BATTERED WOMEN WHO KILL

by

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores the personal narratives of three battered women who have been involved in the killing of their batterers, with regards to the processes of the perpetuation of abuse and victimising patterns in contexts of the battering relationships, the criminal justice system and the prison system, which contribute to the co-creation of the women's sense of self and identity. The narratives unfold from a prison setting, where these three women are serving long-term sentences. The narratives are described within a social constructionist perspective.

Two-tape recorded conversations of an hour and a half were held with each of the participants in this study. The conversations included a written dialogue from the women. In-depth interviews were used to guide the emerging narratives. The reflections of the researcher are linked to the analysis of the co-created narratives.

The narratives suggest that the recognition of these women as victims of violence is clouded by the need for larger systems, namely, the criminal justice system and the prison system to identify the women as perpetrators of violence. The prison system parallels the battering relationship in positioning the women as victims.

Suggestions around the treatment of battered women who kill in prison, include communally validating the experiences and feelings of these women through the processes of group therapy. Re-categorising the women in prison, as battered women who kill, rather than murderers so as to recognise the context of the battered women is suggested. Community service is considered as an alternative to long-
term imprisonment. Community outreach programs from prison to share knowledge of battered women who kill is also suggested. Government policies, where possible, should be made accessible and government sponsored shelters should be established so as to recognise battered women who kill as victims of violence. Children of battered women who kill should be given assistance and provided with necessary treatment.

Empirical research is needed in order to determine the prevalence of battered women who kill. Comparative studies are needed to determine whether these findings can be generalised to the general population of battered women who kill.
Hierdie studie ondersoek die narratiewe van drie mishandelde vroue wat betrokke was by die moorde van die persone deur wie hulle aangerand is. Die studie het spesifiek betrekking op die voortsetting van mishandeling en viktimiseringspatrone binne die konteks van mishandeling in verboudings, asook die regs- en korrektiewe stelsels, wat alles bydra tot die skepping van die vrou se gevoel van 'n eie identiteit. Die narratiewe ontplooi vanuit 'n tronkopset waar die drie vroue langtermynvonnisse uitdien. Die narratiewe word beskryf binne 'n sosiaal konstruksionistiese perspektief.

Twee gesprekke van 'n uur en 'n half elk is op band opgeneem met elkeen van die drie deelnemers. Die narratiewe sluit 'n geskrewe dialoog van elke vrou in. Grondige onderhoude is gebruik om die ontwikkelende verhale te lei. Die navorser is 'n medeskepper van die verhale en haar refleksies is gekoppel ann die ontleding van die narratiewe.

Die narratiewe suggereer dat die erkenning van hierdie vroue as slagoffers van geweld vertroebel word deurdat die regstelsel en korrektiewe sisteem, hulle as geweldenaars moet beskou. Die korrektiewe stelsel stem ooreen met die verhouding van mishandeling deurdat dit die vrou steeds in die posisie van 'n slagoffer hou.

Voorstelle rondom behandeling in die gevangenis van mishandelde vroue wat moord gepleeg het, sluit in groepsterapie waartydens gemeenskaplike
ondervindings en gevoelens gedeel kan word. Verder word voorgestel dat hierdie vroue geklassifiseer word as mishandelde vroue wat moord gepleeg het eerder as moordenaars. So ’n herklassifisering sou erkenning gee aan die konteks van mishandeling. Gemeenskapsdiens word oorweeg as ’n alternatief tot langtermyngevangenisstraf. Dar word ook voorgestel dat inligting aangaande mishandelde vroue wat moord pleeg vanuit die gevangenis aan die gemeenskap oorgedra behoort te word. Waar moontlik moet regeringsbeleid toeganklik wees en behoort plekke van veiligheid behoort tot stand gebring te word ten einde mishandelde vroue wat moord pleeg as slagoffers van geweld te erken. Die kinders van mishandelde vroue wat moord gepleeg het behoort die nodige bystand en behandeling te ontvang.

Empiriese navorsing is nodig om die voorkomssyfer van mishandelde vroue wat moord pleeg te bepaal. Vergelykende navorsing is nodig om vas te stel of hierdie bevindings veralgemeen kan word na die algemene populasie van mishandelde vroue wat moord pleeg.
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INTRODUCTION

The reader is invited to embark on a journey, with me, the researcher, to explore through socially constructed narratives, the world of battered women who kill.

The study focuses on the narratives or stories of three battered women who have had a long history of being battered and were subsequently involved in the deaths of their batterers and are presently serving long-term sentences in the Johannesburg Prison.

The women tell their stories from the prison context, which is their place of punishment for being involved in the killing of their batterers. The recognition that these women are victims of abuse is clouded by the need for larger systems (such as the criminal justice system and the prison system) to label them as perpetrators of violence because of the killing. Thus, it is the aim of this study to shed light on these processes which are involved in co-constructing the women's sense of self and identity.

The reader is therefore encouraged to explore with the researcher specific contexts in the lives of these battered women, namely: the context of their battering relationships, the criminal justice system and the prison context. The reflections about narratives that have evolved from these contexts are aimed at understanding the processes by which the women have come to be who they are.
In accordance with social constructionist ideas, I do not view the stories that follow as an absolute version of a unitary external truth, but rather as a body of ideas, which is brought to life by the reader's active engagement with it. It is also important to acknowledge the incomplete nature of these stories in terms of recognising that the stories are not final statements of a single 'truth', but are partial statements of a particular stage in the lives of battered women who kill.

I therefore invite you, the reader, to respond to the stories by making sense of them, by making connections between them and your experience, by questioning and by challenging, but most of all by engaging with them.

The focus of this study is to explore and understand the self and identity of battered women who kill, using in-depth interviews to ascertain the suitability of punishment for these women and suggest guidelines for clinical practice. The study also explores the perpetuation of abusive and victimising patterns on many systemic levels.

More specifically, this study aims to establish:

i) through the use of narratives, how battered women who kill perceived themselves before, during, and after any form of battering experiences; during their trial in court; and in the prison context,

ii) through an analysis of the narratives, discuss how battered women who kill come to be labelled or identified by different contexts as victims or perpetrators of violence,
whether punishment is a suitable option for these women,

iv) specific guidelines that may assist clinicians who work with battered women who have killed their batterers.

Outline of the dissertation

I begin this study by presenting the stories of the lived experiences of three battered women who have been sentenced for the death of their batterers.

Chapter 2 briefly focuses on the issue of violence in South Africa. Definitions, incidence and the prevalence of battering are given specific attention.

In Chapter 3 I draw a contrast between modernist and postmodernist thinking and pay particular attention to systemic first- and second-order cybernetics, constructivism and social constructionism. Narratives utilised in the social constructionist approach form the theoretical basis of this study.

Chapter 4 looks closely at the social construction of abuse through interpersonal reactions to battering experiences and through society's perception and reaction to battering.

In Chapter 5, I concentrate on the issues of power and control, which are embedded and involved in constructing the identities of battered women who kill in their battering relationships; in the criminal justice system, and the prison system.
The emphasis of Chapter 6 is the creation of an appropriate methodology which is used to elicit the narratives of the women in this study.

Chapter 7 concentrates on the social construction and perpetuations of identities of being a victim and a perpetrator. The context in which the identities are constructed, is given particular attention, namely: the battering relationships, the criminal justice system and the prison system.

In Chapter 8 the victim-perpetrator-victim cycle is summarised. Another section of this chapter deals with the suitability of punishment for battered women who kill. The chapter is concluded by providing recommended guidelines for clinicians working with these women.
CHAPTER 1

STORIES OF BATTERED WOMEN WHO KILL

"...a world we created, and
are creating through language,
in dialogue and
in community with others".
(Sellinck in Pare, 1995, p. 6)

Introduction

The narratives of three battered women who kill is presented as the first chapter of this study. This is because the stories provide a framework for the study and it is within this framework that analyses take place. In addition, the stories give a richer meaning to the epistemological basis of this study.

The conversations from which these narratives evolved took place in the Johannesburg Prison, between November 1996 and December 1996.

These narratives are not absolute, universal or objective in nature. Instead, they are continuously evolving and transforming over time in conversations with, and between, people. The process of how the transformation of these narratives has occurred over time will not be discussed in this study. Instead, this chapter presents the narratives which have co-evolved between the battered women in prison and the researcher. The narratives are not 'pure' or objective, and as such the researcher's reflections of these stories are shared in the analysis chapter (Chapter 7) of this study.
1.1. Introducing the Participants

The participants in this study are three battered women, who had been in an abusive relationship for at least six months, and all of whom have been in prison for at least a year, after being sentenced for the death of their batterers. The women and their stories will be described below.

Elizabeth is a Sotho-speaking woman in her mid-thirties, who worked as a hair stylist. She lived in a house with her husband (her batterer), and her son. Her husband worked as a policeman prior to his death. Elizabeth's batterer was killed six years ago. She received a 25 year prison sentence for hiring two men to kill her batterer. She has presently served five years of her prison sentence.

Thelma is a Tswana-speaking woman in her early thirties. She lived in a house with her husband (her batterer) and her four children. Thelma was a housewife. Three years ago, Thelma beat her batterer to death with a gun. She was given a 21 year sentence for this killing. She has been in prison for three years.

Catharine is also a Tswana-speaking woman in her early forties. She worked as a chef, in a hotel. She lived in a rented house with her husband (her batterer) and her four children. Catharine's batterer was killed five years ago. At the end of her trial (three years ago), Catharine was sentenced to death. Catharine is re-awaiting trial since the abolishment of the death sentence in South Africa, two years ago.
1.2. About the Stories

The stories are told from taped conversations which were transcribed. The transcripts have not been included in this study, but are available on request in writing, from the researcher.

Each story is presented separately. Verbatim quotes and summaries of the transcripts are used to tell the story. The format of the story parallels the manner in which the story will be analysed (see Chapter 7); with subheadings being used to accentuate the profound experiences in the lives of these battered women who have killed. Italics are used to emphasise the researcher’s summaries and interpretations of the stories. Brackets are used to indicate the similarities in the processes that occur, regarding the women’s experiences.
1.3. Elizabeth’s Story

Elizabeth’s Family of Origin

Elizabeth lived with her parents before she got married. Her father works as a machine operator. Her mother was a domestic worker until she died in 1987. Elizabeth is the eldest. She had a brother who died in 1982, and she has four younger sisters. Elizabeth was troubled by poor physical health as she grew up. Elizabeth was not exposed to nor witnessed abuse in her family as she was growing up. At the age of twenty seven, Elizabeth left home.

The Woman She Was

Elizabeth describes the type of person she was before she left home and got married to her batterer. She speaks of herself as a person with a great deal of patience, kindness and respect for others. She enjoyed being with and socialising with people. She appreciated people that were honest. She also "..liked to be loved by other people". She loves her family very much. Elizabeth enjoyed helping people. However, when her good deeds were not appreciated she would become upset. "...they would come and mess me up and I become angry, if they are doing that, and I always ask why me? Why must they do this because I am an honest person and I always like to help even if I always sacrifice my things for other people". When she became angry, Elizabeth had a tendency to act impulsively; "..if I'm angry...I'm different and I won't even think that time, that what I'm doing is wrong or right, I'll just do what I feel I must do at that moment, that I'm angry".
Elizabeth had known her husband for a few months prior to marrying him, and even at this time he would beat her and threaten her; "...he used to tell me that even if I'm deciding to leave him, I won't manage because he will kill me, and I was just telling myself that maybe he will change". Elizabeth used her husband's jealousy towards her as a way of rationalising her battering experiences in these early stages of their relationship. "I was just telling myself that each and every man is jealous, so I was thinking that maybe he is jealous...

"Not Woman Enough"

The beatings intensified after Elizabeth got married. At the time, she thought it was because they were seeing more of each other and spending more time together. "...So while I was still his girlfriend, it was better, because I only saw him once a week or twice a week". Elizabeth was battered at least three times a week. The battering experiences usually involved kicking, stabbing and being threatened with a gun. Her husband did not have a history of substance abuse, and he always beat her when he was sober. Elizabeth frequently received injuries to the head, neck and truncus regions. These injuries were sometimes treated at home by herself, or alternatively by a private doctor.

Her life with her husband was anxiety-provoking. She also became increasingly fearful of him. "You are afraid of him, you are thinking that I wonder when he comes back what is he going to do. I mean, I was killing myself, because I'm nervous everytime when I'm thinking about myself, because I'm nervous every time, when..."
I'm thinking about him. I'm nervous and my mind doesn't work in the right way. I'm mentally stressed, I'm depressed everyday because of him.

She would try to escape from this situation by running away to her father’s house, but her husband used to come and fetch her and take her back home. Elizabeth’s husband threatened to kill her father if he tried to help her again and so her father stopped interfering as he became helpless and afraid of his son-in-law’s threats. The last time Elizabeth ran away, "...he even said that if you can run away again, I'll kill you this time".

Elizabeth didn’t smoke or drink. She always kept her house clean and made sure her husband’s clothes and shoes were clean. Her husband ordered her to be home at five every evening, which she did. Despite all of this she was not appreciated by her husband and as time went on she began to feel degraded and depersonalised, as her husband repeatedly told her off, making her feel that she "was not woman enough". As the situation worsened, Elizabeth began to believe that her battering experiences were her way of life, because she began to attribute her beatings to her husband’s character. "So sometimes I used to tell myself that if he was doing wrongs to that ex-wife, so he’s that kind, so that is why he is still doing this to me.

In her marriage Elizabeth longed to be respected and not taken for granted. In expressing her wish, Elizabeth would find her husband accusing her of having affairs with his friends, flying into a rage and beating her. Elizabeth did not hesitate to explain to her husband that he needed to change and stop blaming her, because she had not done anything wrong. These and other issues such as not knowing her
husband's whereabouts; forcing her to give him food and money when he did not
give her any money contributed to the negative aspects of Elizabeth's relationship
with her husband. Elizabeth began to receive mixed messages about her role in her
home and marriage. While on the one hand, she was to ensure that the house was
clean and be able to entertain her husband's friends; on the other hand, she was
ordered to be home on time and felt as though her husband did not trust her, nor
respect her, in their marriage and so Elizabeth became a wife that was not good
enough.

However, there were times where Elizabeth enjoyed being with her husband.
These included going to the homelands during the festive season; going to town
together; watching movies and gardening.

Gaining support proved to be difficult. The problem, Elizabeth admits, was partly
because she was "too secretive" about her situation. She received little support
from the Station Commander - the highest ranking policeman at the station - to
whom she made numerous reports, and from her husband's family. The latter
blamed her by saying that she deserved the beatings, because she was the reason
why Elizabeth's husband left his first wife and said that they could not help her in
any way. At the police station, her husband's colleagues would tell her that they
don't want to interfere, because they "are afraid of him".

Elizabeth tried to seek help in the form of advice and emotional support, but this was
limited. She also sought legal advice but received very little.
Reasons for Staying

Firstly, during and even before they were married, Elizabeth's husband threatened to kill her if she left. Secondly, Elizabeth thought that her husband would change over time. Thirdly, Elizabeth's father did not like her husband and he emphasised that this marriage was her choice. Her father would say, "there's nothing I can do because you are the one that decided to marry this guy, and you know he once told me that if I can interfere in your problems, he will shoot me; so I'm afraid of him".

This left her feeling very lonely and desperate to do something about changing her situation.

Hiring the Men

Elizabeth was angry and felt very hurt by her husband, when she went in search of a gun. Frustrated and feeling very helpless and stuck in her situation, she began to cry and explain to her cousin that her husband was abusing her a lot "and I'm enough now, I can't take it anymore". Her cousin suggested that she leave, but she replied by saying, "I'm trying to do that, but he (husband) doesn't want me to do that". Unfortunately for Elizabeth, her husband had seen her talking to her male cousin, and when she arrived home he was infuriated and burning with jealousy. He began swearing at her and beating her. The following day, she called upon her cousin and explained that "...it's becoming worse now, and I can't tolerate it anymore".
Elizabeth highlighted her status as a victim of violence when she said to her cousin, "...this man, he always overpowers me, so there is nothing I can do. And something is in my mind now, I don't want to see him in my life anymore". Elizabeth's cousin immediately thought that she wanted him to kill her husband. Elizabeth then explained her intentions: "What I want from you is to cripple him, so that he won't abuse me anymore. He'll be sitting there, whether he can walk with a wheelchair, I don't care. So long as he won't abuse me anymore". Her cousin explained that crippling him would not deter her husband from harming her, because he was a policeman and would remain a policeman even if he was handicapped. Furthermore, if ever Elizabeth's husband found out that she had a part in crippling him, he would take revenge by killing her. But Elizabeth remained adamant about her intentions, "I don't want him to be killed". This process of negotiation between Elizabeth and her cousin took three days before the decision to cripple her husband was finalised. However, on the day of the incident, Elizabeth described her cousin and his friend as being "angry" and "different, even towards me".

Elizabeth blames her husband for abusing her. However, she also tries to acknowledge the processes and interactions of the abusive relationship that eventually led her to hire people to supposedly cripple her husband. As the instruction was only to cripple her husband, Elizabeth's view is that these hired men should take the responsibility for the killing. "I can say they've done that on their own, for killing him, but it was not from my mouth, to tell them that they must kill him".
The Killing Incident and Investigation

The men arrived at her home one night, while Elizabeth and her husband were asleep. Elizabeth's husband heard a noise and tried to wake her up, but Elizabeth in a drowsy state, did not realise what her husband was saying until the two men arrived in their bedroom. Elizabeth was asked to leave the room. She left and went to the lounge, which was some distance from their bedroom. She only heard voices, while she waited. The men then came to her and said, "We're gone," and they left. She was very shocked and went into a frenzy when she realised that her husband was killed.

Elizabeth told the police a slightly different story when they first arrived on the scene of the incident, and she seemed to be consciously aware of doing this. "[B]ut I was not telling them (the police) the truth, because I was afraid of them, the way they were; they were angry. They even said: If we can get them right now, the people who done this, as you are telling us, we can kill them right now".

In their search for clues, the police found a vest full of blood in Elizabeth's house. This she explained to me, was the outcome of a battering incident that occurred a week before, in which her husband tried to strangle her with his vest. Elizabeth received cuts to her neck, which soaked the vest in blood. Elizabeth imagined that one day she would leave this relationship and use the vest as proof of her battering experiences. "I will be going to somebody a lawyer, or anybody who can help me, so that the vest is going to be an exhibit".
At this point Elizabeth realised that if she told the truth about the vest, she would be directly linked to her husband's murder, - "...this blood, it's my blood, they will realise that I'm the cause of this murder" - so to protect herself, she did not elaborate on the story related to the vest, and just said, "I forgot to clean this vest". When the police left Elizabeth destroyed the vest, perhaps realising that at this stage, the vest would be of more harm than benefit to her.

On arrival at the scene of the killing, Elizabeth was immediately perceived as a perpetrator of violence by the station commander: "Tell me the truth, I know you did this...I know that you had a hard time with your husband". He then continued to beg her to tell him the truth. From her conversation with me, it seems as though Elizabeth felt a sense of betrayal by the station commander, because it was to him that Elizabeth would frequently report her battering experiences.

This sense of betrayal was also experienced by Elizabeth with one of her closest friends, whom she would confide in about her battering experiences. "So I trusted this lady...". It was this friend that mentioned to the station commander that Elizabeth had said that, "one day I will kill him (husband), and it's not far". According to Elizabeth, what she had actually said to her friend was, "...but one day, I will show him".

The statement made by the friend threw the police into disbelief about the story Elizabeth had told them. Consequently she was taken to the Murder and Robbery Squad, for further questioning. "They took me to the Murder and Robbery squad, and I was assaulted there, up until I tell them the truth (about) what happened. I
was assaulted by sixteen or thirteen, if I'm not mistaken, police, black and white. So they keep on assaulting me, up until I said to them, "I'm dying". So the one forced me to drink liquor. So I said to them, "No, I'm not drinking liquor".

Elizabeth was locked up with her accomplices, but did not know how long it was before she made her first court appearance. "I can't remember because my mind, as I was assaulted and I couldn't walk....but during that time while I was in the police station, each and every policeman whose coming in he used to kick me, or clap me or swear (at) me, whatever they were doing".

*Reflections of the Killing Incident*

On reflection Elizabeth is regretful and feels remorse for her husband's death. The incident was painful as she felt the loss of her husband. As she says, "I used to love my husband so much; I didn't even want to lose him," and she asks his forgiveness, wherever he may be. Elizabeth believes that she "must pay penalty" because she says people do not believe her nor listen to her if she had to explain her intentions. She goes on to say, "I must pay penalty for what happened.....I accept, but it's just that this sentence, it's too harsh for me, especially because his the one who was abusing me. I've ended up doing what happened because of him. So somewhere along the line, I still blame him, because if he was not abusing me then I would not have done this". Elizabeth subsequently entered the legal system, where she was involved in a lengthy court case.
"An Unfair Trial"

During her trial, Elizabeth constantly received threats from policemen who were colleagues of her husband. They were angry. Elizabeth, alone, and fully aware of her basic rights tried to make sure that the police threats would not interfere with her trial. She directed her lawyer to raise the issue of the threats in court. "You must raise that in court, if they are going to kill me; it's got nothing to do with them, what I've done. So it's only the judge or the magistrate, who is going to decide what his going to do about me or about the people who did this". Elizabeth was initially not granted bail. She remained on trial for six months after which she was granted bail through her advocate. She reported to the police every Friday, (just as she reported home to her husband at five o'clock every evening). The police continued to threaten her and began telling her, "We are going to kill you, we are going to shoot you". (Similarly, Elizabeth's husband used to threaten to shoot her. There is an indication of a betrayal of trust, and shift in the level of honesty and support from the policemen who Elizabeth once thought were on her side, when they said to her, "...even if we don't kill you, you will go to prison for a long time. You are going to get the death sentence or 25 years").

Elizabeth thought that the prosecutor was biased and judgemental. This was because Elizabeth, a stylist, was always neatly dressed and well-groomed, and so her stories around her battering experiences were not believed by the prosecutor. The prosecutor also threatened Elizabeth, "I'll fix you up;.... and she used to talk to my husband's ex-wife and girlfriend". Elizabeth only found out in court that her husband had two girlfriends, one of whom was testifying against her.
Elizabeth constantly speaks of her trial as being unfair, "....the station commander did not come to testify and the people I used to go to, they were not called to testify in court. And all the other police, I used to report to them, they were all against me, although they knew what was happening".

One of the questions which Elizabeth constantly finds herself asking is whether her husband would have been as unfairly treated if he had killed Elizabeth. "I mean, his the one who caused all this, and I'm just wondering that if - from that time when he was shooting (at) me - if maybe he did kill me, what was going to happen to him? Was he going to get a harsh sentence like this one?"

Elizabeth uses the word "harsh" to summarise her battering experience; her relationship with her husband; her encounter with the police; her trial and her sentence. After being on trial for one year, Elizabeth was sentenced for 25 years, which, for a first time offender, she considers to be harsh.

During her trial, Elizabeth believed that she would not find herself in prison. Elizabeth thought that she would receive a suspended sentence, even if she was found guilty, because she had knowledge of women in similar situations who were given suspended sentences.

Elizabeth did not receive support in the form of food, clothing or money from people around her during her court case. During this time, she received moral support which encouraged her position as a victim of abuse. Some friends, her family and
some people that had known her husband stood by her side during this time.
Elizabeth experienced ambivalence from the rest of the people around her, resulting
in very little, if any, further support.

Knowing that her husband had thought of her as a bad person and so had not
respected her, nor supported her or sympathised with her, Elizabeth feared that she
would lose respect, support and sympathy from people around her, especially her
family.

A Terrible Dream Come True

When Elizabeth arrived in prison, it was like a terrible dream come true. Elizabeth
was so shocked and dazed at her sentence that she could not remember how she
arrived in prison. She couldn't and didn't accept that she was in prison. "I was
asking myself, Is it really me in this place?"

Elizabeth was afraid to go to prison because of the stories she had heard about
prisoners beating each other. As she thought about her sentence, she became very
lonely and depressed and felt very helpless. But when Elizabeth arrived in prison,
she felt more hopeful about getting out, because she had met women with much
heavier sentences. "Life must go on, because I'm not the only one".

Thinking about the loss and hardships that her family were experiencing because
she was in prison made her feel very depressed. Guilt, sorrow and regret have
surrounded her father and sisters, who miss her terribly. At home, Elizabeth was
the "bread-winner", self-reliant and financially supportive towards her family. Elizabeth feels the helplessness of her family when they visit her or speak to her. At times her sisters "don't even want to come and see me, because they feel bad after that".

Telling her story to other prisoners proved to be a difficult process for Elizabeth. This was because initially, she remained quiet and secretive about her reasons for coming to prison, and only confided in a friend that used to go with her to court. However, the nature of this secretiveness only lasted for a short period of time, because the members (wardens) were telling prisoners about Elizabeth's sentence. Consequently, Elizabeth began to lose her sense of privacy. Not having heard the correct story from the members, the prisoners used to swear at Elizabeth and pass bad remarks about her. As a result, she would end up crying and telling them her version of the story. "I just want them (prisoners) to know that I'm not that bad as they think. What I did I was forced by circumstances. And it can happen to anybody".

Throughout her life, Elizabeth learned to keep a distance or give herself some space in her relations with others, in order to retain a sense of individuality. In her battered relationship, she developed her career as a stylist and remained financially independent of her batterer. During her court case, Elizabeth fought for her rights to be heard, and tried to ensure that the threats from the police would not distort her image of a battered woman. In prison, it was her version of the story against the members, which elicited reactions from the prisoners. But Elizabeth continued to
believe in herself by saying, "I'm satisfied because I'm the one who knows the truth. So if they don't believe (it) from me, it's their own problem, it's not my problem".

Five years in Prison

Being in prison for five years, she comments, "Sometimes, I can't take it anymore. I just feel that it's enough. I also want to show other people outside that I'm a better person; not bad as they think. And I want to prove to myself, that I am not bad".

Elizabeth hopes to get some money and educate herself, because she says, "If I walk out of here, I must be something".

For Elizabeth her greatest challenge, in prison, is to stay out of the ongoing corruption. So far, it seems she has managed. "....Instead of doing something constructive, we are busy talking about when you go out for the very first week, to get money, what you can do......As I said for these five years if I was not thinking for myself, there's liquor here; the members (wardens) are bringing in liquor for the prisoners. They are smuggling with the prisoners. They are doing all this corruption with the prisoners. So if you don't think for yourself and if you want to indulge yourself in those things, you will do it. But if you think for yourself, you won't do it".

Beauty - A Factor in her Battering Experiences

The beauty that Elizabeth radiates both internally and externally, appears to have been deceiving for both herself and others. Until today, Elizabeth battles with compliments around what a beautiful woman she is. Her beauty has elicited both
positive and negative reactions from others; both belief and disbelief in her stories and support and a complete lack of support.

During her battering relationship, Elizabeth would be told how beautiful she looked by others. Often not convinced by these comments, she would ask one of her close friends whether she was actually beautiful, and her friend would reply, "Whatever you are wearing Pheta (her nickname) you know that your clothes are beautiful and you are also beautiful. So you want us to keep on telling you that. And then I will say to her: It's because Peter, you know he doesn't admire me. He won't even say a word, that maybe these clothes are beautiful or this clothes, it suits you. He won't say that".

In court, Elizabeth found her beauty throwing people in to disarray and disbelief. For instance, the prosecutor didn't believe her because she didn't look like an abused woman. Even in prison, the prisoners and the members (warders), did not believe that she was a victim of "forced circumstances". "One of them (warders), she once said to me: You know we were jealous of you, that is why we used to treat you like this". Some prisoners believe that Elizabeth always looks good because she works in the salon, but others defend her by saying that "she always looks after herself". Elizabeth even stands out among a crowd of prisoners as the one who is neatly dressed and good looking. "Maybe this place doesn't suit me. Because to be honest with you, I always look after myself and even outside, and even here in prison".
What has kept Elizabeth questioning her beauty is the fact that she has received admiration and a proposal from a lawyer, while inside prison. "I can't believe this especially as I'm sentenced for 25 years. I can't believe this...So I always tell myself, it's true, these people when they say I'm beautiful, it's true because somebody else can see that. And another man, who is handsome can see that".
Thelma's Family of Origin

Thelma lived with her mother before she left home at the age of nineteen and got married. Her mother was a domestic worker until she died in 1992. Thelma is the youngest in her family. She has an elder sister. Thelma did not witness nor experience abuse in the family while she was growing up. Thelma was a physically healthy child.

The Woman She Was

Thelma describes the type of person she was before she left home and got married to her batterer. She was a very quiet person. She preferred to stay at home with her mother and help with the housework. She enjoyed sewing, knitting and baking. Thelma abhors people who smoke and drink. Thelma was a regular church goer. She had few friends, because she believed that being able to share with one's friends is an important aspect of any friendship. Thus she believed in having close and personal relationships.

"Becoming Another Person"

When Thelma met her husband, he immediately wanted to marry her. However, they courted for a short while before they married. During the courtship, Thelma's husband showered her with gifts and spent a lot of time with her. After they were
married, he began to spend time away from home and less time with her. Then he began to beat her, usually kicking or shoving her and sometimes threatening her with a gun. Thelma usually received injuries in the upper regions of her body, which she treated at home.

If Thelma kept quiet and chose not to speak to her husband, he would pick a fight by throwing accusations at her and then beating her. As time went on, Thelma began to lose respect for her husband. "I respect him but in the end I did not respect him. I showed him before that I've got respect, but him haven't got respect for me". As the beatings intensified, Thelma became frightened at the thought of her husband changing her, to the extent that she would "become another person".

The following three incidents are examples of what escalated Thelma's loss of respect and anger towards her husband. Thelma's husband repeatedly made accusations at her about having affairs with other men, so one day her husband went to a witch doctor who confirmed these accusations. He returned home and beat Thelma. The next time he went back to the witch doctor, he took the telephone, her pillow and her panties. Thelma was furious at her husband's behaviour and was becoming frustrated, because she felt that her husband was not treating her like a woman.

At another time, Thelma's husband decided to secretly divorce her. Her husband went to their neighbour, to request for financial assistance. The neighbour, who didn't support Thelma's husband's reasons for getting divorced and who didn't want to get involved, decided to inform Thelma of her husband's intentions. Thelma was
shocked when she heard about her husband's intentions, but confronting her husband about this proved to be of no use.

Then, one day, Thelma won some money on a television game show. Her husband who was equally excited about the win stopped beating Thelma. He began to buy food for her and the children, and went back to sleep with Thelma in the same room. Thelma became annoyed at the sudden change in her husband's behaviour, because she knew that this behaviour would only last while there was money. Her husband returned to beating her and not providing food in the house when the money ran out.

Sometimes Thelma would leave with her children and go to her mother's place, but her husband would return to fetch her. She would go back, hoping like Elizabeth, that things would change.

Thelma's children often witnessed the beatings she received from her husband. The children tried to protect her by either telling their father to stop; or by hitting their father. Her husband did not like the children. He neglected them and did not take time to be with them and support them in their schoolwork. This resulted in the children beginning to dislike their father, especially when he beat Thelma.

Throughout her marriage and her battering experiences, Thelma received continuous support from her mother, until she died.
Thelma sought help from her husband's family, but was rejected on grounds that her matters were trivial. "Sometimes I see the family of my husband does not care about me, and I go to the police station to report this". When she reported her situation to the police, her husband would stop beating her. Thelma acknowledges the assistance of the police which resulted in a temporary cessation of the battering episodes. During this time, Thelma would try to look for a job. She once found a job, but when she began working her husband became very jealous and took steps which forced Thelma to leave work.

**Reasons for staying**

Thelma hoped that her husband would change, "...maybe he is going to be alright". She loved him and wanted to ensure that her children were protected, supported and brought up by both parents.

Her stuckness in the situation is highlighted in her answer, "I just think with my four kids, and I haven't got a mother. Where will I go with my children".

*Thelma found herself extremely isolated after her mother's death and became desperate to change her situation as it intensified.*
The Killing Incident and Investigation

Thelma hoped for a better quality of life, both for herself and her children. She felt angry at her husband as she remembered his behaviour towards her. Thelma was also reminded of the hurt and pain she felt towards her husband for not loving her. Thelma was heartbroken when she and her husband began to sleep in separate bedrooms. At the time of her husband’s death, they had been sleeping separately for about ten months.

Thelma explains the day she decided to kill her husband, "I was very angry that day. We haven’t got food inside the house, and the children (were) hungry, and I go there (to the other bedroom), and take the gun and beat him with the gun. After that I don’t worry.....I don’t feel scared that time".

Thelma was more afraid when she initially saw her husband asleep, fearing that he might wake up and take revenge on her. As she beat him, she spoke to him, venting her anger and frustrations.

"I’m tired about you, because you beat me everyday and if I don’t do nothing, you beat me, for what? I don’t know for what. My children is suffer about you. You don’t think about the children, you don’t buy food....You don’t give the children love...and if you go , you just take the car and you go. You don’t tell me where you are going and you go to sleep there and you come (the) next day, and I stay here and I don’t know where you are".
As she spoke, Thelma became unsure of whether her husband was really asleep, because he turned towards her, but he did not answer her. "...you feel angry and hurt if someone doesn't want to talk to you..".

Initially like Elizabeth, when the police questioned Thelma, she denied any knowledge of her husband's death. "I just tell the police I don't know what happened; who killed that person, so I don't know who killed that person. But that thing is sitting here (points to her heart), you see I must (had to) cough it out, but I can't tell the police. I just think about my children, know I go to the jail and leave my children alone".

Reflections of the Killing Incident

As Thelma looks back on the killing, she feels "very hard". What Thelma sought was some freedom and space to be herself. "If I can kill my husband maybe it's going to be better for me and the children. Maybe I can get (a) job to work to give my children food and my children....must be happy all the time". It seems that she feels a sense of regret, and loss and remains despondent and helpless in prison, as she was in her abusive relationship. She says, "I feel very very bad in myself....I don't sleep, when I sleep, I just think about my children".

A Matter of Procedure?

Thelma arrived in court without any abuse from the police. Thelma attended court every Friday, until she was remanded in custody for three months. She was then
granted bail for seven months, through her lawyer. Thelma reported to the police once a month on a Friday. Thelma's trial lasted for three months in the Supreme court. The judge 'sympathised' with Thelma and instead of sentencing her to death, he gave her a twenty-one year sentence.

In summary, it appears to be that Thelma's trial was conducted as a matter of procedure, as is the case with people who are clearly identified as perpetrators of violence.

What Thelma highlights about her court case is the fact that she felt cheated because of her lack of knowledge about the proceedings of the court and the language used in court, since this was her first court appearance ever. She felt restricted and limited through her lack of knowledge. "During the court case, I don't know (how) to answer the questions.... I was scared. If you ask me another question, I just keep quiet. I never talk further".

As Thelma reflected on her thoughts and feelings, she strongly believed, (like Elizabeth), that she would "never go to prison", based on the fact that she was a first time offender. "I've got to tell myself, I've got to win that case. But in the end, I never win the case". At the end of this case, Thelma found herself in a state of shock and disbelief, together with a profound sense of loss.
"It was like for me very easy to forget the whole story, before I was sentenced. It was very funny to think about prison". Thelma felt a great sense of helplessness and despair when she arrived in prison. Yet Thelma was determined that she would serve her sentence and leave prison one day.

Thelma was initially taken to Pretoria Prison, where she felt very lonely and alienated, since she was the only one in that prison, who had been sentenced for such a long time. Thelma was afraid and shy, but received sympathy from many prisoners. Thelma found someone in prison who she confided in. "Got another sister there, she was sentenced for four years. She was a little older than me.... I told her all my stories. I trusted her and she trusted me". Trust, so rarely found in prison settings, was appreciated and treasured by Thelma in her friendship with her fellow prisoner. Unfortunately, this friendship was short-lived as Thelma was transferred to Johannesburg Prison. Thelma immediately felt that she could not trust anybody here. "Other people haven't got a heart...The people just talk about your crime and all things and plenty violence in the prison. Now I don't like that". However, the pain of her long sentence was eased, (when like Elizabeth), Thelma realised that there were other prisoners sentenced for a longer period of time.

Two Years and Seven Months in Prison

"I feel very lonely, very lonely. When I come here and think about my family, I feel very lonely.....very lonely".
Thelma, (like Elizabeth), has tried to remain an autonomous individual in prison, by 'thinking for herself' about what she will do when she leaves prison. "Myself, I think if I got to come out here, I got to make a business outside and to get money, and for my children..."

Thelma's final comment, "I feel alright about being here, because I push my sentence and I know where I'm going".
1.5. Catharine's Story

Catharine's Family of Origin

Catharine lived with her parents before she got married. She was the youngest of three siblings. One of her siblings is deceased. Her father, a policeman, died in 1984. Her mother worked in a market selling fresh vegetables until she died in 1994. Catharine was healthy as a child and did not witness nor experience any abuse in her parent's home. Catharine left home at the age of thirty.

The Woman She Was

Catharine describes the type of person she was before she left home and before her husband began to beat her. Catharine loved her father very much and enjoyed being at home to spend time with her family. She would do the housework, watch television, and sometimes go out to watch movies. She attended church regularly. Catharine also attended meetings of the Black Society, once a month.

The Married Woman

Catharine was married to her husband for six years before she was battered. Prior to her beatings, Catharine enjoyed the idea that she and her husband both worked. This allowed them to buy a house and furnish it together. Catharine's husband began to beat her only when he was intoxicated. Catharine would receive injuries to the head and neck region, which were often treated at a hospital or a clinic.
Catharine perceived her husband's drinking habits and his gambling tendencies negatively. Catharine believed that the fights which arose from this caused a strain on their marriage.

Catharine often went to the police station to report the incident when it happened. *Like Thelma*, Catharine found the police to be temporarily helpful.

Catharine sought help from her mother, but her mother tried not to interfere in her children's problems and would tell her to seek help from a social worker. Catharine began attending sessions with the social worker, but stopped because, "I feel, when they shout to my husband, then I feel shame for him, because I'm in love with him".

*Reasons for staying*

*Just as Elizabeth and Thelma hoped their husbands would change, so did Catharine, and as a result often went back to him.* "I think maybe he will come right, when the time goes on...". Catharine also loved her husband very much, and thought that having his children would bring about change over time.

*The Killing Incident and Investigation*

The death of Catharine's husband remains a mystery.

Catharine's husband left for work as usual, one day, but did not return home. Catharine became worried and concerned and sent her son to her husband's
friend's place to look for him, but this proved to be of no use. Catharine became afraid when a policeman arrived at her home the following day and told her to accompany him, to identify her husband who was lying in the veld. Catharine and her husband's family were then asked to give permission to take her "husband's blood". When they left the veld the police took Catharine to the Murder and Robbery Squad.

Catharine, (like Elizabeth), was assaulted by police. Catharine had her hands and feet tied to the legs of the chair, blindfolded and had water poured over her head by the police at the Murder and Robbery Squad. Then they take the electric choke (shock) and choke (shock) me. Then I fall down. When I wake up the other one told me: You take the cloth and wipe the blood from your mouth. I didn't take that cloth. I just answer: I never did that. They start treating (beating) me".

The police then fetched Catharine's son and beat him while he was being interrogated. Catharine remained in custody until her mother paid for her bail and was released. When she left the police station, she was immediately taken to a doctor and treated for her injuries.

Catharine had to identify her husband's body again, this time in a government mortuary. She was shocked at the sight of her husband, who was beaten up and hardly recognisable. Catharine then found herself in a battle with her husband's family regarding his burial. Catharine obtained legal documents which ensured that she would bury her husband.
It was only in court that Catharine found out that her brother and his friend(s) had taken part in the killing. Her brother had used his car to drive his friend(s), and it was the friend(s) who killed Catharine's husband. Catharine admits that her brother was aware of her battering experiences with her husband, because he lived at home with their mother, "because sometimes when he (husband) beat me, I go to my mother's house". However, Catharine does not mention in her story, that she spoke to her brother and/or his friend(s), about killing her husband. Catharine believes that her brother and his friend should "stay in prison, because they are going to kill more people outside".

For Catharine, (like Thelma), the killing has left her with a sense of isolation and loss, and a lack of support. "My children are suffering outside, because they need family support and their father is dead now... I can't see my children".

"I am not a killer"

Catharine was initially granted bail through her lawyer. While out on bail, Catharine, (like Elizabeth and Thelma), had to report to court. When she first appeared in court, "Then he (judge) just tell me: You killed your husband. I say to him: I never killed my husband. I don't know any further about my husband since I leave (left) my husband, when he go (went) to work". She was asked to come back every second month for about six months, at the end of which she was told, "Your case is withdrawn...The government or the policeman is going to take further steps".
Catharine spent almost a year at home, until one day a policeman arrived to 'take her down' to the police station for questioning. Catharine was accompanied by her children in the police van, but on the way she was told, "Why (did) you take your children, because you know yourself you are going to be arrested". For Catharine, the process of identifying her as a perpetrator of violence and making her responsible for her husband's death had started again. Catharine was taken to the Murder and Robbery Squad again; "They just say to me: Why don't you say you killed your husband? I just said to the policeman: I never say yes, because I didn't kill my husband. If I killed my husband, I can say yes, I killed him because of that, but I never killed my husband". After intense interrogations, Catharine was locked away in prison for four to five months, until she was granted bail which her mother paid. Catharine's brother was also in prison, but her mother thought that if she paid both Catharine and her brother's bail, they might try to run away.

Catharine was plunged into a process of loss while out on bail. When she first arrived home from prison, after being granted bail, she found her furniture and other belongings missing from her home. She is unsure whether her belongings were stolen, or taken away by the police. Some time later, Catharine lost her mother after a sudden illness. Catharine appeared in court before her mother was buried. Catharine was consumed by shock, when she arrived in court and was told, "Catharine, we cancel your bail. I say: For what? They just say: I'm guilty. I say to them: Why am I guilty? Why do you give me sentence. I am guilty, what did I do wrong?" Despite numerous questions which remain unanswered, Catharine was sentenced to death, and was not allowed to attend her mother's funeral (who died
while Catharine was out on bail) nor bury her mother. She was immediately sent to prison.

In the initial stages of the court case, Catharine’s late mother was her pillar of support. Later, Catharine received unconditional support from her children and her brother’s wife.

For different reasons, Elizabeth, Thelma and Catharine all strongly believed that they would not go to prison. Catharine believed that she would not be sentenced, because she did not commit the crime. Catharine perceived herself as a victim of abuse and continued to be one in the criminal justice system, although this did not appear to be the system’s perception of Catharine.

"No Life in Prison"

Catharine was immediately taken from court to Pretoria Prison ("Newlock"), where she arrived in the early hours of the morning. Catharine cried and refused to eat when she arrived. Gradually, Catharine was beginning to feel the reality of her situation. Consequently, Catharine was seen by a social worker. This proved to be useful for her. Catharine was then transferred to Johannesburg Prison. "I feel worse when I came here to this prison, because it’s too far away for my children. I feel bad, because now the phone is not working......it’s painful. Lots of pain I feel for myself".
Like Elizabeth, Catharine was afraid of going to prison because her perceptions were that she would be beaten and given no food. For Catharine, prison is a place in which "there is no life; no life at all in prison".

Communication for Catharine initially began through the use of prison cards. "You just say let me see your prison card. You give them your card; they must see you, how long are you sentenced for". When Catharine was asked to explain the reasons for her arrival in prison, she always related her story emphasising her position as a victim of abuse, and she would go on to explain how she was forced to accept her identity as a perpetrator. "They (police) arrest me. They say I'm a killer, I killed my husband". "Prisoners...they say: You committed that crime. Never mind that you (did) not commit that crime. As long as you are in prison, they say you commit that crime". Catharine's response is a profound sense of helplessness. "I feel bad. Sometimes I feel like crying, screaming, but it's no use".

Three years in Prison

Catharine has tried to help herself by writing to the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Social Welfare. She has received replies, and explains; "I am waiting to go to court, until now".

Financial support and clothing from the church people in prison have helped Catharine to remain optimistic and hopeful that one day she may leave prison.
At the end of our conversations, Catharine shared a poem that she had written when the death sentence was abolished. The poem is also expressive of Catharine's search for meaning in her life.

"SAVED FROM THE DEATH ROW POEM"

After the death of my husband, I was arrested
I was sentenced to death in the Supreme Court. On the same day I was transferred to Pretoria Prison
I awaited my day of execution. It was a lonely time. Nothing to look forward to.
Only the frightening prospects of the gallows
I had absolutely no knowledge of the world of God,
although I was failing death, my heart was as hard as stone
I didn't believe that I was going to die, because I didn't know anything about the death sentence
It was the first time in my life I had seen people, sentenced to death
On 6 June 1995, the death sentence was abolished
I get really mad when I think about my children, and.....
I did not commit that murder
At that time when I was sentenced, my mother had already died
It had more to do with actual knowledge than a rebellion against God
I didn't really know what I expected from God
I couldn't see a way out of Death Row
I will never forget Judge B.S. and Prosecutor E
I walked away from that meeting a condemned woman
I have just left my children alone in my house, since they sentenced me
The preceding months and years of this violence flash past me as I walk down the
cold corridors of the Pretoria Prison

I started to trust the Lord for his Salvation

There is a church. The women here their names are: Van Rensburg, Joyce and
Vincent, Auntie Gina, Norma

I really want to say thank you to these people.
They showed me their love and I just thank the Lord Jesus that by his grace, he is
chancing me into his likeness

He truly blesses us daily, and I simply ask the Lord, to move me into the
person he wanted me to be.

Catharine

Conclusion

The stories of Elizabeth, Thelma and Catharine have been shared, with you, the
reader. The stories are told from prison - a place in which stories may be one-sided,
judged, viewed negatively and ultimately silenced.

Elizabeth, Thelma and Catharine all feel a profound sense of loss with regard to
their situations. They all seem to describe their experiences with a hint of unfairness
and their voices express underlying feelings of anger. Yet it is the strength that is
embedded in and is demonstrated by each woman that provides the researcher with
the courage to write and tell the stories of the lived experiences of these women.
The hope that is highlighted by each of the women at the end of the stories in turn brings a glimpse of optimism to the idea that the awareness and knowledge that is created about the circumstances of these women, may result in more resources becoming available to other women in similar situations.

Domestic violence in the South African context introduces the following chapter. The chapter moves on to discuss specific definitions of terms relevant to this study. The incidence and prevalence of battered women who kill within the South African context is also examined.
CHAPTER 2
DEFINITIONS, INCIDENCE AND PREVALENCE

Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to define specific terms that the reader will encounter in this study. Statistics provide a context for the prevalence and seriousness of the problem, especially in South Africa.

2.1. Existence of Domestic Violence Alongside Political Violence in South Africa

South Africa is historically a highly stratified society characterised by intense structural and institutional injustice (Van der Merwe in McKendrick & Hoffman, 1990), with escalating levels of political and interpersonal violence playing a dominant role.

According to Butchart, Lerer and Terre-Blanche (1994), the almost exclusive media focus on political violence in South Africa has diverted attention away from the high levels of interpersonal violence. Gils (in Martin, 1987) contends that personal and structural violence feed and reinforce each other.

For McKendrick and Hoffman (1990), violence is a social construction. In other words acts of violence seen as legitimate in one society or in one cultural group may be considered illegitimate or culturally unacceptable in another. Such conditions
warrant a broad definition of violence, which is at the same time specific enough to facilitate the protection of persons in a particular society against violence, irrespective of race, culture or creed.

Violence is generally defined in this study as "any relation, process or condition by which an individual or group violates the physical, social or psychological integrity of another person or group" (Dangor, 1991, p. 19).

In recent years, violence in the domestic setting has received a significant amount of media coverage. In the broader social context, families are a microcosm of society and thus, the prevalence of high levels of violence in a particular society is invariably linked to high levels of domestic violence (Butchart et al., 1994). Families have become the scenes of violent human relationship expressions, both between the couple and among parents and their offspring (Kornblit, 1994). Research conducted by family violence experts (Enloe, 1983; Gelles & Straus, 1979; Straus, 1973, 1977) demonstrates that the family has always been one of society's most violent institutions, after police and military organisations (Cannon & Sparks, 1989). However, Dobash & Dobash (1977-78) note that violence in the home is disproportionately directed at females, and not randomly occurring among family members, as one would expect. In addition, violence against women occurs, beyond the public eye, and often at the hands of known assailants (Butchart et al., 1994; Chinkanda, 1992).
2.2. Violence Against Women

Violence against women, a largely universal phenomenon, has recently been recognised by the United Nations as a fundamental abuse of women's human rights (UN Resolution 48/104, in Heise, 1994). The participation of women in the national democratic struggle in South Africa has ensured that gender issues have been placed on the political agenda (Butchart et al., 1994).

Violence against women is defined as "...any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (Oswomen Newsletter in Mogwe, 1994, p. 8). This definition incorporates two basic assumptions about violence against women; firstly, that it is a violation of human rights which damages and revokes women's enjoyment of basic rights and freedom; and secondly, that this is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women (Mogwe, 1994; Cannon & Sparks, 1989). In addition, any acts of violence directed towards a woman are defined differently by the woman herself. Hence Dangor (1992) suggests that a woman's own definition of violence should be acknowledged.

The various forms of violence against women in South Africa, and the world over, include sexual abuse, sexual harassment, incest, rape, marital rape, genital mutilation, trafficking in women, selective abortion of female foetuses, dowry deaths and woman abuse (Butchart et al., 1994; Dangor, 1992). Butchart and his colleagues (1994) point out that the most endemic form of violence against women
is abuse of women by intimate male partners. As Morgan (in Martin, 1987, p. 3) states, "Spouse-abuse, woman-beating, wife-battering - whatever its name, this privatised violence against women is endemic in all patriarchal cultures.....It exists in every class, race and every nation". When battering was first described, there was a great reluctance to accept that this actually happened across the social classes.

However, the battering of women has proven to be a serious social, legal and clinical problem in modern society (Bograd, 1992). The true extent of this problem is unknown, but the individual, familial and social costs of this national tragedy appear to be staggering (Ewing, 1987). Many questions about battered women remain unanswered, yet a great deal has been learnt about these women and their relationships with men who batter them. Battered women who kill their batterers are a subset of battered women in general. Literature around battered women who kill is scarce, yet the growing base of knowledge about battered women in general has provided both an essential and convenient point of departure, as an attempt to understand battered women who kill (Ewing, 1987).

2.3. Definition of Battering

Battering proves to be a very difficult and complicated phenomenon to define as it covers a diverse range of actions and has a largely subjective component in that different women may define themselves through their battering experiences, as "battered" at different stages (Mahoney, 1991). This study uses a general definition of battering provided by Walker (in Kaser-Boyd & Forrest, 1993, p. 426), as "[p]hysical and emotional abuse in an intimate relationship that occurs repeatedly and has the effect of coercion or intimidation". Similarly Crump (1987) notes that
battering is not a random interactional phenomenon, but is structured into marriages and serves as a social function of maintaining male dominance.

Abuse then is defined by Kaser-Boyd & Forrest (1993) as "excessive possessiveness or jealousy; extreme verbal harassment; verbal and non-verbal threats; physical attack with or without injury; sexual assault; restriction of activity" (p. 426).

The term battered woman is used in this study to refer to a woman who has repeatedly been exposed to physical or psychological force either directly or indirectly, with repeated verbal threats by a cohabiting male partner. Other forms of battering do occur, such as battering between women (lesbian battering) and women battering men, as well as elderly battering. However, they will not be discussed in this study.

Battered women who kill will refer to battered women who as a result of their battering experiences have killed their batterers. A batterer would then be defined as a woman's cohabiting male partner, with whom she has encountered her battering experiences. A battering relationship is therefore referred to as a relationship between the battered woman and her batterer which involves chronic or repetitive experiences of battering.

For the purposes of this study terms such as victim and women-battering will be synonymous with battered women; whilst the term abuser will be synonymous with batterer.
Often the term perpetrator is used to refer to the male partner of a battering relationship. However, this study will frequently use the term perpetrator to define women who have been battered. In such cases the use of the term will be made evident. Victim will only be used to refer to the woman that has been battered.

Victim and perpetrator are terms which implicate dynamics of power and control, as well as coercion, domination and intimidation. These issues will be addressed in later chapters of this study.

2.4. Incidence of Battered Women

Although violence against women has become illegal in many countries, the incidence of women battering has not abated, largely because: "Most of the ideologies of social arrangements which formed the underpinning of the violence still exist and are inextricably intertwined in our present legal, religious, political and economic practices" (Dobash & Dobash, in Crump, 1987, p. 439).

In addition, many authors also note that the shame and embarrassment and the threats of revenge encountered by these women result in their decision to suffer in silence (Crump, 1987; Kornblit, 1994; Henning, 1988; Roy, 1977). As such the full extent of women battering can never be known, and only estimates of battered women are at our disposal. For instance, it is estimated that three to four million women are battered in the United States of America (USA), each year (Senate Judiciary Committee on Internet, 1996; Bascelli, 1985; Grant, 1989). In Texas
alone, more than 100,000 women are reported to be battered in their homes at least once a week (Texas Dept of Human Services on Internet, 1996).

In Britain, a recently published Home Office report on domestic violence stated that half a million women may be battered annually (Grant, 1989). In Israel it has been estimated that of a total population of four million people, there are approximately 100,000 battered women (Avni, 1991).

In South Africa, the problem of battered women is invisible as far as research goes. Research into the phenomenon of battering has been covered by layers of neglect and disinterest for a long time. Slowly women are becoming aware of the reality and existence of the problem. However, very little local literature exists and there are very few, if any official statistics to indicate the extent of the problem. This is partly because police do not keep statistics on the abuse of women (Grant, 1989; Crump, 1987).

The reports of official statistics that do exist are stated here to highlight their scarcity.

A study published by the University of Potchefstroom in 1979, found that 3,500 women were beaten by their partners. Of these 140 were seriously injured and 45 died as a result of the battering (De Bruyn & Wulf, 1985).

Crump (1987) reports that in a study among Indian women in the Durban metropolitan area, 126 cases of battered women were found over a three month period.
De Bruyn & Wulf (1985) also quote a report issued by People Opposing Women Abuse, in which 160 women were interviewed in the first half of 1984. Of these cases, 80% involved wife abuse only, while 20% of the cases involved the abuse of women and their children.

More recently, national figures released by the Co-ordinated Action For Battered Women, stated that one out of six women is regularly battered by her male partner; four women a week are forced to flee their homes because their lives are endangered and approximately 70% of violence committed nationally is committed in the homes (Mogwe, 1994).

In recent years growing awareness of the nature and magnitude of this problem has sparked numerous efforts to reduce the incidence and severity of battering. Naturally, these efforts and those of others can and must continue if society ever hopes to eradicate or significantly reduce the incidence of battering (Ewing, 1987).

2.5. Incidence of Battered Women Who Kill

The South African studies have been carried out by non-governmental organisations and universities. The lack of statistics from government sectors clearly reflects firstly the lack of adequate laws representing battered women who kill and secondly, the amount of literature available on the incidence of battered women who kill in South Africa.
As such there are no statistics available on the number of battered women who kill. The only available statistics on this topic are from the USA, which will be mentioned here to highlight the incidence of battered women who kill. These statistics originate from published documents and cases in the legal system.

O'Donovan (1991) believes that the purpose of looking into statistical evidence is to paint the background, which colours the conceptions of violence and fear. Men are the majority of killers and the killed; therefore killing tends to be a male act (Smith in O'Donovan, 1991). In comparison, many authors note that women rarely kill, although women do fear male violence (O'Donovan, 1991; Ewing, 1987; 1990; Internet, 1996).

In 1977, a study at the Women's Correctional Centre in Chicago revealed that 40% of the women serving time there for murder of manslaughter have killed husbands or lovers who have repeatedly beaten them (Lindsey, in Martin, 1987).

Studies investigating the motives of women who killed cohabiting partners suggest that between 50% and 85% of homicides committed by women are purported to be in self-defence (Ewing, 1987; Walker, 1984; Wolfgang, in Kasian, Spanos, Terrrance & Peebles, 1993). Currently there are 2000 battered women in the USA who are serving prison time for defending their lives against batterers (Kabat on Internet, 1996).

A study conducted in Georgia of 226 (96%) of the 235 female inmates, currently serving for homicide, revealed the presence of domestic violence in more than half
of the cases when the women had killed their significant other. Of these murders, 102, were classified as domestic killings; 46 (almost half) claim that their partners beat them regularly, while 38 out of these 46 have repeatedly reported domestic violence (Haley, 1992 & O'Shea, 1993 on Internet, 1996).

These figures illustrate the high incidence of women who are in prison for killing their batterers. This implies that battered women who have killed and found themselves in prison have been labelled by the criminal justice system and the prison system as murderers, i.e. perpetrators of violence. This form of identification becomes problematic, because the histories of the battered women and the fact that they were victims at the time of killing is denied, ignored or overlooked by the systems. Such a process of identification seriously needs to be addressed.

The scarcity of literature and research also contributes to the problem of mislabelling battered women who kill. This research study aims to provide a rich source of information, which could begin a process of exploring and understanding the dynamics around battered women who kill. This information could also contribute to the further development of treatment programs by clinicians engaged in this type of work, particularly in the prison setting.

In the next chapter the social constructionist perspective, as epistemological basis of this study, is discussed.
CHAPTER 3

EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Introduction

In systemic thinking in recent years, a shift has been indicated from the traditional modernist perspective to a postmodern paradigm. In this chapter a brief discussion around this paradigm shift is included to introduce the idea of postmodernity. Theories which constitute the postmodern perspective, namely second order cybernetics, constructivism and social constructionism, are mentioned. Particular attention is paid to the use of narratives in social construction theory, which provides the theoretical basis for this study. The social construction of self and the social construction of identity through narratives is also discussed.

3.1. From Modernism to Postmodernism

Modernism was thought to have arisen as far back as the Renaissance, developed in the Age of Enlightenment, and have blossomed during the French Revolution (Kvale, 1990). In Western culture, modernism has been closely linked to the process of mechanisation with advances in science and technology (Gergen, 1990).
Briefly, modernism assumes the following:

1. that individuals are inherently rational beings (McNamee, 1992; Kvale, 1990).
   
   This assumption encompasses a dichotomy between society and the unique person. There is a belief in a world that exists and is objectively knowable, which stands apart from the individual.

2. that truth is attainable through (empirical) method,
   
   Knowledge about the world which exists is derived through objective scientific research using empirical methods, in particular, using controlled experiments (Gergen, 1990). Underlying this premise is that an absolute truth and an absolute reality can be objectively described and verified through empirical methods. The results of such methodology are impersonal and prevent the entry of ideology and subjective values into the description and explanation of the existence of the world (Gergen, 1990).

3. that the aim is always to discover universal properties or truths,
   
   Theories that develop through results of empirical methods, can be generalised. Subsequently general laws and principles are constructed to govern the linear, cause-effect relationship (Goolishian and Anderson, 1987).

4. Research as progressive
   
   The desire for correct and accurate descriptions of the existence of a knowable world and its related subject matter emphasises progress, outcome and goals. False beliefs are therefore abandoned, and instead, value-neutral
reliable truths are established about the existence of an objective world (Gergen, 1990). Scientific research becomes a central tool in the modernist perspective (McNamee, 1992; Kvale, 1990; Shotter, 1990). The scientist becomes a passive recipient or observer of events (Goolishian & Anderson, 1987).

Language in the modernist perspective is used primarily to represent the reality out there (Shotter, 1990). According to Shotter this reality exists absolutely and apart from the individual.

Modernist psychology, with its application of the above premises becomes committed to the notion of obtaining truth through the application of the right methods to study human behaviour (Hamilton, 1995). Similarly, something’s existence is deemed to be proven when it is shown to be measurable and observable. By using empirical methods, fundamental truths about human behaviour can be derived. It is argued that knowledge that is generated would allow scientists to make accurate predictions about cause-effect relationships, in order to gain control over future patterns of human behaviour (Gergen & Kvale, 1992). Furthermore, modernist psychology generalises across race, ethnic groups and culture, thereby ignoring historical and social contexts.

In response to the development and growth of larger and more complex social structures containing people of different cultural traditions, and with advances in technological capabilities, came the rise of postmodernism in the late 1970's and early 1980's (McNamee, 1992). According to Kvale (1990), it is debatable whether
postmodernism involves a complete break with reality, or merely a continuation of modernity.

Postmodernism challenges all existing ideas of a single truth and an absolute reality. According to Gergen (1990) postmodernism focuses on the relativism of perspectives in which one perspective is viewed as a reflection of another perspective. These perspectives themselves are without justification, except by recourse to other perspectives. Perspectives are therefore seen as byproducts of social interchange. They are built into systems of communication and relationship (Hamilton, 1995).

A central tenet of postmodernism is the focus on language. People use language to interact with one another and to construct their worlds (McNamee, 1992; Gergen, 1990; Shotter, 1990; Kvale, 1990). The focus on language can be traced to arguments of deconstruction, which suggests that words can only be shown to refer to other words and can never be conclusively linked to absolute reality beyond language.

Knowledge, another important feature of postmodernism, is socially constructed through language. The process of creating knowledge becomes a two-way interaction in which the researcher and the researched take part. This interaction implies an active participation of the researcher, in contrast to the scientist who remains outside, or distant from the process of creating knowledge. Consequently, the postmodernist perspective cannot view knowledge as a representation of an external reality, but as a social construction of a reality.
Postmodernism views empirical methods as misleading justification devices. Instead the local contexts of the researcher are taken into account, which place him/her as part of the process of exploring. In the postmodern paradigm the individual is de-centralised. The individual is faced with a need to generate meaning about his/her own experience but is simultaneously confronted with a multiplicity of possible meanings, none of which can be regarded as inherently supreme (Hamilton, 1995).

Postmodern psychology examines how processes of interaction between people occur as they construct their worlds (McNamee, 1992). There is an interest in the social settings in which individuals find themselves in. Language is used as a way of co-ordinating social relationships and actions between individuals within their social contexts or settings.

3.2. First Order vs Second Order Cybernetics

The systemic paradigm shifts from understanding objects to events and patterns. This paradigm focuses on the processes which occur, and the interrelationship between events, people and other elements in the system. Patterns are a consequence of the dynamic interrelation of biological and human systems.

Cybernetics is used as a theory of how communication works. It implies a self-correcting system emphasising feedback, and focuses on the relevant patterns and form that contribute to understanding the organisation of events (Keeney &
Sprenkle, 1982). According to Keeney (1983) cybernetics of cybernetics emphasises the observer's inclusion and participation in the system.

Sluzki (1985) explains the development of the field of cybernetics, which distinguishes between first and second order cybernetics. First order cybernetics postulates a linear direction of communication within an observed system. In other words the system under observation is detached from the observer (Sluzki, 1985). Second order cybernetics is of a higher order which is more involved with a circular feedback system. The observer is within an observed system and can therefore only be subjective, due to involvement and influence of the system. Sluzki, also distinguishes between a first and second wave in first order cybernetics. The first wave and second wave is also known as the negative and positive feedback loops of the system, respectively. The first wave or negative feedback loop focuses on the way in which the functioning of a system is maintained within acceptable limits by minimising the effects of deviation from usual behaviours. The positive feedback loop or the second wave is focused on how systems function to change their organisations by maximising the effects of deviation from usual behaviour.

In second order cybernetics a new system is formed because therapists join their clients in "constructing a shared reality through the epistemological distinctions they establish" (Keeney, 1983, p. 21). In this consensual domain a new system of experience is constructed. Second order cybernetics is also known as cybernetics of cybernetics. In second order cybernetics, there is a greater emphasis on the responsibility of the observer and the importance of ethical considerations:
"Cybernetics of cybernetics....provides us with a view of self-reference and an ethical consideration for how we participate in the construction and maintenance of our experiential universe"

(Keeney, 1983, p. 82).

Both first and second order cybernetics have been applied to family therapy and to working with dysfunctional patterns of behaviour in the family and other systemic contexts.

Important distinctions in applying the theories of first order or second order cybernetics to psychotherapy are shown in Table 3.1. This table was originally developed by Hamilton (1995), but has subsequently been modified by the researcher.

Golann (1988) quotes Hoffman as suggesting that psychotherapy which is based on second order cybernetics will have a number of defining characteristics: An observing system stance which includes the context of the therapist; a collaborative (rather than hierarchical) relationship, with goals being set for changes in the context rather than specified structural or behavioural changes; and a circular understanding of the problem.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First order Cybernetics</th>
<th>Second order Cybernetics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Living systems are morphostatic i.e. systems are essentially stable and in a state of equilibrium (Hamilton, 1995).</td>
<td>Living systems are morphogenic i.e. systems are involved in constant evolutionary change to levels of higher complexity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapist takes an elevated and distant position.</td>
<td>Therapist takes a more equitable position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapist is the expert who unilaterally changes the family system (Haley in Hamilton, 1995).</td>
<td>Therapist less likely to determine specific goals and outcomes because of the circular pattern of causality (Hoffman in Hamilton, 1995).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapist uses power to change the system.</td>
<td>Power is a punctuation which is disruptive and disrespectful to the ecology of systems (Bateson in Pare, 1995).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on technique and instrumentality</td>
<td>Emphasis on co-constructed meanings, interpretations and promote dialogue.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 3.1.: DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FIRST ORDER AND SECOND ORDER CYBERNETICS**

According to Pare (1985), the circular processes, recursive feedback and connection between levels in second order cybernetics, focus on how the world is rather than how we come to know the world. Pare suggests that second order cybernetics construes systems as entities observed in the world. The constructivist approach focuses on meaning rather than observable behaviours, as in second order cybernetics.
3.3. Social Constructionism

3.3.1. Comparison of Constructivism and Social Constructionism

The terms constructivism and social constructionism both place emphasis on the observing systems responsibility for the construction of realities and actions, they are not synonymous (Pare, 1995). Although the terms are often used interchangeably, there are clear distinctions.

Golann (1988) suggests that because of the recursive connection between the observer and the observing system, emphasis is moved away from the representational descriptions of behaviour towards the interpreted realities, which is brought forth by the observing system.

Constructivism is primarily individualistic, focusing on sense data and information processing and constructing the person as an informationally closed system. Social constructionism focuses on the person in community, as well as communally derived meanings through language (Gergen, 1990; Pare, 1995; Hoffman, 1990).

Both approaches abandon the idea of an objectively knowable truth. From the constructivist perspective the observer is the reference point of knowledge, rather than knowledge being 'out there' beyond the observer. From the social constructionist viewpoint, knowledge is a socially negotiated construction and is situated between the social arena of interpreting subjects, rather than in the observed system or the observer (Hoffman, 1990; Pare, 1995). Social
constructionism places far more emphasis on the social interpretation and the intersubjective influence on language and culture and much less on the operations of the nervous system (Pare, 1995; Hoffman, 1990).

According to Hoffman (1990) constructivism posits that all interaction takes place between what Maturana (in Hoffman, 1990) called "informationally closed" nervous systems that can only influence each other in indirect ways. On the other hand, social constructionism encompasses an evolving set of meanings that emerge from ongoing interactions between people. These meanings do not exist inside or only in the 'mind' of the individual, but are a part of the general flow of constantly changing narratives (Hoffman, 1990; Pare, 1995). Concepts, states Hoffman, are narratives socially derived from processes of interaction rather than fixed entities originating from biological based models of cognition.

Pare (1995) states that while social constructionism does not explicitly refute the constructivist view, it arguably subsumes it. In other words, while persons are seen as processing data in accordance with their unique structures (constructivism), they relate with others, their interpretations of the texts or stories of their experiences.

Social constructionism is another theory in the postmodern era which arises from a communal basis of knowledge and meanings which are created through language and culture.
3.3.2. The Social Constructionist Approach

Social construction in psychology can be seen as having evolved from thinking within second order cybernetics and constructivism. The social constructionist orientation is "principally concerned with elucidating the processes by which people come to describe, explain or otherwise account for the world in which they live" (Gergen, 1985b, p. 3).

Social constructionism is an attempt to approach knowledge from the perspective of the social processes through which it is created. Knowledge is negotiated meaning within the context of linguistic interaction (Goolishian & Anderson, 1987). Knowledge emerges as ongoing self-referential constructions, in which beliefs held by individuals construct realities and realities, are maintained through social interaction which in turn confirm the beliefs, which are socially derived (Hoffman, 1992). Knowledge is thus not viewed as the objective reflection of an external reality, but as a social construction of people. Keeney (1983, p. 108) observes that "one's knowing is recycled in the (re)construction of a world".

Social constructionism utilises a number of assumptions. Firstly, that knowledge of the world evolves from the use of concepts rather than through empirical methods. The concepts which are utilised to understand the world are, "social artefacts which are products of historically situated interchanges among people" (Gergen, 1985b, p. 5). In defining knowledge as self-referential, the ability to rely on objectivity, or on one description and an accurate language or on a universal conceptual framework is challenged (Ceruti in Fruggeri, 1992; Gergen, 1985b). According to Gergen
(1985b) an understanding of the world over time is not dependent on empirical validation, but on social processes. He suggests that descriptions and explanations of the world can be seen as constituting a form of social action.

An important assumption in social constructionist thinking is the focus on language as a form of social interaction. Language is the primary vehicle for the transmission of meanings and understandings (Goolishian & Anderson, 1987). The idea is suggested by Wittgenstein (in Gergen & Kaye, 1992) who argues that words obtain their meaning not through their capacity to reflect on an objective reality but through their use in social interchange. Meanings evolve through individuals in conversation with one another. Human activity occurs in understanding that is created through social construction and dialogue (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992).

Hoffman (1992) believes that concepts, experiences and memories develop in social interaction and evolve in the 'common space' or 'common dance' between people. She asserts further that an individual's sense of personal identity can only develop through ongoing dialogue with significant others.

The role of the therapist as being the expert in the psychotherapeutic interaction is challenged by a number of social constructionist writers (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; Hoffman, 1992; White, 1995). The therapist adopts a position of 'not-knowing'. The therapist is always informed by the client and in a position of ignorance in which genuine curiosity is sustained. This role requires that the therapist does not allow his or her present understanding in therapy to be overshadowed by past ideas and experiences.
The therapist is encouraged to attend to local, unique meanings, rather than becoming committed to broadly agreed upon cultural ideas. The social constructionist therapist will encourage a plurality of explanations or meanings in therapy rather than a definition of a single 'truth' (Hamilton, 1995).

Anderson and Goolishian (1992) are two practitioners who have been working from the social constructionist paradigm. Their work is based on the following premises:

1. Human systems are language-generating and meaning-generating systems. Communication and discourse define the organisation of social structures. It is the linguistic system that defines the sociocultural system.

2. The therapeutic system itself becomes a linguistic system.

3. Meaning and understanding are socially constructed by the conversations between two or more people.

4. A therapeutic system can be seen as organised through dialogue in relation to a problem and directed to the dis-solving of the problem.

5. Therapy can be seen as a conversation aimed at a mutual exploration with the constant evolution of new meanings.
6. The therapist becomes a conversational artist - "an architect of the dialogical process" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992, p. 27). The therapist's main role as a conversational artist is the asking of conversational and therapeutic questions. A "not-knowing" position is adopted by inquiring rather than asking questions that are informed by a specific method and requires specific answers.

In their later writing Anderson and Goolishian (1992) add that problems which are presented in therapy are unique to the narrative contexts in which they obtain their meaning. Human beings are seen as living in and by means of the narrative identities that develop in conversation.

Anderson and Goolishian's work places much emphasis on language, meaning and dialogue with a de-emphasis on fixed meanings or closure.

The social construction of knowledge emphasises language as a social phenomenon, through which meaning is created.

3.3.3. Language and meaning

In recent decades researchers have concluded that scientific knowledge in the social sciences can never be objective and value-free (McNamee & Gergen, 1992). Instead the historical and social contexts in which an individual finds herself is considered important. Along with an interest in social processes which underpin the development of knowledge, has gone a realisation that formulations about the world are guided by and limited to the systems of language in which one lives. What can
be said about experienced reality - including oneself and others - is an "outgrowth of shared conventions of discourse" (McNamee & Gergen, 1992, p. 4).

According to Goolishian and Anderson (1987) meaning is generated in human interaction, through the medium of language, within a particular cultural context, at any given moment. Meaning, therefore is interactional, intersubjective, always changing, and exists only in language. Humans become meaning generating systems.

Kvale (1990) notes that human language is rooted in a specific culture as dialects, and is therefore not universal nor individual. An individual is initially dependent on the linguistic system, used through her culture to conceptualise her own behaviour. This focus of language implies a decentralising of the individual. As Kvale (1990) highlights, it is no longer the self of the individual using language to express itself, but rather language speaking through the person. The individual self thus becomes a medium for the culture and its language.

Pare (1995) notes that language originates from the cultural milieu in which it is embedded. Hence language cannot be isolated from culture. Consequently, cultures do not create their realities through language in a neutral way. Rather the language distinctions that cultures make, are inherently ideological and value-laden.

From the social constructionist perspective, the focus is not on the individual but on the social interaction in which language is generated. Reality is socially constructed through language. Meaning and reality are intersubjective evolving from dialogue.
between oneself and others. If the dialogue evolved is taken out of its context, a totally different meaning is acquired (Goolishian & Anderson, 1987; Gergen & Gergen in Josselson & Lieblich, 1993).

Anderson and Goolishian (1992, p. 26) also move towards a "hermeneutic and interpretive position" regarding therapy. This view emphasises meanings as co-created and experienced by individuals in dialogue with one another. Human action takes place in a reality of understanding within the process of social construction and dialogue. From this point of view "people live, and understand their living though socially constructed narrative realities that give meaning and organisation to their experience" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992, p. 26). Thus narratives become an important aspect of the social constructionist perspective.

3.4. Defining Narrative

Epston, White and Murray (1992) suggest that a narrative can be simply defined as

"a unit of meaning that provides a frame for lived experience. It is through these stories that lived experience is interpreted. We enter into stories; we are entered into stories by others; and we live our lives through these stories" (p. 27).

The social world seems to be composed of a network of stories of narratives. Stories are usually context-specific, concrete and testable through ordinary interpersonal communication. In addition, a story is flexible, personal, cultural and contextual in as far as any narrating incorporates aspects of the narrator (Widdershoven in Josselson & Lieblich, 1993; White, 1995; Epston, White & Murray, 1992).
3.4.1. **Narratives in Social Constructionism**

Human beings are actively interpreting the experiences of their lives as they live. In order to understand these experiences a context or frame needs to be provided, in which the attribution of meaning is explicit and made possible. It is stories, that provide this frame and it is the story or self-narrative that determines which aspect of our lived experience gets expressed (White, 1995; Gergen & Gergen in Josselson & Lieblich, 1993; Widdershoven in Josselson & Lieblich, 1993).

People are seen as experiencing problems, and hence seeking therapy, when the narratives they have used to 'story' their experiences dominate their lives and so significant aspects of their experience contradict their narratives (Epston & White, 1992).

White (1995) distinguishes between dominant and alternative stories, where the dominant story is the one that is repeatedly told and is constituting a person's life, while the alternative story forms part of the unspoken and does not shape the person's life to the same extent. People get stuck in their stories or narratives, which then become the dominant stories of their lives. Dominant narratives are units of power and meaning. Their power lies in the fact that they go largely unexamined and are taken for granted because they are dominant.

White and Epston in Bograd (1992) explain that the language of our stories is not neutral, and relies on a host of culturally available discourses. Thus a narrative is
not merely a transmission of information, but in the very act of telling a story the position of the storyteller and of the listener is constituted, with their place in the social order. The creation of the story is maintained through a social bond (Widdershoven in Josselson & Lieblich, 1993). Widdershoven refers to narratives in the postmodern sense as dynamic and changing and themselves products of psychological, social, and historical influence.

According to Gergen & Gergen (in Josselson & Lieblich, 1993) narratives are gendered, and are furnished with different structures of meaning by men as opposed to women, and are influenced by the cultural patterns that differentiate between genders. For instance, women's stories are multiple, intermingled, complex and recursive, whereas men's stories concentrate on pursuit of goals, which are often career oriented.

Our choice of narratives is only limited by the boundaries that are constructed through economic, political social and cultural constraints which exist within the prescribed contexts. According to Epston, White and Murray (1992), stories construct beginnings and endings, which they impose upon the flow of experience. Hoffman (1992) states that there are no prior hidden meanings in stories. These are only stories we tell ourselves and others.

The development of a narrative is something we do in conjunction with others. It is the process of defining who we are in our interaction with other people's perceived understanding of us (Lax, 1992). According to Lax, the stories people develop about themselves and their lives become the basis for identity.
Epston and White (1992) have been at the forefront of the development of postmodern narrative psychotherapy. They believe that human beings need to 'story' their experience in order to make sense of their lives. The success of such storying will provide individuals with a sense of continuity and meaning, and will be utilised in making sense of new experience.

Epston and White (1992) believe that a narrative psychotherapy would have a number of fundamental features.

- An individual's lived experience would be privileged over the dominant narratives of the culture. The client is encouraged to make links between lived experience through the dimension of time, in order to develop a more coherent narrative.

- Epston and White favour the development of multiple perspectives instead of a single perspective on a problem situation. The use of a variety of different types of language such as poetic, ordinary, picturesque, is encouraged in describing experience and constructing new stories.

- Individuals are encouraged to assume a reflexive posture and to appreciate their own involvement in interpreting their own behaviour. White and Epston also emphasise that individuals would be assisted to develop a sense of authorship and reauthorship of their lives and relationships. Thus stories are seen as being co-
produced, and the individual in therapy is encouraged to become the 'privileged author' of his or her own life.

White (1995) suggested that a narrative psychotherapy should be deconstructive in as far as it seeks to subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices. Clients are encouraged to examine the private stories and cultural knowledges according to which they live their lives, with a view to challenging cultural narratives that are oppressive. They are also encouraged to develop or alternatives that will enable them to live their lives in more satisfying ways (Epston, White & Murray, 1992).

3.4.2. **Self as Narrative**

While there is no universally accepted definition or theory of the self, psychologists working with the concept of the self generally, refer to this construct "as a constellation of attributes and processes both physical and psychological which distinguish an individual from others and the environment and give meaning and value to individual's existence" (Ewing, 1987, p. 63).

Thus, from the modernist perspective the self is conceived of as a reified entity (Lax, 1992) which is constituted by rationality and cognition. The self is seen as stable over time, rational, well-ordered and accessible (Gergen 1992c). Mechanistic metaphors are used to describe the self and its relation to others. The self is hence seen as an 'intrapsychic entity' (Lax, 1992, p. 69), both inside the individual and having a substantial existence.
According to Lax (1992) narrating a story about one's life not only generates a description about oneself, but is fundamental to the emergence and experienced reality of the self. This idea challenges any notion of a fixed or unified self, since self-narratives told will change over time.

Michael (1996) views the self narrative as possessing no inherent capabilities to direct behaviour, but rather as being a construction that is continuously alternating as interaction with others takes place. The self-narrative is seen as being a linguistic artefact constructed and reconstructed by people in relationships and employed in relationships to enhance or retard various patterns of behaviour.

According to Gergen (1971) the self is seen as an active agent in the process of generating knowledge about the individual. The self is dynamic and continuously evolving and changing as narratives unfold over time.

Gergen (1992c) takes a more radical view of the construction of the self through narrative. He assumes that linguistic discourse is fundamentally part of a social process. This means that the individual's view of self will change as the pragmatic constraints of social exchange alter. An unspecified range of constructions of self are available in any given context; however there is often competition in such social contexts to determine which meanings are to prevail.

Gergen (1992c) asserts that the self is rooted in a social context and is subject to continuous change, in accordance with the constraints and opportunities that prevail in different settings and in different time periods. This concept of self appears to be
particularly useful in psychotherapy, in as far as it allows for the elicitation of new ideas of individual identity, but also encourages the client to understand the social constraints which limit his or her identity.

The articulation of the implicit unity of life in an explicit story is itself part of the process in which identity is created. In telling stories we change the meaning of our experiences over time (Widdershoven in Josselson & Lieblich, 1993; White & Epston, 1992). The expression of our experience through these stories shapes our lives and our relationship. Life and story are internally related. Life informs and is informed by stories. Our lives are therefore multi-storied as opposed to single-storied (White, 1995; White & Epston, 1992; Widdershoven in Josselson & Lieblich, 1993).

3.4.3. Social Construction of Identity

The identity of a person is constructed as a result of an interaction between personal experiences and personal stories, entwined with stories of others in ordinary life.

According to Gergen (1971) individuals are cast into specific roles or identities by the people around them, through the stories individuals tell about their experiences. People have varying images or perceptions of the individual and depending on these images or perceptions, the people treat the individual in a particular kind of way.
The process of developing a story about one's life becomes the basis of all identity and thus challenges any underlying concept of a unified or stable self (Lax 1992). The narratives of the women in this study exemplify the socially constructed identities that have been co-created by the construction and perpetuation of abuse in different contexts.

In general, Lax (1992) states that the "narrative or sense of self arises not only through discourse with others, but is our discourse with others" (p. 71). There is no hidden self to be interpreted. The self is thus not revealed but constituted in the ongoing dialogue with self and others. Narratives therefore, do not only shape people's lives, but transform narratives of self when performing these narratives (White, 1995; Epston, White & Murray, 1992).

Conclusion

This chapter considered the development of postmodernism by distinguishing it from the modernist paradigm. The development of systemic thinking from first-order cybernetics to social constructionism has been sketched. The application of narratives in social constructionism has been shown to generate intriguing possibilities for the clients rediscovery of a sense of agency and coherence. The nature of the self in a narrative context was discussed. The social construction of identity through narratives was briefly outlined.
In the following chapter, the contextually constructed reactions to battering will be described. In particular, the chapter focuses on individual reactions and societal reactions to battering which contribute to the construction of the battered woman's sense of self and identity.
CHAPTER 4
CONTEXTUALISED REACTIONS TO BATTERING

Introduction

The construction of a battered women's sense of self and identity through narratives is rooted in a social context and is subjected to continuous change, according to the constraints and opportunities prevailing in different contexts along different periods. This chapter therefore illustrates how interpersonal reactions and societal reactions construct a phenomenon such as battering in different ways. Interpersonal reactions to battering are constructed without reference to the societal context and include intra-individual reactions. However, battering is also embodied and realised in specific social contexts or patterns of social contexts. The latter part of this chapter describes how myths around battering and the patriarchal system contribute to societal reactions to battering. The chapter ends with an exploration of the processes within the criminal justice system which perpetuate societal reactions to battering.

4.1. Constructions of Interpersonal Reactions to Battering

Extensive literature is available regarding the psychological effects of battering as experienced by a woman. For battered women in general, the psychological or emotional impact of battering is more debilitating than the physical sequelae (Aguiler & Nightingale, 1994; Butchart et al., 1994; Heise, Raikes, Watts & Zwi, 1994); since
the physical scars may heal but the psychological effects may lead to a woman feeling that her life is meaningless and not worth living.

Ferraro and Johnson (in Follingstad, Neckerman, Vormbock, 1998) note that reactions to emotional abuse may not be consistent over a sample of battered women, due to the varying stages of the battering relationship that they may be encountering. They therefore suggest that further research would be useful in determining the progressive changes in emotional states due to continuing abuse.

Zetlin (1989) states that the experience of battering creates both physical and psychological symptoms and is not created by a battered woman's pathology. Zetlin instead, notes that the symptoms are reactive and caused by observable events.

This section focuses on specific psychological effects experienced by women in this study.

HELPNESSNESS

The psychological impact on the female victim begins with predominant feelings of helplessness and guilt and their corollary lowered self-esteem (Hoff, 1990; Aguiler & Nightingale, 1994; Mogwe, 1994; Butchart et al, 1994). The perception of helplessness becomes reality, regardless of whether the perception is accurate.
The repeated battering extinguishes the women's motivation to respond voluntarily (Bascelli, 1985) leading to a pattern of learned helplessness, characterised by passive and submissive behaviour and a narrowing of a cognitive capacity to exercise choice (Bascelli, 1985; Cook & Frantz-Cook, 1984; Mahoney, 1991; Mogwe, 1994; Walus-Wigle & Meloy, 1988).

"...he always overpowers me so there is nothing I can do...".

Elizabeth

"...it's many times I go to the police station and report this case and the police doesn't help me...".

"I just go to prison; there's nothing I can do".

Thelma

"...sometimes I feel like crying, screaming, but it's no use".

Catharine

This sense of helplessness with an increased fear of the batterer results in a state of dependency (Hilberman & Munson, 1977; Follingstad et al., 1988; Butchart et al., 1994; Bascelli, 1985; Mogwe, 1994; Star, Clark, Goetz, & O'Malia, 1979).

ISOLATION AND DEPENDENCY

The jealousy and possessiveness of the batterer frequently forms the pretext for which these men forbid their partners to maintain former relationships and subsequently prevent them from forming new ones (Mogwe, 1994). Mogwe asserts that the battered women become increasingly isolated and this in turn forces them to be dependent on their batterer, resulting in a deprivation of social support.
"Sometimes I haven't got enough money for the whole month...I never go anywhere to work"

"I told the people (teachers), I don't work and my husband doesn't give me money".

"I feel very lonely, very lonely".

"My support was only my mum, who protect(ed) me, and since she's dead, I haven't got support...",

Thelma

"...At that time I didn't have anybody next to me, maybe who can tell me that....".

Elizabeth

FEAR

Star and her colleagues (1979) suggest that women in battering relationships experience fear at two levels. On an interpersonal level, men react with threats to retaliate, if the women initiate police action or plans to leave.

"I used to run away from him... to my father's house....but because he was telling me that his got powers, he used to come and fetch me and I would go back to him...........he even said: That if you can runaway again, I'll kill you this time".

Elizabeth

According to Ewing (1987) research reports point out that as many as 83% of battered women in general, as well as judicial and media accounts of battered women who kill in particular, are replete with instances in which a batterer has threatened to come after a battered women, find her and seriously injure, maim or kill her if she ever leaves him.
On an intrapersonal level, the battered women fear the prospect of their own inability to survive independently from their batterer (Star et al., 1979).

"[Y]ou are afraid of him, ...because...you are thinking I wonder when he comes back, what is he going to do, .....I was nervous everytime when I'm thinking about him". 

Elizabeth

4.1.1. Other Interpersonal Reactions to Battering

".....When I was in prison, I don't know if the policeman or my husband's family they took my furniture in my house".

"When I'm on bail, I just stay with my children, alone in the house, until my mother died". 

Catharine

"...I was too secretive about my things, but some of the members they used to tell the prisoners about my case....".

"...even if I can tell the next person that my intention was this, they won't listen to me...". 

Elizabeth

"But at the end I never win the case". 

Thelma

Different types and forms of losses were experienced by the women in this study. These losses together with a lack of support, a pervasive feeling of helplessness and powerlessness and the fact that the battered woman is physically weaker than her batterer results in the battered woman choosing a powerful means of retaliating and protecting herself. Fearing for her life, the battered woman kills her batterer, so that she may be free from her abused environment, in which she remains trapped (Bascelli, 1985).

Other forms of psychological abuse that are frequently perpetrated include humiliation, degradation of the women, forced isolation from others (Zetlin, 1989;
denial of support, a lack of self-confidence (Star et al., 1979); pervasive feelings of anxiety relating to post-traumatic stress, which may exist because of chronic patterns of abuse (Follingstad et al, 1988; 1991; Kaser-Boyd & Forrest, 1993); depression and suicidal tendencies (Mogwe, 1994; Hoff, 1990). Notman and Nadelson (in Follingstad et al., 1991), note that battered women rarely express their anger directly, although their stories elicit anguish and outrage in the listener. Other traits of psychological abuse include self-blame; feelings of guilt, and shame (Walker in Serra, 1993; Zetlin, 1989), and inferiority (Cannon & Sparks, 1989).

"I was telling myself, that maybe I'm not a woman enough for him...".

"I was regretful and it was painful .....I must pay penalty".

Elizabeth

"I used to love my husband so much, and I didn't even want to lose him".

"Sometimes they (prisoners) were swearing me, passing bad remarks at me".

Elizabeth

"I feel very very bad in myself....I just think about my children...".

"After I killed my husband, I was very sad, and then I ask myself why I killed my husband....".

Thelma

"My children are suffering outside, because they need family support, and their father is dead now".

"Sometimes when I look (at) my youngest son, because he looks like his father, I start crying. I feel pain in my heart".

Catharine

According to Browne (1987), women's identities are more generally defined in relation to their intimates - be they partner, children, other family or friends while
men's identities are apt to revolve around achievements and activities in the outside world.

Women take responsibility for the maintenance of relationships because they fear being separated and isolated, and so internalise the blame when relationships fail. Women therefore tend to emphasise relatedness and continuity while men on the other hand, stress their independence and autonomy and fight to protect it (Browne, 1987).

In some cases the network of connections in which an adult woman is invested becomes so important to her sense of self-worth that as Miller in Browne (1987) suggests, "the threat of disruption ....is perceived not just as a loss of relationship but as something closer to a total loss of self" (p. 78).

In summary, women battering fractures relationships, by destroying the core sense of a women's relational self, consequently diminishing the possibility of future intimacy and connections in any relationships (Grant, 1989).

4.2. Constructions of Societal Reactions to Battering

Human violence, as opposed to natural violence is an age old phenomenon, being rooted in its earliest myth and history. Being a purely human phenomenon, its existence is deeply enmeshed in human interaction on both an interpersonal and intergroup level, (McKendrick & Hoffman, 1990) and has become an accepted part of every social institution (Dobash & Dobash, 1977).
The struggle for battered women incorporates the struggle against the ideologies that support women battering and the oppression of women in marriages (Dobash & Dobash, 1977). While in recent years there have been encouraging signs of increased social concern about battering, destructive myths and misconceptions about battering throughout the greater portion of our society still exist and persist (Okun, 1986).

4.2.1. **Myths about and/or Contributing to Battering**

4.2.1.1. **The Home is Private**

The family is considered to be the most private unit of society, yet according to Avni (1991), there is almost no privacy in the home. Social norms conform to this concept and dictate that one's home is one's castle and society is not to interfere with what happens within it.

Avni (1991) continues to explain that the home as a private place, aggravates the plight of battered women for two reasons. The battered women refrain from asking for outside support or intervention, because of associated feelings of shame and secrecy which come to dominate the lives of battered women. Secondly, in their acceptance of social ideologies, people refrain from intervening in such incidents even when approached. In the home a man holds dominion over all within, and this is recognised, encouraged and sanctioned by all other social institutions. Hence,
only blatant or extreme abuses of power and authority are questioned and brought into the public arena (Dobash & Dobash, 1977).

Gradually battered women are perceived as double victims, as they experience the reactions of social institutions such as the police and the law, which provide insufficient and ineffective protection and support for the women.

The Gender and Development Editorial (1995), highlights the fact that marriage is often assumed to be a relationship of mutual respect and co-operation, but this is patently untrue. The home is a dynamic entity rather than a static unit, which is continuously being modified by individuals to suit their changing life circumstances. In a home where unequal power relations are the norm, individuals are 'rewarded' with rights, in return for conformity to existing power relations.

In summary, shutting out the public gaze from violence in the home shuts out or cuts women off from potential help. Furthermore, the removal of the phenomenon of battering from the public eye has led to a widespread ignorance of the epidemic's prevalence and the intermittent lethality of women abuse (Okun, 1986).

4.2.1.2. Women are Masochistic

"We see husband's aggressive behaviour as filling masochistic needs of the wife and necessary for the wife's (and the couple's) equilibrium". (Snell in Krause-Prozan, 1993, p. 210).
Until recently - as literature around the phenomenon of abuse increases and a greater understanding is achieved -, the public remained tolerant of women battering. People tended to view battered women as deserving of their beatings and or as masochistically seeking a beating for unconscious arousals (Okun, 1986; Follingstad et al., 1988). This was the general explanation given for why women did not leave their battering relationships. However current literature has re-evaluated and rejected such views on women battering, and reasons for not leaving, have been found to be varied, complex and multiple (Follingstad et al., 1988).

4.2.1.3. Women Deserve to be Beaten

For many decades people have come to believe that it is acceptable to "discipline" a woman if she nags, disagrees or misbehaves with her partner, and therefore deserves the violence directed at her. This is a myth that is deeply entrenched in patriarchal societies. However, a slow transformation is being observed as the full seriousness of the situation has come into the limelight (Gaylord, 1978), and as women become educated, more independent and outspoken about their partners' abusive behaviour. Furthermore, it is against the law to beat anyone. The man should be solely responsible for beating his wife (Gauteng Regional Network Police Training Manual, 1996).

4.2.1.4. Men Abuse Women when they are Stressed

Stress triggers violent behaviour, but is not the cause of violence. When men are stressed at work, one does not find them hitting their work colleagues or friends.
Thus, men are capable of controlling their violent behaviour and choosing when to be violent (Gauteng Regional Network Police Training Manual, 1996), especially since most violent behaviour occurs in the home and not in public places.

4.2.1.5. Battery is Just a Few Slaps

The battering experiences of the women in this study exemplify the untruthfulness of this myth. This myth also stops the people from taking battery seriously (Gauteng Regional Network Police Training Manual, 1996). Generally, battered women receive severe physical injuries that require hospitalisation. Loring and Smith (1994) note that between 22% and 35% of battered women are attended to in hospital emergency rooms.

4.2.1.6. Once a Woman is Battered She Will Always Be Battered

This myth blames the woman for the abuse - she chooses abusive partners or is bad and deserves to be abused (Gauteng Regional Network Police Training Manual, 1996). Many women in abusive relationships have left, and in some cases with sufficient support and courage have managed to establish other meaningful relationships.

These myths are created by people in society who observe and experience one side of the phenomenon of battery. For example, if people in society observe violence in the home, they start believing that violence is a private family matter and therefore
do not interfere or intervene. The nature of a society and the values held in society also influence the beliefs that emerge and that are constructed around battery.

4.2.2. Societally Constructed Reactions within the Patriarchal System

The subordination of women has long been supported by the church and other patriarchal religions through a moral order and by the State, through actively propagandising for the authority of husband's legitimising their use of violence against their wives (Martin, 1987; Dobash & Dobash, 1977-78).

Dobash and Dobash (1977) note that the family is one of the most patriarchal institutions that exists in society. For the authors, patriarchy is composed of two elements, namely, its structure and its ideology. The family structure is hierarchical and one in which the man in the family is 'designated' to a position of power, privilege and leadership. The maintenance and continuation of such a hierarchical order is dependent on its acceptance by many. The ideology used to support and justify the respective positions and privileges is complex and based upon ideas of love, respect and the 'naturalness' of the order. The ideology is also a way of rationalising the inequality inherent in the family, and because of the legitimisation of the hierarchical order there is acceptance and compliance rather than rejection and defiance. Thus the hierarchical order is assisted by patriarchal ideology.

The continuation of hierarchical relationships between men and women, demonstrates the persistence of the patriarchal legacy in the family (Dobash & Dobash, 1977-78). Male authority is still, regardless of the so-called liberation of
women, revered and protected by social institutions and reinforced and perpetuated through the socialisation of children. Chinkin (1995) believes that violence against women is not random, accidental or a private matter, but structural. It is both a manifestation of the power imbalance between men and women and a social mechanism which forces women into continuing subordination.

Women in the African culture, for instance are viewed as second-class citizens with no rights. Before marriage black women are under the authority of their fathers or guardians and later of their husband's when married (Henning, 1988). After marriage the women relinquish their freedom of movement and are confined to a local area. They are socialised to succumbing to sexual physical and mental abuse without complaining (Chinkande, 1992). The same author notes that any problems or hardships that occur are meant to be resolved by the extended family because marriage in the African culture involves the two families and the partners only.

Within the context of a given culture, there are norms which guide the behaviour of individuals and of the community as a whole. These norms may be simplified into rights and responsibilities, firstly of individuals to each other and secondly between individual and the community. Cultures are co-operative systems whose function is the survival and perpetuation of the community. (Gender and Development Editorial, 1995).
To sum up, sociologists in Grant (1989) point out that the family does not exist in a vacuum, but is affected by the ideology, attitudes and moral values of the society in which it exists. It is a known fact that South Africans live in a highly volatile and violent as well as militarised society.

4.2.3. Societally Constructed Reactions within the Legal Systems

Mahoney (1991) believes that our lives are lived within particular cultures which both reflect legal structures and affect legal interpretation. In terms of domestic violence, there exists an interactive interrelationship between women's lives, culture and the law. This interrelationship is further explained in as far as cultural assumptions about domestic violence affect substantive law and methods of litigation in ways that in turn affect society's perception of women. Both law and societal perceptions affect women's understanding of their lives, relationships and options in as far as their lives are part of a culture that affects legal interpretations and within which further legal moves are made. Serious harm to women results from the ways in which laws and culture distort society's experience.

Patriarchy, a system of male domination, is manifested in the control of women through culture, class and race domination. Law plays a significant role in supporting and articulating perceived cultural premises which are not always visible. The characteristic of a gender-blind society is embedded in the law, which is the product of our societies. Ultimately, the law, although concerned about the protection of rights, is an articulator of the dominant cultural values and is therefore based upon a particular notion of women (Mogwe, 1994).
The dual role of women in society is best illustrated through battery or domestic violence. On a practical level, the law frequently distinguishes between conduct occurring in public and that which occurs in the privacy of a 'domestic relationship'. Women who are battered by their partners find that they are invisible behind this barrier of privacy. The result effect is a (con)fusion of the public world of criminal law and the private world of civil law (Mahoney, 1991).

In summary, O'Donovan (1991) mentions that the cultural context in which the law evolved is simply one of male authority and female subordination. In a particular legal action, a battered women's individual experience is at least partly explained, but the cultural perceptions impose limitations on the broader social understanding that shapes legal action (Mahoney, 1991).

Conclusion

This chapter has concentrated on the impact of violent reactions on individuals as well as society's contributions to this impact. In particular, the myths in society, the patriarchal system of society and the law and its interrelation to culture, have been discussed to demonstrate societal reactions to battery further.

From this chapter it also emerges that the use of power and control is implicit in constructing reactions to battering, and this is explored in the next chapter.
Processes around power and control are important aspects of the construction and maintenance of abuse or battering. However, little is known and understood about how power and control operate in the daily interactions between women and men in battering relationships (Hoff 1990). This becomes the focus of a section of this chapter. In addition, attempts are made to show that the battering relationship or the relational system is inherently interactive, and violence is embedded in this system of interaction. However, this relational system does not stand alone. It is embedded in an ecology of larger systems. The following sections of this chapter illustrate the way in which the dynamics of power and control are dealt with in these larger systems, examples of which in this study are the criminal justice system and the prison system.

Before I begin the discussion of how processes around power and control manifest in battering relationships and other larger systems, it is important to discuss the systemic framework underlying the processes of power and control.
Dell (1989) highlights a crucial debate between Bateson and Haley around the issue of power. Authors such as Dell (1989), Keeney, (1983), Pare, (1995) cite Bateson as claiming that power is a myth, which is disruptive, harmful and disrespectful to the system, because it is an "error in epistemological thinking" (Dell, 1989, p. 4). Bateson also suggests that power becomes self-validating when we start to believe in it. "Power corrupts most rapidly those who believe in it, and it is they who will want it most" (Bateson, in Keeney, 1983, p. 130).

Bateson continues to emphasise that there is "No such thing as unilateral power. After all, the man 'in power' depends on receiving information, just as much as he 'causes' things to happen" (Keeney, 1983, p. 131). According to Bateson, power may only be used to describe a physical or scientific universe rather than a mental universe (Keeney, 1983).

Haley (in Keeney, 1983, p. 130) agrees with Bateson insofar as to say that when people 'attempt control' over one another, it is not a way of describing two individuals relating, but is putting a 'need' into them as individuals. Haley differs from Bateson when he reiterates that human beings always organise themselves around a hierarchy. Similarly Gergen (1971) notes that one's power is largely determined by one's formal positions within the hierarchy.

Dell (1989) comments that adopting a circular-causal systemic perspective on violence inevitably obscures the existence of lineal power.
Dealing with the notion of power from a systemic perspective has led to strong criticism. The criticism emphasises the circular interaction between the batterer and the battered woman, which implies that both parties are responsible for the violent behaviour occurring in their relationship. Dell in Serra (1993) suggests that it is not clearly understood from the systemic perspective how an individual who wields power over another and an individual who is subjected to power can be held accountable.

A discussion of the systemic view of battering and the nature of battering relationships from a systemic perspective is described below.

5.1.1. **Systemic View of Battering**

According to Giles-Sims (1983) and Goolishian and Anderson (1987), a system is defined when a man and a woman create a relationship that consists of relatively stable set of interacting and recurrent patterns. A system can be defined irrespective of the size (Keeney, 1983). Giles-Sims (1983) stresses that in looking at the patterns of interaction within the system, the focus is shifted from considering the isolated behaviours of individuals to considering the patterns of interaction between individuals. For instance, Straus (in Erchak, 1984, p. 248) "views continuing violence as a systemic product rather than a product of individual behaviour pathology," and serves to regulate closeness and distance, for example, between the battered woman and her batterer (Van der Hoven, 1992).
Many authors who have conducted research in the area of women battering state that battering is a relationship problem. This is further explained by the fact that the victim and the perpetrator co-create a system in which the events leading to and including the violent act, have a unique meaning that can only be understood within the context of the relationship. A repetition of roles ensues in the relationship system, in which each person takes turns in initiating and maintaining the violent behaviour (Buthchart et al., 1994; Kornblit, 1994; Mahoney, 1991; Sexton, 1994). This results in a recursive pattern of interaction between the members of the relational system, through which a sense of the whole system emerges.

5.1.2. The Systemic Nature of Relationships

Authors such as Stulberg (1989), Weitzman and Dreen (1982), Sexton (1994), and Erchak (1984) try to explain Bateson's and later, Keeney's work on the systemic view of battering relationships.

According to Erchak (1984) Bateson's work focuses on relationships rather than on individuals and their isolated behaviours. By understanding the nature and interaction of the individuals in the relationship we may begin to understand the dynamics of power in battering relationships. Keeney (1983) broadly describes the nature of relationships as complementary or symmetrical. Figures 5.1. and 5.2. below summarise the nature of these relationships.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orders of Recursion</th>
<th>Classification of Form</th>
<th>Description of Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symmetrical Relationship</td>
<td>Husband raises fist to his wife, while in a loud voice calls her a bitch. Wife then raises her fist and tells him in a loud voice that he is bastard. Husband hits wife who returns the blow.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Context**

**Anger**

**Simple Behaviour**

Husband raises his fist to his wife, while in a loud voice he calls her a bitch.

**FIGURE 5.1.**

DIALECTIC OF SYMMETRICAL HUSBAND-WIFE RELATIONSHIP

(Stulberg, 1989, p. 49)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orders of Recursion</th>
<th>Classification of Form</th>
<th>Description of Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complementary Relationship</td>
<td>The husband raises his fist to his wife while calling her a bitch in a loud voice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>The wife holds out and in a soft voice tells him that she loves him. The husband then hits her and she cries and tells him that she is sorry and that she loves him.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Husband raises his fist to his wife while in a loud voice he calls her a bitch.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 5.2.** DIALECTIC OF HUSBAND-WIFE COMPLEMENTARY INTERACTION (Stulberg, 1989, p. 51)

The dialectic ladder analyses the process of interaction in the relationship. The classification of form comprises the punctuations of patterns by the observer. The description of process, refers to the "raw" data or operational descriptions of the observable behaviours (Stulberg, 1989).

The description of simple actions or behaviours are the individual units of actions, which on the same behavioural level can be punctuated by the observer as
belonging to a "category of actions" called anger. On the contextual level, the "descriptions of interactions," or "process" includes the relationship between simple actions, which can also be punctuated by the observer as belonging to a "category of interactions" which may be symmetrical or complementary (Bateson in Stulberg, 1989, pp. 49-50).

The symmetrical relationship as diagrammised in Figure 5.1. is one in which the behaviour of the husband is matched by similar behaviour by the wife. A complementary relationship, as shown in Figure 5.2. occurs when the actions of the husband and wife are different, to the extent that the interactions of their behaviour mutually complement one another (Bateson in Stulberg, 1989). The nature of these relationships are highly interdependent, and as such each person in these relationships has a part in the development and maintenance of any dysfunctional behaviour that arises in the relationship (Sexton, 1994).

Violence occurs at the point at which the relationship becomes increasingly tense and goes unchecked, resulting in an escalating process. Bateson (in Stulberg, 1989), termed this escalating process - "schisomogenesis," which he defines in Erchak (1984, p. 250) as "a process of differentiation in the norms of normal individual behaviour resulting from cumulative interaction between individuals". Keeney in Stulberg (1989) says that when schisomogenesis goes unchecked, "intolerable stress and dissolution of the relational system results" (p. 50). A symmetrical schisomogenesis would result in excessive competition, and a complementary schisomogenesis would result in extreme dependence, submissiveness and nurturance (Sexton, 1994; Stulberg, 1989).
Many authors studying the nature of battering relationships from a systemic perspective note that the battering relationship lies heavily in the direction of complementarity. The status of such a relationship indicates rigid unilateral control, which provides little room for negotiation of the rules established in the relationship (Weitzman & Dreen, 1982; Cook & Frantz-Cook, 1984; Stulberg, 1989; Erchak, 1984; Sexton, 1994). These rules are established early in the relationship and are often unwittingly sanctioned by each person in the relational system, through a multiplicity of factors. Some of these include fear of open conflict, abandonment, denial of dependency, conflict and general emotional immaturity, - characteristics brought by each person into the relationship from past life experiences (Weitzman & Dreen, 1982).

If this complementary relational system is unchallenged, violence will be avoided. However, if the relationship is shifted to a more symmetrical position, the homeostasis of the relational system would be threatened. This shift can occur by changing the situation or by challenging the authority of control in the relationship. As a result, violence would erupt to re-establish the complementarity of the relationship. Violence erupts because the couple struggles for control over the functional rules of the relationship rather than the specific problems themselves (Weitzman & Dreen, 1982; Cook & Frantz-Cook, 1984). In other words it is the interactional process between the couple that ends in violence. This pattern of behaviour defines the relationship, and is repeatedly recycled (Lanson in Sexton, 1994; Nicholas in Sexton, 1994; Rosenbaum & O'Leary in Sexton, 1994).
5.2. The Dynamics of Power and Control in Battering Relationships

As discussed in the above section, complementary schisomogenesis defines the nature of battering relationships. In simple words, there is a rigid unilateral control of one person over another in battering relationships. Thus battering is about domination. Violence becomes a way of "doing power" in a relationship (Mahoney, 1991; Walker, 1983), because at any given time in a battering relationship one person may act with more power than another. The other person may or may not wish this, so that the outcome may be to their detriment or benefit (Fish, 1990).

The dynamics of power and control in a battering relationship are inextricably linked to the interactive process between the batterer and the battered woman. The batterer, often the one with greater available resources such as money status, and education, imposes a variety of restrictions on the battered woman, which in turn, fosters a sense of dependency within her (Ewing, 1987). The battered woman, in her state of powerlessness has the ability to empower her batterer, by placing him in a more powerful position. At this point the batterer is able to mask his vulnerabilities and insecurities, and his needs of being dependent on the battered woman. In this interaction, the battered woman becomes more negative in her self-appraisal (Aguiler & Nightingale, 1994), and more incapable of defending herself. However, if and when the battered woman withdraws the power she has to empower her batterer, in order to become more independent of him (for instance, when a battered woman decides to leave, or go to work), then this process of withdrawal begins to expose the batterers vulnerabilities thereby creating instability in the relationship. As a result violence ensues in the relationship to re-establish the batterers powerful
position which in turn provides some stability within the relationship. The function of this power in the battering relationship is twofold: firstly, it controls the other and secondly, it empowers the other.

The cycle of violence first described by Walker (in Segel and Labe, 1990) demonstrates how the batterer uses violence to control the battered women in their relationship. According to Walker, wife abuse is a cyclical phenomenon. The cycle is based on the social learning theory and involves three stages. The first stage is known as the tension-building stage, in which 'minor' battering incidents occur. These include criticism, yelling, swearing, coercion and threats (Nisaa Pamphlet, 1997; Segel & Labe, 1990; Walus-Wigle & Meloy, 1988). The second stage is the acute violence phase in which the batterer uses physical force. This stage is followed by the honeymoon phase in which contrite loving behaviour is demonstrated by the batterer. During this stage, the batterer shows remorse. It is also because of the behaviour in this stage, that leads the battered woman to believe that her batterer is going to change (Segel & Labe, 1990; Walus-Wigle & Meloy, 1988; Schuller & Vidmar, 1993). The cycle increases in both severity and frequency over time. The honeymoon phase becomes shorter, and the acute violent phase lengthens over time.

This relational pattern of power in a battering relationship intensifies as the battering becomes more severe and chronic, to an extent that the battered woman perceives herself to be extremely helpless, powerless and in danger, in her situation, which consequently leads her to a point of killing her battering mate as her final means of escape.
Gangley in Bograd (1992) argues that 'victims have power, but within a battering relationship and within the patriarchal system, their power and accountability is relative rather than absolute.'

The criminal justice system is not an absolute entity, but instead embodies the societal biases and perceptions of the society from which it has evolved. Processes around power and control are implicitly related to the interactions between the criminal justice system and battered women who kill. This is the focus of the following section.

5.3. The Criminal Justice System

Mahoney (1991) has pointed out that generally, legal literature has ignored the interplay between power and control, domination and subordination in the battering relationship.

The criminal justice system has become an important part of the public and private ideological structuring of society along lines of gender, class, race and so forth. This is clearly illustrated by the way in which crimes are created and defined. Furthermore, the legal rules and concepts of the criminal justice system, are informed by the values, assumptions and experiences which are generally not those of women (Mogwe, 1994). Women have thus found it difficult to identify themselves and their experiences. This is also because power and domination implicitly form part of the legal rules and concepts of the criminal justice system.
5.3.1. **History of the Criminal Justice System**

The criminal justice system evolves partly from the values and beliefs of society and societal norms that are established; implying that the criminal justice system is socially constructed. The amount of power and control that society distributes to men and women in their relationships also influences the amount of power that is allocated and distributed among members of the criminal justice system. The unequal distribution of power by society to men and women is illustrated by the history of the legal systems, which becomes the focus of this section.

Only a hundred years ago were men denied the right to beat their wives in Britain and the United States of America (USA). The first written laws appeared as early as 2500 BC which dictated that a woman who was found to be verbally abusive towards her husband would have her name engraved on a brick to be used to knock her teeth out (Henning, 1988).

During the Middle Ages, women throughout Spain, Italy, France and England could be sold in the city streets; exiled for years and killed if they committed adultery or other 'lesser' crimes. Thus in the Middle Ages it was believed that "the wife ought to suffer and let the husband have the word and be the master" (Trevelyan in Dobash & Dobash, 1977-78, p. 429). Under the English Common Law, a married woman lost all her civil rights and had no separate legal status (Dobash & Dobash, 1977-78).
Prior to the late nineteenth century, it was considered natural and part of a husband's responsibility to control and chastise his wife through the use of physical force (Pleck, 1979). Physical violence against wives during this time, provoked little discomfort unless it was extremely severe.

The power of the men during this time clearly demonstrates the patriarchal nature of society in these times. For instance, while men remained masters in their homes, women were supposed to be passive, submissive and awaiting in the background. Similarly in the criminal justice system, men were allowed to demonstrate their power, while women did not exist in the system.

Then in the late nineteenth-century the struggle for reform began in Britain and the USA and laws against wife-beating were actually passed. In 1824, in the Mississippi Supreme Court, a husband was allowed to chastise his wife only in cases of emergency (Martin, 1987). Most states then established a law called the "rule of thumb," in which a husband had the right to punish his wife with a stick no thicker than his thumb (Henning, 1988; Dobash & Dobash, 1977-78; Pleck, 1979).

In 1874, the North Carolina Supreme Court, disallowed a husband's right to chastise his wife "under any circumstances" but continued to say "If no permanent injury has been inflicted, nor malice, nor cruelty, nor dangerous violence shown by the husband, it is better to draw the curtain, shut out public gaze, and leave the parties to forgive and forget" (Martin, 1987, p. 6). It was only in 1910, that all but eleven states in the USA allowed absolute divorce for cruelty.
In Britain in 1878, women were allowed to use cruelty as a ground for divorce, but the law and its implementation were merely fixed around setting limits on assaults against wives and not really towards making it truly illegal (Dobash & Dobash, 1977-78).

Women were now permitted to be seen and heard in court, but under limited and subdued circumstances. Men still controlled their homes and the criminal justice system, and used their power to keep the women at bay, especially in the legal system. The result of this, was that the system achieved greater power to protect the status quo. However, this long history of abuse towards women by their men and the laws created by the criminal justice system was about to change.

With the rise of the feminist movement in the early seventies, some feminist activists openly began to address the issue of women's lack of rights; their low statuses within their marriages and in society. The feminist activists also began addressing the phenomenon of wife-battering (Van der Hoven, 1992). These efforts culminated in a growing awareness in which women were beginning to be recognised as a human entity, - as opposed to being someone's property -, in the face of the legal system.

For battered women and their families the criminal justice system, can be an influential source of assistance and protection from the batterer (Martin, 1987; Hart, 1996).
However, Henning (1988) blatantly states that in South Africa, there are no 'real' laws protecting women. Battered women can only revert to civil or criminal remedies to protect themselves. For example, in terms of civil action, a woman may apply to the Supreme Court for an interdict, ordering her husband to refrain from beating her. This is an expensive means of protection, which many women in battered relationships cannot afford. Alternatively, women can get divorced, but this is also difficult, especially for women in battered relationships who have children and are economically dependent on their batterers.

From the criminal side, the magistrate could issue the battered women with an order, binding her husband to keep the peace (Henning, 1988; Internet, 1996). This has proven to be ineffective, because often the order does not have the power or the ability to intimidate and so, frighten, the batterer. Another criminal option is for the women to lay a charge of assault.

5.3.2. The Nature of the Criminal Justice System

The criminal justice system is an institution which can publicly condemn violence, wherever it occurs, because it has the power to enforce existing laws. However, the criminal justice system shares the perceptions of society at large, which results in a selective non-enforcement of laws, when violence between family members occurs. By adopting such a non-interventive stance, violence is indirectly condoned. The result: a frequent escalation of violence which sometimes ends in homicide (Mahoney, 1991; Mogwe, 1994).
Most battered women who kill their batterers are convicted of murder or manslaughter and may receive substantial prison sentences, despite their claim of self-defense and despite the abundant evidence of extreme physical, psychological and or sexual abuse inflicted upon them by the men they have killed (Ewing, 1987; 1990; Martin, 1987; O'Donovan, 1991).

According to Ewing (in Kasian et al., 1993) when battered women are confronted with the choice of killing or being killed by their batterers, the women often have been experiencing an existence devoid of meaning, because of their batterer's control over them. Through his actions, the batterer frequently denies his partner of the basic human right to experience life in a psychological meaningful manner. This denial eventually results in a 'psychological death' which is described by Ewing (1987) as a life without meaning or value, and for the battered women a life hardly worth living.

When women begin to experience this 'psychological death' in their relationship with their batterer, they sometimes enter the criminal justice system, to seek help and protection. The unequal power which is embedded in the relationships between men and women involved in battering, is paralleled in the criminal justice system, which reflects societal biases. Usually, the women are helpless, powerless and desperate. The women in the legal system are represented by a handful of laws, which are actually inadequate and ineffective because they do not allow women to utilize their power to its full potential. They are made to feel more helpless when they are uninformed about the criminal justice procedures. Their helpless position, makes them completely dependent on the system, from whom they seek
assistance. The system thus forces the battered women into a feeling of stuckness. This feeling of being stuck represents the stuckness that the battered women felt in their relationship with their batterers, which was further entrenched by the patriarchal system within which the women lived.

At the point at which the women decide to take the lives of their batterers, they threaten the status quo of the criminal justice system, and as a result are condemned by the system for their actions. For instance, behaviour which was once legally condoned is now prescribed by law, yet socio-cultural attitudes and norms still support such practices and it is only mildly condemned, if at all, by law enforcement and judicial institutions (Dobash & Dobash, 1977-78; Martin, 1987; Roy, 1977), which are usually created by men with power. The women are condemned according to the 'male-identified' rules that constitute the law. At the point at which the battered women are condemned, they are identified as perpetrators of violence, and their battering experiences, and their histories of battering are denied or trivialised. The point being highlighted is that even in seemingly helping, the legal and treatment systems can perpetuate the abuse. In this study, it has been specifically with regards to the lack of intervention during the abuse, limited help from the police and a lack of knowledge about the court system.

The criminal justice system errs on the side of the batterer when he dies, because he is considered a victim, at the time of his death. Furthermore, it is the job of the legal system to deal harshly with perpetrators of violence, even if they are battered women who have killed.
What seems to be forgotten by the system is that at the time of killing their batterers, these women are victims of abuse themselves.

5.3.3. Members of the Criminal Justice System: The Police

The police are often the first point of entry to the legal system. Women who are being battered or have been battered report their experiences to the police, in the hope of finding a resolution to their problems. The reactions from the police and their subsequent involvement in dealing with cases of battery have been limited and generally very negative. It is possible that the police still do not treat battery as a violent crime (Mahoney, 1991; Okun, 1986; Martin, 1987).

Ewing (1987) comments that battered women who kill are in many cases doubly victimized - firstly, by the men that have battered them and again by members of a criminal justice system. The battered women believe that they are held to an unrealistic standard of accountability. This was highlighted in the example of Catharine. Elizabeth, another battered women in this study, had similar experiences. She was arrested by the police at the station where she often went to report the beatings from her husband. The police offered her little help when she went to report her beatings, because they were "afraid" of her husband, who was a policeman himself. At one time, Elizabeth decided she was going to leave her husband, but on seeking advice from the station commander at the police station, was told that it would be in her best interests to stay. When Elizabeth was arrested, she lost any kind of support that was previously available from the policemen to whom she often spoke. The very same policemen had become a powerful influence
in labelling her as a perpetrator of violence. After her arrest she was abused by the police, even while in custody. When released out on bail, Elizabeth was being threatened by the police. Just as Elizabeth could not place any faith in her husband, she could not trust the policemen who knew her at the station. Similarly, as she lived in fear of her husband killing her, so she lived in fear of the police killing her (as they had continuously threatened to do).

As violence against women in South Africa escalates to new heights, police are being trained across the country through various organisations in dealing with the prevention of violence against women. Police are being taught to handle domestic violence situations, and women who report battering incidents to them. The response to this training has generally been positive and the police have mostly been co-operative.

5.3.4. The Language of Law as Power

It has long been suggested by feminist theorists that the law and legal language are socially constructed to produce meanings and interpretations which reinforce certain world views and understanding of events (Mogwe, 1994).

The power of the criminal justice system lies in the laws it creates. These laws are given meaning through an authoritative language. The laws themselves become authoritative, because they are composed of what Mahoney (1991) describes as 'male-identified' rules, which in turn, constrain the categories within which the legal images of battered women have evolved. These images which are gender, class
and racially based are ideologically and socially significant. The laws, institutions and ideologies in the criminal justice system are particularly powerful in their ability to define appropriate 'feminine' behaviour, morality and roles, especially those concerned with women's sexuality and reproduction. In this way, certain images are affirmed while others are simultaneously censured through criminalisation, marginalisation and the silencing of alternative accounts of social reality (Mogwe, 1994).

The language of law is linear and as such the legal system is linearly based and is primarily focused around ascertaining responsibility for action and determination of guilt (Rosenwell in Sexton, 1994). This linear-based system, together with its linear form of language becomes problematic for a phenomenon such as battering, which at least from a systemic perspective comprises of a circular interactive process.

For example, McClintock (1978) notes that there is no general definition of violence in criminal law. What exists is the definition of specific offences which are grouped as "crimes of violence against the person" (p. 82). The definition of these specific offences have in common the ability to inflict physical injury on the person. This definition, is linearly causal in its effects, since it implies person A directly inflicting physical harm on person B. The interactions between persons A and B are not considered in this definition.

Another example is the use of the term self-defence. Self-defence in law, requires of the battered woman to approve that she reasonably believed that she was in imminent danger of death or serious bodily harm; to the extent that she "resorted to
deadly force in order to avert that danger because it was necessary to do so" (Palmer, 1996, p. 1; Ewing, 1987; Martin, 1987). Battered women who kill their batterers, usually do so when their batterers are asleep. Sometimes they hire someone to do the killing for them, which does not fit with the self-defence definition either (Palmer, 1996).

The language of the law is said to hold the values of neutrality, universality, impartiality and individualism. O'Donovan (1991) specifically points out that if the law's concept of reasonableness had to take into account a women's perception of her situation, this would become a threat to the law's claim to objectivity. In addition, the law's claim to universality would come under indictment because of the failure to incorporate a battered women's experiences. Furthermore, while the law may not consider it reasonable to wait for a batterer to be asleep before he is attacked, from the battered women or victim's point of view, it may be so (O'Donovan, 1991).

In summary, the language of the law is restrictive and implies direct causal relations. In the case of battered women, the interactive nature of their experiences cannot be included in the language of the law, and as a result of this, the women's experiences are not often heard in court. For a system that is employed to be fair and objective and neutral, it continues to maintain the status quo, which fundamentally is male violence against women. Thus the criminal justice system retains its power by utilising narrowly defined terms, which in the case of battered women are frequently meaningless.
5.4. The Prison System

The process in court comes to an end when the battered woman faces the judge or the magistrate for the last time as her sentence is passed. The battered woman is then dismissed with the injunction, "take her down". Eaton (1993), notes that a process begins, in which the battered woman is both literally and metaphorically 'taken down.'

Erwin Goffman (in Avni, 1991), defines a prison as a total institution, which he refers to as "any social institution which places physical barriers (lock, walls, etc.) between those within and the outside world" (p. 138).

The battered women in prison becomes a subordinate, (the lowest in the hierarchy), and is totally subjected to the authority of others. Her time, space, and behaviour is spelt out by others (Eaton, 1993). Force exists and is available in any social institutions, as it does in situations of domestic violence. In a social institution force is generally used for the purpose of fulfilling and maintaining the existing structure of the institution (Goode in Okun, 1986; Eaton, 1993). Avni (1991) states that endorsing the power structure within the institution takes priority over the explicit aims of the institution. Prison rules are then seen as a way of continuing the process of disempowering the women and destroying what is left of her former self and identity (Eaton, 1993). As a result, the battered women remain helpless and powerless and feel this more profoundly, as they find themselves in prison. According to Eaton, the women are excluded from society and from all that contributed to her former identity. The women are further 'taken down' when they
begin to lose responsibility for themselves and others, which so frequently accompanies their status as adult women in society (Eaton, 1993).

The women are then given a prison number and from this point, they are subjected to the authorities of the prison. The power of the prison system, lies in its ability to 'take the women down' to the lowest possible level, by stripping them of all their possessions and identity. As a result the women become victims rather than perpetrators of violence. In this process, there is no practical manner in which the women can escape. The only way these women are able to retain a sense of dignity is when they think for themselves.

The difficulty in not being able to think for oneself is highlighted by Elizabeth who explains that the amount of corruption in the prison context could easily influence a person's way of thinking. In addition, the discipline from the rules of the institution and the informal control of other prisoners (Eaton, 1993), also disrupts the process of one's ability to think for oneself in prison. For example, Catharine often feels hurt when she is told by other prisoners that for as long as she is in prison, she is a killer or criminal. This label is reinforced by her being in prison. With such reinforcement, Catharine's sense of self and identity is sometimes eroded, but she remains determined in her journey to represent her self as a double victim of abuse.

Dittenhover and Erickson (1992) recognise that the prison system has been criticised for inhumane treatment. On a psychological level, such criticism may be realistic, since the women in prison are continuously dismissed, degraded,
humiliated and denied; and as the system demands docility the women's new role is then characterised by ineffectiveness (Eaton, 1993).

In summary, the women in prison are confined to a small space, in which they have lost their privacy, integrity, dignity and identity which previously contributed, meaningfully, to their sense of self. Only a system which has embedded in it an enormous amount of power and control, is capable of taking its members down, be it emotionally and/or psychologically, as well as physically, and reducing their sense of self to a meaningless entity.

Conclusion

This chapter has paid attention to the systemic view of power and control. The chapter has also considered the dynamics of power and control in the contexts of battering relationships, the criminal justice system and the prison system.

Chapter 6 which follows, describes the research methodology which is used to study the narrative accounts that evolved in conversations between each battered woman who killed, and the researcher.
CHAPTER 6
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter discusses the context, method and processes used to elicit and obtain the stories (narratives) of the women in this study. The conceptual framework of this research methodology is also considered.

The design was exploratory with rich qualitative information being acquired.

6.1. Paradigmatic Consideration of Research Methodology

The boundaries which are used in defining a phenomenon such as battering are blurred and vague, because they include a subjective element, in which battered women and battered women who kill consider themselves battered or abused at different stages. The goal of research specifically around battered women and battered women who kill, involves understanding the process of interaction among the participants within a particular context, which is the goal of qualitative research in general.

According to Locke, Spirduso and Silverman (1993) one of the objectives of qualitative research is to reconstruct the participants experiences, and the meanings attached to such experiences and interactions, through language. The meanings are (co)constructed from experiences, as they are lived by the participants in their
natural setting. This allows for participants to make sense of their experiences and in so doing, create their own reality and establish a profoundly relativistic view of the world. In general relatively unstructured and open research designs are favoured by qualitative research.

Assumptions in qualitative research include the fact that reality is subjective, relative and multiple, and that direct access to a singular, stable and fully knowable external reality is not possible. All of our experiences are contextually embedded, interpersonally forged and necessarily limited through language (Neimeyer, 1993; Creswell, 1994). Among these assumptions are beliefs that human beings are: a) actively oriented to understand the meaning of the world in which they live; b) are denied direct access to any external reality; and c) are continuously in the process of development and change (Neimeyer, 1993).

The goal of qualitative research is not to produce generalisations or search for the 'truth', but rather to understand in detail and produce knowledge of a particular phenomena. Hence in this study, the findings cannot be generalised to the population of battered women who kill, but it is the researcher's intention to share her findings and formulated recommendations with clinicians who work specifically with battered women who kill.
6.2. **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher is not to seek and verify the 'truth' which functions in a cause and effect model of reality, but to facilitate a process of creating and assigning meaning to stories told by the participants in order to gain knowledge that would assist in understanding the nature and process of interaction in a particular context. The researcher is then part of the construction process. She becomes a learner/listener and co-producer of knowledge.

The participants are actively involved and not merely subjects from whom data are gathered. As such the researcher and participant will respond to and influence each other and so biases in the research are inherent, but they can be minimized by being aware - when analysing the information received and identifying the personal values, beliefs and assumptions which belong to the researcher (Morse, 1994; Creswell, 1994; Locke et al., 1993).

Pare (1995) states that the notion of neutrality is incongruent with a social constructionist epistemology, because neutrality fails to consider the ideology inherent in the construction of an individual's world. Furthermore, meanings generated by the researcher are also embedded in language and emerge from cultural milieus. In this study the researcher's involvement in the creation of the narratives is considered.
Initially when I began to listen to the stories, I was overwhelmed by the extent to which I was left with a range of mixed feelings, from excitement, to frustration, to being afraid and angry, to feeling a pervasive sense of helplessness. As the stories continued to unfold, I began to feel the stuckness of the women in their situations. For me, this feeling of being stuck was especially highlighted by the prison setting from which these narratives were evolving. The sound of gates banging, the solid brick walls that radiated a cold, eerie feeling, and the uniformed wardens walking around constantly reminded the researcher that this was a place where an individual's space and freedom to manoeuvre on one's own is seriously limited. The result is a profound sense of stuckness.

As the stories end I realise that the women in this study use the strength within them, to empower themselves so they are able to think for themselves. This strength provides them with renewed hope of leaving the prison some day. The researcher has been influenced by the strength that is demonstrated by the women to the extent that it has resulted in her determination to ensure that the women are given a voice that equals the strength they possess, in order for their stories to be heard.

Thus, to facilitate the process of these emerging narratives, the researcher in this study utilises the technique of in-depth interviewing.
6.3. In-Depth Interviewing as a Tool For Developing Narratives

A basic assumption in in-depth interviewing is that the meaning people make of their experiences affects the way they carry out that experience (Seidman, 1991).

Interviewing, therefore, provides access to the context of participants' behaviour which allows the researcher to understand the meaning of that behaviour (Seidman, 1991; Bateson in Neimeyer, 1993). In addition, interviews provide access to the cultural world where intersubjective meaning is created and sustained.

The interaction between researcher and the participants is inherent in the nature of interviewing. Hence, interviewing becomes a process that enables the (co)creation of information (Neimeyer, 1993; Seidman, 1991). This interaction subsequently reduces the power-imbalance between the researcher and the participants.
"We live in and through stories".

"They conjure worlds".

"Stories inform life".

(Mair in Neimeyer, 1993, p. 5).

Stories or narratives are a way of knowing. Sarbin (in Neimeyer, 1993), developed the narrative principle, in which human beings think, perceive, imagine and act according to narrative structures. In other words, stories provide frames in which it becomes possible for us to express and interpret our lived experiences (White, 1995).

These experiences can only be symbolized through language, and it is in languaging that meanings are created (Neimeyer, 1993). The realm of understanding in which persons interact is then interpreted through the use of language (Morse, 1994). As Efran, M.D. Lukens and R.J. Lukens in Neimeyer (1993) state, "For better or for worse, we live in a world of language " (p. 4).

Bateson (in Neimeyer, 1993) views meaning-making as an active process of construction which owes no direct allegiance to the contours of the external world. Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process.

White (1995) contends that the private stories which people have about their lives create meaning. So when considering the nature of people's expressions of abuse,
it is important that the expressions are considered as units of experience and meaning. In addition a specific story of life presents one of many equally valid perspectives on life, so that if a person is recruited in relating a very negative or painful story about who they are as a person, it is likely that they will give meanings to their experiences that emphasise "culpability" and worthlessness.

Knowledge, according to Neimeyer (1993), becomes a personal and social construction, rather than a direct representation of the 'real world' and human beings are perceived of as pro-active, goal-directed and purposive beings, rather than merely reactive organisms.

In summary, the researcher and the participants use language as a way of understanding the experiences which are expressed, creating meaning in a person's life, and eventually is told in the form of a story or narrative. This process forms the basis of this study, which aims to understand the interactions of battered women who kill in different contexts.
6.4. **Contexts of the Research**

6.4.1. **Context of the Researcher**

This research study is part of a course requirement for the two-year Masters degree in Clinical Psychology, in which the researcher is presently engaged. In the first year of training, the researcher was assigned Johannesburg Prison as a placement for clinical work. During this time at the prison, the researcher was involved in initiating a therapy group for battered women. Elizabeth and Thelma were known to the researcher before because they had taken part in this group. The stories told in these group sessions were intense and intriguing, with regards to how the women perceived themselves. The challenge to better understand the experiences of these women, lead to the development of this research study.

6.4.2. **Johannesburg Prison**

Johannesburg Prison is situated in the southern part of Johannesburg. The prison complex has three separate prisons within it, namely, the female prison; the juvenile and awaiting trial prison and the male prison. The female prison is surrounded by barbed wire, which in turn, is enveloped by a higher fence. Inside the female prison, large heavy iron gates are encountered at very short distances and at every entrance to a section of the prison.
The front section of the female prison is lightly painted, giving the entrance a fresh and airy feeling. Moving further into the lock up section, the walls of the building block off the sun, giving the area a cold, dark and gloomy feeling. The structure of the lock up section is in the form of a spiral. Cells at the bottom of the spiral are mainly communal, with double decker beds placed very closely to each other, providing little, if any, space and privacy. This section is usually occupied by the arrival of new prisoners or prisoners awaiting trial. Moving up the spiral individual cells become more common. Moving up the spiral to individual cells is largely based on the good behaviour of prisoners. Extra privileges are linked to good behaviour.

Prisoners are involved in different tasks in the morning. Some of these include cooking, cleaning, washing, sewing prisoners uniforms and so on at the workshop, attending business courses, knitting courses or church groups. The prisoners are locked away from three 'o' clock every afternoon, until the next morning. The lives of the prisoners become robotic. The prisoners are under constant surveillance by the members (wardens). This constant surveillance by wardens however, does not ensure that the prisoners are protected from the threat of sexual abuse by other prisoners, especially at night, in the locked communal cells. In addition to the absolute lack of protection in prison, the very small spaces between the beds in the communal cells means that new prisoners as well as prisoners that are vulnerable and afraid of being in prison, live in constant fear of being forced to engage in sexual acts with other female prisoners.
The women taking part in this study, were granted special permission by the wardens in their sections to be seen by the researcher. The interviews were carried out in the front section of the prison. The women could only leave their sections to come and see the researcher if they were accompanied by a warden. After the interview, the women were escorted back by a warden, to their sections. The researcher is grateful for the assistance of the social worker at Johannesburg Prison, in arranging for permission to be granted so that the women were able to leave their sections and attend the interviews.

6.4.3. The South African Context

This research is being written at a time in which violence against women is a topical issue in South Africa. There has been a sudden upsurge in the focus of violence against women and children in South Africa, and its prevention. This focus has partly been the result of an increase in the number of reported cases of violence against women and children, with the assistance of organisations working in this field.

6.5. Participants

Three women were recruited from the Johannesburg Female Prison, with the assistance of the social worker for the purposes of this study. Permission was granted from the Department of Correctional Services' Research Committee to carry out this research.
The women were to have been in prison for a minimum of eight months to one year. This time span was decided on for the sake of this research to ensure that the women had settled and adjusted to the prison context. The women had also been in an abusive relationship with their male partners for at least six months, prior to their partners being killed. The reason for this time criterium was to try to grasp the meaning of the relationship in which the women were involved, which eventually resulted in their partners being killed.

All participants spoke English, although this was not their home language. The average age of the participants was 36 years. The membership of a particular 'race group' was not made a criterion for participation in this study. Coincidentally, all participants were black women.

Elizabeth, Catharine and Thelma, are the names of the women taking part in this study. Thelma and Catharine are pseudo-names and every effort has been made to keep their identity, confidential. Elizabeth is not a pseudo-name. It was Elizabeth's wish to retain her name and consent was given by herself to use her name in this study.

All the interviews were conducted by the researcher. According to Avni (1991) this provides maximum uniformity and consistency to the unstructured method used in this study.
6.6. **Process of Inquiry**

Each participant in the present study had tape-recorded conversations with the researcher on two separate occasions in 1996. The second conversation included a written dialogue, which was voluntarily shared by Thelma and Catharine.

The women were individually interviewed for approximately an hour and a half. Prior to my first interview with the women, the researcher had a telephone conversation with the social worker at the prison. During this conversation the researcher discussed the focus of the study and described the type of women she was looking for to take part in the research. The social worker then met the women and discussed the study being carried out. The social worker explained to the women that the researcher was specifically looking for women who had been battered and had been implicated in their batterer's death or had killed their batterers and as a result were imprisoned.

At the first meeting, a general overview of the research being explored was again discussed. Reasons for selecting the women were explained in terms of the fact that they had been battered and subsequently implicated or had taken part in their batterer's death and were now in prison. The women were then asked if they would be willing to take part. The women were also given the option of refusing to take part, but Elizabeth, Thelma and Catharine seemed enthusiastic and excited about taking part in this study. The researcher also noticed that the women seemed nervous and anxious about the stories they were going to tell in our future meetings together.
On agreeing to take part, the format of the research was explained in terms of the fact that I had drawn up an interview guideline (see Appendix A), and they would be interviewed until such time that the areas to be questioned were covered. Consent was granted for the use of the tape recorder, which would be used to tape the interviews that were to follow. All interviews were taped on audio-cassette. This allowed the researcher to take into account all relevant verbal information and to facilitate the flow of the conversations. Questions around the tape recorder were answered as fully as possible, to ensure that the women were comfortable about being taped.

This meeting proceeded to the first interview, in which a questionnaire was given to the women, to obtain biographical and demographical data. The women were asked to fill in the questionnaire. The questionnaire included short questions, about the battering episodes, sexual relationships with the batterer, the type of control in the battering relationship and information on the killing incident. It was assumed that the questionnaire would assist the women in gaining a better understanding of the frame and focus of this research study.

The questionnaire proved to be useful in obtaining relevant dates which the women struggled to remember. It is thought that obtaining this information during the in-depth interviews would have disrupted the flow of the stories told.
The second interview began the following day. The aim of the interview guideline was to guide the narrative process. Questions in the guideline (see Appendix A) were open-ended and covered the following areas: the women's identity before the battering incidents began; the common types of beatings; support during their battering incidents; issues of power in their relationship; the actual killing incident, the court case; and the prison context.

The third interview was conducted ten days later. This space proved to be most beneficial to the women in this study. They were able to reflect, firstly on their feelings and thoughts about the stories they had shared so far and secondly on the process of the two days that were spent with me. This resulted in Thelma and Catharine voluntarily bringing written information to the interview, which they considered important to the stories they had (co)created and told thus far. The information had been individually written, when Thelma and Catharine first arrived at Johannesburg Prison. Thelma shared part of her diary, written in Zulu, which she translated into English. She thought that this information would complete her story.

At the third interview, each story gradually ended, as all areas in the interview guideline were covered. Extra time was used to ensure that the women were comfortable about the stories that were told. Emotional discomfort experienced by the women during the interviews was dealt with immediately or at the end of the interview.
The women who were seen for a total of three interview sessions, were thanked for this time spent. The recorded interviews were then transcribed and analysed. The verbatim interviews have not been included in this study. Interested readers may request transcripts from the researcher.

6.7. **Analysis of Interviews**

The analysis and discussion of the transcripts have been based on two principles. Firstly, using the emerging themes the transcripts are analysed to allow for an understanding of a battered woman's change of identity and definitions of her self in different contexts and the social interactive patterns that occur over time (Giles-Sims, 1983). More specifically, this type of analysis allows for the processes that have governed the person's life to emerge from the narrative, giving the study a flair of uniqueness. This leads to the second principle utilised in the analysis and that is that all conversations are context bound, and so generalisations cannot be made across different contexts.

Okun (1986) mentions that generalisation from studies of clinical samples to the entire population of battering relationships is highly problematic, mainly because very little, if any, systematic research particularly around battered women who kill has been generated.

The relevance of studying clinical samples of battered women who kill is to begin to understand in more detail the processes and interactions of the unique experiences in the lives of the women, particularly with respect to the processes which contribute
to the women's sense of self and their identity. In addition, questions arising from each story are connected to the larger systems that the women encounter, which in turn, implies that the context of each woman needs to be recognised particularly when considering the suitability of punishment for battered women who kill. For this reason the social, cultural and historical contexts from which each woman arrives needs to be considered. Hence, this process is both a relative and unique one.

Kuhn and Martorana (1982) note that the depth and detail of narratives emerges through direct quotation and careful description. As a result every effort has been made in this study to minimize the editing of quotations, so that the depth, detail and meaning of the sentences can be retained.

The content of the narratives is analysed in the form of a thematic content analysis. In this procedure, themes are used to organise the meanings women associate to their sense of self and identity, into a coherent system, so that interpretations can be made upon which treatment recommendations are based (Neimeyer, 1993). In this study, the subheadings used to tell the stories of the women (see Chapter 2), provide the basis for the themes. These are namely, the identities of the women constructed and perpetuated by themselves and others before battering incidents; during battering incidents; around the killing incident; during the court case and in prison. According to Neimeyer (1993) the interpretive process may include any amount of narrative material and observational data that is deemed relevant as the larger context of the meanings are expressed.
During the analyses of Elizabeth's story, I encountered difficulties in deciding whether to include quotations which were controversial in nature. As I continued to write her story, I realised that for the reasons that follow, it would be necessary to include the quotations. Firstly, Elizabeth carries with her a long history of being secretive about her experiences. This secretiveness originates not from Elizabeth's character alone, but is perpetuated by the processes and interactions of the social systems that Elizabeth has encountered in her life. Thus by not including these controversial quotations, I would be perceived as colluding with this secrecy, which I believe was not Elizabeth's motive for taking part in this research. To the contrary, I think that Elizabeth is trying to come out of her secret shell and share her experiences, using this study as her medium of communication. Secondly, leaving out these quotes, appears to diminish the meaning of Elizabeth's story, which eventually would lack the depth and detail.

Conclusion

Chapter 6 has outlined a qualitative research methodology that is considered to be useful in examining the emergent narratives from conversations between the participants and the researcher. The contexts of the research and the role of the researcher were considered. The chapter was concluded with a brief discussion on the analysis of the interviews.

In the following chapter, attention will shift to the construction and perpetuation of the identities of the battered women who killed, which emerged through the narrative accounts which took place between each of the women in this study and the researcher.
CHAPTER 7
ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AND PERPETUATION
OF IDENTITIES OF BEING A VICTIM AND A PERPETRATOR

Introduction

This chapter illustrates how the identities of battered women who kill are constructed and perpetuated as victims and perpetrators. The chapter specifically focuses on the identities which have emerged and have been created through the dominant stories of the women in this study. Attention is paid to how the identities are maintained through the perceptions of others and through the processes inherent in the different contexts in which the women find themselves.

7.1. Identity before Battering

Elizabeth

Elizabeth was a popular, well-liked and well-respected person. She believed in being honest to herself and to others. She inspired people around her to be strong. Elizabeth became a role-model in her family and her community. "I like to teach people how to communicate with other people".

Thelma

Thelma appreciated her freedom at home, where she enjoyed doing the household chores with her mother. She describes herself as being a "nice person". Thelma preferred to be alone, with few, but meaningful friendships.
Catharine describes herself as a family person. She enjoyed being with her family. "...[T]hey enjoy(ed) staying with me all the time...". Religion played an important role in Catharine's life.

Family relationships and friendships were important to the women. These relationships provided the women with a sense of confidence and self-worth, that enabled them to be self-sufficient. In their family relationships, the women had the freedom to make decisions about their own lives. When the battering began, family relationships became fragmented or were broken, and friendships were lost. The women became lonely as they were isolated from their families and friends.

7.2. Identity during Battering

Elizabeth

Being ordered to come home by five every evening; continuously being accused of having affairs; being restricted in her activities; being beaten and threatened with a gun; feeling overpowered by her husband; being told that she was not good enough and being forced to have an abortion were some of the factors that led to Elizabeth believing that she had become a victim of violence. Feelings of anxiety, fear and degradation also contributed to her victim status. "I was telling myself that maybe I'm not a woman enough for him".
In addition to attributing the abusive nature of her relationship, to her batterer being overwhelming jealousy, Elizabeth experienced feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, stuckness, loneliness and desperation, with regards to her situation. The ongoing experiences of these feelings, together with the escalating levels of abuse in her marriage, (which was becoming seemingly unbearable), led Elizabeth to a point of wanting to escape from her situation. Consequently, Elizabeth hired two men to hurt her husband. Even throughout this process of hiring people, Elizabeth reiterated her position as a victim of violence and resisted attempts that were made to convert her into a perpetrator of violence. For instance, Elizabeth spent almost three days negotiating with the two men she hired, to cripple her husband rather than kill him. Elizabeth struggled to convince the men she hired that her intention was to cripple her husband so that he could experience the extreme hurt and pain that she had been exposed to, as a victim of abuse.

Thelma

For Thelma the initial shock at her husband's change in behaviour after they were married, together with the fact that she was confined to her home, unable to provide for her children, because her husband would not allow her to work, led Thelma to believe that she could have a better quality of life, without him. Feeling trapped, degraded and dehumanised by her husband, intensified her desperation to live without him. "If he beat me, I don't feel happy about that, because he is going to make me [in]to another person. If someone beats you, you don't know for what, why is he beating you without reason..". Thelma had come to realise that she was not only a victim of violence, but a subordinate in her home. She was subjected to the authority and orders of her husband.
Thelma also emphasised the fact that her husband, who always knew her whereabouts and sometimes restricted them, would not tell her where he was going and would leave her and the children behind. This reflects the rigid system of patriarchy that existed in Thelma's household, in which her husband demonstrated that he was the "head of the house", by doing what he pleased, and not in any way feeling obliged to tell his wife of his whereabouts, but keeping her submissive and dependent on him, thereby maintaining her status as a victim. Thus, Thelma seemed to be becoming increasingly isolated from her family and friends, through this patriarchal system.

I was immediately struck by the language Thelma used to refer to her husband. She would speak of "that person" instead of "my husband". It seems Thelma needed to distance herself from her husband, who had spent the greater part of their relationship restricting her activities, so that she was forced to be dependent on and needy of him. Perhaps, it is also Thelma's way of stating categorically, that she did not belong to her husband, and that she tried as far as possible to remain an individual in her own right.

The restrictions imposed on Elizabeth and Thelma over their whereabouts by their husbands, who seldom, if ever, told them where they were going was one example of their batterers power over them. Another example is when Thelma and Elizabeth were forced by their husbands to have sex with them, which was often unpleasant for the women. Hence, the freedom of choice that existed in the lives of these women, in previous relationships, now appeared to be diminishing or denied.
Catharine

The cycle of violence described in a previous chapter (see chapter 4), clearly illustrates Catharine's position as a victim. Catharine would be beaten, fisted and kicked by her husband and after that she would report the incident to the police. The police tried to intervene by talking to Catharine's husband. This would result in a temporary cessation in the battering episodes. Catharine's husband would apologise, and become affectionate towards her. "When he beat me today, tomorrow he will come and apologise to me". After a while the battering would start again. Being stuck in this cycle of violence, seemed to make Catharine feel confused and fearful of the next battering episode. At this stage, the police seemed to recognise Catharine as a victim, and their intervention provided hope that the situation would improve.

"I feel bad in my heart, the way he treated me like that".

With this statement, Catharine seemed to be saying that she did not deserve to be treated in this way, thereby recognising that she had become a victim of a violent situation.

7.3. Identity Perceived by Others during Battering

Elizabeth

When the police arrived at the scene of her husband's death, Elizabeth's ability to reserve the truth from them, seemed to be a way of protecting herself from possible consequences (one of which was being identified as a perpetrator of violence), that
she was not ready to deal with. The vest that was subsequently found by the police, gave me the impression that Elizabeth imagined that no-one would be prepared to help her if she only told her story. That in fact concrete proof such as the vest would have to be used to convince Elizabeth's helper of her victim status in a violent situation.

Elizabeth continuously sought help from the police, her family and friends. She always described herself as a victim of violence when she talked to others about the nature of her relationship with her husband.

The little support that Elizabeth did receive was mainly verbal. "Honestly, they used to say, as far as they are concerned, I'm a good person...". This verbal support empowered Elizabeth in her role as a victim, because it reinforced the fact that she did not deserve such treatment and was therefore encouraged to change her situation. Although at times Elizabeth feared that if she changed her situation then she would lose the respect, support and sympathy from people around her, especially her family. Elizabeth's fear is substantiated by White's (1995) perception, that "one's sense of identity is very significantly determined by one's experience of other people's experiences of who one is" (p. 97).

Thelma

Thelma's mother supported and protected her as much as possible. She also believed that Thelma was a victim of violence. "She used to talk to me, and (say): If your husband beat you, you must stay in your home or either you come here and solve the problem. Always I go there, or I call her family to come and solve the
problem, and that family solve the problem now, but when that people is gone, he would start again...". An extreme feeling of helplessness (in the face of Thelma's batterer resuming his beatings), appeared to have led to the collapse of Thelma's support systems. In addition, this sense of helplessness conveyed in the support systems, meant that Thelma's batterer was in a position to exercise his power to continue the process of degradation. This left her feeling trapped and stuck in her situation.

Thelma's husband's family disbelieved her story, and denied that she could be a victim of violence, in her marital relationship. "If I go to his uncle, he would tell me: You come here and tell me small matters, what I must do about small matters. Now I started to stay back (away) of that people". The disbelief would result in Thelma going to the police station, as a last resort. This encounter, is an example of the way in which Thelma's husband's family perpetuated her victim status by making her feel small.

Thelma's children witnessed her beatings and could somehow understand her position as a victim. When the children would see their father beating Thelma, they would immediately speak out: "No father, I'll lose my mum, leave my mum...leave my mum". One of Thelma's children even said to her, "[Y]ou know my father, I don't know why he beats you, what you did to him...and always you stay here at home and never go out. You haven't got plenty friends. Always when I come back from school I find you at home.". Thelma's children seemed to recognise that their mother was becoming a victim in a situation that was being constructed and maintained by their father. The children also recognised that their mother was being
isolated and excluded. The children feared losing their mother. In a similar way Thelma feared that she may be losing her sense of integrity, by being restricted, excluded and made dependent upon her batterer.

In patriarchal systems, problems that arise between couples are initially solved by the families of the couple. If this is not successful, then outside resources are used. In Thelma's case, a huge discrepancy existed amongst the families in terms of the way they perceived Thelma's story and her identity, respectively. Thelma's story was small, trivial and not important enough to notice her as a person with a problem, in her batterer's family. In addition it seemed as though Thelma's batterer's family considered the violence against her to be the norm within a patriarchal system. On the other hand, Thelma's family considered her story to be important and serious enough to intervene.

Families have the power to construct an identity of a victim (as in Thelma's family) and perpetuate an identity as a victim, (as in the case of Thelma's husband). As a last resort, Thelma would find herself going to the police station in order to seek help for her situation.

A decade ago, Dobash and Dobash (in Mahoney, 1991) placed battering in a patriarchal context and described it as domination. They treat battering as part of a history and context of patriarchy in which violence and disapproval inflicted by society as a whole and by individual men, enforced women's roles of submissiveness and dependency. These roles are clearly highlighted by the two examples described by Elizabeth and Thelma respectively. "...He would never ask
for his clothes; I'm the one who will say you are going to wear this and this today, and I will polish his shoes and I will do everything...". In another situation, Elizabeth describes, "...If he is the one who is wrong, he won't admit that he is wrong. I'm the one who will say: Okay, it's finish, let's forget about that".

Thelma demonstrates the strongly embedded notion of patriarchy in her relationship. "Always he talk(ed) like this. Here I am the head of the house. No-one (is) going to tell me what I must do (and) what I didn't (must not) do....".

Catharine often received support from her mother, in the form of shelter and money. However, Catharine's mother avoided any direct interference, and instead would say, "[Y]ou are married and if you've got problems, you must go to the social worker or whatever". Although Catharine's mother recognised her as a victim of abuse, Catharine's mother felt helpless to change Catharine's situation.

It is clear that these women tried their best to get support from the people around them. However, the women gave up their search for support, at different stages and for different reasons. Elizabeth and Thelma felt hurt when they sought help from their husband's families and were turned away because they believed their matters to be small and trivial, thereby perpetuating the process of victimisation. Catharine withdrew when she felt that the social worker was blaming her husband.

According to Serra (1993), the battered woman endures a condition of subordination in that she is overpowered in her relationship with her batterer. The victim's (battered woman's) behaviour is conditioned by the threat of violence and is
consequently oriented toward complying with her batterer by avoiding contradicting him and by pleasing him. Elizabeth, Thelma and Catharine all mention that they would have to act nicely, if they wanted something from their husbands.

7.4. Identity constructed around the Killing Incident

Elizabeth

Elizabeth experienced her first sense of being identified as a perpetrator of violence by the station commander, who arrived at the scene of the killing and emphatically stated, "I know you did this...".

Both the station commander and Elizabeth's friend in whom she confided, had in the past perceived her as a victim of long-standing abuse. At the time that her husband was killed they were both trying to impose upon Elizabeth the label of a perpetrator of violence. This demonstrates a process of non-recognition around being a victim. Prior to the killing, Elizabeth's helplessness, isolation and desperation together with the collapse of her support systems, failed to recognise her as a victim. At the time of killing, the station commander and Elizabeth's friend denied that she was a victim. When Elizabeth is labelled as a perpetrator, she is denied her victim status. Elizabeth's act of killing was the point at which Elizabeth became empowered to change her life situation.

The identity of a perpetrator was being maintained through the anger of the policemen who were colleagues of Elizabeth's husband. The anger they expressed was transformed into physical force, which they felt was legitimate to use against
Elizabeth, even after she told the truth. Often being overpowered by her husband when he beat her, Elizabeth was now being overpowered by the police, which still kept her in a powerless and helpless position. Elizabeth's interactions with the police illustrate the force used against her to accept her new identity as a perpetrator. Elizabeth's only form of defense were the words she used, but this did not stop the assaults. Yet Elizabeth continued to fight the system, using the words available to her. Elizabeth fought to hold on to what she believed was the truth until she was engulfed by the legal system, which in my opinion, in no way perceived her as a victim. The legal system uses words in the form of laws to construct an identity or perpetuate one. In the legal system, Elizabeth is not recognised as a victim of abuse. Instead, her identity as a perpetrator is perpetuated by the laws of the legal system.

Thelma

Thelma's encounters with the police, initially involved a denial of any knowledge regarding her husband's death. This denial seemed to be a way of protecting herself and her children from a number of anticipated losses, such as financial, emotional and social and including the loss of her identity as a victim of abuse, which Thelma was perhaps not ready to deal with at that stage.

Unlike Elizabeth who was being forced to take on a new identity by the police as a perpetrator of violence; Thelma later related her story to the police as a victim of violence, and as someone who was desperate, lonely and feeling extremely helpless. As she says, "I just cough it out and I tell the police it was me who killed my husband". Thelma was never beaten by the police, perhaps because they did
not have to impose or force upon her the identity of a perpetrator of violence. In a way Thelma had 'collaborated' with the police, whose job is to identify perpetrators. "I tell the police, it's many times I go to the police station to report this case and the police doesn't help me with that case. Now one day, I told the police, "this man he will go dead; ...or me". Elizabeth and Thelma both made threats of different intensities, prior to the actual killings. Thelma directly expressed her wish to see her husband dead.

It is interesting to note that Thelma remained fearful of her husband during her relationship, but at the time she killed him, she was not afraid of the consequences of her actions. All she hoped for was a better quality of life without her batterer. I get the impression, that the initial hope and optimism that Thelma experienced when she thought of killing her husband has diminished.

According to White (1995), when women consider separation, they take into account their economic and financial positions and also the resources available to them. However, White believes that women also experience rising expectations at or during the period of separation. Women expect to be freed from the terror and despair that has become a part of their daily existence. Women also expect to reach a degree of well-being through their separation from their batterers.

The thought of being perceived as a perpetrator of violence conveys a profound sense of sadness and loss for Thelma. She adds, "I feel very bad in myself...".
Catharine

The assault by the police was one of the very first conversations Catharine and I shared together. Catharine told her story with a sense of urgency and I believe that the assault by the police is a significant feature of Catharine's story because questions remain unanswered about why Catharine was convicted.

Like Elizabeth, the police believed Catharine to be a perpetrator of violence and used physical force to make her accept this new status. "They start questioning me: You killed your husband? I answer: I never killed my husband. The other one (policeman) took the shambock. They hit me here (points to head). After that I fell down. When I fell down, they lifted me from the floor and put me in a chair. I'm sitting there in the chair....they come they beat me".

The researcher's understanding of Catharine's story about the killing is that she came to be identified as a perpetrator of violence, through the abuse from the police, and this identity was later reinforced by the judge. At the police station, Catharine had only words, like Elizabeth, to defend herself. In Catharine's case these words formed many questions, which were not answered and ignored. In Catharine's case it appears to be that the more she denied being responsible for her husband's death, the more she was being abused by the criminal justice system to accept her identity as a perpetrator.
One wonders whether Catharine was incarcerated because she was overpowered by the abuse that she experienced from the police or because like Elizabeth and Thelma her story it seems may not have been heard or listened to in the respective channels of the criminal justice system.

Until this day, Catharine strongly believes that she did not kill nor hire someone to kill her husband. Perhaps, Catharine has chosen not to share her link, if any, to this killing, or it could be that the story shared here is the one that Catharine considers to be significant.

For both Catharine and Elizabeth, the behaviour of the police appeared to be a way of breaking down their identities and their sense of community, in order to isolate them. In addition, their self-respect was destroyed and their worlds of experiences were demoralised and depersonalised.

To the extent that the battered woman kills to avenge the abuse she has suffered, her homicidal act represents, at least in part, an assertion of her own self-worth. In seeking revenge, she is in effect asserting that she was neither fully to blame for nor deserving of such abuse (Ewing, 1987).

This sense of self-worth in the woman is derived from their "quality of relationships with others" (Browne, 1987, p. 76), which Kaplan and Surrey in Browne (1987) refer to as the "relational self". Hence, it is very hard for a victim not to internalise the implications of this kind of treatment and deeply question her own worthiness.
Elizabeth

Being fully aware of the unfairness of her trial and having spoken out about it seemed of no use. The researcher believes that not calling on witnesses to speak on behalf of Elizabeth (for whatever reason), was the power that the criminal justice system had over Elizabeth, thus perpetuating the helpless and subdued position that she was familiar with.

Elizabeth fought hard to be given a fair trial. However, her beauty created disbelief around maintaining her identity as a victim of violence.

Elizabeth remained a victim in a system which over-powered her through constant isolation and non-recognition of her abusive context. However, she became a perpetrator through the actions, behaviours, feelings and perceptions of others around her, examples of which include the abuse and threats from the police, the denial by the prosecutor of Elizabeth's identity as a victim because of her beauty, and ambivalent support from family and friends. "[S]ome of the other people were saying yes, they know he was abusing me, some of them they've said, its because I'm fooling around, especially his colleagues". This led to Elizabeth becoming angry and afraid of meeting other people, because she was concerned about their perceptions of her. "..they may think I'm a bad person". This in turn began a process of reactions that led Elizabeth to question who she was. This resulted in ambivalence being created around her self and her identity. "But I used to tell myself that even if they can think I'm a bad person, I know that I'm not a bad person
inside. Alright, I'm bad to them, but as far as I'm concerned I'm not bad. So.. but
another thing I was feeling guilty about my younger sisters. They won't respect me
anymore. And my father maybe, sometimes if I want something and then he would
force himself to give me that, trying to comfort me. I didn't like that because it's not
that he is giving me that with a whole heart; his just trying to comfort me, that I
mustn't feel bad. So I was feeling terrible about it".

Little support that was received was verbal in nature and encouraged her status as
a victim of abuse. "They used to say: Even if you used to leave him alone, he used
to go and fetch her (you) again. So he's the one who caused everything".

At the end of this trial, Elizabeth remained powerless and extremely helpless as she
encountered isolation, alienation, intimidation, disloyalty and a betrayal of trust from
people and those involved in the court case. For instance, not allowing the people
who supported Elizabeth to testify, meant that the criminal justice system and the
community had condemned her for her actions. Yet, Elizabeth, a woman who was
constantly silenced, and a woman with a voice that was no longer being heard;
fought hard to continue believing in herself.

Elizabeth believed that she would get a suspended sentence, based on her
knowledge of other women. This thought raises two possibilities: Firstly, for
Elizabeth, her battle would have been won insofar as she would have been
recognised as a victim, rather than a perpetrator of violence. Secondly, it implies
that the story told by Elizabeth about her life would have been heard, listened to and
perhaps even considered.
Elizabeth is paying the penalty because she has been convicted by the legal system, the community and the people around her, who believe that she is a perpetrator of violence. When a woman in such a position is convicted, it implies that the community and larger systems that influence the laws being created, support the decisions that are made by the criminal justice system.

Thelma

Like Elizabeth, it seems as though Thelma felt that her trial was unfair. The researcher wonders whether more knowledge about the court and the language used in court would have helped Thelma to win the case.

The impression I have of Thelma is that she felt that her story was not heard nor listened to, even though she initially entered the criminal justice system with the identity of a victim of violence. Thelma's lack of knowledge about the court highlights the powerful position of the criminal justice system. This lack of knowledge keeps the victim-now-turned-perpetrator in a helpless and powerless position, in which the person is totally dependent on the system. The process of being dependent is also created by the helplessness and eventual collapse of the support systems. This results in the battered woman becoming increasingly isolated. Does this then allow the criminal justice system to be fair, objective and neutral in its decision-making?
Similarities of Thelma's experiences in court can be drawn with her battering experiences with her husband. Thelma's husband restricted her from going out, and so she was forced to rely on him for knowledge of the outside world. Likewise, during her court case, with absolutely no support from the community, Thelma was not given any information about the court proceedings, and so was forced to rely on the court to give her the necessary information. Thelma's silence both in court and with her husband, was another way in which both the criminal justice system and her husband gained power over her.

In addition, the process of entering the criminal justice system and going to court is a matter of procedure for people that are generally perpetrators of violence. For Thelma, it seems as though no consideration was made for the context in which she was brought to court, namely, the nature of her abusive relationship, which led her to kill her husband.

Thelma does not recall her encounters with other people after she killed her husband. Her mother had passed away before the killing incident and her husband's family had withdrawn their support even before Thelma's husband was killed. Generally, Thelma was alone in her trial.

Thelma's children had witnessed the violence that had been directed towards her by her husband. Their support was significant for her, since it was the only available support that recognised her victim status.
Catharine attended court for six months after which her case was withdrawn. This seemed to be a significant turning point; in the sense that the police and other members of the criminal justice system, could not convince the judge that Catharine was a perpetrator of violence. At this stage, Catharine seemed to be a perpetrator only in the eyes of some members of the criminal justice system especially the police.

After some time Catharine was rearrested. Members of the criminal justice system were then able to convince each other, (but not Catharine), of her identity as a perpetrator of violence. Feeling shocked, hurt and confused about the judge's decision, and still mourning the death of her mother, Catharine had lost her battle of convincing the criminal justice system that she was not responsible for her husband's death and was, in fact, a victim of violence. "I feel bad, I was crying all the time...".

Catharine seemed more helpless and less powerful in her fight to believe in herself as a victim of abuse even though Catharine has repeatedly and continuously stated: "I never killed my husband. Yet through their abusive endeavours the criminal justice system remained powerful over her.

Like Thelma, Catharine's children believed that their mother was a victim of violence and their regular presence in court, provided Catharine with much needed support.
"The other people, they think I'm a murderer, I'm a killer of someone. But from my heart I am not a killer. Yes the people they talk too much, because when I'm in the transport maybe to go to town, they talk about my name. But, they don't know me. Yes I feel bad".

The community that Catharine lived in identified her as a perpetrator. Catharine felt lonely and alienated from her community to the extent that she would force herself to go out shopping for the sake of her children. "I feel pain in my heart. Sometimes the next door neighbour, they want to talk to me, but the husband of the next door neighbour, maybe he told his wife: Don't talk to that lady, because she killed her husband". Hence, Catharine's neighbour would not speak to her.

The criminal justice system finds itself in a powerful position with the support from the community. Catharine, on the other hand, seemed to be as helpless and as powerless as she was in her relationship with her batterer.

Hart (1996), notes that battered women across different cultural communities sometimes identify community abandonment as an untenable adverse consequence of cooperation with prosecution. This was apparent in Catharine's case.
Elizabeth

When Elizabeth first entered prison, she was afraid of what to expect. She felt alone and thought she would not survive her sentence. Elizabeth initially remained secretive about her reasons for coming to prison. This resulted in members (wardens) telling prisoners about Elizabeth's story. Consequently the prisoners began swearing at her and passing bad remarks at her, "then I'll say to them: No, if you want to know about my case, come let's sit down, let me tell you what happened".

The researcher is of the impression that being sentenced for 25 years and having served five years in prison, together with her previous experiences in the criminal justice system, the ability for Elizabeth to believe in her self and to believe that she is not a bad person nor a murderer, has begun to erode. This sense of disbelief can be partly contextualised and I think that Elizabeth does this when she describes the nature of the prison setting as corrupt.

The ambivalence around Elizabeth's identity is highlighted, in the prison context itself and particularly, when she states her reasons for wanting to be released from prison after five years in prison. "I want to show other people outside that I am a better person, not as bad as they think. And I want to prove (to) myself that I'm not bad".
Elizabeth's beauty is a factor that she has continuously struggled with in helping herself and others believe that she is a victim of violence. This was especially difficult in prison, where members and prisoners find it hard to believe that Elizabeth is a victim of "forced circumstances".

Elizabeth's beauty and her strong presence were immediately felt as she entered the interviewing room. While listening to Elizabeth's story I wondered whether her 'inner voice' radiated the strong character and stamina that she displays. Listening to Elizabeth's story invoked an intense feeling of sadness, frustration, and helplessness, yet admiration and respect.

Elizabeth also believes that the media has influenced and maintained the image that has been created in society of prisoners. "They think we are bad, bad, bad. They don't even want to hear about criminals...Like in my case they are categorising me as a killer, but they don't know what pushed me to do that".

Yet, having served five years in prison, Elizabeth has managed to retain a sense of dignity and integrity, by thinking for herself.

In sharing this story with me, Elizabeth experienced some discomfort. She attributed her uneasiness to the fact that sharing involved thinking and "I can't run away from thinking". Elizabeth carries on to say, "I want to talk about it, so that I will be relieved". As I understand it, for Elizabeth, sharing her story and not remaining secretive has become a meaningful and healing process.
Thelma

Like Elizabeth, Thelma was lonely when she entered prison. She thought that her sentence was going to be long and difficult. It was only until Thelma was transferred to Johannesburg Prison, that she realised that she was not alone. In Johannesburg Prison, she was perceived as just another perpetrator of violence.

In the prison setting Thelma remains a victim. This is because she feels helpless and stuck and confined to prison, as she was in her home. Thelma is also subjected to authoritarian personnel in prison who make decisions for her and other prisoners' activities. In prison, Thelma has felt completely excluded from her children and I imagine that she feels pain when thinking about the valuable time that she is spending away from home. As such it appears as though Thelma's children in some way reinforce the guilt that she feels about leaving them to fend for themselves, but she has received support and sympathy from prisoners in her cell. Thelma hopes to be released some day, so that she can provide a better quality of life for herself and her children.

Both Thelma and Elizabeth sit with profound feelings of remorse and regret about the losses of their husband's. They also do not appear to have reached the point of feeling relieved about not being in an extremely abusive and intense relationship. The researcher gets the impression that there does not seem to be a sense of feeling free as individuals; perhaps because this feeling has been stifled in the prison setting.
The researcher is struck by the prison context which has robbed both Elizabeth and Thelma of their identities, excluded them from the outside world, their children and their families, but it has failed thus far, to take away their ability to think for themselves.

Catharine

When Catharine arrived in prison, the prisoners initially communicated with her through their prison cards, which stated her length of sentence and category of sentence. No matter how much Catharine tried to make others believe that she is a victim, prisoners defy her by saying, "[A]s long as you are in prison, you commit(ted) that crime".

Catharine seems to feel that she was betrayed, and unsupported by her community, and I sensed anger and hostility in her voice as she spoke about her plans for eventually leaving the prison. "I don't need any friends and whatever". Catharine has been humiliated, alienated and degraded by her community, and her decision to alienate herself from her community seems to be her way of protecting herself and her children from being further alienated because of her imprisonment.

Catharine has repeatedly mentioned throughout our conversations that she did not commit 'the crime. I am in no position to judge her story, but I am of the opinion that taking part in this research study has allowed her to share her experiences and her story. We only hear one side of the story in this study, yet the question I ask myself is if Catharine's story is the 'true' one relative to her context, then she may have been sentenced because of her experiences with the criminal justice system, which
successfully managed to overpower her, and if this should be the case, where does treatment begin for Catharine - a battered woman or a murderer or both?

The experiences of these women in prison confer with those found by Eaton (1993), that when women speak of the prison experience they reveal their experiences of feeling excluded: from home, from family, from friends, from meaningful time and from all that contributes to their sense of self and self-worth. The women are also excluded from decisions about their lives and from the close involvement in the lives of others which would provide a sense of community. Eaton comments that this is the result of a system which defines these women in entirely negative terms; and as different from and less than, other women - excluded and taken down.

Conclusion

The chapter paid particular attention to the manner in which the women's identities as victims and perpetrators were constructed and perpetrated through the contexts they encountered.

Chapter 8 discusses the research and provides treatment recommendations for clinician working with battered women who kill. The chapter and subsequently the study is concluded with a critique and with suggestions of further research in this area.
CHAPTER 8
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter begins by summarising the identities of the battered women who killed, as they have emerged from the narrative accounts. This summary, the analysis in the previous chapter and the societal processes that contribute to the phenomenon of battering (see Chapter 4), raises the issue of whether punishment is a suitable form of treatment for battered women who kill. The discussion is carried further, with regards to recommendations for the clinical treatment of battered women who kill. This chapter is concluded with a summary and critique of this study.

8.1. The Victim-Perpetrator-Victim Cycle

This section attempts to highlight the victim-perpetrator-victim cycle that has emerged, both from the stories told by the battered women who have killed, and systems they encountered, namely, their battering relationship, the criminal justice system, and the prison system.

The researcher has developed the diagram below, Figure 8.1, to summarise the way in which the battered women in this study have been perceived and identified as victims and perpetrators as they have moved through the different systems.
Most battering relationships, if not all, occur in the privacy of one's home. Avni (1993) compares the nature of battering relationships in the home to total institutions, such as prisons. Table 8.1. below summarises the similarities between these two systems.
In battering relationships there is a definite separation between the batterer and the battered woman. Similarly in prison, a clear distinction exists between the managing and the managed (Avni, 1993).

An important feature which focuses attention on to the battered woman's status as a victim of violence, is a process involving the mortification of the self, which the battered woman enters into her home and the prison system. According to Avni (1993), this is an internal psychic process carried out by external physical means. Imposing limitations on one's connections with the outside world with a look or threat, or beating, results in a source of discomfort and becomes an attack on the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Institution</th>
<th>Battered Woman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rules are made by the staff - who are in authority; recalcitrance is punished.</td>
<td>House rules are made by the batterer - the sole authority in the family; recalcitrance is punished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confinement to the institution: all the daily activities are carried out within it.</td>
<td>Confinement to the home: most of her daily activities take place within it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The inmates have only limited contact with the outside world; consequently staff feel superior and the inmates inferior.</td>
<td>Limited contact with her family and friends; consequently the batterer feels superior to his partner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortification of the inmate's self.</td>
<td>Mortification of self due to batterer's suspicion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant exposure to staff and to the other inmates.</td>
<td>Constant exposure to her batterer's surveillance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside interference can not protect the inmate from the threat to her physical existence.</td>
<td>The private nature of the home precludes interference and protection of outsiders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 8.1. SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE BATTERED WOMEN'S HOME AND TOTAL INSTITUTION (Avni, 1993, p. 139)
self of a normal adult. Ewing (1987) describes this process for battered women as a 'psychological death' which leads them to a point when the women engages in homicide practices. A profound sense of desperation, loneliness, helplessness and stuckness ensues which distinctly illustrates the women's position as victims.

**Battered Women Who Kill As Perpetrators of Violence**

In this study the identity of a perpetrator of violence has generally been assigned to the women by the criminal justice system.

As a victim of violence, the battered woman was condemned by her batterer for her activities. As a perpetrator of violence the battered woman is condemned by the criminal justice system.

Just as the batterer controls his partner's life and makes decisions for her, so the criminal justice system decides whether the battered woman who killed should be sentenced or not. Prior to this point, when the woman is arrested by the police, this behaviour immediately implies that she is a perpetrator of violence. Her trial in court is a procedure which reinforces her identity as a perpetrator of violence. The implications of accepting the identity of a perpetrator are far-reaching. For instance, the police are given the sense that arresting a battered woman for the death of her husband; abusing her and ensuring that she goes to trial is the correct way to treat the woman. The procedure of the police is supported by the court, when the latter condemns and convicts the battered women, as a perpetrator of violence. The court is, in turn, influenced by society. Society supports the decisions and actions of...
the court when a perpetrator of violence is condemned and convicted, to ensure that communities are safe and protected.

Elizabeth, Catharine and Thelma were forced to relinquish their identities as victims of violence in the context of their battering relationships and by overpowering them in different ways (as explained in the previous chapter), and then sentencing them, the criminal justice system has forcefully made them accept their statuses as perpetrators of violence.

In summary, the victim-perpetrator-victim cycle demonstrates the circular-interactive process between the actions or behaviours of the battered women who kill and the resulting identity from the context in which she finds herself.

8.2. Punishment - A Form of Treatment?

Punishment in criminal law is utilised as a form of "general deterrence," in which the threat of punishment is thought to deter potential offenders in the general community (Ewing, 1987). For instance, a battered women will be deterred from killing her batterer because she fears being arrested, convicted, and incarcerated.

According to Ewing (1987), this concept of "general deterrence" presupposes firstly, that the battered women will be aware of her potential to use such deadly force; and secondly, that she will be able to assume with some degree of confidence that her defence will justify her lethal actions. It is only in rare cases of battered women who kill, that either of these presuppositions are met.
Ewing (1987) points out that punishment can also act as a "special deterrent", in which the convicted person will be less likely to engage in crime. In the case of battered women who kill, using this form of punishment results in the women being in no position to engage in spousal homicide in future relationships, because they are in prison; and the women learn that spousal homicide is counter-productive. In this, however also because there is no recognition of the bigger abusive patterns as the problem.

An underlying assumption of these explanations is that the women having killed once pose a heightened risk of lethal violence to the community, or at least to other men with whom they may engage in close relationships.

In 1987 Carolene Saunders complained in a Port Elizabeth court of sexual and physical abuse from her husband, whom she eventually beat to death with a pick axe handle, while he was asleep. Mr Justice Solomon heard that Carolene, had over a long period of time, been ridiculed, assaulted and humiliated by her husband. Justice Solomon accepted that Carolene had suffered grievously and was not sent to jail, but given a five year suspended sentence (Henning, 1988).

In August 1986, Diane Stratford, also of Port Elizabeth shot and killed her husband as he lay sleeping. The same judge (Mr Justice Solomon) heard that Diane had suffered four years of sadistic assaults by her husband who sexually abused her with objects, cans and a can of hairstyling mousse. Diane was also given a five year suspended sentence, as the judge told the court that the degree of perversion
and sadism that Diane was subjected to was more than a normal woman would endure (Henning, 1988).

Elizabeth, and Thelma have been punished for crimes they admit to committing and in Catharine's case, for a crime she has supposedly committed. Comparing the two cases above with the women in this study, raises a number of questions; such as - Was it the type of judge that Elizabeth, Catharine and Thelma encountered that led them to their convictions? Was it the colour of their skins that led them to be so severely punished? Perhaps the communities in which Carolene and Diane lived showed their support in the judge's decision - that they had not been humanely treated, whereas in the case of Elizabeth, Thelma and Catharine community support was lacking? With regards to the context of the battering relationship, could it be possible that this context was considered in Carolene and Diane's case; whereas in Elizabeth, Thelma and Catharine's situation, the context of their battering relationships were either denied, overlooked or ignored? The recognition of Diane and Carolene as victims of violence is evident, whereas there seems to be a lack of recognition for Elizabeth, Thelma and Catharine's sense of victimhood.

Based on the narratives that have unfolded in this study, the researcher assumes that the stories of the women were not heard. If this is so, then would the women in this study have received similar sentences, had their stories been heard? Finally the interplay between the underlying notions of fairness, universality, objectivity and neutrality of the criminal justice system when designating punishment is questioned.
The researcher is of the opinion that the women in this study have been doubly punished. The women have been excluded by their batterers from their friends, family and relatives, and from the outside world in general. The criminal justice system has sentenced these women who then move to the prison system, where they are excluded from the events of the outside world. Exclusion becomes the nature and form of punishment in prison. A question arises as to whether battered women who kill actually deserve to be so doubly punished.

The struggle that the battered women who killed were involved in trying to free themselves from their battering relationship, is clearly illustrated in their struggle to free themselves from this process of punishment in prison. All the women in this study have made efforts whilst in prison to contact lawyers for human rights, to assist them in reducing their sentences.

Finding themselves in a vicious cycle of being a victim-perpetrator-victim in the contexts they encounter, implies that treatment for battered women who kill should begin long before they reach the prison context. The stories that the women have to tell are (not) heard many times before they arrive in prison. The lack of funding for shelters from the government is an example of the women's stories not being heard, and a lack of formal national recognition of their statuses as victims of violence.

Most non-governmental organisations dealing with the prevention of violence against women provide counselling facilities for battered women who seek their help. This study will not discuss the kind of treatment available in these
organisations because it has been the focus of other research (see Angless, 1992). Instead this study discusses treatment for battered women who kill who find themselves being identified as perpetrators in the criminal justice system, resulting in their conviction; which brings them to prison.

8.3. Treatment Recommendations

The treatment recommendations are based upon the stories that have unfolded in this study.

8.3.1. The Criminal Justice System

8.3.1.1. The Police

Having killed their batterers, the women were left with few defences, one of which was the story they had to tell about their experiences. The women who sought help from the police were silenced, and abused by the policemen to whom they spoke reminding them, again, of the abuse they had experienced at the hands of their batterers.

It is recommended that either trained policemen or policewomen should be available for the women to share their stories. At this point in the criminal justice system, the women need to be listened to and heard without having to be defensive. They do not need to be judged or degraded by the police for having carried out an act that has freed them from the abuse.
In South Africa, non-governmental organisations dealing with the prevention of violence against women have implemented an extensive training course with the police. The aim of the course is to provide knowledge and assist the police in dealing with cases of battered women.

The experiences of Elizabeth and Catharine with the police have been horrific, humiliating and dehumanizing. The abuse they experienced from the police left them in a position that found their stories silenced and denied; and their voices suppressed. The courts have continued to silence the stories of these women.

8.3.1.2. The Law

According to Mogwe (1994), one of the most pressing tasks for women in South Africa is to challenge the dominant discourse and dominant values particularly in the law. In addition, Mahoney (1991) explains that meaningful change requires rethinking the entire relationship of law and culture in the field of domestic violence and developing approaches that reveal the issue of violence as a part of the issue of power, rather than perpetuating or exacerbating the images that now conceal questions of domination and control.

A more specific and immediate form of treatment recommendation is directed at lawyers who deal with and represent battered women who kill. A more open and honest relationship between the lawyer and his/her client is suggested, which will provide further challenges to the way in which this process is organized by the...
nature of legal discourse. Kaser-Boyd and Forrest (1993) comment on the lawyer-client relationship with battered women who kill. They state that protection becomes a non-negotiable aspect for the survival of victims of violence. Without protection risks escalate and the chances for recovery become remote. Women are likely to see their lawyers, especially males, as authority figures and perhaps feel intimidated and somewhat ambivalent. For a battered woman who kills, the only way of relating to the lawyer is the way she learnt with her batterer. In other words, she will be indirect in expressing her thoughts and wishes and afraid to say how she really feels. She is also helpless, dependent, confused and disempowered to make a decision.

It is therefore suggested that lawyers or other individuals representing the women in court (such as attorneys, prosecutors, magistrates and so on) should firstly be able to educate their client's about the language of the court and the nature of court proceedings. For instance, Thelma felt completely silenced because of her lack of knowledge about the court. Secondly, lawyers or other individuals representing the women in court, should be in a position to educate their clients about possible legal options available to them.

In Elizabeth's case, friends and the station commander, key witnesses, were not called on to testify. For whatever reason, none of the women had expert witness testimonies in their trials. The experiences of these women, give the impression that their lawyers had not listened to nor heard their stories and were merely representatives of already condemned perpetrators of violence. The potential for more people to get involved, perhaps to give the women a stronger voice it seems,
was not encouraged by the lawyers at any point in the trial. It is only on the basis of a supportive and trusting relationship that a lawyer can encourage such efforts.

To sum up, the researcher believes that giving battered women who kill a voice in the criminal justice system, with which their stories can be listened to and heard, would make a difference in the amount of abuse, power and degradation the women experience within the system.

It is not impossible to change policy, the law, the legal system and the traditional attitudes, norms and values around the issue of battered women who kill (Mogwe, 1994). It is just not easy.

8.3.2. The Community

Despite the growing awareness of the phenomenon of battering and the search for ways to alleviate some of the problems battered women encounter, very little is known about how communities are responding to the problem (Cannon & Sparks, 1989).

Bascelli (1985) suggests that communities must display compassion towards the abused women. Eascelli believes that it is essential that battered women generally feel that there is a medium of exchange of dialogue. If society demonstrates that there are outlets which the battered woman may exploit, then avenues for her protection and treatment for her batterer will be readily available.
Elizabeth strongly suggests that professionals working in the prison should get involved in community outreach programs, because she believes that communities should be educated about the plight of battered women who kill and their experiences, in the hope that this will change their perceptions of battered women and especially battered women who kill. "Even if we are criminals, we are still human beings... I was not born a criminal. Something force me to be a criminal. I am not a criminal". Elizabeth believes that the community has a distorted image of battered women who kill. The researcher agrees with the need for community education on abuse, also because it involves the recognition of the context of battering from which these women emerge.

8.3.3. Treatment Recommendations to Clinicians in Prison Settings

The following treatment recommendations are addressed to clinicians such as psychologists and social workers who work within the prison setting.

Elizabeth, Thelma, and Catharine are now in prison. It is here that the work to heal themselves can begin. They have received minimal treatment in prison thus far.

For battered women, the primary task in therapy is to derive alternative meanings of their experiences of abuse, and thus for therapists the task is to establish the conditions or contexts that make it possible to reinterpret the abuse. The dominant story in the lives of these women is a negative one, and assisting them to provide positive accounts of who they might be as person, will allow them to actively engage in the reinterpretation of the abuse they were subjected to (White, 1995).
Psychotherapy becomes an interpersonal construction process (Fruggeri, 1992; Lax, 1922). In this process an interpersonal context co-evolves within a consensual domain to explore through conversation, realities that are compatible with a particular client's unique tendency to attribute meaning and explanation in her life (Goolishian & Anderson, 1987; 1992). The process of (re)constructing new or alternate narratives and meanings may occur individually or in a group.

Group therapy provides the women with an opportunity to express themselves and their concerns to be listened to without judgement. The battered women in the group develop a sense of culture and community and a sense of belonging. By communally expressing and validating their experiences the women are recognised as victims. The act of killing can be re-interpreted as act of empowerment for the women, that impacts on their autonomy. Clinicians are seen as participant observers in a reciprocal process of exchange with participants in these communities. Clinicians create an open space, which can facilitate dialogue. According to Neimeyer (1993) the spontaneous give and take and the confirmation and disconfirmation of experience among group members is accepted as part of the communal process from which personal narratives take shape. Group therapy is therefore seen as a social, meaning-making process. Clinicians learn about the lived world of these women through their personal narratives, which in turn may increase our consciousness around their problems of existence.

Thelma has a strong need to attend group therapy. She feels that having taken part in group therapy sessions, with me (during my training), has helped her to gain courage in prison and not feel intimidated by the prisoners. "I'm not like before (and
laughs), I'm changed now, I like people now". Regaining a sense of trust remains Thelma's biggest barrier. She has met someone and now communicates with him through writing, but she is wary of the relationship and says, "I don't like the men, because I'm here because of that man".

Catharine was seen by social workers on an ongoing basis, while on trial and in prison. "When I talk about my problem, I feel better".

Elizabeth received treatment from both a psychologist and psychiatrist. She describes experiencing post-traumatic stress symptoms when she first arrived in prison. Elizabeth then chose to discontinue treatment with the psychologist and psychiatrist after telling herself, "I'll fight this, and will end up being a human being again. Elizabeth strongly suggests the use of group therapy with battered women who kill. She feels that a lot may be learned, both on an educational and on a personal level, in sharing one's stories with each other. According to Anderson and Goolishian (1992), telling one's story is a re-presentation of experience; it is constructing history in the present. The re-presentation reflects the tellers re-description and re-explanation of the experience in response to what is not-known by the therapist. The therapist's role is to develop a free conversational space and to facilitate the co-development and evolution of new meanings, new realities and new narratives, new action and thus change (Goolishian & Anderson, 1987; 1992; Lax, 1992; Fruggeri, 1992).

Suggestions therefore put forward by each woman emphasises the need for their experiences and feelings to be communally validated. This is a central premise of
therapy from a social constructionist perspective (Goolishian & Anderson, 1987; Lax, 1992;). Thus the dialogical creation of meaning, through language, is always a continuing process (Goolishian & Andersen, 1992). The therapist becomes a co-author of the story which is unfolding, with the client(s) as the other co-author(s) (Lax, 1992; White, 1995).

It is suggested that an alternate category for these women should be developed in prison. Rather than being categorised as murderers, these women should be categorised as battered women who killed. This would imply that the context of the battered woman is being recognised within the prison system. The act of killing is therefore placed in a context of a battering relationship. In addition, such a category will challenge the perceptions and images embodied in society.

Government policies around battered women who kill seem to be clearly lacking. When developed, these policies should be made clear and accessible within any context that the women may encounter. Policies should address the investigative and legal processes around battered women who kill. Policies developed around the punishment of battered women who kill should include the involvement of the women in community service. In this way, battered women who kill will not so severely be excluded by society (which is so often the case), and instead will be able to share their experiences with the community, for the purposes of education. Elizabeth strongly suggests the implementation of community outreach programs for this purpose. One of its aims would be that communities may become more aware of the processes by which battered women who kill become labelled as perpetrators and are consequently incarcerated, when in fact, they are victims of abuse.
The government should provide funding for the establishment of shelters. The purpose of building more shelters would ensure that battered women are provided with adequate and the necessary treatment, so as to prevent them from reaching a point of actually killing their partners. At this point, the government's lack of funding for shelters condones the violence against women. Furthermore, the government is seen as not recognising the status of these women as victims of violence.

In prison, government should encourage and establish a stronger network of resources that can provide assistance to battered women who kill and their children. The children of battered women who kill are often alienated from their mothers who are in prison. Thelma and Catharine have constantly emphasised this point. Their primary concern is the safety of their children. The researcher is of the opinion that the government, in conjunction with non-governmental organisations, should take responsibility to ensure that the children of these women are safe and provided with adequate treatment around having been exposed to extreme violence in their homes. Contracts may be used to guarantee such responsibility. Catharine believes that communities should assist in tending to the children's needs. In so doing, the researcher believes that the communities would be recognising the women as victims of abuse. It is also suggested that communities could also be involved with non-governmental organisations in giving the children an opportunity to understand that their mothers are victims of violence.
To sum up the aim of the treatment recommendations suggested above is to establish a greater and stronger recognition of battered women who kill so as to ensure that adequate treatment is provided for them.

8.4. **Summary**

This study has attempted to (re)construct the stories of three battered women who killed, with regards to their sense of self and identity. Conversations with each of the three women were held on two occasions. These conversations also included a written dialogue from the women.

The stories that unfolded in these conversations were presented in Chapter 1. The stories provided the framework or structure for this study and from which the stories were later analysed.

Domestic violence in the South African context was one of the themes in Chapter 2. This chapter included the definition of terms used in this research. The chapter ended with a discussion of the incidence and prevalence of battered women who kill, particularly within the South African context.

This study was conducted within a social constructionist epistemology, which was the focus of Chapter 3. Social constructionism sees reality as socially constructed in the dialogue between individuals situated within a particular cultural context.
The social construction of battering, which includes societal reactions and interpersonal reactions to battering was described in detail in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 explored the processes around power and control that manifest in battering relationships and other larger systems, such as the criminal justice system and the prison system. These processes were described in terms of the construction and maintenance of battering or abuse.

A qualitative research methodology used to analyze the interviews of the emergent narratives was described in Chapter 6.

Chapter 7 discussed the construction and perpetuation of the identities of battered women who kill as victims and perpetrators, as they emerged in the contexts of the battering relationship, the criminal justice system and the prison.

In this final chapter, a summary of the victim-perpetrator-victim cycle throws light on the suitability of punishment for battered women who kill. Treatment recommendations are discussed, based on the findings of this study. The study is concluded with a critique of its strengths and weaknesses.

8.5. Critique

The social constructionist approach is useful in exploring ideas which are normally inaccessible to systematic, empirical research. For example, the reader may recall the subjective component involved in the definition of the phenomenon of battering, which can be included from a social constructionist research, but would prove to be
impossible to define from the domain of empirical research. The subjective nature of the phenomenon of battering allows for the unfolding of complex webs of meanings attached to the processes and interactions of battered women who kill.

The ability to converse with the participants, as in the present study, is a significant strength insofar as it provides a space for the participants that puts them at ease. This space is safe enough for the participants to relate their stories around personal and difficult experiences in their lives.

Interpretations made in the analysis of the narratives, highlight the researcher's involvement in the co-construction of the narratives. The researcher is actively engaging with the participants in dialogue and therefore does not stand apart from the research.

The drawback of the present research methodology is that results cannot be generalised to the broader population of battered women who kill, since the knowledge derived is only true for the particular and circumscribed situations in which the research was undertaken.

The conversational mode of the present research is also more time consuming than empirical research methods. As such, the present research method can only be applied to a small group of participants at any particular time. Thus the generalisability of the findings is further limited.
In this study there was a transformation of the narratives, since the battered women will have told and re-told their stories to families, friends, police, the court, and other prisoners. However, it has not been possible in this study to illustrate how these narratives have been transformed over time.

There is accumulating literature on men who kill their female partners and some literature on women who beat their male partners and women who beat each other (lesbian battering), as compared to literature on battered women who kill. This study did not focus on these phenomena, even though they exist in the context of abuse or battering. Comparative studies around the processes encountered when battering men kill their female partners and battered women who kill their male partners, would be useful in identifying some of the nuances of difference and commonality in terms of the narrative construction to battering.

It would be interesting and useful to explore the narratives of battered women who kill from different cultural and racial backgrounds.

In order to gain a broader vision on the extent of the existence of the problem, empirical methods may be used to provide more information around the incidence of battered women who kill.

An extensive exploration into the social support networks is beyond the scope of this study. Further exploratory studies in this area would provide more knowledge around the social construction and perpetuation of abuse.
A discussion around the historical patterns of abuse, which may have occurred in childhood, has been a topic beyond the scope of this research.

Finally, two points mentioned in this study require further emphasis. Such as the fact that these women were victims of abuse, rather than perpetrators of violence, at the time of the killing.

A second point is that it is not possible to generalise the findings from this study to battered women who kill, because of the subjective nature of the phenomenon and the very small sample size.
Epilogue

While a greater understanding has been achieved from the available literature on battered women in general, there are still limits to our knowledge and understanding of the nature of battered women who kill.

This study has attempted to contribute further knowledge to the field of battered women who kill. Using a social constructionist epistemology, this study has specifically tried to understand the dynamics of power and control in the battering relationships and in the larger contexts (such as the criminal justice system and the prison system) encountered by these women which has contributed to the construction and perpetuation of their personal identities. These identities, as highlighted by this study, have been embodied within a victim-perpetrator-victim cycle. Treatment recommendations are based on the recognition and validation of this cycle which unfolds in the personal narratives of battered women who kill.

The study has attempted to help the women find their voices to re-tell the dominant stories about their lived experiences, with the hope that they may be shared, listened to and heard by those that read them and in so doing create new and unique meanings. While this text may be fixed and finite, conversations about the research continue without end:
I have reached no conclusion, have erected no boundaries, shutting out and shutting in, separating inside from outside: I have drawn no lines; as manifold events of sand change the dunes' shape that will not be the same shape tomorrow, so I am willing to go along, to accept the becoming thought, to stake off no beginnings or ends, establish no walls

(A.R. Ammons, Carson's Inlet, in Gergen & Kaye, 1992, p.166)
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APPENDIX A
IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

- If battering is defined as any repeated acts of physical or psychological force or repeated threats thereof used against a women by her partner, how often were you beaten or battered according to this definition?

- Describe the kind of person you were before you were beaten/battered?

- Describe the most typical/common form of beating/battering that you experienced with your partner?

- What thoughts and feelings did you have about yourself during the time you were beaten/battered?

- How did you cope with your beatings or battering experiences?

- Who was in charge in your relationship?

- What kind of support did you receive during the beating/battering experiences with your partner?

- How did these people think of you?

- Describe exactly what happened the day your partner was killed. Try and tell me so that I can see it as if it were a movie or a programme on television.

- How did you think about the killing then - and now?

- Tell me about the court proceedings or trial and your court case.

- What kind/type of support was available to you at the court case?
- What thoughts and feelings did you have about yourself during this period (trial).

- How did people think of you during this period?

- How did you think about yourself before you got to prison?

- Describe your experience about having to discuss or tell others about why you came to prison.

- How do people think of you now in prison?

- Having been in prison for an X amount of time, what thoughts and feelings do you have about yourself?

- What kind of treatment or rehabilitation have you received since you've been in prison?