

## **PART IV: A MODEL OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE**

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### **CHAPTER 10: MAKING SENSE OUT OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE**

*One can either see a universe of things interacting with each other or a universe of interacting activities which give rise to things, moment after moment*  
Dostal (2004)

In attempting to understand emotional abuse I was impressed by the extent to which any experience, and therefore women experiencing emotional abuse within close relationships, is grounded in history, culture, society, and time frame of occurrence. The experience is embedded in the totality of a complex ecological context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Reality therefore becomes a construct of the culture, the history, and the society these women live in. The reality is also constructed through language, and shows in the contracts people negotiate between them in their relationships. The stories of the women coming from emotionally abusive relationships which I collected for this study showed that emotional abuse could not be attributed to the individual woman or man in the relationship alone.

Emotional abuse lies in the space and the interactions between the individuals, and therefore the abuse is constructed by the relationship. In reading and rereading the stories, I realized that these stories gave evidence of the existence of patterns as well as processes within the relationship. In this chapter I consolidated my interpretations of these patterns and processes. First I present a brief discussion of the relevant literature concerning abuse, descriptions thereof, and what had been written about patterns and processes in abuse until the present time. Then I present a model for making sense of emotional abuse in close relationships based on my interpretations of the case studies I analyzed for this project. Although I will, to a certain extent, be repeating myself in the first few paragraphs, I find it necessary to revisit the historical developments concerning issues of abuse before developing a new model of emotional abuse based on the many themes that emerged in this project.

## Earlier Theories and Research

Early research conducted on abuse, domestic violence, and wife battering have been vast, systematic, and quantitative (Dutton, 1992; Gelles, 1974, 1987, 1993; Gelles & Cornell, 1985; Gelles & Straus, 1988; Marshall, 1994; O'Leary & Maiuro, 2001; O'Leary & Murphy, 1992; Straus, 1988, 1990; Tolman, 1992; Walker, 1979; Wallace, 1996). Although the psychological aspects of the abuse and the meaning of the abusive incident were considered, the focus was mainly on physical abuse (Dutton, 1992; Tolman, 1992). Dobash and Dobash (1977-78, 1980) saw violence against women as grounded in the patriarchal domination of women, and Dutton (1992) and Tolman (1992) concentrated on the abuser aiming for control of the victim. These authors also seriously considered historical and social elements, but the content of the individual experiences of the women is missing from their results and conclusions.

Lenore Walker (1979) concentrated her studies on the woman involved. She concerned herself mainly with physical battering, but not only described the abuse as the physical actions that lead to bodily harm and injury. Rather, Walker also accentuated the emotional torture found in the abusive situation as well as the whole process of abuse. She saw "a battered woman (as) a woman who is repeatedly subjected to any forceful physical or psychological behaviour by a man in order to coerce her to do something he wants her to do without any concern for her rights" (Walker, 1979, p.xv).

Walker described what she termed the *battered woman syndrome*, and she showed the myths pertaining to women in abusive relationships, the blaming of the woman for her own victimization, and the physical and emotional entrapment not realized by society. She saw abuse as part of learned aggression in a society where sex discrimination abounded, leading to the domination and control of the so-called weaker sex (Walker, 1979; Marshall, 1994). Walker's main contribution concerning the battering of women was her theory of the cycle of abuse (as I will later discuss when describing the patterns found in the abusive relationship).

The focus gradually shifted to emotional or psychological abuse as a separate entity and the widespread nature of the abuse was accentuated (Loring, 1994; Miller, 1995). Themes were identified that are still present within the phenomenon of emotional abuse; themes such as women and society not recognizing the abuse for what it is, and women searching within themselves for the causes.

Further themes evolved. The concept of emotional abuse as an *ongoing process* started winning field (Loring, 1994). Intermittent patterns were described as presenting in both covert and overt form (Loring, Davic & Myers, 1994), and description of emotional abuse now changed from an isolated incident to a consistent pattern of behaviours whereby the male is using the power bestowed on him by society to demean and control the women (Douglas, 1996; Hirigoyen, 2000; O'Connor, 2000). In the same manner Chang (1996), taking a feminist stance, and others (Horley, 2002; Jukes, 1999; Miller, 1995) placed the emotional abuse of women central to the norms and workings of patriarchal society, and therefore on gender and on stereotyping. The male abuser was described as positioning himself in accordance with patriarchal entitlement and narcissism (Jukes, 1999; Miller, 1995). He showed no respect for women, and he objectified and used them to his advantage (Hirigoyen, 2000).

The impact of the oppression of women within the family structure was now described as the ways in which meaning was constructed in the emotionally abusive relationship (Chang, 1996; Horley, 2002). Loring (1994) took a systemic approach to emotional abuse and considered both partners as contributing to the abusive relationship, not again making women out as solely responsible and an accomplice to the abuse. On the other hand, Loring was well aware of the danger of not taking into account the suffering and the inequality in power facing the victim, as the systemic approach is often accused of doing so.

Kay Douglas (1996, p.16) placed the blame for the emotional abuse solely in the hands of the male partner, stating that “underlying a man’s lack of emotional responsibility ... is often sadism. Many men positively and knowingly relish the drama, the tension, the increase in adrenaline that abusing their partner can bring them.” Jukes (1999) supported Douglas in her description of sadistic intent, but Miller (1995) did not see this as sadism, as there was no pleasure in inflicting the pain, only the overall need for dominance and control.

### ***The Cycle of Violence Theory***

To my knowledge Lenore Walker (1979) was the first to describe a pattern of abuse, calling it the *Cycle of Violence*. The Cycle of Violence Theory (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993) explained why women remained in violent relationships. As with all theories, this theory could only encapsulate part of a truth, a truth as applicable when created within its immediate time and space frame. This truth was accepted and held up as valid and valuable by researchers and

psychologists—all those researchers and psychologists who benefited from describing the woman in the relationships as an unthinking peon in a game of chess.

Walker (1979) described three distinct phases, varying in time and intensity, varying from couple to couple and within the relationship of the same couple.

### ***The Tension-Building Phase***

The first phase in the cycle of violence against women was characterized by minor battering incidents (Walker, 1979). The woman usually handled these incidents by trying to calm and placate the abuser through behaviour that previously proved successful. Her coping with the minor incidents was seen as an indication that she accepted the legitimacy of the abuse and in taking some of the responsibility she was branded as an accomplice to the abusive act.

Walker's focus on the woman must be seen as valuable development in the research on abuse in general. Unfortunately, the woman's behaviour was still described in a manner that fell into the traditional trap of, to a certain extent, blaming the woman and thus blaming the victim. There was no reflection on the woman's position of strategic coping, or her valuing relationship-building more than the occurrence of the abusive incidents, or of her challenge and opposition to the abuse. Walker described the woman as denying her anger and accepting the guilt. The woman minimized or excused the incident, because she knew that it could have been worse (Walker, 1979). The woman who positioned herself as expected within traditional patriarchal society was overlooked, and her programmed stance of being dutifully obedient was ignored. Her well-trained positioning of taking responsibility for the emotional continued existence of the relationship therefore went unnoticed. As no one was really listening to the woman, no one paid any attention to the development of the abuse in the relationship (the space) between the abuser and the abused.

In her explanation of the first stage, Walker (1979) described the woman as sinking into powerlessness and helplessness as she realized that nothing she said and did would prevent the next stage of the cycle from occurring. The batterer, believing that he had found passive acceptance for his behaviour, saw no point in further controlling his actions. But each minor incident left residual tension, and as these incidents increased, the psychological interplay continued and escalated, until the tension became unbearable and resulted in an acute

battering incident (Douglas, 1996). Walker (1979) also stated that the batterer knew his behaviour was unacceptable, as was proven by the fact that he did not take the battering out in public. What she did not clearly bring out in the open, however, was the batterer's need to show his power and why he needed to show such a hierarchical need to dominate and control.

### ***The Acute Battering Incident***

The acute battering incident, as the second phase in the pattern of woman abuse, was characterized by a discharge of built-up tension, destructiveness, and lack of control. The trigger was often something the woman did or did not do or say (Walker, 1979). The batterer's goal was interpreted as wanting to teach the woman a lesson, and so a rationalization or justification for his behaviour was covertly implied. Likewise, there was nothing the woman could do to stop him—he stopped when he wanted to, when he was emotionally depleted or exhausted. But, most importantly, the relatively less important physical blows suffered during this stage paled in comparison to the woman's emotional experiences of the psychological entrapment that followed, as well as her experiencing of the futility of trying to escape (Walker, 1979).

On the part of the woman, disbelief and dissociation followed, and similar to the reactions suffered by catastrophe victims, she could suffer an emotional collapse after the attack, or she became listless, depressed, and felt helpless further pushing her towards entrapment (Walker, 1979). Again, the unfortunate implication was an implied weakness in the women themselves, not a normal reaction to an abnormal situation as was usually attributed to posttraumatic stress syndrome.

### ***The Phase of Loving Contrite***

The final phase in the cycle of violence was characterized by contrite and loving kindness from the man. He begged forgiveness and promised it would never happen again. The woman, caught up in the traditional values of love and marriage, felt responsible for not being able to prevent the violence, or being made to feel guilty by those around her, so she believed and forgave him. Slowly, as the one cycle followed onto another, the woman was filled with contempt for herself as she gave in, time after time (Walker, 1979). Contrary to the

learned helplessness attributed to the woman, nothing was said of women's continual hopefulness. It was as if the millennia of male oppression had cemented women's communal feelings of inferiority. Women were entrapped by their programmed selflessness.

### ***Critique on the Cycle of Violence Theory***

To summarize, it could be said that Walker describes interpersonal violence, especially wife battering, as cyclic in nature. Gondolph (1988, in Worell & Remer, 1992) questioned the cycle of violence theory, and found that the batterer showing remorse was the exception to the rule. Dobash and Dobash (1980) agreed, and reasoned that the man acted in an off-hand manner, showed little or no remorse, and was seldom willing to apologize. They further argued that the abusive man did not take responsibility for what was happening in the relationship and stated that after the violent episode, the partners did not reconcile, they "just drift back together again" (Dobash & Dobash, 1980, p.119).

As far as my survey of earlier literature went, Loring (1994) was the only author I came across who did not fully agree with the cyclical pattern described by Walker. In relating what she called psychological abuse, Loring described the abuse escalating in a more linear manner rather than through repeated cycles. Later scholars question Walker's differentiation between the three stages (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Dutton, 1992) as they argue that the honeymoon phase grew shorter over time, and the tension-building and violent phases became longer (Burstow, 1992), or that the tension-building phase increased and intensified and the phase of reconciliation became shorter, less intense, and even ceased to exist (Douglas, 1996). Walker (1979) later described the last phase as more of a cessation of the violence (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993). I presume that what Walker described as the three phases of abuse reminded me of what more recent authors identified as the intermittent nature of abuse (Follingstad & DeHart, 2000; Loring, 1994; Loring et al., 1994; Marshall, 1994).

Most researchers who followed in Walker's footsteps described the abuse as escalating over time (Douglas, 1996; Dutton, 1992; Miller, 1995). They also agreed that abuse was in some way or another, an organized way of relating. Loring (1994) as well as Loring, et al., (1994) stated that a pattern in the emotionally abusive relationship did exist, but rather than being cyclic it was described as linear. Some scholars referred to the abuse as holding those "involved in an established pattern of behaviour" (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993, p.xxii). Chang (1996) then

describes emotional abuse (psychological abuse) as an evolving process involving shifts in both partners and in the relationship, and refers to the changes taking place in both partners as the relationships progress. Some authors describe the stop-and-go process within the abuse as what kept the abused on tenterhooks, never knowing what to expect (Miller, 1995). It was the intermittent nature of the abuse that seemed to be most effective in controlling the abused, the islands of shared positive experiences and feelings that fire the abused woman's hopefulness (Douglas, 1996; Matlin, 1987). The cessation of violence, or the covert abuse juxtaposed with more positive behaviour increased the uncertainty of the abused woman as she questioned the truth of her perceptions (Follingstad & DeHart, 2000).

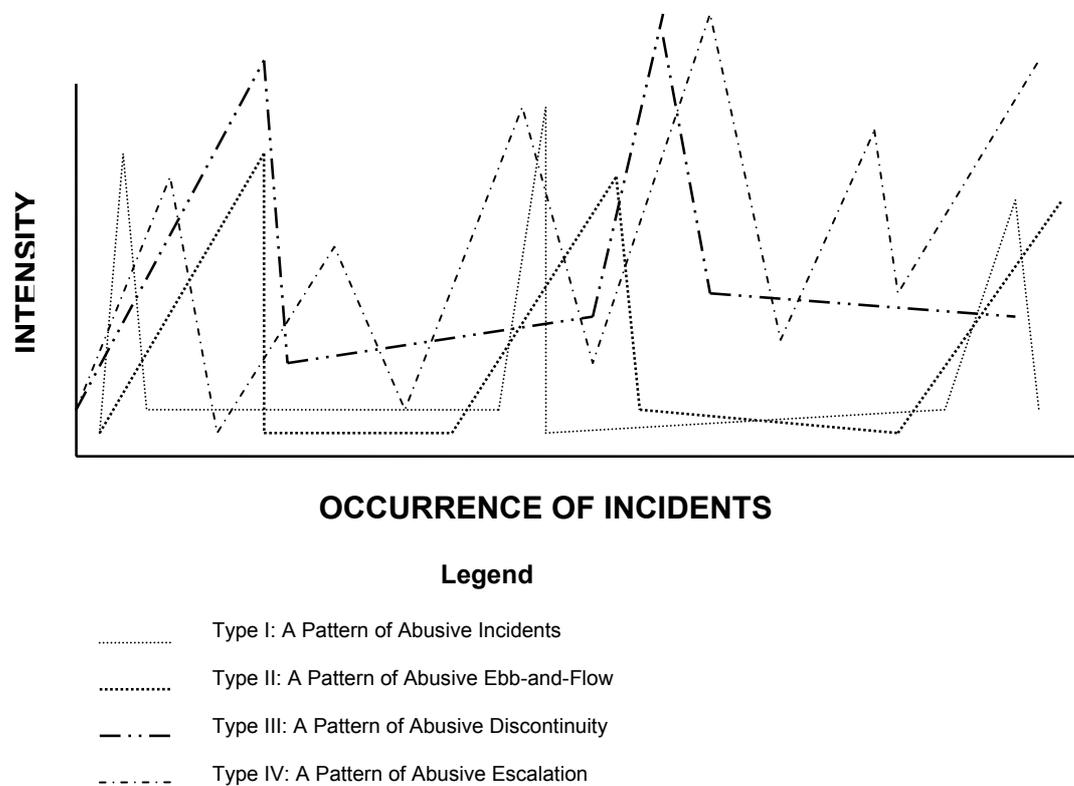
### **The Patterns of Emotional Abuse**

As I listened to the stories presented in the present project of women that were involved in emotionally abusive relationships, I was able to identify definite patterns to the incidences of emotional abuse. I caution the reader to take these patterns as descriptions of emotional abuse occurring in close relationships and that these cannot be seen as applicable to other situations wherein emotional abuse occurs. These patterns also differed from the concept of common couple violence as they showed a lack of the patterned control seen in physically abusive relationship (Arriaga & Oskamp, 1999b; Greene & Bogo, 2002). Four different patterns of emotional abuse unfolded as typical of the occurrence of emotional abuse in close relationships (See Figure 10-1, p. 231).

#### ***Type I: A Pattern of Abusive Incidents***

Within the pattern depicted as a Pattern of Abusive Incidents the relationships mostly started off from an atmosphere relatively free of overt and covert abusive incidents, but from time to time high-voltage abusive incidents occurred which sometimes lasted for a few of days. Although there were a few abusive incidents over a particular period of time, the emotional barometer of the relationships could be described as always returning to more or less base line. Unfortunately the abusive incidents carried consequences. Similar to relationships where physical abuse was a factor, once an incident of abuse occurred, the underlying threat of a re-occurrence was always present. The threat not only lingered and had an influence on the

relationship, but with each new incident, the threat escalated, and the entrapment within the relationship grew.



**Figure 10-1:** Patterns of abuse in close relationships

Within all relationships, a fall-out could occur from time to time. Although the ideal of two adults sorting out and negotiating their differences in a mature fashion would be possible, this did not always reflect reality. The experiences of the women in therapy with me were mostly an argument or quarrel resulting, wherein the degrees of emotional control as well as the abusive nature of the contact hugely differed. It seemed that, because of the low level of emotional upheaval caused by some incidents, the marriage, partnership, or relationship would follow its course. It was only with the occurrence of intensely high-level abusive incidents that the equilibrium of the unity suffered. The psychological pain, self-doubt, and all the other consequences of emotional abuse would now continuously influence the behaviour of the female partners in the relationships and the emotional health of the relationship.

These intermittent abusive incidents did not always turn out to escalate in terms of the intensity of their abusive nature. Whether or not there was an increase would be a further construction of the relationship that depended on the further positioning of both players. This construction in turn depended on influences from outside of the relationship, where one partner either took a different stance, or where both developed as persons and found workable solutions to differences.

In the case of Karin (See Case study on p.90), the intensity of the abuse did increase, which she attributed to her becoming stronger. Strangely enough, her “becoming stronger” had both a negative and a positive outcome. At first, the intensity of the abuse increased, following the abusive process that will shortly be described. But then Karin came for therapy and some changes ensued. She cried out her pain and verbalized her anger, coming to a better understanding of the whole phenomenon of emotional abuse, and thereby rid herself of both her guilt and her self-doubt. She thus grew in making peace with herself, and could weather the abusive incidents that now followed with stoic indifference. With a deadpan expression, she communicated her inner belief that, no matter what Johan did or said, she did not need respond, take it to heart, or allow herself to be hurt. If Karin continued in the same manner, the emotional climate of the relationship would most likely increase in a positive manner, because Johan will still find issues to fight about but Karen will not show the expected reaction, which would defuse the situation.

On the other hand, a couple in couple’s therapy, Mandy and Ricus, would most probably end their relationship in divorce. In this case, Mandy grew through her managerial exposure in her professional life. She started reading, and in general broadened her perspective in life. Ricus, on the other hand, stayed put and still demanded:

I need my wife to be submissive and respectful. I prefer women to be humble and obedient in their demeanour, and I will not allow Mandy to do as she likes. Why can’t she come home and see to dinner ...

In this case, a different abusive pattern emerged.

### ***Type II: A Pattern of Abusive Ebb-and-Flow***

In the Pattern of Abusive Ebb-and-Flow, the relationship started out in a similar fashion to the one described above, characterized by the intermittent occurrence of abusive incidents. The incidents started out of from a baseline relatively free from abuse and conflict, to always returning more or less to the base line space in the relationships. There usually followed a time of respite that could last for a couple of days or a longer period, before the tension started building up again. Although this might sound similar to the first pattern described, there was a distinct difference. In the case of a Pattern of Abusive Incidents the periods of “normality” were much longer, to such an extent that there could literally be no incident for a few years. Secondly, whereas in a Pattern of Abusive Incidents these abusive incidents did not include much build up prior to the outburst and could occur suddenly, whereas in the Pattern of Abusive Ebb-and-Flow there was a build-up of tension before the actual outburst. This particular ebb-and-flow constituted the patterning of this kind of abusive relationship.

Berna’s story fits this particular pattern. For twenty odd years she and her spouse had a marriage that an outsider would have seen as relatively happy. What was kept secret was the on and off incidents of extreme emotional abuse that surfaced from time to time.

The last two patterns are characterized as being the most violent.

### ***Type III: A Pattern of Abusive Discontinuity***

The Pattern of Abusive Discontinuity closely resembled the cycle of violence as described by Walker (1979). However, the abusive incidents were not cyclic in nature, but rather intermittent, as there was a clear break from the abuse. During these periods of normality, life apparently went on as always, but on an emotional level there was movement. Irrespective of the break in the occurrence of abusive incidents, the woman suffered. On the one hand, she was constantly reminded of what marriage and the love for her spouse/partner means to her, and she sustained herself by hoping for a miracle. However, on the other hand, each new incident escalated the pain she suffered, the doubt and the self-incrimination. Gradually her soul started to die. Sometimes her love for the spouse diminished, but usually the most difficult decision was to actually leave the relationship because of the emotional abuse because she did still love her partner.

The woman also experienced a huge amount of resentment that from time became apparent in either overt or covert form. This resentment would in turn further break down the already shaky relationship. The intensity of the abusive incidents therefore tended to increase, and an increase in occurrence was not unusual. Elaine eloquently explains (See Appendix A),

You go on with your day to day life. The abuse occurs, but the rest of your life is good – even fantastic. So you choose to overlook the negative part. I was so naïve ... You just ignore what you did not want to see, until it gets so glaringly obvious. Now thinking back, I think it's just like childhood abuse, "because I enjoy it doesn't make it less wrong" ... I lost my self in this relationship; in the end it was hell.

#### ***Type IV: A Pattern of Abusive Escalation***

A Pattern of Abusive Escalation more or less followed the same pattern as the previous. The abuse was intermittent in nature, and there was a gradual increase in both the occurrence of incidents and the intensity of the incidents. But, there never seemed to be a period devoid of tension. Although there was ebb and flow in the level of intensity, the overall barometer of tension was rising. This description of the abusive relationship tallied with Chang's findings in her study of psychologically abusive relationships. Participants in her study described that a break or respite from the abusive behaviour was almost nonexistent (Chang, 1996).

Although this type of abusive relationships would most likely be the first step towards a total break up of the relationship, they did not always end in divorce. In the cases where the participants showed more co-dependency than in the other patterns, the relationship, although high in violence, did seem to lead to some sort of need-fulfilment in both partners. It could also be that in this relationship the woman was practically entrapped because of financial and other reasons, and refused to give-in and give-up.

### ***Summary of the Patterns of Abuse in Close Relationships***

I concluded that there were four patterns in the occurrence of emotional abuse within close personal relationships. In the preceding section I described these patterns of emotional abuse in close relationships, keeping in mind that one cannot fit people and relationships into definite categories. Although these patterns described the alternating patterns of abusive incidents, they were done with wide and diffuse brush strokes and were not always helpful to explain the extent of variance found in emotionally abusive relationships. There was a great variety as to the intensity of the abuse and as to the influence of the abuse, as well as when and if there was tension build-up. It did, however, account for the undertone of anxiety and fear and the varying intensity thereof that prevailed in these emotionally abusive relationships.

In some of the emotionally abusive relationships, the intensity and the occurrence of the abusive incidents flattened or even decreased over time. This decrease in intensity and occurrence is attributed to either both players developing and positioning themselves in a more congruent manner or the woman finally giving-in, totally losing herself, and giving herself over to passive tolerance. The increasing emotional abuse in, for example Berna's case (See Case study on p. 101), I took as primarily a result of Kevin's increased drinking and the cumulative effect of the affairs he had, but also again as a result of Berna's steady growth as a woman.

Some scholars have stated that psychological abuse developmentally preceded the physical abuse of women, and that the female partner's psychological aggression usually paved the way for the male partner's physical aggression (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Schumacher et al., 2001). Although I did find the occasional denial of physical abuse occurring in the emotionally abusive relationships, I could not interpret these as the beginning of a later physically abusive relationship. These cases that I studied also did not all show an increase in intensity over period time that is characteristics of most battering (physically abusive) relationships.

### **The Processes of Emotional Abuse**

As I listened to the stories women told, and as I went back to other authors' description of incidents of abuse, it became clear that there was a definite way in which people perpetrated emotional abuse. This could be described as the processes of emotional abuse, and in this context, I took the concept of process to mean "a particular course of action intended to achieve

a result or a phenomenon marked by gradual changes through a series of stages” (Wordnet, 2003). The Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary (2002) described a process as “a natural progressively continuing operation or development marked by a series of gradual changes that succeed one another in a relatively fixed way and lead towards a particular result.” A process therefore entails a number/series of bigger or smaller steps or stages that follow one another in a prescribed manner, this leads to a more or less specific result.

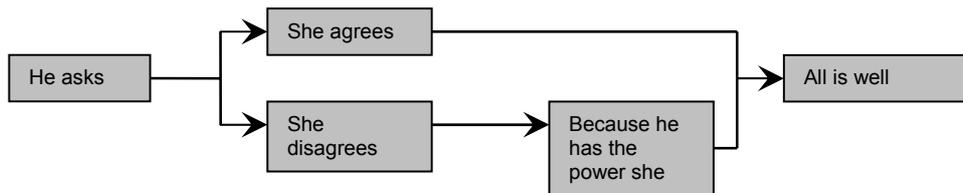
Within the process of emotional abuse I therefore concluded that it was a process driven by issues of power and control that aimed at the establishment or re-establishment of power-control relationship between the partners in a close relationship (Chang, 1996; Hirigoyen, 2000; Loring, 1994). Although Horley used of the term “pattern,” her description referred to a process, as she saw abuse as “systematic, patterned behaviour on the part of the abusive man, designed – consciously or subconsciously – to control and dominate ‘his woman’” (Horley, 2002, p.15).

### ***Step by Step through the Process***

I have positioned the phenomenon of emotional abuse as far as it applied to the women I represented here, within a culture of traditional, conservative patriarchy, presuming that the processes may be different given different circumstances. Coming from a position of male dominance, the male partner had no scruples about what he wanted. With the powers of all patriarchal systems behind him, he knew that she would take care of his needs simply because she was a woman, and thus he could proceed to graciously win her over. She, on the other hand, saw the charming companion he seemed to be, and thought that, judged by this track record, he would honour her. He listened to her and she believed he would take her needs into consideration as well as take care of her because she looked at him through glasses covered with a stereotypical glaze of a woman’s protection by a male partner.

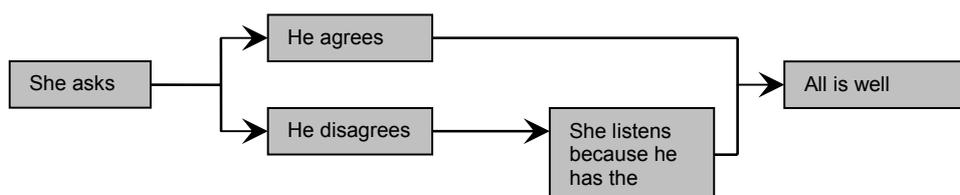
The unwritten scripts did work out within heterosexual relationships as long as both parties stayed within the lines. When Cudd (2000) describes the hierarchical positioning of the patriarchal male in terms of a father-as-director model, it is assumed that there is equality and therefore no need for competing for resources. Being the strong male, he will unselfishly protect and for this promise of security, she is willing to stand in obedience to his sovereign power. And all is well in marital bliss.

If she now considers him to be unhappy, or if he shows his dissatisfaction in some way, within this stereotypical model she assumes herself to be at fault in some way or another. She therefore adapts and changes until she gets it right. Everything turns out according to plan, because she has attended to his needs and wants (Chang, 1996), and when he is happy, he reciprocates in kind.



**Figure 10-2a:** Process in the patriarchal relationship

Should he ask for something and she does not agree, the patriarchal context within society and culture stipulates that he has the last say. So by his upping the power that lies within his position, she retreats back into her place (Illustrated in Figure 10-2a). Should she ask for something he agrees on, he plays the loving husband and unselfishly gives. Should she, on the other hand, ask for something he does not agree with, he has the power to say no. Because of the power of the dominant male, she listens, obeys, and falls into line, and all is well (See Figure 10-2b). But a different scenario plays itself out within the abusive relationship.

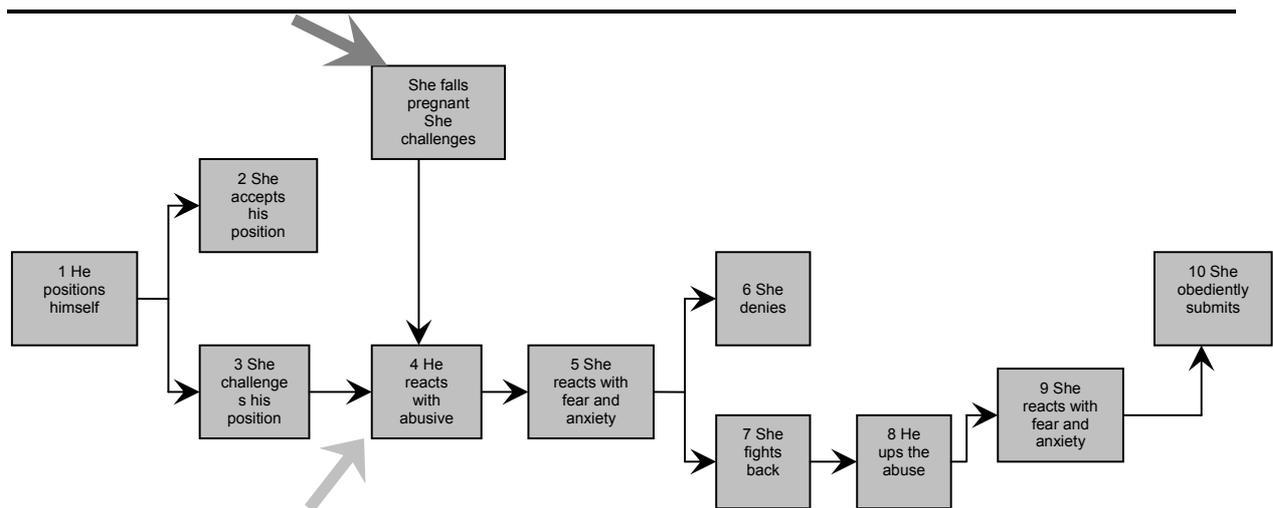


**Figure 10-2b:** Process in the patriarchal relationship

The overall process of emotional abuse basically stayed the same, but the points of entrance and departure varied. There was something chillingly narcissistic in the manner in which the abuser consciously stalked the victim, confusing her by constantly pressuring her and watching over her, destabilizing her, reproaching her in a vague and fuzzy way so that there was no way

she could reason herself out of it. The intensity, the devious manner in which the entrapment was accomplished made for unsettling and disturbing reading matter (Hirigoyen, 2000).

### Diagram of Processes



**Figure 10-3:** Step by step diagram of the processes in emotional abuse

I deduced the step by step process of doing emotional abuse from the stories the abused women told me during psychotherapy (See Figure 10-3). The following table (See Figure 10-4) offers a basic synopsis of the process, but I will explain this in more detail through further examples of the women's experiences of the abusive situation.

### The Process of Emotional Abuse

The emotional abuser makes excessive demands, be it sexual or acts of extreme possessiveness, domination, and control. He positions himself (1) using mechanisms of domination and control as described in chapter 8 (The numbers in parenthesis refers to the numbers used in Figure 10-3).

His spouse can now assume one of two positions:

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- She can deny her own feelings, perceptions and reality, and accept his positioning of her as the lesser person in the hierarchical relationship (2) (Also see Figure 10-2a&b).
  - She submits to the dominant power that lies within his positioning and assumes a stereotypical position of femaleness; playing strictly according to the stereotypical role prescriptions, and as this is the expected norm, everything turned out peacefully.
  - He has accomplished his goal of having an obedient slave at his beck-and-call.
  - She challenges his position (3). In doing this, she in effect does not keep to the contract of adhering to his wishes and needs.
  - He forcefully manipulates and pushes her back into the position he wants her to be by either using subtle or overt, controlling or violent mechanisms of control (4). He may also pacify her with tokens of giving-in, making some changes, and listening to her needs (O'Connor, 2000) (As, for example, Ian promising to help Minette with the IT-related issues). She accepts the token (or again deny her own self – 6), and all is well, until she realizes she has been manipulated or conned.
  - Subsequently or whenever he again ups his forceful attempts to dominate and control, she might challenge again (7) and the process starts all over again. If he increases the abusive behaviour (8), she reacts with fear and/or anxiety, feels guilty and doubts herself (9). The guilt makes her submit to his wishes the next time he makes a demand, and he accomplishes his goal of having an obedient slave at his beck-and-call (10).
  - She may decide, at a future point, to challenge him again resulting in the process to repeat itself with her experiencing increasing
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levels of fear and anxiety. As well as self-doubt.

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**Figure 10-4:** The process of emotional abused explained

### ***The Process Model Applied***

In the case of Minette, for example, she fell pregnant and Ian feared that her attention would be turned away from him; that he would no longer be the centre of attention. If his wife then either had less energy to bestow on him and his specific needs, or if she re-directed some energy towards the baby (a challenge to his position as the most important person in her life), his worst fears became a reality. He reacted in a controlling and dominant way (4) (The numbers in parenthesis refers to the numbering in Figure 10-3), as he wanted to force her attention back onto him. She only saw his selfishness, but could still give him the attention he asked for. However, by doing so she denied her own feelings and her new-mother exhaustion (6). She also confronted him and resisted his attempts to position her as only there to heed his needs (7). The confrontation made him bring in the cavalry, punishing her and kicking her out of their bedroom (8).

Jukes (1999, p.12) explained the process,

Every abusive attack I have heard about occurs when women, either passively or actively express needs or wants or fail to demonstrate that they are positioned response-ably, waiting, expectant, to their male partner. It is not necessary that female desires be in conflict with men's desires. It is enough that they are expressed. Not being response-ably positioned, waiting expectantly for a male desire, or indeed anticipating it, is expressive of a woman's desire to be subject, agent to her own desire. This is enough to trigger abusive controlling behaviour from a man.

The dance between the abuser's violent behaviour and the abused reacting by either resisting or submitting could become a never-ending pattern (Schwartz, 2000). The abuser could continue to up his control mechanisms, until his spouse or partner turns back and keep to the original contract. Because the emotionally abused woman experiences the abuser as not taking

care of her as contracted, she continuously challenges him. If the abuser does not return to the original contract, the abused woman could give in and give up, or she could in the long run call in her losses and decide to leave. She turns her attention inward and tries to reason out where she was in the wrong, what subjected her to a position of shame and the acceptance that she was to blame. Even if she does not find the fault in herself, she submits to the abuser's positioning in the hope that he will return to the original position of a caring and supportive companion.

Helen's story:

Not only being wife and mother but also a practicing psychologist was very important to me and I tried my utmost to keep up with colleagues, both on an intellectual manner, but also socially. Although Tom was always the first to admit to the relevance of social networking in business, this did not apply to my situation. If I had to attend anything from a conference to a social get-together, he would be ever so kind but piled on the guilt (4); he was working so hard and how could I expect him to attend, and what about the children. Usually he did then attend, but was so critical, aloof and irritable that I stood not change of ever enjoying myself. Furthermore he thus embarrassed me in front of people who meant a lot to me (4). In the end, I stupidly, accepted less and less invitations and so isolated myself (10).

The woman could also enter the process by arguing for more freedom, respect, or equality (Jones in Jones & Brown, 2000, 28-29). Mandy and Ricus were in a constant battle. She challenged Ricus by becoming active in community work. He experienced fear of losing his dominant hold over his spouse and retaliated by a show of force – verbally attacking her – or by gestures reminding her of the other times he verbally denigrated her (4). Fearing him (5), Mandy usually retreated (6) and thus in effect laid the foundations for him using the same ploy again when he experienced her as not complying with his wishes. In fear, she submitted (10) and apologized as if she was to blame, and obediently followed his lead in the hope that peace would be restored.

Mandy: He yanked me into our bedroom and hissed at me, "I am sick and tired of your attitude. You know I want you to be a soft-spoken and submissive wife. I will not tolerate you behaving in this manner. If you do not stop this nonsense immediately, you will force me into taking away your check book."

The male partner can position himself as dominant or dependent in the relationship (O'Connor, 2000), also a process played out between Mandy and Ricus. Ricus constantly manipulated Mandy by pleading with her; subtly forcing her to take the responsibility for their marital strife.

Ricus said,

I will do as you ask me as long as you truly show me your love. I need your love to start working on the issues you want me to. If I do something wrong, I need you to softly correct me in a kind and caring voice.

However, the moment she placed herself in a position which faintly resembled the dominant position he felt was his prerogative, he retaliated with emotional violence, blaming her and calling her names. He entrapped her in a double-bind and then blamed her,

Everything I do, you seem to find fault with. Why are you constantly contradicting my orders? You are not going to tell me what I should do. I know right from wrong and will do as I see fit. I can do without your dyke-manners. Has no-one ever taught you how to be a woman?

Other men tried to play crazy, took to alcohol or developed a depressed stance – forcing the spouse into caring and nurturing behaviour. The woman usually submitted because of fear of having to take sole responsibility. So, in the end, he got what he bargained for in the initial contract; someone to cater to his needs. Some abusive men saw, what they called, the castrating bitch or the victim who refuses to give in as the ultimate challenge (Hirigoyen, 2000). He specifically targeted her because of her capacity to resist authority and pressure. He pursued her for her strong character; he turned into the adoring admirer to win her over, and she submitted in relief that the abuse has subsided. The moment she returned to the appropriate slave mode as expected, he again treated her as a slave-object; there to see to his needs.

Helen: I was always most upset by Tom's going into one of his drooping shoulder stages whenever we did not agree on something. By having everybody questioning me as to why he was so unhappy, I really felt the pressure. I mean it's always either the women's fault, or she has to make it right again ... In the end you just give in and apologize. When it gets up to two weeks and you haven't spoken a word, it just gets too much! In the end you're

just too tired to care – thinking that if you do as he says, you will at least lift some of the pressure, and perhaps you can then figure out what to do. In the meantime, he has long ago already figured it out and won the game.

The abuser also behaved in such a calculated aggressive manner as to deliberately unleash a huge amount of anxiety in his partner (Hirigoyen, 2000). She usually reacted in a defensive manner, giving him the justification for yet another and more intense attack. The abused woman submitted, confused, disorientated, and ashamed by her behaviour. She found herself in the “fog”, similar to that caused by emotional blackmail as described by Forward (1997, p.6).

Mandy: He will just go on and on and on ... I promise you, he will go on blaming, nagging, screaming, reasoning with you, forcing you ... forcing until you cannot take it any more. I remember one time I completely lost it and started screaming, yelling .... I wasn't really saying anything, I was just bawling ... just making these horrible noises. In the end I ended up curled into a fetus position on the bathroom floor. Now he had something new to taunt me with ... playing games with me to try and drive me crazy.

Berna: I think it all began when I started developing an own personality. All of a sudden I wasn't in the “yes, dear” mode any more, and he couldn't take that. He brings out the worst in me. I truly hate myself for the things I sometimes say and do.

Helen: It would go on right through the night ... mostly because sexually you didn't perform as wanted ... this endless reasoning of his; trying to win you over and force you to understand how wrong you are and that he all along had the right answer; if you'd only have listened to him ... on and on ... and if you wanted to leave, he'd forcefully bring you back to bed. In the end I just stopped listening and answering him, but that really made him angry ... I was so ashamed of myself for being in such a degrading situation ...

In putting forward a model to enhance further understanding of the patterns and processes of emotional abuse, I underscored the power-issues involved through the forcefulness of the man's behaviour and identified the coercive and narcissistic behaviour mechanisms he uses. I also maintained that the abusive man positions himself in a number of positions; all having as goals the domination, control and submission of the woman. No matter how strong and resilient the woman; her agency was effectively curtailed.

## Wrapping up

Walker (1979, p.xv) described battering as “any forceful physical or psychological behaviour ... to coerce (her) to do something he wants ... without any concern for her rights.” Straus and Gelles (in Cahn, 1996) even more than Walker accentuated the intentional nature of the abuse and concentrated on the pain and physical damage caused to the woman. They see physical abuse as, “an act carried out with the intention, or the perceived intention, of causing physical pain or injury to another person” (Cahn, 1996, p.467). Tolman (1992, p.292) wasted no words in his definition of what I call emotional abuse, “broadly construed, psychological maltreatment can be any behaviour that is harmful or intended to be harmful to the well-being of a spouse.” The intent of the abuser is illustrated by the aggression, the violence and the abuse. No matter the mechanisms used, harm is always the end result (Cahn, 1996; Marshall, 1994; Tolman, 1992).

In conclusion, I argue that emotional abuse could not be attributed to characteristics of either the female or the male partner in a close relationship. Emotional abuse is constructed in the interactions between the partners. The abusive behaviour emerged as a result of the patriarchal male wanting to establish or re-establish his dominant position, while the female partner vacillates between a position of giving in or denial on the one hand, or challenging and opposing the abuser on the other hand.

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