

## **PART III: RECONSTRUCTING THE ABUSE**

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### **CHAPTER 6: THE FAMILY OF ORIGIN**

*One individual can succeed in destroying another by a process of emotional abuse  
... a virtual murder of the soul ...  
Hirigoyen (2000)*

In chapters 1 and 4 I set myself the goal of answering to a number of research questions. One was giving voice to the stories that women tell about their experiences in emotionally abusive relationships. It is easy, however, to hear for example whining and nagging if one does not know the context of the incident, or if one cannot experience the emotional tone of the relationship. I therefore need to situate these incidents of emotional abuse within a historical, societal, and cultural context.

Feminist Standpoint Theory finds capitalism and patriarchy to construct women, their self, and their experiences as subordinate under patriarchal oppression (Harding, 1993, 2004a; Hartsock, 2004; Narayan & Harding, 2000). Although I knew this to be the case, I was still amazed when, within the first few sentences, the women positioned themselves as coming from families that were described as traditional, Afrikaans, conservative, authoritarian, extremely strict, and religious.

Minette (See case study on p.66): ... she comes from a traditional Afrikaans urban family. Her father is a retired lawyer and her mother has always been a housewife. She describes the father as a man of principles, strict, conservative, and authoritarian, whereas her mother plays the supportive nurturing role.

Elaine (See case study on p.84): My father ... came from a religious family with more than one brother and uncle being in the ministry. My dad himself was an exceptionally religious and intellectual man ... my mom is from an extended, rural Afrikaans family ... extremely conservative in their outlook on life.

Berna (See case study on p.101): ...born in a small rural town in the North West Province where her father was the local pastor and her mother a teacher ... He was extremely strict

and conservative in his outlook ... relates the exuberance of tasting some of the freedom ... as something so different from the conservative enclaves of our town.

What I heard and am still hearing from women in emotionally abusive relationships is that there is a tendency for the family of origin to be structured in a specific manner. The description of the family of origin fits what I call the *Traditional Afrikaans Family*. If one accepts that historical and societal placement does impact on a person, then the similarities between the traditional, conservative, and Afrikaans family and patriarchy, and the impact on women need to be considered. Although I did touch on feminist views on patriarchy in chapter 2, I now turn to the historical development of the patriarchal system and the practical implications thereof. I will then discuss the way in which the family of origin informs the positioning of both the emotionally abusive man and the woman caught up in such a relationship.

### **Practical Patriarchy**

*There is a good principle, which has created order, light, and man; and a bad principle  
which has created chaos, darkness, and woman*  
Pythagoras

Patriarchy is an ideology, an intricate web of beliefs about reality and social life (Chang, 1996; Stanley & Wise, 1983). It is a set of views that supposedly reports the facts, gives a value judgment about what is naturally true, and which is institutionalized as public knowledge, structures for social institutions, and rules according to which people live these truths about themselves (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004). Patriarchy, as an ideology, therefore structures the lives of women and men according to a number of beliefs and truths (Scheman, 2003).

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) argued that men are superior and by nature the rulers of women (Chang, 1996; Lengerman & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004; Millet, 2000; Spelman, 2003). His views in effect describe social practices in the then Greece and Greek philosophy (Lange, 2003). He chose to see women as biologically inferior and rationally not fully developed. Men were identified with activity and higher elements, women with matter, passivity and the lower elements (Allen, 1997). Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) depicted women as useful possessions, predestined for

service, their sole function being to please men (Clack & Whitcomb, 1997; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Hutchings, 1988; Matlin, 1987).

As such, St Augustine is quoted to say, “woman ought to serve her husband as unto God, affirming that in no thing hath woman equal power with man” (Dobash & Dobash, 1980, p.33). Philo, a Jewish philosopher in the first century after Christ, found grounds for his view on women in the Torah (Allen, 1997). His focus was on womanly obedience in her role as home-maker, whereas men were active and rational in their involvement with the affairs of state. Even the Calvinist John Knox, quoting from the Bible, states the irrefutable inferiority of women (Dobash & Dobash, 1980). In an article by Hurtado (2000), she illustrates how, in male-dominant cultures, women are still dichotomized as good women and bad women depending on how they exercise their sexuality, but being a good woman also means a loyal devotion to and nurturance of the family. Disobedience will bring punishment, with little or no accountability. But there are other cultures where society is depicted as unisex. In the Pacific Island of Bali, for example, the productive and domestic roles are performed by both genders (Geertz, 1973).

Patriarchy as a masculine-dominant ideology is a system of social relations in which the male has the social power to exploit and control the female, and expects women to be subservient and obedient (Chang, 1996; Dickson, 2003; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Ferguson, 1991; French, 1995; Greene & Bogo, 2002; Kelly-Gadol, 1987; Scheman, 2003; Schutte, 2000). The surrounding culture and society position women as dutiful and supportive, compliant and respectful on all levels towards authority, men in general and in particular towards their husbands. I will therefore examine the ways in which power, control, and dominance is transferred onto the specific male agent, and the ways in which obedience is played out in the lives of emotionally-abused women.

Collins (1991) explains the transference of ideological beliefs into behaviour in terms of the utilization of the organizational power position. Those in a position to give the orders as well as the order-takers are determined by the historical, cultural and societal order that influence their behaviour in various settings. This is a circular movement with the implication that the more one gives orders, the more one identifies with the position and vice versa.

In the same manner, Dickson (2003) describes the dynamics of domination (mostly referring to dominant cultures) and how the system of patriarchal control permeates society. Domination and control firstly need a dominant group and a lower group that can be dominated (Dickson, 2003; Dutton, 1992). It furthermore is necessary for the dominant group to assume superiority, because it is supposedly God-given or part of the hierarchical, patriarchal ideology (Millet, 2000). The dominant group infers the inferiority of the lower group, and stays in power by superimposing ideas and behaviour on the lower group, thus effectively objectifying and muting them (Burstow, 1992). This is achieved by means of overt or covert aggression and always by a dominant group who is able to find justification for their beliefs and behaviour.

The man's construction of the self in his early differentiation from the mother will program him towards hostility and a combative dualism in his sense of masculinity (Chang, 1996; French, 1995; Hartsock, 2004). He needs to escape the female world of the household and does this by opposition, but as he also needs the female, he can only relate to females by domination. Needing to be self-sufficient and individualistic he experiences fusion as a violent threat (Gilligan, 1982; Hartsock, 2004). The control and dominance, the aggression and hostility will later become apparent as it shows itself in the abusive relationship.

I therefore construe that a society that adheres to the beliefs and customs of patriarchy legitimizes the abuse of women. Patriarchy in South Africa as such depicts a society where most races display extremely high levels of domestic violence despite a political endorsement of gender equality and the rights of women and men (Sideris, 2005). On the other hand, patriarchy cannot be taken as the only factor as patriarchy in different cultures will differ from one another. Dutton (1996) refers to the studies of Sorenson and Telles (1991) and Davis (1992), which found that wife assault rated by a Mexican-born Hispanic sample were less than half of that for a sample of non-Hispanic whites although Hispanic cultures are generally considered to be more patriarchal than the white American culture. But, then again this could be because women in the Hispanic family, different from their position in open society, occupy a dominant position (Burgos-Ocasio, 2000).

## The Traditional Afrikaans Family

Traditional implies to be in accordance with the tradition, i.e. beliefs and practices handed down from generation to generation. These beliefs and practices are described as the time-honoured, the conventional, and that which falls within the accepted and well established norms (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000; Geddie, 1968; Wordnet, 2003). Conservative, in effect, means favouring the traditional views and values and usually implies someone averse to change or innovation; actively opposing change (i.e. someone who conserves the traditions). It is often taken to mean a people, or an individual, who believe that they have the power and responsibility to conserve what they believe in and that change is an anomaly to traditional values. Those seen as conservative are often described as “unimaginatively conventional” and having a “bourgeois mentality” (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000; Wordnet, 2003 – quotes taken from the cited references on the World Wide Web).

When taken to the extreme both these concepts describe individuals who, with difficulty if ever, accept or adapt to change. These are the individuals who need their views, values, beliefs and customs to be adhered to as they believe them to be the only, the best, and the truth. Although therefore not applicable to all traditional individuals, the negativity thereof fits in with what is stereotypically believed about the traditional Afrikaner family.

Ever since a Cape-born Dutchman first uttered the words, “*k ben een Africaander*” (I am an *Afrikaner/African*), during the 1707 uprising of local farmers against the then governor of the Cape Colony, Willem Adriaan van der Stel, Afrikaner culture has been characterized by protestant Christianity and conservatism. Traditionally the *Afrikaner* holds firm to what they see as biblical truths and instructions (Kotze, 1968). For example, the belief that the man is the head of the family as in;

1 Peter 3:1

<sup>1</sup>..In the same manner, you wives must accept the authority of your husband ...

Ephesians 5: 22-24

<sup>22</sup>You wives will submit to your husbands as you do to the Lord. <sup>23</sup>For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of his body, the church ... <sup>24</sup>As the church submits to Christ, so you wives must submit to your husbands in everything.

Scripture quotations taken from: Spiritual Renewal Bible (1998), Tyndale House Version.

This truth structures women and men's familial and social lives; especially so in white traditional Afrikaans families. Wordnet (2003), for example, still defines Afrikaans or Afrikaner as belonging or relating to white people.

As in most other patriarchies, the father's word is final. Although he is expected to protect and support his wife (Worell & Remer, 1992), he has the right to discipline anyone who disobeys his wishes (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Walker, 1979; Gerdes et al., 1988; Walker, 1979). So it is that the woman is given away at the altar during marriage (NiCarthy, 1982), taking on her husband's surname, submitting to his will, and nurtures and supports him (Reed, 2000; Van Schalkwyk, 2005). She takes on his social status (Worell & Remer, 1992) and vow to stay subservient "*till death do us part.*" She is expected to set her goal in life primarily as being a good wife and a good mother, and is dependent on her spouse on all levels (Hurtado, 2000).

Historically South Africa's patriarchal culture and society walked two distinguishing paths: that of protestant Christianity and apartheid (Van Zyl Slabbert, 1999). As power and control are imparted to the individual by institutions such as patriarchy and the church (Dobash & Dobash, 1980), it is of the essence to define Afrikaner Christianity as I will later describe the influence thereof in the emotionally abusive relationship. I in no way wish to imply that Afrikaner Christianity is the only institution legitimizing the emotional abuse of women. But, Dobash and Dobash (1980) also highlight the profound influence that Christian principles have and had on the cultural beliefs and social institutions of Western society. Ratliff (2000, p.205) describes the intertwining of the political, social and religious areas of life referring to the notion that "at its not-so-best, religion degenerates into an oppressive rationalization for male supremacy, racial hegemony, and political fanaticism."

Although at present not generally accepted as the societal norm, women of age thirty and above grew up in a society wherein Afrikaner Christianity focused on God's sovereign control and

redemption through the Christian community. Bethel (2005), an internet web page on African Christianity, sees Afrikaner Christianity as working towards a New Jerusalem in South Africa. Afrikaners were seen as an obedient people that fought hard against all hostile forces, trying to prevent these forces from opposing the specific ideal of the chosen people in South Africa (Bethel, 2005). Not only was the sovereignty of God uppermost, but the husband was God's authority in his home. Women's place was equated with Paul's view in the Bible where he wrote to Timothy,

1 Timothy 2:11-15

<sup>11</sup>Women should listen and learn quietly and submissively. <sup>12</sup>I do not let women teach men or have authority over them. Let them listen quietly. <sup>13</sup>For God made Adam first, and afterward he made Eve. <sup>14</sup>And it was the woman, not Adam, who was deceived by Satan, and sin was the result. <sup>15</sup>But women will be saved through childbearing and by continuing to live in faith, love, holiness, and modesty.

Scripture quotation taken from: Spiritual Renewal Bible (1998), Tyndale House Version.

Apart from the religious underpinning of the traditional Afrikaner, the stereotypical Afrikaner is also described as one whose beliefs were grounded in the ideology of apartheid. In a society where political polarization is accepted, independent thought, behaviour and belief is seldom tolerated (Van Zyl Slabbert, 1999). All communities exercise power over their members in order for them to conform to the practices and values of the group. The in-group shares special qualities and privileges (Burstow, 1992) and conformity is enforced by threatening expulsion. As the member's sense of identity lies within the group and expulsion is feared, they face the moral dangers of repression and denial of the true self, dogmatism, intellectual dishonesty, elitism and partialism (Jagger, 2000). The women whose stories I represent in this research grew up within the era of apartheid. I doubt that it would be far off to presume that the narrow-minded acceptance of the man or husband's political ideas had an impact on their family situation. Schutte (2000) supports this view in stating that women's role in masculine-dominant cultures is not seen as questioning or creating cultural values. Rather, she is kept in a submissive and passive role by excluding her from critical decision-making both in the political arena and in the home.

## **Traditional Marriage**

*In olden times sacrifices were made at the altar – a custom which is still continued!  
Helen Rowland (Hewitt & Hewitt, 2003, p.111)*

In discussing the Traditional Afrikaans Family I focused primarily on the traditional, conservative and protestant heritage and important role played by Christianity in establishing the patriarchal ideology in society. The traditional marriage, furthermore, has been described as a major patriarchal institution (Millet, 2000), and I mentioned above the manner in which many prominent philosophers and religious leaders depicted women in a subordinate position, especially when it came to marriage (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Worell & Remer, 1992). In Western civilization the natural pairing of couples and their cohabitation were legalized through the monogamous marriage. The state wrote the ideology and principles of patriarchy into the law books thus perpetuating the ideology still further (Reed, 2000).

Upon this sanctification of marriage by religious and legal institutions followed the belief that women were specifically raised and trained to fulfil the isolated role of homemaker (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Worell & Remer, 1992). Church as well as state believed in the right of men to dominate and control their wives, and saw this relationship as natural and sacred (Bonvillain, 1995; Okin, 2000). One reason for a man's marriage to a specific woman was to provide him with exclusive rights to her sexual favours, in order to keep the bloodline pure (Collins, 2000; Hurtado, 1989) (- "Thou shalt not adulterate" – compare Exodus 20:14). This explains the dominant man's sometimes inordinate jealousy as well as the pre-occupation with the wife having to be the good woman. Obedience by those naturally inferior was seen as a virtue (Allen, 1997) and should a woman find this order or system unacceptable or stifling, her struggle was construed as "wrong, immoral, and a violation of the respect and loyalty a wife is supposed to give to her husband" (Dobash & Dobash, 1980, p.ix). Marriage thus was burdened with more myths and moral prejudices than modern society would care to acknowledge. I believe that patriarchal myths and the legalisation of patriarchal principles have had a direct impact on the phenomenon of emotional abuse.



Minette, for example, contemplates divorce, but immediately checks herself,

No, I believe divorce is a sin in the eyes of God. This is not how God intended it to be. Maybe I should be more submissive, more supportive of Ian. The Bible does tell us that the husband is the head of the house, and I am not supposed to question that.

The Industrial Revolution further cemented these concepts of family life, much of it relevant even today. Roles and responsibilities are decided according to sex/gender stereotyping. The man is expected to move out into the public sphere of work, separating himself from the domestic sphere where women take on the primary responsibility. Men hold traditional beliefs about women staying at home and taking care of the children and their home (Collins, 2000; Hare-Mustin, 1992; Worell & Remer, 1992). The husband's stereotypical role is one of assuming authority in family decisions (Brannon, 2002; Poling, 1996). His commitment becomes one of financial responsibility, and his goal is to earn enough money to take care of housing, food and clothing (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Friday, 1998). He has to support and defend the private but then also feminized space that their wife and family occupy (Collins, 2000). Thus was born the good provider definition of masculinity.

The wife makes decisions about housework and child-care and is seldom allowed to seek outside employment (Friday, 1998; Matlin, 1987; Worell & Remer, 1992). She is bombarded by society's idea that children will suffer developmental problems if not cared for on a full-time basis by the mother (Dobash & Dobash, 1980). Society proclaims the true woman, and her virtues are held as piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity (Carlson, 1990). Dutifully remaining in the marriage and behaving as a good woman should, she is rewarded by her husband's support and social status (Collins, 2000; Hurtado, 2000; Worell & Remer, 1992). The wife falls into the trap of measuring her worth against how well she performs as a wife and mother, and by not questioning patriarchal society's authority (Brannon, 2002; Poling, 1996; Schutte, 2000). She falls into dutiful obedience and subservience as she has few alternatives to marriage, and because she has been programmed to believe this way to be the only acceptable way (Horley, 2002). As Karen says, "I am not allowed to oppose him or disagree with him. If I differ from him in anything, there will be trouble". Asking her what she usually does in such situations, she says, "I cry and beg his forgiveness." Asking her about her views on obedience she says,

Of course men expect you to listen. In his eyes a woman is always wrong and he proves it by stating that The Bible tells us to be submissive and listen to our husbands. He never ever wants to hear that he might be wrong.

Taking patriarchal sovereignty in the family as the norm when it comes to traditional, conservative families, the stereotypical role played by both father and mother impacts on the way in which both the emotionally abusive man and the woman in such a relationship position themselves. I therefore turn to a discussion of the family of origin and the role that the family play in pre-determining the woman's behaviour in close relationships.

## **The Traditional Family**

The traditional patriarchal family socializes many patterns into taken-for-granted societal systems. For example, it lays the foundation for many hierarchical organizational patterns (Hare-Mustin, 1992), and dictates hierarchy in race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nation, and social class. The model of parental control through seniority and dependent children is assumed to be the only model (Collins, 2000). As the father's role has the major power to impact on all those in his family, I will start with the impact thereof on specifically his daughter. Whatever the father's role, it is in totality underscored by a patriarchal society. Whatever the father does and says do not stand on its own but is given credence by the power bestowed on him through all the patriarchal institutions under which he and his daughter function (Gee, 1999). The rule of the father never stands on its own; its power lies within the culture and society.

### ***The patriarchal father***

Chesler (1972, p.108) saw both marriage and psychotherapy as "re-enactments of a little girl's relation to her father in patriarchal society". Also Greenspan (1983) takes the positioning of the traditional male therapist in the therapeutic relationship as a metaphor for explaining the father's position in relation to his daughter. She states that within patriarchal society Father knows best and thus has the right to define the other's reality and the right to name the problem, always done from the male perspective. Culture, psychology, and even biology give fathers special powers in the eyes of their children's.

Christianity calls God the Father, while other religions and cultural traditions such as Judaism or Islam, also heavily support the status of the father (Bonvillain, 1995; Millet, 2000). Because of his dominant position, the father in the traditional household has the power to create in us belief in the lie of patriarchal society; the belief that all things masculine are better and of greater value than things feminine (Collier, 1982; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Greenspan, 1983). Some people strongly object to Christian values depicted as strictly male oriented. But Peggy Sanday (1981) shows how stories of creation encapsulate something as basic as cultural beliefs when applied to gender status. In societies characterized by egalitarian gender relations the creator tends to be female or a female-male pair. Male-dominated societies see their creator as either male or animal.

Camilla (See Appendix A: All Cases): There was only one way to make a bed and that was dad's way. The table had to be set precisely as he wanted to, and please, no listening to our music as that was called rubbish! If you forgot to pick up the dog's droppings he threatened to shoot your dog.

Father has the authority to make the rules, from *clean your room and be respectful* to *don't do drugs* (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Gerdes et al., 1988), and the authority to decide what is acceptable behaviour for girls (Greenspan, 1983). He has the supreme power to permit and forbid according to his rule (Hare-Mustin, 1992; Walker, 1979). He rules by example, and in our mind creates the way things are, which we come to believe in when still small and dependent children (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Walker, 1979). People tend to stick to rules long after the rules no longer apply. The rules then serve as introjects which continue to dominate their behaviour (Collier, 1982). It often is the highly successful and socially powerful men who make the greatest demands on their daughters (and wives) for compliance. They consider themselves to be of high importance and carry over their social and professional dominance into family life. In the upper class, the father's iron rule is clothed in the benevolence of material affluence (Carter, 1988a).

A client handed me a letter written by a father to his two adolescent daughters. He justified his demands and never once negotiated or checked to see where they stood with regard to his rulings.

I daily find myself in other people's household and I have no doubt in my mind as to the responsibilities and obligations of both children and parents in a family. I therefore want you to rectify and pay attention to the following:

- No friends may visit for longer than half an hour
- No one may smoke without obtaining permission from me first
- On week-ends you may only invite friends if your schoolwork is up to date
- Sunday is a day for the family and you may not go out or invite friends
- The use of the telephone is a privilege and not a right, and you will keep record of all the calls made
- No pocket money will be increased because when a child receives too much pocket money, the child will usually:
  - Want to be out on the streets every night
  - Demand more money without doing something in return
  - Not be willing to do chores when asked
  - Do nothing to earn more pocket money
  - Start smoking

Barnett and LaViolette (1993) also refer to the way in which one's father can determine one's views on femininity. Through interaction with the father, girls learn that anger is not acceptable but that indirect coyness might do the trick (Carter, 1988; Greenspan, 1983). Conformity is rewarded, deviance is punished (Chafetz, 1991), and she learns that it is risky to strike back because disdain or rejection can follow. Girls may therefore lose their authentic self (Pipher, 1995) or lose their voice (Muuss, 1996). A traditional and conservative or a traditional Afrikaner father thus informs stereotypical, sex-appropriate behaviour that reflects patriarchal beliefs and truths about women (Matlin, 1987). Even if the father labels being feminine in the negative sense, this is the truth she will grow up with. Although the daughter might want to be independent, she spends a great deal of energy in trying to win the father's approval, realizing that her worth is determined by men (Carter, 1988; Collier, 1982).

Elaine (See Case study on p.84): I think it's a woman thing. Cultural indoctrination I will call it. We live in a culture dominated by men's ideas. Since day one you are taught how to behave as a girl, especially with regards to your man. Our culture says, "Stick to your

man,” and we do. We’re trained to please, trained to be the least – always to take the second position when it comes to men.

The father also shapes the young woman’s vision of what masculinity is all about. In his position of Father knows best he matches the cultural stereotype of rational, omniscient, powerful masculinity, and he teaches his girl-child what to expect from her male counterparts being either the superhero or the arch-villain (Greenspan, 1983). Masculinity in western culture means to be self-made, self-defined and self-referential (French, 1995), and the girl comes to see it as natural to be reliant on an authoritarian, powerful male figure (Greenspan, 1983). His authoritarianism is excused by society on the grounds that he is very important, very busy, and thus deserving of accommodation by others (Carter, 1988). Daughters of any social class who grow up in families where fathers are physically or emotionally absent for whatever reason, often develop negative and condescending attitudes toward men and shift their energies toward more rewarding family relationships with their mothers or siblings, or they develop a fantasized ideal man forever yearned for and sought after (Friday, 1998; Kaplan, 1988).

Nan (See Appendix A: All Cases): I see a lot of my dad in my husband. My dad was a strong and domineering man. I really admired my dad; he made me feel secure, but my mom was his slave.

Elaine: I idolized my dad.

Hedwig (See Appendix A: All Cases): He was a hardworking farmer, driven and self-motivated. He was an aggressively impatient man.

Beatrice (See Appendix A): He was always criticizing and downing my mother, teaching us what to expect.

### ***The mother in the patriarchal household***

*You who come of a younger and happier generation may not have heard of her – you may not know what I mean by The Angel in the House. I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draft she sat in it – in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others.*  
Virginia Woolf, *Professions for Women*

Western society defines women through their capacity to form intimate relationships with men and if she does not do so, she is seen as damaged in some way (Ellis & Murphy, 1994). This is the script she is expected to adhere to. The works of Uri Bronfenbrenner (1979) showed the extent to which role expectations and stereotyping go hand in hand with the expectations having its roots in the higher-order macro-system ideology and institutions. It is concluded that the longer a child, and therefore the later adult, is exposed to the expectations and social pressures of a specific society, the more the child will resemble the model (Shouval, Kav-Venaki, Bronfenbrenner, Devereux & Kiely, 1975). Women (and therefore mothers) are no exception (Matlin, 1987). They are constructed by social, historical and cultural environment since early childhood, and they have internalized the oppression of women by a patriarchal ideology. Women are the lesser in the relationship and are the nurturers in the patriarchal society.

Just as men are socialized to take command and believe that they have the right to authority, women are socialized into accepting this command as natural (Collier, 1982; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Reed, 2000; Walker, 1979). Roles have magic-like power to alter how a person is treated, how she acts, what she does, and even what she thinks and feel (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Muuss, 1996). Women's dutiful acceptance of male authority has come to be accepted as proof of her dependent nature, a finding which I personally object to. I will discuss the issue further in the way that the woman positions herself within the abusive relationship.

A woman often starts out by genuinely caring for husband and family and expressing her nurturing role as prescribed by the cultural scripts. However, should the husband be cold and distant, or should he himself be emotionally abusive in the relationship towards her, she suffers an emotional famine (Greenspan, 1983). Being starved for emotional affection, this woman cannot find the inner love and affection to nurture her children. The daughter seeks nurturance from the powerful father in her life, an emotional nurturance she does not experience from an

apparently weak mother (Greenspan, 1983). But this can become a never-ending spiral as men in western society generally do not learn to nurture, or as an abusive man himself he will not give as needed. The mother, the daughter and later the woman feel frustrated, deprived, and angry. But angry women are not acceptable to society. So the woman sees denial as her only option, and the anger is repressed into compulsive care-taking (Hemfelt, Minirth & Meier, 1989). The previously caring behaviour that was motivated through feelings of affiliation and connectedness now becomes an obligation often coloured by bitterness (Dickson, 2003).

Elaine: All I can remember (of her mother) was that during this time she used to physically lash out at me for whatever reason. We were constantly at each other's throats.

Gerda (See Appendix A): My dad used to constantly criticize my mother, but she never said anything back. Her unselfishness I cannot describe to you.

Hedwig: As a child I saw my mom as friendly and gentle. She was the best at taking care of us. Later I realized that emotionally she was absent.

The mother dominated by a patriarchal ideology, as many women before her, cannot purposively set personal goals and strive to attain these. Her life course and daily time schedules are determined by the agendas of her husband, her wifely duties, and her children (Collier, 1982; Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004). The husband's social independence changes minimally in marriage, but the wife's social life is curtailed by her involvement in her role as wife and mother (Dobash & Dobash, 1980). She believes that the only way to be a real woman is by assuming the role of wife and mother (Worell & Remer, 1992). Reed (2000, p.506) hits home by saying of women's place in the family, "Only three justifications for their existence remain under this system: as breeders, as household janitors, and as buyers of consumer goods for the family".

Elaine: Women work harder at relationships. They are all self-sacrificing – the Bible says so and therefore it's the right thing to do. I amaze myself; even now in this new relationship I find myself packing him lunch. That's what my mother used to do. I never thought I would be that way.

There is a subtle difference in the content of what mothers had previously taught, and some still do teach their daughters, and that which they teach their sons (Walters, 1988). The mother assigns her son household tasks but involve her daughters centrally in the every-day aspects of family life. Hereby she defines her role as intra-familial and that of her children as scripted according to the dominant ideology and stereotypical gender behaviour patterns (Kaplan, 1988). The mother's womanly duties range from household and housekeeping tasks, and she takes responsibility for care-taking activities such as assisting, serving, trying to please, and winning approval. She dutifully attends to vacations and social gatherings, buying clothes and maintaining appearances (Chang, 1996; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Ferguson, 1991; Gilligan, 1982; Papp, 1988). Patriarchal society expects the mother to teach her daughter how to be a wife and a mother and the son how to be a man (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993).

The mother in the patriarchal family is responsive, but this does not imply an active role in decision-making and egalitarianism. She has made it her task to be oriented towards the needs of the rest of her family, monitoring, co-ordinating, facilitating and moderating the wishes, needs, and time schedules of those around her. She is nice and tries to keep everyone happy, thus perpetuating the disease of pleasing (Chang, 1996). Everything works better because of mother being there right in the middle of everything and ready to take care. But some mothers find themselves locked into a place, influenced by powers from which they see no escape, more used by others than helping others (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004).

## Conclusion

In this chapter I reflected upon the phenomenon of emotional abuse as it is embedded within a specific ecology. My research and the specific environment surrounding the couples playing out emotional abuse in the close relationships can be seen as temporally, culturally and socially specific. This concurs with feminist research which confirms the importance of culture and context in violence against women (Boonzaier, 2004). Patriarchal society and therefore the institutions of patriarchy, such as church, marriage and family life, construct the way in which women and men position themselves within the emotionally abusive relationship.

Patricia Hill Collins, in her article, *It's all in the family: intersections of gender, race, and nation* (2000) argues that family values and other principles attributed to the family (seen as the traditional patriarchal family) are used as political instruments to affirm the naturalness of



government structures and social organization. The traditional family ideal with the father-head, and the good wife-mother with a strict division of labour is depicted: a state-sanctioned, heterosexual marriage that legitimizes family. The power of the traditional family therefore lies in its function as an ideological construction as well as a fundamental social organization (Anderson, 1991).

Firstly, the father's positioning of himself will serve as a role-model for both his daughters and his sons. If the father is traditional and conservative in his outlook, one can assume that he will operate within the conventional, well-established norms of the society and culture in which he finds himself, and that which he believes in. The father will most likely be averse to change, and will presuppose that he has the responsibility and the power to rule his family within the boundaries of what is traditionally expected of him. As political polarization within traditional Afrikaner conservatism further disallows independent thought, he will need to inform conservative and traditional rules.

In a dominant patriarchal ideology the father will enforce himself as the head of the family, and will consider this the will of God. He will expect his word to be taken as law, as he has the legal and moral right to discipline. Above all, he will expect obedience from those over whom he has power. He will expect his woman (wife) to know her place in society and in the family, and he will expect her to submit to his wishes, to nurture and support him in his role as head of the family. His wife, who was raised and programmed within the traditional and conservative society, will unquestionably accept the husband's position as well as her own subsequent submissive positioning within the relationship. Because this is the will of God, defiance is out of the question, and the only moral option is obedience and a dutiful following of the rules. Should she not comply, she will be faced with abandonment and rejection.

Patriarchy enforces conservative and traditional ideas even further. Within the patriarchal tradition, men are superior. They are the order-givers, and can use their power to control, dominate and exploit the female. The woman becomes a useful possession, predestined to serve and please her man. Men have the moral right to attend to things outside the family, and they are entitled to certain privileges within the family. They may therefore expect women to serve, to be subservient, and to attend to the home and children. Obedience and dutiful service are expected within a compliant and respectful mode. Traditionally women have accepted these norms, raised by a patriarchal society to believe this to be the only and the right way. The

wife or the daughter can object, only to be faced with the disdain of society, and only to have control and domination upped to keep her in her place. The son is expected to carry the tradition of the patriarchal male into his future relationships.

Secondly, the patriarchal marriage constructs the female and the male through experiencing the stereotypical positioning of both the father and the mother within the family relationship. Stereotypical beliefs are carried over from the traditional, conservative patriarchal society and culture, and superimposed onto the patriarchal family. All the rights and privileges of the patriarchal male are played out in the marriage and in the family as social entity. Financially taking responsibility as the good provider, the patriarchal husband expects his wife to reciprocate as a true and good woman, dutifully nurturing and caring, obediently following his wishes. The wife can only defy or accept. The position of acceptance is characterized by those who accept under duress, but also those that accept in return for having someone that will take care of them, responsibly seeing to their financial and safety needs. Thus, some women oblige in fear of rejection and losing a secure base.

Through patriarchy, daughters are constructed in a certain manner. They are supposed to dutifully and unquestionably accept the father's rules, as he is the legate of God, and they introjected the father's rules as good and acceptable practice. Because of their age and dependency as children, the daughters find security in the father's position of strength and authority. As children, they cannot risk defying the father's way, because they expect punishment and fear rejection. They come to believe in the authority of the rational omniscient and powerful male, and accept his right to authority and control. Daughters therefore learn to be a good girl and to give-in in order not to risk rejection, abandonment, or punishment. They dutifully accept their submissive positions and obediently comply as instructed. As children, they come to accept the father's power over his expectations.

As children learn by example, they are informed by the mother's stereotypical role within patriarchal society and especially patriarchal marriage. They accept compliance to male expectancy and unreasonable demands. Dutifulness and obedience are further impressed on the daughter by the mother's selflessness and the absence of any personal agenda in the

mother's life. They experience her responsibility, her caring and nurturing, and her centrality in the family as the norm and what they should live up to in their own lives when entering a close relationship in adulthood.

I can understand the strong stand taken by the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September, 1995 against cultural and religious justifications for using women (Okin, 2000) seeing the impact thereof in the emotionally abusive relationship.

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## CHAPTER 7: THE POWERFUL VOICE OF CONTROL

*Power is no blessing in itself but when it is employed to protect the innocent*  
Swift

Just as patriarchy is a main theme in the emotionally abusive relationship, it becomes clear that the themes of patriarchy and power are intricately enmeshed into one another. The discourse of power is a primary and forceful river that flows through feminist theory and research, making its presence felt also in the stories of the women I presented. I shall therefore, in this chapter touch upon the concept of power.

Western society places high value on power and the possession thereof. In most western cultures the possession of power has become both a sign of a healthy and free person, and a characteristic of the majority or the ruling group (Collier, 1982; Miller, 1988). But power, although often sweepingly seen as negative, is emotionally neutral and illusive. There is no objective model of power (Radtke & Stam, 1995).

### More about Power

Power is not tangible. The French philosopher, Foucault (in Burr, 1995), saw power not as a possession, as but the effect of discourse. Power is constructed through language and behaviour. Power lies within the dance of Discourse, and it exists in the abstract of the “coordinated pattern of words, deeds, values, beliefs, symbols, tools, objects, times, and places and in the here and now as a performance that is recognizable as just such a coordination” (Gee, 1999, pp.17&19). Power is an abstract to be utilized in whatever manner the user finds appropriate. It can be either a life-giving force or a force that can torture and devastate. Power is a forcefully potent river of energy that can gently flow over the lives of those living on its banks to bring resources and the ability to develop. But it can be a devastating power flooding, killing, and carrying away all in its path. Such is the flow of power – the softly empowering and the dreadfully destructive.

Power is defined as a nation, a group, or a person “having great influence or control over others” or the ability, capacity or authority to control (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000). Influence and even control, do not automatically spell misuse or negativity (Miller, 1988) as people have the ability to determine their own actions provided they

consciously take the effort to do so. Therefore, on a macro-level, having power implies the ability or capacity of political, historical, social, cultural, or religious systems to exert power and bestow or delegate the authority to hierarchically lower organizations, systems, groups or individuals (Dickson, 2003; Hurtado, 1989; Shields, 1992). Foucault (in Parker, 1989) defines power as what is spoken as well as who may speak. With regards to the latter Kenneth Gergen (1989) speaks of “warranting voice”, the ways in which people achieve voice through a number of rationales and justifications.

### ***Macro systems: Imparting power through the ideology of patriarchy***

Patriarchy cascades power down the ranks of hierarchical rule and appoints men to positions of power and control (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Brannon, 2002; Greene & Bogo, 2002; Shields, 1992). Feminist scholars therefore view power as top-down and oppressive (Davis, 1991). This implies control over women and all the systems of which they are part (Chafetz, 1991), a position against which critical feminists have taken a strong stand (Qin, 2004).

Some men try to hide behind the institutions and make women believe that it is not the particular man that is at fault (O'Connor, 2000). This has been possible because in Foucault's (in Parker, 1989) panopticon concept power becomes separated from the intentions of those who exert power. However, as long as men have the power to create myths such as, for example, women having the most important power – the power of shaping the future generation – men will be in the dominant role (Elworthy, 1996). Bronfenbrenner (1979, p.92) indicated that the “greater the degree of power socially sanctioned for a given role, the greater the tendency for the role occupant to exercise and exploit the power and for those in a subordinate position to respond by increased submission, dependency, and lack of initiative.”

The macro-system has the power to determine the societal and cultural blueprint from which beliefs about sex, patriarchal rulings, what constitutes cultural, political, social, legal, religious, economic, and educational values originate (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Chafetz, 1991; Edleson & Tolman, 1992; Muuss, 1996). But the macro-system also has the power to change the meanings or dominance of any of these so-called blueprints. Third World feminists have irrefutably shown the ways in which the dominant class changes and disregards cultural practices to suit their needs (Narayan, 2000). Subsequently, the dominant class has the power of labelling and can hide the meaning of many showings of control (Burr, 1995; Chafetz, 1991;

O'Connor, 2000). For example, when the male utilizes power, control, and dominance, it is called "manly, brave, strong, paternal, protective, and powerful." The same behaviour in women is negated to showings of "nagging, shrews, bitches, domineering, mean, lesbians, and, of course, unfeminine" (O'Connor, 2000: 177-178).

Jones (Jones & Brown, 2000) argues that an institution such as power or patriarchy cannot be maintained by force alone. It needs those being acted upon to conceive of them selves as in a position congruent to the particular treatment. Domination (in the words of Dickson) or control (the latter being my preference) is thus taken to be a two-way relationship between those that assume control and the hierarchical lower group that accepts the domination (Dickson, 2003). The unquestionable God-given superiority of the hierarchical powerful is just as real as the God-given accepted inferiority of the lower group as was discussed in the previous chapter (Dickson, 2003). Women, through their lack of power, are classified as a minority group (Collier, 1982). The result is that the lower group takes on the imposed ideas, beliefs and behaviours of the controlling group, wherein the former's voice becomes muted (Dickson, 2003).

Foucault (in Burr, 1995), on the other hand, does not see power as the property of the group or institution. He starts from information that constitutes discourse or knowledge. Such knowledge is used by some to control others, while making it seem as if it was in the latter's own interests (Burr, 1995). Spears (1997) refers to a number of scholars who interpret Foucault as saying that institutional power relations reinforce and elicit discourse but also sustain such discourse. He stated, in their words, that knowledge-power cannot be without resistance (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). In my view, however, Foucault focuses on the person who has agency, that is, the person who is able to produce social structures and discourses as well as to resist and change them. Foucault's interest (in Ritzer & Goodman, 2004) lies with the techniques and technologies used by institutions to exert the power. In the process, knowledge and power become intimately intertwined.

Ritzer and Goodman (2004) identify three mechanisms of disciplinary power that Foucault promoted in his writings: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgments, and examination. The concept of disciplinary power can be applied to power within the emotionally abusive relationship. Taken from the idea of a panopticon where prisoners never knew whether they were watched, power lies in controlling subjects through "disciplinary power" (Burr, 1995). This form of power works because people enter willingly, not realizing that they are being controlled,

seeing their self-monitoring as their own choice and for their own good (Parker, 1989). Komter (1991) describe power in terms of manifest power, latent power and invisible power mechanisms. With latent power conflict is avoided by the less powerful through anticipating the needs and wishes of the more powerful and with invisible power mechanisms their functioning and effect usually escape awareness.

Both these approaches to the concept of power explain why the power is experienced while the victim remains unable to name it for what it is. Those who are watched internalize the prevailing standards and come to monitor and control their behaviour accordingly. They freely submit to the scrutiny of the other and to their own scrutiny (Burr, 1995). Parker (1989) states that power then operates independently of the initial intentions and individuals. This will explain why women who grew up in a system of economic, political, and religious oppression accept this state of affairs, and even the abuse that goes with it, as natural, morally just, and sacred (Dobash & Dobash, 1980). Jones (in Jones & Brown, 2000) moreover refers to the position of slaves and rightly observes that in order for the system to work, the slaves must conceive of themselves as inferior beings. But having no power equals having no agency (Greenspan, 1983) and this situation can only be changed by resistance that brings forward marginalised discourses in order to challenge prevailing knowledge systems (Burr, 1995).

Although women suffer under a dominating and subordinating patriarchal system, not all women are unwilling prey. Some women accept and expect the security, especially the financial security, which adhering to the system brings them. They accept submission to an authoritarian and powerful male and enjoy the status that comes from the dominant male in their lives (Greenspan, 1983). They actively collude in reproducing their own subordination, and in seeing the old order slip away, manipulating their men to live up to the obligations they have towards wife and children. Women claim the protection of the patriarchal system in exchange for submissiveness (Kandiyoti, 1991).

### ***Hierarchical power: Men as the carriers of power***

On an individual level, within interpersonal relationships, power implies the ability of one partner or one individual to influence or actually modify the behaviour of the other (Brannon, 2002; Cahn, 1996; Oldersma & Davis, 1991). For feminist scholars power is inevitably linked with control (Davis, 1991). Elworthy (1996, p.4) goes beyond the concept of influencing as she focuses on the use of force, strength, domination, and authority to rule or to use force. She calls this kind of power “domination power”, implying inherent aggressiveness and no sense of collective responsibility. To her, this kind of power is masculine power; power based on male values and male norms. Each time the man engages in supremacist beliefs and behaviours, the oppression becomes personal (O’Connor, 2000).

It may be possible to understand men’s entrapment in such power relations by his position of power and due to the fact that ordinary people are willing to blindly obey an authority figure. The Milgram Experiment to this avail (1963, in Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Weisstein, 1971) is well known. Milgram demonstrated the extent to which people, under the influence of an authority figure, are willing to administer shocks deemed dangerous to human subjects. But, power also means the power and freedom to choose, and therefore it must be accepted that the man freely chooses as he does.

### **Women Utilizing Power**

Using power, in the common sense of the word, for a number of reasons does not come easily and comfortably to women. Society denies power to women. Women growing up within a traditional patriarchal society have not been granted public and personal power. The macro-system constantly bombards them with the message that for women being powerful is equated with being unfeminine (Chang, 1996). Miller (1988) thus argues that some women deny that they want power, as this does not fit in comfortably with society’s expectations. Women are too afraid to use their power, as they fear this might lead to attack and abandonment (Greenspan, 1983). Seeing that women are trained to stand in a connected relationship to others, abandonment threatens an integral part of her being (Miller, 1988).

When confronted with the power ploys within the emotionally abusive relationship, women find it extremely difficult to act on their own behalf (Chang, 1996). They retreat from utilizing their



power, as in any relationship they fear to impinge, limit or down the other. The woman is afraid of acting in her own self-interest because of being taught that this resembles selfishness and inappropriate for a good woman. Even women in high positions fear being accused of selfishness, a concept rare in men in the same positions (Miller, 1988). Should a woman manage to overcome the fear, or accepts that she has power that she can utilize in the relationship, she might still pull back, because in her mind, power equals destructiveness or aggression.

It may seem that women have been more comfortable when using power in the service of others, in the empowering of others, and in using their power to help the growth of another (Miller, 1988). They seldom stand back and acknowledge using power for their own benefit. Women are led to believe that their own self-determination is wrong and immoral, and they should value relationship above all. Because women cannot bear the label of selfishness or being destructively aggressive, they therefore willingly give away their power in favour of their socialised roles in society.

Matlin (1987) refers to research that states that women use more indirect power and are more manipulative in their use of power. They use personal power, such as liking, affection, and approval, versus concrete power. This then stand in sharp contrast to the popular view that male power is all “*bad*” and female power is all “*good*” (Kitzinger, 1992). There is some control in another major strategy used by many muted cultural groups, the strategy of monitoring. From lower down, they vigilantly watch for any change in atmosphere and emotional climate, ensuring emotional, and, at times, physical survival (Dickson, 2003). But this also gives women the opportunity to silently and unobserved organize and orchestrate the behaviour of another as sometimes plays out in the emotionally abusive relationship.

On the other hand, the intuitive healer Caroline Myss (1997) states that an internal concept of power is needed for healing and maintaining health. But a position of powerlessness, a position of having no power or a denial of power will lower self-esteem and eat away at internal energy and emotional resources. Such a position inevitably entraps a woman in an abusive relationship.

## **Control Equals Abuse**

As I have argued previously, power is constructed through behaviour, and the behaviour mechanism that is used, is control (Cahn, 1996; Chang, 1996; Douglas, 1996; Worell & Remer, 1992). Control is part and parcel of both physical and emotional abuse (Lloyd, 1999; Marshall, 1994; Tolman, 1992). Within relationships, control is defined as behaviour resulting in one partner establishing the upper hand on most issues, having his needs met, his rights taken into consideration, and his beliefs and desires adhered to (Brannon, 2002; Miller, 1988; O'Connor, 2000).

The controlling person (the male in 95 percent of cases) uses his power, be it muscle or subtler manipulations, to control his partner (usually the wife) (Miller, 1995). Douglas (1996, p.24) says about this, that “when one partner consistently controls, dominates, or intimidates the other by means of manipulation, punishing, or forceful behaviour, abuse is occurring.” Chang (1996, p.12) defines psychological abuse (emotional abuse) as the “continuous and relentless misuse of power by one person ... in order to create submission in the other person.” She states that “(a)ny non-physical behavior that controls through the use of fear, humiliation, and verbal assaults can be considered psychological abuse.”

Controlling behaviour in the lives of some men becomes the abuse of interpersonal power (Brannon, 2002; Cahn, 1996; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Millet, 2000; O'Connor, 2000). Many scholars have concluded that abuse is another form of dominance and/or control (Chang, 1996; Douglas, 1996; Hirigoyen, 2000; Jukes, 1999; Miller, 1995; Schumacher et al., 2001). The fact of the matter is that the hierarchical rule of patriarchal society means an unequal distribution of power (Dickson, 2003; Tolman & Edleson, 1989 in Edleson & Tolman, 1992; Tolman, 1992). A man has the power to subordinate and he does (Marshall, 1994; Miller, 1995). “He is the main character, and she the supporting actress; he is the actor (and) she is the acted upon” (Gergen, 2001, p.7).

An exaggerated need to control is often described as an inherent characteristic of the male, because men define their manhood in terms of dominance and control over others (Miller, 1995). I have argued that this is not the case as the behaviour of both women and men are constructed through their culture, history and the society in which they find themselves. If individuals have the ability to either accept a position of power or reject it (Miller, 1988), we need

to answer the question as to why men continue the abuse and whether they consciously do so. Why do men excuse their behaviour as losing control while in effect they are ensuring control? It is most often accepted that men continue to control because they can, and because they have been trained to accept their controlling behaviour as the relationship norm set by patriarchal society (Jukes, 1999). Men have also not learned to control their frustrations and some are just unthinkingly oblivious to issues of control (Miller, 1995).

According to Miller (1995, p.26), women indicate that “emotional abuse begins before he even comes home or before she returns from her job; it begins with the memory; it begins with the dread.” Men maintain control even in their absence or in the absence of abusive behaviour (Dutton, 1992). There are a number of reasons. Firstly, the power to control does not solely lie with the emotionally abusive individual himself, but comes from the total eco-system of patriarchal rules that has infiltrated all aspects of society and works together in keeping women in their place (Dobash & Dobash, 1980). Secondly, without any effort from him self the individual abuser has the control. Usually, however, his control remains because past behaviour and threats from his side stay in effect without his even being present. Dutton (1992) supports Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power as control in the absence of the authority. The control therefore lies in the *Umwelt* as well as in the individual relationship.

### ***Men control and dominate through a number of mechanisms***

Scholars of abuse name a magnitude of mechanisms used to control and dominate. In social constructionist terms these can be seen as the discourses that are co-constructed in the process of controlling another person (Gergen, 2000). Edleson and Tolman (1992, p.5) refer to their earlier work in 1989 in which they describe the elements of control used in psychological abuse as verbal intimidation, isolation, and financial manipulation. Miller (1995) names economic abuse, coercion and threats, intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, minimizing, denying, and blaming, using children as weapons, and using male privilege as mechanisms of control utilised by men in relationships. Others, such as Douglas (1996), concentrate on elements such as denigration, belittlement, contempt, censorship, and blaming, as expressions of the desire to control. Chang (1996) describes verbal assaults and denigration by criticizing, belittling, demeaning, or deprecating remarks in the presence of others, and name-calling, as well as the use of fear and humiliation, and most researchers imply the utilization of both verbal

and non-verbal mechanisms in their definitions of abuse (Cahn, 1996; Chang, 1996; Douglas, 1996).

The control mechanisms mentioned above can be arranged into four largely overlapping categories, namely mechanisms making use of mainly aggressive means, others utilizing domination, and abusive communication, as well as mechanisms of entrapment and exploitation. Mostly, the *modus operandi* for staying in power entails some measure of aggression and violence (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Bloom, et al., 1975). Although the use of abusive aggression is the more overt form of emotional abuse, the softer mechanisms of verbal abuse and isolation can do the most damage, especially when more than one mechanism is utilized within the same act or incident.

### ***Power as translated into violence and aggression***

Stephanie Dowrick (in Douglas, 1996, p.15) comments that it is an appalling state of affairs to live in a society where the emotional abuse of women is described as a “terrifying ‘ordinary’ phenomenon.” It is even more inexcusable that in going home, the woman is in jeopardy to be confronted by emotional abuse from a partner who is expected to care about her well-being (Ammerman & Hersen, 1992b; Haaken & Yragui, 2003; Walker, 1979). Research tends to focus on the power inequality in abuse and the misuse of interpersonal power, but sadly, the extremely violent nature of the abuse is not addressed. Marshall (1994) argues for a strong association between violence and abuse, and includes a long list of authors that have shown that violence results in psychological abuse. This is sometimes called environmental abuse, psychological abuse, or battering, psychological torture, confined abuse, maltreatment and social abuse. Nonetheless, it is emotional abuse and demands attention of the research community.

Miller’s (1995) long-standing illustration of the discrepancy that exists between what is taken as serious misdemeanours in society, but ignored when exhibited by a spouse or partner in marriage, is well-known. She mentions the following as obscured forms of abuse that evolve in close relationships:

- *Disorderly conduct*, e.g. behaviour such as yelling, calling obscenities, name-calling, breaking windows, kicking in doors.

- *Harassment*, e.g. as in following her, hiding keys, letting air out of the tyres of her car, isolating her from family or friends, constantly calling her, breaking her favourite things, constantly disapproving of her, being unreasonable in his demands.
- *Menacing in the third degree*, e.g. locking her in a closet, waving a weapon before her, hitting her pet, cutting up her clothes, pretending to hit out at her.
- *Reckless endangerment*, e.g. driving the children without a seat belt, forcing her out of the house at night, not letting her take prescribed medicine, forcing her to drink or to take drugs.

However, because the concept of violence is usually equated only with the resulting physical evidence, it is easy to deny that the above forms of violence is taking place in close relationships, especially emotional abuse (Ammerman & Hersen, 1992b; Collier, 1982; Marshall, 1994; Wise, 1990b). Here the vindictiveness of Minette's husband (See Case study on p.66) easily comes to mind as an example of harassment. Equating emotional abuse with violence requires an understanding of what is meant by the term violence. There is also consideration of the level of tolerance for violent behaviour. Every family seems to have a toleration level for violence. The amount and intensity of violence in one family differs from what is acceptable in another family (Walker, 1979).

Barnett and LaViolette (1993) point to the discrepancy in the way society allows the expression of aggression. Male aggression is permitted and even encouraged, while female aggression is only condoned when defending a loved one. Boys grow up learning to suppress vulnerable and sad feelings. The only strong emotion they are allowed is anger, encompassing the whole range of their emotional experience (Pollack, 1999). Violence is learned behaviour (Dobash & Dobash, 1980), which was found to have the desired effect when it comes to problem-solving (Walker, 1979). Aggression is hostile but violence is mostly instrumental (Jukes, 1999). So it is possible that boys learn to be aggressive by imitating their more aggressive fathers (Matlin, 1987; Moore, 1979b). It is interesting to note that in parent-child relationships, verbal aggression was found to be the most common form of child abuse (Vissing & Baily, 1996). I presume that emotional abuse might not be as rare as previously thought.

Earlier researchers who investigated violence within the boundaries of wife-battering or family violence defined violence as "an act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of physically hurting another person" (Straus, et al., 1989, p.3 as quoted by Sabourin, 1996).

Violence is equated to aggression of a verbal and non-verbal nature; aggression that shows itself in physical violence, sexual abuse, and the verbal aggression of one person against another. Aggression becomes the language of domination. Aggression is a behaviour mechanism that needs an outside object to be released onto (Dickson, 2003; Toch, 1969) while anger is an internal healthy emotion that can be expressed in a harmless manner (Brannon, 2002; Vissing & Baily, 1996).

I personally prefer the uncluttered definition of Leonard Eron (1987, in Brannon, 2002), a psychologist who spent 30 years on studying aggression. He simply defines aggression as “an act that injures or irritates another person” (Brannon, 2002, p.435). But using others, venting aggression on another, is only possible in situations of inequality and discrimination (Dickson, 2003; Walker, 1979). A number of terms are used to describe verbal aggression, such as verbal abuse, a verbal attack, verbal assault or a coercive response (See Vissing & Baily, 1996 for a number of authors), all in effect referring to verbal aggression as emotional maltreatment or psychological abuse (Chang, 1996; Schumacher, et al., 2001; Straus).

## **Conclusion**

My intention in this chapter was to place the occurrence of emotional abuse within close interpersonal relationships firmly within the context of a patriarchal ideology that utilizes power to dominate and control. The patriarchal system positioned the male partner in the position of power, sanctioned to use all manners of control mechanism. Just as patriarchal power legitimized the male position it legitimized women’s position of inferiority and subordination. How this legitimized positioning plays out in individual relationships, and how the close personal relationship is characterized by emotional abuse, will now be discussed in the next chapter.

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## CHAPTER 8: THE ABUSER POSITIONING HIMSELF

*... there is a connection between ordinary maleness and abusiveness*  
Jukes (1999, p.7)

In this chapter I will discuss the ways in which the abusive partner in a close relationship positions himself in relation to his spouse. I use the social constructionist term *positioning* as a person's sense of self, the ideas and metaphors of which he forms part and his self-narratives as the totality of his subject positioning. Positioning constrains and shapes what a person does and how he does it (Burr, 1995). Therefore, I start with the abusive man positioning himself within the abusive relationship because the ideology and the institutions of patriarchy have imparted him with the power to exploit, to control and dominate his partner or his spouse. Gee (1999) explicate the concept that implies that more than one Discourse can merge in the same situation, and I see the Discourses or in this case, the themes, of patriarchal rule and power merging through the male abuser's positioning of himself.

Men claim the right to voice because of their superiority and do so by rationales and justifications (Gergen, 1989). This creates an unequal distribution of power wherein he firstly positions himself and his partner and secondly, utilizes a number of control mechanisms through which he maintains his control and thus his power. Subtly disguised in his positioning of himself are aspects of Foucault's disciplinary power (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). Elements of hierarchical observation are present as well as the entitlement to examine and make normalizing judgments about the other. To be able to wield power also implies a certain amount of detachment from those to be dominated and controlled (Meyer, 1991). The man, through his positioning of himself as patriarchal male, thus becomes an instrument towards creating and keeping a disciplined society.

### Hooking

Ross (2002) writes,

Whenever a friend tells me she's dating an incredible new guy who treats her like a princess, the hairs on the back of my neck prickle ... he bowls you over with his charm, intelligence and caring nature. He worships every inch of you, whispers, "We were meant to be together", and makes you feel you're the luckiest woman alive ... then, gradually things change. He sulks when you go out with your mates, so you

begin staying in; he makes you feel guilty, so you end up doing what he wants and he whips you with small, stinging put-downs ... Eventually, you become a pale shadow of the full, independent woman you were when you met him.

I have found that it is part of the process of therapy for the female client to question and reflect on not only the abusive relationship, but how they themselves ended up in such a negative situation. The abused women often do not realize how they were ensnared or taken captive by the specific positioning of their male partners. Most people respond positive to attentiveness from others and women that end up in emotionally abusive relationships are no different.

Jennifer (See Appendix A): He changed a full 180° after our marriage. Now there was no love shown. We didn't go to church anymore, although he knew how much it meant to me. Socially he changed. Either he didn't want to go out, or he embarrassed us all by his behaviour.

Helen (See Appendix A): I can remember being attracted to my ex-husband because he really listened to me. Women in a patriarchal society are seldom taken seriously and here was this highly intelligent guy that seemed to be really interested in me as an individual; me as a person with my own dreams and needs. As I was eight years his junior I have come to question if being so much younger had an effect on how each of us was positioned in the relationship ... We were students together and he was my soul mate. There was nothing we couldn't talk about. On an emotional level, we had this amazing connection, even after we were married. And then I fell pregnant. It wasn't even unexpected, we planned to have a child, and this was already two years down the line. Now all of a sudden he had to work so hard. He was always busy with either work or sport. We didn't sit and talk any more, except when it was about him, his work, and his interests. Gone was the sharing, and if I complained I was scolded as being immature or childish.

Hooking is an initial and soft approach to establishing domination. The man cunningly and progressively takes on the role of the benevolent teacher showing caring concern; positioning himself as the well-meaning teacher-friend (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Miller, 1995). The control goes unnoticed as it is disguised by the love relationship (Meyer, 1991). The woman is subjected to ongoing advice, disguised as given "for your own good" (Douglas, 1996, p.25;

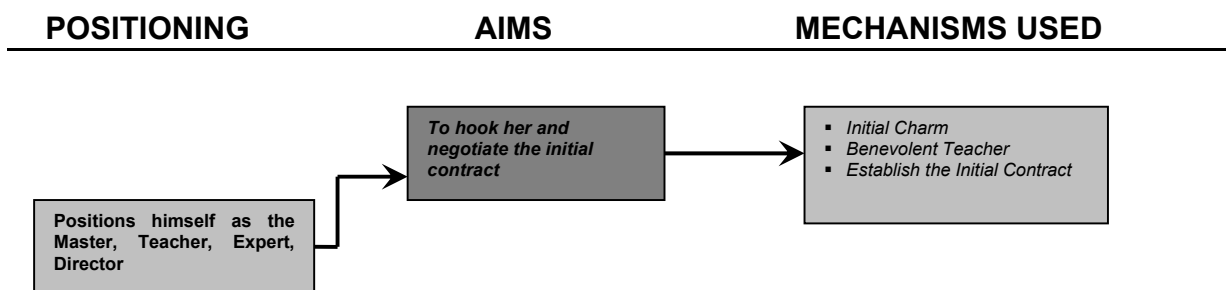


Forward, 1997). The message is clearly one of “You’re not good enough as you are, so I will teach you how to be better” (Douglas, 1996, p.26). She is expected to do as told at all times and to honour his proposals for her betterment, and if she does not, there is the subtle threat of “Do as you wish, but don’t come crawling back,” or “You know you can’t handle situations such as these.” Women have been conditioned and so believe that those in a lower position are supposed to submit and listen to those higher up in the hierarchy and so she listens (Collins, 1991; Dickson, 2003; Dutton, 1992). The abusers are the puppeteers in the controlling game; their aims disguised by their well-meaning advice, but they see themselves as deeply sincere (Grinnell, 1988).

Helen: I can remember him always willing to give advice on how I should handle a situation at work and as we were in the same business, I in the beginning interpreted this as loving concern; him having only my best interest at heart. Over the years I realized he was only conning me into believing how much he helped and supported me. It only lasted until the next time I asked him to do something or criticized him; then he could throw my not appreciating his loving concern back in my face, and I had no ground to stand on. As I grew as a person and developed as a manager, I did as I thought best, and as I was physically more involved in the business I was in the better position to decide what to do. He reacted with cold anger, physically showing his disgust in me, punishing me by withdrawing. I always just prayed that I’d made the right decision so that he wouldn’t have yet something more to throw in my face.

The same process of hooking plays itself out whenever inexperience meets up with experience. Newcomers to any unfamiliar situations run the risk of becoming entrapped by their ignorance of the system. The young first-time prisoner, for example, is hooked into being the “wife” of the experienced old-timer (Gear, 2005). I can therefore understand Worell and Remer (1992) concluding that, as the above excerpts also show, it is mostly younger women that become entrapped. Although younger women are more at risk, women also latch onto some special ability they see in the man, maybe something they themselves aspire to. This special ability can be security – be it financial or emotional security, success, self-assuredness.

I therefore conclude that the abusive man in the beginning of the relationship already subtly positions himself in the dominant position by using mechanism such as his charm and assuming the role of the caring teacher-friend. He starts out to subtly establish the initial contract with him having the power to control. If she agrees to his terms he has succeeded in his aim to “hook” her into his contract as illustrated in Figure 8-1 (See Appendix B: The Abuser Positioning Himself for further examples).



**Figure 8-1:** Position assumed and mechanisms used by the male partner to “hook” the woman

After the pursuit and winning the woman, having her committed in marriage, the power shifts to the man as the emotionally abusive man “doesn’t take a partner, he takes a hostage” (Douglas, 1996, p.30). The male partner has thus established himself as the one that has the power to say, to label, to be right, and to demand. He will now use the control mechanism of entrapment even further.

Karen (See Case study on p.90): I didn’t see the signs, but it already started before our marriage. He first had a go at me for daring to have an opinion that was different from his mother’s, and the he started telling me the way he wanted the curtains to be hanged.

We can therefore identify a contract that is constructed by the dating couple early on in the relationship. She understands the contract to read:

*He will honour and respect me.*

*He will listen to me as a person.*

*Because of all his special qualities and abilities he will take care of me.*

*He’s the Expert so I can relax and know he will take care of me.*

The contract he has in mind, however, is one of:

*I will charm and take care of you as long as you do precisely as I want you to.  
I have the power over you.*

## **Domination**

### ***Master of his House***

Through the traditional, conservative patriarchal family's principle of Herrschaft (Millet, 2000) the husband positions himself in a hierarchical position to his wife (Dobash & Dobash, 1980). He takes being master of all as his birthright (Chang, 1996; Douglas, 1996; Dutton, 1992; Millet, 2000). Patriarchal society allows him to see himself as the better person and the more valued in society. The possessions of certain characteristic as valued by patriarchy (be it superiority in mental processes or the experiences that give one the reasons; also described as observation, rationality, intention, passion and moral value) thus automatically warrants male voice, and give him the right to denigrate the other (Gergen 1989). The wife or female partner is positioned lower on the ladder of power.

Karen says,

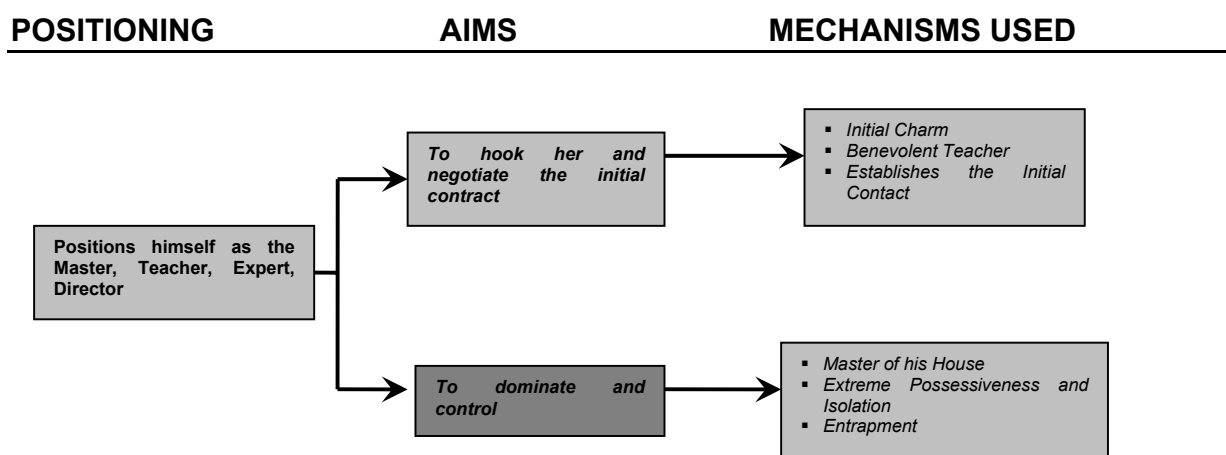
Of course men expect you to listen. In his eyes a woman is always wrong and he proves it by stating that the Bible tells us to be submissive and listen to our husbands. He never ever wants to hear that he might be in the wrong.

Johan, her husband says,

I must tell you that I'm a man of the Bible. I believe in facts and approach everything from the perspective of the Bible. The man is head of his home and he looks after his wife. She should be submissive to his authority. From the beginning I told her that when we marry I will be her first priority, I will be number one in her life ... I have had enough. If she doesn't drastically change, I am going to go for a divorce.

Whereas we previously had the abusive man positioning himself as the benevolent teacher, he can also position himself as master of his house (Chang, 1996; Douglas, 1996); at times called the position of the expert (Greenspan, 1983), or the director. He can always fall back on hooking when needed although this process is much more evident in the beginning phases of

the relationship. But, some abusive men's objective of dominating and controlling his partner or spouse are more overt; overt usually only to those who through circumstances or different learning experiences understand the process of abuse or power over being played out. In order to establish his control over and therefore his position of dominance, the abusive man utilizes such mechanisms as positioning himself as master of his house, through extreme possessiveness and isolation, and mechanisms to entrap his spouse (See illustrated in Figure 8-2).



**Figure 8-2:** Position assumed and mechanisms used by the male partner to dominate and control the woman

More often than not, the hooking action or the more covert signs of domination and control turn to abuse when the man realizes that the partner is committed. The abuse, for example, starts the moment a child is due, because of the contract he has in his mind; the contract reading, "You will constantly be there for me, to serve and help and listen." He realizes (or she has already shown him) that her growing up in a patriarchal society and now her commitment to him indirectly gives him permission to do whatever he likes. Watching his partner's every step is a form of controlling behaviour and possessiveness, a way of keeping himself in the dominating position (Douglas, 1996; Miller, 1995; O'Leary & Murphy, 1992).

Control, domination, and exploitation are intended and deliberate within an unequal distribution of power (Lengerman & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004; Reed, 2000). Jones (Jones & Brown, 2000, p.28) descriptively captures the manner and the attitude by which the abusive man positions

himself, saying “(He) may simply lay down the law that, God damn it, her first responsibility is to her family and he will not permit or tolerate something or other. Or if she wants to maintain the marriage she is simply going to have to accommodate herself.”

Beth says: Kobus needs to be right, always. Everything has to be done on his terms. He needs to win. He can drive me crazy when his lawyer friend comes to visit. They will start arguing about something and he will try and bulldoze her as he always does with me.

The man positions himself as head of his family and society, and the law, culture and the church support him (Chang, 1996; Dickson, 2003; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Dutton, 1992; Millet, 2000; O’Conner, 2000). Often he can assume this position of power because of his greater earning power; the greater his income, the more power he has in making decisions (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1991). He assumes the central and most important position in the family and everything is organized to accommodate him (Cahn, 1996; Douglas, 1996; Horley, 2002). Emotional abuse tends to escalate when the abuser is at home full-time. He now has more opportunity and time to find fault or extend his power. As he has no outside affirmation of his status, he establishes his power by dominating his home-base (Miller, 1995).

Gerda (See Appendix A): I find that our holidays, when we go out and when we stay at home, what time we have dinner and when the children can play – everything is dominated by his demanding quiet time to study. This also means that he can close the study door and just disappear for hours on end. I just have to keep the children quiet. Sharing family-time is not an option ... I think he will only be satisfied if I do everything and he can sit back and relax. Oh, he will sit in front of the TV, doing absolutely nothing to help out in the house and with the children. As the head of the house he just assumes he can.

In his position as master of the house he demands respect from those sharing his roof (Chang, 1996; Douglas, 1996). He demands to be taken care of and narcissistically expects that his needs will be taken care of as he assumes them to take prominence (Cahn, 1996; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Roloff, 1996). There is a grandiose sense of self-importance in some abusers (Forward, 1997; Hirigoyen, 2000).

Anca, the engineer’s ex-wife (See Appendix A): He never ever took my needs into account. I and mine were never even considered – not even sexually. I used to jokingly

say that it's always his work, then come the golf and the rugby, and if he's not too tired I might stand a change of some time and attention.

The emotionally abusive male expects everything to be done his way, and his way only. He keeps his hand on every aspect of home-life. Barnett and LaViolette (1993) report that most batterers admitted to physically punishing their wives to show her who's the boss. Samantha (See Appendix A) works in the IT industry. She explains how she organized their four year-old son's birthday party, repeatedly asking for input from her husband but being brushed of. On the day of the party, Jack comes home and explodes: "What were you thinking! The cake's a real mess. Why did you invite ... (a couple of their son's play mates). I swear I cannot take you any more! One cannot trust you to do anything the way it's supposed to be done."

It is the second marriage for both Antoinette, a sixty year old psychologist, and her husband, a law professor (See Appendix A). Her son and his wife are arriving from Italy, with Antoinette's first grandchild. Her husband refuses to have them stay in their five bedroom house: "I don't want crying babies in my house anymore. I'm busy and I need my space to continue with my work." What he is actually saying is that she is not honouring the contract of being there solely for him alone.

Heidi (See Appendix A): Nothing has ever been good enough. I was known as an excellent hostess and an exceptional cook, but he would still come home as I was preserving curry beans, and say, "Why don't you phone so and so. I'm sure they can do it better." Or if something went wrong when hosting people, he'd scream at me for being such a bad organizer, although he had done nothing himself.

Furthermore, the emotionally abusive husband further positions himself as master to his slaves and expects them to serve him (Clack & Whitcomb, 1997; Hutchings, 1988; Matlin, 1987). He has the right to demand anything, and his demands often are excessive and endless (Chang, 1996; Douglas, 1996; Loring, 1994). His previously lavish attention has turned into the suffocating message of "you do as I say and want, because you're mine" (Dobash & Dobash, 1980, p.85).

Berna (See Case study on p. 101): He treats us like slaves. It's a constant "do this, do that, why didn't you... must I always ask you to?" I remember this one time we were moving again because another of all his brilliant business deals had fallen through. The

children were still babies and I constantly had to look out for them. I made all the arrangements for the move, I packed, I organized, and I did everything. On the day of the move he left for work and after work returned to the new house, asking, “And when will dinner be ready?”

(Further examples illustrating Master of his House can be found in Appendix B: The Abuser Positioning Himself).

### ***Extreme Possessiveness and Isolation***

The emotionally abusive man uses extreme possessiveness and isolation to establish and re-establish his control (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Miller, 1995; Jukes, 1999; NiCarthy, 1982; Wallace, 1996). Just as is the case with close neighbourhoods being safer when it comes to interpersonal violence and crime than communities where people are isolated from one another (Haaken & Yragui, 2003), isolation opens the door to abuse. A number of the strategies utilized to isolate women are extremely subtle, and women fear that people will laugh at them in mentioning it; others are much more devious (O'Connor, 2000; Tolman, 1992). Should I describe all the mechanisms used by the emotionally abusive man, I run the risk of side-tracking the reader's attention from the main theme of the abuser positioning himself so as to dominate his spouse. I will therefore briefly refer to the different ways in which the emotionally abusive man can show extreme possessiveness and isolate his spouse and I refer the reader to Appendix B: The Abusive Man Positioning himself for further examples of extreme possessiveness and isolation as taken from the stories of women in emotionally abusive relationship.

He watches her every step (Miller, 1995; O'Leary & Murphy, 1992). He steals her time, energy and leisure (Jones in Jones & Brown, 2000) and is supported by a patriarchal society which expects the wife to leave her own interests and serve her husband and the household (Cahn, 1996; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Douglas, 1996), isolating her from friends and family (Brannon, 2002; Burstow, 1992; Chang, 1996; Loring, 1994; NiCarthy, 1982; Rosen, 1996; Tolman, 1992; Walker, 1979).

He controls all outside contact by being rude, critical, or threatening when visiting or receiving visitors, family and friends (Chang, 1996; Douglas, 1996; Wallace, 1996). He constantly

humiliates and embarrasses her in front of them (Miller, 1995; NiCarthy, 1982). In the end she does not want to risk socializing – a common feature found in abusive relationships (Horley, 2002; Walker, 1979). He often prohibits friends and family from visiting (Tolman, 1992) or forbids her to out visiting. The abusive man may engage in a subtle power struggle with whomever his partner has the best relationship (Rosen, 1996). Being jealous of her spending time with others and reacting on the patriarchal belief that a woman's place is at home, to take care of whatever needs to be taken care of, he also interferes with her friendships (Burstow, 1992; Jukes, 1999; Loring, 1994), by feigning jealousy (O'Leary & Murphy, 1992; Saunders, 1992). He needs to monitor her whereabouts (Jukes, 1999; Tolman, 1992) and the abusive man also tends to monitor his spouse's work situation (Jukes, 1999; Tolman, 1992). In part he is checking up on his possession, but he is also coercing her to give up her work to return to the safety of their home. He harasses her at work. He may even stalk her, preying and encroaching upon her very existence (Hirigoyen, 2000). Douglas (1996) and Miller (1995) are in agreement that the possessive man who needs all the attention will see to it that his partner is not in a position to actualize her potential. Further education might show her that independence is possible, so he will forbid her to go back to her studies. Another clever way of keeping his wife under his thumb is to get her involved in his business.

The emotionally abusive man can insist that his wife accompanies him to his tennis and rugby matches, or whatever, as he would love to have her at his side. She reads into his insistence a positive showing of his commitment to their relationship. He is in effect side-stepping his own guilt-feelings for not spending time with the family and being involved in his own pursuits; for controlling his spouse into doing whatever pleases him and not going off on some pursuit of her own (Miller, 1995). But, although he manipulates her into accompanying him everywhere he goes, the abusive man, on the other hand, refuses to go to social gatherings at his wife's work (NiCarthy, 1982; Tolman, 1992) or her family. If he knows how much the event means to his wife, he will manipulate her into doing whatever he wishes. She bends over backwards to please the spouse in order to get him to accompany her (Walker, 1979). If the husband does go to the longed-for social outing, he opts to socially humiliate her. He denigrates, embarrasses, or neglects her in public (Chang, 1996), ensuring that next time she would be the one to decline the invitation, and the wished-for isolation is accomplished.



Chang (1996) explains that the possessive husband will often deliberately move or change jobs in order to isolate his spouse. They move and he gets on with the challenges of a new position. She finds herself largely isolated. As she is new to the neighbourhood, her time is taken up by the household and the children, and as she is not allowed to go out and make friends, her husband becomes her only contact with the outside world (Jones in Jones & Brown, 2000).

Some women feel cheated and trapped (Jones in Jones & Brown, 2000; Walker, 1979); a phenomenon often found in the spouses of men in high-powered jobs, careers, or community positions - military wives, corporate wives, politicians' wives, and wives of other prominent men. These women know that whatever they do will reflect on their husband's position (O'Conner, 2000). She is doubly caught up in the system; not only is patriarchal authority constantly looming over her every activity, but now she has the military or corporate system not allowing her the opportunities to pursue whatever she wants (Walker, 1979) or to be a person in own right (O'Conner, 2000). It is typical for the abuse to be kept private out of shame and the realistic knowledge of no-one will believe them; all the more so when the husband is the minister, the CEO, or the commanding officer. This VIP person is seen as being in the position of absolute social power (Walker, 1979).

To a certain extent, the controlling man is condemning his partner in solitary confinement. As Berna would say, "I'm in a fortress where I'm not even safe anymore. I've come to a place where I cannot think for myself anymore." Jones (in Jones & Brown, 2000) places the control via isolation just below that of capital punishment and forced wakefulness; both devastating forms of torture. Some emotionally abusive men literally lock in their wives or take away their cars (Burstow, 1992; Dutton, 1992; NiCarthy, 1982; Wallace, 1996). He explains his actions through his loving care for her and his wish to keep her safe. Other abusive men use intangible locks; they lock their wives in by the threats of what they will do if their wives would go out or walk out of the marriage (Miller, 1995). Abused women are often left at home with no money, or with only a small amount of petrol, so as to restrict her movements (Tolman, 1992). Other women give in to their spouse's plea of staying at home full-time for a diverse number of reasons (Douglas, 1996; Miller, 1995; NiCarthy, 1982). Some are of the opinion that this is what is expected of them; being the stay-at-home mom, giving their children the best of attention and creating a pleasant environment for their husbands to come home to.

### ***Positioning himself by Mechanisms of Entrapment***

*Somehow many women are able to maintain themselves in a captured state, but they live a half life or a quarter life or even an nth life. They manage, but may become bitter to the end of their days. They may feel hopeless, and often, like a baby who has cried and cried with no human aid forthcoming, they may become deathly silent, and despairing. Fatigue and resignation follow. The cage is locked.*

*Women Who Run With the Wolves  
Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1992, p.246)*

Friday (1998, p.510) describes the way a man's vanity is fed through the beauty of the woman on his arm, but this also causes him to resent her for the power her beauty exerts over him. What better way to control this sexually-tempting woman than to domesticate her, "to de-sexualize her after marriage, encourage her to lengthen her skirts and let her hair go back to its natural colour." The emotionally abusive man uses entrapment strategies, domination, and control, to ensnare the woman into a fatally addictive process (Grinnell, 1988). Through her fear of further emotional and possibly physical abuse or the fear of rejection and abandonment, he forces his spouse into a position of compliance (See Appendix B: The Abusive Man Positioning Himself for more incidences of entrapment as told by the emotionally abused women).

However, in order for entrapment to work, both players need to be committed and involved (Dickson, 2003). The woman is ensnared by the coping or (women call it) survival mechanisms she uses (Horley, 2002; Rosen, 1996). Deceived by the polarities of domination and submission, aggression, and passivity (Cahn, 1996; Chang, 1996), and the societal norms of marriage and divorce (Worell & Remer, 1992), they accept the abuse because their abuser has convinced them of their own worthlessness. The man has entrapped her in this position of being not good enough (Miller, 1995).

The emotionally abusive man uses a number of specific ploys to entrap his partner or spouse. Some of these mechanisms are often ascribed to psychological abuse and therefore needs to be explored further.

*Brainwashing:* I often hear women say, "I don't think I'm going to take the trouble and read The Da Vinci Code. Henry read it, and he thinks it's a lot of hogwash" or "We never dine out on Sundays. Patrick says it's a day the family should spend at home together" or "John says he knows me and he doesn't think I'll be able to cope with a group of pre-schoolers." The process of entrapment, sometimes on a more intellectual level, sometimes more physical in nature, is often compared to brainwashing. Brainwashing is a process by which

a captor bends the mind of his captives to his will through coercive control, and transforms the other's perceptions to coincide with his own (Miller, 1995). Authors such as NiCarthy (1982), Dutton (1988), Barnett and LaViolette (1993), and Miller (1995) believe that many of the control mechanisms used in emotionally abusive relationships are similar to the coercive techniques used to brainwash political prisoners.

Oriental brainwashing methods were first described by individuals who had been prisoners of war during the Korean War. If American soldiers during this war could be convinced to denounce their country and supply information to the enemy, it is entirely possible to believe that women can also give in and start to believe in the omnipotence of the abuser and do as prescribed by her manipulative partner (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993). The emotional abuser similarly uses mechanisms and processes such as isolation, induced debility, monopolization of perceptions, possessiveness, threatening to harm those dear to the victim, degradation, and humiliation. He will, for example, keep her awake night after night by arguing, blaming, needing to sort things out; stealing her energy and breaking down her resistance (Dutton, 1992).

*Torture and the Stockholm Syndrome:* The similarities between behaviour exhibited by the abuser and the definition of torture given by Amnesty International is pointed out by Leonore Walker (1979) as well as Follingstad and DeHart (2000). In the same manner Dutton (1988), and Barnett and LaViolette (1993) refer to a number of studies claiming similarities between the behaviour exhibited by battered women and the behaviour of hostages as found with the Stockholm Syndrome. The Stockholm Syndrome, first depicted after a 1974 bank robbery in Stockholm where a number of hostages were taken, describes the processes individuals go through as prisoners of war, hostages, or captives. Suffering from isolation, maltreatment, and in fear of their lives, these captives experience feelings of helplessness, and some end up identifying with the captors (Dutton, 1988; Horley, 2002). Because of these feelings or the reality of helplessness, they stay within the physical or emotional area designated to them by the captors, in order to survive (Wallace, 1996).

Keeping in mind the case of Patty Hearst, who after her kidnapping joined the aggressors in their struggle for liberation (Dutton, 1988), brings me a little closer to understanding how women are ensnared in emotionally abusive relationships. There is an astonishing similarity between the actions of the abusive partner, brainwashing and the techniques used in controlling hostages (Described by The Biderman's Chart of Coercion as published by

Amnesty International, in Miller, 1995). Women in emotionally abusive relationships, who need means of survival, may exhibit hostage-like behaviour; behaviour such as praising the abuser, denial, and self-blame (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993).

*Schismogenesis or double-bind relationships:* The process of schismogenesis or double-bind relationships is another process that is described as entrapping women, but more specifically both partners within an abusive relationship. Complementary schismogenesis is an interaction pattern in which there is constant adjustment by the one partner in response to the other partner (Bateson, 1972; Sabourin, 1996). On the other hand, all committed couples mutually influence one another, and their perception of experiences is influenced by their particular personal and couple-history. I argue for the emotionally abusive relationship not being a double-bind relationship. In the latter, the partners are dependent on one another, and both gain from the experience, whereas in the emotionally abusive relationship, most women do not emotionally gain from the process. It's all take from his side and give from her side.

Berna: He's always telling me how selfish I am. I've so grown to believe him that I cannot make the decision to leave. Maybe that will just again prove my being selfish.

Women can become entrapped by, for example, the conflicting messages of a double-bind relationship (Bateson, 1972). Although I do not describe the emotionally abusive relationship as in essence a double-bind relationship, these conflicting messages imply that, no matter what the woman does, she cannot be right and she cannot win, she will bear the suffering in the relationship and will not gain from it.

Karen: He says he loves me, but where is the loving behaviour?

Berna: He's constantly telling everyone how proud he is of his women, but he still treats us like slaves; breaking one of us down 24-7.

*Crazy making:* After breaking out of an abusive relationship, women often state that while they were in the relationship they at times doubted their own sanity. However, it is the abusive man who deliberately behaves in a manner that has the woman doubting reality and her own perceptions (Douglas, 1966; Miller, 1995; Tolman, 1992). He consciously engages in behaviour that sends her the message "You're crazy" to psychologically destabilize his partner. Literature and film offer the example of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Here the woman

is dominated through physical intimidation, psychological maltreatment, and deprivation. More often the process of driving her crazy is on a much more subconscious level. So the abusive man does not consciously drive the woman crazy, but sends her the message by his controlling and manipulative behaviour (Douglas, 1996). Sometimes the message comes through as blaming, as in “John says he is tired of my moods” (Rose) or “He says I drive him crazy” (Samantha) (See Appendix A for details on Rose and Samantha).

Jennifer’s husband said: In the mental state you’re in, you cannot look after yourself. I ask you, please go and see a minister or a psychologist immediately. You need counselling and help.

To my mind, the whole process of emotional abuse is one of constant mind games and manipulations. There is constant psychological coercion and behaviour which is aimed at oppressing and degrading the other (Andersen, Boulette and Schwartz, 1991). The overtly vindictive and major control mechanism called Gaslighting as found in emotionally abusive relationships, serves as a good example. The term “gaslighting” originated from the film *Gaslight*, wherein a - what was supposed to be a loving - husband attempts to convince his wife that she is crazy, by, for example, hiding possessions, and then convincing her that she had misplaced them (Horley, 2002; Tolman, 1992). Gaslighting is a planned process of convincing a person that she is crazy; a subtle way of undermining the other person’s reality and logic. The husband will lie, manipulate, deny, and blame his partner to confuse her. Or the man will say or ask something, just too vehemently deny all knowledge thereof in the end (Miller, 1995).

Heidi: He would phone my friends, telling them how worried he is about me. Telling them that I’m supposed to be on medication – that mentally I’m not all there. He would tell them things that I am supposed to have said, while I knew full well that this was not true. The irony is that I then started doubting myself.

*Manipulative set-ups:* Time and again I have women trying to explain to me the way they always end up the culprit, “He turns anything you say against you” or “He’s so clever; no matter what you say, you always end up the guilty party.” Jones (Jones & Brown, 2000) describes how the abuser, after his explosion, turns into the attentive, remorseful partner. He now implores his partner to tell him all she feels and needs, fully knowing the limitations

he placed on the conversation by his aggression. As the woman needs some form of sharing, she falls for his manipulation, so they end up discussing her problem, the abuser again having successfully turned the tables. Forward (1997, p.5&8) describes the mind game of “emotional blackmail”, defined as “a powerful form of manipulation in which people close to us threaten, either directly or indirectly, to punish us if we don’t do what they want.” She analyzes the process of entrapment through the processes of fear, obligation and guilt. The woman is caught up in bewilderment and murky perceptions, while the blackmailer skilfully masks the pressure he applies, so that he can later deny all harmful intent.

Some subtle set-ups are a tactic used by the abusive partner so as to gain control. He will buy her chocolates when she’s on a diet, or will manoeuvre her into a one-down position. He manipulates his partner to behave in a certain manner, only to blame her for precisely this behaviour afterwards (Douglas, 1996). The frustration lies in not knowing the rules, because they are constantly changing (Miller, 1995) and therefore the recipient never seems to be able to get it right. If she does get a grip on reality and confronts him, he either laughs at her or accuses her of overreacting (Tolman, 1992). She is frozen into passivity, so he gently gets her to relax, and then uses her passivity as something else to blame her for. Even police officers answering a distress call are confused and blinded as they find a woman hysterically crying and a calm man who has them believe that they are dealing with just another woman who, “you know women,” is as always exaggerating (Miller, 1995). Being thus confused, the woman becomes all the more dependent on her partner. In the end he has the power and the control to turn to her and say, “Nutty as you are, you’re lucky to have me, or you’d be in the loony bin” (Miller, 1995, p.38).

*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde:* The woman who experiences emotional abuse from her partner but sees a different person in his relationships with others (Chang, 1996; Douglas, 1996; Horley, 2002) is left seriously confused and doubting her own judgment. People would describe this utterly charming man at the office, most likeable in his everyday social behaviour, even charismatic and pleasant, but in the privacy of his own home or the relationship between him and his wife, he changes his stripes (Douglas, 1996). Miller (1995) relates this behaviour pattern to the age-old tale of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Authors such as Chang (1996) and Hirigoyen (2000) highlights the degree of narcissistic seduction used by the abusive man.

Gerda: Others see this charming, fantastic guy. When entertaining guests he's always the centre of attention, attending to the food, the flamboyant host, the guy I love and fell in love with. But when we're alone he's always angry. How do you explain this to others? How do you explain it to yourself?

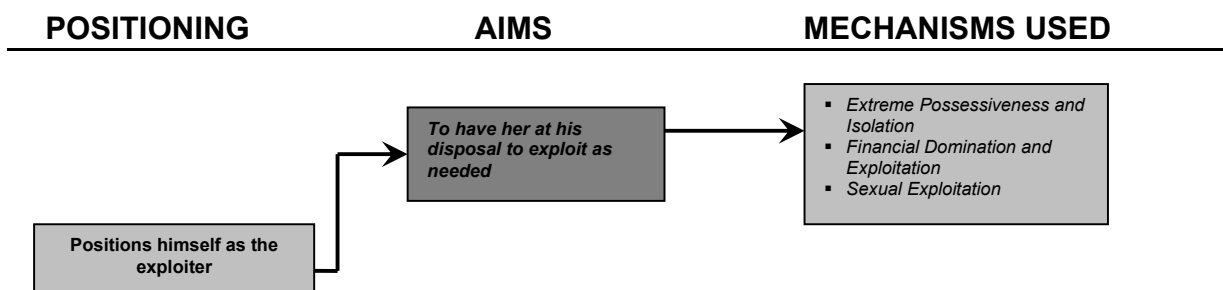
The Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde pattern, the abusive man instantly switching between being a charming and caring man to a cold and abusive one (Douglas, 1996), relates to the control paradigm. As long as the abuser has the control, he can be caring. He is an expert in knowing just how far he can push his partner; immediately turning on the charm to prevent her from leaving (Miller, 1995). This intermittent normal, kind, or ordinary behaviour is what entraps the women. It takes a while before the woman catches on and starts seeing the abusive man for what he is; "charming but phoney" (Chang, 1996, p.56). Catching on to his double role, the woman starts seeing the abusive man as egocentric and narcissistic, one who exploits others to indulge the self, lacking in empathy, and with a disregard for the rights and needs of others (Dutton, 1992).

## **Exploitation**

The male sense of entitlement to a position of dominance, control, and power are often described as the germination site for later emotional abuse (Ferguson, 1991; French, 1995; Kelly-Gadol, 1987; Scheman, 2003). The man believes himself to be better experienced, which supposedly gives him the right to show contempt for those having less power (Lengerman & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004; Millet, 2000). Jones (in Jones & Brown, 2000) practically illustrates the abuser's sense of importance in reserving the right to read the paper first, being entitled to the best seat in front of the television, being served first, having the right to sit down and relax with the paper or in front of the television while she has to see to the children, do the washing, do the housework, and make supper. He has the right to exploit and use his partner, as he is in the position of power.

Positioning himself as the one that has the power, the emotionally abusive man sees himself as having the right to dominate. The distance between domination and the controlling nature thereof to the misuse of power are not that sizeable. Domination and control easily flow into

exploitation of the one without the power, the one who does not have the controlling power of patriarchy behind her. In some instances it therefore becomes impossible to distinguish how and where domination differs from exploitation. In Figure 8-3 I intercept this interplay by stating extreme possessiveness and isolation as well as exploitation as mechanisms used to force the woman into a position where she can be exploited by the emotional abuser. The difference lies in the abuser's positioning. He can position himself as the master with the aim to dominate or the exploiter, the latter which to my mind, has the edge in terms of vindictiveness and selfish intent.



**Figure 8-3a:** Position assumed and mechanisms used by the male partner to exploit the woman

### ***Financial exploitation***

Some abusive men position themselves as dominant by means of their mutual finances (Chafetz, 1991; Douglas, 1996; Dutton, 1992). In a capitalist society, money means power (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1991). If one partner is dependent on the other's resources – be it financial or emotional – he/she is vulnerable to control by the person possessing the resources (Burgoyne, 2004; Chang, 1996; Miller, 1995). An uncommonly large number of men in this study were financially exploiting their partners (See Appendix B for further examples of financial exploitation).

Finance becomes just another area in which men have been conditioned into believing that women have no place. These men believe that women know nothing about matters that fall outside the affairs of the home (Dobash & Dobash, 1980). Some abusive men take full control of his wife's wage packet, whereas other wives fall into the trap of earning their own salary only to spend it on their families (Burgoyne, 2004; Walker, 1979). Even when not gainfully employed himself the exploiting man ventures into schemes without consulting his wife, and in the end it is



expected that she will take full responsibility for his financial mishaps (Douglas, 1996; See the case studies of Minette, p.66 and Berna, p.101). Women have been conditioned into emotionally supporting their husbands (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993) which is only a short way away from accepting all financial responsibility. From my experience and from the women in this research I learned of flagrant misuse or misappropriation of funds that lead to extreme financial hardship for the family, but mostly the financial exploitation is much more subtle (Chang, 1996; Miller, 1995; Tolman, 1992).

Samantha: He had this continuous flow of new work opportunities he delved into, chopping and changing, that left us struggling for the better part of our married life. At times this left me to be the major breadwinner.

Some abusive men subtly force their wives into working, even playing into her need for self-development. This relieves him of the full financial responsibility, and should she then complain of either something at work or carrying a double workload, he can reflect it back as being her own choice. When the wife in the end decides to divorce him, he still plays the victim-game in blaming her (Hirigoyen, 2000), saying something to the effect of so “You throw me out without a cent. Selfish as always.”

Jennifer: So he says to me, “I will really appreciate your being on the look-out for a morning-only position. It will help you build your self-image and will show that you are able share the financial responsibility of this family” and this after he was the one that squandered my inheritance.

There are those abusive men who will go out and buy themselves expensive golfing equipment, while the wife struggles to buy a piece of material to make herself a new house frock; bullying his spouse by him applying financial double standards (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1991; Douglas, 1996; Miller, 1995). He leads an extravagant life-style at the expense of his partner, justifying his expensive clothes, the car he drives and the club membership by saying that he needs them to suit his status (Horley, 2002; Walker, 1979). The unequal power base in the family is clearly demonstrated by the distribution of the family income and the privileges it will buy; as the “capacity for income (buys) the privilege of leisure, or at least freedom from household chores” (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1991, p.266). The case study of Karen illustrates her making ends meet with whatever she is given as family budget, while the husband is not in the least perturbed by the situation.

Jennifer: He started all these businesses and asked me to withdraw money from a trust fund my parents had left me. If I resisted, he withheld sex or started on a blaming spree, often blaming me for being so selfish.

Joint checking accounts are kept, under the auspices of finances being a family matter (Dobash & Dobash, 1980), but although the money goes to a joint account, psychologically the entitlement still lies with the earner (and the earner is the man (Burgoyne (2004). Rigid financial control has the abusive man forcing his spouse to explain, in the greatest of detail, what she intends to do with the money she says she needs for household necessities (Dougals, 1996; Horley, 2002; Jukes, 1999; Miller, 1995). The difference here lies in the control and the management of the finances. The mere fact of being paid always implies a drop in status and carries the further implication of an imposed debt or obligation, though the precise terms of repayment are left unspecified (Burgoyne, 2004). These measures impinge on the woman's autonomy, demean her, isolate her, and keep her in a state of financial and childlike dependency. She is denied self-management and self-improvement opportunities (Chang, 1996; Tolman, 1992) for if she "never has a cent, she never has a choice" (Miller, 1995, p.77).

Positioning the woman as financially dependent, she experiences financial entrapment and has the realistic fear of becoming poor on leaving (Tolman, 1992) no matter what the financial status of the family is (Walker, 1979). Some women will fear losing the house she was accustomed to before the divorce, others will fear being in a position where she will have to bargain for lower prices when she cannot afford the medical fees. Feminists emphatically state that there cannot be personal power without financial autonomy (Collier, 1982).

### ***Sexual exploitation***

French (1995) cited that the viewpoint that women are bodies and men are minds serves another purpose except for the political stratification and parasitism. It also gives man the spiritual leverage of transcending nature as by asceticism, as soldiers by toughness, or as superior intellects. Transcending sex becomes the highest acclaim and so man scorns women and sex. Therefore the sexual aspects of the relationship do not escape the oppression, the conflicts, and the humiliation found in the emotionally abusive relationship (Basile, 1999; Douglas, 1996; Miller, 1995). Whereas sexual abuse was previously described as part of

physical abuse (Dutton, 1992), I find that there are a number of aspects surrounding sexual abuse that are more fitting to emotional abuse.

Berna: I find it difficult to sexually respond to Kevin. Sometimes, when he wanted to make love, I could still hear his abusive words ringing in my ears, but mostly I think it's because with every major incident, another part of your heart sort of splits of.

It has been said that men fear the sexual attraction of women. This can be attributed to men's powerlessness in the face of the power their mother had over them as children (Elworthy, 1996; Gerdes, et al., 1988). Pollack (1999) in his memorable book, *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood*, on the other hand, attributes men's fear of women, to them remembering the painful separation from their mothers. Men remember the shame experienced because of the natural need for closeness and nurturing they felt; the embarrassment and feelings of inadequacy experienced when asked to act like a man, and not yet being equipped to be what society expects of them. Rather than going through similar experiences, feeling humiliated and rejected (Papp, 1988, p.203), men avoid dependency, and end up wanting to control their women, to ensure that their mothers' female power will never overwhelm them again.

Women in emotionally abusive relationships are often blamed for not being sexually responsive. The women in the present study reacted by attempting to find the source of the problem in themselves. Seldom do women realize that being sexually cold is a symptom of the relationship being in trouble and that this cannot necessarily be attributed to only their own behaviour within the relationship (Douglas, 1996; Horley, 2002). I do not find it in any way surprising that a woman loses her sex drive when manipulated into having sex, criticized for her performance as a sexual partner, criticized for everything else, constantly badgered, bullied and punished and, above all, blamed for causing or inherently having a sexual problem.

Heidi's husband James: We're having problems in this relationship, because you're never interested in having sex, you're such a cold and calculating bitch.

The abuser positions him in the sexual arena through the myth of the male sex drive. He uses the misconception that men's sexuality is directly biological and beyond his control as his right to the body to the female of his choice (Alsop, et al, 2003; Hollway, 1984). Sex is demanded as the man's right (Cahn, 1996; Chang, 1996; Dutton, 1992). Men often use women as a fix

(Douglas, 1996). Women are treated as a possession or an object (Ferguson, 1991; Hirigoyen, 2000). A large amount of power can be experienced in the claiming of a woman's body (Horley, 2002). This controlling behaviour is seen as a measure of his maleness, making him feel alive, masterful, and strong (Hine, 1987 in referring to Rubin, 1983; Papp, 1988). This stereotypical behaviour is so ingrained in society, that when asked if a man has the right to have sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent under certain circumstances, 80 per cent of teenagers answered in the affirmative if the couple was married (Pipher, 1995).

Heidi: This is the pattern of our lives. He comes home, and after talking a bit he would start on some work he brought home. On Wednesdays and Saturday mornings he plays his golf and also fits in all his rugby and official sport-related functions and get-togethers. He never spends real time with the family – and, oh yes, he drags us to all the functions. So we never really talk, and if we talk it's about his work and his life, or we'll end with him, as always, telling me were I'm supposed to better myself. We'll go to bed, and the moment I get into bed, he'll brutally start something with my breasts and will demand sex ... At times he was shoving me onto the bed, forcing me down either to listen to him degrading me, or to force intercourse. He would prevent me from leaving the bed or the room and would blame and scold. Worst of all was when he forced himself on me. When I subsequently tried to explain to him that I experience it as rape, he was so genuinely surprised that I started to doubt my own perceptions again. As I grew stronger, I plainly stated that this was rape, and then he laughed at me!

Not only are women in emotionally abusive relationships subjected to forced sex from time to time (Cherry, 1983; Horley, 2002), some abusive men also deny their spouses or partners foreplay or sex (Chang, 1996; Douglas, 1996; Miller, 1995).

Rose: After having had this really good sexual relationship, he doesn't pay any attention to me sexually anymore. If I keep my mouth shut and the household runs the way he wants it to, he'll start making sexual overtures again.

Linda (See Appendix A): Whenever he's annoyed about something, he'll push me away.

Sex becomes another way of catering to the man's needs (Alsop, et al., 2003; Cahn, 1996; Douglas, 1996; Dutton, 1992; Miller, 1992), of punishing and humiliating her (Chang, 1996), or

of violently controlling her (Horley, 2002; Kelly, 1990). The most often cited incidence of coercive sex mentioned by women is forced sex after they couple had had a major fight. Usually the fight was intensely bitter and aggressive, with her being criticized, scolded, and degraded, and she is either fuming or bitterly crying because of the injustice. Or she is emotionally spent, feels guilty and is in doubt about herself and the relationship. The psychological pain is described as intense, and then he demands to have sex. Mandy, for example, is contemplating divorce because of years of emotional abuse and Ricus is pulling out all the stops; justifying himself, blaming her for not being submissive and a good wife. He batters her until after midnight, when he has her whimpering, and then he asks for sex (See Appendix A). One cannot slight the sadistic element of the emotionally abusive man's positioning in these examples.

“I am so sorry and I love you so much. I will make it up to you as long as you bring your side. If you have sex with me it will prove that you really care and that you are willing to forgive and go on. Please, let me kiss you and touch you and show you how much I love you.”

Finkelhor and Yllö (1983) describe a range of sexual coercion that occurs within the marital relationship. They refer to the social coercion where the woman engages in sex only to avoid appearing frigid or old-fashioned, but also the interpersonal coercion where she will engage in sex in an effort to stop her spouse's continual beseeching, pleading, and scolding. Some women do give in because they were brought up to believe a number of societal imprinted expectations. They believe that sex is part of their wifely duties (Dutton, 1992; Gavey, 1989) and that their husbands have the right to demand sex from them (Douglas, 1996; Horley, 2002). They give in out of fear of retaliation (Basile, 1999).

Anca: At first it was Jim (ex-husband) who rejected me sexually. Now I'm in this relationship with Danny and he expects me to sleep with him. I'm not ready yet, but he said it is because we haven't had sex yet. I don't believe in sex outside of marriage, but I gave in. Now I'm guilt-ridden. I'm so ashamed of myself for giving in and for not being strong enough to resist him.

Sexual force can take on a number of other forms. Some emotionally abusive men force women to partake in sexual practices the women do not feel comfortable with. Others force a woman into sex in front of her children or sex with other men or other forms of degrading sexual

behaviour (Horley, 2002). Women in this study relate experiences of having objects inserted into her vagina and anus as well as threats of violence or physical injury during sex (O'Leary & Murphy, 1992). Some abusive men have the women believe that in complying with the man's wishes for unwanted sex or strange sexual acts, the woman proves her devotion to him (Miller, 1995). Karen says she feels extremely uncomfortable with some kinky sex her husband usually suggests,

At first I refused, but Johan said The Bible says I'm supposed to do as my husband expect. He says The Bible says a man can do with his wife as he wishes.

The emotionally abusive man threatens to go elsewhere if she does not live up to his expectations (Douglas, 1996). Refusing his sexual overtures is met with extreme anger and sometimes even rape. He uses the sexual relationship as a brutal and punishing display of his power in the relationship (Hirigoyen, 2000; Horley, 2002; Kelly, 1990).

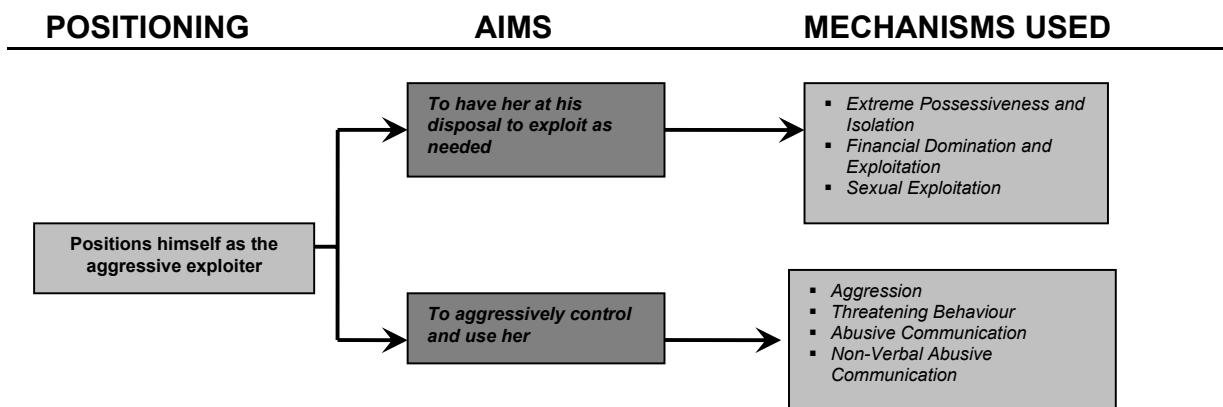
Kevin: They are many women out there that will be only to glad to have me as a husband and will be only too pleased to see to my needs.

Edwina (See Appendix A): He really hurts me. He is so rough in everything he does. In the end I feel as if I have been raped. This isn't worth my while. I will never ever ask him for sex again or give an indication when I'm interested. This hurt even more than his frequent rejection.

Listening to the sexual experiences of the women in the study, I support other researchers in their preliminary finding that there seems to be a connection between the male spouse or partner's extramarital affairs and emotional or physical abuse (Boonzaier, 2005; Boonzaaier & De la Rey's, 2004; Horley, 2002). An extraordinary large number of the women in the present study complained of their husband's double standards when it comes to marital fidelity as were also found by Jukes (1999); area that needs further investigation. I also concur that one cannot divorce heterosexuality within a dominantly patriarchal environment from the systems of male domination and oppression. Some women have found a role model in lesbianism as a result of the struggle to free themselves from male domination (Crow, 2000). This reaction against heterosexuality forms part of women's struggle to regain control over their own bodies (Alsop, et al., 2003; Burstow, 1992).

## Aggression

Although there is a substructure of aggression found in exploitation as shown above, I discuss aggression as a separate mechanisms used by the emotionally abusive man as I value aggression as an integral part of emotional abuse. In Figure 8-3b I therefore illustrate the interplay between the abusive man positioning himself as either exploiter, or using primarily aggressive means or assuming the position of an aggressive exploiter. Taking the more aggressive stance, he uses mechanisms such as threats, abusive communication and non-verbal abusive communication to aggressively control and use his spouse as he pleases.



**Figure 8-3b:** Interplay between assuming the position of exploiter and/or using aggressive means to control and use the female partner

Society and culture have given the husband the right to discipline his wife (Chang, 1996; Millet, 2000), and it is only a small step towards man positioning himself so as to aggressively punish his wife or partner if she does not do as expected and to use further aggressive mechanisms to dominate and control her; to keep her submissive (Brannon, 2002; Douglas, 1996; Forward, 1997; Roloff, 1996). By her inner weakness, Eve destroyed paradise and this punishment for her primal sin is therefore justified in the eyes of society (Clack & Whitcomb, 1997).

The abusive man uses a number of mechanisms to punish his partner or spouse, for example emotional bullying, sulking, silence, and passive resistance (Douglas, 1996), or emotional blackmail (Forward, 1997). Some measures can be dangerous and vindictive, and others are subtly coercive (Douglas, 1996; Roloff, 1996) (See also Appendix B for further examples of aggressive mechanisms used).

Hedwig (See Appendix A): He would sulk and you would try and keep the conversation going. In the end it's just too much and you give up.

In most relationships, aggression surfaces from time to time in the form of, for example, sarcasm or an occasional put-down. But as society frowns upon direct aggressive behaviour, humankind has taken to indirect ways of showing their aggression. Dickson (2003) lists covert and indirect ways of showing aggression, including excessive control, deflation of the other, withholding of information, constant criticisms and taunts, denying the other the right of expression and choice, the withdrawal of vital resources, manipulation, neglect of responsibility, and sabotage. Indirect aggression mainly constitutes emotional abuse, but varies in its intensity, the continuous manner in which it is utilized, and above all, intent. The intent specifies the conscious or subconscious wish to control, emotionally harm, or hurt the victim (Cahn, 1996; Cahn & Lloyd, 1996; Sabourin, 1996; Schumacher et al., 2001; Vissing, & Baily, 1996).

Camilla (See Appendix A): It's always been a stormy marriage; I mean he's always been a difficult person. You can say anything and he'd react with rage. Anything you say has the potential of being used against you, it's just going to boomerang.

I find that the emotionally abusive a seldom shows his aggression in the presence of others as in the following insert:

Beth: He will call me a bitch, a tart, or a whore in front of my female friends.

In only a very small percentage of the women in this study, did their emotionally abusive spouses or partners use uncontrolled rage as a control mechanism (Miller, 1995). The aggression is still controlled to a certain extent, and it seldom, if ever, explodes into physical violence. Timing is important as a sudden unexpected flare-up can have a profound impact. Some of the women describe a low-intensity aggression that is a constant in their lives:

Beth: Kobus can become extremely aggressive in his manner. There's this rage, and extreme and constant irritability.

Gerda: He always is angry ... He stays angry forever.



### ***Threatening behaviour***

Threats constitute a further aggressive control mechanism (For further examples see Appendix B). The abusive man can instill fear in the woman, because of his position of authority in society and because violence towards women is not uncommon in western culture (Millet, 2000). Although the majority of men do not go out and commit violent acts against women, women do know that it is possible and that violence against women occurs regularly. This knowledge threatens women. It is also true that once violence has occurred, whether physical or emotional, the implied threat becomes ever-present (Barnett, 1990 in Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Cahn, 1996; Marshall, 1994). The woman believes that she can be next (Douglas, 1996; Horley, 2002); she believes that if she does not comply, she will be punished (Roloff, 1996).

Karen: I'm so afraid, God help me. I just don't know what to expect. I believe he's capable of murder – I see it in his eyes. I'm so scared. He's so terribly strong – I may never oppose him. If I differ from him in anything, there will be trouble.

Emotional abuse takes its toll, even in the absence of the abusive man, as the abuser preserves a level of control through his implied threats (Dutton, 1992). As Miller (1995, p.26) says, "Women tell me that emotional abuse begins before he even comes home or before she returns from her job; it begins with the memory; it begins with the dread." Hirigoyen (2000) sees threats as always being indirect and veiled, but the abuser ensures that the recipient understands the intended threat in the message sent, behaviour that will fit Forward's (1997) earlier notion of emotional blackmail. The fear it arouses keeps the woman in her place (Douglas, 1996; Marshall, 1994; Roloff, 1996).

Mandy (See Appendix A): Ricus believes in a house being tidy, but with three pre-school children that is a major issue. I find myself constantly tidying the house, keeping it just the way he likes it. Before he gets home from work, I will bath the two youngest and then start tidying again, to have everything ready, clean and tidy, for when he comes. If he phones to say he'll be late, I actually breathe again – then I can go and tidy up after the children have been put to bed.

Camilla: I find myself yelling at the children to keep their rooms tidy even when Chris is not around. What does it matter if their rooms are untidy when they're playing?

The emotionally abusive man uses the coercive technique of threatening to harm her family or her friends. Some abusers utilize the most frightening of all threats for a woman, threatening to harm her children if she does not comply (Miller, 1995). Some scholars describe the subtleties of the clenching of a fist, a look given (Dutton, 1992; Jones [in Jones & Brown, 2000]; O'Conner, 2000), others describe more overt threatening behaviour like verbal threats, using actual force or the threat of using force, or threatening to use guns or knives (Marshall, 1994; Vissing, & Baily, 1996). He threatens to destroy property or to lock her in or out of the house or room. He may threaten to place his partner in a mental institution, to permanently disfigure her (Follingstad & DeHart, 2000), to have an affair, or to humiliate her in public (Douglas, 1996; Tolman, 1992). He threatens to harm or torture the family pets (O'Leary & Murphy, 1992).

Hedwig: He would be walking around in the house with his pistol loaded, swearing and screaming at me. The children were still babies. What was I supposed to think and do? Sometimes I froze. At other times I went into screaming mode myself.

The emotionally abusive man keeps his woman in line through the threat of divorce or abandonment (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Jones & Brown, 2000; Tolman, 1992), either by withdrawing or physically moving out (O'Connor, 2000). To a woman, socialized into believing she has no standing in society without a man, this spells trauma. He threatens to take all the money they have (Barnett, 1990 in Barnett & LaViolette, 1993) or deny her financial support (Burgoyne, 2004). For those women who find themselves financially dependent on men, this is horrifying, because they realize that "Poverty is cruel and prolonged violence" (O'Connor, 2000, p.176).

Alma (See Appendix A): He screamed, "Just remember, if you do not do as I say, I will see to it that you get nothing. Before the settlement I'll see to it that all property is placed onto my name". This is so cruel. He wants a divorce while he knows that I'll be out of work and that I'm totally dependent upon him.

### ***Utilizing verbal mechanisms***

Wittgenstein (Gergen, 2000) explains that words come to meaning through their use within a situation or their specific place in the verbal game. Meaning lies within the broader context of actions, as language is “speech acts, that is, actions which accomplish something within the interpersonal world” (Gergen, 2000, p.35). Therefore the subtle abusive messages aimed at his spouse by the abusive man are mostly picked up only by his spouse and not necessarily by those around her (Horley, 2002). Cahn (1996) states that violent and abusive acts and messages to be those that are in violation of the social norms and accepted standards. I do not agree and also Hirigoyen (2000), in agreement with the context-specific concept explained above, states that it is possible to completely destabilize another person by using seemingly harmless words and hints, spiteful allusions, humiliating remarks, inferences, and unspoken suggestions.

Verbal aggression is a primary component of emotional abuse (Schumacher et al., 2001). Some emotionally abusive men will tire out his woman by means of propaganda although the words and meanings differ from culture to culture. He constantly derides her and launches a direct verbal attack on her worth as a person (Chang, 1996), calling her a slut, a bitch, a whore. Sometimes this is done jokingly, but often with the subtle meaning that he sees her as a lesser being who requires his masterful guidance to correct her faults and flaws. The emotionally abusive constantly bombards his spouse with his negative perceptions of her intellectual abilities. He would, for example, say,

Nannette’s husband (See Appendix A): You’re so darn stupid. You’ll never be capable of looking after other people’s kids. I sometimes think that you don’t have it in you to be more than a low-ranking government official.

Some abusive men purposely talk to their partners in the most abstract, dogmatic, and technical language, creating an opportunity to humiliate her when she fails to understand him, so that when she does not understand he has created an opportunity to degrade her (Hirigoyen, 2000).

The abusive man verbally attacks his partner or spouse’s physical abilities (Douglas, 1996; Horley, 2002; Vissing & Baily, 1996). Rose’s husband says,

You disgust me! Just look at you! You're as fat as a cow and you do nothing about it ... Look at yourself. You're so fucking fat your clothes won't fit you ... Look at your hair. Can't you do something about it? ... You're getting so old. It makes me nauseous to look at you ... You're old and you're fat.

The emotional abuse lies in the emotionally abusive man's negative perception of his wife's civil conduct (see Vissing & Baily (1996) as applicable to child abuse).

Samantha: While on holiday, I had to hear, "You with your fuckin' nose in the air." I felt he was constantly trying to provoke me. He just wanted somebody to scold.

Anca's husband: You're just like you're fuckin' dad. I don't know where you were picked up.

Vissing and Baily (1996) describe the abuser wishing the other ill health or misfortune. Berna's and Karen's husbands say,

Ag, go to hell! That's where you belong ... Just get out.

Go to blazes! ("*Gaan na jou moer!*").

The ploys used in abusive communication are numerous. Although the positioning of the abusive man through his use of abusive communication is important, I will not discuss each of these in detail. I will present a broad overview of the types of abusive communication used while citing further examples in Appendix B).

*Deliberate miscommunication:* Abusive communication can consist of lies and the refusal to communicate in a direct manner (Vissing & Baily, 1996); described as using a "mix of innuendo and unspoken hints to create a misunderstanding" (Hirigoyen (2000, p.100) Cunningly he shifts gears, deny, blame and bait her with false accusations (Douglas, 1996; Miller, 1995). He purposefully scrambles the abusive message within the context of other more positive messages, so that initially they are not seen as destructive (Jukes, 1999). He will say something hurtful, but on seeing her reaction, he will retract his words while the original intent stays with her. The abuser side-steps answering her questions directly, or gives vaguely unsettling remarks, and "everything is suggested but never said outright" (Hirigoyen, 2000, p.96). The abusive man can say something verbally and express the

opposite in a non-verbally manner (Rosen, 1996). Picking up on the discrepancies, not knowing what to believe, the woman feels trapped.

Helen: He will constantly find fault with me, 'till I'm close to tears, and then he will comfort me by telling me how good a mother I am.

*Jokes and teasing, making fun of and sarcasm:* Within a position of unequal power, accompanied by the intent to change the other or pointing out her shortcomings, teasing and joking, sarcasm and making fun of embarrasses and discredits the other (Chang, 1996; Douglas, 1996; Horley, 2002). Others in the company hear the joke; she picks up the intended negativity because of the content of their shared history (Hirigoyen, 2000). Since the abusive man is joking, bantering, or being sarcastic, he can invalidate the intended hurtfulness as experienced by his partner; he can belittle or blame her for misinterpreting his intent (Vissing & Baily, 1996).

Helen: If I try and explain to him how I feel, he either doesn't listen, or he laughs off my concerns. In frustration I'll start crying and he'll burst out laughing, saying, "Ah, do we have the sensitivities again today?"

*Belittlement, denigration and degradation:* The emotionally abusive man resorts to many acts of degradation and humiliation such as insults, name-calling, demeaning and deprecating remarks, put-downs, and critique (Dutton, 1992; Kirkwood, 1993; Loring, 1994; Tolman, 1992). He calls her a slut, a bitch, a whore and some women are never referred to by name. The emotionally abusive man ignores and discredits his wife or partner's achievements and convinces her of her failures (Douglas, 1996). Should his tactics no longer work, the emotionally abusive man does his screaming and name-calling in front of the children; forcing the woman into submission as she sees the distress of the children (Chang, 1996; Miller, 1995).

Minette: Ian was not working at the time. I had to look after the baby and see to my practice, but he was spending money like it was going out of fashion. When I dared to talk to him about our money situation, he would lash out, "You're just being selfish. You always want everything for yourself. Aren't you ashamed of how you treat me?"

Linda: I, Liezel, and Nadine were sitting on the stoep, chatting, when he stormed out. Something again was not to his fancy. He raged and screamed at me, “You bloody incompetent bitch.” That’s a word I often hear, or he calls me a “whore.”

*Criticizing:* The abusive man criticizes everything: behaviour, opinions, competence, intelligence, appearances (Horley, 2002; Loring, 1994). Most people have enough ego strength to shrug off a few criticisms, but if it comes at you constantly, the cruelty thereof in the long run wears you out (Chang, 1996; Douglas, 1996). The blatant rejection the woman experiences are even worse than the criticism.

Heidi: He told me that he don’t want me in his official car, because it takes him two weeks to get the smell of my perfume out of his car.

Sylvia (See Appendix A): Nothing I do seem to be right. But he expects me to jump when he tells me to jump. What am I supposed to do?

### ***Utilizing non-verbal mechanisms***

It is the subtle but continuous pattern of abusive incidents that cause the most hurt and “overtly coercive compliance tactics” are far less used than milder or socially desirable traits (Marshall, 1994, p.296). O’Connor (2000) therefore concludes of the opinion that most of the power-play that leads to the oppression of women occurs on a non-verbal level. These patterned or ritualized threats of violence are aimed at establishing and maintaining social hierarchies and rankings; another way in which the abusive man positions himself (See further examples in Appendix B).

*Silence or the failure to respond:* The passive aggressive side of emotional abuse is illustrated by silence and the failure to respond. People find their sense of being through contact and communicating with others (Douglas, 1996). Living with stony silence, withdrawal, hostility, and cold contempt is painful, and women are dehumanised by being found not worthy of communicating to (Chang, 1996; Dutton, 1992; Hirigoyen, 2000; NiCarthy, 1982; Tolman, 1992; Vissing & Baily, 1996). They hear the message, “You are unworthy of my attention” (Douglas, 1996, pp.33-4). As Estés (1992, p.240) explains,

Shunning treats the victim as if she does not exist. It withdraws spiritual concern, love, and other psychic necessities from that person. The idea is to force her to conform, or else to kill her spirituality ... If a woman is shunned, it is almost always because she has done or is about to do something in the wildish range, oftentimes something as simple as expressing a slightly different belief or wearing an unapproved color ...

Gerda: I live in total darkness. He's always angry. The loneliness just gets to me. There was a time where I begged him to talk to me, now I just keep quiet.

Some abusive men do talk to their partners. Usually the problem here lies in the when and how and what he says. The following scenario as described by Jones (Jones & Brown, 2000, p.30) cropped up again and again in my research: "He parries (her) plea for conversation, which he thoroughly understands, until bedtime or near it, and then, exhausted and exasperated, he slaps down his book or papers, or snaps off the TV, or flings his shoe to the floor if he is undressing, and turns to his wife, saying, "Oh, for Christ's sake, what is it you want to talk about?"

Rose: His not there – either physically or emotionally. He doesn't talk. He doesn't share.

Karen's Johan: I'm a busy man and I need my own quite time. Saturday-evenings I want to relax so I need no wife or child around, playing, asking questions. They know it's better not to bother me with anything on a Saturday-night.

Heidi: If we go shopping or even gets out of the car going to church, he always walks ten paces in front of me.

*Sulking and Pouting:* Sulking and pouting are rather immature and manipulative ways of establishing control; showing one's disdain but refusing to discuss it (Douglas, 1996; Loring, 1994; Vissing & Baily, 1996). Although not overtly aggressive in nature, sulking is a form of retaliation (Jukes, 1999).

Heidi: If he doesn't like what you say or what you did, he would give you the cold shoulder. For weeks on end he would walk around, shoulders drooping, bitter around the mouth. I always felt so ashamed – what did my parents think, what did his colleagues think ... So in the end, you keep quiet about these matters because you are so ashamed.

Sometimes you give in just because you needed to feel comfortable in you own home again, and because you couldn't stand the hurting anymore.

*Abandonment:* There is a strong interconnection between rejection, silence, failing to respond and abandonment. I am of the opinion that the first three, all taken to the most extreme can be seen as the latter; abandonment and the ultimate abandonment or rejection being that of leaving her or divorcing her. He is constantly telling her "Fuck off, I don't want you in my house" or "Get the hell out of my house. I give you three days and then you're out."

Ina (See Appendix A): Wednesday was my twenty-first birthday and my dad didn't even call me. How can a father say he loves you and this is what he does ... I was in the swimming pool and my dad was standing on the other side. I couldn't breathe and I knew that he knew that, but he didn't help me. I thought this so typical of our relationship. He will never be there for help, he will never stretch out a helping hand, but I'm always afraid when he calls, because he will always try some act of emotionally blackmail on me again.

And some abusive men do disappear:

Elaine: There I was in my little prison and if I said something he didn't like, he disappeared for a couple of days, a couple of weeks, leaving me without a car or a cellphone, no money and no food. So, I didn't say anything, I didn't go anywhere. All I did was make sure that he didn't get cross. When I was good, I had everything; when I was bad ... I think he wanted to punish me and by disappearing the though he could show me how dependent I was on him and in the beginning it really did work. Boy, was I scared!

*Facial Expressions and Gestures:* Some facial expressions that convey a negative message may be easily observed, but it is the unobserved, fleetingly subtle expression on the face of the abuser that conveys the abuse. The meaning of these expressions are found within the abusive nature of the total relationship and everything that went before. The more obvious expressions that convey the negative message are the abusive man's frown, his scowl, sticking out his tongue, rolling his eyes, tics and his lip biting (Vissing, & Baily, 1996). He conveys his aversion and antipathy by crossing his arms across the chest, using hand signals to convey degrading messages such as being mad or banging a fist on the table.



Gerda: He would only so slightly shrink back and you can barely sense him shudder. The humiliation lies in having your partner finding you that repulsive.

Gestures are commonly used to create and maintain social hierarchies (O’Conner, 2000). Gestures of dominance often turn out to be gestures of violence, or gestures containing the threat of violence. The threat lies in knowing the pattern that usually follows; she then knows what he expects or wants even before he angrily glances at her (Chang, 1996; Tolman, 1992). O’Conner’s (2000, p.176) expertly brings the point across in his description: “A husband and wife are at a party. The wife says something that the husband does not want her to say ... He quickly tightens the muscles around his jaw, and gives her a rapid but intense stare. Outsiders don’t notice the interaction, though they may have a vaguely uncomfortable feeling that they are intruding on something private ... If the wife does not respond with submission, she can expect to be punished.”

The threat of further abuse lies in the man” paling or flushing, clenching his fists at his sides or gritting his teeth” and even more subtly, a “slight change of colour on his part, or a slight stiffening of stance.” Others do not even see it, but she knows the signs (Jones in Jones & Brown, 2000, p. 28-9).

Berna: He would promise to go with me, but just by the way he turned around I new that it wasn’t going to happen.

*Showing Cold Contempt:* Walker (1979) referred to the researchers Eisenberg and Micklow who found 90 percent of batterers in their study to come from the military. So it is of interest that Helen, the wife of a high-ranking military officer, describes behaviour from her spouse that is more fitting to a military training facility or disciplinary institution as to the institution of marriage. Two of the other women in the study had similar experiences; an occurrence that is open to further research.

This cold-blooded communication has a sadistic element to it; sadistic taken to mean “the passion to have absolute and unrestricted control over a living being” (Dowrick in the Foreword to Douglas, 1996, p.16). The wife or partner of an emotionally abusive man can therefore expect to find herself in a position of being controlled and dominated by violence

(Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Douglas, 1996). It can be that the abuser's cold and theoretical approach initially impressed the woman and he gained the intellectual upper hand (Hirigoyen, 2000). The abuser objectifies the victim in order not to be affected by her suffering and so does not see her distress. Needing to gain the upper hand he uses aggression in a cold-blooded, emotionless way (Dickson, 2003; Dutton, 1992).

Karen: How can you explain this, you just know and feel it and it drives you crazy. And then if you complain or try and show him what it does to you, he denies everything and you can prove nothing ... Like he doesn't care or doesn't love you.

*Being Vindictive:* Women describe their partner's vindictiveness the moment they as women start pulling away from the relationship:

Phoebe (See Appendix A): I cannot believe this! This was not the way both of us were brought up. We come from good farm stock. You know what he did? He actually climbed up the fence of the security complex where I'm staying and stole photos of me having a drink with Martin and getting a massage. We're divorced, for heavens sake! He sent these to my poor unsuspecting parents way down on the farm, wanting to prove that I'm an unfit mother!

He uses others as Scapegoats:

Helen: My sixteen year old wanted to have a tattoo or a belly-ring. We were having this rather pleasant mom-and-daughter discussion about the pros and cons, real nice sort of. I was feeling rather chuffed with myself because I was having her agree that maybe a belly-ring was the better options – seeing that you could later-on remove it with no visible after effects, when he stormed in and demanded to know what's going on. Loud and clear, cold as ice, "I'm the boss and I need to know." On being told, he barked, "What sort of a mother are you!? Do you have no sense of decency?" I only later realized that he was feeling left out, and he was trying to take back the control.

*Sabotaging his Partner:* The following example shows how the emotionally abusive spouse unconsciously or consciously sets out to sabotage his spouse's commitment to her psychological practice as well as her sense of well-being as a mother. She is faced with a

dilemma; needing the income she had to twice a week, she keeps office hours till late as this is her busiest time. Having two children of pre-school age and not wanting to leave them with alternative care more than is called for, she thought her husband understood the situation:

Helen: We agreed that as there was no rugby practice or the weekly golf match on a Thursday, and because Thursdays was the maid's day off, he would be available to take care of the kids after coming home from work. But every week he seemed to have some sort of work-related crisis - he was in middle management then - I was left to sort out the arrangements. More than once I had to cancel clients – can you imagine having to cancel your clients because your husband didn't stick to his agreement - and nothing helped; no amount of pleading, blaming, bitching, and even crying and begging. I mean he had this terribly important position and he was a responsible man. After a couple of months I just gave up ... I was fighting a losing battle, or so it seemed to me.

Why I didn't leave him to sort out alternative arrangements? I don't know. I think I was made to believe that it was my practice and therefore my responsibility. His was the "important" work, mine was the part-time job. On the one hand, I had to work – we needed the money, but on the other hand I was made to feel guilty for not supporting him and understanding the immense amount of strain he was under. And then also, I was young and still had this nagging feeling that maybe I was supposed to be home and looking after my kids.

*Property Violence:* Although property violence is not often considered emotionally abusive, it has serious emotional consequences. Behaviour such as punching the walls, breaking down the doors, pounding on tables, breaking objects, destroying treasured possessions, threatening or actually abusing her pet, will severely intimidate the woman (Burstow, 1992; Loring, 1994; Miller, 1995; O'Leary & Murphy, 1992; Vissing & Baily, 1996).

Mary (See Appendix A): If I did something that Raymond didn't approve of, he would start throwing my things from our room – never caring if something that I truly treasured, broke in the process.

*Rejection:* The emotionally abusive man can threaten abandonment, but he can also overtly or overtly reject his partner or spouse as a way of keeping her under his control (Tolman,

1992). The emotionally abusive man functions in a narcissistic manner. The way in which he ignores the needs of the woman he is in a relationship with is in effect rejection of her as a person.

Antionette (See Appendix A): Here I am. Struggling to come to terms with my decision to divorce him, constantly asking myself if I did the right thing, feeling so guilty of hurting him, just to find out that he from day one has been seeing this other chicky – I was so shocked.

Anca: He never ever takes my needs into account. He tossed me aside like a used piece of cloth. He never took me and mine into consideration – not even sexually.

There is the theme of rejecting the woman when pregnant, or of the baby itself. The ultimate of this type of rejection is usually denying that the child is his, or accusing his wife of being unfaithful, killing off all her joy. He needs to have his spouse's full attention:

Heidi: He just left me and I went through the whole birthing process alone. And the afterwards he wanted to know why I was crying ... Never once did he touch my belly or anything that you hear other dads do. He never listened for the baby's heartbeat or wanted to see how she was kicking.

The abusive husband rejects his partner by objectifying her; she and others like her are only a way to a means to him (Chang, 1996). The intent is to hurt and to punish her for previously not doing something he wanted her to:

Antoinette: He sees me as this object to do with as he wishes. It really hurts, and will make one careful in trusting another again.

Anca: The self-doubt cuts deep and then even deeper if he rejects you sexually. We grow up believing that men always want sex, so in not wanting me, I felt that there must physically be something terribly wrong with me. He just tossed me aside.

## Justification

Positioning inevitably also implies the ways in which a person will justify his own positioning (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1989). The abusive man legitimizes his violent behaviour by excuses and justifications, minimizing, and denying the woman a sense of self (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004; Wetherell & Potter, 1989). Although some scholars still speculate about whether the abuser consciously decides to go the route of violence, his justifications prove his conscious intent. How can one not be conscious of behaviour and then apply a number of defences to cover oneself? Jukes (1999) shows the abuser as representative of patriarchal society to assume the right to define reasonableness and appropriateness. Only his way is the right way and only he knows the way. He tells the truth – his truth.

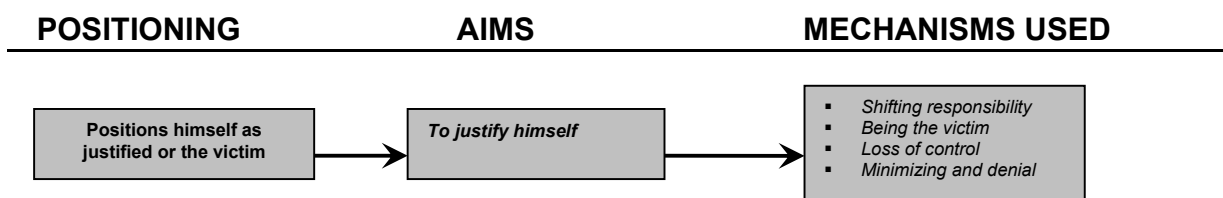
The abusive man feels justified in his behaviour because he is of the opinion that his partner or spouse is not sticking to their contract; she should take care of his needs and his needs only. He is justified in punishing her for not living up to his expectations (Chang, 1996). The abuser shows an inability to recognize women as people with minds, needs, wants and desires of their own which are important to them – “living in the bubble” Jukes (1999, p.12) calls it.

Ian, Minette’s husband: I don’t know what Minette’s complaining about, I cannot do more. On a Saturday she even wants me to keep Duncan busy, while she takes a bath or reads a magazine. I mean, for heaven’s sake, woman!

Miller (1995) argues that the abusive man does sometimes rebuke himself, but only long enough to shift the blame. Schwartz (2000) asks why, if the man is sorry, he doesn’t seek help, while Jukes (1999, p.x), a psychologist working with male batterers, says,

Experiences such as this led us ... to a position which is a difficult one for a psychotherapist – put simply it is that “you can never trust an abuser.” This is not to say that they are insincere (although they often are) but that the denial is simply too strong and insidious to assume that you are getting the truth. One simply has to assume the worst, however difficult this is. Positive counter transference may be a very good sign that you are colluding with abuser’s denial and his continuing victimization of his partner.

The emotionally abusive man positions himself as justified through his behavioural acts (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). Justification means that the man will admit making use of violence against his female partner or spouse, but will not accept responsibility for his action. It is intriguing to analyze the manner in which the emotionally abusive man finds excuses in being violent as under precipitating pressures, downgrading the violence of his acts (Wetherell & Potter, 1989). Another strategy is to turn the tables on the woman and present himself as the victim. He blames women and accuses them of provocation (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Edleson & Tolman, 1992; P. Evans, 1993; Walker, 1979). The emotionally abusive man utilizes the myths of patriarchal society to justify his behaviour. In Figure 8-5 I summarize the positioning of the emotionally abusive man as the justified and/or the victim, uses such mechanisms as shifting responsibility, playing victim, seemingly losing control, minimizing and denial to justify his actions.



**Figure 8-4:** Mechanisms used to justify his behaviour through the abuser positioning himself as justified or the victim

### ***Shifting the responsibility***

Men internalise the beliefs of society, and therefore blame women for being the cause of men's abusive actions against women and therefore do not take responsibility for their own actions or words (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Walker, 1979). The abusive man positions himself as justified by finding reasons in his spouse or partner's nagging and provocation (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Edleson & Tolman, 1992; Greene & Bogo, 2002; Hirigoyen, 2000). He finds the excuse for his behaviour by distracting attention away from his behaviour and focusing, for example, on the woman's wrongs. He criticizes her for a number of issues that he finds irritating and unacceptable, often those things that challenge his position of dominance and control (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004; Chang, 1996), as the accusations of provocation are usually grounded in social myths or excuses (O'Leary & Murphy, 1992; Rothman & Munson, 1988;

Wallace, 1996). The abuser legitimizes his behaviour (Jukes, 1999), but he has a choice and to be abusive is the decision he makes (Further examples is to be found in Appendix B).

I have shown the mind games he plays to prove his innocence (Douglas, 1996; Miller, 1995). He may put up a smokescreen, accusing the partner of the very behaviour he himself indulges in, blocking communication by becoming angry, and baiting her with false accusations, or he will sulk for days, manipulating her to give in to his needs (Dutton, 1992).

Jennifer's husband: I don't care what you tell your family and friends. They haven't been married to you for twelve years. They don't know you as I do. They don't see you when we're together.

Camilla: We were already divorced and I went out on a coffee-date. Believe you me, he stormed in and in front of the children just let go. This was the guy who was having the affairs ...

Heidi: He's been sleeping around and everyone knows about it. I mean this is a small community. Now he screams at me for talking to you, "You're ruining my life with all your stories. You have been gossiping all over town."

Often abusive men imply or blame incompetence on the women to justify their behaviour:

Gustav about Eva (See Appendix A): "I had to tell her to go out and work to get rid of her depression. She had to come to terms with Adele's and my friendship – it was over, and she had to deal with it. You know, I even had to teach her how to cook and sew. Now she wants me to do everything."

### ***Positioning himself as the victim***

The abuser justifies himself by presenting himself as the emasculated victim attempting to correct his sense of contested and unstable masculinity (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). This experience has been described as a feeling of "thwarted gender identity; meaning the inability to sustain or properly take up a gendered position resulting in a crisis, real or imagined, of self-representation and/or social evaluation" (Moore, 1994, p.151). Often the feeling arises as the result of the woman not taking up her subject position in relation to him. The male abuser thus

sees himself as justified in using strict and violent measures to force his partner back into her position of emphasized femininity, a position from which he can expect the selfless nurturance that is his due (Connell as cited in Jackson, 2001).

Minette's story is full of examples. Here we have one from Karen's husband, Johan:

She was working for a banking group and put in way to many hours. Even her own mother said she worked too hard. At that stage, I was still drinking, and it was war between the two of us. She just lost it. Once she screamed at me "Just leave me." I never hit her, but I did push her around once in a while, but come that Christmas and her whole family were onto my case, saying that I hit her. They said I strangled her... and this after I had paid half of her brother's debt.

### ***Loss of control***

Loss of control is named as a third justification or excuse for his abusive behaviour, mostly again placing the responsibility for his behaviour on the woman (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004; Jukes, 1999; Schwartz, 2000). The woman allows him to justify and claims that he loses control, because then they do not have to face up to the terrible truth of his consciously hurting them. Women also fall for this justification in believing the abuser to be pathologically out of control, which places them squarely in the victim position (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999). But the theory of loss of control has also been found invalid by research (Saunders, 1992; Weisstein, 2000), as behaviour is still a choice. Jukes (1999) refers to Gottman (1984) as both of them can found that men react differently in conflict with women than when they are in conflict with their fellow men. As male and as a therapist involved in a program for male batterers, Jukes (1999, p.56) is embarrassed by "how easy (it is) to deconstruct ... and show the vast majority of men that they were completely in control at all times."

### ***Minimizing and denial***

Men position themselves by minimizing and denying their behaviour (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004; Edleson & Tolman, 1992; Horley, 2002; Saunders, 1992). They deny the abuse (Jukes, 1999) or minimize the level and the type of the abusive behaviour (Loring, 1994; Wetherell & Potter, 1989). The emotionally abusive male manages this minimizing by arguing that verbal



and emotional abuse are not as hurtful and damaging as physical violence, and again they have a patriarchal society backing them in their belief. They also deny responsibility and the consequences of the abusive behaviour (Jukes, 1999).

## **Conclusion**

Although patriarchy bestows power on the male, not all men misuse their power and not all emotionally abusive men use all or most of the mechanisms in positioning themselves for domination and control. But as my clinical practice is situated within a largely Afrikaans environment, the tentacles of traditional and conservative patriarchy reflected in the positioning of the emotionally abusive male appeared to be deeply ensnared in the stories of the women I saw in therapy. As it is in the nature of having power over someone to progress into exploitation of the other, having the expectation of being served coffee or handed the paper after returning from work easily changes from being spoiled to taking advantage. The emotionally abusive husband or partner malevolently misuses the mechanisms of patriarchal ideology. In this way, he takes the power bestowed on him in his position as male and changes it into mechanisms of control and domination of his spouse or his partner.

Positioning himself as the attentive one (able to take care in the eyes of the woman), the wiser one with special abilities (the omniscient Expert) in the beginning of the relationship, the emotionally abusive male has the expectation that his special position will be honoured. Therefore, the woman is positioned as the lesser being, the one to be controlled and dominated, and the one to serve him and take care of his needs. His position as the master of his house relegates the woman to a position of either obedient and dutiful compliance, or rejection of his demands. What women do with this positioning and how they position themselves will be discussed in the next chapter.

<b>SUMMARY OF ABUSER’S POSITIONING</b>		
<b>POSITIONING</b>	<b>AIMS</b>	<b>MECHANISMS USED</b>
<b>Positions himself as the Master, Teacher, Expert, Director</b>	<i>To hook her and negotiate the initial contract</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Initial Charm</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Benevolent Teacher</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Establishes the Initial Contract</i></li> </ul>
	<i>To dominate and control</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Master of his House</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Extreme Possessiveness and Isolation</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Entrapment</i></li> </ul>
<b>Positions himself as the aggressive exploiter</b>	<i>To have her at his disposal to exploit as needed</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Extreme Possessiveness and Isolation</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Financial Domination and Exploitation</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Sexual Exploitation</i></li> </ul>
	<i>To aggressively control and use</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Aggression</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Threatening Behaviour</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Abusive Communication</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Non-Verbal Abusive Communication</i></li> </ul>
<b>Positions himself as justified or the victim</b>	<i>To justify</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Shifting responsibility</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Positioning himself as the victim</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Loss of control</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Minimizing and denial</i></li> </ul>

**Figure 8-5:** Summary of abuser’s positionings

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## CHAPTER 9: THE WOMEN'S POSITIONING

The narratives or stories people tell are not dependent on their inner lives. Rather, individual narratives are heavily dependent on the co-actors in the construction of stories (Gergen & Gergen, 1986). An individual can adopt a certain position or attribute position to the other as their part in her story (Burr, 1995). The self differs from moment to moment as subject positions are offered, accepted, claimed, and resisted through the interchange between people (Burr, 1995; Steier, 1991b). Because I am of the opinion that emotional abuse arises within this interchange of meanings, I aim to reconstruct the positions that the abused assume within the emotionally-abusive relationship. But it is by no means possible within the limited space of a single dissertation, to champion all the themes that have and have had an influence on the positioning of the women represented here. As a departure point, I therefore present my reasoning on the positioning of women in the emotionally abusive relationship within the present time and space.

The stereotypical characteristics of not questioning and therefore accepting traditional beliefs and truths were pointed out in the discussion of the Traditional Afrikaans Family. The Traditional Afrikaans Family was also described as patriarchal in orientation. I have shown the manner in which the patriarchal male relies on a number of patriarchal, traditional, and conservative principles in his positioning of the woman. The ideology of patriarchy and the beliefs and truths of the family of origin work together to generally position women in their close relationships; all having as their goal the subordination of women (Chang, 1996; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Lengerman & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004; Millet, 2000).

The previous chapter explained some of the ways in which the emotionally abusive man utilizes domination and control to force his partner or spouse into subservience and compliance. The woman has a number of choices. Some women slip into the prescribed stereotypical roles as they were conditioned to do and seldom if ever query their place in marriage and society. Other women, either not committed to the particular relationship or not driven by the taken-on responsibility to make the relationship work, sever the relationship. As the abusive man often only shows his need for dominance and control after the partner's commitment in marriage, the woman runs the risk of becoming ensnared by her dedication to the relationship and the stereotypical contract to take care of the partner and the relationship. A woman can react by resisting and by rejection of his attempts to position her; while another woman can more or less

willingly accept what is expected of her and slide into a position of denial. The dynamic, assertive woman who marries or commits herself often unwittingly glides into the familiarity of stereotypical gender roles as experienced in childhood. The independent woman therefore does not necessarily make for the independent wife or partner.

The position women assume is often not clear-cut, and one finds the individual woman's positioning a strange mixture. Her position also changes throughout the relationship because of the effect of different life events and the impact of meaningful situations from her environment. Surrounded by the all inclusive systems of a patriarchal society, women are conditioned by imposed fear and anxiety towards positioning themselves within a system that often violently curbs women's agency; a pivotal point in the emergence of emotional abuse in close relationships.

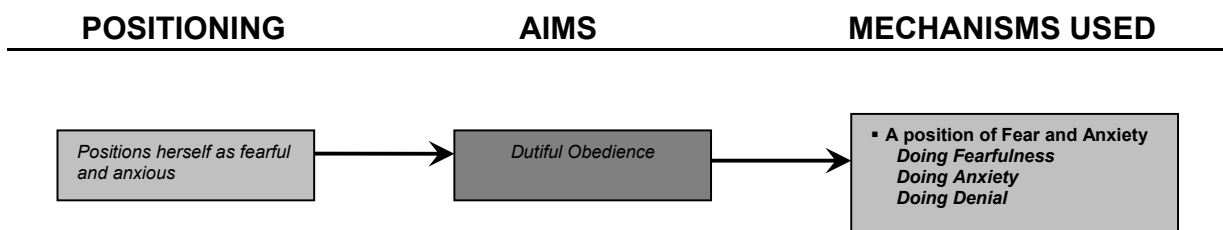
## **A Position of Fear and Anxiety**

### ***Doing Fearfulness***

Fear and anger are a woman's two most prominent reactions to violence (Arias, 1999; Dutton, 1992; Greene & Bogo, 2002; Horley, 2002; Tolman, 1992). She has been conditioned to fear abandonment and separation and to believe that she must defer to men to keep from being abandoned. So she lives in fear of losing both the partner and the relationship. For some women, not challenging psychological abuse seems safer than risking separation (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Chang, 1996). The abusive man plays into the woman's fear by isolating her and realizing her aloneness her fear of abandonment is reactivated (Miller, 1995). She falls back into obedient submissiveness. Growing up in a western culture most women are seldom exposed to competition and rising through the fear that comes with any challenge. Not knowing how to face their fear, they are not in a position to build trust in themselves and their own abilities (Dickson, 2003).

Taking into account that women can respond to emotional abuse by severing the relationship or passively slipping into the stereotypical roles expected of women by patriarchal society, I use Figure 9-1 to illustrate how some women in emotionally abusive relationships position themselves as fearful and anxious. Hydén (2005) takes an interesting stand and describes the fear these women experience to be an expression of resistance. The fear implies a reaction to

something she does not want to happen and therefore also implies resistance to the abuser's violence. But her resistance is often without any clear-cut strategy of how to avoid the violence. By assuming a position of fear, women aim for dutiful obedience and thus proving themselves capable. In attempting to do so they utilize mechanisms such as doing fearfulness, anxiety and denial. Some of the mechanisms used to reach the goal of submissive obedience, are utilized to such an extent that they develop into positionings in their own right.



**Figure 9-1:** Positions herself as fearful and anxious

Some women cope with the fear by denial, others close themselves off, and some try to reason it out. The fear spills over into all areas of the woman's life, becoming a learned and generalized response that entraps the woman. Forward in her book *Emotional Blackmail* (1997, p.11) states that emotional blackmail can only occur when "we let people know they've found our hot buttons and that we'll jump when they push them." Therefore, each time the woman complies she rewards the blackmailer for his actions and she gives in to the fear; she indirectly gives the abuser permission to continue with the abuse. The woman trains the blackmailer by apologizing and reasoning with him, arguing, crying, pleading, and by changing important plans and appointments to suit the blackmailer, by giving in and hoping it will not happen again, and by surrendering.

Secondly, women live in fear as a result of the constant threats of violence from their abusive partners aimed at controlling and dominating them (Horley, 2002; Douglas, 1996; Marshall, 1994). Having already suffered a number of incidents she fearfully anticipates, tries to prevent or cope with the idea of the next outburst looming (Douglas, 1996; Miller, 1995). On a subconscious level, the emotional trauma she had suffered influences all her life circumstances (Dutton, 1992). Barnett and LaViolette (1993) describe the fear women experience in violent

relationships as a chronic, constant low-level fear. Because the woman never knows what next will trigger the abuse, she is constantly on the alert (Burstow, 1992; Hirigoyen, 2000).

Minette (See Case study on p.66) expresses it as follows:

Hearing the threat in his voice, having him previously threaten to shoot himself, and having seen his total reckless driving when the baby is in the car, she fears for her and the baby's safety and decides to temporarily move out of the house, a house registered in her name.

Her fear becomes embedded in his threats and she fears the emotional impact even more than a possible physical battering (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993). Dutton (1992), speaking about physical abuse, indicates that even when a woman says and cognitively believes that the abuser will not hurt her any further, she still behaves in a compliant manner as though she is afraid. I found the same applies to the emotionally abused woman. She becomes immobilized with fear (Horley, 2002; Wallace, 1996). Haaken and Yragui (2003) explain that, in a similar manner, residents of a shelter for abused women still suffered the fear even though their location was kept confidential. The women from the shelters experienced the fear, but could find support in the presence of other women who knew their circumstances. It therefore seems that the fear which an emotionally abused woman suffers in isolation is as bad as the fear she suffers in relation to the abuser.

### ***Doing Anxiety***

The woman who submits to the wishes and the needs of the abusive man in the emotionally abusive relationship pays a high price. She can never relax, but is constantly weighing her options. Having taken the submissive stance, she feels that she needs to appease him when he is irritable. She takes the responsibility to distract him and make him feel better (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993). She suffers continuous stress (Miller, 1995). Cognitively, she is constantly questioning her safety, feeling vulnerable and exposed (Dutton, 1992). As this pattern persists, her resistance and strength wear down, resulting in one or more of the following: fear (as discussed above), depression, permanent hyper-alertness, panic attacks, or chronic anxiety (Hirigoyen, 2000).

Helen (See Appendix A): It's difficult to describe the feeling you have. I can't say that I'm anxious or afraid, but it's this sort of uneasiness you carry within yourself, never completely sure whether what you did will be okay, never completely relaxed.

Berna (See Case study on p.101): It's not the real abusive incidents that happen from time to time that get at you. It's something that's in the air, you absolutely feel it. But then you're also reminded by the constant flow of his abusive words. You see it in his eyes and in the way he smiles at you. Sometimes there's just nothing when he looks at you, at other times there is mockery or slyness. Kevin can be extremely overt in his rejection, but also so cunning that no-one else will notice.

On the one hand the emotionally abused woman experiences anxiety because of the constant strain of having to cope with the wishes and needs of the abuser. On the other hand the emotional abuser imposes anxiety in the abused women by constantly threatening her (Miller, 1995) (See Appendix B for further examples of threatening behaviour). The woman reacts with fear and anxiety when, for example, overhearing a man raising his voice in similar fashion to the abuser, seeing a movie with a familiar scene or hearing someone tell a related story.

Normally a person will experience anxiety when objectionable thoughts, feelings, and impulses come into awareness. The abused woman experiences anxiety in realizing her fear, but also in realizing her own anger and aggression; the latter rendered unacceptable emotions by society when experienced by a woman. The anxiety is now triggered by the conflict between loving the abuser and experiencing the hostility and even the hatred towards him for the pain he causes (Chang, 1996). Members of families where violence is an everyday occurrence often show generalized anxiety symptoms (Dutton, 1992; O'Leary & Murphy, 1992; Saunders, 1992).

Some women describe symptoms of a panic disorder (e.g., trembling, shaking, feeling unsteady, exaggerated startle responses, choking and sweating) or a generalized anxiety disorder (e.g., nausea, diarrhoea, dry mouth, and abdominal distress).

Helen: It was more than three years after our divorce that I was a member of a therapeutic support group. I was totally overcome by anxiety the moment the women started telling of their abuse. My whole body started shaking, I was trembling all over. I had this urge just to take my things and run. I felt caged in, afraid ... But it was nearly six

years thereafter that my twenty year-old son still from time to time had dreams featuring his father, dreams so filled with anxiety that they kept him awake for the rest of the night.

The psychological trauma of the abused is not adequately recognized and researched, as much of the violence against women in their homes has previously been seen as normal behaviour. In studying the literature on battered women and posttraumatic stress Saunders (1992), Dutton (1992) and O'Leary and Murphy (1992) found that the symptoms seldom develop into a full-blown Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, but that a large percentage (the number not mentioned) of battered women suffer from symptoms of posttraumatic stress. The current research and relevant literature show that women in emotionally abusive relationships also experience symptoms of posttraumatic stress, as for example, the intrusive symptoms illustrated below (Barnett & LaViolette, Hirigoyen, 2000).

Minette: I can be driving wherever and the moment I see a -champagne-coloured VW Jetta, my mouth goes all dry and my heart beats so fast that I have this heavy, cramping feeling on my heart. This makes me so angry. Why can't I just let go ... ? Why does he still have this influence on me?

Karen (See Case study on p.90): The moment he starts yelling or raising his voice it's like a fist to my stomach ... If things were not going well the children and I would usually go into a sort of panic an hour or so before he is due home, not being able to function properly ... sort of waiting, expecting the next emotional blow-up.

Symptoms of arousal as an element of posttraumatic stress are found in abused women, especially in those who can not act out their anger and rage (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Rothman & Munson, 1988). Avoidance symptoms are also found but are not as easily illustrated (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Hirigoyen, 2000; Saunders, 1992; Worell & Remer, 1992). The abused women do not want to tell or are unable to recall precisely what happened to them, this even in the safe environment of the therapeutic relationship. This can be taken as an indication of avoidance as is found in posttraumatic stress. The women will vaguely tell about the incident, but find themselves unable to recall the full details of the incident (especially when it comes to abuse that has the potential to turn more physical); they deny and minimize the experiences (Dutton, 1992). Part of the avoidance symptoms is the emotional and physical numbing that the women experience, as well as feelings of being detached, estranged, frozen, or blocked in their



responses (Dutton, 1992; Miller, 1995). These feelings are usually ascribed to depression by the professionals they consult with.

I find that some emotionally abused women cannot stop crying, while others will tell you the most gruesome details in a flat, unemotional tone of voice, not showing any emotional turmoil (Dutton, 1992). The experience of fear, anxiety, and pain in the abusive situation becomes so intense that the abused women can dissociate from full consciousness (Dutton, 1988; Walker, 1979), thus “easing pain and providing some protection to the soul” (Hirigoyen, 2000, p.161). Being trained in a number of hypnotic disciplines, I was astounded in hearing an abuser use a technique used especially in hypnotic induction and in public speaking called the “Yes Set” and realizing how persistently and deviously the abuser works on his victim (Hammond, 1990). The abuser forces the abused to answer in the affirmative and skilfully leading her into the trap.

Ricus (See Appendix A for Mandy’s husband): Haven’t I always financially seen to your needs ... haven’t I always been a good father ... isn’t the least I can expect from you some manner of love and support ... some manner of respect ... I really need you to see to it that the children obey me when I ask them to.

The state of anxious hyper-alertness of the abused is similar to the symptoms of hyper-vigilance and heightened suspiciousness as described under the diagnosis of posttraumatic stress (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Dutton, 1992; Hirigoyen, 2000). The abused woman functions within a state of constant alertness, the fear and anxiety grounded in the past occurrences of violence, threats of violence, and the general fear that the violence can occur again (Miller, 1995).

### ***Doing Denial***

In the event of an emotionally abusive incident occurring, the woman experiences fear and/or anxiety; prompting her to either deny the occurrence or resists the abusive stance of the man. The women as represented in the present study utilized a number of mechanisms to position themselves in denial of the abuse.

Denial can occur on three levels. Society is the first to deny the high occurrence of emotional abuse and thus makes it harder for the emotionally abused woman to speak up and to be heard.

But professionals, such as social workers, clergy and psychologists also do not always recognize the emotional abuse, and if they do they tend to work within the guidelines of a patriarchal society, negating the experiences of the woman (Burstow, 1992; Ellis & Murphy, 1994). Lastly, the abused woman uses denial as a coping strategy.

### ***Denial by Society, the Helping Professions and the Church***

Society ignores and even condones family violence and more specifically the emotional abuse of women by seeing wife abuse as something private and to be dealt with within the family (Brannon, 2002; Chang, 1996; Douglas, 1996; Dutton, 1992; Ellis & Murphy, 1994; Leland-Young & Nelson, 1988; Walker, 1979). The denial is made easy by the fact that emotional abuse leaves no physical evidence (Marshall, 1994), and no tangible signs to show and describe (Ammerman & Hersen, 1992b; Wise, 1990b).

Some women can recall the most intimate details of, for example, the battering incident, but find others recoiling from hearing their stories (Walker, 1979). So instead of validating the abused woman's experiences and help her challenge the abuse, society, friends and family help her to deny her reality (Chang, 1996; Miller, 1995). Even parents forsake their abused daughters when told of the abuse by turning a deaf ear (Dobash & Dobash, 1980). This shames the abused women and she begins to doubt herself. She therefore tries to find a different reality by denying the abuse and grows silently obedient (Hirigoyen, 2000; Miller, 1995). As Estés (1992, p.250) said, "but far more commonly, the woman just goes dead. She doesn't feel good or bad, she just doesn't feel."

As is the case with woman battering, even the helping professions deny and minimize the incidence and the effect of emotional abuse (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Chang, 1996; Collier, 1982). They deny the woman the opportunity to tell because they themselves are not able to emotionally come to terms with the impact and the consequences (Dobash & Dobash, 1980). They want to keep on believing that the family home is a place of safety, symbolizing affection and nurturance, and not society's most violent social institution (Ellis & Murphy, 1994). The professional blindly upholds the principles of the system, not allowing for a different truth as for example that love and power are operant in close relationships, to come through (Davis, 1991; Meyer, 1991).

Barnett and LaViolette (1993) cite Roy's finding that, measured against friends and family, legal and women's groups as well as psychologists, the clergy have the most negative influence when counselling the battered women. In the event of a minister or priest who does not validate the abuse and sends the woman away without support, a severe spiritual crisis erupts in the lives of these women. First she is abused in her home and then the church does the same (Poling, 1996). As we have characterized the protestant Christianity of the Traditional Afrikaans Family, the largely Christian perspectives of western civilization is a predominantly male perspective, that operates on the given of the male as head of the family, and relegates women to the home under the law and the punishing hand of the husband (Clack & Whitcomb, 1997; Dickson, 2003; Hecker, 1910).

Minette: I sometimes feel like walking out on the morning service at church. How can you believe anything these guys tell you? I sit there and I'm filled with abomination at the men around me. I feel betrayed... I cannot even pray. It's more off an "Oh God, I do not understand Your ways. I know You are there", but that's about all. I do not read books of a spiritual nature anymore. I see them as only the work of people, each with his own opinion, and how are we supposed to know it's His will and His Word they're writing about?

But then, in contemplating divorce, her Protestant upbringing entraps her:

No, I believe divorce is a sin in the eyes of God. This is not how God intended it to be. Maybe I should be more submissive, more supportive of Ian. The Bible does tell us that the husband is the head of the house and I am not supposed to question that.

Alternatively, the church authorities entrap the woman,

Eva's pastor tells her (See Appendix A): If you are a real woman, you will go back to Gustav. Give him love and forgiveness.

He further said: The damage brought about by divorce will be much worse than the situation you're in now.

A pastor's wife says to Berna: Support your husband. You cannot be selfish now.

### ***The Woman's Denial***

Burstow (1992) and Chang (1996) believe that during the early phases of the emotional abuse, the woman chooses to deny the significance and the horror of the abusive behaviour. The abused woman accomplishes denial in a number of ways. Firstly, she usually is uncomfortable with the term abuse because it seems such a strong word to describe the behaviour of the man she loves, and she rather keeps quiet (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Douglas, 1996). Secondly, and for the same reason, she may deny by minimizing the seriousness of the problem; she denies the malicious nature of the abuse (Hirigoyen, 2000; Horley, 2002). Dianne Schwartz (2000, p.204) describes the denial,

We believe that living in denial will rescue us. We look for our saviour in bed while it actually resides within our soul ... the abuser is behind the walls we have built. We haven't protected ourselves; we've taken refuge with him at our side.

Denial is the abused woman's way of dealing with cognitive dissonance (Douglas, 1996). On the one hand, there is the man who at times is kind, considerate and loving, and on the other hand there is the man who abuses her (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Burstow, 1992; Dobash & Dobash, 1980). She denies that she protects the positive image she has of the abuser (Chang, 1996; Walker, 1979). The woman consequently accepts the abuser's view of reality, and will blame herself for not doing the right things (P. Evans, 1993; Horley, 2002). It is only in realizing these symptoms in herself that the woman will be able to admit that her spouse or partner is not just in a bad mood from time to time, but is an emotional abuser (Miller, 1995).

Although writing about physical assault Schwartz's (2000, p.120) conclusion, I believe, also rings true of emotional abuse.

Somehow, when you're a victim of a violent assault, you still tell yourself afterwards that it wasn't really that bad. It's our way of not facing the truth. But if a stranger had done to us what our abuser had done, we would have called the police ...

As most people do, the abused woman wants to believe in the love of a partner, she wants to believe that the marriage will work and that she will not lose the security it brings (Chang,

1996; Moore, 1979b). So the woman concentrates on the positive and the acceptable in the relationship, and explains away, or denies the negative elements (Douglas, 1996; Horley, 2002; Rosen, 1996). She changes her perception of reality and structures a relationship that she can deal with (Miller, 1995). This strategy brings hope, and it is this hope that allows the emotionally abused woman to deny her partner's unacceptable behaviour (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Burstow, 1992), because "if I remember ... then I'll go crazy and thus couldn't protect myself" (Dutton, 1992, pp.52-3).

Elaine (See Case study on p.84): You must remember that everything isn't bad. Abuse occurs, but the rest of the relationship is working just fine. And if I wanted to leave, he would bring me another present. Women choose to overlook the bad. They naively choose to do so until it's glaringly obvious. I hung in there because I loved so much. Women work harder at relationships, and even our culture says, "Hang in there, stick to your man". And the Bible teaches women about self-sacrifice, it is cultural indoctrination.

The woman denies the situation and her own reality by adapting to the stereotypical role of "emphasized femininity" (Connell in Jackson, 2001). She thinks that in doing everything as expected both by the systems of society and her husband as a representative of the system she will win him over (P. Evans, 1993). Although this appeases the abuser, it also in the long run establishes a degree of power with the woman, and she grows stronger (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). In having more power, the woman shifts into the mothering role which can answer to the abuser's caretaking needs, but not his sexual needs. The latter, as well as the whole process of the woman being the *The Angel in the House* (Woolf, undated), again serves as an emasculating mechanism for the man; something to complain about and a reason for being violent.

At first Karen says:

You know he has studied and has two degrees, and he has such a strong personality. I think my personality also got stronger, otherwise I would have gone completely mad, but I know I should be more submissive.

She tries to be the perfect wife:

I work like a maid, but still he finds fault. I try and wear my hair the way he likes it, and dresses the way he wants me to, but it's still not working. If it's not my breasts being too small, it my waistline getting bigger. I really try.

### ***Denial of Sexual Abuse***

Through studies of sexual abuse, rape and physical violence, it is known that women do not tell (Boonzaier, 2005; Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). They do not tell because "in some instances, rapes literally 'don't exist'" (Cherry, 1983, p.252), because the woman-victim perceives the coercive sexual experience as normal and natural within the unequal power relationship between her and the perpetrator. At the end of 2004 two catholic theologians, Roberta Bereta and Elisabetta Broli, published a book, *It's a Sin Not to Do It* (Jackson, 2004) – the title telling it all. How are women to tell of rape and coercive sexual experiences if their church orders them, telling them that by marriage they are contractually bound to have sexual relations with their spouse? Some women describe experiences of forced sex and other sexual practices, but do not see it as physical abuse. Women have been conditioned into believing sex on demand to be part of their wifely duties (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004; Dutton, 1992).

Minette: I'm cooling off towards ... find lovemaking intolerable ... I realize that this is going to bring further problems, but I just cannot open up and give my all anymore. How can one trust another human being, if he's constantly out to hurt you? ... I cannot call it making love, its plain sex. To be honest, I think its rape. He uses me to answer to his physical needs. There's no cuddling or fore-play or intimacy. And I'm always the guilty party. ... He'll ask me, "Why don't you feel anything? Why are you hurting?" Maybe it is all in my head. The gynaecologist explained that it will get better the more sex we have. I feel dirty and used. Sometimes I just cry, but never ever does he stop. He goes on with whatever he's doing, hurting me more and more.

But there is also another side to the apparent denial of the abuse. The woman keeps quiet because of the shame of what is happening to her and because they think no-one will believe them or understand the situation they find themselves in. If even in sexual assault cases the outcome hinges on the issue of consent, who will believe the powerful pressure they are submitted to, the emotional coercion they experience.

Karen: I don't know how to ask you this because I know even sexually The Bible says you're suppose to please your husband, but he is breaking me down. At first I refused, but then he quotes from The Bible, saying a man can do with his wife as he pleases. I feel horrible. He wants me to please myself and then he'll sit on a chair, watching, or he'll want to put a bottle up my vagina and see if I feel anything. He wants to use all these sexual aids. Is it normal? If I don't comply, he says, "Women from the lowest of classes give their husbands more than you do. They give their husbands whatever they need. Their husbands don't need to go prostitutes." He forces me into whatever position he prefers. If I don't immediately comply, he slaps my face. Now I only complain when my neck hurts. I feel like a human guinea pig that he uses as he pleases. Piece by piece he breaks down my spirit.

### ***Denial of Physical Abuse***

Women do not realize the physical abuse for what it is. Rosen (1996) describes the denial as an avoidance strategy, the woman minimizes the incident, forgets about it, and even denies that the incident is abusive, for example, "he choked me, but not very hard." I found three loosely overlapping categories:

In some cases we do find an escalation to physical abuse. But seemingly the physical abuse was the exception to the rule and the emotional abuse the constant.

Berna: Only once did he attack me physically.

Antoinette (See Appendix A): First there was only the belittlement and then came the humiliation of knowing that he was involved with some-one else. It ended with a situation where he picked up the kettle and without any emotion or saying anything, poured the boiling water over my arm.

Camilla (See Appendix A): I'm going to get an interdict against him. This is the fourth time that he has pushed me around hard handedly. It scares me and I don't want the children to see what he's doing.

Eva: He's been slapping me and he's even spits on and at me when angry.

Then there happen to be those women who do not see the physical pushing around, hair pulling and hard-handed sex as physical abuse and thus do not mention it. Or they will in a matter of fact, offhanded way mention that,

Linda (See Appendix A): He has once or twice slapped me or pushed me around, but you get so used to all these things happening that you see it as the norm. You in a way come to accept it as the way it is supposed to be.

Helen: I sometimes just could not take his verbal attacks or long sermons about all my wrong-doings any more. I would try and excuse myself. But that was like oil on fire. He would forcibly pin me to the chair or bed, jump up and lock the bedroom door before I could reach it. Once or twice – after a heavy abusive argument – I would go and lie down in a different room. He would either come to me and just continue the argument and just go on and on, or he would forcibly drag me back.

The last group consists of cases where physical abuse, has never been an occurrence – even after one or more decades of marriage. My personal feeling is that much of these cases, fall into the second category, but the women either do not realize it or it did not surface as such during the sessions.

Hannah (See Appendix A): I've seen him break down doors, but never has he touched me.

Hedwig (See Appendix A) could only after her divorce say: Al's physical and emotional abuse was the main reason I left him. It all started after the birth of our first daughter and just got worse, especially after Marli was born.

### **Positions Herself as Depressed**

Depression and a number of issues surrounding women doing depression have been the subject matter of a huge amount of publications and research. Although the focus of the present study does not fall on depression, I do take depression to be one of women's answers to the fear and the anxiety experienced. Unable to resist the abuse, the woman denies her reality and survives by covering up. In *Verbal Abuse: Survivors speak out on Relationships and Recovery* P. Evans (1993, p.103) says, "The symptoms of depression are strikingly similar to the symptoms of a spirit dying from abuse." Depression must therefore be redefined as



women's response to the reality of oppression (Collier, 1982; See Ellis & Murphy, 1994 for further references; Greenspan, 1983).

In order to illustrate the manner in which women from emotionally abusive relationships position themselves as depressed, I refer back to the following excerpt from the case study of Minette (See p. 66). Taking this case study as an example, I thus show the emergence of important themes related to women positioning themselves as depressed.

Minette: "Emotionally I feel totally depleted."

In the session her manner is anxious and depressed, and she bursts into tears silently crying throughout the whole of the session, saying, "If only I can get some perspective on what's happening to me. I think I've been depressed since Duncan's birth, and he's six months old now. I have been on medication but it doesn't really help. It feels as if I am applying band-aid and not dealing with the real problem.

- *Emotionally I feel totally depleted*

At some time during the emotionally abusive relationship, the abused woman realizes the reality of her situation and falls into a state of mind often wrongly diagnosed as a depression, or she wrongly sees herself as depressed rather than oppressed (Collier, 1982). I see this as a phase of bereavement. One can understand the feelings of anger, denial, fear and sadness that she experiences, mourning her particular losses. Staying on in the relationship, she mourns the loss of what could have been, her dreams, her positive self, and the freedom to be herself. Deciding to leave, she may mourn the loss of her belief in marriage and love, the loss of her partner, her house, her place in the community, herself as part of a couple, contact with some friends and family (Dutton, 1992). Grinnell (1988) sees women's depression as a form of altruism. As women shy away from hurting the other by anger or leaving, she turns against herself. This stance, which is often depicted as masochistic, is therefore described as a heroic stance instead of a psychiatric disorder.

- *She bursts into tears and silently cries throughout the whole of the session, saying, "If only I can get some perspective on what's happening to me.*

The depression is often caused by the conflicts inherent in the double-bind situation she experiences, Grinnell (1988, p.50) says,

I believe depression ... arises when entropy – “the measure of the capacity to undergo spontaneous change – specified by the relationship” – clashed with the command not to change because change threatens the relationship in which it occurs. Depression is due to be double-bind. This occurs because of entrapment in the command to serve others and the conflict to potentiate while enmeshed in the *Folie* where primary service is to males in relationship.

Minette has come to realize the covert contract of the relationship: that she is expected to care for, nurture, pay attention to, and heed all of her spouse's needs, and that her own needs will not be answered. The depressed state is used to dull the senses in order to allow her to go on. She denies the anger (Greenspan, 1983) and being depressed she cannot find the energy to leave (Douglas, 1996).

- *I think I've been depressed since Duncan's birth and he's six months old now. I have been on medication but it doesn't really help.*

Although bereavement is experienced in the woman as mourning her lost self (and soul and life), one nevertheless cannot deny that in experiencing futility and powerlessness depression often are the end result and the most common complaint of women stuck in abusive relationships (Collier, 1982; Miller, 1995; O'Leary & Murphy, 1992; Saunders, 1992; Walker, 1979). Tolman (1992) refers to Straus, Sweet, and Vissing (1989) who reported preliminary findings indicating that the more verbal abuse a woman experiences from her partner, the more depressed she gets. Having had their confidence eroded, having been dominated and controlled, their emotional and physical resources at a low ebb, women fear that they do not have the inner resources to survive, and so become increasingly immobilized (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Douglas, 1996; Ross, 2002).

Because she feels depressed, angry and distressed, the emotionally abused woman finds that her ability to effectively cope is impaired in a number of roles (Dutton, 1992). They find it difficult to engage in the ordinary social interactions around them. Some battered women are incapacitated to such an extent that they find it difficult to nurture even their children

(Greenspan, 1983) and they complain of losing concentration and are often confused (Hirigoyen, 2000).

- *Maybe this whole mess is my fault as I'm the one with the depression.*

Most people tend to blame themselves if they are unable to find logical explanations for the negativity of others directed at them (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Douglas, 1996). As is generally true of all critique, most blaming remarks will contain some truth. So women in emotionally abusive relationships in particular start questioning and doubting their own actions. They measure themselves against the perfect woman, the perfect mother, lover, and housewife, held up to them by society. The woman fears that if she turns out to be less than perfect, society will find her husband's abusive behaviour acceptable. As she often finds herself to deviate from the norm she begins to see herself as being responsible for her own abuse and she ends up accepting the partner's claim that if only she was "better", everything would be all right (Chang, 1996; Douglas, 1996).

The stereotypical myth that women are always to blame becomes internalized in women (Collier, 1982; Dickson, 2003; Dutton, 1992; Grinnell, 1988; Hirigoyen, 2000; Miller, 1995). As strange as it might seem, accepting the abusive partner's blame gives the woman something on which to build a degree of hope – at least now she has something she can do to make things better (Chang, 1996; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Rosen, 1996). Douglas (1996, p.72) explains that, "If we believe we are in some way responsible for the abuse, then we can believe that we have some power to prevent it."

Karen: All these years I was trying to find out what I did wrong, telling myself that there must be something I did that caused this.

As always blaming themselves, some women get caught up in the pattern of "If only I tried harder." Taking all the blame for his abusive acts onto herself, concurring with society, she believes that if she makes the expected changes, everything will work out (Chang, 1996; Walker, 1979). She therefore finds excuses for his abusive behaviour (Walker, 1979, p.170), "He didn't mean it that way, He's tired and stressed out, He's the impatient sort", or the worst one of all, "I should have known better to say or do that."

Karen: I suppose I didn't listen. I didn't give him enough attention. It was just after having lost my job and I had four small children to take care of. The maid had left, and I was faced with this entrance exam, a prerequisite for a job I had applied for.

### ***Doing Passivity***

Gavey (1989) reminds us that individuals are not passive. They are active and have a choice as to how they will position themselves in relation to any discourse. Unfortunately this choice is seldom rational. It is consciously and unconsciously informed by one's upbringing and especially by the cultural indoctrinations of the power systems operational at the time. Western society's stereotypical image of femininity implies passivity. Curiously, girl-children are taught to be passive. Since early childhood, the woman is taught that her actions do not make a difference, but when she is abused she is blamed for her not taking action. She is trained to be obedient and not to question, but should the finger point to any aspect that might indicate the misuse of male privilege, the woman is blamed.

Lips (1995) cites the body of research done by Jeanne Block in the 1980s, showing how the then school system taught girl children that their actions and voice will have no effect, no-one will pay them any attention. Maybe this, as well as the already mentioned incapacitating fear, is why Dutton (1988) in dealing with domestic violence, found extreme passivity in the behaviour of the abused women. This was called "traumatic psychological infantilism" (Dutton, 1988, p.95), meaning to lose the ability to function as an independent adult, identifying with the perpetrator and regressing to behaviour such as compliancy and submissiveness. Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment is well known. A simulated prison environment is created with guards being verbally abusive and using all their power resulting in the prisoners becoming docile and passive. Frightening but comprehensible results, but only if it is not made applicable on the female of the species. Should a woman react in a passive manner, she is blamed and shamed for some inherent deficiency (Bernard, 2000).

Some scholars take the intermittent nature of the maltreatment over a period of time as one of the reasons why the abused woman positions herself as passive and unable to assert self-will, resulting in her subjecting herself to the will of the controller (Miller, 1995). Psychological paralysis sets in, caused by a number of issues as explained by the reasons why the women stay (Walker, 1979). I do however postulate that some women in emotionally abusive

relationships practice passivity. I also believe that some women practice passivity as a symptom of their overall depression. On the other hand, I propose that more women in emotionally abusive relationships practice dutiful obedience (as described later in this chapter). Faced with the overwhelming power relations from their spouses, their church, their culture and society of origin they fall into a place of obedient silence, programmed to do as told.

### ***Doing Learned Helplessness***

Leonore Walker (1979) was the first to apply Seligman's experiential findings of what he called learned helplessness to women in abusive relationships. The concept as well as the implied powerlessness became popular in explaining women's entrapment in the abusive relationship (Dutton, 1992). In effect, Seligman found that being continuously exposed to violence, creatures (animals) become used to not having the power or not being able to intervene (Estés, 1992; Walker, 1979). He identified the components of learned helplessness as motivational impairment (passivity), intellectual impairment (poor problem-solving ability), and emotional trauma (increased feelings of helplessness, incompetence, frustration, and depression) (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993).

Two kinds of helplessness were described as applying to humans, namely, universal helplessness, where the subject cannot see that her behaviour can have any effect on the outcome (Miller, 1995; Walker, 1979), and personal helplessness when she holds herself responsible for the negative outcome of her behaviour (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993). Miller (1995) agrees with Walker in that the emotional abuser holds his woman captive through learned helplessness. The woman, who believes herself powerless against society and against her partner, becomes easily manipulated and entrapped by the man in his hierarchical dominant position (Wallace, 1996). Thus it is reasoned that women do not stay in the abusive relationship because they like being beaten, but because they find it difficult to break away in a society where wife-beating is condoned (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Horley, 2002; Walker, 1979). In wanting to be a good woman, obedient and dutiful, she is unable to break free.

Karen: I find that I cannot function effectively anymore. Everything becomes personal, and I can seldom decide what to do or what not to do. I have no more confidence. When alone with him, I find that there is nothing I can do or say that will hold against all his arguments.

Collier (1982) refers to a number of studies, concluding that powerlessness is learned behaviour. Women believe themselves to be powerless in that their identities are controlled and defined by others, and their feelings, needs, and wants are not seen as important (Greenspan, 1983). Being in a position of not having power relegates a person or a group of individuals to a minority group. Relying on the work of a number of authors, M. A. Dutton (1992) also discusses learned helplessness and futility, but finds learned helplessness not to imply an inherent weakness in the women. Women have been taught that punishment will follow if they do not comply and so they do helplessness (Hurtado, 2000). Qin (2004, p.300) describes how Chinese students in host countries, being “devalued” and “othered” by the dominant culture, find themselves with a devalued sense of self, and experience powerlessness.

The woman in an emotionally abusive relationship experiences helplessness when she realizes that she has used up all the alternatives known to her (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Kosberg & Nahmiash, 1996). The helplessness surfaces as her viable alternatives diminish and she finds herself in a situation where all efforts to either handle the situation or break free are futile. The so-called helplessness of the woman is an adjustment made by the women as they temporarily give in, do not break with tradition, and stay within the boundaries of the female stereotype in a patriarchal society (Chang, 1996; Dutton, 1992; Leland-Young & Nelson, 1988). Women do break free, however, and as the present study shows, there comes a point where they will say no more, this usually being when she sees her children suffering (Giles-Sims, 1983; Miller, 1995; Saunders, 1992). Not yet having reached that particular turning point, she blames and doubts herself.

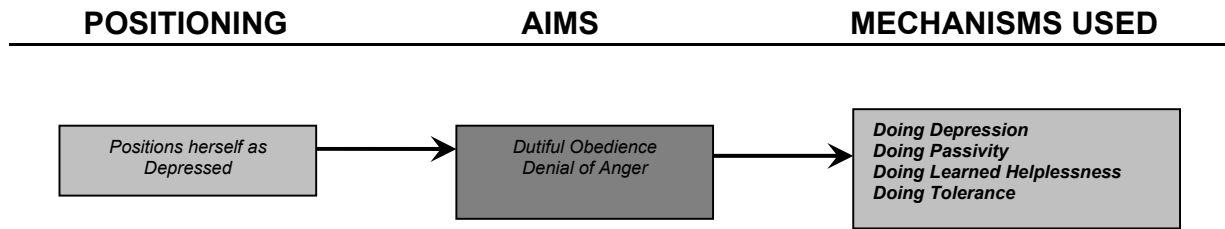
Walker (1984 in Barnett & LaViolette, 1993) also refers to “learned hopefulness.” The abused woman can then position herself in a place she believes that she has some control in that she will eventually be able to turn the partner’s abuse around. As a therapist one does meet up with whiners, but if these women are to be criticized it is for the hope they carry, for the “little” and “big optimisms” they do (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 9). Hydén (2005) described the women to retain a degree of self-confidence because they see themselves as having a positive impact on others outside of the abusive relationship. This concurs with the description of hope as partly having a sense of agency. Just as Seligman’s learned helplessness harmed society’s perception of women, care should be taken that the swing of the pendulum towards positive psychology do not do just the same, blaming the women for not finding the answers while the

solution lies within society and culture. This is clearly stated by the criticism of a number of writers in the special edition of the *American Psychologist* on positive psychology edited by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000). They are taken on for being positivist (Shapiro, 2001), ethnocentric (Bacigalupe, 2001; Walsh, 2001) and narrowly value-based (Compton, 2001). Powerlessness lies not in the individual, but is an experience when one's self-image is impressed upon one by others – the dominant group or person, i.e. when others decide your needs and your rights (Collier, 1982; Greenspan, 1983).

### ***Doing Tolerance***

The most obvious cognitive women experience as a result of emotional abuse is developing a tolerance of cognitive inconsistency (also described as cognitive dissonance), a diminished perception of alternatives or the development of a continuum of tolerance. When confronted with a life-threatening situation or illness, people are able to tolerate much more than they themselves think humanly and morally possible. Only the emotionally abused woman can decide what she regards as acceptable or unacceptable behaviour from her partner or spouse, obviously changing her perception of tolerance as she is confronted with the continuous flow of incidents (Horley, 2002).

The forceful domination, the aggression, and the verbal abuse gradually destroy her essence, her subjectivity. When constantly bombarded with negatives, she starts seeing herself as the being described through his words (Douglas, 1996; Miller, 1995). She becomes an object, and she loses respect for herself (Chang, 1996). Hirigoyen (2000, p.163) says of the abused women that "it is impossible to deny the dramatic consequences of a period in their lives when they were basically reduced to the position of object." Tolerance does not imply making one's peace or passively accept circumstances. Abuse never loses its sting, it never gets any easier, but the woman tolerates the situation, because she needs to survive. Marilyn French (1981, p.56) purports that "survival is an art. It requires the dulling of the mind and the senses, and a delicate attunement to waiting, without insisting on precision about what it is you are waiting for."



**Figure 9-2:** Positions herself as depressed

The above figure illustrates the woman hypothetically positioning herself as depressed by using such mechanisms as doing depression, passivity, learned helplessness and tolerance. I have shown the manner in which some women do position themselves as depressed, but I also detailed doing depression as a stereotypical position often attributed to women by a patriarchal society. Society presumes women to be as suits society; expectations often sculptured by the ancient male Christian clergy (Flinders, 2002). The women aims for dutiful obedience as will be described later in this chapter, but by doing depression she finds immobilization and denial of her anger.

### Positions Herself as Dependent

*In marriage, two people are united and become one. The question is, "Which one?"*  
*Laura Twiggs (2005)*

Some women in an abusive relationship may exhibit symptoms of dependency and even co-dependency. If I rely on the ten criteria for co-dependency as indicated by Hemfelt, et al. (1989), no evidence is found that the emotionally abused women in the present study needed to, for example, correct issues that spilled over from a dysfunctional family of origin. The co-dependent is described as driven by the need to control and dominate his partner (stemming from childhood issues; a psychoanalytic theoretical standpoint I do not adhere to). Krestan and Bepko (1990) state that care-taking is often labelled as co-dependency to pathologize and shame the woman. Also Stordeur and Stille (1989) rate the description of women as co-dependent as a symptom of the dominant class's power to label. Characteristic of the co-dependent relationship is the need to recreate the original painful situation in an attempt to right the wrongs of the past (Hemfelt, et al., 1989), with which I cannot concur when it concerns the emotionally abused woman.



Dutton (1988) furthermore reviewed a number of studies suggesting unmet dependency needs in both or one of the partners in the abusive relationship; unmet dependency needs that can lead to mutual need fulfilment between the abuser and the abused. I argue for the woman more entrapped by special features of the abusive relationship, for example, features such as the intermittent nature of the abuse and the power inequality than by her personality attributes (Dutton, 1992; Wallace, 1996). Also working from hostage experiences Dutton and Susan Painter (In Dutton, 1992, p.106) termed the process “traumatic bonding”, defined as “the development of strong emotional ties between two persons where one person intermittently harasses, beats, threatens, abuses, or intimidates the other.” They consider the abused as binding with, and being more dependent on the positive side of the abuser. When abuse then occurs, the woman believes them to be going through a difficult phase and that the relationship will normalize again.

Furthermore, Dutton (1988) and Rosen (1996) argue that the abuser’s need for power is satisfied by the abused person’s dependence on him. I would rather reason that the abuser’s need for power is satisfied by his being able to entrap the woman into the abusive relationship by means of a number of either control and domination strategies or by strategies that entrap and exploit. To Ansello (1996) this means a process of role synchrony, a process kept alive by both parties keeping to their assumed or assigned roles. Especially as one notices how the couple’s sense of bonding increases with their surviving one incident after another (Rosen, 1996), this would seem to make more sense. I therefore argue for entrapment emerging from the relationship between the spouses or the partners, rather than the woman as dependent on her partner.

The above can be summarized as meaning that the unequal distribution of power through hierarchical rule has resulted in a state of affairs where male dominance and their utilization of interpersonal power within families have placed women in a subordinate position and promoted their dependence (Chang, 1996; Collier, 1982; Dickson, 2003; Dobash & Dobash, 1980). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979, p.92),

The greater the degree of power socially sanctioned for a given role, the greater the tendency for the role occupant to exercise and exploit the power and for those in a

subordinate position to respond by increased submission, dependency, and lack of initiative.

Women are so used to labels such as dependent that they, without thinking, label themselves accordingly. For example, Minette sees herself as dependent, but I would want to know how dependent one can be on someone who you yourself support financially, who seldom if ever helps out in the home or with the baby, and who renders no emotional support. I postulate that women have grown so accustomed to these labels and have been conditioned to such an extent that they seldom challenge them.

Women find themselves in a catch-22 position (Collier, 1982). People have dependency needs, but women's needs are often not met because of them being the sole emotional support system of the family (Brannon, 2002). Positioning herself as the nurturer she is nevertheless the one blamed for unhealthy dependency needs (Mirkin, 1994b). Society chooses not to mention male dependency needs as these are usually adequately seen to by his female partner or his spouse (Greenspan, 1983). I therefore construe that many a reproach against women for being dependent stems from her partner's inability to openly acknowledge his own dependency needs or the partner stonewalling her attempt as positioning him as the "giver" instead of the sole "receiver" of support. She is forced into denial, for should she rebel she will be made out to be nagging and all the other names assertive women are often called. French (1981, pp.79-80) summarises this by saying,

Everything Mira's told us about her life shows it to be one long training in humiliation, an education in suppressing the self ... But in fact if you're brainwashed into selflessness, it wouldn't occur to you to do what you wanted to do, you wouldn't even think in such terms. There isn't enough *you* to want.

What society and even health professionals often interpret as the woman positioning herself in a dependent mode, thereby wanting the other to assume the role of the expert, take over responsibility, and take care of her, can mean many different things. A number of tentacles may be pulling her in many different directions. On the surface all these resemble dependency:

- She is tired and depressed
- Self-blame is eating at her

- She has lost confidence and doubts her ability to cope
- She finds herself unable to make a decision for change as this might place her marriage in jeopardy
- She struggles with issues of attachment
- She is struggling with other issues that literature up till now has called dependency.

When it comes to attachment and dependency the abused woman knows there was a time when she and her abusive spouse or partner shared a loving relationship and enjoyed intimacy (Dutton, 1992). Barnett and LaViolette (1993) describe the woman's dilemma as part of an approach-avoidance conflict. The woman has positive feelings for her partner and desires a happy home with her husband and children, but is confronted with his violence. On the one hand there is her love and commitment, and on the other hand there is the abuse and fear. She is increasingly entrapped by a decrease in her self-worth. Also the positive feelings for her spouse do not disappear when the abuse starts. On the positive side, she retains a degree of hope that things will normalize again, or that she can make them better. Cameron (1997), on the other hand quotes from shamanism when she states that when a human loses a vital part of the self and so they try and fill the gap. The abusive relationship therefore both murders the soul of the abused soul but also brings an addiction to the relationship.

Elaine: I stayed long after I should have left. I think it's a woman thing. Cultural indoctrination I will call it ... since day one you are taught how to behave as a girl, especially with regards to 'your man'. Our culture says, 'Stick to your man' and we do. We're trained to please, trained to be the least – always to take the second position when it comes to man.

Edwina (See Appendix A): My eyes have opened, but his a good man, it's only his behaviour that gets me down.

Although I attribute certain aspects of the emotionally abusive relationship to entrapment by the male partner, as well as partly to role-synchronicity and even to traumatic bonding, I cannot subscribe to the concept of co-dependency. Also, if dependency can be ascribed to the emotionally abused woman, I will argue that it is not a dependency on the abuser (except where financial and practical issues are involved), but a woman programmed to find validation from outside herself. She can therefore be described as dependent on validation from the outside

male authority, trapped into a role and position she finds it difficult to escape from (Greenspan, 1983; Mirkin, 1994b). The woman is connected to a source of power outside herself, and the abuser is drawing power from her need for validation. Myss (1997) reasons that the energy circuits of an individual can become so thoroughly connected to an outside object that they no longer have the use of their own reasoning ability, so they surrender their power. Some scholars will reason that this implies dependency, but I find that the emotional entrapment of the woman differs in undertone from that of dependency.

Helen: It is now six years since my divorce. Since moving out, my ex-husband and I have not once had an argument. From time to time, we meet up to discuss practical arrangements concerning the children. Usually, these discussions are quite amicably, as in principle we agree on most issues. We have a cup of coffee, ask about the other's well being, and even share a few jokes with the children if they are present. But when he leaves, I am depleted. I experience a heavy dark fog settling over my conscious mind. I feel like I've recently had an anaesthetic or wrote a most tiring exam paper. In mentioning this to the children, they burst out laughing, "That's precisely why it's so difficult to go and visit. You miss him and know that you should go, but it's just too much."

### **Positions Herself as Victim**

Some researchers see feminist consciousness as a consciousness of victimization as women are encircled by the hostile forces of an oppressive system and so the victim theme becomes society's variation on perceiving woman as masochistic (Kirkwood, 1993). A consciousness of victimization is to know that one has been unjustly treated (Bartky, 1990; LeLand-Young & Nelson, 1988), and the "perennial feeling of being entrapped or powerless" (Greenspan, 1983, p.202). In essence victim-blaming spells disempowerment. It is just another way of blaming women for their own positioning in an emotionally abusive relationship. On the other hand, the word victim also signifies to the survivor the process of winning and of taking back control over her life. Psychologists are trained by a psychiatry where the male knower has labeled women clients and both society and psychology have refrained from questioning this diagnosis (Burstow, 1992). We have grown used to the idea of the woman as problem as already described (Crawford & Marecek, 1992; Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991).

Women have been the victims of a dominating and subordinating patriarchal system, but not all women are unwilling victims. Some women do position themselves as victims. Because an ideology, system or an institution such as marriage cannot be maintained by force alone, she conceives of herself as inferior claiming protection from a patriarchal system in exchange for submissiveness in much the same way as slaves conceive their position (Jones in Jones & Brown, 2000). She accepts and expects security, especially the financial security that adhering to the system and her subordination brings (Alcoff, 2000; Kandiyoti, 1991). It appears that the woman in an emotionally abusive relationship prevails by positioning herself as victim, losing much of her resources, but preferring the protection and status gained from staying with the abusive husband (Alcoff, 2000; Bloom, et al., 1975; Hydén, 2005; Kandiyoti, 1991). This positioning could be attributed to a situation where she has no other options available, or because of the immense power imbalance that disempowers her within society as a whole.

Another reason cited for women playing the victim card is having experienced a lack of affection in the family of origin. This lack of affection in the family of origin is taken to make women vulnerable to any show of affection. What is not known is how many women (and men as well) come from dysfunctional or loveless families but are never entrapped by an emotionally abusive relationship. Women try their utmost to find emotional understanding but do not experience reciprocation (Chang, 1996). Men are more comfortable focusing on the rational, linear and cognitive areas. But this can be no excuse for expecting his female partner to take over total emotional responsibility for the family and withdrawing or refraining from rendering support or empathy in times of illness, family crisis or daily needs (Chang, 1996). Being treated as an object, not worthy of any attention, positions a woman as a victim. Not being shown any emotional support victimizes her (Chang, 1996; Dutton, 1992).

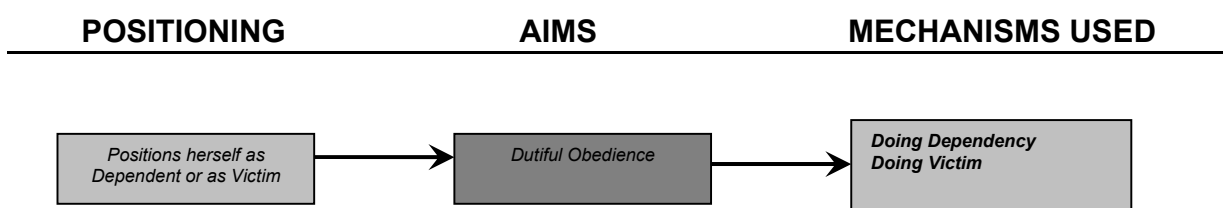
Minette: One can really experience that loneliness. Just after our marriage I had to go in to have my wisdom teeth extracted. He plainly stated that he didn't feel up to taking care of me – although he was at home full-time. I had to move back in with my parents.

Berna: Our children really suffered. After writing his final medical exams, my eldest phoned me in tears, 'Mom, you know, he didn't even phone me. I wrote the biggest exam of my entire life and he didn't even care to find out how things went. In the end he wasn't even interested in attending Barry's graduation. It's such a catch-22, on the one hand you truly believe in staying to keep the children safe, and on the other hand you are subjecting them to this.

Rose (See Appendix A): Our only son was run over by a car, and although not seriously hurt, was admitted to hospital. John was working really long hours, and although I would have overlooked quite a lot because of this, I'm to this day hurt by the fact that he did absolutely nothing. At that stage, we still had two under ten's at home and I could not drive at night. So here I was trying to keep the baby okay, seeing to the girls at home, doing whatever had to be done at home, trying to as quickly as possible feed and tend to the girl's needs and then again rushing off to hospital. Once or twice he showed up at hospital, making a big fuss – all freshly shaven and bushy tailed. I was so tired and I was so angry ... You come to a place where you think, "Why am I married?" He never even says he loves me or holds me close. I see myself as a very lonely and sad person. I'm so tired of fighting on my own.

Experiencing herself as the victim, the women now blames her partner or spouse. She expresses the belief that men are not to be trusted.

Minette: I don't think I will ever be able to trust men again or ever consider a relationship again. Never, never again (shaking her head). I cannot even imagine myself in a relationship. ...As for now I'm in the process of finding a locum for my practice as I'm leaving for this congress in Germany. So the agency asks me if I would prefer a man or a woman and I have this screaming-feeling of "How, can they even ask!" I will never appoint a man in my practice, never.



**Figure 9-3:** Positions herself as dependent and victim

The above figure refers back to Figure 9-1 and 9-2 when depicting the aims of the women's positioning. Although additional or sub-goals emerge with each positioning (depression has a sub-goal immobilization and the denial of her anger; with dependency there is the need for outside validation; and in doing victim she claims security and affection), the overall aim remains what I call dutiful obedience. As with the woman positioning herself as depressed, I have

argued that the assumed positions of dependent and victim largely refer to societal myths and misconceptions.

### **A Position of Dutiful Obedience**

I have thus far illustrated the manner in which society needs to believe and position women as anxious and fearful, depressed, dependent and as victim. Although many of these mechanisms can be seen as negative labelling by a hierarchical society the emotionally abused woman at times utilizes these mechanisms in an attempt to adhere to the script of the good daughter, the good woman and the good wife. But, I am of the opinion that the abused woman actually aims to be dutifully obedient to the expectations of the surrounding society. Her goal of being dutifully obedient takes on the status of a different and new position she assumes. Being dutifully obedient carries the negative implication of the childlike woman, the non-adult woman, the woman not able and not willing to take self-responsibility. Women, on the other hand, are conditioned towards submission, obedience, and doing as told. If it is not the father telling her what to do and how to do it, it is either the systems that surround her, or her husband.

It is because of their patriarchal upbringing that women in emotionally abusive relationships do not see the trap of giving-in for what it is. They dutifully comply because they tend to be stuck in believing this to be their only way of surviving (Horley, 2002). It is difficult to explain the impact of constant and continuous emotional battering. There are endless lists of the control and domination mechanisms (e.g., aggression, control through isolation, abusive communication, threats, rejection, exploitation and entrapment) used to keep the woman subservient and obedient to her male counterpart. Fact of the matter is, women do give in and become dutifully obedient.

Minette: In the beginning I used to ask my mom to help me out, but then he'd be so rude that she leaves and he will complain, "You and your family. She has never really liked me." So mom does not come around any more ... .. Like I used to go jogging with this sixty year old friend I had since varsity, but Ian thought we were having an affair. In the end I just stopped jogging ... .. At five to three he calls from the playground asking, "Where's my child?" and I go all whimpering ... .. He informs me that the house telephone bill needs to be paid (This is after she moved out and he is the only one having use of the telephone) and my first reaction is that maybe he is right. Maybe I am supposed to pay

the bill. It's this feeling of powerlessness in that he's able to manipulate my feelings, my thoughts and my logic.

True to Strümpfer's (2004) model of resilience and against all misconceptions of passivity, dependency and learned helplessness, the abused woman sets goals to overcome and find answers to the abusive situation. But, trained to be subordinate and dutifully obedient, she often has her focus re-directed by the extreme demands of the abuser. The woman takes his criticisms to heart and tries to do as expected only to learn that it will never be enough. This is so because the abuser was never concerned with the issues at hand, but was using them to establish or re-establish his position of domination and control. Listening to Minette her cultural sculpting becomes clear,

I had this conference in America, and he spoiled the whole trip for me by making me feel selfish. I would dutifully phone him, a 3 minute call costing me whatever, and he would be most disagreeable. It spoiled everything for me. Why did I allow him to influence me to that extent? It's my fault for always being so pleasing. I have this "I'm so sorry for taking up space-attitude, sorry to be alive attitude". I allow others to use me. ...I fall into this trap of blaming myself. How could I have chosen this man as my husband? There must be something seriously wrong with me for having got myself in this mess.

The emotionally abused woman attempts engage in resilient behaviour, in other words she attempts to do something to overcome or restructure the relationship (Strümpfer, 1999 & 2004). The stories of the women in the present research show the woman taking on more and more responsibility, always willing to try her best (Kirkwood, 1993). Karen makes do with less and less money to buy food, but she still manages to do whatever it takes to put away money to buy new towels. Her spouse, on the other hand, is working against her and nothing will be good enough. The more she tries, the more she fails. She is entrapped by her own efficiency, her own effectiveness and strength (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Dutton, 1992). Minette feels obligated to take care of Ian, and time and time again she steps in, only to have her efforts exploited. Instead of taking care of her own needs, she says,

I think I would have been willing to keep quiet if he made any effort whatsoever to help me with Duncan or the house. He's at home all day long, but he never as much as washes the dishes or offers to look after the baby while I cook dinner. If I ask him to do something,



the fighting starts ... Sometimes I try and reason and tell him how difficult my day has been, how I have to take care for the baby, my practice and still come home and cook dinner. How I need him to help me out ... At times I go into this nagging mode, but mostly I end up crying. I wish I can explain how this hurts. I even ask for his forgiveness because I honestly in that moment believe him to be right.

At first glance this may again seem like a nagging and dependent woman, willing to accept the situation as long as he's there for her and offers her the security of a man at her side. She positions herself true to the patriarchal script for women; a good wife script that has been superimposed on the good daughter script. She is willing to take all the responsibility for their home and baby as a good wife should. She will settle for next to nothing in the help department because of her own shame for not being able to cope better. But there is also the anger she feels because of her partner not sticking to the male patriarchal contract that he will always come to her aid when needed.

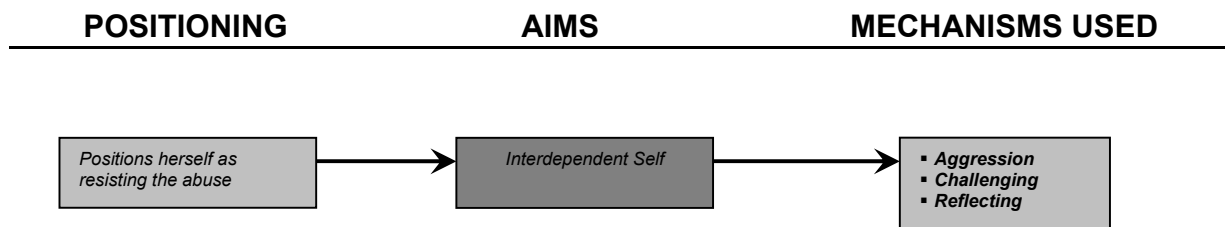
I suggest that because of these women's successes in the outside world, they feel guilty for not being as expected and therefore are trying their utmost to be the best where it matters to society; the home. She takes all responsibility for the abuse into herself and starts to blame herself (Hydén, 2005). She doubts herself and therefore has to try even harder. She also exerts herself because, being self-reliant, she realizes the unfairness of the power inequality or the unfairness of her place in the relationship (Jukes, 1999). Some women have not learned how to take on a situation with a desire to win and to generally take responsibility for their own success in life (Brownmiller, 2000; Crawford & Marecek, 1992). They in effect deny their own self-worth. This reminds me of the *Impostor Phenomenon*, relating that although some women do succeed in public life, they do not internalize their success, and doubting themselves they feel as if they have fooled everyone (Kahn & Yoder, 1989). Why else would they believe everything their spouses or partners throw in their faces (Kirkwood, 1993) or why would Minette constantly question the therapist in terms of "How do you know that I'm telling the truth, that my version is the correct version?"

It is never easy to change. It is even more difficult to go against society, one's own cultural history and the teachings of one's religion. The woman's wanting to do differently is taken as a violation of the sacred nature of matrimony, those rules that tell her to show respect and loyalty although she does not agree; those rules that tell her not to think and not to feel.

## A Position of Resisting the Abuse

*... men are taught to apologize for their weaknesses, women for their strength*  
Lois Wyse (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993, p.1)

Many therapists work from the premise that the woman in an emotionally abusive relationship has a choice regarding her reaction to the abuse. I have shown why and how women choose to deny the abuse and in other instances give in to the abuse. However, women also resist and challenge the abuser. Figure 9-2 I illustrate the women positioning herself as resisting the abuse through mechanisms such as confrontation and resistance, challenging and reflecting. She aims to be a person in her own right; to utilize agency in an interdependent manner.



**Figure 9-4:** Positions herself as resisting the abuse

Working with the female partners of the emotionally abusive relationship, I was astonished by the strength, the resilience, and the clear headedness of most of these women. Greenspan (1983, p.308) in the same manner describes one of her abused clients as “a strikingly powerful woman: she was remarkably smart, physically vital, and quite wilful” in contradiction to the client’s story of “painful and crippling dependence.” Other authors describe these women as strong, confident, and capable (Horley, 2002; NiCarthy, 1982; Schwartz, 2000).

At school, Minette excelled both academically and in cultural pursuits. She describes herself as a driven and self-motivated person. She enjoys her work and to be successful in her profession is important to her. She therefore built a successful practice. Elaine describes herself as having been an over-achiever and strong-willed; “always asking questions” – behaviour that can be described as assertive and challenging. Working full-time and still completing a law degree in four years by means of part-time study through the University of South Africa also spell success and assertiveness. Karen proves her strength when she at the conclusion of therapy

manages to structure a new position for herself within her marriage, and Berna excelled as a student leader and is at a managerial level involved her at her children's school. Even just in glancing over the stories of women included in the study I am impressed by the women's level of qualifications and the occupational positions they hold.

Few women of these women will fit the stereotype of stay-at-home mothers with no alternative options in terms of self-support. I cannot see these women to completely fit under the thumb of the patriarchal conditioned spouse. It is difficult to imagine any of them not raising objections, not opposing a spouse they do not agree with or accepting everything they are told and asked to do. In listening to the women I weighed Leonore Walker's (1979, p.xii) summary that "perhaps violence erupted because women began to make their own decisions to control their lives" and found myself in agreement with Hydén's (2005) argument that the ways in which women oppose and resist violence have been underemphasized and insufficiently examined. The present research renders the following ways in which women resist the abuser and his mechanisms of control and domination.

### ***Aggression: Confrontation and Opposition***

Karen: He would tell everyone that I am in need of treatment and that there is something seriously wrong with me. I would get so angry at him I would rage at him ... wrong way of asking for his love, I suppose.

Personally I am extremely cautious when it comes to calling a woman's actions aggressive. Experience has taught that this often boils down to labelling the woman (Bernardez, 1988; Elworthy (1996), whereas it is not uncommon for an individual to retaliate with aggression when being manoeuvred into a corner. When one attempts to describe the woman's behaviour as confrontational much depends on the amount of aggression that accompanies the behaviour. Sometimes the women literally retaliate as a reaction to the frustration of constantly being provoked, not having him take her seriously or change his behaviour and because of the symptomatic arousal as found in a posttraumatic stress reaction to constant abuse (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Dutton, 1992; Miller, 1995; Rothman & Munson, 1988). On the other hand, some women do bicker, nag, constantly blame and pick fights. It will only be possible to determine if this is solely their manner, or retaliation to the abuser's actions, or the abusive man and society labelling her behaviour as aggressive or confrontational mainly

because she does not comply with the prescribed norms of behaving as a subservient woman. Greenspan (1983) has described women's original sin to be not completely surrendering to the male. As Johan, Karen's husband complains, "She screamed at me, 'I will not have my life regulated by your lists!'" or "She is always on the defensive."

Women mostly shy away from fighting back as aggression in women is frowned upon (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Collier, 1982; Hirigoyen, 2000), but women do show anger:

Berna: At first this was just the way life goes, but then – time and again - he went out and put me and the children through financial hardship yet again. I find it so unbelievably insensitive and uncaringly arrogant.

Or,

He will openly tell me I'm worthless and that when things go wrong "he will be the one that'll have to sort them out". Bloody hell, he will!

Some scholars indicate that when women do react in an aggressive fashion, it is mostly in self-defence (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Dickson, 2003; See Lloyd, 1999 for a number of researchers). But be it self-defence or retaliation, she is immediately and loudly accused of provocation (Dutton, 1992; Papp, 1988; Rothman & Munson, 1988). It has been said that verbal aggression always seems to be the forerunner to physical abuse (Gelles, 1974; Schumacher et al., 2001). I think it all depends on where one punctuates the incident (Tolman, 1992), as studies done on provocation in particular indicate the reasons men give for being provoked, range from the woman's being too talkative to not talking at all, being pregnant or not being pregnant, being frugal or extravagant, or not being submissive enough (Dobash & Dobash, 1980).

Helen: I remember me and my husband once having this argument, and no matter what I said, he turned it around, making me into the guilty party. I was so frustrated. Just giving-in, I tried to leave the room and he physically held me back. I lost it and repeatedly punched his arms and shoulders. He held up his forearm so that I couldn't get near him and there was this amusement in his eyes – sort of laughing at me. I ended up doing precisely that which I despise so much ... I really turned out of control ... I cannot describe the shame I felt.

Berna: He brings out the worse in me. I behave in a hateful manner.

However, some battered women experience a morbid hatred for the abuser, wishing him dead, wanting to harm him, and seeking retaliation (Dutton, 1992; Hirigoyen, 2000). It was only in April 2004 that South Africa had the landmark acquittal of a woman who allegedly murdered her husband in self-defence after years of physical and emotional abuse. Women who retaliate after years of psychological abuse are doubly riddled by guilt. They see the hatefulness of their partner's abuse and they have to cope with their own inexcusable retaliation.

Minette: There are times when I really wish I can get Ian out of our lives. At least then I'll know that Duncan will be safe. There are times when I actually sit and contemplate how to get back at Ian. I want him to suffer as I did, I want him to feel the pain, I want him to come crawling at me, saying he's sorry. I really need him to apologize, as I cannot believe that he wasn't aware of what he was doing.

### ***Challenging: Being Assertive and Objecting***

Minette: Every time he wants to start on a new course, we have these fights. I want him to go out and find a job; he wants to do another course. I have been supporting us for close to three years now, and the courses really cost an arm and a leg. So I stall and try and have him see my point of view.

The author and therapist Adam Jukes (1999) describes the male batterer as having great difficulty in dealing with projections of his nature, or simply with accusations that are not projective. Thus, one can understand Barnett and LaViolette and other author's earlier conclusion regarding the victim's verbal aggression provoking the abuser. Every challenge she presents is seen as a threat to his control and domination (Miller, 1995), and he escalates his abuse to maintain the upper hand. Every time she requests something from him, he labels her actions as nagging or unrealistic. He reacts with as much force as he deems necessary and justifies his behaviour by using her challenging behaviour against her.

In the same manner Dickson (2003, p.54) explains that "any protest is unacceptable, because it constitutes a threat" and "(t)hreats have to be eliminated." The abusive man cannot tolerate such an expression of self-reliance, and he will do anything in his power to subdue her. Much in the same manner Karen says, "If I differ from him in anything, there will be trouble" or "He never

gives you time to state your case, he always leaves the impression that he's never really interested in what you have to say." It therefore does seem that she opposes and tries to reason with her spouse. Often there is blaming and one can imagine these differences developing into a full blown fight with both partners not on their best behaviour.

During therapy Minette complains; she refers back to the "these fights", her constantly trying to reason with her spouse and indicates the number of times she has taken up some of the issues with her spouse. Should Minette, for example, assert herself and decide what to do all by herself, Ian retaliates with, "That's just like you, always wanting to control everything." Minette immediately falls into self-doubt, because women have been socialized into believing that looking after their own interest is an act of selfishness, and that their own self-determination is wrong and immoral (Miller, 1988). French (1981, p.258) purports that "when the cause was yourself, all the guilts rose up. How dare you fight for yourself? It was so selfish." Western culture, and in particular the traditional-conservative culture, is not at ease with women having power and therefore signs of dominance have conveniently been labelled in derogatory terms by the ruling class as illustrated here by Ian's reaction.

### ***Reflecting: Discussion and Reasoning***

I have often found the emotionally abused woman to be intelligent and clear-headed. Because of these qualities they consciously deal with life by asking questions, reflecting and are able to evaluate themselves and their situation in psychotherapy. Minette refers to discussing issues with her spouse but these discussions lead to further abuse and oppression from her spouse. She says, for example, "I try and reason with him" or "If I try to further reason with him he starts screaming at me." She also verbalizes the wish "if only we can talk", saying that "If I ask him" some sort of negativity or abuse will follow. Elaine, on the other hand is a highly intelligent and self-assured lawyer. She tells of having had a relationship with her father wherein they constantly discussed issues and in therapy she tends to constantly question, reason and discuss. And Karen says,

All these years I was trying to find what I did wrong, telling myself that there must be something I did to cause this. You try and you try to change, but nothing helps. He asks this and you do so, then he asks thus and again you do as asked, but he always needs something more, something else. It never is good enough.

Women become confused as they do not see the reason behind all the abuse heaped on them (Kirkwood, 1993). The women in this study constantly tried to reason out the “why” as they realized that their interpretation and that of the abuser differ. I argue that in most cases the woman does not intend to nag, pick a fight or confront her spouse. She has been reflecting on the abusive (or any other aspect of the relationship) and she wants to sort things out. She wants to understand in order to be able to better the relationship and she tries to reason with the abuser in the hope that he will understand; Evans (1993) calls this the explaining trap. I personally experience that in this age of warfare and aggression, some women still do not play the game of the survival of the fittest. They intuitively aim to work towards interdependence; seen as the basic law of all life. I recently reread Carol Lee Flinders’ *Rebalancing the World* (2002) in which she reiterates the same idea of working towards the age-old principle of “Belonging.”

But, appraisal is also the first step in building emotional resilience; resiliency defined “as a pattern of psychological activity which consists of a motive to be strong in the face of inordinate demands, the goal-directed behaviour of coping and rebounding, and of accompanying emotions and cognitions” (Strümpfer, 2004). Much has been written about women (as well as men) needing mutual sharing and emotional interdependence in their relationships. Not finding answers and not finding that which she needs from her close relationship the woman is faced with the choice of giving-in and denial or setting some goals as to how to try and remedy the situation or in the last instance when, if and how they should let go of the relationship.

Many emotionally abused women decide to leave the relationship in the end when the threat to her and her children looms too ominous. She decides to leave as and when she realizes that the abuse will never make cognitive sense (Antonovsky, 1987). She realizes that the control of the abusive behaviour lies mainly in the hands of the abuser, and although she can minimize it happening, she does not have the power to have it not happen again. Antonovsky (1987) also refers to finding meaning. Each abused woman who breaks away has her personal and meaning-giving reasons for doing so; many wanting to keep their children safe from the emotional abuse in the intimate or marital relationship. Personal growth is strongly implied. Again this belies the often cited truth of women being passive. More often the women are willing to walk the line for a better life as proven by the fact that more than half of the women in the study were divorced, separated, or had a divorce pending (usually initiated by the woman).

Abused women do in the end reach a situation where they realize that if she desires change, she will have to make the changes in her life. In a recent interview on feminism Gloria Steinem (2005, July) said and I quote her here as it can just as well apply to the woman having to make up her mind to leave the emotionally abusive relationship,

.... if you are part of the wrong group, nothing you do is right anyway! So you might as well do what you f\*\*\*ing well please, you know! I mean, there's no way of behaving in order to get approval! First of all if you do that, you've given the approver all the power, secondly, it's the nature of being part of the wrong group that you won't be approved, you know, you can't be good enough to be a "good girl"! I would say: it just doesn't work. Because, the most comforting thing is: it just doesn't work! So you might as well do what you want to do, and use your talents and use your head, and point out unfairness.

## **Conclusion**

Contrary to society's appraisal of the woman emotionally abused in a close personal relationship, these women often are strong and resilient women, but they also to a degree still feel the need to answer to the call of a patriarchal society. The totally subservient woman may be used and abused, but as she takes the situation as the way it is supposed to be, she can in a manner adapt. The woman who lends no ear to the expectations and rules of patriarchy frees herself from the need to conform. I do believe that it is the woman caught in the middle who suffers the most. She finds herself in this position through her upbringing in a specific society; a system she experiences as unfair to women, not answering to her needs and lending her no support in her personal growth and development.

In theory the emotionally abused woman has a choice how to live her life, but I have shown her entrapment in the system through a number of mechanisms that operate on a variety of levels. Most of these positionings by the woman are interpreted by her partner or spouse as a threat to his position and he ups his attack to control and dominate. Time and time again, all efforts to independent thought and behaviour are thwarted by the male positioning. All this brings us to the *how* of the emotionally abusive relationships. The processes involved in these relationships will be described in the following chapter.



<b>SUMMARY OF THE WOMEN'S POSITIONING</b>		
<b>POSITIONING</b>	<b>AIMS</b>	<b>MECHANISMS USED</b>
<b>Positions herself as Fearful and anxious</b>	<i>Dutiful Obedience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Doing Fearfulness</li> <li>▪ Doing Anxiety</li> <li>▪ Doing Denial</li> </ul>
<b>Positions herself as Depressed</b>	<i>Dutiful Obedience Denial of Anger</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Doing Depression</li> <li>▪ Doing Passivity</li> <li>▪ Doing Learned Helplessness</li> <li>▪ Doing Tolerance</li> </ul>
<b>Positions herself as Dependent</b>	<i>Dutiful Obedience Seeks outside Validation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Doing Dependency</li> </ul>
<b>Positions herself as Victim</b>	<i>Dutiful Obedience Claims Security and Affection</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Doing Victim</li> </ul>
<b>Positions herself as Resisting the Abuse</b>	<i>Changing the Relationship</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Aggression <i>Confrontation and Opposing</i></li> <li>▪ Challenging <i>Being Assertive and Objecting</i></li> <li>▪ Reflecting <i>Discussion and Reasoning</i></li> </ul>

**Figure 9-5:** Summary of the Women's Positioning

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