women.

Thirdly, there is an alleged male political and religious backlash. An Afrikaans newspaper carried a report on a so-called extremist political group (the *Boeremag*) standing trail after an alleged failed attempt to take over government. It was alleged in court by state witnesses against the accused that there were intensions to start a *breeding program* (the word *breeding* was specifically used) in which women would be inseminated by members of their own so-called extremist political group (Du Toit, 2004). It has not ever been proved, however, that the accused people did in fact belong to a group, or that a group such as the so-called “*Boeremag*” in fact existed. This conforms to the typical pattern followed by the abusive husband against the helpless abused wife. In fact, the entire court record of the so-called “*Boeremag* trial” reads like a classic case study of name-calling, family violence and wife-abuse. Also there exists the South African Association of Men, a white middle-class organization which aims to re-establish some of the previously masculine icons and to oppose the threat of feminism (Morrell, 2001).

A letter from a male writer under the title of *Women giving rise to the second fall of humanity* (Krugger, 2004), explains that to argue for women as equals is clearly to promote a ploy of Satan. He accuses women of not learning from their first uprising through Eve, after which they were punished and placed under the guidance of men. Thanks are given to God for those women that know their place at home and in society, neither equal nor above men.

I do believe that the above by no means illustrates the beliefs of the average South-African male. However, historical, stereotypical, and religious traces of the belief that women are worth less than men, and women therefore are subordinate to men, is still subconsciously played out in our households.

On a more intimate and micro level, closer to the concept of emotional abuse, it is said that,

Twenty years ago we began hearing women telling the truth about the physical abuse they were experiencing in their lives. Ten years ago we began hearing women telling the truth about the sexual abuse in their lives. Recently we began hearing women telling the truth about the psychological abuse in their lives. The stories are not new, only the voices and our ability to hear and understand (Chang, 1996, pp.11-12).

The stories that speak for themselves are the stories of the emotional abuse suffered by women in close personal relationships. Scientific studies and the literature on emotional abuse before the 1990's are the exception to the rule (Arias, 1999; Dutton, 1992; Follingstad & DeHart, 2000; Marshall, 1994; Schumacher, Slep & Heyman, 2001; Tolman, 1992). Until fairly recently, psychological research on issues related to any form of abuse in relationships, focused primarily on physical violence. At times, a mere chapter, or at most a few paragraphs, were denoted to non-physical abuse (Bartky, 1990; Braude, 1988; Burstow, 1992; Russell & Hulson, 1992), because also psychology operated from a value system where women were the add-on in studies (Burr, 1995). It was only in the latter part of the 1990s that popular self-help books started off a trend of new titles ranging from verbal abuse (P. Evans, 1993), non-physical abuse (Miller, 1995), invisible wounds (Douglas, 1996), emotional blackmail (Forward, 1997), and stalking (Hirigoyen, 2000), all written by women. In the last five-odd years, the daily news media started waking up to the emotional abuse of women within the inner circles of society, as played out in harassment at work or within close interpersonal relationships.

My interest in close relationships and the occurrence of emotional abuse in these relationships is by no means impartial and dispassionate and was influenced by two distinct life events. Although the one cannot be separated from the other in adding meaning and understanding, I will, for the purpose of relating them, refer to the one as professional and the other as more personal in nature. Firstly, I have been working professionally within a male-dominated environment for more than two decades, and almost exclusively consulted male clients. In the late 1990's I moved into private practice and my clientele changed accordingly. I now saw more female clients, a characteristic of the therapeutic environment often documented (Burstow, 1992; Greenspan, 1983). The stories of emotional abuse in close relationships, as my women clients related them, mystified me. I was bewildered by the number of questions about emotional abuse I was confronted with and the reality that the available literature was unable to answer most of these questions to my satisfaction.

In the second instance, prior to changing my professional environment, I, also opted out of marriage. When asked about the reasons for the divorce, I offhandedly referred to personality differences. I did not speak of my own experiences of emotional abuse. But time and time again, I had to explain the process of emotional abuse, as I then understood it, to clients and support them in finding a better way of going about their lives. It dawned on me that in keeping quiet, I myself was instrumental in the continuing abuse of women in close relationships. By

keeping quiet, I kept an emotional distance, and this rendered me uneasily passive in my approach.

If I am not telling of women's experiences of emotional abuse, I am not taking responsibility, and to me has specific implications.

- The academic world and psychotherapists will go on not being able to recognize the mechanisms used in emotional abuse within relationships (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Chang, 1996; Collier, 1982; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; O'Leary & Murphy, 1992). Women will remain ignorant of the games played out in their relationships, because if they cannot name them, they may start thinking that they are imagining it (Collier, 1982; Jagger, 2000; Loring, 1994). As Jones (Jones & Brown, 2000, p.38) states, "Women must share their experiences with each other until they understand, identify, and explicitly state the many psychological techniques or domination in and out of the home". The field of psychology is new to the study of specific women. The first book on the counselling of women was only published only in the 1970s (Worell & Remer, 1992) and I believe that my telling can serve a purpose greater than just in the lives of the few women I touch.
- Society will go on ignoring or even condoning family violence, and more specifically the emotional abuse of women (Brannon, 2002; Chang, 1996; Collier, 1982; Douglas, 1996; Dutton, 1992; Leland-Young & Nelson, 1988).
- Women will go on believing that if they can just be good enough, they will overcome the problems they face. In 1979 already Leonore Walker in her *The Battered Woman*, realized that women will go on being victimized if we leave them to believe that they can find "the right way" (p.xvi). Women's physical battering did not stop after the publication of Walker's work, but physical abuse is more readily recognized and spoken for.
- Women will remain stuck in their sense of misplaced shame.
- Women will continue to keep to a position of the powerless (Myss, 1997) and communicate their powerlessness to society, other women and their girl children, if, out of loyalty to their abuser and not wanting to harm family, children and friends, they keep their stories to themselves.

- As a psychotherapist and researcher, I by implication side with the abuser and by doing so imply that abuse is acceptable.

Yet another reason for not keeping quiet stemmed from my own personal therapeutic style. Developing one's own personal style of therapy within a particular theoretical framework, and the techniques one applies, are part of the responsibility of every psychotherapist. In my own practice I have found aspects such as sharing and constant reflecting – both in private and with the clients – crucial to the successful living of both my clients and myself, a standpoint that can be seen as more feminist in nature. In this way, my own particular style of interacting with clients was instrumental in the decision to make the voices of these specific clients audible, and to have female clients tell of their experiences of emotional abuse in their heterosexual relationships.

Coming to a decision to research emotional abuse was the first step. By rethinking and re-evaluating my own situation and the stories of my clients and by continuous reading, I progressed through a number of phases in trying to make sense of the process of emotional abuse as experienced in close relationships. I went through a phase in which I wanted to lay all the blame on the abuser and consequently found abundant literature citing research that either proved or disproved the abuser's liability. As I am more concerned with women's experiences, I will not here fully review the extensive literature on the male abuser, but I need to share a few conclusions, as many of these have grown into myths with serious implications on the lives of women. Most of the following research has been done on the physically abusive man, and I found myself contemplating whether this would also apply to the emotionally abusive man.

Society attempts to shift the responsibility for the occurrence of abuse in our western culture onto drunkards (Douglas, 1996; Miller, 1995; O'Leary & Murphy, 1992; Russel & Hulson, 1992; Walker, 1979) and drug addicts (Saunders, 1992; Walker, 1979). As far as physical abuse is concerned, there seems to be some truth involved in this widely believed premise (Horley, 2002; Russel & Hulson, 1992; O'Leary & Murphy, 1992; Saunders, 1992). It has also been found, however, that most men who go on alcohol binges or are high-frequency drinkers do not hit their wives (Kantor & Straus, 1987; Wallace, 1996). One can therefore conclude that women are mistaken in their belief that the abuse will stop if they can control their partner's drinking.

The perception exists that only men who are pathologically ill will physically abuse their partners (Collier, 1982). Researchers have found that many batterers exhibit traits that can be described as pathological (Saunders, 1992; Wallace, 1996), but as all pathologically ill men do not abuse their spouses and the majority of physically abusive men do not show evidence of mental disorders (Horley, 2002; Saunders, 1992; Schumacher, et al., 2001), it seems reasonable to deduct that mental illness is not the cause of abuse between intimate partners.

Blaming the abuse on the man's inability to control his aggression is also found to be an unacceptable excuse (Miller, 1995; Saunders, 1992). Evidence of biological determination was overthrown by research (Weisstein, 2000). Behaviour is a learned option (Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2004; Dobash & Dobash, 1980) and this choice of abusive behaviour is illustrated by the fact that physically abusive men do not randomly hit out at anyone (Miller, 1995; Walker, 1979). They seldom show their anger in public, they only break the spouse's possessions – and the most prized ones at that – and do not bruise where it will show (Douglas, 1996). Such behaviour, according to Douglas (1996, p.69), proves a "chilling level of control".

The abuser's stress levels are often cited as causing the abuse, but if he is thus stressed, the question remains why the abuse is only directed at his partner (Douglas, 1996; Horley, 2002). Also, abuse being the result of the abuser not having the necessary coping skills was seen as another myth by Walker (1979) as the abuser solely targets his partner.

I found that society, and particularly women, justify the abuser's behaviour through his so-called terrible childhood. Available research tends to indicate the possibility of an intergenerational transmission of abuse and verbal aggression (Cahn, 1996; Cahn & Lloyds, 1996; Collier, 1982; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Dutton, 1988; Gelles, 1983; NiCarty, 1982; Russel & Hulson, 1992 for further details; Saunders, 1992; Stordeur & Stille, 1989; Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980; Vissing & Baily, 1996; Wallace, 1996; Worell & Remer, 1992). Although Kosberg and Nahmiash (1996) concluded that violent behaviour can be the conscious or unconscious wish for retribution, research has shown that all people coming from bad childhood experiences do not abuse their partners, children or any other (Miller, 1995; NiCarthy, 1982; Schumacher, et al., 2001). Women also suffer terrible childhoods but largely do not turn out being abusive towards their partners.

Research has also proven that, contrary to popular belief, battering and abuse do not only occur in the lower social classes, the uneducated walks of life (Russel & Hulson; 1992; Schumacher, et al, 2001; Walker, 1979) or within certain races (Collier, 1982).

The review of research directed towards finding characteristics common to the abuser, left me with the clear impression that there is a higher incidence of physical batterers or abusers that come from violent homes (Walker, 1979). There are some indications of personality disorder, and a slight indication of higher levels of alcohol consumption, but battering and abuse seems to be a personal choice. Not being able to conclude that the reason for abuse lies within the abuser himself and struggling to have female clients recognize their experiences as emotional abuse, I found myself in a position of questioning the role women played in the process of emotional abuse in their relationships. Although I realized this position could be found extremely offensive, especially within the feminists' ranks, I realized that in this I was a product of my own personal history. Having been reared as a female in a patriarchal society, my own intellectual reasoning is programmed in this way.

In reading about emotional abuse, working with women in emotionally abusive relationships, speaking to women, and socializing with women, I – as well as some scholars, psychotherapists and other people – am often astounded to see intelligent, emotionally competent, assertive, and well-rounded women ensnared, caught up in a process of emotional abuse (Greenspan, 1983; Miller, 1995). I needed to consider the possibility of women contributing to their abuse, making myself vulnerable to criticism for yet again making the woman into the victim, as so often happens. According to common knowledge it is often accepted that the woman is deviant for staying. We have all fallen prey to have this myths obscure our clinical and legal judgment (Saunders, 1992).

Throughout modern research it had been easy to listen to the dominant culture – the male perspective. This point of view clouds scientific disciplines (DuBois, 1983; Burr, 1995). Myths and other beliefs prescribe our understanding of women, and even literature exploits the so called deficiencies of women. I therefore need to refer to a number of perceptions that are relevant to the present study.

Researchers have concluded that a stereotypical conception exists that women need to replay the abuse of their childhoods (Dutton, 1992; Wallace, 1996), but in her study Walker (1979) found that more women had their first encounter with violence in their relationships with their partners. Evidence of intergenerational abuse/aggression has been found in relation to physically abusive relationships (Cahn, 1996; Cahn & Lloyd, 1996; Collier, 1982; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Dutton, 1988; Russel & Hulson, 1992; Saunders, 1992; Vissing & Baily, 1996; Wallace, 1996; Worell & Remer, 1992). Although by having witnessed abuse as a child, these women are placed at a higher risk of becoming a target for abuse in later life (Cahn, 1996), all women abused or having witnessed abuse as children do not end up in an abusive relationship. As Douglas (1996) explains, it is not the woman's childhood that makes the abuser abuse her, but the reasons the abuser finds within himself.

Researchers refer to the oldest and most often utilized myth that all battered and/or emotionally abused women are masochistic (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Collier, 1982; Hirigoyen, 2000; Matlin, 1987; O'Leary & Murphy, 1992). Society and even therapists reason that if she puts up with it, she must like it (Collier, 1982; Douglas, 1996). Caplan and Gans (1991) researching the Self Defeating Personality Disorder found the myth to be grounded in the ideological bias of white male psychiatrists, and Wilkinson (1997a&b) took it as another example of the ways in which psychology has been damaging women. Although having found no other or previous shown self-punishing behaviour in the woman's history (Hirigoyen, 2000), the myth is still taken to be true within a male dominant society.

The absolute and complete relief which the abused women experiences after leaving the relationship serves as contradiction to masochistic tendencies in the women (Hirigoyen, 2000). Scholars often one-sidedly ask women: What do you get out of the abuse? (Dutton, 1992), thus not addressing the role and characteristics of the perpetrator. I believe this misconception comes from the cultural expectation that all women need to be self-sacrificing and tolerant (Hirigoyen, 2000). Thus, a woman behaving in the selfless manner expected by society, is seen as a good woman, but should she be selfless and then abused, she is seen as a masochist (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993). Hirigoyen (2000) also rejects the conception of a pleasurable sadomasochistic relationship between abuser and the abused. The abusive relationship is one of control by the one partner and the inability of the other to stop the abuse.

Women are often accused by society of having provoked the abuse (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004; Collier, 1982; Douglas, 1996; Hirigoyen, 2000). They reason that she must be looking for it, and she must be doing something wrong, or there is something inherently wrong with her (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Greene & Bogo, 2002). Women retaliate (Rothman & Munson, 1988), because of the never ending victimization by her partner (O'Leary & Murphy, 1992; Wallace, 1996) and are then accused of provocation. The fact is, however, that her male partner is still in the position to choose his own behaviour (Douglas, 1996; Horley, 2002; Tolman, 1992).

Douglas (1996, p.39) clearly voices the sentiment of many, "No provocation is justification for violence. Violence is against the law. No woman has to put up with it." The abuser, on the other hand, needs to portray himself as the helpless victim and needs to see himself as only reacting to women's assault (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Tolman, 1992). But it is also true that women do sometimes fall onto abusive behaviour themselves as a means of either defending themselves or having been manipulated into reacting (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Hirigoyen, 2000).

Feminist writers as well as other authors writing about battered women have been cautious to imply psychological symptoms in battered women. This diagnosis was often taken to be a justification for blaming the woman for the abuse (Dutton, 1992). A few non-conclusive studies were attempted to show the presence of pathology in the woman at the receiving end of the abuse (Grinnell, 1988; O'Leary & Murphy, 1992). Here I am in agreement with Dutton who already in 1988, after his research on women's pre- and post-abuse profiles, concluded that abused women only differ from other women in their post-abuse profiles.

Being a woman myself, I know how easily women tend to accept the blame. The myth that women are to blame is so widely believed that it has become an accepted truism in society. Women have through the years been indoctrinated into believing themselves to be the weaker sex, the powerless, and the helpless. To them the doubt comes easily. Women accept a victim stance in their lives. Miriam Greenspan (1983), writing about women in psychotherapy, refers to women positioning themselves as patient, versus the male expert as therapist. He has the power and she feels like a little girl, being scrutinized and judged, and finds it difficult to be herself. So she feels the anger, questions herself, and then, experiencing the shame, she ends up in a dependent position. Greenspan (1983, p.35) sees the victim as the woman "who has

successfully adapted to a situation of social powerlessness”, and the woman “who sees herself through male eyes” acting against her own best interest. Not intending to blame the victim, the word victim is an emotional, negatively laden word that I do not find acceptable within the context of emotional abuse.

I was therefore faced with the dilemma that, although there were pointers that indicated characteristics in both the abuser and the abused as having some influence on the process of emotional abuse taking place in the relationships, these indicators were neither conclusive nor satisfying. It was through my exploration of the available scholarly literature, newspaper and magazine clippings, social interactions, and especially through the interaction with emotionally abused female clients, that I concluded that emotional abuse seems to be firmly embedded in the culture, the society and the relationships within which it manifests. My thinking was further influenced by reading the works of ecologist Uri Bronfenbrenner. To Bronfenbrenner (1979) behaviour can never be a contentless process. This principle is echoed by the social constructionist standpoint of Vivien Burr (1995) and Kenneth Gergen (2000) in that all knowledge is cultural and historical specific and can only be taken as an observation and description at the specific time (Marecek, 1989; Peplau & Conrad, 1989; Worell & Remer, 1992).

I thus came to the conclusion that abusive behaviour, and consequently the experiences of emotional abuse within close relationships needed to be studied in terms of the processes and interactions occurring between the individuals themselves, as well as their past and present environments. It has to be a study within the applicable systems. Weisstein (2000, p.188) explains:

It has become increasingly clear that, in order to understand why people do what they do, and certainly in order to change what people do, psychologists must turn away from the theory of the casual nature of the inner dynamic, and look to the social context within which individuals live.

Reflection, wanting a better understanding, and aspiring to one’s own growth as a person and therapist, has me continuously searching for new and better answers. But it is also true, as both feminists and social constructionists state, that research is only a beginning, a starting point for further discursive actions or the beginning of further useful exploits. Research is seen as the

beginning of a process of social change (Burr, 1995) and as a therapist working with women who have to deal with incidences of emotional abuse in their close relationships, I embarked on this research project with a number of specific goals and objectives in mind.

To clarify my own intent, I need to point out that the aim of this research project is not to find cause and effect in the abuse of women (Sherif, 1987) or some aspects of the phenomenon that are minimally necessary and sufficient to be seen as defining emotional abuse (Dunham, 1988). The focus is not on the therapeutic approach used or on the therapeutic outcomes thereof. I do not intend to find the final truth as I perceive there to be many constructions of circumstances or truths (Burr, 1995). To the contrary, I aspire to become clearer on the concept of how people do emotional abuse. This I aim to do by having the representations of the stories of these particular women speak for themselves and not fit the stories into pre-conceived ideas (Gilligan, 1987). The objective is to have the reader “feel the moral dilemmas, think with our story instead of about it, and join actively in the decision points” (Art Bochner in Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p.735).

Finding all experiences situated within the influence spheres of history, society and culture, the challenge is to describe and analyze the ecologies that legitimise the occurrence of emotional abuse. This entails describing the operational systems and the ways in which they interact to culminate in the emotional abuse of women. I will necessarily reflect on my own influence on the research, the influence of my being a woman and taking a feminist standpoint, the influence my own life history, and my own exposure to emotional abuse.

The focus will be on the way in which the woman positions both herself and her partner in the abusive relationship. This entails the construction of the self and the other, as well as any paradoxical constructions to be found. The way in which she positions herself with regards to the therapist/researcher will be taken into consideration, as this could render valuable clues to the identification of processes and patterns taking place within the abusive relationship. In the woman’s positioning of the self and the partner, it is of importance to explore if and in what way the phenomenon of emotional abuse is an experience that is constructed by a particular relationship.

Presuming that the experience of emotional abuse is played out within a particular relationship, the contracts between partners will be studied to show in what way such contracts change over time and are paradoxical in nature. It will be valuable to examine and analyze the existence of

patterns as well as processes occurring in the relationship and in what way the abuse calibrate the relationship or impact on the women themselves.

Noting and describing the interaction between the various processes and the emergence of new processes or systems will be of value. Describing a partially different model for explaining and understanding the processes involved in emotional abuse can be useful and usable in understanding the phenomenon. By describing a different understanding of the occurrence of emotional abuse in close relationships, a different theory of emotional abuse could be put forward (Glaser & Strauss, 1999).

It is impossible to answer to all possible research questions about a specific research subject within the boundaries of a single research project. I can only endeavour to come to a partially new and partially better, historically and culturally located model for understanding of emotional abuse in close relationship. The aim is not to discover the final truth about emotional abuse, but to restart and continue the conversation about the abuse of women, and in so doing enable us to continuously work on challenging the words of Naomi Weisstein with which I started the chapter. By showing the experiences of a number of women, I hope to build new understandings by forming new and different connections. In the words of Harding (2004d, p.260), "science never gets us truth; it always promised something much better than truth claims ... Scientific procedures are supposed to get us claims that are less false than those – and only those – against which they have been tested."

CHAPTER 2: A PHILOSOPHY OF BEING

A Philosophical Stance

As scientists some of us prefer to follow the rules of membership of the specific scientific community we work in and prefer to obediently go about our task of fact-finding in professionally sanctioned ways. For the postmodernist, this foundationalism is one of the epistemological errors of modernism (Lengerman & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004). Post-modern thinking challenges all scientific thinking. It is deconstructive in nature, as it seeks to distance us from, and make us sceptical about beliefs concerning truth, knowledge, power, the self, and language. Post-modern thinking places knowledge claims within the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender and other affiliations (Creswell, 1998). It makes us question the often-taken-for-granted that has legitimized Western culture (Burstow, 1992; Flax, 2003).

It is also true that we come from a western sociological and psychological tradition of researchers specifically studying other groups such as deviants, the mentally ill, freaks, subcultures, women and coloured groups; all those believed to differ from the norm (Alsop, Fitzsimmons & Lennon, 2002; Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991; Mama, 1987; Schutte, 2000). Psychology has long been a victimology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The norm is set and the research subject is approached from the position of the powerful (Du Bois, 1983; Madriz, 2000; Millman & Kanter, 1987) or the scientific elite (Sherif, 1987); an androcentric or phallogocentric approach (Bograd, 1988; Burstow, 1992; Crawford & Marecek, 1989; Matlin, 1987; Peplau & Conrad, 1989; Worell & Remer, 1992).

Harding (1987a, p.8) states that traditional research was to find answers for men so as to assist the dominant to “pacify, control, exploit, or manipulate women”. Feminism, however, is prominent in questioning these proclaimed truths (Bowles & Klein, 1983b; Marecek, 1989). Feminist psychology was deeply critical of mainstream psychology’s inattention to women’s issues as seen from the standpoint of women and the damage done to women by mainstream psychology is criticized (Kitzinger, 1992; Weisstein, 1971; Wilkinson, 1997b).

I am aware that the ontological stance I assume will influence my thinking and the methods I apply. It will influence the processes I go through, and all interpretations or sense I make from the information obtained. The basic nature of a way of being is significant in determining my philosophical views on all facets of knowledge and the processes of finding knowledge (Mouton & Marais, 1990). I find myself perplexed by the intertwining connections between ontology and epistemology; the boundaries of which are fluent and permeable.

Perhaps this is so because taking action against perceived oppression led to a distinctive feminist ontology, and a distinctive feminist epistemology is the product of exploring a feminist ontology (Stanley, 1990b). My views on being in the world are the product of a feminist stance. I shall therefore briefly point to the general aims of feminist research before detailing my views on being in the world.

Differing from mainstream psychology's opposition to any kind of overt political influences (Kahn & Yoder, 1992; Wilkinson, 1997a&b), feminist research works within the political and philosophical values of the women's movement, and therefore their epistemology and methodology reflect this stance (Brannon, 2002; Burstow, 1992; Collier, 1982; Elworthy, 1996; Peplau & Conrad, 1989). The main driving force in feminist research is the ending of women's oppression (Bartky, 1990; Hartsock, 1996; Klein, 1983; Ricketts, 1989; Westcott, 1983; Wise, 1990a; Worell & Remer, 1992). This is so because according to Mies (1983, pp.123-124) it is only through active involvement in the struggle against the oppression of women that women can "prevent the misuse of their theoretical and methodological innovations for the stabilization of the status quo and for crisis management".

Feminist researchers are committed to break away from the dominant conceptions of knowledge and those psychologies produced by men (Flax, 2003; Gross & Averill, 2003; Harding, 1987a; Hartsock, 2003; Hollway, 1989; Oleson, 2000; Stanley & Wise, 1979, 1990). As feminist research purposely works towards changing women's lives, it is political in nature (Kahn & Yoder, 1992; Ricketts, 1989). Feminist scholars express the need to benefit and empower women through their writings and research (Harding, 1987a; Klein, 1983), having women benefit from new and different understandings of issues they are faced with and empowering them through the growing experience of partaking in the study (Chang, 1996; DeVault, 1999), and therefore making research not only research *for* women, but research *with* women (Bowles & Klein, 1983b; Gottfried, 1996b; Mies, 1983).

Feminist research critically examines the source of the social powers that influence women's lives (Burstow, 1992; Harding, 1987a). Whereas mainstream psychology is criticised for the failure to see power relations as central to social interactions (Kitzinger, 1992; Meyer, 1991; Wilkinson, 1997a), a feminist aim is to examine the connection between knowledge and power, as well as to acknowledge the ever-present dynamics of power in all research interactions (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall, 1994; Creswell, 1998). Feminist scholars believe that women should be helped to understand their oppression and should be assisted in finding new and more empowering ways of dealing with oppression (Collier, 1982; Hartsock, 1996; Peplau & Conrad, 1989). They see themselves as accountable (Chang, 1996; Wise 1987), and believe that significant change in women's lives is only possible through change in society (Brannon, 2002; Madriz, 2000).

Feminist research further claims the novelty of studying gender (Creswell, 1998; DeVault, 1999; Hepburn, 2000; Jagger, 2004; Stanley & Wise, 1993). Gender is defined as "culturally-determined cognitions, attitudes, and belief systems about females and males" (Worell & Remer, 1992, p.9). The idea of the social construction of femininity and masculinity is explored (Harding, 1987a; Kahn & Yoder, 1989), defining femaleness as referring to biological sex, whereas femininity is connected to being female and the result of social training (Bailey, 2000). Feminist research claims that biological differences are less important than cultural programming (Collier, 1982; Crawford & Marecek, 1992; Ferguson, 1991; Reed, 2000). In a patriarchal society, being different often carries the implication of being depicted as deficient (Kerstan & Bepko, 1990). These so-called deficiencies lead to the societal concept of women-as-problem orientation (Crawford & Marecek, 1992; Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991) and so feminists strongly reject the notion that women are inferior to men, and that women's characteristics and personality must be valued as a variation on those of men (Brannon, 2002). They question the subordinate role that women have been manoeuvred into through industrialization (Addelson, 1993; Gerdes, Moore, Ochse & Van Ede, 1988; Huber, 1991).

Feminist researchers aim for the relationship between client and researcher to reflect female values and female ways of relating (Brannon, 2002; Burstow, 1992; Chang, 1996; Oleson, 2000). They claim not to work in dichotomies such as the observed and the observer, thought and feeling, personal and political, objective or passionate and subjective (Madriz, 2000). The focus is on the experience and so feminists consciously use subjectivity as well as their experiences in and out of research as a means towards reaching clarity (Banister, et al., 1994).

Feminist scientific work raised the question of whether women do science differently from the way men do science (Rosser, 1989). Whereas in traditional research different has often meant lesser, feminist epistemology and methodology aim to bring an alternative perspective on science. They motivate for the inclusion of differences as these can add value through an alternative way of seeing to the body of science (Keller, 1989). As a result, feminist research today is rich in diversity (DeVault, 1993; M. Evans, 1983; Gottfried, 1996b; Harding, 1987a; Hepburn, 2000; Stanley & Wise, 1990) and is characterized by continuous and dynamic debate. This diversity is seen as added value. The context and boundaries of feminist research are constantly shifting and changing (Olesen, 1994).

On Being a Feminist

Being a feminist is often simply and naively defined as any person who has high regard for women as human beings and believes that women and men should be regarded equal on a social, political and economical level (Matlin, 1987). In the popular idiom, feminism is reduced solely to women's struggle against male oppression (Bartky, 1990; Elworthy, 1996). I find myself identifying with mainly the no-frills definition of feminism by the psychologist Sue Wilkinson (1997a). She defines feminism as, firstly, placing high value on women and deeming women worthy of study in their own right and secondly, feminism as acknowledging the need for social change where it concerns women.

So am I a feminist? If perceived against the intense and active involvement in the feminist movement by traditional feminists, I might be found lacking. But then again, my own involvement comes with the concentrated involvement in the present study; the knowledge that I cannot be silent and need to be an active agent of change. My own feminist stance was poignantly illustrated to me when I recently spoke up for a friend. Her husband had repeatedly in my presence as well as in broader social situations, violently lashed out at his wife, blaming her, degrading her in public, negating her very worth as a person. In the process of speaking out against her husband, I lost a friend. She was not yet ready to confront the abuse in their relationship, while I lived feminism. This is reminiscent of what Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1993, p.18) mean by saying that "...whatever situation I go into, wherever it is, wherever I go, and whatever I do involves feminism – because that's me. Because that's a part of my everyday interaction with people that I meet each and every day".

Sandra Harding (1987) comments on feminist research, seeing it as the dedication to a specific epistemology; a theoretical commitment that is critical of the historically dominant conceptions of knowledge, a commitment to questioning gender issues, seeing the connection between being and knowing. Also to DeVault (1999), her feminism signifies the belief in feminist views on being and reality, reasoning about knowledge, and following feminist theory.

So, whether I am seen as a feminist will in the end depend on my way of reasoning, my set of beliefs, and whether or not my epistemology fits in with feminist theory and thinking. It will depend on whether feminism can be seen as being the intellectual backdrop to my research (Williams, 1990).

A Historical Diversity

Some standpoint theorists now interchangeably talk about their work as an epistemology and a method of doing research (Harding, 1993). But before explaining feminist epistemology and methodology, a short detour into the historical diversity of feminism and being a feminist in the world is appropriate. Feminism, in the form of an organized political movement, has existed for more than 150 years. The history of feminism and the contributions of the movement have over the years been adequately covered in a wide variety of psychological and sociological textbooks (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). The Second Wave of feminism has its origins in the civil rights movement and the student peace movement in the United States during the 1960s (Bartky, 1990; Brannon, 2002). The latter, especially, was instrumental in the international uprising in women's consciousness against their oppression (Elworthy, 1996). Second Wave feminism brought a significant change in the way women viewed their position in society (NiCarthy, 1982; Poling, 1996; Wallace, 1996).

The international women's movement brought about an upsurge in literature about all aspects of women's lives (Burstow, 1992). These women's studies by academic writers were of an interdisciplinary nature, but also consisted of writings aimed at the general public (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). For many a reader of women's literature, as for myself as a student starting out on post-graduate studies, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1976, but the first edition in the original French, published in 1949) was one of the first voices that focused on the problems of women, especially in families. De Beauvoir's thinking is often captured in her now famous words "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (De Beauvoir, 1976, p.295).

Then along came, Betty Friedan (1963) and *The Feminine Mystique*. She wrote about American women, kept from growing and developing to capacity, calling it the problem that has no name (Chang, 1996; Friday, 1998; Hurtado, 1989).

Feminist literature gives due recognition to the contributions of these earlier feminists and the subject matter they pursued. One can recall Sandra Bem's 1960's contribution towards the understanding and popularisation of the term androgyny and her description of women's development as restricted by traditional sex roles (Gough, 1998; Worell & Remer, 1992) or Kate Millet's targeting of patriarchy in her 1970 *Sexual Politics* (Alsop, et al., 2002). Carol Gilligan's research on moral judgments and especially her hearing of the *different voices* are widely recognized (Brannon, 2002; Ferguson, 1991; Gilligan, 1982; Percy, 1998).

Feminism distinguishes itself by its methodology, on which I shall elaborate in discussing the epistemological perspective of this research. At this moment it is sufficient to point out the contributions of earlier feminist writers in drawing attention to the absence and invisibility of women within different contexts (Chang, 1996; Harding, 1987a; Marecek, 1989; Oleson, 1994). They focused their studies on the sexual exploitation and male control over female sexuality, and attached new and different meaning to the woman's specific life stages and experiences (DeVault, 1999; Gerdes, et al., 1988; Hepburn, 2000; Jagger, 2004; Millman & Kanter, 1987; Peplau & Conrad, 1989; Stanley & Wise, 1993).

Different faces to feminism developed. The psychoanalytic feminists focused primarily on the power of the unconscious in shaping behaviour (Percy, 1998) and were represented by authors such as Carol Gilligan, Karen Horney, and Chodorow (Brannon, 2002; Burr, 1995). They find the reason for women's oppression in men's deep emotional need to control women, because of ambivalence toward the mothers who reared them (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004), and the social process of aggressive individualization that is expected of them. This theory of breaking away from mother and the aggression needed to establish oneself as a person is a theory that could have application in the research of the abuse of women.

Liberal feminism believes women generally to be oppressed and discriminated against by the legal system, customs, and tradition (Elworthy, 1996; Jagger, 2004). They see patriarchy and the sexist patterning of institutions as the cause of oppression and discrimination (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004; Percy, 1998), and work towards the re-patterning of these

institutions and systems. They are predominantly concerned with gender inequality, and claim women and men to be equal on the basis of essential humanity and morality.

Socialist feminism sees the oppression of women as the first, the oldest, and the primary form of oppression, and comes to the conclusion that the differences between women and men are socially and economically constructed (Collier, 1982; Elworthy, 1996; Greenspan, 1983; Willies, 2000). Marxist and radical feminist thinking are maybe the two best-known and most controversial feminist ideologies. Radical feminists believe in the absolute positive value of women and criticize the deliberate and intended oppression of women by the structures and institutions of society, the most fundamental of these being patriarchy and capitalism (See Chang, 1996 for an extensive list of research; French, 1995; Gergen, 2001; Glenn, 1991; Jagger, 2004; Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004; Reed, 2000).

Radical feminism asks for profound personal and political transformation (Bartky, 1990) and vies for the overthrow of patriarchy through the active refusal to collaborate with the structures, institutions and systems held in place by masculine power and the subsequent abuse of power (Alsop, et al., 2003; Percy, 1998; Ware, 2000; Worell & Remer, 1992). They support the struggle of women to regain control over their own bodies (Burstow, 1992; Jagger, 2004) and to separate them from the institutions of men and heterosexuality, some finding a role model in lesbianism (Crow, 2000). Furthermore, radical feminists work for a social change towards feminist values such as wholeness, trust, nurturing and sensuality (Elworthy, 1996), but they also give voice to the anger women experience in recognizing their oppression and the systems that oppress (Collier, 1982).

Third Wave Feminism or Postcolonial Feminism started around the 1980s as a reaction against the persistent whiteness in feminist theory and research in economically privileged Western industrialized societies (Harding, 1993; Jagger, 2000; Oleson, 2000; Sandoval, 2004; Stanley & Wise, 1990). This still continues, for example, when the behaviour of women of colour in shelters controlled by white women are not understood because their normal behaviour (such as talking loud, swearing, moving fast and arguing) are seen as different and therefore negative (Haaken & Yragui, 2003). In the same manner, black feminists often equate difference with particularity (Qin, 2004), because some white economically privileged women use difference as a tool to stay in power, “conceptualizing their experiences as normative, and naming women of colour as ‘different’” (Qin, 2004, p.301). White women here take on the patriarchal supremacy

of their fathers, husbands and brothers; white women fooled and used by the dominant gender. Mary Daly (1978) pointed out to what extent patriarchy uses racism to divide and rule. Even Chinese students in host countries are “othered” by the dominant culture because of their being “rare, alien, and poor” (Qin, 2004, p.300), devalued because of being different. The same goes for the widely used Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders seen as “another Western bourgeois attempt to dehumanize human beings, and to silence (potential) forms of protest against oppressive situations” (Richters, 1991, p.137).

But there also are the third wave feminists who pull away from the idea of shared gynocentric identity and concern themselves with the differences found in women. They study differences pertaining to women of colour, lesbian women, and disabled women (Oleson, 2000; Schutte, 2000), and women differing because of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, culture and their place in history (Narayan, 2000). The focus turns to the knowledge gained from being different within a dominant group; the knowledge of the “outsider within” (Collins, 2004a, p.103). Harding (1993, 1998) cites the value to be found in postcolonial as well as historical, political, and culturally different standpoints. The aim is solidarity and not unity, as a monolithic feminism would lose the valued input of the discursive position thus created. The words of the renowned author Toni Morrison reveal a different being as “there is something inside us that makes us different from other people. It is not like men and it is not like white women” (Sandoval, 2004, p.198).

Women in postcolonial Africa are doing a women’s movement or women’s movements that at times become more radical than those of North America and Europe (Smith, 1996). They take a stand against the intellectual exploitation by the northern donors (Meema, 1992b) and the research models applied by white western feminism (Jagger, 2000). But as elsewhere in the world, the governments of the majority of countries in Africa pay lip service to establishing equality of sex and race. Whereas governments in the region incapacitates woman’s movements by restricting their influence to the women’s political wings of the ruling party (Meema, 1992b), the situation in South Africa started to change with the 1994 elections. However, in sub-Sahara Africa most women still face quadruple oppression: oppression because of their gender, class and ethnicity, as well as through imperialism (Mbilinyi, 1992).

Feminism demands equal rights for women in a male society and this leads to the re-emergence of interest in wife abuse in social scientific and mental health circles (Heise, 1996; O’Leary & Murphy, 1992). Feminism is increasingly focusing on how issues of class, race,

ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion impact on different groups of women (Hurtado, 1989; Narayan, 2000; Narayan & Harding, 2000; Schutte, 2000). I shall focus on how these issues touch on my research in the discussion of epistemology and methodology.

Capitalism as Equal to Oppression

Feminism views the oppression that occurs within a patriarchal system as the cornerstone of women's subordination (Creswell, 1998; Haaken & Yragui, 2003). I myself have no doubt that the interaction between capitalism and patriarchy, as well as each system on its own, has a direct impact on the lives of women. In this, I take a social constructionist's view, in that culture and history, as well as the social, political and economic arrangements thereof, directly impact on the lives of the individual (Burr, 1995). It is not the biases of individuals that oppress women, but the ideology of women's inferiority and the systematic structural oppression of women (Harding, 2004a; Narayan & Harding, 2000).

As women are social beings, the place they occupy in social life and all of their relationships and interactions are influenced and constructed by the systems in which they function (Harding, 1993; Kelly-Gadol, 1987). This domination of women through the interacting systems of capitalism and patriarchy are optimally described in literature (Gergen, 2001; Glenn, 1991; Greenspan, 1983; Hartsock, 2004; Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004; Reed, 2000). Burstow, in her introduction to *Radical Feminist Therapy* (1992, p.viii) states, "Civilization as we know it is based on the violation and domination of subordinates by elites. All women are subordinate".

Feminist theory incorporates many of the principles of the macro-social order found in the Marxian model (Harding, 2004a; Hartsock, 2004a). Those having the power accomplish domination and control by the gendering of both the systems of capitalism and patriarchy, and by the separation of work or production into a private and public realm (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Chafetz, 1991; Chang, 1996; Hare-Mustin, 1992; Kelly-Gadol, 1987; Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004). Within close relationships, patriarchy benefits through this sexual division of labour, as the woman's unequal position in the employment market keeps her financially dependent on her spouse (Agassi, 1991; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Glenn, 1991; Haaken & Yragui, 2003; Glenn, 1991; O'Connor, 2000), and leaves the man free to go out and conquer the world (Greenspan, 1983; Harding, 1993; Smith, 2004).

The woman's private (home and household) responsibilities marginalize her in the job market, and thus capitalism benefits by being able to employ women against lower wages (Agassi, 1991; Glenn, 1991; Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004; Valian, 1998). Women were believed to be limited by their biology (Hubbard, 1989), but in fact her limitation is social and institutional (Bartky, 1990; Crawford & Marecek, 1992; Hartsock, 2004; Kelly-Gadol, 1987; Valian, 2005). The January 2005 incident at the University of Harvard cannot be disregarded as the uttering of merely one person; it shows the deeply-seated biases of institutions and of those running organizations. In a keynote address, president Lawrence Summers attributed the low numbers of women in science to genetics and aptitude, choosing to forget the patriarchal biases in appointing women, and the magnitude of research done that show the opposite to be true (Bombardieri, 2005).

Feminists see the more dominant, the masters, as controlling all crucial resources and thus receiving all profit when it comes to production (Hartsock, 2004; O'Connor, 2000). The production of knowledge is also controlled in the interest of contemporary capitalism (Smith, 1996). The subordinate or subservient, through whom all production occurs, is exploited and excluded, even given the fact that human social life is sustained through them (Hubbard, 1989). Even "women's experiences of sexual harassment on the job and of being hassled in public places are not incidental and insignificant micro events but examples of a power relation in which patriarchy helps police the borders for capital" (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004, p.341).

Feminists have strong views on both capitalism and patriarchy, and as both these processes and systems feature strongly within the worlds of the female clients I see, I find it necessary to further expand on the workings of patriarchy.

Patriarchy spells Oppression

Thus the ideal of the average Western man is a woman who freely accepts his domination, who does not accept his ideas without discussion, but who yields to his arguments, who resists him intelligently and ends by being convinced.
Simone de Beauvoir (1976, p.16)

Patriarchy takes a central position in Western society, constructing hierarchical rule, gender polarity, and sexism, and appointing men to positions of power and control (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Chafetz, 1991; Dickson, 2003; Dobash & Dobash, 1980). Stanley and Wise (1983, p.199) see patriarchy as “an ideology reflected in institutions and negotiated through interactions”. For feminists, patriarchy thus becomes both the structure and the ideology that legitimizes the structure (Chang, 1996), a system of social relations wherein the male has the social power to exploit and control the female (Ferguson, 1991; Kelly-Gadol, 1987; Scheman, 2003). It refers to the “dominance of an elite group over all other groups” (French, 1995, p.23), thus Max Weber’s description of patriarchy as a system of *Herrschaft* (Millet, 2000).

Feminists, therefore, take patriarchy as deliberately keeping women subordinate, as well as keeping them from positions of power in institutions (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Chang, 1996; Kelly-Gadol, 1987; Lengerman & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004). Denying women the right to the pulpit or the bench takes from them the means and the power to be able to bring about change (Chafetz, 1991; Dobash & Dobash, 1980). The powerful application of patriarchy in the daily lives of women and men will be described in chapter 6 (The Family of Origin) and chapter 7 (The Powerful Voice of Control).

On Being Woman

Selves can only exist in relationship to other selves
George Herbert Mead: Mind, Self and Society

Concepts of Gender

Most theories of gender were developed within the belief of a natural and biological division between women and men and within the female-male dichotomy and male-dominated power structures of a capitalist and patriarchal system (Alsop, et al, 2003; Chang, 1996; Qin, 2004; Weisstein, 1971). Not being either determined by biological sex nor ever entirely independent of it (Brannon, 2002; Ferguson, 1991; Keller, 1989; Millet, 2000; Stoller, 1968), gender is defined as “culturally-determined cognitions, attitudes, and belief systems about females and males” (Worell & Remer, 1992, p.9). Because of this cultural determination, the concepts of femininity and masculinity vary from culture to culture, from society to society, as well as during different historical periods (Brannon, 2002; Harding, 1987a, 1998; Millman & Kanter, 1987). This leaves us with a constructed idea of femininity and masculinity; a cultural, racist, class, ethnical agreement of what must be true (Code, 1993; Harding, 1987a, 1989; Matlin, 1987; Worell & Remer, 1992). Within a capitalist and patriarchal system, females and males are encouraged to conform to the gender norms modelled to them by significant others (Chafetz, 1991). Dominant culture pervasively stereotypes both female and male behaviour through early programming (Bloom, Coburn & Pearlman, 1975; Stanley & Wise, 1993) into a system where gender is always hierarchically organized, with masculinity receiving the highest status (Harding, 1998).

Whether one sees oneself as female or male is determined by one being raised female or male. This was confirmed by the studies done on hermaphrodites with the same-sex diagnosis (Money, 1970; Hampton & Hampton, 1961). Says Weisstein (2000, p.191): “identical behaviour occurs given different physiological states; and different behaviour occurs given an identical physiological starting point”. So boys are trained towards individualization. The boy-child comes to deny the female (Gergen, 2001; Gilligan, 1987; Hartsock, 2004) as he understands that his claim to male privileges is based on his distancing himself from female behaviour (Brannon, 2002; Ferguson, 1991; Gilligan, 1982; Kaplan, 1988; Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004; Percy, 1998). He is expected to construct himself as an individual, different from and competitive towards others (Walters, 1988). This brings a hostile and combative

element into being masculine, and so the male incarnates domination and power (Chang, 1996; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; French, 1995; Walker, 1979).

Pipher (1995) describes adolescence as the stage where girl-children are taught to stop asking what they want or who they are, and start asking what they can do to please others. This is because the girl is allowed to stay connected to the mother (Brannon, 2002; Gergen, 2001; Gilligan, 1982, 1987; Percy, 1998) and so experiences herself through interaction with others (Ferguson, 1991; Kaplan, 1988). The woman is known, especially within patriarchy's main system of the family (Millet, 2000) only by the identity bestowed on her by others, mostly that of wife, mother, and daughter (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004; Worell & Remer, 1992). They are the caretakers and the nurturers and so incarnate responsibility (French, 1995). They are the "nameless, undifferentiated, undistinguished, and undistinguishable" (Dobash & Dobash, 1980, p.33).

A Female Sense of Self

We live in a time in which most people believe there is not much inside them, only what teachers, parents, and others have put there
Michell Cassou and Steward Cubley (Cameron, 1997, p.4)

Traditional research refers to the unified subject as an individual woman or man with an ongoing, consistent consciousness and a sense of self. This assumes a stable, knowing self (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004). Social constructionism, on the other hand, asserts that there is no specific essence to personhood (Burr, 1995; Sampson, 1989). It is argued that a person's being is a product of the social processes to which she was and is exposed (Hartsock, 2004). The social processes referred to embrace historical situatedness as well as race, social class, power, ethnicity, sexuality, and culture (See Qin, 2004 for further references). The view of a socially constructed self is shared by postmodernism and by standpoint theory (Hartsock, 2004). Feminist standpoint theory has been instrumental in grounding the belief of no essential, universal woman (Harding, 1987a, 1998; Marecek, 1989; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Weisstein, 2000) and replacing it with situated woman within specific experiences and knowledge (Oleson, 2000).

It follows that a person is different depending on what she is doing and with whom she is. The self is not an entity within the person (Burr, 1995), but exists within the interaction between

people, embedded in the relationship (Alsop, et al., 2003; Gergen, 2000; Stanley & Wise, 1993). As Sampson (1989, p.4) declares, “society constitutes and inhabits the very core of whatever passes for personhood: each is interpenetrated by its other”. I find Qin’s (2004, p.303) use of the Chinese sense of self defined as “beings in webs-of-relationships” most appropriate. This comes from the Confucian idea that the self is a sharable experience. All people therefore have a number of selves, each is socially constructed and constantly changing (Ferguson, 1991; Harding, 1998; Hartsock, 2004; Hepburn, 1999; Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004; Oleson, 2000). Recent studies of masculinity in South African prisons, mine and rural communities, for example, show the malleability of gender and identity under specific circumstances (Gear, 2005; Reid, 2005). Haraway (2004, p.90) talks about heterogeneous multiplicities, that the “knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another” (italics in the original).

The person is brought into being through language (Coyle, 1995; Gavey, 1989; Ritzer & Goodman, 2004), and therefore the self should not be taken as a reality existing outside of social interaction (Parker, 1992). As language is not transparent (Burr, 1995), each person is surrounded by a number of discourses. A discourse is seen as “a system of statements which construct an object” (Parker, 1992, p.5), and therefore there can be different presentations and truths about the self (Burr, 1995). Subjectivity is therefore described as constructed by the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, the person’s sense of self, and the ways of understanding her relations to the world (Weedon, 1987).

As meaning lies within the context of the discourse (Gavey, 1989), it follows that the discourses of society can restrict our identity or use it to society’s ideological advantage (Sampson, 1989; Shields, 1992). For example, the prevailing discourses of femininity can serve to uphold power inequality (Burr, 1995) or western patriarchal society construct a woman’s meaning through the language of the oppressor (DeVault, 1999). Johnston (1973 as cited in Kitzinger, 1989, p.82) thus says, “Identity is what you say you are according to what they say you can be”. The woman then finds her thinking, feeling and experiencing as a self (an identity) bestowed on her by the oppressor (Alsop, et al., 2003; Gilligan, 1987; Harding, 1998; Weisstein, 2000). Even an idea such as the nurturing mother is a social construct and therefore not true of all women or all mothers (Flinders, 2002). But the self can also affect society (Qin, 2004), and as Marilyn French (1981, p.16) says in *The Women’s Room*:

...a silly woman always running for her mirror to see who she is? Mira lived by her mirror as much as the Queen in Snow White. A lot of us did: we absorbed and believed the things people said about us.

The individual takes on a role from the generalized other (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004; Mead, 1943/1962). Feminist scholars cite the generalized other to be representative of the male-dominated and patriarchal community norms. Therefore, what constitutes a person is the male norm (DuBois, 1983; Greenspan, 1983; Harding, 1987a; Kelly-Gadol, 1987; Millman & Kanter, 1987). The individual (the male social actor) sees himself through the eyes of others that are more or less on his level, much like himself (Mead, 1943/1962). Women, to the contrary, learn to see themselves through the eyes of the dominant male. To women, the other is male, foreign and unfamiliar (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004). Says Nancy Friday (1998, p.6): "I have sought out men's eyes, required their gazes as far back as I can remember. There is nothing like the mystery of an absent father to addict you to the loving gaze of men."

Consequently even women in the position of the significant other – accustomed to, expecting and accepting validation to come from the outside – view and evaluate other women not by their own norms, but through the eyes of men (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Pipher, 1995). Woman is "defined and differentiated with reference to man, and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other" (de Beauvoir, 1976, p.16). As traditional science has looked upon being different as being lesser (Keller, 1989), when a woman measures herself against the generalized other, she finds herself to be less than, or unequal to (DuBois, 1983; Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004; Qin, 2004).

As Greenspan (1983, p.191) indicates, "in a woman-hating culture, it is normal for women to hate themselves", as the self is constructed through society and the meanings of the current discourses. A woman is taught to measure her success as a person through her popularity with others; others defined as those in the dominant position. She experiences acceptance through identifying with the man in her life, either the father or the man she is having a relationship with, and finds it difficult to build her own sense of self (Collier, 1982; Walters, 1988). This explains why women fear losing a relationship. Losing the other, they lose themselves as defined by the other (Gilligan, 1982; Mirkin, 1994b). She is programmed to find a possessive, domineering male partner, who will pave the way to belittlement and will even abuse later in life.

Feminist psychology urges women not to accept only one meaning as defining femaleness (Hepburn, 1999; Wilkinson, 1997a). We can discursively position ourselves; we can accept or resist the object position as addressed by the discourse (Davies & Harré, 1990). In this constructing and reconstructing of the self in interaction (Burr, 1995), language becomes a place of struggle (hooks, 2004) and is it possible to negotiate identity (Davies & Harré, 1990). Therefore, to me, being woman means being aware of the influences that the others in society have had on my thinking, being and doing, but it also means taking the responsibility of accepting or denying this positioning in order to actively construct my further being. Therefore, when I refer to woman or women in this study, I do so because of space limitations and I in no way imply that all women are the same or will be the same (Gottfried, 1996; Marecek, 1989; Peplau & Conrad, 1989). I also realize that there are some differences that most of us share (Hartsock, 2004).

Consciousness and Agency

It is argued that, for most women, there are large discrepancies between their own personal lived and reflected-upon experiences and the social and cultural stereotypes expected of them (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004; Millman & Kanter, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1993). This inevitably leads to a bifurcated consciousness or double consciousness that makes women knowledgeable in both the ideological processes of society, but also the activities of everyday life (Davis, 1991; Harding, 1993; Marecek, 1989; Mies, 1983; Smith, 1992). This is in agreement with the earlier conclusion by Stanley and Wise (1993) that opts for many feminist consciousnesses without the implication of lower or higher states of consciousness, or false consciousness. Social constructionists also do not view consciousness as an essential, fixed entity. As consciousness is constructed through language, meaning resides in the discourses that surround it (Burr, 1995).

Seeing the way in which a woman's consciousness is different from her experiences, one could then ask in what way women are free to choose their opportunities. Whereas western society underwrites the existential concept that all people are able to follow their own chosen path of development and meaning, they only pay lip service to this concept when it comes to women. The dominant male has a right and duty to compartmentalize his life into individual projects. This gives him the freedom to answer to his own needs while not seeing and hearing the other

(Flinders, 2002; Gilligan, 1987; Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004). Women, on the other hand and because of their subordinate status are not in a position to project their own plans and meaning into the world, they are not in the position to master the world according to their own interests. French (1981, p.86) argues that women “found it easier with him gone (work related). She could adjust her schedule completely to the babies and wasn’t nearly as anxious when they cried.”

Women are programmed to balance their world according to the needs and interest of a variety of others (Collier, 1982). Their time and space are rarely free from interferences, and women’s lives are controlled by the agendas of others (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004). If we take agency to mean the ability to choose (Burr, 1995; Davis, 1991; Schutte, 2000) and oppression as the lack of choices, women seem to be bereft of meaningful agency (hooks, 1984). Social constructionism also argues that people are conceptualized through language, and this would imply no agency, but humans have a choice, for example in putting forward a number of selves or positioning themselves. Experiences, for example, are not unquestionable facts, but can be seen as a resource for critical reflection (Stone-Mediatore, 2000). Women’s experience becomes a resource for starting change. Agency thus remains a concept on which scholars differ, but I believe that, although some women’s agency is constricted to the most horrifying degree, agency – like power – is a diffuse, intangible concept; something to either be seized or to slowly work towards, while positioning oneself as one is best able to seize it.

Issues of Body

Many authors have rendered fascinating work on a prehistoric time when the female body was considered powerful and beautiful, admired, and worshipped in all its functions (De Beauvoir, 1976; Elworthy, 1996). A number of happenings negated this view over a period of time. Also the myths of Western culture and Christianity, for example the myth of The Fall, the myths of the harlot and the virgin, and Pandora’s Box (Armstrong, 1986; Clack & Whitcomb, 1997; Ferguson, 1991; Kelly-Gadol, 1987), created the archetype of women being the cause of all human suffering, justifiably placed under the domination of man, and liable to be punished for their sins (Booth, Goldfield & Munaker, 2000; Greenspan, 1983). Thus the dominant male helped to establish the connection between woman, sex and sin (Millet, 2000). Armstrong (1986, p.1) writes about women’s place in Christianity and concludes that it is “in the West alone that women have been hated because they are sexual beings instead of merely being dominated

because they are inferior chattels.” Society has therefore made women into victim through their bodies.

Many authors describe the way in which, since childhood, a woman’s self and self-esteem are closely connected to her body (Brownmiller, 2000; Burstow, 1992; Gergen, 2001; Gilligan, 1982; Greenspan, 1983; Pipher, 1995; Stanley & Wise, 1993). Just as her hips start swelling into womanhood, society shows her magazines pictures of the thinnest of models, leaving her with the message that she does not measure up (Gergen, 2001). Women therefore learn that not only are their sexuality dominated by the male norm, they are also confronted with male-dominated body images (Alsop, et al, 2003; Mirkin, 1994b). Being socially and culturally defined through one’s body makes one into an object (Booth, et al., 2000; Dickson, 2003).

Alsop et al (1992) refers to Simone de Beauvoir’s description of not the woman’s body being the problem, but the way in which she loses agency because of the way in which society views her as a body. Her body therefore becomes an obstacle for further development and living a fulfilled life. Some women, in their eagerness to please and to have the perfect body, find themselves, for example, in the vortex of a bulimic down spiral (Pipher, 1995). Feminists object to the expectation that a woman will undergo breast surgery or shave her legs to fit her man’s liking. They see these actions as damaging and degrading; further objectifying women (Dickson, 2003; Ferguson, 1991; Greenspan, 1983). Thus the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist group (1981, p.6) said,

The heterosexual couple is the basic unit for male supremacy. In it each individual woman comes under the control of an individual man ... In the couple, love and sex are used to obscure the realities of oppression, to prevent women identifying with each other to revolt, and from identifying ‘their’ man as part of the enemy.

Radical feminists strongly object to seeing women as Body, especially a body there to perform subservient and sexual services for men (Alsop, et al, 2003; Booth, et al, 2000; Collier, 1982; French, 1995; Greenspan, 1983; Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004). Some even object to the heterosexual sex act symbolising conventional rape, with the man dominating and taking or possessing the woman (Burstow, 1992). In South Africa studies have shown this concept to be historically informed as, for example, Isak Niehaus (2002) has described rape as an expression of patriarchy. French (1981, p.86) writes that “Coitus was quick and unsatisfactory.

Mira lay back and permitted it. Norm seemed to realize she did not enjoy it; strangely this seemed to please him.”

But within an oppressive system of male dominance, women’s bodies are controlled and exploited as a resource in social production within the macro-social order (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004), serving a purpose in political stratification and parasitism (French, 1995). Sexual pleasure, sexual desire and curiosity can be dangerous for women (Alsop, et al., 1992; Collier, 1982) and they are robbed of an affirmation of their own bodies and sexuality. The female body is a liability; vulnerable to violation (Lips, 1995; Mirkin, 1994b). As a person, the woman is disregarded, leaving her with a profound sense of self-loss and hunger to be recognized as a person (Greenspan, 1983). Should the woman’s body be violated, she experiences an invasion of the self, a direct mutilation and vandalism of her identity (Gergen, 2001).

Conclusion

I start of the conversation on the emotional abuse of women in close relationships by stating my own philosophical stance; my way of being in the world and thinking about the world. I reasoned from a feminist standpoint but also realized there to be a huge diversity in feminist thinking. Before embarking on a more detailed description of epistemology and methodology, I needed to paint the ontological canvas against which to explore issues such as capitalism and oppression, patriarchy and what it means to be a woman within a patriarchal system.

CHAPTER 3: EPISTEMOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY: FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY

Sandra Harding (1987a&b), and Stanley and Wise (1990) following in her footsteps, describe epistemology as a theory of knowledge, the study of how and what we can know, epistemology also forming the basis for both methodology and method. But then Stanley and Wise (1990) relate that what they described in their 1983 edition of *Breaking Out* and believed to be epistemology, are referred to by others as methodology. They ascribe these contrasting views to semantic differences and recommend epistemology to be seen as a framework within which knowledge can be constituted and produced, an understanding of reality. Methodology, on the other hand, is described as “a theory and analysis of how research should proceed” (Harding, 1987a, p.2).

Within the scope and space allowed by this dissertation I find it extremely difficult to organize my writing in terms of epistemology and methodology as the interplay and interconnections between the two often spill over all boundaries. Also feminist scholars within standpoint theory write on a high level of philosophical abstraction. I shall therefore not clearly distinguish between epistemology and methodology but rather stay with the natural flow of my reasoning on the different concepts. I briefly start off with a description of feminist standpoint epistemology which informs much of my thinking, and then discuss situated knowledge, deconstructing reality, truth and knowledge, and finding meaning and understanding.

A Feminist Standpoint Epistemology

Standpoint theory emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a feminist critical theory, also defined as a philosophy, an epistemology, a methodology, and a political strategy (Harding, 1993, 2004b; 2004d). Standpoint-critical theory is about the relation between the production of knowledge and practices of power (Harding, 1998; Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004). Above all, standpoint theory is a feminist standpoint in that it focuses on inequality in power relations and aims to understand and oppose all forms of domination (Hartsock, 1996, 2004; Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). It was standpoint theory and the voluminous literature flowing from such persons as Sandra Harding, Dorothy Smith, Patricia Hill Collins, Nancy Hartsock, as well as Liz

Stanley and Sue Wise that brought women's consciousness out from under dominant sexist and androcentric ideologies (Harding & Hintikka, 1983; Oleson, 1994, 2000).

Firstly, standpoint theory aims at producing knowledge for marginalized people (Harding, 1998), first and foremost gaining knowledge *for* women (Acker, Barry & Esseveld, 1983; Gottfried, 1996b; Harding, 1987a, 2004b; Oleson, 2000; Stacey, 1996; Stanley & Wise, 1979, 1990, 1993). The notion of knowledge for women changed over the years to knowledge for marginalized people, as women are marginalized in all forms of domination (Alcoff & Potter, 1993). Secondly, as standpoint theory starts from the lives of those exploited by the domination system, the questions and issues of importance will be those of the subordinate group (Harding, 1998; Marecek, 1989). Standpoint-critical theory produces knowledge to answer the questions of women (Harding, 1998) differently from patriarchal influences and male mentality (Gross & Averill, 2003); questions such as why in every class and race there seem to be violence against women (Harding, 2004b).

Thirdly, the intellectual history of standpoint theory refers back to Hegel's reflections on the master/slave relationship as from the slave's standpoint in contrast to what is seen as the much more distorted view of the master (Harding, 1993, 1998; Pels, 2004). Standpoint critical theory therefore speaks from the particular, historically specific, social locations of women (Jagger, 2004; Harding, 1993, 2004b; Marecek, 1989; Smith, 2004), placing the knower on the same critical plane as the subject (Smith, 1987). In the fourth place, standpoint is something that is achieved (Hartsock, 2003, 2004) by the political struggle of the oppressed and through critical theorizing. This stands in contrast to the prevailing world-view of the dominant ruling group (Jagger, 2004; Pels, 2004). Standpoints are "critically and theoretically constructed discursive position(s)" (Harding, 1998, p.17) and not merely a perspective or point of view (Hartsock, 2004).

But to come to an understanding of feminist standpoint theory, it is essential that some of the principles thereof be examined.

Situated Knowledge: Location, Experience and Multiple Standpoints

It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our lives that we must draw our strength to live and our reason for acting
Simone de Beauvoir

Traditional researchers stated that knowledge of the particular cannot lead to generalized knowledge (Stanley & Wise, 1983) and therefore they opposed any focus on the particular and the specific. Critical standpoint theory opposed this view through focusing on location and experience.

Location has become one of the cornerstones of knowledge within feminist standpoint theory. Standpoint theorists state that a particular experience can only be described and evaluated within a particular location (Bailey, 2000; DeVault, 1999; Harding, 1993; Hartsock, 2003; Longino, 1993; Marecek, 1989). Our being is continuously influenced by our environment as well as the class, race and gender of everyone we interact with (Alcoff & Potter, 1993; DuBois, 1983; Flax, 1983; Haraway, 1988, 2004; Jagger, 2004; Reinharz, 1983; Rose, 1983). Our daily lives are constructed by specific input from our location, where location refers to physical and psychic location as well as time in history.

This concept of situated knowledge as developed by Donna Haraway (1988) opened the way to alternatives, as situated meanings could constantly change depending on the person and the experience (Gee, 1999; Hartsock, 1996). In turning away from the faceless, disembodied subject, standpoint theorists argue for valuing embodied location, the “cultural process by which the physical body becomes a site of culturally ascribed and disputed meanings, experiences, feelings” (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p.197). The female body becomes the site where the natural and the cultural or societal meet (Barker, 2000; Nelson, 1993), and so reality is seen as located in the female body (Hepburn, 1999).

Experience in traditional research meant the analysis of men’s experiences (the experiences of white, western, bourgeois men). Standpoint feminists took a critical stand on the omission and distortion of women’s experiences (Addelson, 1993; DeVault, 1999; Flax, 2003; Harding, 1987a, 1998, 2004b; Jagger, 2004; Millman & Kanter, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1993). They maintained that women’s perspectives were needed as their perspectives and understanding will differ from the biased perspectives of men (Banister, et al., 1994; Haraway, 2004; Harding, 1993; Narayan,

2004; Pels, 2004). Feminist standpoint research generates its questions from the perspective of women's experiences, and therefore made working from the perspectives of the woman's experience probably the most distinctive feature of earlier feminist standpoint research, although it was Humanism that brought us the appreciation of the human experience as unique (Bernard, 2000).

The subject of inquiry in research is women, their reality and their experience, what they spend their everyday lives on (Harding, 1987a, 1998; Jagger, 2004; Madriz, 2000; Mareček, 1989;; Reinharz, 1983; Smith 1987, 1992, 2004; Stanley & Wise, 1979, 1983, 1990, 1993). Dorothy Smith (1987, 1992) in particular concentrates on women's everyday experience as the seat of what is problematic in their lives. She explains that these aspects can only be brought into being through the language of experience and the telling thereof (Smith, 2004b). Earlier critics of standpoint theory attacked this view for meaning a single set of experiences that is shared by all women (Mareček, 1989). Harding (1991, 1993, 2004c), and other standpoint theorists (Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Flax, 1983; Haraway, 2004; Hartsock, 2004; Jagger, 2004; Narayan, 2004; Rose, 1983) do not perceive a single woman and a single experience, but reason that the different locations and the different experiences of women are a place from which to start off thought. Harding (2004b, p.7) therefore maintains, in effect, that "the very best human knowledge of the empirical world is grounded in human experience".

It consequently is accepted that, although a woman experiences oppression within the broader culture of oppression and male domination, one cannot accept her experiences of oppression to be the same experience as that of the next woman. Experiences of oppression vary from woman to woman (Flax, 2003; Harding, 2004b; Stanley & Wise, 1993), from culture to culture, and within the power inequalities specific to the situation (Harding, 1998). This concurs with the earlier view held by Stanley and Wise (1983) that different women bring different experiences and standpoints that lead to different knowledges. Ib Ravn's (1991) unity-in-diversity concept; explains it as being able to observe the difference or be different but still part of the whole. Different accounts, perspective and standpoints are generated from different locations, different women and different experiences (Gottfried, 1996b; Haraway, 1988, 2004; Longino, 1993; Nelson, 1993), a movement away from the traditional search for universality in research (Haraway, 2004).

According to Bailey (2000) María Lugones (1987) further built on the notion of multiplicity and developed her concept of “world travellers”, individuals whose identities shift because of their willingness to expose themselves to the differences of the other, to see the other of colour, culture, and sexual orientation. As a white woman one has to become a traitor to one’s privileged position in order to see differently and to develop new habits. World travelling in this sense opens the eyes and leads to self-reflection, and thus evading the vision of the other is no more possible (Bailey, 2000). Harding (1991, p.290) states that “intellectual and political activity is required in using another’s insights to generate one’s own analysis”. Standpoint theory therefore offers “an epistemology of diversity or multiplicity ... of double consciousness or ‘crossover’ identities” (Pels, 2004, p.278). Some postmodernists have found standpoint theory not reconcilable with the concept of difference, but Hartsock (2004) believes that the concept of multiple standpoints brings standpoint theory and postmodernist thinking closer together. Acceptance of the concept of differences launched a feverish debate on the relevance of relativism as will be discussed at a later stage.

Stone-Mediatore (2000) argues that many feminists today find the concept of women’s experience problematic. One of the problems cited is the danger of seeing the ideology as natural through the experience or the telling of the experience (Harding, 1991). Joan Wallach Scott (1991) feels that the problem is that the person who experiences is herself constructed through discursive practices and her telling of the experience re-inscribes already-made assumptions. To my mind, the reliability and validity of the experience as constructed by culture can only be comprehended by placing the experience within the total complicity of the extended location of the experience, which includes culture, society, place, time, and historical background. Even so, culture, society, religion and so forth, is not in itself static, but constantly changing (Narayan, 2000). Most people can cite examples of how the dominant group has, over time, either employed or changed cultural practices to suit their own needs.

Whereas the research questions generated by the dominant group centre only on their position (Harding, 1993, 1998), when one starts out from a specific, objective location such as the experiences of women, one will produce questions important to the specific group (Banister, et al., 1994; Harding, 1998, 2004b&c; Millman & Kanter, 198). The position of the previously marginalized now becomes an important resource (Bailey, 2000; Mies, 1983); a resource utilized to move subordinate groups to the focal point. Post-modern thinking refers to this

concept of locating the marginalized in the centre position in theory and research as decentring (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Ritzer & Goodman, 2004).

Studying or viewing from the location of the oppressed yield critical insight into the sexist and androcentric nature of dominant institutions and systems (Addelson, 1993; Gorelick, 1996; Harding, 1987a, 1998, 2004b; Hartsock, 2003; Jagger, 2004; Madriz, 2000; Marecek, 1989; Narayan, 2004; Wylie, 2004). The position of subjugation thus brings epistemic advantage (Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Bailey, 2000; Crawford & Marecek, 1989; Flax, 1983; Rose, 1983, 1986). But, research from the vantage point of the subjugated is not, in the words of Haraway (2004, p.88), an “innocent position.” This position will include all the denials, the issues of forgetting and disappearing that are common to the way people usually represent an experience. Harding (1993) therefore states that the research agenda, but not the solutions, can be assembled from marginalized lives. It is through feminist theorizing and feminist political engagement that solutions must be generated (Code, 1993; Flax, 2003; Harding, 1991; Pels, 2004). It is in the finding of new solutions, working towards a re-definition, and re-naming of women’s experiences that the personal becomes intensely political (Wylie, 2004).

Being in the position of what is called the insider, part of the dominant privileged group (be it class, race, sex, colour, culture, society and many more) can be an impediment to developing bifurcated consciousness (Bailey, 2000). It can be a hindrance to seeing other points of view. Although the insider can understand the cultural meanings of the particular society’s practices and will therefore be able to discuss findings in appropriate and understandable language, they might also ignore or be blind to alternative solutions, and might suffer societal pressures in freely expressing their findings (Crocker, 1991). Some insiders are able to, and do, open their minds to the understanding of the marginalized; “traitors” who operate from “traitorous locations” and “identities” (Harding, 1991, pp.288-296). The traitor’s experience cannot be taken to be the same as the outsider-within position, but the insider in the centre can learn from the views of the outsider-within.

Standpoint feminists argue for the advantages of an outsider view (Bailey, 2000). An outsider may find the cultural meanings of the other unfamiliar and may not easily understand it (Crocker, 1991). Members of a minority or marginalized group, on the other hand, can bring a different or distinctive perspective precisely because they are the outsiders (Peplau & Conrad, 1989). Because of an external perspective, they may be able to reveal things that are hidden to

insiders (Crocker, 1991; Daly, 1973). When it comes to oppressed women within a dominant culture, they can see the world the way a man sees it, as well as the way a woman sees it, and they can question prevailing distortions about reality (Marecek, 1989). Thus, the only person in a position to view trans-positionally, says Pels (2004, p.287), is the marginalized person, who can obtain a “small measure of synthesis and objectivity still available in the chronic ‘war of positions’ waged in the social world”.

Feminist work has increasingly focused on the differences in class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion (Hurtado, 1989; Narayan & Harding, 2000) and so the outsider-within view has become considered as the most advantageous (Bailey, 2000). Harding’s view of strong objectivity is also applicable in the context of observing the lives of the oppressed from a multi-culturalist standpoint. On the one hand, sensitive observation from the lives and the perspectives of the oppressed is needed, and on the other hand, a critical and theoretical examination in order to reconstitute theory where needed (Cudd, 2000). The vantage point held by the outsider within (Collins, 2004; hooks, 2004) who enjoys “double vision”, resulted in the fact that marginality became a powerful topic in Black feminism (Pels, 2004). As bell hooks (1984, p.vii) says, “living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside and from the inside out ... we understood both.”

In summary, the question can be asked whether a feminist standpoint or even a hierarchy of standpoints can encompass the diversity of women’s lives (Gottfried, 1996b; Harding, 1989). I take it that each and every experience brings us a step closer to a better understanding; a better view on the reality of women. This forms the opposite of ghettoizing. Experiences of oppression are connected in that each on its own forms patterns and processes that throw light onto the other; each brings a different view of the knowledge of oppression (Gorelick, 1996; Narayan, 2000; Smith, 1987).

Deconstructing Reality

Traditionally, reality was seen as a given (DuBois, 1983). Reality was understood to consist of facts that one could presumably discover by using objective research (Stanley & Wise, 1983, 1993). Post-structuralism, to the contrary, held the belief that there is no pre-existent, fixed, or universal structure of reality (Gavey, 1989). For the social constructionist, reality is constructed through the interaction between people (Burr, 1995; Sampson, 1989; Smith, 2004). Reality can

only be conceptualized through discourse (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Spears, 1997) and therefore the reality lies in the stories we tell, with or without the numerous and conflicting discourses surrounding any object.

Standpoint theorists share the belief of no fixed reality (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Smith, 2004; Stanley & Wise, 1983). According to Hartsock (2004), some standpoint feminists actually differ from the social constructionist's idea that reality can only be constructed through discourse, as they consider the certainty of women's oppression as substantially real (Stanley & Wise, 1993). They argue for the reality of oppression to pre-exist its naming through language. Rogers and Rogers (1997, p.68) explain that the allegation that there is "nothing outside of text" does not necessarily claim that there is no such thing as reality; reality is only not constructed (Spears, 1997). Within the study of discourses Gee (1999) also maintains that language simultaneously reflects and constructs the reality of the situation and the context of its use. According to Hubbard (2003), we need words to objectify and categorize our sensations so as to be able to place them in relation to one another. To me, this signifies that there is always some interaction between our constructions and our reality.

Reality is named against the backdrop of what society in general has accepted as real (Hubbard, 2003), and so it should not be forgotten or denied that members from diverse groups and different locations inhabit unrelated social worlds and realities (Millman & Kanter, 1987). Those in the dominant position in any situation are sanctioned with the right to name, be it the state or religion or the dominant man (Hubbard, 2003; Shields, 1992), and as reality is constructed by the social environment, women's reality within a capitalist and patriarchal society is informed by a rigidly white male elite.

In being the dominant group, men have the power to define woman's reality (Addelson, 1993; Burstow, 1992; Du Bois, 1983). Says Haggis (1990, p.76), "No one voice can be privileged without risking the slighting of another, a danger sufficiently echoed in the manufactured silence of women's voices in the telling of history". One can therefore deduct that men's interpretation of reality does not embrace the different perspectives of women (Kelly-Gadol, 1987; Millman & Kanter, 1987; Sampson, 1989; Smith, 2004). Nevertheless, Stanley and Wise (1993) argue that no view of reality should be invalidated because there is a number of ways to view reality. Provided that their reality is not used to view our realities, Stanley and Wise will accept reality as multi-dimensional and multi-faceted.

According to Harding (1987), women's experiences serve as a significant indicator of their reality. Reality can be found in the concrete experiences of the oppressed and subordinated (Jagger, 2004; Harding, 1993; Smith, 2004; Stanley & Wise, 1993). Feminist standpoint theory is criticized for accepting the reality of women's experiences as not clouded by an ideology and a mystification that would serve the needs of the dominant class (Addelson, 1993; Code, 1993; Pels, 2004). Feminist standpoint theorists stand firm, however, in their belief that starting from the reality of the experiences of the oppressed or the marginalized brings valuable and different perspectives.

Because of the magnitude of perspectives brought by differing experiences as a whole, women's overall representation of reality is seen as less partial and less distorted by relations of power and domination (Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Flax, 1983; Harding, 1991, 1993; Rose, 1983, 1986). But, says Jagger (2004), insights about reality gained from the different standpoints of women should be tested in political struggle and should be further developed into an organized representation of reality, free from the distortion brought by considering the dominant man's viewpoint as better than those of women.

Deconstructing Truth and Knowledge

When a subject is highly controversial, one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold
Virginia Woolf: A Room of One's Own

Post-modern thinking and post-structuralist theory reject the idea of ultimate and absolute truth (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Gavey, 1989). Truth or objective knowledge is no more thought of as obtained through pure reason after exploring a fixed reality about an essential object (Addelson, 1993; Burr, 1995; Harding, 1998; Lengerman & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004; Pels, 2004). Scholars now believe that every theory is a self-fulfilling prophecy of scientists formulating their hypotheses within the context of a certain theory; agreement is built into the process and it therefore cannot tell us anything about truth or reality (Hubbard, 2003). In general, feminists do not believe in truth as spelled out through grand theory or master narratives (DeVault, 1999; Roiser, 1997).

A number of features about truth come to mind. Firstly, truth and knowledge are not neutral but are closely related to power, as the dominant group has the authority to regulate what is socially

interpreted as truth (Gergen & Gergen, 1991; Shields, 1992). In a patriarchal Western society truth tends to be male constructions that support the male dominant position (Gavey, 1989). Says Jane Flax (1987, p.625),

If there is no objective basis for distinguishing between true and false beliefs, then it seems that power alone will determine the outcome of competing truth claims. This is a frightening prospect to those who lack (or are oppressed by) the power of others.

Secondly, because of the dominant group's power to establish and control what is reality and therefore truth, truth continuously change in value. Truth also grows and develops over the course of a person's life and her experiences (Mies, 1978).

Dorothy Smith's metaphor of a multi-dimensional cube in describing truth is well known (Smith, 1987, 1992, 1997). According to Smith, truth is constructed from all the related activities in different locations, as well as from the constantly changing social relations within the system or the organized whole (DeVault, 1999). In the third instance, truth therefore is constituted within historically-specific micro-situations (Spears, 1997). Reality is constructed from the varied experiences of people in different positions within a hierarchy and against the backdrop of a particular society. Therefore, and in the fourth place, truth can only be partial and is more or less distorted by relations of power (Harding, 1991). Standpoint theorists consider these differing and even contradictory understandings and explanations of reality to constitute truth (Stanley & Wise, 1993).

Post-modern thinking embraces multiple truths and so signals a renewed respectability for relativism (Spears, 1997). Relativism means to have a variety of different discourses or perspectives, each seeming to be equally valid (Burr, 1995). Social constructionists reason that truth is what we currently accept from a variety of social constructions, as a way of understanding our continuously changing world (Gergen, 1973). It is in the interest of the more powerful to value some constructions as being more truthful or common-sense than others.

When feminist standpoint theory admits to the truth of one specific standpoint, it indirectly implies the truth of whatever other standpoints there can be (Stanley & Wise, 1990). The existence of differences in standpoints or multiple standpoints do not assume a hierarchical relationship between the different points of view (Stanley & Wise, 1993). For example, although

standpoint theorists explicitly agree on starting out from the experiences of women, the implication is not that they view their own lives as the better or the best point to start from (Harding, 1993). Starting off thought from the life of any oppressed woman is also not the answer. Observation should be done by someone who recognizes the oppression and who, as the outsider-within can have a less distorted view of reality. What is needed is to critically examine a situation within a theoretical understanding of patriarchy and racism, and therefore multiculturalism is seen as a cognitive virtue (Cudd, 2000).

Standpoint theory, on the other hand neither “advocate(s) - nor is it doomed to – relativism” (Harding, 1993, p.61). All social situations and all experiences do not present knowledge claims, nor are they of even value (Cudd, 2000; Gorelick, 1996). Harding (2004c, p.131) reasons that some social situations are “scientifically better” suited than others as situations from which to start knowledge projects. Starting with the experiences of the marginalized, although an epistemological advantaged starting point, does not guarantee optimum objectivity. It presents “only a necessary – not a sufficient – starting point for maximizing objectivity” (Harding, 1993, p.57). To this standpoint, feminist partially located and critically situated knowledge is the alternative to relativism (Haraway, 2004).

For standpoint theorists, relativism does not exclude judgment and critical thinking, nor is the researcher forced to see all knowledge as equally valid just because she stands sceptical (Cudd, 2000; Hepburn, 2000; Nelson, 1993). A situation of “being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere” to the same extent (Haraway, 2004, p.89) is not proclaimed, because claims to knowledge only have meaning within the context of the historical, cultural, and local values and interests (Harding, 1993). To me, women’s experiences provide the initial point of departure, but critical feminist theory and political struggle provide the grounds for deciding which knowledge claims are preferable (Harding, 1991; Pels, 2004). Even then, the claim remains a “reliable account of some part of reality” only (Harding, 2004b, p.10).

In trying to establish truth one should take into consideration, however, that all we see and all we think we see are influenced by our values. As therapist and researcher I cannot separate the facts from my values and no results are therefore value-free (Burr, 1995). Each individual has the responsibility to constantly take note of the position and perspective from which she questions and counters. The concept of value-laden observation is alien to those adhering to

positivist views, as they consider value statements as not verifiable and therefore meaningless (Code, 1993). To me, women's experiences provide only the initial standpoint, but critical feminist theory and political struggle provide the grounds for deciding which knowledge claims are preferable (Harding, 1991; Pels, 2004); any standpoint therefore is considered the "product(s) of someone's or some group's location and choice; hence it is always contestable" (Code, 2000, p.71).

Baudrillard and Jean Francois Lyotard (in Roiser, 1997) argued that, for example, the multiple media images that surround us make it almost impossible to tell what is truth and reality. People bombarded by different and contrasting truths turn to science in want of a rational and objective explanation of reality, truth, and knowledge. If religion or ideology cannot provide the answers, the critical thinking, abstractions, and testability of science must then provide the answers. This does not happen because of three reasons, namely the interplay between power and knowledge, the fact that knowledge is constructed, and the unstable nature of knowledge.

Foucault's views on the inextricably intertwined nature of power and knowledge are well known (Gavey, 1989; Parker, 1989; Ritzer & Goodman, 2004; Roiser, 1997). As I have explained in writing about reality and truth, those in dominant positions have the power to decide on what constitutes knowledge, and thereby they make the other into a subject to be governed with this knowledge (Cudd, 2000; Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004). Only those discourses accepted as truth by the dominant class is taken as knowledge (Burr, 1995), therefore knowledge is never neutral (Gavey, 1989).

Social construction in effect means that knowledge is the result of our constructing and ordering, inventing, creating, languaging, and constituting processes (Cudd, 2000; Gavey, 1989; Held, 1990). As there is no single standard for deciding what knowledge seems to be more or less true, only local historical claims of knowledge as grounded in experience can be considered true in itself, but cannot have any claims against other truths (Harding, 1993; Harding & Hintikka, 2003). Knowledge-making becomes the product of multiple experiences from diverse groups in different settings (Lengerman & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004; Madriz, 2000; Pels, 2004).

Knowledge is also seen as inherently unstable, most likely to change (Gavey, 1989) as new knowledge is incorporated, or as needed by the dominant class. Pels (2004, p.274) finds that standpoint theory offer(s) "the most persistently popular rationale for a politics of knowledge

framed by particularist identities and the reclamation of cultural difference". In the same manner, I can associate with the much older perspective of Code (1993, p. 40); advocating for a position where knowledge is always relative to specific situations – always a perspective "on" or a standpoint "in" and one should keep an open and tolerant state of mind.

Finding Meaning and Understanding

Conventional models of interaction are described by sociological theory as equals in power, aware of one another as they pursue projects or meaning (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004). But in the event of structural inequality, such as within the patriarchal system, the power vested in the dominant group controls the meaning-giving (Painter & Theron, 2001; Shields, 1992).

Nevertheless, social constructionism takes the idea a step further, as they see meaning as created and co-created within the activities and communication of the individuals (Burr, 1995; Gergen & Gergen, 1991; Gergen, 2000; Gergen, 2001; Schwandt, 2000; Shields, 1992). Meaning does not reside within the person, but rather within the social realm (Hollway, 1989; Painter & Theron, 2001). As Kenneth Gergen (2000, p.145) says, "we remove meaning from the heads of individuals, and locate it within the ways in which we go on together". According to post-modern thinking, meaning is constantly changing because of the change in interaction (Coyle, 1995; Freedman & Combs, 1996).

The change in meaning is constructed through language, as language provides the categories and the concepts for the way people think (Burr, 1995; Coyle, 1995; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). As language provides the means to structure our experiences, language is a pre-condition to meaning. But the meaning attributed is arbitrary, always contestable and changing, always dependent on the context (Gavey, 1989; Painter & Theron, 2001). The French philosopher, Derrida (in Roiser, 1997) set out to deconstruct meaning. Deconstruction refers to a process whereby meaning can indefinitely be taken apart and reconstructed. No interpretation should be considered privileged. Social constructionism therefore proclaims meaning to be produced by reflexivity (Durrheim, 1997) and reflexivity utilized to question the taken-for-granted of the established "regimes of truth" and to create new meanings (Durrheim, 1997, p.181). But the understanding is that we are co-creating and re-

creating meaning by making choices, as we have the power and the ability to change and as we are free to act (Burstow, 1992).

The same principle applies to understanding. Just as meaning is changeable and context-dependent, understanding will also change with changes in situation (Gergen, 1973) and does not rely on a meta-narrative or an over-arching system as, for example, religion (Burr, 1995). Social constructionism sees all understanding as historically and culturally specific (Gergen, 1973). If meaning and understanding is considered situation-specific, and when one takes into account the manner in which particular social and political organizations exercise dominance in claiming truth and knowledge, knowledge-making becomes a political act (Addelson, 1993; Code, 1993). Feminism is often characterized by the coined phrase “personal is political” (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p.62), but the opening-up of opportunities is brought about by perceiving and understanding differently than the existing male-biased perspective (Haraway, 2004; Harding, 1993; Narayan, 2004; Pels, 2004). Asking for a re-defining and re-naming of women’s experiences creates new meaning and understanding, so that the personal becomes intensely political (Wylie, 2004). Feminist scholars look for meaning instead of truth; a “constructive, ongoing process” (Reinharz, 1983, p.183) that assumes no final interpretation, but aims to keep the dialogue flowing.

Conclusion

As I will be working with the stories of women as told in psychotherapy, the concept of discourse comes into play. I have already noted the role played by language in the understanding of reality, truth, and knowledge, and it can therefore be concluded that reality, truth, and knowledge is constructed through discourse (Macleod, 2002; Parker, 1990). This is true for language-in-use or “little d” discourse and “Big D” discourse (Gee, 1999), the latter bringing into play the non-language content of values, beliefs, symbols, times, places, and all the other abstract things that influence and construct meaning (See Gee, 1999 for further details on “little d” and “big D” Discourse). Especially true of the latter, as we have seen, is the way in which the dominant discourse of power, capitalism, and patriarchy cover up their power and gain authority by appealing to common sense and in appearing natural (Gavey, 1989; Parker, 1992).

Change is needed in the lives of the abused women, and although I will not be doing discourse analysis, it will be necessary to deconstruct dominant discourse in order to disrupt the prevailing

taken-for-granted ideas about women in abusive relationships (Burman, 1990; Macleod, 2002; Roiser, 1997). Although I have referred to discourse analysis above, I also mentioned that I will not be using discourse analysis. Thus, in the next chapter, I will describe the method I used in the current research. I will also attend to some important methodological issues that I have not discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: FINDING MY OWN METHOD

One of the false Gods of theologians, philosophers and other academics is called Method ... Under patriarchy, Method has wiped out women's questions so totally that even women have not been able to hear and formulate our own questions to meet our own experience.
(Mary Daly, 1973, p.11-12)

Method in research is defined as the particular tools and techniques used to do scientific research (Bernard, 2000; Harding, 1987a; Kelly-Gadol, 1987). Although feminist research is often classified as qualitative (Banister, et al., 1994), no specific method is seen as intrinsic a feminist method as the perspectives that feminist researchers take, differ hugely (Bartky, 1990; Brannon, 2002; DeVault, 1999; Klein, 1983; Mareček, 1989; Worell & Remer, 1992). The immense variety of methods used in feminist research, express the growing and dynamic nature thereof (DuBois, 1983; Madriz, 2000). Examples often cited are, Reinharz's experiential analysis (Reinharz, 1983); surveys and interviews, as in Marxist and ethno-methodological approaches (Smith, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1983, 1993) (See DeVault, 1999 for further examples).

Feminist methodology thus, does not specify its own, and/or appropriate research methods or techniques (Stanley & Wise, 1990), but feminist research methods should be distinguished by the unique epistemological and methodological theory that underlies their use (Harding, 1987a; Gergen & Gergen, 2000). Traditionally researchers (men) applied scientific method to answer the questions men asked (Marecek, 1989), giving us their truth and at that only a partial and distorted perspective (Crawford & Marecek, 1989). They did research so as to administer to and manage the lives of the marginalized (their objects of study) and the issues women grappled with were either ignored or added on to those of men (Harding, 1993).

In answering to the questions of women, feminist standpoint adheres to a number of principles in doing research. I will deal with some of these principles in explaining the method I will use. The position on the knower and the known in feminist standpoint research is crucial to all other aspects and therefore needs to be explored first.

The Knower and the Known

Critical feminist standpoint theory rejects the positivist idea of any scientist giving himself (or herself) out as an expert on another's life (Chang, 1996; Greed, 1990; Haggis, 1990; Madriz, 2000; Sherif, 1987; Stanley, 1990b). They reject taking an omnipotent view and doing research from a position of power (Harding, 1993; Stanley & Wise, 1983, 1993) or explaining women's world through a theoretical grand narrative (Lengerman & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004). Feminist standpoint theory also rejects the idea of dispassionately standing back to study the object (the researched) in order to objectively understand the other (Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Code, 1993; DuBois, 1983; Nelson, 1993; Steier, 1991b). The knower and the known "are of the same universe" (Du Bois, 1983, p.111), and the knower should realize herself to be "part of the matrix of what is known" (Wilkinson, 1986b, p.13).

I cannot completely disengage from the influence of theory and my own thinking and philosophical stance. I cannot totally disengage from my own self and the experiences of my own life history, social class, and gender (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). It is an accepted reality that my specific class, culture, race and gender will have an influence on the research method and findings (Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Breakwell, 1995b; Code, 1993; Hollway, 1989). It is a further certainty that my life experiences (Crawford & Marecek, 1989) as well as my motivations, limitations and ignorance shape my understanding of realities (Gorelick, 1996). My intellectual life history, my skills, my education, and my familiarity with theory and methodology must therefore be incorporated, explained, and managed throughout the research (Acker, et al., 1983; Burr, 1995; Greed, 1990; Harding, 1987a, 1989b; Stanley & Wise, 1979, 1993, 1990; Tait, 1990; Westkott, 1983).

As a feminist researcher I am thus located within the centre of the activities in the research (Breakwell, 1995b; Cook & Fonow, 1986; Gergen & Gergen, 1991; Harding, 1987a; Stanley & Wise, 1979, 1983; Steier, 1991b). I participate as a real person and not a disembodied authority (Harding, 1993, 1987a; Pels, 2004; Tait, 1990). My experiences and consciousness as the knower is important (DuBois, 1983; Madriz, 2000). There therefore is a collaboration between the researcher and the researched (Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Burr, 1995; Flax, 1983; Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Gergen, 2001; Greed, 1990; Hartsock, 1983, 1987; Rose, 1983, 1986) and the position between "knower and known" in principle become interchangeable (Code, 1993). I am obliged to honestly display my actions. My reasoning and findings are all

the more open and vulnerable (Stanley & Wise, 1993). Research in this way becomes a productive social interaction (Longino, 1993; Stanley, 1990b; Steier, 1991b).

It is assumed that I as a feminist researcher, in rejecting the scientist/person dichotomy will take into account issues of power that rear their heads in the relationship between researcher and researched and within myself (Pels, 2004; Stanley & Wise, 1993). Within the traditional method the participant's view was seen as of lesser value than that of the researcher. Within feminist research the object of research becomes subjects in their own right (Acker, Barry & Esseveld, 1996; Gergen & Gergen, 1991). For if the researched can in principle grasp what the researcher understands, the researched can make up her own mind and not solely rely on the researcher's findings (Stanley, 1990c). Haraway (2004, p.95) explains the object of knowledge being "actor" as well as "agent". Therefore knowledge stands not to be discovered by a powerful authority, but knowledge can be found within the interaction.

The effect of the participants on the researcher is not disregarded (Breakwell, 1995b; Stanley & Wise, 1993). The researcher changes with every new insight as she is taught by her respondent-participants and as she influences them. Not imposing my ideas on the participants, I am actually open to hear what they are telling me (Steier, 1991b). Theory and practice interact and transform all those it interacts with (Gorelick, 1996). Thus feminist standpoint theory advocates for the open admission of all relevant interaction of facts and feelings (Klein, 1983), leading feminist researchers to incorporate also emotion as part of the research experience (Banister, et al., 1994; Stanley & Wise, 1990). Feminist scholars have come to refer to knowers in the plural (Nelson, 1993) implying the participation of an epistemological community in constructing knowledge (Gergen & Gergen, 1991).

Although I personally find this way of reasoning and doing more authentic, it also poses its challenges. As a privileged white woman I cannot speak for the less privileged and coloured, only some of my interpretations and representations will inevitably ring true. Growing up as a woman in a patriarchal traditional culture also influenced my thinking. A personal goal in attempting this research was personal growth but I am not in the best position to judge to what extent it has been accomplished. In having experienced and shaken off an emotionally abusive relationship places me both in the position of the knower and the known, and it becomes easy to stumble over my own ideas, feelings, and thoughts. However, having been there also places

me in the most opportune position to openly reflect and share new and different insights; more than the organizer of the information as described by Chang (1996).

Qualitative Method

The paradigms of research methodology distinguish between quantitative, qualitative and participatory action research (Mouton, 2001). Qualitative research is described as a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b, p.3). This description fits the feminist requirement of situated knowledge. The researcher is part of the research and makes the voices of the abused women visible/audible. Thus the qualitative method seems suitable for the research experience I intended. Qualitative research goes by many other names, as for example, field research, ethnographic research, the interpretative approach and the case study method (Mouton, 1988), or discourse analysis, participant observation, ethnography, and action research (Banister et al., 1994) and grounded theory (Dick, 2005).

In being descriptive and unstructured in manner the qualitative method fits my goals of sensitively and intuitively representing the stories of women from emotionally abusive relationships (Breakwell, 1995a; Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991; Karlsson, 1993). Instead of testing hypotheses the intent is openness to all information, and an acceptance that any concept or conclusion can be interpreted in a number of different ways (Mouton & Marais, 1990). Qualitative method is also sensitive to the possibility of emerging and new knowledge. Knowing that assumptions can shape conclusions (Stiehm, 2003), I intend to enter into a reflexive conversation between my assumptions, the stories the women tell and my own philosophical stance, open to challenging all assumptions and changing as I go along.

Furthermore, qualitative research is known to focus on *verstehen* as empathic understanding (Schwandt, 2000). Whereas Weber in his interpretive sociology implicated *verstehen* as utilized from the privileged position of the external observer (Smith, 2004b), feminist research in general and more specifically standpoint critical theory focus on finding meaning and understanding. To me finding meaning and understanding is a process of co-constructing, and this concurs with both qualitative method and feminist standpoint theory seeing the researcher as central to the whole research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). The research project and therefore also the goals and objectives as pointed out in chapter one, imply a journey towards meaning and

not ultimate truth. Final, absolute, and conclusive understanding exists only for mere seconds until new and fresh information is received. Mouton and Marais (1990) thus state that within meta-theoretical thinking it is generally accepted that scientific conclusions cannot be irrefutably proven by empirical research conclusions.

Feminist standpoint theory and qualitative methods are also a comfortable fit in that qualitative findings are not interpreted in the isolation of the experimental laboratory. The focus is on the *Umwelt* (the external, physical environment) and the *Mitwelt* (the interpersonal relationships studied here). The focus is on the context (Banister, et al., 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b; Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991). Although not disregarded, the *Eigenwelt* (the individual's world within herself) receive much less attention. I have explained the central position given to embodied location and situated knowledge within feminist standpoint theory. The main starting point is therefore the experiences of women, the individual woman within her particular situation and embedded by a societal and cultural time frame.

The *verstehen* tradition has often been criticized as being idealist (Bhasher, 1979). Maybe this was in a timeframe when feminist researchers operated from a rather romanticized version of research done only by women with women, or feminist research seen as only qualitative (Banister et al., 1994). Kersti Yllö's 1986 working paper for the National Council on Family Relations Theory and Methodology Workshop held in Detroit was, for example, strongly criticized from within feminist groups. The interview part of the research was seen as feminist but the quantitative part taken to be non-feminist and patriarchal in nature.

Peplau and Conrad (1989), on the other hand, argue that methods based on numbers and statistics can be sensitive to feminist concerns. Feminist research is empirical and the answers often more comprehensive than traditional empirical research (DeVault, 1999). This position can be attained by rigorously and carefully observing and analyzing (Oleson, 1994), starting from the more favourable although not only position of the marginalized. DeVault (1999, p.3) argues the truths of feminist research are "smaller; more tailored, and more intensely pointed truths than the discredited 'truth' or grand theory and master narratives". It is believed that feminists initially recommended qualitative methods as a corrective measure towards the biases implicated by the traditional quantitative methods. In so doing, the idea was to encourage researchers to take into account the entire context of the situation and to be more open and

spontaneous towards changing situations, as well as new and unexpected influences (Peplau & Conrad, 1989).

My Method

Summary of research goals

My ultimate goal with this study has been discussed in chapter 1. I intend to gain a deeper understanding of how people perpetrate emotional abuse, and I shall do so by representing the stories of women who come from emotionally abusive relationships. Giles-Sims (1983, p.2) explains about validating the stories of women in research:

Battered women know what it is like to live with a batterer ... To understand their histories, we must listen to the women tell their own stories. The women's stories present their perspectives on their relationships with battering males and their perceptions of those men. The stories are not unbiased, but the perceptions of the women are important ... To understand why battered women respond as they do, and make decisions when they do, requires knowledge of their perceptions of their own situations.

The aim is to establish whether there is an ecology that legitimizes emotional abuse, and whether the woman or the man, in positioning themselves, constructs such a relationship (Giles-Sims, 1983). A further aim is to analyze textual data to see if any patterns and processes can be determined that can or cannot lead to a model of the *how* of emotional abuse in close relationships. I do not have any preconceived ideas. No hypotheses are formulated, and my approach can be equalled to the case study method (Carpenter, 1999). The aim is an analysis of the data presented to obtain a functional description of the *how* of emotional abuse, to gain an understanding of the qualities of human behaviour in emotionally abusive relationships (Mouton, 1988).

Finding the research participants

In choosing the research participants, the options are to either to enlist new cases or utilize all the available data from clients who I saw in my therapeutic practice. For a number of reasons, I decided to follow the latter. Firstly, because it is known that women cannot name the experience of emotional abuse for what it is (Dutton, 1992; Miller, 1995) and I am unsure if it will be possible to enlist women who will be able and willing to tell their stories. Secondly, I am of the opinion that abused women in practice will find the therapeutic environment safer and therefore tell more than they would if confronted with the unnatural, disconnected, and less safe setting of an interview room (Gergen, 2001). Should I search for women able and willing to tell, I am concerned about their ability to openly tell, either because they are fearful of legal repercussions (Dutton, 1992), or because they are shameful about the abuse or want to protect their loved ones (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Walker, 1979).

I therefore opt to use the case material from clients I saw in my psychotherapy practice. Finding the research cases will entail systematically reading through the files, and therefore the therapy notes on all female clients seen in the period from September, 2001 until September, 2005. All files containing any kind of abusive behaviour, verbal as well as non-verbal, will be seen as case files. I realize that this is an intuitive selection (Condor, 1997) but it is also seen to be the most practical way to assess information from a number of women that come from emotionally abusive relationships.

Finding the data

The plan for assembling the data is deceptively simple. From the case files selected notes will be made of any abusive incident of a verbal or non-verbal sort. As these notes will be based as what can be seen as self-reports of clients, both the advantages and disadvantages of self-reports can influence the data obtained. First of all the client herself has the widest observational base concerning the incidents she relates and her memories thereof. Data thus becomes easily obtainable (Westen & Weisberger, 2004). But this information remains the client's reconstruction of the event (Shields, 1992). Westen and Weisberger (2004) state that the disadvantage of relying on self-reports of people who have had no training in understanding and interpreting behaviour of, is that distortion can occur and defences will come into play.

Within standpoint feminist theory these so-called disadvantages bring the benefits of the knower within, situated knowledge and multiple truths to the fore.

No particular value will be attributed to the given incidents in any other way than noting them down. I do realize that in choosing certain incidents, stories, or anecdotes, I will rely on my therapeutic experiences and literature search as to what seems to be the important issues at that time. It will be impossible, however, to identify all issues involved or to fully disengage from the limitations of one's own subjectivity and knowledge.

I presume that, as the research progresses, new incidents will become available, either through seeing new clients in therapy or by my own sensitized reading and hearing. The intent is, as I did in the past, to also collect anecdotal incidents that occur in my environment; be it conversations overheard or conversations I happened to be part of, clips and discussions taken from newspapers, magazine articles, and daily television shows, or the discussing of ideas with friends and colleagues. In so doing, I will lend an ear to previously seen unscientific insights and ideas (Gergen, 2001), but will also place the research within a specific historical and social milieu. Not working with numbers and statistic, and given the fact that research is a re-awakening experience (Williams, 1990), these will be incorporated in the main body of data. Banister et al. (1994) explain this as the chaos of fluid information that constantly flows in and brings new aspects as part of qualitative research.

I am also to collect collateral evidence and stories from literature, the popular press, and social situations. In this I rely on the social constructionist view that "anything that can be 'read' for meaning can be thought of as being a manifestation of one or more discourses and can be referred to as a 'text' ... everything around us can be considered as 'textual' ..." (Burr, 1995, p.51).

Utilizing the data

I assume that, as is with most qualitative research, the amount of unstructured information thus obtained can be daunting (Breakwell, 1995b; Mouton & Marais, 1990), and I therefore considered a number of options. Firstly, I considered making use of coding or categories (Bernard, 2000; Farran, 1990; Steier, 1991b). Coding will enable me to rely on the themes I identified from literature, and I will be able to fit the data to these categories. As used in

traditional research in psychology, I will break down data into elements to be studied (Sherif, 1987). This at present will not make sense, as I will end up losing precisely the understanding and the meaning I am looking for, or I might even lose the meaning of the relationship between the categories (Hollway, 1982 in Hollway, 1989; Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991).

Banister (et al., 1994) wrote that notes that relate the clients' experiences can be utilized in a search for subjective meaning, and if I work from the experiences as the core element that ultimately connects with meaning, the client should be the most reliable witness in telling her experiences; her account being the product of her social domain (Hollway, 1989). This makes sense to me, because rather than fitting people to theory, I will listen to their meanings (Chang, 1996; Steier, 1991b). I will therefore follow this route, and will read and re-read all available data and weigh it in the context of feminist thought (Farran, 1990; Bewley, 1994). In this process, I will analyze the data to find evidence of ecological themes that legitimize emotional abuse as well as recurrent themes (Bernard, 2000; Breakwell, 1995) and contradictions in the accounts (Hepburn, 1999; MacLeod, 2002); themes seen "as abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs" (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p.780) that can be identified. From the social constructionist's concept of positioning, I will endeavour to identify the ways in which the women and the abusers position themselves, and how they abuse emotionally (Burr, 1995; Hepburn, 1999; MacLeod, 2002).

The process of analysis is never linear (MacLeod, 2002), but one moves from incident to incident with the same client, and then to other clients, trying to establish links, comparing all the time. The process can be seen as an interpretive analysis with a back-and-forth movement between that which is strange and that which is familiar, as well as between all other dimensions — a movement between description and interpretation, foreground and background, part and whole (TerreBlanche & Durrheim, 1999). Care will have to be taken in utilizing the notes and making interpretations, in that the notes are only my representations or reconstructions against my particular background, or my translation of what the women told me (Charmaz, 2000; Gergen, 2000; Haraway, 2004). I will have to decide between what is meaningful and what is unimportant, what will be omitted or unspoken, what will be taken for granted (Breakwell, 1995; Farran, 1990; Greed, 1990; Reinharz, 1983).

A transcript or representation will always, to a certain extent, be an impoverished record (Banister, et al., 1994; DeVault, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Through the transcription, I want

the reader to hear the same message as I did in hearing the stories originally (MacLeod, 2002). However, it becomes a record of my experience as therapist and I or anyone else may then or later read these testimonies differently (Gorelick, 1996). Cudd (2000) also indicated that, against all possible background assumptions, it is not possible for the researcher or all her peers to recognize all possible assumptions.

There are both advantages and disadvantage of doing the interpretations while occupying an insider position. I will be in a better place to achieve empathic understanding or *Verstehen* than most others. I might also be unaware of some hidden relations of oppression or some contradictions however, because I have not yet found some intellectual distance (Gorelick, 1996). Some experiences may be so familiar that they are difficult to see with a fresh eye (Scott, 1995). But as the units I choose have a profound effect on the results (Stiehm, 2003), I trust that at least the most important themes will at some stage or another be picked up on.

Constructing cases of emotional abuse

I will search all files selected for case studies that will illustrate most of the themes, patterns, and processes identified. The main objective is to illustrate and explain (Stake, 2000), and not to generalize to others (Mouton, 1988). Although I will make use of cases this is not in the true sense in-depth case studies (Creswell, 1998), and therefore generalizations are not possible (Stake, 2000). I will, however, identify and describe themes found in all the other cases by incidents and anecdotes from these cases (and from other data sources) (Breakwell, 1995b). One of the advantages of using case studies – even only partial case studies – is the experiential knowledge gained by the reader. By this transference of ideas and thoughts the reader is assisted in constructing or re-constructing her own knowledge of the phenomenon (Stake, 2000).

Susan Condor (1997) speaks of enlisting the other when the researcher/author grants the participant's voice the space to give testimony. Although I hope to give voice to the multiple of silent voices, I realize that one can never stand completely innocent and dispassionate in deciding which voices I will allow to speak and which will remain silent (Gorelick, 1996; Stake, 2000). As Kenneth Gergen points out, the meaning of text is the author's meaning (2000).

As I work with information obtained from the files of female clients who I saw in my practice, the stories I will represent are neither verbatim scripts, nor video or tape recordings. Rather, they could be considered as narratives. “A narrative is always a story about the past and not the past itself” (Carolyn Ellis in Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p.745), and the aim is to have the stories speak for themselves. I will thus not be representing the actual experiences of the clients, but their reconstructed memories (Shields, 1992), and therefore a reconstruction of a reconstruction. In this regard, I will not use data to prove the stories true or false (Gergen, 2001).

One of the advantages of using case studies – although only partial case studies – is the experiential knowledge gained by the reader. By this transference of ideas and thoughts the reader is assisted in constructing or re-constructing her own knowledge base (Stake, 2000).

Writing up the research findings

In writing the research findings I will concentrate on discussing and illustrating the key themes with direct quotes, anecdotes, the applicable literature and my own thinking (Breakwell, 1995b; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). The use of direct quotes from the case material will enable me to illustrate the meanings, leading the reader to an understanding of how the women reconstructed their experiences of emotional abuse in their relationships (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). The goal is to place these within a relevant ecology of relational patterns and behaviours, and to pay attention to the way in which the abuse and the abused use or misuse their position to their advantage (or not).

Research can be seen as a different kind of relationship or a conversation. Therefore, in writing the final text I will aim to adhere to this principle and will aim towards stimulating further conversation and thought. Deconstruction is never complete (MacLeod, 2002). Carpenter (1999) rhetorically asks if her changing thought as she continues her further reading and research will create a problem of validity. She answers this challenge herself in the negative, and in writing up the research findings, I hold fast to her words:

Different and contradictory truths can be told from my data. I merely told one ‘truth’. No other researcher would have worked in the way I worked, would have asked the questions I asked, read the material I read ... No other researcher has the history I

have ... no one else has lived my life and takes my 'baggage' to the analysis. My ratiocination is unique, it encompasses my truth alone, my subjectivity (Carpenter, 1999, p.20).

Writing up the research report also creates some conflict of interest. I will now have to assume the power position of having to define and label the women's experiences from a position that does not easily fit with wanting to equalize positions between the researcher and the researched (Acker et al., 1996). But in reflecting, as in using my own self-awareness as comparison when questioning, relating, and experiencing I will presume some sort of temporary objectification in order to maintain as much as possible this position of equality.

Openness and Reflexivity

The question often arises whether results obtained through the qualitative method and within the openness of principles such as those utilized in feminist standpoint research can be seen as valid and objective. If the traditional codes of standardization and replicability (Banister, et al., 1994) are not utilized and accepted, if there is adherence to a variety of truths (Lengerman & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004), and if it is not necessary to generalize from the particular (the experience), wherein lies the validity?

In trying to establish truth, it is of the essence to take into consideration that all I see and think I see as a researcher in this project are influenced by my values. I cannot separate the facts from my values, and no results can therefore be value-free (Bernard, 2000; Burr, 1995; Code, 1993, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b; DuBois, 1983; Gergen, 2000; Kahn & Yoder, 1992; Moulton, 2003; Ravn, 1991; Ricketts, 1989). Mary Gergen (2001, p.23) states that "there is no value-free or unbiased manner in which to report on the nature of the world. What is important is to acknowledge one's standpoint, to declare it, and to respect its centrality in the formation of one's views". Validity and objectivity, therefore, lies in the openness of my standpoint and frame of reference. The reader then has the opportunity to decide for herself where she stands.

Both feminist standpoint and social constructionism consider the knower to be situated within a social hierarchy. The knowledge reflected by the knower cannot be anything else than to a lesser or greater extent influenced by the situatedness of the knower (Code, 2000; Crawford & Marecek, 1989). It is precisely because of the incorporation of the knower in her totality into the

research project, however, that these so-called biases are turned into resources (Oleson 1994). Feminist epistemology finds validity in the researcher's use of methodology, her relationship to the data, and the contextual validity reached (Acker et al., 1996; Banister et al., 1994; Hubbard, 2003).

All information elicited from participants is taken as a valid product of the social context wherein they function (Burr, 1995; DuBois, 1983; Hollway, 1982; Silverman, 2000). Some feminist scholars argue for the attainment of validity by opening up all interpretations to the subject for criticism. As a therapist I find this view difficult to deal with. For example, when a woman describes experiences of emotional abuse, I will label it as such if the client cannot do so on her own. At other times, however, there are some issues in a client's story that I, as the therapist need to leave be until the client can face up to her own truth. Handing over my research findings will place me in a moral predicament, as I fear to violate the client's reality (Acker et al., 1991). I will be hesitant to share all findings with a client who will not gain from the experiences. I will be hesitant to use the client towards bettering my research results (Carpenter, 1999). Facts can be changed, but an interpretation remains just an opinion – open to question at any stage, so why violate the client? The adequacy of interpretation must be tested by returning to theory (Acker et al., 1983).

Does this then render the traditional goal of objectivity obsolete? For post-modernists it does (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). Peplau and Conrad (1989) argue that science can never be fully objective. Marecek (1989) and Burr (1995) believe that objectivity is an impossible goal when working from the principle of individual experience bringing knowledge.

Far removed from the positivist's notion of objectivity, Harding (1998, p.19) even argues for "stronger objectivity". She states that when those from the dominant structure observe and theorize, they will overlook and not observe relevant issues. In order to bring these invisible issues in the clear, input is needed from the experiences of women. She reasons that "starting thought from women's lives" (Harding, 1998, p.17) will increase objectivity. She further qualifies that the starting thought should not come from any woman's experience. Rather, the starting thought should come from the life and experiences of someone able to recognize and reflect on the nature of oppression as experienced, giving a less distorted interpretation of reality than others (Cudd, 2000). If I therefore agree with the concept that every standpoint is a "critically and theoretically constructed discursive position" (Harding, 1998, p.17), nothing more and

nothing less, there is no need to endlessly debate objectivity and truth. Knowledge can then be utilized, understanding it to be neither universal nor relative, but always partial and responsible, embodied in agents of knowledge that are constantly moving between a diversity of narratives (Mies, 1983; Selgas, 2004; Haraway, 2004).

I therefore find it unnecessary to assert for either objectivity or no objectivity. The value of the results does not lie in finding *the* truth, but in finding *a* truth about these particular women and the processes within which they are operating as well as the systems of which they are part. This will be enough until new data immediately or after some time bring new information leading to a fresh view on this truth. What are expected from the researcher are constant reflexivity and an ethical stance.

Research is a growth experience, but in doing research I also position myself as a knowledge-maker. I therefore have to constantly question my own perceptions and challenge my own self by continuously reflecting upon my approach, my view of the truth, and knowledge and the influence thereof on the results (Banister, et al., 1994; Burr, 1995; Greed, 1990; Olesen, 2000). Thus, through being self-critical, I illustrate a personal investment in the research (Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Spears, 1997). This is all the more true because of my insider position, being both researcher and participant in the meaning making process (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Reflexivity becomes a re-evaluation and a re-validating of shared experiences and leads to a deeper understanding (Williams, 1990).

Reflexivity, meaning constant reflection on one's own positioning, or the "bending back on itself" (Steier, 1991b, p.2), or being conscious of ourselves as we see ourselves in social constructionist terms, also implies that I will take care in not privileging my own reading above that of the researched (Burr, 1995). The ideal will be openness to the multiple voices and standpoints of participants (Gergen & Gergen, 2000), and reflection on the power inequality within the research process is needed (MacLeod, 2002). Reflection also implies, however, that I will grow and will be changed by the process of research (Gergen, 2000; Gergen, 2001). I therefore need to be ready to be part of the process and not part of the problem by, for example, using the unequal power situation to my advantage (Spears, 1997). My experience is not unquestionable but a source of critical reflection (Stone-Mediatore, 2000). Solutions can only be generated by responsible reflexivity, tempered by feminist values and theory. MacLeod (2002) calls the focus back to this inherently political goal of reflexivity. As a researcher, one

has to value both one's own view and that of the researched as only the starting point of a new discussion, and to aim for what Kenneth Gergen (1994, p.414) calls "an invitation to reflexivity".

But the process of reflexivity and sharing my own path can be scary, as I am confronted with seeing myself through the eyes of others (Ibáñez, 1997). My willingness to reflexivity can be met with bland invulnerability (Stanley & Wise, 1993). Aiming to find meaning in the research, I therefore also need to practice reflexivity. Social constructionists find reflexivity of importance as they maintain that meaning is produced by the process of reflexivity (Durrheim, 1997).

Ethics

The researcher has to take responsibility for every aspect of the research project (Acker et al., 1983; Gorelick, 1996). She is accountable to three main audiences (Marshall, 1986). There is her responsibility towards the research community to bring fresh views and understanding. In feminist research, this will also imply a political influence because of the need to utilize research findings in the struggle against any kind of oppression in women's lives. There is also a responsibility towards my own development as a researcher and therapist, and then there is the particularly important responsibility towards the participants.

Responsibility towards the participant can bring ethical conflict (Christians, 2000; Oleson, 1994; Wise, 1990b). I have already discussed the moral conflict experienced in deciding whether to share my interpretations of her story with a particular client. Acker et al. (1996) shares my resistance to sharing interpretations with those who can find it upsetting. The dignity and welfare of the participants are at the forefront in any decision making (Cone & Foster, 1993). On the other hand, Walsh (1989) stands critical of the fact that researchers often do not actively include participants, and biting refers to researchers who relegate participants to merely a source of data.

Furthermore, obtaining data from the files of previous and current clients places me with a moral dilemma. There is no way in which consent can be obtained from previous clients. In her auto-ethnographical writing, Carolyn Ellis advises the researcher to construct scenes and dialogues from the notes taken and to collapse events so as to protect the participants (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). I will follow her advice as well as the recommended directions of the American Psychological Association for Dispensing with Informed Consent when using archival

information (Cone & Foster, 1993). Another option is to change all identifiable information about the client. The main issue for concern needs to be anonymity (Christians, 2000), rather than confidentiality (Barret, 1995; Cone & Foster, 1993). Anonymity is defined as “any condition in which one’s identity is unknown to others”, in contrast to confidentiality having “the characteristic of being kept secret, an intimacy of knowledge, shared by a few who do not divulge it to others” (Banister et al., 1994, p.156). Some researchers make use of misinformation regarding, for example, sex, and ages of children.

I will therefore take care that anonymity is ensured by changing the names, location, and time frames in which a client places an incident, presumably in such a manner as to convey the true meaning of the incident without giving identifiable information. Wise (1987) describes working towards an acceptable risk, ensuring that the participants will not be recognizable to their next door neighbours. Should it then be possible to identify a participant, I do believe that those people were already in the participant’s confidence.

Stacey (1996) states that the greater intimacy and the apparent mutuality of the relationship between researcher and researched can be dangerous to participants in a qualitative study. Believing this to be true I decided to adhere to my primary role of therapist when faced with situations where the researcher in me needed to, for example, delve deeper for more information and the therapist realized a different strategy was necessary for the client. Society still attributes an unequal amount of power to the role of the therapist. As the clients come from abusive situations, their possible sensitivity to oppression and my slight upper hand as a therapist might not be a safe situation to overstep any boundary whatsoever. Although I believe that woman-to-woman sharing is acceptable when following feminist guidelines for psychotherapy, I decided to share on a personal level only in the odd moment with the rarest of woman while busy with the research project.

Conclusion

In the first part of the dissertation you heard the voice of the researcher. I communicated where my interest in emotional abuse started and the further development thereof. I shared the reasons for the research as well as the intended aims of the project. As I believe that the voice of the researcher, her philosophy of being, will be heard throughout the research, I positioned myself and the wholeness of my intellectual and emotional development within my

writing. I will be working within feminist standpoint theory, but will also divert into social constructionism wherever the need arises and whenever I think it suits the means.

There is no particular feminist method and the feminist researcher is relatively uninhibited in her choice of method. I believe that qualitative methods will suit my purpose better when I work towards finding meaning and understanding. For this reason, no hypotheses are formulated. Furthermore, I have shown the reasons why working within a feminist framework makes issues of researcher bias, validity and objectivity irrelevant, but also how ethical issues can bring role-conflict. Qualitative work using the personal therapy notes of a number of women while elaborating on some of the semi-case studies is time consuming, and yet there is no other way. It is also impossible to attend to all the issues relevant to the specific subject of emotional abuse in close relationships.

In the end I will have to decide if the work I have done was worthwhile. Were the voices of women adequately and accurately portrayed? I will have to decide whether, in any way, value was added to our understanding of women in emotionally abusive relationships and how people do abuse. I will have to answer how this knowledge is applicable to change in the lives of women in whatever small way. In this I believe that the voices of the women must be heard first, and then the dialogue will hopefully begin.
