SOCIAL MASQUERADE:

A THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ANALOGY AS APPLIED TO SELECTED CASE STUDIES OF BATTERED WOMEN IN JOHANNESBURG.

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation, which I herewith submit for the research qualification Master of Technology: Fine Art to the University of Johannesburg is, apart from the recognised assistance, my own work and has not been previously submitted by me to another institution to obtain a research diploma or degree.

Robyn Magowan  ___________________
Date  ____________________

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For
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ABSTRACT.

My research, in support of my cultural practice approaches the notion of masquerade from the position of battered women who employ it socially as a vehicle that allows them to perform the traditionalist ‘happily-ever-after’ fantasy of marriage. I propose that their ‘masquerade’ functions as a performance of what they perceive they should be in the public domain, and as a defence against punishment in the private domain. Central to my research are interviews with battered women who masquerade socially, from a select group who have been battered for most of their married lives. In a response to these interviews, I refer to the prevalence of battery in South Africa and propose a psychological rationale for social masquerade in these particular battered women. As the masquerade of these women informs my art production I have included a discussion of alternative expressions of masquerade in the work of two artists, Tracey Rose and Cindy Sherman. This forms a counterpoint to the use of masquerade as explained in my own cultural practice, which highlights the importance of dress as an adjunct to communication and disguise.

Key Words.

Masquerade, battery, Cindy Sherman, Tracey Rose, communication, dress.
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INTRODUCTION.

Womanliness could ........ be assumed and worn as a mask, both to
hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected
if she were found to possess it......

(Riviere 1929:38).

Confronting man, a woman is always play-acting: she lies when she
makes believe she accepts her status as the inessential other, she
lies when she presents to him an imaginary personage through
mimicry, costumery, studied phrases. These histrionics require a
constant tension;...every woman is more or less conscious of the
thought ‘I am not being myself’

(de Beauvoir 1953:557).

In her paper “Womanliness as a Masquerade” (1929) Joan Riviere’ analyzed the
masquerade of certain intellectual women, during the period around the 1920’s, who
did not conform to the typical standards of femininity and suffered emotionally (rather
than physically) as a result. Masquerade is explained by Riviere as an act; a woman’s
performance of herself as she perceives a man would have her be and a
psychological defense against ‘unconscious masculinity’ for which, as a woman, she
fears she will be punished (Andemahr, Lovell & Wolkewitz 1997:129). Similarly, her
contemporary Simone de Beauvoir in the “Second Sex” (1953:547) suggests that
masquerade is a game played by all women and not only women who are afraid of
retribution.

In this paper, in support of my cultural practice, I address the notion of masquerade
from the position of battered women specifically. My argument is based on what I
regard as the failure of womanly masquerade as defined by Riviere and confirmed by
de Beauvoir. The women I interviewed for this study were subjected to the retribution
that masquerade was employed to prevent and they consequently turned to what I
term ‘social masquerade’, which I describe as a battered wife’s performance of

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1 Joan Verrall Riviere was the wife of a barrister, a mother, social reformer, worker for divorce reform and women’s suffrage and
could be classified as a member of the British upper-classes. She came from an established Sussex family with literary connections
and like many well-bred women she did not go to university but spent a year in Gotha in Germany where she learnt to speak fluent
German. (Maddox 2006:125). Until recently, Riviere’s most important work was regarded as translating four volumes of Freud’s
Collected Papers, 1924-5 and overseeing his translations for publication in the International Journal of Psychoanalysis. She died in
1962, unrecognized for achieving this feat and unmentioned by Freud for her seminal piece of analytic writing about women’s
sexuality and femininity in ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade’ (Heath 1986:45-61).

2 Masquerade will be discussed at length in a following chapter. However, the word masquerade is derived from the French
‘mascarade’ and the Italian ‘maschera’ or mask, and is defined in the general sense as the performance of being someone that one
is not, putting on a false appearance.
herself, firstly as she would like to be seen in the public domain and secondly, as she thinks her husband would like her to be. Social masquerade, as a means of disguise, allows a battered wife to perform the traditionalist fantasy of living 'happily-ever-after' in keeping with what she believes to be social and cultural expectations. She chooses a demeanor as she might chose a mask or a costume. It can be put on or taken off like an item of clothing or an accessory and can be manipulated to hide a state of mind or state of body.

In my dissertation the theme of masquerade will be reviewed in the context of psychological manifestations and examples of visual art. The first chapter raises the issue of wife abuse, or battery, as it is known, and the psychological underpinnings for it, using information gathered from formal and informal interviews with affluent and well educated women in abusive relationships.

In the second chapter I look at evidence of masquerade in the work of two artists who use it to address issues other than abuse. American artist Cindy Sherman and South African artist Tracey Rose expose stereotyping, and other subtle and insidious subjections suffered by women, through their parodies of women’s roles. They thus foreground masquerade as a tool in the denial of a stabilized identity for women.

The third chapter comprises a review of masquerade in my own work. I propose that dress is as essential a part of masquerade as costume is to an actor. With my art production, I explore clothing, accessories and pastimes as concealment strategies and as a metaphor for the less material means of hiding psychological damage.
CHAPTER 1.
SOCIAL MASQUERADE.

The focus of this chapter is the battery of certain women within marriage. This chapter is divided into three sections, beginning with an introduction to the women interviewed for this study, followed by the prevalence of wife abuse and battery in South Africa, and ending with a psychological rationale for social masquerade.

1.1. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE WOMEN INTERVIEWED FOR THIS STUDY.

The women I interviewed for this study are white, well-educated and live in the affluent northern suburbs of Johannesburg. They are between the ages of 45 and 60 years old and have been, or were, married for many years. They have children and their husbands are professional men. Although I talked to a group of women informally about their abusive marriages, I concentrated on three women specifically, namely C, A and V, interviewing them formally, because they were typical of the sort of women who appear to have ‘everything’ - materially and otherwise - and live ‘normal’ lives. The others will also be referred to in the text by their initials.

For periods during their marriages these three women admit to masquerading socially and creating facades, to hide from public notice the evidence that they were physically, emotionally and verbally abused. In one case, severe physical abuse has continued for many years and still does. From outward appearances it is not possible to identify any of them as victims of battery nor would they seem to fit into any category of battered women identified by women’s support groups. None of them admitted their circumstances to anyone, not even family members, for many years because they regard the gossip, criticism and social stigma attached to being battered as unacceptable and unbearable. For all of these women, seeking help from a psychologist working for P.O.W.A. I consulted with Lifeline, on her recommendation, to see if statistics confirmed my notion that the women from my area of interest were battered and pretended not to be. The statistics could not accurately confirm this, but the paperwork completed by LifeLine counsellors estimated age, status and cultural group suggesting that this might be the case. The women I chose to interview, in consultation with Jansen van Rensburg, came from a small number of women suggested to me by acquaintances and friends because they fell directly within the social group in which I was interested. They were approached and agreed to be interviewed. I chose them because socially they pretended that they had happy marriages. Their experiences as battered wives were also completely different from each other. In the text I have referred to them by their initials for the sake of confidentiality, because anonymity was a condition stipulated by the women and the ethics committee. The other women I refer to declined to be interviewed formally so, with their permission, I recorded some aspects of their stories divulged to me, which I have used in my art production and in this paper.

3 The three formal interviews were conducted and taped in the presence of a psychologist, Madri Jansen van Rensburg then a psychologist working for P.O.W.A. I consulted with Lifeline, on her recommendation, to see if statistics confirmed my notion that the women from my area of interest were battered and pretended not to be. The statistics could not accurately confirm this, but the paperwork completed by LifeLine counsellors estimated age, status and cultural group suggesting that this might be the case. The women I chose to interview, in consultation with Jansen van Rensburg, came from a small number of women suggested to me by acquaintances and friends because they fell directly within the social group in which I was interested. They were approached and agreed to be interviewed. I chose them because socially they pretended that they had happy marriages. Their experiences as battered wives were also completely different from each other. In the text I have referred to them by their initials for the sake of confidentiality, because anonymity was a condition stipulated by the women and the ethics committee. The other women I refer to declined to be interviewed formally so, with their permission, I recorded some aspects of their stories divulged to me, which I have used in my art production and in this paper.
women’s agency or the police is seen as the final acknowledgement and confirmation of their failure as wives. Moreover, they perceive that it is not befitting of people in their social milieu, to approach such agencies.

1.1.1. **AN INTRODUCTION TO C.**

The first woman I interviewed, C, has left her husband, but she still has an important job in his company. She is well-liked, petite, pretty, sociable and seemingly confident. She is 50 years old and has 2 teenage sons. She was the younger daughter in a family of two daughters and although she had a good relationship with her mother, she was her father’s favorite child: ‘I was Daddy’s blue eyed girl’, (C 2004). She left home in Cape Town with a secretarial diploma at 21, to live in Johannesburg where she was independent and had a busy social life but after three years of ‘burning the candle at both ends’ (C 2004) she had a ‘breakdown’, and went back to Cape Town ‘and Daddy’ (C 2004) He bought her a flat nearby so he and her mother could look after her.

A few years later, at the age of 27, she married a man 11 years older than herself. It was his second marriage. She knew he had battered his first wife but naively accepted his claim that she drove him to it. When asked what she liked about him when they met, C replied; ‘It was fantastic. He was an older man who had the manners of a gentleman. He was so polite……and such fun’ (C 2004). Asked if she had any idea that he had an abusive and manipulative personality, she said that she did not, although the verbal battery started before they were married but she went ahead and married him anyway: ‘One thinks it’s going to stop. You see this perfect person [and ask yourself] how can he be like this? You blame yourself. You think ‘What did I do?’ (C 2004) To her, her husband was the man she had chosen and she believed he was perfect, so conversely, she must be to one who was imperfect. It appears that early on, she blamed herself for provoking his aggressive behavior. She questioned herself obsessively, ‘what did I do? Did I come home too late last night? Did I stay at book-club too long?’ (C 2004) and she spent years trying to convince her psychologist that it was her fault that her husband verbally and physically battered her - ‘He treated me
really like I was really something low down, like I had no brain. I believed I was useless and worthless and nothing could persuade me that I was not’ (C 2004).

She kept up the masquerade for almost all her married life and when asked how she managed this, she replied wryly:

Anti-depressants: I'm still on anti-depressants, um, 15 years now. And medication for panic attacks. You just pretend - life and soul of the party! 'C and… - the happy couple! Look how happy they are, they go out once a week to communicate and chat.' Never mind when we went home we had a big argument. It is a 'front' you hide behind. When people hear that I have left him, they are shattered. They don't believe it.

(C 2004).

I asked if she declined invitations at which her husband might become abusive and expose her masquerade, C answered:

Yes, oh yes, everything - whatever it was. It was always the question of what will _ say and what will _ think, or do, never mind I am my own person. Once, I did not tell him I was going to lunch with a girlfriend, confidante, but he found out. He believed I was telling her about the problems at home, which I was. He came into the restaurant and verbally attacked her. He cleared the restaurant. There wasn't a soul left. He just stood there screaming. So humiliating.

(C 2004).

When asked if any of her friends or her sister knew that she was on medication, she replied; 'it was not something you talk about. You want everything to be perfect on the outside, hoping it will become perfect’ (C 2004). She took anti-depressants to disguise herself as compliant and servile for him so that he would not get angry and publicly humiliate her. Eventually her fear escalated into full-blown panic attacks which enraged him but the more she pretended to be happy, confident and independent, the more he verbally and later, physically, battered her. When asked why she did not go to the police after he punched her in the face in her sleep one night, she smiled sweetly and said 'I couldn't! This doesn't happen to people like us, you know’ (C 2004).

After her teen-age son followed his father's example, slapping and swearing at her, she saw how this behavior affected her children and realized that she had to leave, which she has since done. After 22 years of marriage, she has a home of her own.
She no longer needs to masquerade as worthless to satisfy her husband’s need to dominate, nor does she need to masquerade socially and pretend to her family and friends. ‘I cannot tell you the tranquility when I walk through my townhouse door, the peace!’ (C 2004)

1.1.2. **AN INTRODUCTION TO A.**

A is a tall, attractive woman. She is sociable, creative, well-dressed and laughs a lot, often at herself. Like C, 'I was my Dad's best thing in the world' (A 2006). Since her second, also abusive, husband died a few years ago, she has had a clerical job but while she was married she lived in 'comfortable' circumstances in the inner northern suburbs (A 2006). She married her first husband when she was 21 and they were married for 20 years. He was:

*the boy from down the road, I was in love with him. He was good looking and he was a really nice man, really nice, but I had a bad relationship with him. He treated me like a 'buddy' not a wife. A buddy accepts anything and everything. I was there to create an environment in which he felt good. He manipulated me into a position where there was no man/wife 'thing'. It was more a mother/child 'thing'. I did not realize my marriage was different from other people's marriages because I was in a convent boarding school for my entire school life, from the time I was 6 years old. I did not know he was actively bi-sexual but looking back, I should have seen it. I had never been with my parents at home. I did not know what husbands and wives were like. Totally naïve'.*  

(A 2006).

After she married, A took on the household duties like, in her words, ‘a German hausfrau’ (A 2006), continually overcompensating and trying to please or make an impression on her husband. She had a son and later, a daughter, and her husband ‘...was the breadwinner. I felt I had no power to do anything, no money, no bank account, any money I earned went to him.’ (A 2006.) She recognized that, ‘I was the victim of his pecadilloes, which I had bravely born like a dutiful wife’ (Bult: Unpublished). Subsequently, she met a man with whom she had an affair because

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4 She explained that a ‘German hausfrau’ was a woman who took domestic duties very seriously and performed her tasks in an uncompromising, militaristic manner and to the best of her ability.

5 This un-published work consisted of a bulging lever arch file containing the story of her life which she started in 1999 and ended in 2003 although she says she adds to it from time to time. It is detailed and intimate. She has 2 copies, one of which she lent to me proudly. Madri Janse van Rensburg, was surprised by the amount of detail it contained and after the interview, commented that it was a pity she had to carry her story around with her like burden she could not let go.
she was 'nothing but a house-keeper' (A 2006) to a man who ignored her and had no remorse for either his public or private extra-marital affairs, both homosexual and heterosexual.

She blamed herself for not putting a stop to his sexual exploits, their often unstable financial state and ultimately, the failure of their marriage; ‘I was naïve and did not really realize what was going on’ (A 2006). When she looked to her mother for support she was criticized for being, 'just a housewife who had not taken the opportunity of an expensive education to further any ambitions if I'd had them' (Bult: Unpublished). She felt let down but because it was her mother's opinion, she believed her. Her second marriage was also to a batterer but they were not married long before they divorced, although later, when he became terminally ill, she nursed him until his death, thinking it was her duty to do so. She was not willing to talk openly about her second husband (although the file contained information about him) because it was her first husband that had the greatest impact on her. She blamed herself for marrying her second husband saying she should have recognized what she was getting herself into.

1.1.3. AN INTRODUCTION TO V.

V is a woman of 59 but she looks about 50. She left her first husband after a short marriage (but would not say why) and married her second husband, a violent man to whom she has been married for 15 years. She is glamorous and quietly spoken. Between them, she and her husband have 5 children all of whom have left home. She is still married and lives with her husband although he batters her regularly and often, both verbally and physically. She says she understands the meaning of masquerade and admits masquerading at times. She says her love for her husband is unconditional and it appears to be a burden to him.

She refers proudly, throughout the interview to a book written by her husband, ‘Running to Stand Still’ (O’Riain 2005) in which he justifies his reasons for battering her. In the book, she refers to a visit to a psychiatrist with her husband where she says to him: 'I've turned myself inside out to change, to be like you wanted me to be' (O’Riain 2005:308). He writes that it is hard not to take someone like her for granted
Arguments and physical confrontations seem to happen for him in cycles, the pressure of his belief that he has married the wrong person building repeatedly into violent episodes. Her opinions annoy him. Before they saw a psychiatrist, he would knock her to the ground and kick her, but she says that he has not done it for a while. After such an episode, she leaves home but always goes back again because her husband is always very remorseful. In V’s case, it suggests that her masquerade of being whatever he wants her to be has the effect of enraging her husband and provoking more violence. V and her husband have worked out a way of living together but she is constantly hyper-aware of his mood swings and his drinking. Asked why she did not report her husband’s assaults to the police, she says she could not do that because she loves him (V 2006).

1.1.4. INTRODUCTION TO THE OTHER INTERVIEWEES.

The following women were also interviewed, but informally, and will also be referred to here by their initials. They form part of my research although they did not want to be formally interviewed with a psychologist present, arguing that everyone goes through ‘hard times’ (B 2006) and some were not ‘actually beaten’ (R 2004), ‘things could have been worse’ (Z 2005) and ‘he is not such a bad man, just stressed’ (Z 2005).

Z, 50, was married at 25 to a man 12 years older than she. She had no children because she was ‘too stupid to be a mother’ (Z 2005). From early in their marriage, her husband shouted and swore at her, often publicly, about what he perceived to be her stupidity. She was slapped when she cooked a meal not to his liking, being made to clean up and start again after it was thrown onto the floor. She masqueraded by smiling and agreeing with his insults, pretending it did not matter. She was afraid of his shouted criticisms so she had no visitors and did household chores when he was out or asleep. She structured her home-business around early mornings and weekends, knowing her husband would not harass her while she was working. When, after 20 years and what she terms ‘a dramatic event where he did something more terrible than one can imagine’, (Z 2005) she planned to leave him. She went into therapy and revealed the extent of his battery to her family. She has gained enough confidence to deal with her fear of him and men in general and has started divorce proceedings.
Similar to Z, B, aged 58, rarely left the house and had no friends of her own. She could not follow her chosen career because of a medical condition. She was not as well educated as her younger, good looking husband (48) who, with heavy sarcasm, privately and publicly dismissed her and her opinions. He constantly complained about what she cost him, referring to her medical condition. Her only contacts were his friends, whom he entertained lavishly at home. To compensate for her lack of 'work' she masqueraded as a servant, keeping a low profile and obsessively cleaning their home to comply with his demand that the house was 'hotel' perfect as was his due, since he earned the money she lived on. He continually threatened to leave her if she did not comply arguing that there were ‘many younger fish in the sea’ (B 2005) and she believed him. Eventually, she moved into their holiday house. Away from her husband, she found a job which she loves and is developing a circle of friends. Strangely, she does not accept that she was battered because she ‘had everything that a woman could ever want. He never laid a hand on me. I was never beaten...’ but says her husband was 'not a nice person to live with' (B 2005).

T is a very quiet Catholic woman of 55 whose life consisted of activities that concerned her four children. Her masquerade as a modestly dressed, older woman was so that she did not attract attention or reveal ‘shake’ bruises so she did not engage in conversation or make friends. She was married to a wealthy man whose mistress lived in the family home. He threatened to take her children away if she said or did anything to change his domestic status quo or damage his reputation. She knew that he could and would carry out his threat so she sacrificed herself for them because they are all she cares about. Twenty eight years later when all her children had left home, she left her husband. She is still married but her outlook has changed, she is confident and sociable but she never mentions her husband. It is as if he never existed (T 2006).

R, 50, is an elegant, chief executive officer of a successful company who was married for 8 years, during which time she and her husband maintained a glamorous lifestyle. Her masquerade involved smiling and laughing, going to the gym, the beautician and the hairdresser regularly and spending a lot of money on clothes and entertaining. Her husband was an extremely jealous man, a ‘control freak’ (R 2004), who threatened her with a knife when he was drunk or under the influence of drugs. She suggested
that he needed psychological intervention to control his jealousy but he refused, saying there was nothing wrong with him, she made him jealous ‘on purpose’ (R 2004). Asked why she did not go to the police and lay a charge, she said she did but the police just took her statement not bothering to take her complaint any further. She said it infuriated her husband so she later withdrew it, wary of the possibility of his retribution. Finally, after she woke one night to find him standing over her with a knife, R left home taking her young child with her. She never went back and eventually divorced him (R 2004).

The common thread running through these interviews is that for periods of many years, these women did not feel worthy of better treatment and they perceived their battery to be a private issue. Only R approached the police, but they were not able, appropriately trained, or willing to help. Her age and financial situation made her unique among the interviewees and she alone felt confident enough to divorce her husband after a relatively short period of marriage (R 2004).

All the women I interviewed perceived their social position to be superior and taught themselves to perform their masquerade accordingly. Publicly, their performances earned them respect but in the private domain, they were their husband’s means to feeling powerful and achieving the self-esteem that lay in their ability to batter, dominate and subjugate their wives. Further, it appears that the growth of their husband’s self-esteem was somehow linked to the wives’ potential to tolerate and conceal their domination. Within a patriarchal tradition, many women are conditioned to accept male-serving behavior and perform male-serving roles even without the use of force to dominate them. Research seems to suggest that the family is an insidious channel of indoctrination into patriarchal ideology because it socializes the young within a particular hierarchy of gender and entrenches patriarchal domination from the earliest age (Donovan 2000:159).

The women I interviewed accepted that social masquerade helped them to keep up the appearance of a happy marriage and better their lives in their own way. As C said ‘There is no point in hanging out your dirty washing, people will only gossip, even your friends. It only embarrasses you and worries your family. Better to shut up and put up’ (C 2004). The interviewees have practiced social masquerade for some time and their
masquerade allows them to be seen as confident, attractive women who, like the women they aspire to be, have happy marriages and happy families. Their rationale seems to be that if they can appear to be happy, well-dressed, and affluent with high social standing, it could become a reality. They all appeared to have very low or non-existent self-esteem during the period of their battery and in choosing to masquerade socially they publicly fulfilled their husband's expectations, even managing to keep the peace at times.

These women also masqueraded socially to protect themselves from public judgment and criticism because they saw themselves as 'the problem' and a failure as the patriarchally stereotyped 'good wife'. They masqueraded to protect their children from embarrassment and their parents and siblings from anguish. In addition, in some cases, it seems that social masquerade was performed to protect the violent husband's reputation, and by association, their own. Cynically, social masquerade might be seen as a form of collusion with the batterer because battered wives seem to fear public humiliation and recrimination more than battery. In the case of T, she colluded with her husband's threats by wearing long sleeves to hide the 'shake' bruises from their adult sons, or from people at work and at church, so they would not find out what her husband was really like (T 2006). V claimed that she used social masquerade to protect her husband's parents from the knowledge that their son was a particularly vicious 'wife beater' (V 2006). Z wanted people to respect her husband so that he would be happy and feel less inclined to scream criticism at her (Z 2005).

It must be stressed that the one thing that social masquerade does not protect women from is battery. It does however enable her to live life as a stereotype of a submissive, suburban housewife by providing her family with a happy home. T and C's goals were to 'keep the peace' (2004) whatever the cost to themselves because they felt it was their responsibility. A, who had been brought up by nuns in a Catholic boarding school accepted that, 'it was my lot, I did not know any better, I thought marriage was for ever and just make the best of it' (A 2006)

Throughout my interviews and conversations with these women, I constantly thought, 'Why did you pretend, cover up, conceal, hide or mask, your husbands violent nature?', 'Why did you create a social façade that lasted for so many years?', 'What
good did it do?’; ‘Why did you allow yourself to be treated so badly?’ There is no single answer but learned passivity seems to be a possible reason. It appears that some women accept that fear of physical or verbal battery is a way of life that has to be tolerated. When asked why they masquerade and conceal their husbands battery, they answered with similar resignation, ‘I don’t know, I suppose it’s easier that way’ (B 2005), or ‘I really thought I was useless and stupid, and that everyone thought so’ (C 2004), or ‘I felt I had no power. He was the bread winner, I was the addendum’ (A 2006).

1.2. THE PREVALENCE OF BATTERY IN SOUTH AFRICA.

Domestic violence, or battery as it is known, has a long history. Globally and historically, enculturated patriarchal power relations are associated with patterns of spousal battery under the common term ‘domestic violence’. In a report by Dr. Naeema Abrahams\(^6\) who delivered a conference paper in 2006: ‘What we know (and don’t know) about Intimate Partner Violence in South Africa’; she (2006) stated that in WHO\(^7\) population based surveys, between 10–70% of women report being assaulted by an intimate partner: ‘Women are more likely to be beaten or raped by their partners or husbands than by anyone else’ (Abrahams 2006).

Battery is very wide spread in South Africa but there are few statistics to substantiate this statement\(^8\). Historically, in South Africa, battery in marriage is not taken seriously by the police, often being regarded as an intimate exchange between a husband and wife, so they tend to abide by a policy of non-interference when battery is reported (Machonachie, et al. 1993:3). Terminology in police reports, hospitals or social service organization records such as ‘assault' and ‘spousal abuse’, 'domestic violence', and 'marital violence', serves to conceal the extent of the incidence of battery (Machonachie, et al. 1993:1). Battery is defined as, ‘Any repeated acts of physical or psychological force or repeated threats thereof, used against a woman by her partner,’

\(^6\) Dr. Naeema Abrahams is a senior researcher at the Human Sciences Research Council, Gender and Health Unit of the Medical Research Council. Her research experience is in both epidemiology and quantitative methods and research with men on violence against women. The reference I use here is from copies of un-numbered overheads presented at the conference.

\(^7\) WHO - World Health Organisation

\(^8\) Machonachie, Angless & van Zyl (1993), van der Hoven (1992), Abrahams (2004) concur that there is very little conclusive evidence to support this statement because of the private nature of marital abuse.
(Angless 1990 cited in Machonachie, et al. 1993:1). In this instance it should be understood within the context of the male-dominant hierarchy of traditional marriage. This abuse of power which includes murder, marital rape, physical beating and torture, emotional abuse, slavery and imprisonment, as well as withholding financial support, occurs across all social strata. The level of violence experienced by some women in addition to fear of retribution and social stigma prevents them from reporting battery preferring to put up with it and tell no-one. This might also be exacerbated by a lack of protection or understanding from a predominantly male police force.

In a survey of mortuaries for a Medical Research Council study, released in June 2004, researcher Shanaaz Mathews (cited in Keeton 2004:4) reported that an estimated 1349 women were murdered by their partners in 1999 with approximately 69.9% of perpetrators acquitted for lack of evidence. An analysis of 'intimate femicides'\(^9\) shows that 18.4 % of the killers were husbands. Lisa Vetten from the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation is reported to have said that in about half the cases of intimate femicide there were witnesses but the men had no fear of sanction (Keeton 2004:4). Dr. Abrahams (2006), estimates that 3793 women of 14 years and older were killed in intimate femicides in 1999 and 50.3% of the perpetrators were intimate partners and known to the victims with only 24.2% of cases resulting in conviction. According to reporter Claire Keeton (2004:4), this works out at a rate of 8.8 women per 100,000 which is one woman being killed every six hours by an intimate partner.

The attitude of the legal system in South Africa is changing however. The prevention of Family Violence Act passed in 1993 and the Domestic Violence act passed in 1998 were passed to provide women with maximum protection, according to Dr. Abrahams (2006) but Jackie Selebi, Commissioner of Police, was quoted in The Star on the 14\(^{th}\) August 2001 as saying that the Domestic Violence Act was ‘made for a country like Sweden, not South Africa and was not practical or implementable’. (‘Well meaning laws can’t be policed – Selebi.’ Oelofse and Mkwananzi cited in Ludsin & Vetten 2001:10). In April 2004, Judge C.T. Howie, in the Supreme Court of Appeal, set aside the life sentence of Anieta Ferriera who hired hit-men to kill her abusive husband, Cyril.

\(^9\) Intimate femicide is female homicide by an intimate partner.
Parkman, taking into consideration a history of extensive physical and mental abuse (Moya 2004:7). J. Malaluke, director of gender issues in the South African Department of Justice is reported as saying that:

*The legal system has not recognized accumulated anger or abuse as a defense. Instead it has regarded that as premeditated and given the heaviest sentence possible. While men have had the defense that they were so angry when they found their wife with another man and lost it, women have not had that defense.*

(Moya 2004:7).

Judge Howies’ landmark judgment sent out a powerful message that women, who experience battery which ends in murder, will be charged in the context of the crime. In the past South African courts have refused to recognize continuing abuse as a mitigating factor (Templeton 2004:2).

It is important to acknowledge that extensive research has been done in the area of woman abuse, battery and femicide in South Africa from legal, social and educational standpoints. My research and my resulting art practice is confined to a small section of affluent, well-educated, upper-class women who are battered and who do not feature in any statistics because their battery goes largely unreported, unrecognized and unpunished. In addition there seems to be a bizarre perception that battered wives enjoy being physically and verbally assaulted (Machonachie, et al. 1993). According to them (1993:3) such a view might be internalized by some battered women so that they actually believe the batterer when he tells her she is at fault, or she likes it, when he assaults her, ‘you are asking for it’ or ‘you make me do it’ (V 2006), ‘you are too stupid to be allowed to live on this earth’ (C 2004).

Generally, it is reasonable to assume that battery is subjective and different women may define themselves as ‘battered’ at different stages of a relationship. It might not be continuous but nevertheless it goes unreported for many varied and complex reasons. In contemporary ideologies of marriage and ‘the family’, a woman’s status is perceived to be derived from her relative position to her husband, as his wife, as a housewife, and the mother of his children. It appears that women are taught, as children, that they need to shape their lives around male responses and men expect to be at the head of households as providers and protectors of what they perceive to be weaker and more vulnerable women.
Battery is a subject that people do not discuss in the social stratum I researched, apparently preferring to pretend that it is a phenomenon that either does not exist or happens to ’other people’. This sort of social snobbery causes the type of women I interviewed to avoid association with stereotypical, poor or homeless women that form the bulk of statistical reports. Comments like, 'It doesn’t happen to people like us’ (C 2004) confirm this and it is certainly true among all the women I interviewed. They would do almost anything to protect themselves from the humiliation of being identified as battered and classified with ‘them’.

To maintain their privacy, they masquerade socially, telling no-one, not even their closest friends or family about their ’guilty secret’ (C 2004.). A tragic example of the extent to which a woman will go to maintain secrecy was related by a member of the women’s group P.O.W.A\textsuperscript{10} (Jansen van Rensberg 2004), concerning an elderly woman who arrived at their offices a few weeks after her husbands’ death. She wanted to expose the secret that her husband had physically battered her throughout their 50 year marriage. She had never told anyone because she was afraid of what he would do to her if she did and only his death released her from that fear.

There are many reasons why husbands batter wives. Anna van der Hoven (1992:246-8) proposes that abusive men have maladjusted personality characteristics and that a prominent and common characteristic is pathological jealousy with an inherent need to dominate. Some battered women might have been brought up in violent homes or in homes with rigid patriarchal sex-role orientation where violence and coercion is a learned means of conflict resolution. Contributing factors such as alcohol, drug abuse and poor self-esteem in both men and women contribute to the fear and vulnerability of women who are victims of coercion and battery in marriage.

Among the women I interviewed, the perceived reasons for battery were each unique. All the women agreed that their fathers were the dominant heads of the households in which they were brought up but not in a negative sense. It might be possible that they did not know the inner workings of their parents’ marriages or, possibly, their mother’s masquerade. Some theorists propose that from early childhood, girls are taught to

\textsuperscript{10} POWA -People Opposing Woman Abuse.
accept male domination and learn to be helpless, passive and dependent which ultimately results in their being dependent on husbands, especially when they have children (van der Hoven 1992:248). This is supported by both C and A, who, as young women were dependent on their fathers for emotional and financial support. Both were ‘daddy’s blue eyed girls’ (A 2006) (C 2004). Subsequently both were dependent on their husbands for the duration of their marriages.

The battered women I interviewed do not feature in statistics in South Africa. They certainly do not fit the stereotype commonly associated with domestic violence. Generally it seems that the powerful element of humiliation and embarrassment associated with battery results in secrecy because the stigma attached to being identified as battered, is not worth the exposure. Another powerful factor for secrecy seems to be that if the husband is humiliated, by virtue of her relationship to him, the wife's status will be compromised, so secrecy was generally regarded as paramount. In her interview, C was of the opinion that social masquerade for her, was an expedient, saying that she felt it was easier to appear to be ‘a bit silly’ (C 2004) and let her husband feel that he was in control. It does not appear to be a statement against her husband or his battery but merely a way of accepting battery without drama, and making life easier.

1.3. A PSYCHOLOGICAL RATIONALE FOR SOCIAL MASQUERADE.

Psychoanalysis\textsuperscript{11} is a huge field which is not my area of research although it has provided insight into issues concerning battery and masquerade. Diverse views merely defining psychoanalysis illustrate the extent of the subject. For example, contemporary psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow proposes that psychoanalysis is ‘a theory of masculinity and femininity, a theory of gender equality and a theory of the development of heterosexuality’ (Chodorow 1989:174). Anna Freud defines it as, ‘the study of repressed instinctual impulses, affects and phantasies’ (Freud 1937:3) and Karen Horney, one of the first female psychoanalysts to research female psychology (1937:iix) defines it as ‘the role of unconscious processes and the way in which they find expression’. My interest lies in a very limited area of psychoanalysis that provides

\textsuperscript{11} Psychoanalysis is defined in the South African Concise Oxford Dictionary (2002) as a system of psychological theory and therapy used in investigating the interaction between the conscious and unconscious mind.
a psychological rationale for why some battered women use social masquerade to pretend that they are not battered.

Horney (1939:38-40) proposed that the need to masquerade in women was motivated by a response ‘to gain safety and satisfaction in life through inconspicuous dependency’. C seems to confirm this because she was afraid of what would happen to her if she did not. She said she had to consider the needs of her children as well as her status as a married woman and a mother, and tolerate her husband’s battery because she could not, at that stage, leave him:

I accepted the emotional and verbal abuse which was a daily occurrence. Every single day of our married lives without fail, in front of the maid, the children, employees. I was useless and he did not know why I’d been put on this earth. I was a useless employee but I worked for him for 15 years. When I had children, I was a useless mother and I did not know what I was doing. I was a whore and a slut every day. I believed it from the word go. I had no self esteem. I was just flat'.

(C 2004).

Social masquerade could be interpreted as the outcome of a sense of inferiority. Horney (1939:118) proposed that inferiority was not an inherently feminine quality but was a product of cultural stereotyping. Machonachie, et al. (1993:3) concur that popularized negative views such as self-blame, inferiority and a lack of self-worth are internalized by some women inducing acceptance and servility. The emotional basis for self-confidence, reliant entirely on giving and receiving love in return, according to Horney (1939:118), was too precarious a foundation for marriage because it was based on unpredictable human factors and could lead to emotional dependence. To quote Horney (1939:114) ‘... one of the predominant masochistic means of reassurance against anxiety is to obtain affection, a fear of losing love is a specific masochistic feature’. She proposes that although a sense of inferiority is the same in both men and women, a woman’s self-confidence is more easily destabilized12. Contemporary South African ‘voice’ on women’s issues, Stephanie Vermeulen (2004)13 refers to masquerade as a form of, ‘self-sacrifice……one of the two pillars

12 Devaluation during the first half of the 20th Century was compounded by puritanical, social influences that regarded female sexuality as low, soiled and the symbol of sin. Although the puritanical attitudes have changed, institutionalized unequal gender relations in marriage remain.

13 Stephanie Vermeulen is an acclaimed author, conference speaker and well-known in corporate circles for presenting personal growth programs.
upholding the falsehood of male superiority… the other is the male ego, which only survives because it is fed by the complementary notion of self-sacrifice in women’ (Vermeulen 2004:13).

The women I interviewed use masquerade to reinvent their lives. Publicly they pretend that their lives are normal and privately they pretend that the battery is not what it is, in an attempt to provide a peaceful home for the children and avoid provocation. The interviews have shown that Riviere’s (1929:38) theory that masquerade could be used to ‘avert reprisals’, does not apply to the women I interviewed because the threat of violence is always there and when it will occur is unknown. Machonachie, et al. (1993:5-6) suggest that masquerade could even be regarded as a provocative action which cannot be tolerated by some men. In her husband’s book, V confirms that it does not protect her against battery and it seems to have the effect of provoking her husband. C’s story illustrates that it is impossible to protect oneself from a husband intent on domination:

It was in the middle of the night. I was fast asleep. He hit me across the face and then punched me sideways. There was no reason. He said he was asleep but then he grabbed me and twisted and tore my fanny, twice. I could hardly walk and my face was swollen. I went to my doctor the next day and she recorded what happened, just in case something happened to me in the future. He did not apologize but asked what I was going to tell the people at work and I said I would tell them I had a fever blister and I wasn’t feeling well.

(C 2004).

It seems that the battered women I interviewed would do anything to save their reputation and protect their children even if they put themselves in danger. Ironically, in attempting to create a façade of traditional marital idealism, they put themselves at risk of not being believed when they reveal the true circumstances behind their performances.

As one can see in my discussion thus far, masquerade can be employed to present any persona when expedient or necessary and thus suggests that woman as a stabilized identity is a myth or a social construct. In the following chapter I review the work of artists Cindy Sherman and Tracey Rose who explore masquerade in their work. They are not, to my knowledge, battered women and I do not review their work in the light of battery. Instead, I explore their presentation of masquerade as an
exposé of dominant cultural theoretical codes in the representation of women, and their denial of womanliness as a stabilized identity.
CHAPTER 2.

FEMININITY AS A PERFORMANCE:
MASQUERADE IN THE IMAGERY OF CINDY SHERMAN AND TRACEY ROSE.

In this chapter, I review masquerade in the allegorical photographic stills of performances by South African artist, Tracey Rose and the black and white still photographic imagery of Cindy Sherman, to illustrate and explore the parody of feminine stereotypes in the representation of women. The importance of dress and accoutrement is also raised. Tracey Rose and Cindy Sherman both use themselves as models in their work, Rose, to confront aspects of her personal post-colonial history and Sherman, in an attempt to act out the psychoanalytical masquerade of femininity referred to by Joan Riviere (1929) by denying the masculine notion of destabilized identity.

2.1. CINDY SHERMAN.

Western social discourse, especially film and advertising media has created masculinity and femininity as a series of socially constructed binary oppositions. Within the construct or stereotype of femininity, a woman is expected to have been born with certain feminine qualities which are qualified by particular visible signs connected to prevailing social codes. Kavanagh (2002:423) in the Concise Oxford Dictionary defines ‘feminine’ as: ‘having qualities traditionally associated with women, especially delicacy and prettiness’. The classification of femininity, however, seems to be subject to continuous change depending on prevailing social norms. In a review of some of the images from the series ‘Untitled Film Stills’ by Cindy Sherman I will show how the illusive nature of femininity is revealed through masquerade.

In 1978 Cindy Sherman began placing herself in front of the camera in the conventions of 1950’s and 1960’s advertising and film images of women. She recognised that the lure of popular cinema was and still is, a powerful medium ideally suited to patriarchal propagandist intentions in the creation and manipulation of stereotypes. Her first series of black and white photographs, made between 1978 and 1980 ‘Untitled Film Stills’ focussed entirely on women in this genre. These photographic ‘masquerades’, reminiscent of ‘film-clips’, seem to confirm the
psychoanalytic notion of wearing femininity as a ‘mask’ refuting the masculine notion that feminine identity can be stabilized or controlled. Sherman’s many incarnations in these images illustrate that she, like any woman, can occupy any persona. Each persona is constructed via the outward application of accoutrements such as clothing, wigs and make-up as well as facial expressions and body language. In an attempt to avoid prejudice, Sherman gives few signs of narrative or location in her images, so the viewer’s own references are the only points of departure. Each image utilizes an illusive reminder of a cinematographic stereotype to expose the instability of feminine image and its reliance on external factors for its existence.

Film critic and analyst, Laura Mulvey places Sherman’s images in a genre having a characteristic ‘fifties’ feel that is reminiscent of the nostalgic, white, middle-class American myth of neo-realist Hollywood B-movies of the period (Mulvey 1996:67). Like masquerade, nostalgia can conceal as much as it exposes, similar to sentimental, selective memory. Sherman focuses attention on details of dress typical of a role in her performances, such as back-combed blonde hair, perky hats, mask-like make-up, and darkly outlined eyes, to imitate the stereotypical ‘starlet’ of the genre. The eerie iconography of the series ‘Untitled Film Stills’ shows a particular type of conformist young ‘lady’ who adheres to a respectable and primly desirable social code14.

In ‘Untitled Film Still #21’, 1978, (Figure1) Sherman is centrally located, in front of a soft-focus, back-projected exterior of city buildings. The lack of detail in the buildings and the unrecognizable location suggest a dreamlike quality, bordering on nightmare. An obviously feminine, anxiously un-smiling, isolated, image is shot from below and takes up most of the lower portion of the frame obscuring what might be happening around her in the seemingly sinister, deserted location. The woman is conservatively dressed in a modest suit and her spotless white collar implies innocence and vulnerability. She is carefully made-up in the contemporary style, wearing a neat hat from beneath which blonde curls can be seen. The hint of a frown as the isolated model appears to glance anxiously upwards over her shoulder enhances a sense of intensifying nervous unease. The success of this image confirms that Sherman’s

14 Similar fashion and social codes alluded to by Sherman, existed for young women in South Africa during that period and continued to exist until recent times within some more traditional cultural groups. The women interviewed in the first chapter would have recognised the generation of the ‘type’ of women Sherman refers to, in their mothers.
masquerade using limited but recognizable props, make-up and facial expression, can create a network of meanings that communicate a stereotype of a feminine emotion, in this case vulnerability. She illustrates that there can be calculated intentions behind a certain personal presentation that might manipulate the perceptions and emotions of the viewer to the performers will.

This seems to be evident in the image, ‘Untitled Film Still #11’, 1978, (Figure 2) Sherman again poses in the role of a vulnerable woman seen here lying submissively supine, diagonally across a bed with a cover of brocade roses in what seems to be a small room. The image is shot from above with the head in the lower right quarter enhancing the demonstration of feminine vulnerability. As evidence of the ambiguity of the destabilized feminine identity, Sherman, in her left hand, clutches a lacy handkerchief suggesting the frailty of feminine emotion, while in the right she clutches at the bed-spread as if it will provide security or ground her in some way. Sherman uses a curly blond wig in this role to imply the traditional, clean, blue eyed stereotype born out of the advertising campaigns of the 1970’s that equated ‘natural’, ‘good’ and ‘wholesome’ (Scott 2005:226) with being blonde. Superficially, the pouting mouth and lowered gaze suggests emotional withdrawal and despair.

Sherman pays attention to grooming, in the feminine hair-style, and distinctive make-up in this image, possibly to raise awareness of the belief system that proposes that the only appropriate role for a woman is related to her reproductive system and her subordinate role as an attractive wife and mother. With this in mind, and although this garment might not intentionally suggest a wedding dress, within the ambit of this paper it seems appropriate to propose the notion. Using a stereotypical, modest, white, three-quarter length, lace, long-sleeved evening dress she invokes the idea of marriage or romance, and the problem of identity emanating from that feminine role. Suggesting that the she might be in collusion with her oppressed role, this garment is accessorized by a traditional wedding gift of a white pearl necklace symbolising innocence and purity, but this one is a long rope of pearls looped as a choker and her sequined, pointed, high-heeled evening shoes might suggest submission to being hobbled.
Sherman’s intention seems to coincide with the rationale behind a battered woman’s masquerade. She presents a façade to a ‘viewer’, who interprets the information available and creates a narrative according to autobiographical stimuli. Again, Sherman makes the point that the stabilization of feminine identity is not possible, illustrating that with very little information, assumptions will be made. The isolation of the model in this location creates an atmosphere of tension, and limited body language and dress provides the viewer with enough information to make assumptions about who the model might represent and what she is doing in this location.

In ‘Untitled Film Still #35, 1979, (Figure 3) Sherman poses as the archetypal example of a down-trodden housewife of the ‘film noire’ genre suggested by Mulvey (1996:67). In support of her role she is dressed in knee-high support hose and sensible black lace-up shoes that could be described as masculine or orthopaedic, but for their high heels. She wears what was known as a ‘house dress’ which is covered by a utilitarian apron, her hair is protected by a scarf and, in the public domain, it appears that Sherman’s role of housewife is stabilized. Her location in a corner behind a grubby door infers the possibility she might be undergoing a form of punishment prompting her resentful facial expression and body language, with a hand on the hip. In addition, the escape of the blonde ‘starlet’ curls suggest the seeds of rebellion and that her façade of the perfect house-wife is about to crack and her masquerade inevitably, about to fail.

The viewer is conscious of a sense of voyeurism in observing these intimate moments. Although the viewer is aware that the characters in these images are Sherman disguised, for a moment the masquerade is accepted, then the illusion shatters with the credibility and motives of the performance. The battered woman experiences a similar outcome when she masquerades for her husband. He has intimate knowledge of her and as hard as she tries to masquerade for him, he suspects her motives and she cannot evade his gaze or his retribution.

Sherman consciously performs ‘femininity’ as an appearance (Mulvey 1998:68) to explore the media construct of femininity in contrast to the sub-conscious psychological phenomenon of social masquerade employed by some women who fear
men and their retribution. Sherman’s masquerade is a conscious parody of femininity to illustrate that the traditional expectation of ‘femininity’ is illusive and exists just long enough to be photographed. Her performances show that femininity or womanliness are not stable concepts by illustrating that recognised stereotypes are constructs that inform idealised traditional masculine notions of stabilised femininity and, above all, that appearances are sometimes inaccurate and misleading.

2.2. TRACEY ROSE.

Tracey Rose’s ‘stills’ are photographic allegories in the style of Cindy Sherman and also constructed using costume and make-up. In contrast to the masquerade of the battered wife who seeks to conceal intensely personal issues in her life, Rose’s work publicly examines, also through masquerade, her experiences of the complexities of race and womanhood in South Africa. Her intention is to expose, parody and mock social hypocrisy, feminine stereotypes, and Christianity. The range of Rose’s conceptual thought is illustrated in the dissimilarity between the amusingly trussed hypocrisy of ‘MAMI’ (2001), (Figure 4) and the asexual undress of the boxer in ‘LOVEMEFUCKME’, 2002, (Figure 5). As with Sherman, Rose herself masquerades publicly as a site of intervention and as a political statement to expose perceived inequalities.

In a recent article about Rose’s work by Ashraf Jamal, he writes that: ‘By putting herself at the centre of her art...in an act of mimicry, of self mockery, Rose introduces the element of play, of the performative, in the making of art and the ceaseless recreation of ones cultural and socio-historical identity’ (Jamal 2004:107). Referring to what he calls Rose’s ‘trickery and deception’ in her performances, he writes:

...at the root of the mockery lies the realization that no identity is binding, but that each and every attempt to pin something or someone down illuminates the shadow and the act of a radical human heterogeneity. The centre could never hold the tidy polarities between black and white, man and woman, could never fix the flux. For Rose every faked posture is more than the sum of its parts. Always there is something other than the obvious statement that matters to her.

(Jamal 2004:107).
Rose’s allegorical stills result from a scripted three-channel DVD projection produced for the 49th Venice Biennale in 2001 entitled ‘CIAO BELLA’ (2001). In brief, the content is a fast moving, exaggerated display of post-colonial social conditions with historical links to Great Britain and France. All the characters are performed by Rose but I will review the stills only, of ‘MAMI’ (2001), ‘LOVEMEFUCKME’ (2001) and ‘MAQUEII’ (2002). They are not actual stills from the DVD but they have been ‘styled’ to reflect the characteristics of the ‘type’ presented in the performance. The first character in the performance is ‘MAMI’ who opens and closes the event acting as the narrator throughout. Reference to the name ‘MAMI’ seems to suggest a cynical, racial slur and seems to parody servitude and repression among American deep-south African-American slave-women.

Rose’s masquerade as ‘MAMI’, portrays a well-dressed, conservative, middle-aged woman of the type she refers to as ‘always ‘in charge’ leading proceedings with a smile on her face’ (Rose 2004). Rose says ‘MAMI’ is ‘sexually repressed woman’ (Rose 2004) who ‘picks up the pieces’ when things go wrong (Rose 2004) and her masquerade is a parody of the hypocrisy, which, in her opinion, is inherent in woman in positions of power. With reference to her catholic schooling, Rose positions the character at the gates of a convent where she went to school. The motivation behind her performance seems to be resentment against restrictions enforced by this type of woman which still seem to exert influence over her life15.

Rose’s antipathy towards her convent education might be understood in the light of a quote by J. Branigan of the Catholic Teacher’s Federation in his manual published in 1956 on teaching religion in Catholic schools: ‘we must realize to the full that if we are to implant these [Catholic] values in our pupils so as to produce followers of Christ, our own habits, wills and emotions must be oriented in the Christ-way. (Branigan 1956:4). I refer to this manual because, Rose’s portrayal of ‘MAMI’ illustrates a ‘type’ similar in age to her grandmother and who, she reiterated, ‘has a pathetic dependence on a phenomenon [God] that doesn’t fucking deliver’ (Rose 2004). Branigan continues:

15 During the interview, Rose became overtly angry about what she considered the repressive social and moral codes of her parent’s strict religious upbringing, referring to a phenomenon that, ‘does not deliver’ and ‘God, motherfucker, [who] is not doing what he’s supposed to be doing’ (Rose 2004).
...our mission, then - to make our children bundles of religious habits, and to integrate these habits into correct religious behaviour. Knowledge, of course, must have a necessary place in all this but it must remain secondary to holiness; by itself it is valueless. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge brought sin into the world. (Branigan 1956:2).

Rose’s locates ‘MAMI’ in front of a convent school so it seems appropriate to refer to Christian symbolism in the interpretation of her performance. ‘MAMI’, stands at the gates of the school in a parody of St. Peter, who according to the catholic catechism, guards the gates of paradise. In the background, behind her head, there are three crucifixes which Rose specifically identified in the interview, referring to a masculine concept, the Holy Trinity (Rose 2004), that is the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, which ‘MAMI’ could be seen to serve.

She is wearing large, round, tinted glasses suggesting that Rose’s intention is to expose a short sighted hypocrisy she has experienced in this ‘type’ of woman (Rose 2004). She is dressed in a dark-orange masculine suit of a tweed fabric which she accessorizes with a pale blue chiffon scarf around her otherwise exposed throat. The colour of the scarf could infer symbolic references to the Catholic Virgin Mary or represent the intellect (Fontana 1993:66) and the nature of the chiffon fabric implies demure femininity contrasting with the tweedy fabric of the suit. According to Mary Anne Doane (1982:74-87) by clothing ‘MAMI’ in a sensible, masculine suit and glasses, Rose classifies her as a woman who displays sexually undesirable qualities of competence and control. Rose might be exposing a social inequality that requires some women to present themselves in a masculine guise to gain credibility.

The photographic image does not show extent of ‘MAMI’s performance but in the DVD performance she is seen pacing in front of the screen speaking directly to the camera patronizingly enunciating her words, clasping her hands like a supplicant and at intervals, modestly lowering or raising her gaze as if communicating with God. Throughout the performance over which ‘MAMI’ seems to have control, other performances are played out by diverse characters, with socially questionable morals, but untouched by the spectacle, she narrates, paces, and glances heavenward as if a higher power protects her from ‘them’.
Rose (2004) informed me that the character was dressed in a suit that belonged to her dead grandmother. According to social anthropologist Irving Goffman (1959:28-76), the use of an item of clothing in a performance can stand in as the absent wearer. By using this suit, Rose recalls her grandmother confirming her resistance to traditional Christian values. Rose drew attention to the red, striated pattern in the fabric which, to her, resembles the small cuts made in the flesh by some Catholic orders who use flagellation\(^\text{16}\) as a form of penance, ‘like Bartholomew, the Last Supper’ (Rose 2004).

In the next work Rose masquerades as a boxer. The title, ‘LOVEMEFUCKME’, 2001, (Figure 5) refers to the binary oppositions, love and fuck. On the black glove ‘love’ is demanded and on the white glove, ‘fuck’. According to Kavanagh (2002:464) in the Concise Oxford Dictionary ‘fuck’ is defined as ‘to have sexual intercourse with’ or ‘to damage or ruin’ with the phrase ‘to fuck someone up’ meaning to damage or to confuse, emotionally and physically. Love is defined as, a deep feeling of affection or sexual attachment’. Rose plays on the physical similarities in the two words and the potential of both states to cause damage, possibly referring to obsessive love with the intention to dominate. Rose does not present herself as a powerful image, appearing to use herself as a punch bag which echoes the self-blame experienced by battered women. Rose, with the aid of thick white mask-like make-up, appears devoid of emotion which is how it feels when being beaten, confirmed by C who said that when she was punched: ‘It hurts but it just happens. You know you can’t stop it. You are [feel] dead. It’s as if you are somewhere else and its happening to someone else - afterwards is the problem’ (C 2004).

In the still image, however, ‘LOVEMEFUCKME’ (2001) would seem to represent oppositions; good and evil, repression and freedom, rich and poor, powerful and powerless, colonial and post-colonial and love and hate. The front-lit figure against a black back-ground has a dreamlike quality. Rose, dressed in simple, white sports clothes with her breasts flattened denying her sexuality, infers controlled power, creating the antithesis of traditional femininity. The sculptural head, also de-gendered by a lack of hair and thickly concealing white stage make-up, according to Rose, looks like ‘that Brancusi head’ (Rose 2004). There is a barely defined look of anguish in the

\(^{16}\) Flagellation is a form private physical self-discipline that involves whipping the body with a knotted whip until the blood runs, creating small open cuts, as a form of penance, to atone for sins committed.
frown between the eyes and the mouth appears to be clamped shut. Rose uses no colours in the image, relying on the polarities of black and white to increase a sense of her vulnerability and fragility, in stark contrast to the power implied by the boxing gloves. She appears trapped behind the expressionless mask. When asked if ‘LOVEMEFUCKME’ (2001) was a political statement about violence against women, she elusively responded; ‘it was not only about that sort of abuse but other forms also...’ and could not to be drawn on the subject (Rose 2004).

Boxing is not a sport traditionally associated with women which strengthens the power of Rose’s performance because historically women were discouraged from developing their physical potential. The androgynous image denies the traditional, idealised role of femininity. In view of the desire to keep battery a secret by many women (van der Hoven 1992:253), this work seems to resonate with personal experience.

According to Dr. Naeema Abrahams it is not common for a battered woman to fight back although it does happen (Abrahams 2006). According to Anna van der Hoven, the obvious reason is that women are often physically smaller than their opponents. They lack self-esteem, often suffer with immobilizing depression, and are embarrassed and isolated, all symptoms that contribute to a seemingly masochistic passivity that prevents them from defending themselves. In addition, the trauma of repeated assault destroys the normal instinctive coping mechanisms that prompt retaliation (van der Hoven 1992:246). Typically, the battered wife does not know how to deal with the stress of being battered by someone she believes she loves and loves her and often, she seems to accept that she should be beaten. When a battered woman decides to go into therapy, she is encouraged to redefine herself as a woman and improve her self-esteem by caring for herself in an effort to remind her that she has worth. In the persona of the boxer, Rose appears to represent a woman without a feminine identity or self-worth, who resorts to beating herself up.

Rose claims her work is personal and not merely about the polarities that exist because of her cultural and socio-historical identity (Rose 2004). Her use of analogy to ‘misrepresent’ issues in her performances supports her claim. Rose engages in subjective masquerades that are intended to confuse and deceive the viewer, allowing her to confront what she perceives as the effects of inculcated, religious and social
repression, mocking the performances of stereotypical characters that have impacted on her life. Ashraf Jamal writes about Rose:

*She can be everything and nothing. She can as easily spoof the fetishistic integrity [of race] as turn it on its head. However at the root of the mockery lies the realization that no identity is binding, but that each and every attempt to pin something or someone down illuminates the shadow of a radical human heterogeneity.*

(Jamal 2004:107).

In an interview with Rory Bester referring to another performance, she states that: ‘*Like a confessional, there’s a degree of confidentiality [in masquerade] that allows me to be what I am, say what I want, without being totally implicated*’ (Bester 1998).

According to Goffman (1959:29), ‘*When an individual plays a part [s]he implicitly requests [her] his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them*’. Rose seems to confirm this by stating that her work was about ‘*seducing as many people as possible*’ (2004).

The next masquerade to be discussed is Rose as ‘MAQEII’, 2002, (Figure 6). I see echoes in this performance of the battered wife who juggles her disguise to comply with a preferred theme, in the juxtaposition of the three images. The title is a conflation of Marie Antoinette of France and Queen Elizabeth II of England. The image is created from three images of Rose behind a ‘white-face’ mask. She wears full length long sleeved white robe befitting a queen but it is made of dustbin liners held together with ‘Pres-stick’ and sticky tape; ‘*I work better with crap, ticky-tacky*’ Rose (2004). The impermanence of the material could be what attracts Rose to the use of what she refers to as ‘*ticky-tacky*’, some-thing with no value, in an attempt, in her case, to discard irksome permanence of traditional values.

In this image, Rose juxtaposes three translucent images created during the DVD editing process. They appear to balance chocolate cakes in their hands as they dance precariously, barefoot, on a crash barrier at the side of a motorway. In the background is a panoramic view of Orange Farm informal settlement outside Johannesburg that was developed as a result of apartheid policies. According to Kathy Myers (1989:189), who analyses the content of media images, long curly blonde hair and lightly tanned skin stereotypes women as sexually available. This ‘look’ has become resistant to change and fetishized among men as a masculine fantasy of feminine perfection and
desirability. Rose covers her own dark hair with a long blonde wig in which are concealed symbolic plastic fish and snakes.\(^{17}\)

The seemingly classical robe parodies the seriousness with which a queen or dominant matriarchal figure is traditionally regarded. She highlights the throat with a thin red satin ribbon tied in a bow implying the removal of Marie Antoinette's head (Rose 2004). Historically Marie Antoinette's head was removed but Queen Elizabeth's was not, although it could be possible Rose thinks it should have been, considering British colonial policy in Africa in the past. The conical beribboned shape on the top of the head of the superimposed images resembles the horn of the unicorn \(^{18}\). It is simultaneously an actual and residual image of the knife used to cut the cake, which ironically, could be seen as a symbol of destruction as well as mundane domesticity.

Rose's red painted mouth is different in all three images; one is pursed in a prim, accentuated kiss while the others are wide open. The image of a wide open, tooth filled mouth in classical art practice refers to the power of woman's sexuality over men\(^{19}\). and when asked why she used this 'femme fatale' type of make up, her response made reference to the flamboyant sexuality of the drag queen, a seemingly, but not actually, castrated male, although the reference could have been a cynical ruse to parody sexual difference (Rose 2004).

Rose's hands are concealed by long white gloves but incongruously, her feet are naked and their natural colour. She is holding a Viennese style mask resembling Queen Elizabeth, on a long red, blue and white decorated handle. If classical iconography is used to translate the presence of this item, it could be interpreted as a lance, signifier of the phallus, in the control of women suggesting a desire to transfer power away from a patriarchal social order. The mouth and eyes are removed from

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\(^{17}\) According to Fontana (1994:88) the first letters of the words Jesus Christ, spell 'icthus' in Greek, meaning fish and symbolizing Christ and the trinity which is represented in the symbol of three intertwined fishes. The snake is linked with Eve who seduced Adam in the Garden of Eden and according to catechism, was responsible for original sin (Branigan 1956:71). The mythical Medusa, a symbol of terror, enchantment, cunning and a threat to masculinity is also symbolized by the image of a snake (Mullins 1985:39).

\(^{18}\) The unicorn was associated in remote antiquity with the worship of a mother goddess and linked with the idea of chastity and virginity of Mary as well as Christ's incarnation. The horn had the power to purify whatever it touched and was adopted as a Christian allegory in spite of its phallic overtones (Hall 1974:27).

\(^{19}\) This imagery has its roots in Greek mythology where the mouth of Hades or hell, is often represented as a wide open woman's mouth. Pluto in classical Greek art is not only the king of the underworld but he was also the god of fecundity and controlled fertility. Greek myth conflated with Christian misogyny in the Middle-Ages, re-interpreted woman's sexuality as dangerous, if not castrating (Mullins 1985:54). A red painted open mouth symbolizes a tantalizingly highlighted vagina with teeth, the *vagina dentate*, representing the fear of castration and the destruction of masculinity (Mullins 1985:148).
the mask changing the expression of the face in different positions creating the theatrical symbol of sadness and joy.

‘MAQEII’ appears to be happily dancing on crash barriers unconcerned and without regard for the Orange Farm informal settlement in the background, drawing attention to the effects and results of colonial and post-colonial politics. The inclusion of a chocolate cake in the image, may suggest a political concern for the fate of French ex-colonial cocoa producing central African countries. Cynically, conflated with Marie Antoinette’s apocryphal statement during the French revolution, it suggests that the starving peasants, possibly in Orange Farm, should eat chocolate cake.

Goffman (1959:28-76) proposes that performance in a theatrical sense could be defined as the impression an actor makes on an audience but social acting or masquerade, is an individual’s attempt to live with an adopted self imagery (as seen in the masquerade of battered women). Both Cindy Sherman and Tracey Rose use masquerade to illustrate and explore dominant cultural and theoretical codes that function in the representation of women, using themselves as models. Sherman’s masquerade attempts to deny the masculine concept of a stabilized feminine identity by illustrating that women can masquerade as whoever they want to be. Rose however, masquerades to expose events and people that have affected aspects of her life in an attempt to come to terms with them. For this purpose she uses parody and symbolism to subversively expose that which is concealed. Battered women, however masquerade to deny reality and pretend to be the same as and accepted by, other women. They use masquerade to conceal that they are battered and uphold the feminine stereotype in public.

In the following chapter I discuss my work in which I use fabric, domestic items and haberdashery to construct woman’s dresses and accessories in an attempt to illustrate the physical and emotional anguish divulged by some of the battered women that I interviewed that has resulted in their womanly masquerade.
2.3. **Illustrations.**

![Figure 1](image)

**Figure 1**
Cindy Sherman. ‘*Untitled Film Still #21*’. (1978).
Figure 2
Figure 3
Cindy Sherman. ‘Untitled Film Still # 35’ (1978).
Figure 4
Figure 5
Figure 6
CHAPTER 3.
SOCIAL MASQUERADE.

In this chapter I discuss how women masquerade using dress as an unspoken language of signs to reveal or conceal information as a means of managing or manipulating interpersonal behavior. The chapter is divided into two sections, the first deals with the significance of dress as part of masquerade and the second is an explanation of my work.

3.1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DRESS.

The rationale for this paper has been that masquerade among the battered women I interviewed, hides the evidence of their acceptance and tolerance of battery in their private lives. Clothing or dress, when regarded as a language of signs is an important system of non-verbal communication and is an aspect of life that mirrors what is going on around us by allowing us to ‘read’ what the wearer wants us to read (Kaiser 1985:126). Battered women choose to disguise their self-blame, humiliation and degradation. This does not mean that they are neither scared nor scarred by their experiences. The opposite is true and each woman is giving a performance of the ‘happy-ever-after’ wife she would like to be.

Dress has always been a signifier of social position and by the 19th Century, according to Jane Ussher (1997:60), it was a technique learned by young women in the art of performing womanliness, and being well groomed and fashionably dressed at that time was a wifely duty. By the early 20th Century fashion designers, mostly men, exercised considerable control over the details of feminine dress defining what was respectable and acceptable. In the social group to which the women I interviewed belong, it is still important to be well groomed and fashionably dressed. Mass media ‘fashion gurus’ still influence many women in dress and fashion, dictating the current ‘look’ and how to achieve it.
According to Susan Kaiser\(^\text{20}\) (1985:126) a woman’s behavior is influenced by her clothes and her ‘dress’ is determined by the way she wants other people to see her. Kaiser (1985:129) proposes that a woman trying to improve her public image observes that reciprocal behavior is influenced by the image she presents and her clothes facilitate a non-verbal means of defining her identity, role and status as well as how she feels emotionally (145). Simone de Beauvoir (1953), social commentator and contemporary of Joan Riviere, refers to social masquerade at that time thus; ‘Since woman is an object, it is quite understandable that her intrinsic value is affected by her style of dress and adornment…it is an imperative obligation for her to keep up her position’ (1948:548).

The interviewees appeared to be aware of the power of dress in social positioning and as a means to boost confidence. They agreed that publicly they used ‘dress’ and role playing to disguise the truth in public but in the privacy of the home, however, they agreed that the way they dressed or the role they played did not protect them against battery. C claimed that she always tried to look her best and that her husband was very generous with money but it did not seem to matter what she was wearing when her husband decided to attack her. She said that she was naked when she was viciously attacked because she was visiting her mother in another town the following day (C 2004). Being well dressed and performing a ‘happy’ role seemed to arouse suspicion and jealousy in V’s husband who imagined it indicated infidelity so she ‘dressed down’ (V 2006). R’s husband said that she dressed up and seemed to be enjoying herself ‘on purpose’, to make him jealous (R 2004). A, being a creative woman, kept herself busy making her own clothes because it made her feel better about herself (A 2006).

Linda Scott (2005:311) cites an interview by feminist cultural critic, M.G. Lord, with Jill Barad, chief executive officer of Mattel, where she was criticized for being beautifully dressed and well mannered. Lord referred to her as a ‘homeovestite’ because she perceived that Barad exaggerated her femininity by dressing in an overtly feminine style. A ‘homeovestite’, in Lord’s opinion, is a woman who disguises her masculinity by, ‘cloaking ones cross dressing strivings by disguising oneself as a parody of ones

\(^{20}\) Susan B. Kaiser at the time of publication of The Social Psychology of Clothing in 1985 worked in the Division of Textiles and Clothing at the University of California at Davis in the United States. The purpose of her book was to acquaint the reader with the importance of clothing as social interaction.
own sex’ (Scott 2005:311). Social masquerade could be regarded by men, therefore, as a feminine deceit, destabilizing the masculine notion of a stabilized therefore manageable feminine identity. For women who are battered however, social masquerade is a routine impression management technique symbolic of who she is or who she wants to be, because it helps boost her morale. Kaiser (1985:131) proposes dress sometimes results in stereotyping. If this is so, however, it could assist battered women because stereotyping is seldom accurate and relies on generalizations of characteristics unique to those making generalizations (Damhorst 2005:3). Battered women are not oblivious to the advantages of the human characteristic to generalize and people have a natural tendency to classify others into familiar types, so it seems that stereotyping is a small price to pay for their disguise.

For the construction of my practical cultural production, what you see is not what battered women would like you to see. The women I interviewed concealed their emotions in everyday life by putting on a front and pretending that they were as happy as their peers. By inverting the façade, ‘dress’, which includes accessories, I expose the horror, humiliation and self-blame expressed in interviews with actual women and in some instances, combinations of women, to construct visual metaphors for the emotions they really feel and for the most part, successfully conceal.

3.2. MY WORKS.

My work is about battered women and in the production of it I manipulate fabric to resemble emotions, wounding, scarification and mutilation to express the physical and psychological menace which I believe is experienced by battered women at the hands of their husbands. In an attempt to create a simulation of feminine distress I use domestic crafts, sewing, knitting, quilting and embroidery principally because they are traditionally associated with the containment and management of women. I also refer to cake baking in one work as an example of domestic chores.

I use a limited color range, from grey and dark brown-reds to loud orange-reds, with a departure into grey and pink for the following reasons. Traditionally, black or dark grey denotes self-denial, isolation, guilt and sorrow although it is often regarded as ‘sartorially distinguished’ (Lurie 1992:187-193). Red and its crimson to brown
variations is the color of blood and open wounds. According to Alison Lurie\textsuperscript{21}, physiologically, the sight of red causes a rise in heart and respiration rate in preparation for sudden action, such as self-defense or avoiding attack and she continues, that dark crimson is associated with passion and rage. The works to be discussed here have been grouped into categories ie. Accessories, Dresses and Pastimes and consideration will be given to the emotional aspects of battery which will be discussed individually.

3.2.1. **ACCESSORIES.**

The first three works I will discuss are handbags, which are according to Lurie (1992:242) the most universally recognized sexual indicators of ‘woman’. The American term for handbag, ‘purse’, is a word denoting the female pudenda which dates from the 17\textsuperscript{th} Century. Anna Johnson (2002:xii-xiv) in her publication, ‘Handbags: The Power of the Purse’ refers to handbags thus:

> Marked with life, stuffed to the gills, saved for, cherished like a child, a good bag becomes an intimate extension of the body. A second sex, but not in the way Simone de Beauvoir imagined it. A belly for concealment … The language that surrounds it is possessive and territorial: clutch, clasp, grasp, strap, and snap shut’. Psychiatrists have always held the bag in suspicion, imagining it to be a ‘vagina dentata’ - the only place a man’s hands are not welcome.


The contents of a handbag are generally seen to be private and may represent the contents of the female mind or be seen as a portable identity kit (Lurie 1992:242). Women are seldom seen without their handbags.

**Figure 7** ‘SHE IS SO ANGRY!’ 2005-6.
(Fabric, batting, beads, mild steel plate, jewelry wire, fishhooks, ribbon. Size approx.250x150x100cm.)

This formal evening clutch-bag symbolizes the contained emotions of continually battered women who have learned to repress their feelings. The satin body is intended to imply social class and the mid grey color suggests that her emotional status is similar to mourning (Lurie 1992:194) possibly for what she was led to expect

\textsuperscript{21} Alison Lurie wrote ‘The Language of Clothes’ in 1992 while she was Professor of English at Cornell University, New York.
from marriage which never materialized. The metaphor in the structure of this handbag, designed to be clutched tightly and invisibly under the arm, is a very angry woman who has had to silently tolerate her husband’s need to dominate her.

The bulging body of the bag suggests that this woman is ready to crack. When the clasp is closed this handbag represents a container of suppressed and impotent rage that has fizzled into depression. Disguised as a benign, quiet shadow the intertwined serpentine, quilted forms pushing through the fabric suggest seething subcutaneous activity. When the industrial mild-steel clasp in the shape of a snake’s head is open, the contents reveal menacing stainless steel tongues snagged by fish hooks. The machine-cut clasp-sides etched in decorative, serpentine imagery, gape confrontationally. The ‘mouth’ is lined with delicate, negligee-pink padded and pleated satin, slightly worn and colored to suggest pain. It symbolizes the brutally battered woman who, if pushed too far, will not be an accommodating or benign, feminine receptacle but a vengeful container of murderous aggression.

Figure 8 ‘IT IS ALL HER FAULT!’ 2006.
(Sickle blades, circular steel knitting needle, thread, found apron, wire. Size approx. 100x 200cm.)

This bag, resembling an innocuous common knitting bag, is indicative of traditional happy domesticity and is usually made at home by the user. The women symbolized in this work secretly cannot cope with their lives. They are battered and unhappy pretending to be what they are not and they blame themselves for failing to fulfill their idealized domesticated roles. This bag has no bottom so it cannot fulfill its function. The women it represents believe that they are similarly intrinsically flawed.

The handles, worn over the shoulder or the forearm and typically made of cane, are etched, femininely floral, steel sickle blades that are hinged with knots of thread over a circular, steel knitting needle. With these, the ‘wearer’ like a flagellant, punishes herself for not being perfect by repetitively rocking the blades into her body. The hopelessness felt by many battered women is suggested by a trapped, pretty, domestic apron caught up in its web-like threads. These threads, which are barely connected, comprise the body of the bag, thus the fabric, like the women, appears strong, but in reality it is falling apart and is too fragile to fulfill its function.
Some battered women would like to ask for help but they do not because they are afraid or depressed and it might mean that they will have to reveal closely kept and intimate secrets. These unraveling, bloodlike threads indicating the disintegration of the body of the bag suggests that the hopelessness, blame and self-punishment felt by these women, might be self-defeating.

Figure 9  ‘SHE IS ALWAYS HIDING SOMETHING!’ 2006.  
(Fabric, thread, batting, tailors clippers, copper wire. Size approx. 120x120x 450cm.)

This handbag is folded with a reptilian appearance having a wide, provocative opening which is surrounded by tooth-like black blades, which are gathered and ribbon plaited. When extended, it tapers towards a ‘swallowed’ tongue-like conclusion that folds in on itself and if extended it would present a uselessly convoluted, deep and narrow reticule. In the side of the body, concealed in the folds, there is a gaping, ‘mouth-like’ pocket suggestive of C’s (2004) ordeal. C’s (2004) husband threatened to kill her if she revealed that he attacked her in her sleep, tearing her vagina with his hands. The handbag is therefore, curled protectively around a torn and damaged ‘pocket’ in the side of the body that suggests the damage she experienced.

The armored upper surface of this handbag is made of layers upon layers of fine and delicate, feminine fabrics and embroidered with text upon text, revealed and concealed in the stitch-work. The text contains details of the violent act and threatening instructions to keep it a secret. In some places the text is fully visible and clear but in others, it is concealed within the fabric of the embroidery, suggesting the vacillations a battered woman experiences before she realizes that she has to break her promise of secrecy to protect herself. This surface forms a protective shield against a history of unprovoked violence whereas the underside of the bag is without text and, like battered women, is un-armored and vulnerable. Surrounding the entrance to the handbag is a protective row of tailor’s shears simulating a menacing but feminine frill suggesting that the woman symbolized here has had enough and although afraid of her husband, she is prepared to protect herself somehow, in the future.
This work is symbolic of the women who martyr themselves to the whims of their battering husbands and their idealized traditions. It is constructed from plastic ballerina cake decorations which usually appear dressed in silver tutus, ballet shoes and silver crowns, and are used for decorating birthday cakes. In this work, their ‘stands’ have been removed leaving their sharp arms and legs resembling thorns, and they have been re-colored to deny their traditional celebratory function. They are joined into the shape of a crown, which is reminiscent of the one referred to in Christian doctrine22 and which parodies crowns worn in recognition of achievement. In this instance, this crown is intended as an instrument of internalized self-torture. It symbolizes that part of masquerade that supports martyrdom and self-mockery and colludes with battery (Vermeulen 2004:114) to ‘keep the peace’ (V 2006). All the women I interviewed confirmed that the harder they worked in the hope of being recognized for their contribution to the happiness and economic stability of the family unit, the less recognition they received, and it did not stop or affect the levels of battery they endured.

3.2.2. DRESSES.

My next set of ‘works’ are dresses which I would like to preface with an explanation about why I have used fabric reinforcing techniques, such as quilting and embroidering. In a theory proposed by Lurie (1992:ix) for the protective element evident in woman’s clothing since the 1980’s, she suggests that the global trend towards defensive dressing is a response to fear:

All these contemporary styles, odd as they may seem, can be seen as a general trend towards defensive costume. There are many things we fear today. … self-protection has become a more and more important aspect of fashion….dark colors and heavy materials dominate, and the shape of the body is disguised rather than revealed by protective layers of cloth. …clothing has begun to resemble amour. But a costume, like a sentence, can mean more than one thing at a time and in the aggregate such styles seem to me

22 ‘Then Pilate’s soldiers took Jesus into the governor's palace and the whole company gathered round him. They stripped him of his robes and put a scarlet robe on him. They made a crown out of thorny branches and placed it on his head, and put a stick in his right hand; then they knelt down before him and mocked him’. Holy Bible Good News Edition (1991), Mathew Chap.27 vs.27:27-29
to say that as the end of the twentieth century approaches a lot of people are very frightened - perhaps more frightened than we have ever been before.

(Lurie 1992: x-xi).

The fear she refers to is in response to international crises that impact on lives generally. For the women I interviewed, global issues did not impact much on their private lives but fear of escalated incidents of battery preoccupied them constantly.

**Figure 11** ‘SHE THOUGHT SHE HAD ALL THE ANSWERS!’ 2004-7.
(Fabric, thread, buttons, stones, steel wire. Size approx. 100x500x500cm.).

This simple A-line dress in a color reminiscent of scabbed blood is constructed from segmented squares in the form of traditional ‘pillowed patchwork’. Each square is made up of a batting-stuffed felt pillow covered in an external layer of chiffon and lined with black taffeta which, together, forms a thick, shapeless, protective amour, heavily reinforced with embroidery. Between the segments there are transparent pockets reminiscent of vaginas and filled with pebbles. The back of the dress is vulnerably open and edged with hundreds of buttons hanging on by a thread. The dress crouches on its internal armature, leaning forward, seeming to beg.

The padded construction of the fabric and classical style of the dress implies a certain type of older woman and seems to be a ‘one-size-fits-all’, ‘perfect person’, garment with ‘personalizations’. The neck opening and armholes are bound with satin in the style of an evening dress and are a reminder of superior social status. The embroidered text, suggestive of painful scarification asks ‘why’. This constant rhetoric, for which there is no answer, was deeply imprinted in the psyches of the battered women I interviewed and surfaced time and time again in interviews.

The open back of the dress infers a gaping wound, implying that this woman is physically or psychologically unwell. The opening exposes an empty, eviscerated, black satin carcass with the buttons hanging from and into the wound-like opening suggestive of shining droplets of fresh blood, dripping into the space within. A restriction of personal freedom is implicit in the body-constricting, controlling and uncomfortable ‘armoring’ of the garment exterior, like a portable cage. The front of the dress, or façade, on the other hand, seems completely whole and undamaged like
battered women who pretend that they are ‘fine’ and nothing is amiss, even when they are in pain, sad, hopeless and depressed.

**Figure 12** ‘SHE THINKS SHE IS ABOVE IT ALL.’ 2004-7.
(Fabric, batting, beads, thread. Size approx. 700x 400x 300cm.)

The style and fabric of this garment is indicative of a stereotypically svelte, quietly wealthy, middle-aged woman. She is proud of her social status and the physical appearance that she works hard to maintain. Although this woman masquerades as aloof and self-contained, the small beadwork ‘stings’ that evenly erupt over the body of the dress belie this. Her self esteem is damaged and she is not who she seems. She masquerades as ‘aloof’ but she is merely trying to maintain the façade she has worked so hard to create.

Like the old stitch lines, the sharp, exposed but femininely etched blades as supports under the arms holes of the garment are the only indicators of her secret experiences. Without them as reminders, her self discipline might be forgotten, her façade will collapse and her secret will be exposed. The excess fabric folds into an obsessively neat, tightly controlled and tidy bolt, suggesting an impeccable linen cupboard and a scrupulously well managed home. In this case, the bolt is symbolic of the pressure of her carefully concealed private life that she hauls around with her like an emotional weight and which she cannot let go because it has become a part of her public identity.

**Figure 13** ‘IT NEVER STOPS!’ 2006.
(Embroidered dresses, hooks-and-eyes, press studs, thread, wire batting. Size approx 350 cm diameter)

This work is composed of four dresses gathered into a circular wreath-like structure. The neck-lines are formed into ‘mouths’ that swallow the lower end of the dress going before, echoing snakes consuming one another. The colors of the fabric represent the cyclical nature of emotions, from innocent acceptance, to hopeless realization, impotent rage, anger and resignation. Each dress is caught, ruched and knotted, into a quarter-circle indicating the continuous passage of time. The delicate, feminine fabric is held firmly in place with heavy-duty haberdashery notions. The bodices are

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23 A snake in the form of a circle, its tail in its mouth was a religious image in ancient Egypt. Late antique mythographers interpreted it as a symbol of eternity and associated it with Saturn who personified Time (Hall 1974:286).
embroidered with traditional ‘lazy-daisy’ stitch floral motifs that disintegrate into running stitches with forgotten, un-clipped threads that flow over and suggest the passage of dedicated domesticity. This dress has echo’s of A’s and V’s marriages. Both say that they continually chased after themselves, trying to be who they thought their husbands wanted them to be and failing, until they realized that their efforts were hopeless. That realization developed into a sense of failure and a desire to try again, harder than before, but failing again, resulting in a never ending circle from which they could not break free.

**Figure 14  ‘SHE PRETENDED FOR YEARS’. 2007.**
(Fabric, thread, fish hook. Size approx 1200x 400x 200cm.)

This dress is the metaphor for the old woman who was physically battered for all her married life. In this work the fabric implies translucent, old skin and suggests a fragile old body, tortured and exposed, indicating that her disguise finally failed. The color is indicative of this woman’s permanently angry emotional state and the garment is evidence of years of suffering. Text stitched into the translucent ‘skin’, begs the questions, ‘Why did he do this to me?’, ‘Why did I let him do this to me?, ‘Why didn’t I tell someone?’, ‘Why didn’t someone stop him?, for which there are no answers.

The back of the dress is firmly buttoned shut and both sides twist around each other like an disabling knot of fear being undone. Some women, like her and out of fear, perform ‘happiness’ all their lives because they are conditioned to do so, and eventually, possibly only after their death, the physical evidence of assault and battery is exposed.

3.2.3. **PASTIMES.**

**FIGURE 15  ‘SHE’S THE ONE WHOSE WORK IS NEVER DONE’. (2006).**
(Thread, copper wire, steel circular knitting needle, Size approx 200x200x200cm.)

This piece is made from fine embroidery thread gathered together from an ‘out-of-control’ knot into a knitted piece that goes back and forwards on itself, smoothly and in control for a few rows and then in a chaotic manner for another a few rows, making no noticeable headway towards a recognizable end. The circular knitting needle ends are
sharpened to a fine point that will injure, suggesting both self-abuse and the hidden potential of self protection.

‘A woman’s work is never done’ is the cynically sympathetic platitude often directed towards a stereotypical ‘housewife’ like B (2005). Her goal was to achieve her husband’s ever escalating, shouted expectations of comfort and consideration. He expected ‘at least that’ and he did not ‘ask for that much’ (B 2006) from her. It appears to be human nature that roles in life are performed in relation to other people and B’s role was slave her husband’s whim’s to justify her income-less existence in his home. Her sense of self-esteem depended on whether her husband recognized and acknowledged her efforts to make him happy or not. He seldom did and, like the knitting, although she failed, she began again and again in another direction hoping to achieve the desired outcome. Eventually she gave up.

Figure 16 ‘SHE IS THE ONE WHO GOSSIPS’. (2007).
(Fabric, batting, crochet thread, fish hooks, found handbag clasp. Size approx. 120x120x100cm.).

Marina Warner, in a chapter about gossips, refers to a shrewish character in a play ‘The old Wives’ Tale written around 1590 by George Peel thus,…‘A woman without a tongue Is a soldier without his weapon…’ (Warner 1994:13). This little bag is symbolic of the gossips feared by battered women. It is constructed out of traditional crochet ‘granny’ squares suggesting a harmless, domesticated woman. The ‘throat’ of the bag is forced backwards into a contorted grimace by four large fishing hooks and out of which protrude eight tongue-like structures. The first tongue is flaccid and quilted in a traditional pattern suggesting that this one is harmless. The rest of the tongues are quilted into layers of tense, tumescent, protuberances which are stitched into sinister growths with uneven edges. This metaphor for a woman who gossips is analogous with a small, poisonous, buzzing insect, therefore the bright orange-red color of the fabric is a sign to ‘keep away’, indicating danger. All the women I interviewed feared potential exposure and humiliation by gossips.

Items of apparel, dresses and handbags, are to be found in any woman’s wardrobe and they contribute to the way in which a woman visualizes herself. The women I
interviewed did not express anger over their circumstances nor did they rage about their batterers and they appeared detached, smiling when they described their frightening experiences. Typically battered women internalize the terror, anxiety and apprehension they experience as daily occurrences (Machonachie, et al. 1993:3). It was evident that these women perceived themselves as ‘different’ from other women suggesting a reason why they masquerade. In my work, shown in the illustrations following, I have explored what I believe to be the internalized impact of battery on women, which I have interpreted as visual entities.
3.2.4. **Illustrations.**

![Image of a sculptural artwork](image)

**Figure 7**
(Fabric, batting, beads, mild steel plate, jewelry wire, fishhooks, ribbon.
Size approx. 250x150x100cm.)
Figure 8
Robyn Magowan. ‘IT IS ALL HER FAULT!’ (2006)
(Sickle blades, circular steel knitting needle, thread, found apron, wire.
Size approx. 100x 200cm.)
Figure 9
(Fabric, thread, batting, tailors clippers, copper wire. Size approx. 120x120x 450cm.)
Figure 10
(Wire, cake decorations, copper wire. Size approx 210x210x50cm.)
Figure 11
(Fabric, thread, buttons, stones, steel wire. Size approx. 100x500x500cm.)
Figure 12
Robyn Magowan. ‘SHE THINKS SHE IS ABOVE IT ALL’ (2005). (Fabric, batting, beads, thread. Size approx. 700x 400x 300cm.)
Figure 13
(Embroidered dresses, hooks-and-eyes, press studs, thread, wire batting.
Size approx 350 cm diameter)
Figure 14
(Fabric, thread, fish hook. Size approx 1200x 400x 200cm.)
Figure 15
(Thread, copper wire, steel circular knitting needle, Size approx 200x200x200cm.)
Figure 16
(Fabric, batting, crochet thread, fish hooks, found handbag clasp.
Size approx. 120x120x100cm.)
CONCLUSION.

In this paper I approached the notion of masquerade to discover whether it protected battered women from further battery and I discovered that it did not. Masquerade seems to be a phenomenon that can be attributed to all women at different stages of their lives and it is not uniquely employed by women who are battered. It seems apparent, however, that battered women who masquerade socially do so for a specific reason, to disguise their battery from public gaze thereby avoiding criticism, blame and guilt.

My work is an attempt to try to understand the complex nature of battery among a voiceless but seemingly privileged section of society and thereby confront a wider audience with the evidence of the devastating and lasting effects of battery. Battery is not a ‘here today – gone tomorrow’ event. Its effects are cumulative and disabling and it is a myth that women enjoy or provoke battery or that they refuse help because they do not want it (Ludsin & Vetten 2005:76). Secrecy is a pervasive and ongoing aspect of battery but, until women are satisfactorily protected in law from their husband’s retribution, the situation will continue to look bleak and it will go on until human values that respect femininity and women, are put in place (Machonachie, et al. 1993:5).

This research has revealed to me that battery is an enormous field of research in South Africa and that I have merely touched on a small aspect of it. My conclusion is that there are numbers of older, seemingly ‘respectable’ women who are battered and who, without help, will continue to deny battery believing that they have no options but to accept their fate and to live in fear. I would like to propose a topic of further research which is the use of art as therapy, in conjunction with other forms of therapy, to assist battered woman to rebuild non-existent self-esteem and hopefully live lives that are not filled with fear.
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