

PART V: BRINGING THE VOICES TOGETHER

CHAPTER 11: NO ONE IS GOING TO LISTEN—SO QUESTION AND DO!

*I tore myself away from the safe comfort of certainty through my love for truth;
and truth rewarded me*
Simone de Beauvoir

Post-modern thinking means questioning the taken-for-granted truths (Flax, 2003). The postmodern parent teaches her children to question everyone and everything: their parents and teachers, advertisements, and religion. However, when it comes to the general position of women in society the macro-system, society and the individual prefer to go on believing in the dated, grand narratives of truth and of positivist thinking (DeVault, 1999; Roiser, 1997). Some misconceptions about women and their place in society have not changed. Double standards still prevail when it comes to women. Patriarchal society pledges an alliance to equality, but do not accept women as fully equal under all circumstances. The organized church proclaims equal love for women, but keeps them from executive leadership in the church. Men rally for mutual understanding as long as they have the last and final say.

After more than a quarter of a century, we are today still confronted with the same issues of women's abuse in a society in which discrepancies, excuses, and justifications surround women's lives. There were changes after the groundbreaking work of Dobash and Dobash (1977-78, 1980), D.G. Dutton (1988, 2003), M.A. Dutton (1992, 1996), Marshall (1994, 1996), Straus (1988, 1990), Tolman (1992), and Walker (1979). Today, most relatively sophisticated and intelligent individuals know that rape, for example, is not a sexual crime or a crime of passion, but a violent and aggressive transgression against women. In the same manner, people will generally associate power and aggression with most forms of abuse. My objective with the present research was to obtain some clarity on the *how* of emotional abuse.

As a therapist, I am regularly confronted with female clients caught up in the so-called truths of their upbringing. Although a single research project cannot change the way in which society thinks, I am of the opinion that gaining a better or new understanding of the phenomenon of emotional abuse in close relationships will enable me to bring small changes in the lives and experiences of the women whose lives I touch. Therefore the research is *for* women, me included.

I must point out, however, that although I use the word “women” throughout my writing, I do so for the sake of brevity. In no way do I wish to imply that I believe women to be a unified subject with an ongoing, consistent consciousness and sense of the self. There is no stable, knowing self (Harding, 1987a, 1998). Furthermore, the self is a construct of social processes, and therefore constantly changing in nature (Burr, 1995; Ferguson, 1991). My own being therefore is inseparable from my growing up and is constantly being shaped by the social and cultural environment in which I am still functioning as therapist and researcher: white, middle-class, and conservative Afrikaans. But I also hope that my writing, my reflections, and my findings will reflect the developmental path travelled by many like myself. Still, I cannot speak for anyone else but myself, and to a certain extent for the women I represent here.

The aim in this project was to gain further knowledge about the positioning of the individual players. The positioning of the male abuser run parallel with what could be expected from men influenced and conditioned by patriarchy, although some positionings were more prominent. Even though expected, I was surprised by the extent to which the double standards of society were in particular applied to the emotionally abused woman. She was forced into distinctive positions as it suited both society and her dominant and controlling partner; leaving her with the minimum of agency, just to be blamed for doing precisely as expected.

I also aimed to analyze and describe the patterns and processes happening in emotionally abusive relationships. The definite patterns that did emerge differed from the Cycle of Violence Theory. Both these patterns and the portrayed processes of emotional abuse offered a new perspective that can be applied to further a better and new understanding thereof, but can also be utilized in the empowerment of the abused women in psychotherapy.

A Feminist Philosophy Applied

From the beginning of the research I declared my philosophy in science as is in life as feminist in orientation and therefore opened up the possibility to the reader to position herself and take a reflective perspective in order to weigh, evaluate, and find an understanding of her own.

I mostly took a philosophical point of view that resonated with feminist standpoint theory. As a woman working with women, I felt myself comfortable in doing so, as feminism has been at the forefront of questioning the proclaimed truths about women held by Western scientific thinking (Marecek, 1989). Feminism allows a deep and critical point of departure when it comes to the views on women held by an androcentric and phallogocentric traditional psychology. This allowed me to critically analyze the concepts constructed by dominant men within a patriarchal society. As I intended to focus on the positioning of both the players in emotional abuse, the concept of self as a social construction was useful in coming to a new and better understanding of the phenomenon of abuse.

I was not particularly interested in the testing of new hypotheses. I consequently embarked on a qualitative study in order to utilize descriptive methods in representing the stories of women from emotionally abusive relationships. The objective was to be as open as possible to the meanings of the women's stories. Although it is not truly possible and realistic to think that one can effectively "desilence" (M. Gergen, 2001), in other words truly make heard, the voices of women in their present cultures, it is possible to work towards the legitimizing of their experiences and feelings. I therefore underscored the worth implied in every new story told bringing a new perspective to form the "small-scale-situated partial theory" of feminist research (Qin, 2004, p.307).

Working within the framework of feminist standpoint theory presented me with the freedom to intuitively select data from client files; knowing that research cannot be value-free. I therefore relied greatly on my therapeutic experience in scrutinizing available literature to select incidents that seemed relevant to the present study. Such an intuitive data selection is in stark contrast to the empirical data collection of positivist research. However, in doing so I positioned myself in the centre of the research project, realizing the responsibility which this brings in terms of reflection; to try and find my own blind spots and grow personally in the process.

Feminist philosophers and theorists have painstakingly and methodically debated the issues that surround validity, objectivity, subjectivity, the insider/outsider, the knower/known position in research. I hence conducted my research within the postmodernist framework of expecting to find a number of truths and also a number of realities (Spears, 1997; Stanley & Wise, 1993). A concern with the positivist notion of only one truth and a hierarchy of truths did not cloud my concept of validity. I therefore needed to read and evaluate the truth of one emotionally abused woman in the study as different and similar to the truth of another emotionally abused woman; drastically different from the truth of the abuser. This particular standpoint offered me the freedom to analyze the ways in which the truths of both the abused and the abuser to a greater or lesser degree differed from those of the dominant class, race, culture, and society.

I did not however, equate multiple truths with relativism, as I took relativism to imply that all truths are equally important. Feminist standpoint theory does not stand for a hierarchy of truths. I thus postulate that the truths unveiled in this project ought to be validated against firstly, feminist critical theory (Harding, 1991; Pels, 2004), and, secondly, against the experiences of these emotionally abused women, and/or the experiences of women as the oppressed or the marginalized (Haraway, 2004; Harding, 1993; Hartsock, 2003). According to feminist standpoint theory, the situated bodily experiences of women, the oppressed or the marginalized are the best place from which to start thinking (Longino, 1993; Marecek, 1989). My focus was to such an extent centred on the emotional experience of the particular women, that I to a lesser degree paid attention to the mind-body-soul connection in being women. Also working from experiences noted in my therapy files did not always open up all the avenues that could be explored. The reliability and validity of the women's experiences were further enhanced by situating these experiences within the wider environment of macro-systems (Jagger, 2004; Smith, 2004). The value of the knowledge, meaning and understanding thus gained, lies in the multiple experiences from a diverse group of women from different settings, each in its own right contributing another piece of knowledge to the other in the process of knowledge-making.

Harding (1987, 1998, 2004b) and other standpoint theorists and writers (Hartsock, 2003; Jagger, 2004; Narayan, 2004; Pels, 2004) argue for the position of the insider within, the oppressed within the oppressive situation, as a valued position in validating new and different truths. Having been in an emotionally abusive relationship myself, I was in a scientifically advantageous position from which I could critically observe the abuser from within the abusive situation, but also critically reflect on the experiences of the abused. However, it was all too

easy, in an attempt to empathically understand the abusive relationship, to be unaware of the hidden and the unspoken in the interactions and the stories. As a feminist researcher I needed to step into a position of constant reflection and needed to become a “world traveller” (Lugones, 1987 as cited by Bailey (2000) in Narayan & Harding, 2000, p. 295); I had to shift identities in the search for new meaning and better understanding.

To a certain degree I missed out on a mutual and valuable source of knowledge-making as I did not attempt to enhance validity by optimizing the interactional construction between the knower and the known. Being first and foremost in the position of therapist to my clients (now also participants and knowers), I was, to a certain degree, in a position of power over the clients ((Pels, 2004; Stanley & Wise, 1993). On an ethical level, I decided that it will not be primarily in the client's interest to share the full impact of my findings with a participant while she was still in psychotherapy. Although I did test some of the findings where therapeutically relevant, none of the knowers had full insight into the final product. I have also lost contact with some former clients who could have given input and the one remaining client, when approached, positioned herself as emotionally not ready to deal with such an experience.

I placed the findings and the research themes within a specific historical timeframe by the more informal collection of incidents from social encounters, from newspapers, popular literature, as well as glossy magazines (Burr, 1995). This constituted my reconstruction of all available data and could be considered an impoverished record of the stories of the emotionally abused women (Charmaz, 2000; K. Gergen, 2000). It was only in retrospect that I realized to what extent I missed out on valuable information. I missed out on some important information because at that specific stage in the therapy, I did not realize the importance thereof, or I did not write down some other information because I was ignorant of the value thereof at the time. Concentrating on women's sharing of their experiences of the concept of love, for example, and especially the ways in which they challenged and resisted the abuse could have added valuable information in empowering women when it comes to any form of abuse. More attention could also have been given to writing down more verbatim information or even recording therapy sessions on audio tape.

In order to present the vast amount of data in an easily accessible format, I organized the experiences of emotionally abused women in the following manner:

- A presentation of four semi case studies.

- Identifying and indicating the ecological themes that legitimized emotional abuse as they emerged.
- Deconstructing the positioning of both the abuser and the abused and critically evaluating the relevant themes found in emotional abuse.
- Mapping the patterns found in doing abuse.
- Critically deconstructing the processes of emotional abuse.
- Synthesising the power mechanisms used in the process of control and domination which represented the *how* of emotional abuse.

Conversing about the Emotionally Abusive Relationship

Postmodern perspectives have challenged the idea that meaning and truth can lie in categories. Truth is now taken to lie within rhetoric and communication. In part one of this text I therefore started on a conversational journey by giving voice to the researcher and therefore my own position in the research. I explained my personal investment and the motivation to find new meaning and understanding for the experiences of emotionally abused women. The reader was introduced to the ways in which my ontological stance resonates with feminist epistemology and methodology, and how this philosophy eventually influenced my choice of method. Representing the voices of the emotionally abused women in the most comprehensive manner possible was the purpose of part two.

Part three of the text continued with the conversation as the positionings of both the abused and the abuser were analyzed and described after these positions were in turn represented as legitimized by the specific conditioning of both the Traditional Afrikaans Family as well as the ideology of patriarchy. This inevitably (in part five) led to a presentation and description of a new and different model of emotional abuse; incorporating the patterns and processes identified as occurring in the abusive relationship. In this final conversation I will endeavour to bring together all the voices in beginning a new conversation that will hopefully not end in the last words of this particular research project.

An Ecology that Legitimizes the Emotional Abuse of Women

Feminism ascribes the abuse of women to the intertwined systems of capitalism and patriarchy (Gergen, 2001; Greenspan, 1983). In going back to the client files I found this to be captured in many of the women's opening remarks. These emotionally abused women depicted their families of origin as stereotypically patriarchal. Patriarchy stood central to all themes found and described; none of the other themes identified can be seen as in any way removed from the influences of patriarchy.

Marilyn French, an active feminist writer and scholar, has the gift of making theory and science a living voice. I therefore, instead of again referring back to the voices of the women in my study, broaden my conversational reach by including the voices of her fictional characters. She, for example, illustrated the influence of growing up in a patriarchal society through the life of Mira, her main character from her late 1970 publication of *The Women's Room*:

Mira:

... things she could not put her finger on, that told her her parent's ideas of being good and her own were not the same. She could not have said why, but her parent's idea of what she should do felt like someone strangling her, stifling her ... "They ask too much. It costs too much." What the cost was, she was not sure; she labeled it "myself" (French, 1981, p.20).

The ideology of patriarchy sets the stage for the possibility of later emotional abuse. My research showed that patriarchy indoctrinates both men and women with a set of expectations which many follow, either unthinkingly or because it suits them to a certain degree. It is shown to what degree patriarchy positions men as superior and the rulers of women, paving the way to the abuse of power through control, domination, and exploitation. The inevitable result is a class of women seen and seeing themselves as inferior, born to serve with womanly obedience. Time and again, this disrespect for women, which leads to the subjugated woman's obedience, was illustrated in the women's stories.

Mira:

The unspoken, unthought-about conditions that made it oppressive had long since been accepted by all of them: that they had not chosen but had been automatically slotted into their lives, and that they were never free to move that she had

given her life over to him just as she had perforce given her life over to her parents (French, 1981, pp. 57, 99).

The second theme that emerged, closely related to patriarchy, is what I termed the *Traditional Afrikaans Family*, a traditional family driven by its construction along patriarchal norms and customs. Two aspects of especially the Traditional Afrikaans Family were found to validate the continued existence of patriarchal norms and beliefs. Firstly, patriarchal beliefs, practices, and customs are validated and accepted as biblical truths. Women (and the patriarchal male) tend to unquestioningly hold to the construct of a number of biblical (I do not call them Christian) and mythical misconceptions about women's position in society and the privacy of her home; relegating women to the "nobodiness" described by Martin Luther King with reference to marginalized people (quoted by Flinders, 2002). Not only do they forget that much of written western religion has been transmitted through culture and language; the latter in metaphoric form (Bonvillain, 1995). Therefore, in not agreeing with any particular belief, the woman is confronted not only by a number of powerful intertwined systems supporting one another, but also faced and threatened by religious extradition and her own overwhelming sense of guilt and shame.

Mira and her husband, Norm (setting the *norm*) had an extremely emotional fall-out. He blamed her for his low grades and used a number of other kinds of blaming behaviour usually found in emotionally abusive relationships. So as her tears subsided, "finally he smiled up at her...and asked her if she weren't hungry. She understood. She rose and made dinner" (French, 1981, p.60).

I found that within the Traditional Afrikaans Family unquestioning obedience was expected from those lesser in hierarchical power. It was the accepted and internalized norm that father knew best. Because male authority was the norm in the macro-system, father's right to rule came from, and was again generalized to all male authority as well as all males, whether deserving thereof or not. The male authority in the home had the right to make the rules and to construct the family's views on both masculinity and femininity. The women's stories I represented in this project showed how obedience was indoctrinated and in what way the narrow and small-minded adherence to extreme stereotypical role-division came from a biased and one-sided interpretation of The Bible. French (1981, p.58) described Mira's reasonings and feelings about being entrapped in a patriarchal system:

She wanted to point out to him the injustice of his attack. But the fact that he felt right in making it, felt that he had legitimate grounds to treat her like a naughty child, overwhelmed her. It was a force against which she could not struggle, for his legitimacy was supported by the outside world, and she knew that (French, 1981, p.58).

In the second instance, and similar to the warrior culture often depicted as the man's world, in South Africa powerful control and domination mechanisms came to be accepted as the norm on the political front; even more so than usual in world business, syndicated crime and international sport. Although I do not imply one typically South African male, it was pointed out that "masculinity and violence have been yoked together in South African history" by historical incidences as colonialism and apartheid (Morrell, 2001, p.12). In the foreword to *Men Behaving Differently* (Reid & Walker, 2005, p.xii) Morrell continued to say, "But in South Africa, there are always other, deeply historically rooted, forces at work." I believe that men from all the races in South Africa have been informed – although in different ways – by the violence of the struggle; a "struggle masculinity" (Reid & Walker, 2005b, p.8) and that the many norms, beliefs, and customs of this patriarchal system have amassed to the extreme in especially the Afrikaans traditional family.

Hereby I do not wish to imply that all patriarchal norms and customs should be experienced as negative. Much can be said for the safety and security which people find within traditional and conservative families; one of the reasons why women hunger to stay within the relationship. It is when behaviour manifestations such as domination and control in their extreme form, become the accepted norm, or women specifically are forcefully entrapped, that it becomes hurtful. Whereas patriarchy normally expects those lower down on the hierarchy to serve, the service expected in the emotionally abusive relationship took on an exploitative flavour. It was shown to what degree domination and control become vindictive in the execution. Whereas the right to give orders is the accepted patriarchal norm, in the emotionally abusive relationship it surfaced as verbal denigration and abusive language. I found the adherence to stereotypical roles to be politically and aggressively enforced, and I therefore postulated that emotional abuse will be a regular occurrence in a society where rigid patriarchal norms are enforced.

Then again, it would have been absurd to conclude that patriarchal rule causes the emotional abuse of women and so my attention was inevitably directed to the concept of unequal power

relations that stands central to feminist writings and philosophy (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2004). Patriarchy is seen as utilizing power through the systems of patriarchal rule and as having bestowed power on the individual man. The patriarchal male – no matter what his status in life – determines the rights and the wrongs, the rules and the regulations to adhere to. To me this kind of power thus means power over; masculine or domination power. Therefore power over as seen within the emotionally abusive relationship signified not only coming from the outside, but also as having hierarchical characteristics. Patriarchal society sees women as the lesser in the power relationship. Women mostly experience power of this nature as from the receiving end; especially so in the disciplinary measures taken by those who have the power to dominate. In analyzing the stories of emotional abuse it became apparent how obedience and the fear of abandonment are installed in the young woman and to what extent she adheres to patriarchal norms, never having been in a position to experience anything different.

Mira:

(She) realized that Norm was not the enemy, only the embodiment of the enemy ... She began so see that his authority over her was based on mutual agreement, that it was founded on nothing but air, and that that was why he had to assert it so often in such odd ways ... There was something more, out there, out in the world, something that gave him the power, wasn't there? Or was it just that she feared losing his love ... (French, 1981, p.259).

Gee (1999) writes that establishing one's own power can only be accomplished through human social interactions within a specific relationship. As part of the social goods, power is negotiated within the relationship. In the emotionally abusive relationship those having the power were not willing to relinquish their privileged position. On the other hand, it was also not possible to negotiate for more power from a position of powerlessness. I therefore turned to the specifics of the emotionally abusive conversation.

The Emotionally Abusive Conversation

I have shown the meaning of the experience of emotional abuse, as is all experience, to be grounded in a specific historical, cultural and societal time frame. Ecological context is always multi-layered and complex, and although an understanding thereof was not the main purpose of the study, the experiences of the women involved were also embedded in the political time frame of their growing up and being. Their reality of experiencing emotional abuse in a close relationship became a construct of their history and could have played out differently in different circumstances.

As reality is constructed through language and not informed by the person in isolation, I scrutinized the stories the emotionally abused women presented for the contracts the abused and the abuser negotiated in the abusive relationship. The positioning of both the abused and the abuser were analyzed and described, but it is the space and the interactions between the abused and the abuser that were seen as the conversational construction ground wherefrom the abusive behaviour and abusive relationship emerged. The presented interactions between the partners in the abusive relationship gave evidence of existing patterns as well as processes in emotionally abusive behaviour and therefore formed the abusive interaction.

A person's sense of self, the ideas and metaphors she or he forms part of and their self-narratives construct their subject positioning. This positioning constrains and shapes what they do and do not do. The present study showed that the conversation of abuse between the partners as represented here took place in a setting wherein both players were conditioned by the beliefs, myths, stereotypes and rules of a patriarchal system and unequal power relations. The particular conversation between the later abused and abuser could be initiated by either of the partners, but for the purpose of this conversation I started with the male partner.

The Male Contract

The individual male has a choice in how he appropriates his power. He could choose to be the sovereign, but also the loving, caring, and supportive father. The emotionally abusive man chose to abuse his personal power within his close relationship with his spouse or female partner. He adhered to the dominant themes of sexism and gender inequality generally found under patriarchal rule. Knowing what he wanted (to have his needs on all

levels catered for and that she will do so because she was a woman), and with the power of all patriarchal systems supporting him, he graciously proceeded to win over his woman. The aim of the abuser was to hook the partner or spouse to commit to the relationship. This he accomplished through mechanisms such as initially using charm or playing the Benevolent Teacher. His contract read “I will charm and take care of you as long as you do precisely as I want you to, because I have power over you.”

The Female Contract

Theoretically women have agency. But, the stories of the emotionally abused women presented in this study showed the extent to which their being hooked into the relationship was programmed and predisposed onto them. Growing up in a patriarchal society, they have reaped the benefits of having a strong, reliable, and responsible male take care of their needs and safety. She had bought into the stereotypical role prescriptions and accepted norms as powerfully laid down a patriarchal system firmly supported by Protestant Christian beliefs.

The women were entrapped into the relationship by believing the patriarchal lie of having less say, being worth less and having less sense and they therefore thankfully accepted the man's offer. Because of his initial hooking behaviour the man's offer was seen to imply the idealized promise to be respected and valued and these women did not realize the covert condition of first being of service to the man. She accepted the initial contract to read “He is the Expert so I can relax and know he will take care of me. Because of all his special qualities and abilities he will take care of me. He will honour and respect me. He will listen to me as a person.” She was hooked into the stereotypical role of woman as protected by the stronger man.

The Stereotypical Patriarchal Conversation

The strong male have now supposedly contracted to unselfishly protect his female partner; promising her security. Because of this promise she is willing to stand in obedience to his sovereign power. Any dissatisfaction from his side she attends to and he reciprocates in kind. Should she not attend to his needs or disagrees from him, the patriarchal contract has given him the power of decision making and she retreat back into her place. Whenever the

man wants to he can unselfishly attend to her needs when asked to or he can disagree and say no to her wishes. As he is positioned as the dominant male, she listens and obeys.

Changing into an Abusive Conversation

The stories of emotional abuse told by women I saw in therapy, illustrated how in having hooked the woman, having gained her commitment, the abuser positioned himself as what has been called the position of the Expert (Greenspan, 1983), the Teacher or the Master (Douglas, 1996), the Director (Cudd, 2000), or the Father (Evans, 1993; Greenspan, 1983). He made excessive demands; be it sexual or acts of extreme possessiveness. His domination and control became excessive, intended and deliberate.

Theoretically the woman can adopt position. In meeting up with the excessiveness of the male partner's demands, the women had the choice to stay within stereotypical role prescriptions. She could deny her own feelings, perceptions, and reality, and accept his positioning or she could resist his position and therefore not have kept to the initial contract to adhere to his wishes and needs. But, the emotionally abusive man's demands were endless and he made use of a number of mechanisms to further his absolute control. He needed submission from his partner. The present research showed how women are practically ensnared, entrapped, and tricked; the main ensnaring mechanism being the inequality of power within heterosexual interpersonal relationships (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2004). In order to dominate and control the abusive male positioned himself as the master of his household, he used extreme possessiveness and isolation to entrap his partner. He exploited his partner in a financial and sexual manner because he was "entitled to it." He used her and he controlled her by aggressive behaviour, aggressively threatening her, by abusive communication of a verbal and non-verbal manner.

Women submitted in fear; socialized to fear abandonment. From conditioning since birth and from experience women knew, "You break society's rules, and you might even get away with it, but after such success, what return? Forever and forever you would be alone (French, 1981, p.247). The women's stories told of them reacting in fear because of the real or imagined threats the abuser posed, especially in having had to deal with his abuse in the past. Her anxiety levels rose, immobilizing her and leading to a number of posttraumatic

stress-related symptoms. She felt vulnerable and exposed. Dissociation and numbing of feelings occurred at times.

Some abused women chose to deny the abuse, because the wider society condoned and ignored the abuse. Doubting herself, she was forced to question her own reality. The examples of professionals and her church not validating her reality were numerous. She denied her own self, because she could not accept the horror, the vindictiveness, the aggression, and the hurting behaviour of the man she loved. She clung to the hope of finding the right things to do or say; those things that would change the abuser's actions. She tried to be the perfect wife.

Some other emotionally abused women in the present research denied themselves, their feelings, and their reality by doing depression, doing what is seen as dependency and obedience, and by doing victim.

Depression has often been seen as positive proof of woman's inherent human deficiency. As other feminist scholars before me, I found women to suffer depression as a result of the constant nature of the emotional abuse. Much of what often is diagnosed or taken to be depression, can be described as bereavement in the woman losing the self, or losing the one she thought loved her and the one she loves, losing the relationship and all the dreams and ideals embedded in the meaning of the relationship. She denied herself hope in realizing that there remained no other alternatives, as change is unacceptable within the *force majeure* of the dominant male society. She fell into depression as she felt herself failing to right the relationship or to adequately attend to the man's needs. As Mira's thought along the lines of making adjustments, "That is called a tragic flaw, and like guilt, it's very comforting. You can go on believing that there is really is a right way, and you just didn't find it" (French, 1981, p.63).

The abused woman did as was expected; obediently following the directions as given and submitting to the power in the relationship. But, for doing so the woman is often blamed and scorned for being passive. She is trained and socialized to be a certain way, and then has the tables turned on her, and the prescribe way becomes a personality deficit. Some women are more passive than others, as are men, but I strongly argue that the so-called passivity of women is learned behaviour that can be described as dutiful obedience.

Although it is occurring less frequently now, the traditional thinking of Mira and her circle of friends illustrate the emotionally abused women's thinking, "But no one ever suggested that the situation could be changed; not one ever challenged the men's right to demand and control (French (1981, p.102).

The same line of attack is followed in scorning women for acting in a manner taken to reflect learned helplessness. The emotionally abused woman was at times overwhelmed by feelings of powerlessness and did act in a helpless manner, but she was not born inherently less able to find answers and generate solutions. Her helplessness must be seen as a symptom of her alternatives giving out and the incessant nature of the abusive behaviour. As power and love are part of the relationship, it can be that she finds herself in a position where the power, both of the abuser and society backing him, is stronger than her individual strength (Meyer, 1991). Listening to these women, I deduced that in order to survive they temporarily acted in ways that can be described as helpless and tolerant. Unfortunately this can and often did entrap her deeper into the relationship.

Yet another accusation made is that generally women are dependent in nature and therefore also dependent on the abuser or the abusive relationship. This dependency is taken as a reason for her not leaving or fighting the abuser. A dominant male society orders her to submit, be obedient, listen and do as instructed, but then blames her for being dependent. This is so firmly engrained by training that even the professionally successful and assertive Minette in the study looked at herself and labeled her behaviour as being dependent on her spouse (See Case study on p.66). If you do not have the power or the agency, what else can women be, except to be reliant on the other who has the power and the agency; even women's nurturing behaviour is taken as proof of her dependence.

Many a reproach for being dependent stems from the woman's partner's inability to openly acknowledge his own dependency needs or him stonewalling her attempts to position him as the giver instead of the sole receiver of support. She is forced into denial and again I believe what is taken to be dependency is the woman's dutifully obedient answer to the *tour de force* of the dominant male. Reading the stories of the emotionally abused women, I reasoned that, although some abused women and their partners did establish a co-dependency or traumatic bonding, this was not usually the case. To the contrary, the abuser found his satisfaction within the power of ensnaring the abused, of controlling her,

and not in her being dependent on him. But I will submit that the process of abuse could become a way of living, a comfort zone, as Elaine said, "Better the devil you know than the one you don't."

The abused women fell into dutiful obedience, a stance programmed into women by patriarchal society and often labelled childlike. These women were stereotypical feminine in the softness of their tone of voice, and many married young. Continuous emotional battering (the aggression, the threats and control through isolation, the abusive communication, the rejection, exploitation and measures of entrapment), took its toll. Often she chose the role of care-taker over the rejection she would have experienced in going against the expectations of society, her culture and her religion.

But, I - as do other authors - found that the emotionally abused woman did not to completely fit the stereotypical image of the subordinate woman nor the type of woman who would passively accept the abuse. The abused women in this study did resist the abuse, an aspect that even feminist research has been criticized for not sufficiently paying attention to (Hydén's, 2005). I postulate that to a certain extent it was the women's resistance to the abuse, her opposing and challenging behaviour that elicited the abuse. The abuse was constructed in the relationship and I am convinced that a strong contributing factor in the occurrence of emotional abuse is the abuser not wanting (for whatever reason) to allow the woman any agency and the woman on the other hand not being inclined to traditional serfdom.

The women in the present study resisted the mechanisms of abuse as utilized by her emotionally abusive partner in a number of ways. Some followed a more aggressive route in resisting through confrontation, but I cautioned against the labelling of her behaviour as aggressive, solely because it opposed and/or did not suit the preference of her male partner. These women were caught in a double-bind situation. Should she aggressively oppose the abuse, she was blamed for provoking the abuse. On the other hand, did she not react by resistance she would be silently giving the abuser permission to continue in the same manner. I also refute the misconception that the woman's verbal aggression causes the abuse. This conclusion can often only be reached by a different position in punctuating the abusive incident.

Some emotionally abused woman challenged the abuse by asserting herself and objecting to the behaviour of the abuser. I concurred with Jukes (1999) that the male abuser finds any challenge unreasonable and unacceptable. Any request from his female partner the emotionally abusive man interpreted as unrealistic, nagging and needy as it threatened his position of control and domination in the relationship. Some of the abused women positioned themselves as blaming and this served as an even stronger signal for the abusive spouse to up his measures to re-establish control.

Some emotionally abused women reflected on the abuse and tried to reason things out with her partner or spouse; she tried to discuss matters with the abusive male partner. Mostly she was not aiming to be confrontational, but authentically tried to find reason and meaning in the hope of then being able to better the relationship. These women showed strength and resilience in the hope she retained and in the resilient behaviour she utilized. Unfortunately, it was her sticking power that further entrapped her in the abusive relationship. She was willing to do whatever it took to make the relationship work.

I saw most of the women I met up with in the research as by no means weak, helpless, and passive women. These were mostly professional women who to a greater or lesser degree obtained success outside their own home. These women fell victim to emotional abuse precisely because of their resilience and being particularly responsible women they were abused because of their resistance. But, the present research also confirmed that women in emotionally abusive relationships at times and temporarily (although this can last for days up to years) did not always take a stand against their abuse. The reasons were numbered; ranging from fear of the abuser intensifying his abuse, her longing for peace and quiet, struggling with her own sense of what is acceptable, and not having the energy and strength to oppose him any further. The women took on more and more responsibility in an effort to be the good enough wife and in an effort to have some manner of control. However, because of their willingness to take on more and be more responsible, there were so much more they could be blamed for.

Turning back to the emotionally abusive man, it was noted that the moment he experienced any resistance, he aimed to forcefully manipulate and push his woman back into the position he wanted her to be in. He would forcibly up his game - be it subtle or overt, controlling or violent. She would again either submit or resist and the process would start all over again.

This could become a never-ending process because of the continued resistance of the abused woman. If it was not for the resistance of the abused, the abuser would not find it necessary to intensify his mechanisms of control and domination.

The emotionally abusive man used a number of mechanisms to justify his behaviour. I am of the opinion that it is only necessary to justify oneself when one is in some agreement as to having overstepped the boundaries, and therefore I argue that the majority of emotionally abusive men do at some level know what they are doing. The emotionally abusive man cannot admit to the abuse, because losing face or giving in is never a masculine option. The stories of the emotionally abused women showed how he minimizes and denies the abuse. He justified himself by blaming the woman or shifting the responsibility for his abuse onto his partner. He played the emasculated victim or pleaded loss of control. He justified himself because he felt that she was the one not delivering on her contract of being there solely to look after him and his needs.

This process of emotional abuse played itself out in different patterns. The patterns were identified as:

- A Patterns of Abusive Incidents describing a relationship wherein there from time to time occurred high-voltage abusive incidents with the implied threat of always re-occurring.
- A Pattern of Abusive Ebb-and-Flow characterized by the intermittent occurrence of abusive incidents with a period of respite that could last for a couple of days or a longer period, before the tension started building up again.
- A Pattern of Abusive Discontinuity which differed from Walker's (1979) cycle of violence mostly in that the incidents were intermittent rather than cyclic in nature as there was a clear break from the abuse.
- A Pattern of Abusive Escalation, where although intermittent in nature there was a gradual increase in both the occurrence of incidents and the intensity of the incidents.

Although I analyzed and described four different patterns, there was huge variety between these patterns as influenced by a number of factors. I also noted that these patterns seldom escalated into physical abuse. The most important and decisively influential factors in these patterns of emotional abuse were the intermittent nature of the incidents, the intensity of the incidents, and the rate of occurrence thereof.

In Summary

I therefore came to the conclusion that the emotionally abusive behaviour emerged from the positioning of both the abuser and the abused. The phenomenon of emotional abuse in close relationships was constructed through the interactions between the partners. I thus postulate that abusive behaviour emerges as a result of the patriarchal male who wants to establish or re-establish his dominant position, while the female partner vacillates between a position of giving in or denial, or resisting and opposing the abuser in an attempt to position him as someone who respects her as a person in her own right. The emotionally abused women had the choice of continuing to deny the abusiveness of the relationship. She had the choice to accept and adapt to the situation or to continue to resist the abuser and his abuse and have her soul gradually murdered.

Many emotionally abused women did cut their losses and left the abusive man; often finding a better life after the separation or divorce. I found these ex-abused women to have found new answers to the abuse. They reconceptualized their stories and reconstructed themselves and did not allow their past power over them. They were more often than not less inclined to be constrained by societal labelling, guilt and self-blaming (Van Schalkwyk, 2005).

Prologue

Do not believe in what you have heard; do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations; do not believe anything because it is rumoured and spoken of by many; do not believe merely because the written statement of some old sage is produced; do not believe in conjectures; do not believe merely in the authority of your teachers and elders. After observation and analysis, when it agrees with reason and it is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.
Buddha in the Kama Sutra (Abt, 1982, p.134)

No one is going to listen; so question and do – the heading of this chapter sets the tone I want to adapt in my final words. People tend to assume that others will heed their stories, hear, and therefore act when we say or ask. We tend to think that others will listen and respond intelligently if we talk meaning and understanding, but this seldom is the truth.

I can thus take you through each page of the present research and as a therapist show you where it is possible to facilitate change; I can show you the windows of opportunity. But, psychotherapists usually do not follow prescribed programs; they internalize ideas they can work with within the parameters of their own philosophy in life, and then apply the new information where applicable. I therefore intend to leave the reader with only the one message: We need to first question and then do. As therapists I believe we have a responsibility to co-create new realities that make for better living.

It is difficult, even impossible to break from patriarchal rule if you place yourself within the system, but marriage and relationships are private affairs and only social constructions and do not have to be ruled by the state, the church or those of power (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2004). If systems are human constructions, the implication is that the human agent has the power to change the system (Ravn, 1991). We as women can take back the power of being born the way we were supposed to be. Our sons and daughters are showing us how. Young women are shunning men and careers; they decide when and if they want children and they rate financial independence crucial. These strong and confident young people are willing to embrace both their female and male side (Keene & Jenson, 1997) without being caught up in issues of “women do not do aggression” or “men do not use moisturizer.” These are young people who see themselves as human beings first before identifying themselves as female or Afrikaans or a lawyer.

There is a number of already done and to be recommend ways in which to attack the systems of patriarchy, to negotiate and manipulate them, and to ignore and handle them. Feminism has taken a stand against oppression and has succeeded in many areas – many of these already taken for granted. Maybe only those women who can look back on a period before the second wave of feminism can truly validate and appreciate the change already accomplished. For many women this has been an intellectual fight that is directed at macro-level issues. Women tend to fight the battle out there and expect the other to change. The time has come to direct the gaze to the inside and ask ourselves where we need to adapt our own way of thinking and especially doing if we want change.

I will never want to take away the love, the sharing, and the warmth from any close relationship. But as a therapist I know that I can be empathically listening and intuitively understanding with one part of my brain while at the same time another part, the therapeutic self, is scientifically

making the necessary calculations, weighing and making decisions. Therefore I believe that while one can enjoy all there is to enjoy in any relationship, there should be a part of one's adult brain that can still run the business of taking care of one own emotional and spiritual health.

To find our own and a new truth women or the abused woman will need to learn about abuse. Women will need to heed the control mechanisms used by the abuser and tear down the myth of the all-powerful father-male. The sharing of experiences brings understanding and the ability to identify the techniques of domination and control women are exposed to. In being emotionally honest, one meets the waves head-on and moves through or over them (Dickson, 2003). This will enable the individual to find her power, to connect with other support systems that will allow her to emerge as an interdependent woman (Keene & Jenson, 1997). Taking sole responsibility for the quality of one's life and taking responsibility for the self is the best point of starting change from. In doing so the woman confronts challenges, seeks solutions and becomes interdependent, autonomous, self-actualizing and self-governing in order to have a strong sense of self which refuses to accept limitations and displays a zest for life (Keene & Jenson, 1997). Women do not need to apologize, reason or argue, cry and plead, change to suit the other. Women do not need to defend their way of life. They have a right to be the way they are. To do anything else will result in losing the self; in losing soul.

The loss of soul is taken to be the gravest verdict to be made in shamanism (Cameron, 1997: 78-79, quoting Jeanne Achterberg). Emotional abuse is often described as a murder of the soul. It therefore comes as no surprise that scholars now start to speak of spiritual abuse. I do not find it strange, but I do find it frightening. Professor Christina Landman, a professor in Theology and Religion at the University of South Africa, describes spiritual abuse as mankind's new weapon of mass destruction. She typifies religion as shameful and a disgrace when it changes the individual to a malfunctioning person by the biased dogma that is abusively heaped onto the individual (Landman, 2004). Although a frightening idea, I realize that it actually is a sign of the marginalized making some progress. If patriarchal rule cannot subdue the voice of women further by the power of the patriarchal systems; then they need to utilize their version of the powers of God or a Higher Power to subordinate them.

So it is said that the Tibetan Buddhists describe three kinds of mind. To them there is the dull mind which has no spiritual interest. There is also the average mind content with dogma and blind faith (Borysenko, 1999). To me this is the type of mind that abuses the other; whether in

attacking their country, their culture and beliefs, or their souls. This is absolutistic thinking that in effects says, “I have seen the light, and there is **no** other path, which is absolutism and fanaticism, whether religious or ideological” (Ravn, 1991, p.111 – italics in the original).

But, according to the Buddhist thinking, there is also a third kind of mind; an inquiring mind that is curious and thinking, and therefore often filled with doubt (Borysenko, 1999). Although many Protestant churches refer to doubt as a human imperfection, I would argue that our survival as a decent human species might just lay right at the core of the inquiring and the doubting mind. It is in re-evaluating one’s reality as it plays out from day to day, measuring reality to experience, that one is able to construct a new and meaningful reality.

I believe that each and every perspective the individual takes is nothing else than a personal perspective on the greater whole and I therefore argue for unity-in-diversity. The argument is for an ethical principle that informs unity of experience in being able to connect to a larger whole that shares one’s views, but also allows for the diversity of “appreciating other paths”, but not the relativist nihilistic idea of “accepting **any** path.” Different paths are still part of the whole (Ravn, 1991, p.111).

We need to step by step, and fact by fact, through al the means at our disposal, to re-create new truths to replace the dominant Discourses of power and patriarchy that have been ruling our lives. We need to reflect on the stereotypical taken-for-granted assumptions about what to see as normal or acceptable so as to not exclude ourselves from new ideas and different paths to follow. Joan Borysenko (1999: 15) quotes a female friend on her return back to her ministry who said:

**Perhaps that is the only true definition of faith.
The belief in a fair and loving Universe,
despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary**
