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Investigating the discourses women draw on to understand violence in intimate relationships

by

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ABSTRACT

The rate of violence against women by intimate male partners is extremely high in South Africa. Although violence against women has been researched from a variety of perspectives, little research has been done in South Africa on the discourses that women draw on to understand the violence. This research investigated how women in violent relationships make meaning out of the violence by examining the discourses that women draw on to understand the violence. Using feminist poststructuralist theory as the epistemological framework, a discourse analysis was conducted on seven in-depth interviews with heterosexual women who had been in violent romantic relationships. Three main findings emerged from the analysis: 1) dominant in women's accounts were romantic discourses, which appeared in both fairytale and dark romance forms; 2) a *discursive battle* between dominant and marginalised discourses; and 3) the silences that emerged when attempting to name and explain the violence. Fairytale romance discourses present the relationship as still having hope, justify the violence, and position the woman as able to stop the violence. Dark romance discourses position romantic relationships as naturally abusive and present abuse as not a valid reason to leave a relationship. These justifications, beliefs, and understandings of the abuse appeared to make sense within hegemonic gendered discourses, which normalise dominance in men and dependency and passivity in women. This research highlights the urgent need to create alternative gender and romance narratives which provide women with more empowering subject positions to draw on when faced with violence in intimate relationships.

Key words: violence against women, intimate partner violence, gender, discourse analysis, feminist poststructuralism

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Declaration

I declare that **Investigating the discourses women draw on to understand violence in intimate relationships** is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination to any other university, and that all the sources that I have used have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter highlights the urgent need for research on intimate partner violence against women in South Africa. I present the rate of intimate partner violence against women internationally and in South Africa. I introduce some of the critical feminist research on violence against women in intimate relationships. I highlight the social, cultural, and political context that produces, impacts on, and maintains extremely high levels of intimate partner violence against women in South Africa. Lastly, I outline the structure of this thesis. I begin by providing a definition for domestic violence as found in the Domestic Violence Act (1998) and highlight some of the complexities involved in defining violence against women in intimate relationships.

Definitions

The Domestic Violence Act (1998) describes domestic violence as:

> physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional, verbal and psychological abuse, economic abuse, intimidation, harassment, stalking, damage to property, entry into the home without the complainant's permission, and any other abusive, controlling behaviour (Vetten, 2000, p. 51).

Physical abuse of women can include being slapped, bitten, punched, hit with a fist, having something thrown at her, kicked, shoved, being choked, strangled, beaten, intentionally burnt, assaulted or threatened with a gun, knife, stones, or other weapons (Abrahams et al., 2009; Jewkes, Penn-Kekana, Levin, Ratsaka, & Schrieber, 1999; Vetten, Riba, van Jaarsveld, Dunseith, & Mokwena, 2009) and can lead to serious injuries that require hospitalisation or result in death (Jewkes et al., 1999; Vetten et al., 2009). Psychological abuse has been identified by threats of violence, insults, controlling a woman's movements, verbal harassment/criticism, extreme jealousy, eviction from

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home, economic deprivation, contingent or withheld emotional support, and humiliation (Bell, Cattaneo, Goodman, & Dutton, 2008; Seedat, Van Niekerk, Jewkes, Suffla, & Ratele, 2009). Controlling and dominant behaviour as well as humiliation and degradation have been found to be particularly toxic for women's physical and mental health (Bell et al., 2008; Walker, 1984). Emotional abuse is very diverse, varies between cultures, and takes many different forms, some of which include 'verbal abuse, threats of violence, engendering fear, humiliation, destruction of property, enforcement of social isolation, taking or withholding earnings, and flaunting other sexual partners' (Jewkes, 2010, p. 851). Emotional abuse overlaps strongly with physical and sexual abuse (Jewkes, 2010). Sexual abuse includes forcing or persuading a woman to have sex against her will by holding her down, threatening or hurting her, gang rape, and other sexually humiliating or degrading behaviour (Jewkes et al., 2006; Jewkes et al., 1999; Vetten, 2000).

Kelly (1990) suggests that violence against women be understood as occurring on a continuum of sexual violence and stresses that distinctions between, for example, sexual and physical abuse are arbitrary or false. She argues that because different types of abuse are so closely related, forming or defining distinctions between them is meaningless and unhelpful. Some researchers argue that having a more narrow definition of violence where each type of violence is researched in its own right may be important for generating greater clarity about the nature of specific types of violence against women (Dobash & Dobash, 1998a). However, if violence against women is defined narrowly then as a consequence it may be understood as a rare occurrence (Kelly & Radford, 1998) and could present the picture that different types of violence are not closely related (Dobash & Dobash, 1998a), whereas research shows that different types of abuse are indeed very closely related (Hydén, 1994; Jewkes, 2010; Vetten et al., 2009; Walker, 1984). Conversely, defined too broadly leads to violence against women being understood as very common, and may be culturally defined as a 'normal' interaction between men and women. Violence against women has been defined as occurring in three domains: the family, the community, and perpetrated or condoned by the state (Jewkes et al., 1999). This thesis focuses primarily on violence against women by intimate male partners.

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Different terms are used to describe and talk about violence against women. These include but are not limited to 'domestic violence', 'family violence', 'woman abuse', 'intimate partner violence', 'wife battering', 'violence against women', 'sexual violence' and 'gender-based violence'. 'Domestic violence', 'family violence' and 'intimate partner violence' are gender-neutral terms (Rodriguez, Bauer, McLoughtin, & Grumbach, 1999) and can in some cases refer to mutual violence (Bell et al., 2008; Follingstad & Edumdson, 2010). Bograd (1990) argues that gender-neutral terms collapse the distinctions between husband/male-to-wife/female violence, wife/female-to-husband/male violence, child abuse, incest, and elder abuse and obscure the dimensions of gender and power which underlie feminist conceptions of violence against women by male partners. For this study, I use the term 'intimate partner violence against women' as this appears to describe violence against women perpetrated specifically by intimate partners. For convenience this is at times shortened to 'intimate partner violence' or 'violence against women'. Throughout this paper, the terms 'violence' and 'abuse' are used interchangeably to refer to physical, psychological, emotional, and/or sexual abuse of women by intimate male partners.

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The rate of intimate partner violence

In South Africa and internationally, intimate partner violence against women has been constructed as a major social, public health, and human rights problem that threatens gender equality and social justice aims (Boonzaier, 2008; Feder & Wilson, 2005; Fikree, Razzak, & Durocher, 2005; Geffner & Rosenbaum, 2001; Goldman & Du Mont, 2001; Jewkes et al., 1999; Jewkes, Levin, & Penn-Kekana, 2002; Rodriguez et al., 1999; Rothman, Butchart, & Cerdá, 2003; Smith & Randall, 2007; Stuart, Temple, & Moore, 2007; Wright, Kiguwa, & Potter, 2007). Over 1.3 million women are physically abused by an intimate partner each year in the United States (Stuart et al., 2007). Violence against women is estimated to occur in one in every six households annually (Rosenfeld, 1992). These estimates are conservative as they reflect only reported incidents and many incidents are not reported (Wood, 2001). Intimate partner violence is the leading cause of injury in women (Buttell & Carney, 2004; Coben, Forjuoh, & Gondolf, 1999) with over

12 percent of the women treated for injuries in emergency hospital rooms being victims of ongoing intimate partner violence (Sartin, Hansen, & Huss, 2006).

The rate of gender-based violence in South Africa is extremely high, with the death of women by the hands of an intimate partner being six times that of the global average (Jewkes et al., 2002; Kim et al., 2007; Seedat et al., 2009). Violence has become a normal way of asserting one's masculinity and is seen as a socially acceptable method of exercising power over women (Boonzaier, 2008; Jewkes et al., 2002; Seedat et al., 2009; Wood & Jewkes, 2001). Nearly half of the deaths in South Africa are due to injury caused by interpersonal and gender-based violence, which is four and a half times the proportion world-wide (Seedat et al., 2009). Moreover, 80% of women who live in rural areas are victims of abuse (Vetten, 1999 cited in Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003).

Feminist research on intimate partner violence against women

Feminist literature and research on intimate partner violence emphasise the importance of understanding the context within which the violence occurs (Boonzaier, 2005, 2008; Dobash & Dobash, 1998b; Gavey, 1996; Goldman & Du Mont, 2001; Hydén, 1994; Jewkes, 2002; Johnson, 1995; Ussher, 2004; Walkerdine, 1986; Weedon, 1987). Violence against women by the hands of an intimate male partner is not arbitrary, but linked to women's position in society in relation to men (Hydén, 1994; Weedon, 1987). Women have historically been disadvantaged in relation to men economically, educationally, within the family, religiously, and culturally (Ahmed, Reavey, & Majumdar, 2009; Bograd, 1990; Hetherington, & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Walkerdine, 1986). Feminists argue that understanding the historical, cultural, and social suppression of women within patriarchal society is fundamental to understanding current levels of violence against women (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2002; Bograd, 1990; Corvo & Johnson, 2001; Hydén, 1994; Jewkes et al., 1999; Johnson, 1995; Weedon, 1987; Wood, 2001). Out of the social context the act becomes meaningless (Hydén, 1994). Feminist researchers emphasise the patriarchal context of violence against intimate women partners and de-emphasise the individual pathology of the man (Goldman & Du Mont, 2001; Hydén, 1994; Jackson et al., 2003; Wood, 2001). Therefore, intimate partner violence against women is viewed

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not from an individualistic perspective but from a historical social perspective (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997).

Patriarchal culture and social structures normalise male dominance and female submission (Adams & Govender, 2008; Connell, 2002; Hydén, 1994; Vetten, 2000; Wood, 2001; Walker, 1984). Feminist researchers view intimate partner violence as related to issues of power and gender (Bograd, 1990) where violence is the acting out of male authority and female submission (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). Women abuse is a clear example of vigorous patriarchy in society (Bograd, 1990; Dobash & Dobash, 1998a; Hydén, 1994). Patriarchal culture and society encourage male aggression and ownership of women in the family; men who beat their wives are living up to cultural prescriptions of male dominance and are using violence as a means of enforcing that dominance (Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Connell, 2002; Hydén, 1994; Johnson, 1995; Kelly, 1990; Saunders, 1990). Moreover, normative heterosexuality involves eroticising dominance over women and the use of force (Graham, Rawlings, & Rimini, 1990; MacKinnon, 1983). This normalization of male dominance has led to rape by an intimate partner being viewed as socially acceptable (Graham et al., 1990). Feminist researchers are also exploring how violence against women is related to masculine identity and how men use violence to achieve successful forms of masculinity (Boonzaier, 2008; Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007; Wood & Jewkes, 2001).

South African context

South Africa is characterised by a history of violence and oppression and is currently experiencing massive transformation on social, political, and economic levels (Boonzaier, 2008). One of the results of state-sponsored political violence and armed resistance under apartheid is that violence is viewed as an acceptable way of solving conflict in South Africa (Jewkes et al., 1999). In 1994 South Africa held its first democratic election and the implementation of legislation aimed at eradicating apartheid's injustices. However, freedom from political violence, as experienced under the apartheid regime, has not led to freedom from gender oppression and violence against women in South Africa (Vetten, 2000). Armstrong (1994) argues that in an attempt to not divert attention away from the

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political struggle against racism, violence against women and rape as political issues were and continue to be marginalised in South Africa. Indeed, South Africa has one of the highest rates of violence against women in the world (Jewkes et al., 2002; Kim et al., 2007; Seedat et al., 2009) and it appears to be increasing (Vetten, 2000).

Violence against women in South Africa is influenced by its political, social and cultural history, by colonisation and apartheid and by the resulting race, class, and gender divisions (Vetten, 2000). Vetten (2000) points out that socio-economic status intersects with race and gender identities to produces a complex pattern of dominance and oppression in South Africa. Moreover, only relatively recently has violence against women within intimate relationships been granted official recognition by South African law (Vetten, 2000).

Violence against and rape of women is so common in South African society that it is often accepted as a social norm by doctors, social workers, policemen, and the victims themselves (Armstrong, 1994; Jewkes, 2002). Studies have found that hospital staff often do not ask about women's injuries and rarely refer women to further services (Vetten et al., 2009). For instance, in a study done in Mpumalanga, only 6.4% of women presenting at a hospital for injuries caused by physical violence from a male partner were referred to the police (Vetten et al., 2009). In the same study, one in three cases was discontinued by the police when they were unable to find the perpetrator.

In a study done among Xhosa women Jewkes and colleagues (1999) found that men are often violent towards women during pregnancy and that the violence is frequently directed at the pregnant abdomen, often causing miscarriage. Moreover, emotional abuse of women during pregnancy contributes to her developing post-natal depression (Jewkes, 2010). Importantly, emotional abuse is often pervasive but is overshadowed by physical violence (Jewkes, 2010) and is rarely treated as a crime (Vetten et al., 2009).

Considerable health sector resources are spent providing treatment for women who are injured by intimate male partners (Jewkes et al., 1999). Health consequences include injuries, chronic pelvic pain, mental health problems, and death (Jewkes et al., 1999). Abrahams and colleagues (2009) found that just over 50% of female homicides are due to intimate partner violence, with blunt force injuries most commonly involved.

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South Africa has one of the fastest growing HIV rates in the world. Reducing levels of intimate partner violence and equalising gender relations is an inseparable part of tackling the HIV epidemic (Jewkes et al., 1999). In addition, violence is a major impediment to achieving health, development, equity, and social justice goals in South Africa (Jewkes et al., 1999).

International perspectives on women's talk and the need for South African research

Research has found that when talking about their relationships, women struggle to name and explain abuse from intimate male partners (Gavey, 1996; Kelly, 1990). MacKinnon (1983), Kelly (1990), and Gavey (1996) have theorised that the patriarchal content and structure of language as well as dominant patriarchal discourses do not contain words and discourse that enable women to talk about abuse by male partners and therefore form a further means of oppressing women. The discourses that are available in cultural life shape the options open to individuals for making sense of threats and acts of violence as well as the relationships within which they occur (Wood, 2001). Jackson (2001), Towns and Adams (2000), and Wood (2001) have found that women in violent intimate relationships draw on perfect-love discourses, discourses of romance, and fairytales to understand the abuse in their relationships. This research has broadened current understandings of violence in intimate relationships and has elucidated the discourses that not only justify and normalise abuse of women by male partners but which also bind women to abusive partners. Examining how culturally endorsed gender and romance discourses normalise violence in intimate relationships has been found to further current understanding of violent heterosexual relationships (Wood, 2001).

The literature on the discourses abused women draw on to understand their relationships is not well developed in South Africa (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). This study aimed to address this gap in research by investigating the discourses that South African women draw on to understand the violence in their intimate relationships. Research has suggested that knowledge about how women understand intimate partner violence can help illuminate what is needed in order to end violence against women (Hydén, 1999).

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Moreover, knowledge about how women understand themselves and their subject positions in violent relationships can enable the creation of new, more empowering, subject positions for South African women. This can lead to new definitions of intimate partner violence against women. This is important because how violence against women is defined influences legal decisions and public policy around intimate partner violence (Kelly, 1990). This underscores the urgency of doing women-centred research in South Africa with women who are currently or have been in abusive relationships in order to identify the discourses and subject positions that they draw on to understand their relationships. It is also vital to ascertain whether South African women in abusive relationships draw on the same discourses as North American and European women, such as western traditional femininity, perfect love and fairytales, and therefore whether much of the international literature on female talk about intimate partner violence can be applied to women in South Africa.

Given that South Africa has one of the highest rates of intimate partner violence in the world, this research is urgently needed. How acts are defined influences public attitudes, agency practices, and legal decisions (Kelly, 1990). Therefore, understanding how women define and categorise their experiences is invaluable for the development of theory and policy around intimate partner violence. By building this understanding my project makes a valuable and significant contribution to what is known as well as theory development on intimate partner violence in South Africa.

For this research the sample included seven women aged between 25 and 47 years old, five of which were married to the abusive partner, one separated and in the process of divorce and one divorced from the abusive male partner. Six of the women lived in Mitchell’s Plain in the Western Cape. Access was gained through contacting the manager of an intervention organisation that provides services aimed at rehabilitation of offenders. A feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework was used to approach and analyse the data gained from the seven interviews.

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Summary

This chapter introduced the rate of intimate partner violence against women internationally and in South Africa in particular. A critical feminist understanding of intimate partner violence was also presented. The chapter highlighted the cultural, political, and social context of violence against women in South Africa. This chapter introduces the value of feminist research on the discourses drawn on when talking about intimate partner violence. As illustrated above, given the extremely high levels of intimate partner violence against women in South Africa, research in this area is urgently needed.

Thesis structure

Chapter Two of this thesis reviews the literature on how women understand abuse in their intimate relationships. Chapter Three presents the methodology used to collect and analyse the data, and includes reflexivity and ethical considerations. In Chapter Four I present the analysis and discussion of the data, illustrating the discourses women draw upon to understand the violence in their relationships. Chapter Five concludes the thesis and provides recommendations for future research.

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CHAPTER TWO

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON WOMEN'S UNDERSTANDINGS OF ABUSE IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

This chapter reviews the literature on how women understand and make meaning out of the violence in their intimate relationships. I review the critical feminist work that has been done on women in abusive relationships. This will include literature on women resisting abuse, leaving abusive relationships, and how dominant discourses on love, marriage, femininity, and romance shape how women understand the violence they are subjected to. I also review critical feminist work that problematises patriarchal language, as well as dominant patriarchal discourse, and the lack of scope within these for women to name, label, and talk about abuse perpetrated by intimate male partners. Some of the discourses women have been found to draw on to understand the violence in their relationships relate to the nature of the violent relationship and the possible causes of the violence. Therefore, I begin by briefly discussing the violent heterosexual relationship and what has been described as some of the contested causes of the violence.

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The violent relationship

Walker (1984) proposes a cycle of violence that occurs in abusive relationships. An abusive relationship is characterised into three phases: 1) tension-building phase, 2) explosive phase, and 3) honeymoon phase. The tension-building phase is characterised by 'name-calling, dissatisfaction, mean intentional behaviours, and/or physical abuse' by the man towards the woman (p. 96). Stage two, the explosive phase, is characterised by severe physical abuse that can leave the woman with serious injuries. Walker (1984) argues that once in stage one, without intervention stage two becomes inevitable. The honeymoon phase is characterised by greater closeness between partners, which often follows an abusive episode.

The emotional closeness experienced after an abusive episode can lead to women interpreting that the man is deep down kind and loving and is often used as a justification

for remaining in the relationship (Lundgren, 1998). In accordance with Walker's (1984) theory, researchers have found that women create a split between the good husband/prince charming who is loving and caring and the bad husband/beast who becomes violent (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001). In this way, women dissociate the violence from the man who perpetrates it (Boonzaier, 2008). This dissociation, as well as minimising or denying how bad the abuse is, appears to be employed by women in order to cope psychologically with how badly she is being treated (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Hathaway, Silverman, Aynalem, & Mucci, 2000; Kelly, 1990; Towns & Adams, 2000; Walker, 1984).

Graham and colleagues (1990) argue that extreme power imbalances between an abusive man and an abused woman can lead to strong emotional bonding. An essential aspect of this type of traumatic bonding is intermittent violence alternating with kind, warm, friendly behaviour, which is often found in abusive relationships (Walker, 1984). The unpredictable behaviour patterns and an inability to avoid a man's abuse or understand why it is occurring have been argued to lead to the development of learned helplessness (Walker, 1984).

Research has found that abused women are often isolated from their family and friends and other sources of outside help and thus depend on the male partner for emotional support to ease the emotional distress that he has created (Goldman & Du Mont, 2001; Graham et al., 1990; Hydén, 1999; Johnson, 1995). Women who are abused tend to have a low self-esteem (Goldman & Du Mont, 2001; Smith & Randall, 2007), often live in fear and terror of her partner (Goldman & Du Mont, 2001, Hydén, 2005; Smith & Randall, 2007), and feel powerlessness (Walker, 1984), shame and humiliation (Boonzaier & van Schalkwyk, in press; Hydén, 1994). Fear of further violence often prevents women from seeking outside help (Graham et al., 1990; Hydén, 1999; Rodriguez et al., 1999; Walker, 1984). Furthermore, women often drop charges against the male partner and return to him after having left either out of fear or with the hope that she can help him reform (Graham et al., 1990). Boonzaier and van Schalkwyk (in press) highlight the social stigmatisation of the identity of an 'abused woman' and that women therefore resist taking up this position. Women are often ashamed of the abuse, see it as a

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private matter or view the experience of abuse as normal in romantic intimate relationships (Armstrong, 1994; Jewkes et al., 1999; Wood, 2001).

When making meaning out of the violence in their relationships, women often speak about the possible causes of the violence (see Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Towns & Adams, 2000; Wood, 2001). The actual causes of intimate partner violence against women are highly contested (Jewkes, 2002). Some of the proposed causes include alcohol consumption (Corvo & Carpenter, 2000; Jewkes, 2002), aggression (Anderson & Umberson, 2001), the intergenerational transmission of abuse (Kwong, Bartholomew, Henderson, & Trinke, 2003; Sappington, 2000), poverty (Jewkes, 2002), and patriarchy (Bograd, 1990; Boonzaier, 2008; Jewkes et al., 1999; Hydén, 1994; Weedon, 1987). These are understood as related to each other in complex ways. Within the South African context, Jewkes (2002) proposes two main causes of intimate partner violence: the unequal position of women in heterosexual relationships and society, and the normative use of violence to resolve conflicts, both of which interact with a web of other factors to produce violence perpetrated against women in intimate relationships.

Context and culture have been found to be important in understanding the maintenance of violence against women in intimate relationships (Boonzaier, 2005; Jackson, 2001). Boonzaier (2005, 2008) found that within a South African context both women and men positioned themselves within hegemonic gender discourses when explaining their relationships. International feminist research has found that women draw on and construct their intimate relationships using dominant discourses of gender and romantic love (Jackson, 2001; Towns & Adams, 2000; Wood, 2001). Investigating the discourses that women draw on to position themselves within and construct their relationships has proved useful in developing an understanding of the psychological dynamics of abuse in intimate heterosexual relationships.

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Romantic discourses and dominant prescriptions of femininity

Feminist work on women in abusive relationships is extensive. Areas that have been covered include, but are not limited to, the abusive relationship (Boonzaier, 2008; Hydén, 1994; Walker, 1984 among others), women’s resistance against the abuse (Hydén, 1999,

2005), leaving abusive relationships (Hydén, 2005), women's position in society (for example, Bograd, 1990; Walkerdine, 1986, 1996; Weedon, 1987), the social and political context of the relationship (Boonzaier, 2005; Dobash & Dobash, 1998b; Jackson, 2001; Jewkes, 2002; Towns & Adams, 2000; Walkerdine, 1986), and services available to women who have been abused (Grauwiler, 2008; Vetten et al., 2009). Feminist work has also investigated the social and cultural construction of romantic heterosexual relationships and the impact that this has on women in abusive relationships (Jackson, 2001; Towns & Adams, 2000; Wood, 2001). The impact that religious discourse and practices have on women's position in abusive relationships has also been explored (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Knickmeyer, Levitt, Horne, & Bayer, 2003; Levitt & Ware, 2006a, 2006b; Lundgren, 1998). Furthermore, feminist work has investigated the social construction of gender and the discourses that are used to justify, shape, normalise, and make meaning out of violence perpetrated against women by intimate male partners (Boonzaier, 2008; Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003, 2004; Gavey, 1989, 1996; Hollway, 1989; Wood, 2001).

Feminist research has approached violence against women from a number of perspectives, some of which are: the perspective of women who are currently in abusive relationships (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003, 2004; Towns & Adams, 2000), women speaking about past abusive relationships (Gavey, 1989; Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001), women who have left (Hydén, 2005; Jackson, 2001), male partners who abuse (Anderson & Umberson, 2001), and couples (Boonzaier, 2008; Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003, 2004).

Women in abusive relationships have been found to embody traditional emphasised femininity: passivity, selflessness, care-giving, motherliness, and romance (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Jackson, 2001; Smith & Randall, 2007; Towns & Adams, 2000; Walker, 1984). Prescriptive gender roles have led to many women believing that they need a man to have value (Boonzaier, 2008; Wood, 2001). Moreover, social and cultural constructions of perfect love and romance have been found to keep women with male partners who abuse them (Ahmed et al., 2009; Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001). In addition, the positions provided to women by culture, the media, and historical conceptions of what constitutes a good woman are complex and can be contradictory (Walkerdine, 1986, 1996).

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Connell (2002) argues that the media and social constructions of masculinity naturalise gender difference and gender hierarchy. Media plays a powerful role in shaping women's and men's gender identities and bolsters romance narratives where female subordination to men is viewed as romantic and as the 'ideal' (Connell, 2002; Towns & Adams, 2000; Wood, 2001).

Hydén (1999, 2005) investigated women leaving abusive relationships and resisting abuse and the different positions that comprised resistance. Hydén (1999) argues that *fear* contains an unarticulated form of resistance. She argues that when a woman fears her partner it is an expression that she does not want or desire the abuse he perpetrates. She further argues that the fear is a rejection of the man's violence without necessarily having a strategy of how to avoid future violence. Hydén (1999) therefore urges that *fear* be understood as a concept that is two-fold, containing both suffering and resistance, and that this is empowering to women. She argues that a monolithic concept of fear being only suffering is disempowering to women.

In more recent research Hydén (2005) examined the relationship between male-perpetrated violence and female resistance by focusing on agency by women who had left abusive partners. She investigated the relationships between power, responsibility, and activity as reflected in how abused women positioned themselves in stories of leaving. Hydén (2005) identified three positions that women occupied after leaving a relationship: *wounded*, *self-blaming*, and *bridge-building*. Within the *wounded* position women depicted themselves as powerless and their male partners as dominant and powerful. The *self-blaming* position was characterised by criticising 'past selves' for 'letting' men abuse them. Women positioned their 'past selves' as 'co-offenders' who were responsible for allowing the abuse to happen (p. 180). The *bridge-building* position saw women position the man as no longer having power over her and positioned herself as able to resist him. Hydén (2005) showed that after leaving abusive relationships women do not occupy consistent and unambiguous identities in relation to the abuse and the self. The three positions, although occupied during resistance, as women had already left abusive partners, were not static but rather fluid and changing during the aftermath of the relationship.

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Moreover, Hydén (2005) argues that battered women have been categorised as unambiguous victims where their ways of resisting and opposing violence are underemphasised and insufficiently examined by feminist work. She emphasises that battered women are not unambiguous victims, but rather that in each woman's story of oppression and abuse there is a parallel story of resistance. This was similarly found by Boonzaier (2008), as discussed below. Hydén (2005) argues that the 'battered woman as victim' concept is problematic as it reduces battered women to their suffering.

Jackson (2001) researched how popular and idealised forms of the romantic narrative occurred in young women's talk of relationships in which they were emotionally, physically, or sexually abused. Jackson (2001) argues that western fairytales position women as 'princesses' who need a handsome prince to rescue and marry them, and live happily every after. She argues that from a young age girls are bombarded with romantic fairytale narratives through teen television dramas, music, teen fiction, and teen magazines which position attaining a boyfriend as paramount and construct femininity as passive, submissive, self-sacrificing, and sexually desirable. For instance, some teen magazines in New Zealand regularly feature 'hot tips' on how to attract a boyfriend and keep him (p. 306). Jackson (2001) found that romantic fairytales and cultural narratives of romance had a powerful impact on how women understood their relationships and in many cases prevented women from leaving abusive partners. She found that the romantic narrative functioned as a resource for women to make sense of what had happened to them.

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Jackson (2001) found that young women's stories of how they became involved with abusive boyfriends fitted the classical romantic fairytale with the woman being a victim of difficult circumstances, lonely, and needing a prince to rescue her. She argues that romantic narratives are also complex, ironic and ambiguous. For instance, one woman said that the relationship 'just sort of happened at the right time' (p. 311). Yet, given the already vulnerable position that the woman was in without friends or family and the violent abuse that followed in the relationship, Jackson (2001) argues that it was more the 'wrong time' than the 'right time' (p. 312). However, for the woman to talk about the encounter as the 'wrong time' would be telling a story against the classical fairytale romance, within which it is always the right time (Jackson, 2001). Jackson found

that women avoided a victim status by labelling their partners as not abusers; these women also avoided self-blame by attributing their susceptibility to abuse to situational factors.

In addition, Jackson (2001) found that women remained in violent relationships for fear of hurting their partner's feelings. This shows the interdependence of romantic fairytales and dominant conceptions of femininity (Jackson, 2001). Discourses of femininity and romantic narratives can function to trap women in abusive relationships by normalising dominance and violence in men and vulnerability and victimhood in women (Boonzaier, 2008; Jackson, 2001).

Jackson (2001) argues that the classical romantic fairytale reinforces the fusion of love and violence: dominating, violent behaviour is portrayed as an expression of the hero's love and desire. She argues that the classical romantic narrative is problematic as it conforms to a social order of female submission and male dominance, which underwrites abuse and violence. As argued by Hydén (1999, 2005), Jackson urges that women's stories of resistance need to be heard so that they can become a cultural resource for other women to draw on when faced with abusive partners.

Towns and Adams (2000) investigated how discourses of perfect-love bind women to abusive relationships. They argue that discourses may have a strong impact in determining a woman's position when relationships become violent. Towns and Adams (2000) discuss how women's depictions of perfect-love are represented and how they produce contradictions about the meanings of men's violence. They argue that perfect-love discourses may silence women's talk about male perpetrated violence, prevent change in the relationship, and in so doing, prevent change in patriarchal society and practices.

Perfect-love discourses depict fairytale love where Prince Charming overcomes all obstacles to save the passive and distressed princess (Towns & Adams, 2000). Perfect-love discourses idealise one's romantic partner and construct love as loving a man for what he is, even if abusive, and supporting him through the good and bad (violent) times. Male heroes are depicted as dual, being both prince and beast. This is linked to fairytales such as *Beauty and the Beast* where the woman's love cures the man of his temporary beastliness and brings out his true self: the prince. Women in Towns and Adams' (2000)

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study showed fluidity in their constructions of male partners, who were both loving and cruel. This was sometimes portrayed as a ‘splitting’ of the good man from the bad man who was violent (p. 566). Towns and Adams (2000) argue that splitting was used as a method of rationalising that the violence was not who the man really was, which assisted women in maintaining the relationship despite violent abuse. This is also similar to Walker’s (1984) theory of a cycle of violence, where abusive male partners and relationships follow a cycle of loving kind behaviour followed by violent abuse, followed by loving behaviour again. Boonzaier (2008) argues that the dual-identity is implicit in the construction of the relationship as a cycle of violence. The relationship is constructed as ‘good-at-times’ and ‘bad-at-times’ which leads to the male partner being constructed as good and bad (Boonzaier, 2008, p. 193).

Towns and Adams (2000) argue that included in the perfect-love discourse is possessive love where the man loves the woman so much that the idea of another man having her can drive him ‘berserk’ and lead to violence (p. 570). They argue that this constructs the woman as responsible for the man’s violence. Jealousy is understood as an expression of the man’s deep love for the woman. In addition, love depicted as having transformative qualities is common in fairytale representations of perfect-love. This is evident in tales such as *The Frog Prince* where the kiss of the princess turns the frog into a prince. In order for the princess to discover the real prince she must prove that she can sacrifice what no other princess has been capable of. Towns and Adams (2000) argue that this encourages women to be the perfect partner to abusive and violent men. Perfect-love discourses provide subject positions to women that encourage them to help men who abuse them, stay in the relationship, and not try to challenge the status quo of the relationship. Moreover, perfect-love discourses encourage women to construct a male partner as ‘the ideal man’, similar to a male-god, who is the perfect-lover and who will solve all her problems and protect her (Towns & Adams, 2000, p. 575).

Boonzaier and de la Rey (2004) researched how both women and men attach meaning to their experience within the relationship. They found that women and men drew on discourses of femininity and masculinity in contradictory and complex ways. Women were found to at times embody hegemonic femininity by responding to men’s violence with nurturance and selflessness. The authors found that the lines between

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'wife' and 'mother' often became blurred. On the one hand constructing the self as the mother was related to traditional feminine practice where nurturance and selflessness are emphasised. However, Boonzaier and de la Rey (2004) note that by positioning their partners as childlike and needing support, women were simultaneously constructing themselves as stronger. Although empowering, representing the man as needing care also serves the function of keeping women in the relationship out of feelings of sympathy and care for their partners.

Boonzaier and de la Rey (2004) also found that successful masculinity was linked to being able to provide financially for the family. When unable to provide men experienced a loss of confidence and self-esteem. This, coupled with a woman partner owning the house they live in or earning more than he does, sometimes led to conflict and violence. This was linked to men feeling emasculated by female partners who 'disrupt gendered practices' by not adopting traditional femininity characteristics of passivity, dependence, and subservience (p. 455). Researchers argue that men are violent towards women in an attempt to maintain a particular self-image in the face of real or imagined threats to their masculine identity; therefore men control and beat their wives in order to prove that they are 'real' men (Jewkes et al., 1999; Wood & Jewkes, 2001).

Boonzaier and de la Rey (2004) found that women's sexuality was a site for male control. Men felt entitled to exert control over women's bodies and restrict their movements. Controlling and possessive behaviour acted out the belief that his wife and her body are his exclusive property and that he has a right to have sex with her. In their sample, being 'wives' meant being sexually available to their husbands. After being sexually coerced by her husband, one participant spoke of a 'feeling of being raped' but resisted constructing the incident as 'rape' (p. 458). In her description she implicitly drew on male sexuality as active and female sexuality as passive. Furthermore, in later research Boonzaier (2008) found that notions of manhood were intimately linked to having his sexual needs met and catered for by his partner.

Similarly to Towns and Adams' (2000) finding that based on romantic fairytale heroes, women construct dual identities of violent partners, Boonzaier (2008) found that men too portray themselves as having dual personalities because their violence was not consistent with their sense of self. Men in Boonzaier's (2008) study constructed

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themselves as normally ‘good’ men who were non-violent and who were transformed into a ‘monster’ by forces that were beyond their control (p. 194). Women partners also constructed the violence as a departure from the norm. Moreover, both partners constructed joint responsibility for the violence and portrayed it as a mutual activity. This was done using words such as ‘fight’ or ‘argument’ (p. 196). Describing the violence as a ‘fight’ suggests that it is a ‘reciprocal activity with no clear distinction between attacker and victim’ (Hydén, 1994, p. 196 cited in Boonzaier, 2008). In agreeing that the abuse was mutual, some women in her study did not construct themselves as ‘pure victims’. Boonzaier (2008) found that within women’s and men’s narratives were ambiguities and complications surrounding the identification of ‘actual victims’ or ‘actual perpetrators’ (p. 196). Moreover, Boonzaier and van Schalkwyk (in press) found that women position themselves as partially culpable of the abuse perpetrated by male partners, thereby avoiding a position of a ‘passive victim’ and taking up the position of ‘co-producer’ of the violence.

Boonzaier (2008) found that gender was constructed relationally in women’s and men’s talk about violence and relationships. ‘Acceptable’ forms of identity involved dominant femininity: passivity, self-blame, and denying or minimising partner’s violence (p. 201). However Boonzaier (2008) also found that feminist discourse emerged in some of women’s talk in which they positioned themselves as strong, capable, and independent and as survivors as opposed to victims of abuse. Women evidenced resisting dominant femininity as well as male hegemony by employing resources to enable them to end male partners’ violence. Similar to Walkerdine (1986, 1996), Boonzaier (2008) showed that adopting femininity is at times shaky, unstable, and contradictory.

Wood’s (2001) study conducted in North America aimed to examine how women construct their romantic partners’ violence as understandable. She used Grounded Theory and conducted a narrative analysis. She argues that narratives provide ‘structure, sequence, and coherence on experiences that would otherwise be fragmentary and inchoate’ (p. 241). Wood (2001) argues that narratives are sought especially when presented with experience that does not make sense, such as abuse from intimate partners. Wood (2001) found that women continue to care for and protect abusive partners in order to maintain a fairytale romance. She argued that women have

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internalised the gender expectation that women should care for male partners as well as maintain the harmony of the relationship despite high levels of violence. In her research on the narratives women use to make sense of violent relationships Wood (2001) found that women's accounts were infused with romance narratives; she divided these into fairy tale narratives and dark romance narratives. Wood's (2001) narrative structures will be used to thematically organise the analysis presented in Chapter 4.

Similar to the fairytale romance discussed above (Jackson, 2001) and to the perfect-love discourse found in Towns and Adams (2000), the fairytale narrative was characterised by a 'Prince Charming' who swept women off their feet and gave them gifts (Wood, 2001, p. 249). Within this narrative women minimised the violence by believing that it was not that bad and they could control it, as well as dissociating the violence from who her partner really was. Women idealised the male partner, were willing to risk everything for him, and believed he was her soul mate. Within this narrative it was believed that love would conquer any problem in the relationship, including extreme violence.

The dark romance narrative was used when women did not manage to find ways to conform their relationship to the fairly tale romance (Wood, 2001). This well-established dark narrative prescribes that men are sometimes violent, violence is a normal part of a relationship and not a reason to leave, and women should cling to their male partners in order to be complete Wood (2001). Within the dark romance narrative women believed that they deserved to be hit and that there was no way out (Wood, 2001). Wood (2001) found that women felt that they could not leave the relationship because they 'would not be able to make it' or because the male partner was the 'only stability' that she had (p. 256). Wood (2001) argues that women's stories in both the fairytale and dark romances 'are resolutely social because they reflect and embody culturally produced, sustained, and approved narratives of gender and romance' (p. 257). These narratives form the cultural resources that women have to make sense of violent relationships, where love and violence are experienced as united. Wood (2001) argues that these romantic narratives define violent relationships as normal, tolerable, and preferable to no relationship.

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Ahmed and colleagues (2009) found that discourses of culture, including constructions of gender, relationships, and family were drawn on by family members and communities of South Asian women living in the United Kingdom and functioned to keep women in violent relationships. Family members who upheld beliefs that encouraged women to return to abusive partners were experienced as unsupportive and colluding in the violence. Cultural discourses contained patriarchal assumptions and were viewed as unchangeable. Although disappointed that family members reproduced these assumptions, women believed that family members were not to blame as they were helpless to resist the pervasive nature of patriarchal cultural discourses. Ahmed and colleagues (2009) showed that patriarchal relations exist not only within the couple but are exacerbated by families and the community who reproduce patriarchal assumptions. Dominant prescriptions of femininity and marriage and patriarchal assumptions have also been found in various religious discourses.

Some religious social structures sanction strict adherence to traditional gender roles (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003, 2004). Priests, counsellors, friends, and family have been found to urge a woman to remain with a man even when the abuse is extreme (Graham et al., 1990). Exploring religious leaders' responses to intimate partner violence against women, Levitt and Ware (2006a, 2006b) found that religious leaders hesitated to condone divorce and urged reconciliation. Some of the religious leaders placed responsibility for the abuse solely on the woman and suggested that women desired to be abused due to their childhood experiences of abuse. Religious leaders also indicated that divorce would be detrimental for the children (2006b). However, other research has shown that high levels of parental conflict are more damaging to children than divorce (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Levitt and Ware (2006a, 2006b) argue that patriarchal beliefs inscribed in some religions, such as passivity and compliance in women and male supremacy, make it difficult for women to resist abuse from husbands or try to leave the relationship. Similarly Giesbrecht and Sevcik (2000) found that religious leaders endorsed traditional gender roles that supported the inequalities in abusive relationships. Women in their study reported that religious leaders blamed them for 'push[ing] his buttons' when the man became violent (p. 235). Moreover, the religious notion of forgiveness, which links with traditional emphasised femininity, is

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often used as a justification for remaining with a man who abuses (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004).

In her research investigating the images that fundamentalist Christian couples in Norway use when talking about violence in relationships, Lundgren (1998) found that ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ became complementary and mutually exclusive with ‘masculine’ encompassing the ‘authority principle of God’ and ‘feminine’ signifying the ‘rebellious principle of Satan’ (p. 172). This traditional dualist view of reality also included the belief that men are granted authority over women. The dualist view of the binary between masculine and feminine led to a strengthening of gender polarisation: men must not behave or think like women. Women who cross this gender boundary are termed ‘rebellious’ and effectively dealt with by using violence, which, in Lundgren’s (1998) sample, was openly tolerated by their church.

In investigating the coping strategies employed by religious women to survive male partners’ violence, Knickmeyer and colleagues (2003) found that the relationship between religion and intimate partner violence is highly complex and paradoxical. When reaching out to the church women in their study were met with vastly different responses from religious leaders and community members, which ranged from protection and care to rejection or advice that left women at greater risk for further abuse. Knickmeyer and colleagues (2003) found that women who chose to divorce reconciled this with religious teachings of the sanctity of marriage by believing that God was forgiving and willing to forgive divorce.

Importantly, religion also provides vital support to abused women (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). Giesbrecht and Sevcik (2000) found that religious leaders provided support and practical assistance to women with abusive partners and that the religion provided a meaning-making framework for women. Levitt and Ware (2006a) highlight the tension that religious leaders face in trying to both protect women and adhere to religious constructions of relationships and marriage.

Critical feminist research on abused women has found that dominant cultural, social and religious discourses form the resources that women have to understand and make meaning out of the abuse perpetrated by intimate male partners. As Jackson (2001), Towns and Adams (2000), Wood (2001) and Burns (2009) point out, it is important to

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create and highlight alternative and more empowering cultural narratives for women. Wood (2001) argues that narratives are maintained by and rooted in culture. New narratives need to be established (Burns, 2009; Jackson, 2001) and in order to do this cultural structures and practices need to be involved in authorising new narratives (Wood, 2001).

Creating a new discourse

Many women have struggled to name their experiences as abuse or wife battery because their experiences seldom fit the stereotypes of sexual violence and wife beating (Gavey, 1996; Grauwiler, 2008; Kelly, 1990). For instance, because rape is commonly understood as something very violent that happens to you in an alley by a stranger, one participant in Kelly's (1990) study understood her experience of being raped by a family member as an 'acceptable rape' (p. 123). Similarly, Jewkes and colleagues (1999) found that nearly a third of women who had recently experienced physical or sexual violence did not describe themselves as having been abused. Stereotypes of battered women include her being weak, ill-educated, nagging and deserving to be hit (Kelly, 1990). Because women do not see themselves in that category, they often conclude that the abuse is part of acceptable and normal behaviour (Kelly, 1990). This highlights the importance of creating access to discourses that do not base experiences of sexual violence on stereotypes which often blame the woman and represent extreme and clear cut cases of gender-based violence. Moreover, being able to label their experiences can be empowering for women (Kelly, 1990).

In her research focusing on women's experiences of sexual aggression and rape, Gavey (1996) found that women who had been date raped or forced to have sex with an acquaintance did not label it as rape because they knew the man, and having forced sex with a man on a first date was understood to be common practice. She found that women experienced the boundary between consensual sex and rape as blurred and concluded that a new discourse was needed with which women can adequately name their experience and articulate their agency, desire or lack of it, and sense of power. This shows the importance of illuminating how women understand what constitutes abuse and how this

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relates to their experiences. Understanding how common conceptions of abuse impact on how women understand intimate partner violence can enable researchers to gain a better conception of the positions women find themselves in, which can inform theory development about intimate partner violence.

In order for women to define their experiences of abuse words need to exist with which to name them (Kelly, 1990). Language is patriarchal in structure and content, therefore not containing adequate words to describe women's experiences of abuse (Kelly, 1990; MacKinnon, 1983). In this way language is a further means of patriarchal control. Not having words with which to name experiences makes those experiences socially invisible and nonexistent (Kelly, 1990).

New names for violence against women need to be developed in order for finer distinctions to be made (Kelly, 1990). Gavey (1996) terms this a 'discursive intervention' whereby names are developed in order for women to adequately label violent sexual experiences (p. 53). Problematising the stories and discourses that constrain or make women's lives dangerous can help create the opportunity for the creation of more empowering discourses and subjectivities for women (Burns, 2009). Given that stereotypical patriarchal gender roles are so dominant within society, stories and movies where gender boundaries are transgressed or removed completely are termed 'science fiction' and 'fantasy' (Burns, 2009, p. 110). It is important to provide women with a new discourse and subject positions that are different from the dominant patriarchal discourse and that enable women to understand themselves and their relation to men differently (Gavey, 1996; Jackson, 2001; Towns & Adams, 2000; Wood, 2001). This can enable women to occupy new subject positions that, for example, do not position a woman as needing a man to have value. I propose that in order to create discourses that counter oppressive dominant discourse, it is important to investigate what types of discourses women currently use when talking about the abuse they experience in their intimate relationships. This is especially important in South Africa where few studies have focused on the cultural and social discourses available to women.

As previously mentioned, the literature on women's accounts of violence in their intimate relationships is not well developed (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). Knowledge about how women currently understand themselves and their subject positions in violent

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relationships can enable the creation of new subject positions for South African women. This can lead to new definitions of what might constitute abuse and violence, which is important because how abuse is defined influences legal decisions and public policy around intimate partner violence (Kelly, 1990).

The aim of this project was to further develop the body of knowledge and theory on how women in violent heterosexual relationships understand their relationships and the discourses that they draw on to do this using Wood's (2001) narratives of romance as a thematic structure. I aimed to examine the social and cultural discourses that women draw on when explaining the violence in their relationships. In doing the above I paid attention to how social institutional discourses in South Africa shape women's agency in abusive relationships and impact on their understanding of the relationship. I aimed to explore whether illuminating the discourses that women draw on can help researchers and policy makers gain a clearer understanding of and approach towards intimate partner violence.

In light of the above, I answered the following research questions.

What discourses do women draw on to understand and explain their experiences of violence in heterosexual relationships? How do institutional discourses shape women's positions and agency within abusive relationships? What discourses do women draw upon when explaining why they remain in violent relationships?

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Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature on how women understand abuse perpetrated by romantic male partners. I have focused on the romantic and fairytale narratives and discourses that women have been found to draw on when making meaning out of violence in their intimate relationships. Included in this review is feminist literature on the violent relationship, its contested causes and location in patriarchal society and culture. I have also reviewed literature that problematises patriarchal language and discourse and women's ability to talk about and name violence in intimate relationships. I highlight the cultural and social discourses that women draw on to make meaning out of

abuse in intimate relationships. Lastly, I present the research questions. The following chapter presents the methodology used in this study.

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CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins with the theoretical framework within which the research is situated. Thereafter I explain the qualitative research design, which includes validity, the sample, data collection and procedure, and the method of discourse analysis used. This is followed by a section on power and reflexivity. Lastly, I discuss the ethical considerations of this research. My aims of this project were to examine the social and cultural discourses that women draw on to understand violence in their intimate relationships and the impact that these and institutional discourses have on how women make meaning out of intimate partner violence.

Theoretical framework: poststructuralism

Poststructuralism refers to a collection of theoretical positions which are influenced by but not restricted to Marxism, especially Althusser's (1971) theory of ideology, psychoanalysis (particularly Lacan's reworkings and interpretation), feminism, and the writing of French feminists such as Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray (see Berg, 1991), and the works of Derrida, Barthes, and Foucault (Gavey, 1989). Trying to identify the key features of poststructuralism puts one on shaky ground as one is in danger of oversimplification and fixing the ideas, whereas an important part of poststructuralism is its resistance to definition as this comprises pinning down an essence that does not exist (Gavey, 1989).

According to poststructuralism, language is not transparent or reflective but structural, and always located in an historical and social context (Gavey, 1989; Towns & Adams, 2000; Weedon, 1987). Language structures social institutions and interactions, relations of power, and individual identity. How we understand our experiences is never independent of language and it is through language that we are able to give meaning to the world (Gavey, 1989; Weedon, 1987). Language does not reflect meanings that are intrinsic to social or natural reality; rather, meaning is constituted within and through

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language (Walkerdine, 1986; Weedon, 1987). Language offers a range of ways of understanding and interpreting our lives which imply different versions of reality (Weedon, 1987).

Poststructuralism holds that no text has a fixed or inherent meaning; rather, the meanings are plural and open to many interpretations that change over time (Gavey, 1989; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Hollway, 1989; Weedon, 1987). Poststructuralism rejects the possibility of an absolute truth or objectivity (Flax, 1987; Gavey, 1989). The meanings of words are historically constructed and relational (Walkerdine, 1986; Weedon, 1987).

Social structures are organised through institutions and practices such as religion, the law, the educational system, the family and the media, which are in turn located in discursive fields (Weedon, 1987). A discursive field is a way of understanding 'the relationship between language, social institutions, subjectivity and power' (Weedon, 1987, p. 35). Discursive fields are made up of ways of giving meaning to the world as well as organising social institutions. A discursive field presents a range of subjectivities to the individual (Weedon, 1987). Within a discursive field there are different discourses, some of which are more dominant than others.

Discourses are multiple and vary considerably. Different discourses offer competing, often conflicting and contradictory ways of giving meaning to the world (Gavey, 1989; Weedon, 1987). The statements used in a discourse centre around common meanings and values which are the product of historical, social, and cultural factors, and not originating from the individual (Gavey, 1989; Parker, 2005). Discourses are 'evolving complexes of statements that reflect values, understandings, or meanings specific to certain cultures, contexts, and times' (Towns & Adams, 2000, p. 563) and that are a product of social powers and practices as opposed to an individual's set of ideas (Gavey, 1989). Discourses structure society, constitute and are reproduced in social institutions (Weedon, 1987). Discourses govern the way we think, act, and feel, and are constructed by people through both talk and action (Towns & Adams, 2000). Material power is exercised and power relations established and maintained through discourse (Gavey, 1989). Discourses can be so common and deeply woven into our culture and talk that we

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are not aware of their influences; in particular, the influences of traditional cultural assumptions can be invisible (Towns & Adams, 2000).

When a discourse becomes dominant what it prescribes is taken as common sense (Weedon, 1987). In light of this, poststructuralist theory views common sense not as neutral but as full of presuppositions that favour certain groups (Gavey, 1989). Dominant discourses deny their own partiality and present as truth that which is in the interests of those with power (Gavey, 1989; MacKinnon, 1983). Such discourses support and perpetuate existing power relations and become hegemonic when accepted by those it oppresses. Dominant discourses constitute the subjectivity of most people most of the time (Gavey, 1989). Moreover, dominant conceptions of reality tend to reflect and perpetuate male power interests (Gavey, 1989). For instance, Wood (2001) points out that within western culture, gender and romance discourses, which position women as submissive and dependent and men as powerful and authoritative, are pervasive. Additionally, women are also able to resist and challenge dominant discourse positionings (Gavey, 1989).

Discourses offer subject positions for individuals or groups to occupy (Weedon, 1987). People are often unaware of the discourses that influence them and are therefore unaware of the subject positions that they occupy or are positioned in when using various discourses (Towns & Adams, 2000). The different subject positions offered to people by different discourses vary in terms of power (Gavey, 1989). For instance, dominant discourses offer men positions of power in relation to women who are often subordinated.

Poststructuralism holds that subjectivity is not innate or genetically determined but socially produced (Weedon, 1987). 'Subjectivity' refers to an individual's sense of herself, her unconscious and conscious thoughts and emotions, and her ways of understanding her relation to others (Weedon, 1987). Subjectivity is produced by language through discourse in socially specific ways (Hollway, 1989; Weedon, 1987). Because discourses provide changing, different and often contradictory subject positions it becomes difficult to attain a coherent, unified and stable sense of self (Flax, 1987; Weedon, 1987). Unlike western psychology, which assumes an essential unified and coherent self, poststructuralism holds that the subject is fragmentary, contradictory, and inconsistent (Gavey, 1989). Therefore, poststructuralism denies the existence of an

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essential female nature or femininity (Gavey, 1989). Poststructuralist theory can therefore accommodate inconsistent subject positions held in the same person simultaneously and understands this as the constant struggle for coherence in the self.

Feminist poststructuralism

I situate my research within feminist poststructuralist theory (Gavey, 1989; Weedon, 1987), which asserts that language needs to be understood as emerging from and constituting discourses that influence the way people act and behave. Through discourse material power is maintained and power relations are established (Gavey, 1989). Feminist poststructuralism emphasises the material basis of power and the need for change at this level (Gavey, 1989). Feminist poststructuralism is therefore political as it proposes change in current gendered power relations (Weedon, 1987).

Feminist poststructuralism holds that language shapes realities (Gavey, 1989; Jackson, 2001; Weedon, 1987). Weedon (1987) describes feminist poststructuralism as 'a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change' (p. 40). Feminist poststructuralism is a theory that focuses on power and subjectivity with the goal of changing oppressive gender relations (Gavey, 1989). Instead of uncovering 'truths' or revealing objective facts, feminist poststructuralist theory is concerned with disrupting dominant hegemonic knowledge that works to oppress women (Gavey, 1989).

How women live and structure their lives 'depends on the range and social power of existing discourses, our access to them and the political strength of the interests which they represent' (Weedon, 1987, p. 26). As Wood (2001) argues, women make meaning of their relationships by drawing on the cultural and social discourses available to them. Feminist poststructuralism looks at the range of possible *normal* subject positions open to women, and the amount of power or powerlessness presented in them (Weedon, 1987). Feminist poststructuralism reveals that the historical oppression of women is present in modern discourses about what it is to be a woman; discourses such as what it means to be 'a good wife', 'mother', and 'feminine'. A discourse is not only produced in speech and

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thinking but has concrete and practical implications. As Gavey (1989) illustrates, the discourse of a ‘good mother’ involves childcare books, hospital visits, and other normalising techniques that define maternal health. These activities, which may be taken as common sense within dominant patriarchal discourse, have economic and social implications for women.

Feminist poststructuralist theory acknowledges the impact that a social history of male dominance has on the subject positions available to women today, and how this shapes women’s choices and their experiences within abusive heterosexual relationships. This theory helps us understand why women submit to men who abuse them by taking into account the context of women, such as social institutions, the law, religion, the media, magazines, and power relations that have historically structured women’s lives (Weedon, 1987). Without having access to discourses and social systems of resistance it is difficult for women to occupy identities that enable them to evade dominant prescriptions of what constitutes normal life. For instance, feminist discourses are limited in their power because they are marginalised and their subject positions are unavailable to most women (Gavey, 1989).

Discursive systems to which a woman has access can be contradictory and constitute different versions of reality (Walkerdine, 1996; Weedon, 1987). Because different discourses hold different meanings about what it is to be a woman and what is expected of a woman, a woman’s subjectivity becomes inconsistent, which can result in a narrative that may appear contradictory (Weedon, 1987).

Feminist poststructuralism has proved useful when analysing the accounts given by women in abusive relationships (Boonzaier, 2008; Gavey, 1996; Jackson, 2001; Towns & Adams, 2000). Because women in violent relationships often have contradictory and paradoxical feelings towards their male partners as well as contradictory and shifting identities (Boonzaier, 2008) feminist poststructuralism provided me with a framework with which I could accommodate contradiction and enabled me to more fully analyse women’s accounts of their experience and understanding of abuse in their relationships.

How women are positioned within discourses was expected to be varied, contradictory, and changing rather than uniform and consistent. Although discourses are

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viewed as both constructing the social world and being constructed by it (Gavey, 1989; Towns & Adams, 2000; Weedon, 1987), the focus here is on how women's talk draws on particular discourses to understand abuse in their intimate relationships.

Research Design

Qualitative Research

For the qualitative researcher human experience and the meanings attributed to that experience are most important when generating knowledge about a particular person, situation, or phenomenon. Qualitative research is interested in how people experience certain life events and what they do in order to cope with pain, personal struggle, and social inequalities (Willig, 2001). Like feminist poststructuralism, qualitative research acknowledges that there are multiple truths, and that a person's interpretation of their experience is dependent on the social context that they are in (Goldman & Du Mont, 2001). There are different meanings, experiences, opinions, subjectivities, and perspectives to be explored and challenged. The meanings that people attribute to their experiences are explored with reference to how these meanings impact on the way they understand the world.

The techniques used in qualitative research are flexible enough to accommodate new or unanticipated categories of meaning and experience that may come up during the research process (Willig, 2001). The research question is open-ended and able to change during the process of research. The research question acts as a guide that points me in a direction without predicting what will be found (Willig, 2001).

From a feminist poststructuralist framework the subjectivity and context of women is very important when building knowledge about intimate partner violence against women. Therefore, a qualitative methodology is appropriate for this project as it emphasises both subjectivity and the context within which people are embedded. In order to analyse the discourses that women draw on I needed a method of accessing women's talk about their relationships. Qualitative research provided a method to attain those accounts. Moreover, using qualitative research allowed me to reflect on, as a woman, my

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own subjective contribution to the research, which is a fundamental part of using a feminist poststructuralist framework.

Research Evaluation

I have attempted to follow 'good practice' in qualitative research, which Willig (2001) defines as:

> ... the systematic and clear presentation of analyses, which are demonstrably grounded in the data and which pay attention to reflexivity issues. … such work is characterised by an awareness of its contextual and theoretical specificity and the limitations which this imposes upon its relevance and applicability. (p. 144).

Qualitative research does not aim to work with representative samples whose data can be easily generalised to other groups or populations. Rather, it is interested in emphasising the uniqueness of a person, group, or situation. Being able to replicate the research is not an important concern (Willig, 2001). Qualitative research acknowledges that every piece of research has its own unique context, participants, and researchers.

Validity is the extent to which the researcher researches what she or he aims to research; it is the extent to which the data collection and data analysis answer the research question (Willig, 2001). Participants in qualitative research are free to challenge or change the researcher's assumptions, methods, or emphasis. In this way, the participant contributes to ensuring validity in the research process. Qualitative research takes place in the real life setting of the phenomena studied. The research is engaging with the phenomenon *as it is* in the world. This promotes validity because the phenomenon has not been changed, reduced, or removed from its natural context, which means that the conclusions drawn relate to the phenomenon as it naturally occurs. This provides qualitative research with high ecological validity (Willig, 2001).

As mentioned by Parker (2005), the researcher always has a certain stance towards the questions being explored in the research, which prevents her from being objective in the research process. Because of my standpoint in relation to the research, such as my hopes, assumptions, and goals for the research, my conclusions will be open

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to challenge (Parker, 2005). My own individual standpoint and subjectivity mean that I am not researching the same aspects or phenomena as other previous or future researchers (Hollway, 1989; Parker, 2005).

Sample

For this research I did a secondary analysis of data collected and transcribed by me in 2009. Seven in-depth interviews about women's experiences of their relationships were conducted with women who were attending a support group for abused women. The interviews lasted approximately one hour. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 47 years old (with a mean of 37.57 years). Five of the women were married at the time of the interview and two were either separated or divorced from but still in contact with the male partner who had physically abused them. Of the two who were separated from the male partner, one was in the process of a divorce and had been separated for roughly two months, and the other had been divorced for approximately two years. Participants had been married from between three and 21 years, with five of the participants being married longer than 18 years and two less than seven years. All of the participants had on average two children who ranged in age from infancy to 21 years old. Six of the participants could be classified as 'coloured'[1] and one participant could be classified as 'white'. Five participants were employed outside the home. One participant owned her own business and four participants were employed in low-earning employment with one working two jobs.

All except one of the participants resided in Mitchell's Plain in the Western Cape, South Africa, an area characterised by a lack of adequate police control, lack of recreational and health facilities, unemployment, geographical isolation, and high crime levels (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). Participants were referred by court to the intervention organisation when the violence from male partners had become extreme. In

[1] The terms used here are used to refer to people who were, under the apartheid government, identified as 'coloured' or 'white'. My use of these terms is not intended to indicate an agreement or endorsement of the use of these terms. However, although originally used as apartheid racial designation, many South Africans use these terms to identify themselves today.

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order to maintain anonymity of the participants, identifying details have been omitted and names have been changed.

Access to participants was gained through contacting the manager of an intervention organisation in the Western Cape, which provides services aimed at rehabilitation of offenders. The manager provided the contact details of two support group facilitators who I then contacted by phone. After explaining my aim to interview women about their experiences the facilitators spoke to women in their support groups about me. The facilitators gave me the contact details of women who were willing to be interviewed. I contacted these seven women and arranged to meet with them at the organisation where they had been receiving support.

Data collection methods & Procedure

Data was collected in 2009 with women who were in violent relationships using a 'minimally structured interview' (Wood, 2001, p. 245). After explaining the voluntary nature of the interview and the right to end the interview at any time without any negative consequences to the interviewee or her male partner, a single question was asked to start off the interview, which was then followed by probes. Please see Appendix A for the interview schedule used. In the data collection process I moved beyond my own experiences and ideas in order to really understand the interviewee's point of view (Esterberg, 2002). The research question acted as a guide to what was talked about. Questions asked by me worked to prompt the interviewee or ask for elaborations on what was already said. The interviewee's responses are what shaped the structure of the interview (Esterberg, 2002). If personal questions need to be asked, this is done in the second half of the interview, when a type of rapport may have been established (Willig, 2001).

When analysing the data generated in the interview, careful attention was paid to how the interviewee is embedded in a certain social situation and context (Boonzaier, 2005; Parker, 2005). What was said in the interview was viewed as being said and shaped in a set of contexts, some of which are: the actual interview, the interaction between the interviewee and myself, the location of the interview, the social identities of both, our

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political agendas, the social situation, the country, and the political history of the country. Ethnographic sensitivity is important during interviews; therefore I paid attention to and was aware of the aspects of the interviewee's life-history that form a background to the interview process (Parker, 2005).

Because the data generated by qualitative research is interested in the experiences and understandings of those that are studied, the data is participant-led (Willig, 2001). Qualitative research recognises that who we study are not neutral or objective. The participants have agendas, viewpoints, political perspectives, and motives that shape how they respond to the research questions and how they present themselves to me.

Interviews were conducted privately in a quiet room where the participant felt comfortable. After the interview was conducted I listened to the data and transcribed it. During the interviews women spoke at length about how they understand their relationships, the violence in their relationships, and their positions in their relationships. The discourses that women drew on were analysed using feminist poststructuralist theory and discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis

There is no recipe or formulae for discourse analysis (Gavey, 1989). Rather, discourse analysis proposes a broad theoretical framework, which provides suggestions about how discourses can be studied, and the role of discourses in social and daily life (Gavey, 1989; Hollway, 1989). Discourse analysis should be thought of as a sensitivity to language as opposed to a 'method' (Parker, 2004, p. 152).

The discourse analysis presented here is informed by feminist poststructuralism and conforms to that used by Gavey (1989), involving the identification of the social discourses available to women in a given culture at a certain time. The types of discourses that women draw on and the ways in which they adopt and resist dominant discourses were investigated. I identified and explored the social and cultural discourses, and the subject positions that they offer to women. This study involved examining how the discourses reproduce or challenge existing gender relations specifically in the context of a violent relationship. I paid close attention to the social and economic context and

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relations of power in South Africa. The discourses were approached in their own right as opposed to texts referring to something ‘real’ beyond them (Parker, 2004).

Davies and Harre (1990) explain how discourse is an institutionalized use of language that can occur at the cultural, political, or small group level around a specific topic, such as gender. They argue that poststructuralist research recognises that discourses have a constitutive force which lies in the subject positions available within certain discourses. A subject position provides a view point from which to view the world in terms of the story lines, concepts, and values that are made relevant within that particular discourse in which they are positioned (Davies & Harre, 1990). Davies and Harre (1990) point out that positioning oneself within a discourse is never fixed, but changes through social interaction. Discourses provide stories through which one can make sense of others’ and one’s own life events (Davies & Harre, 1990).

Importantly, stories occur within various different discourses, and can vary dramatically in terms of concepts and the moral judgements within them. Positioning includes speaking from a certain viewpoint within a discourse that brings with it a certain story line (Davies & Harre, 1990). Moreover, Davies and Harre (1990) assert that when telling a story, which provides coherence to life experiences, one assigns positions – therefore is in the process of positioning – to other people, including those who are taking part in the conversation. Therefore, by speaking to me, interviewees assign me a position within their story, which may be a ‘listener’, ‘counsellor’, ‘researcher’, each influencing the type of story that is presented to me. At the same time, according to whom I am perceived to be and what my aims are perceived to be, the interviewee positions herself in a certain way within available discourses. Thus, she may position herself as ‘powerless’ either in her intimate relationship, or as powerless to act, or as powerless in relation to me as the interviewer. Therefore, my positioning influences the interviewee’s positioning of herself in relation to me. Furthermore, within the storyline of her narrative of the experiences on which the interview focuses, she may position herself in ways that are determined by both the cultural and social discourses available to her and the discourse(s) that is at work within our conversation as interviewee and interviewer. As Davies and Harre (1990) mention, it is important to examine these subject positions and the act of positioning oneself and another, and furthermore, how certain subject positions are

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interpreted and understood within various discourses. Therefore, it was important for me as the researcher to examine what 'powerless' meant for the interviewee in the discourses available to her, as oppose to viewing or understanding 'powerless' solely from the discursive position within which I am situated.

Narratives and discourses are distinct from each other. According to Wood (2001), 'the bedrock assumption of narrative approaches is that humans make sense of themselves through stories, or narratives' (p. 241). Narratives provide structure, coherence, and sequence to experiences that may otherwise by incoherent (Wood, 2001). Moreover, narratives are sought especially when experience does not make sense, such as being confronted with an abusive intimate partner (Wood, 2001). Similarly to discourses, narratives are not strictly personal stories, but rather originate out of the social – they are culturally constructed, reproduced, and sustained (Wood, 2001). Therefore, as with the discourses available to women, the narratives that are available to provide coherence to abusive intimate relationships are those that are socially and culturally available. Wood's (2001) romantic stories and narratives will be used as a thematic structure within which discourses will be examined in Chapter 4.

Discourse analysis is consistent with feminist poststructuralism (Gavey, 1989) in that it recognises the material reality, power, and influence of language and discourse and aims to illuminate the discourses at work in people's talk and understanding (Parker, 2005). This approach aimed to name and identify the discourses women use to constitute their understanding of abuse in their intimate relationships.

Discourse analysis is the study of the way texts are constructed, what functions they serve in various contexts, and the contradictions that run through them (Parker, 2004). The analysis pays close attention to the social context of language and how it functions in existing relations of power (Gavey, 1989). Discourse analysis is the careful reading of texts to identify the discourses, social and cultural, that are drawn on, how these function and construct the text, the subject positions they offer, and how the discourses reproduce or maintain existing power relations within a given society (Gavey, 1989; Parker, 2005; Weedon, 1987). Discourse analysis explores the different discourses within a text, how they are in conflict with or contradict each other, as well as the varied and changing values, beliefs, and world views within a given discourse (Parker, 2004).

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Discourse analysis questions the way subjectivity is constituted (Parker, 2004). Discourse analysis is concerned with the conflicting and changing identities that emerged in women's and men's talk (Towns & Adams, 2000). Identities that appear to be particularly conflicted or troubled could suggest that those conflicting identities are salient in exposing the potency and influence of certain discourses (Towns & Adams, 2000).

The discourse analysis in this study involved the careful reading of the transcripts with the aim of identifying discursive patterns, contradictions, and inconsistencies. I approached the text with the view that the discourses are not static or fixed but rather changing, fragmented, and inconsistent. A repeated reading of the interviews was involved in the analytical process. Transcripts were read in order to gain a conceptual understanding of women's stories. Preliminary notes were taken while reading the transcripts. These notes focused on the general impression of the texts. Subsequent readings involved a more detailed discourse analysis.

There were many discourses evident in women's narratives. In my analysis I have focused primarily on those relating to women's understandings of abuse in their intimate relationships. The analysis was guided by what emerged from the data as opposed to theoretical formulations indicating what should emerge. I have therefore paid attention to the discourses that were dominant within women's accounts. I am also aware that my own reading of the texts is influenced by my own location in various discourses, such as feminist, therapeutic, and psychological discourses.

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Power & Reflexivity

Qualitative research is concerned with issues of power and political agendas. It pays attention to how power is challenged or reproduced in the process of research (Parker, 2005). Those conducting research are generally seen as authoritative, educated, advantaged, and perhaps even all-knowing. These assumptions shape what is generated and discovered in the research. The conclusions drawn in this research are one form of interpretation of the data and many different and equally valid interpretations are possible. By using qualitative research I aimed to empower marginalised or unheard

groups of people, such as abused women in South Africa and internationally, and thereby challenge the social dynamics of power.

'Reflexivity' is the process through which the researcher acknowledges her role in the research and her reasons for doing the research. I reflect on how my interpretation, perspective, agenda, beliefs, life-history, and personal experiences shape the research process and findings. Reflexivity involves acknowledging my own subjectivity and the impossibility of my remaining objective or neutral towards the research (Willig, 2001). I aimed not to interfere and control the research but to acknowledge the impact that my presence has on the research process. Importantly, I was in a position of power in that I would be conducting the analysis of the interview material, write this report, and be involved in the publication phase of the work that was based on the interviews.

I am a counsellor and have often counselled women victims and survivors of intimate partner violence. I am therefore biased in my orientation toward violence against women in that I may tend to favour the woman's version of the events. Moreover, my orientation as a feminist researcher renders the empowerment of women and their equality with men as its main goals.

I was different from the women I interviewed in a number of ways, such as age (I was younger), race, education level and socioeconomic status. The similarity in gender to the participants influenced how the interview unfolded and the information shared with me. Women often acknowledged my gender and indicated a commonality with me on this basis. However, given this similarity and the assumptions that follow, such as because I am a woman I should understand certain things about intimate relationships without them needing to be said, details and information may have been left unsaid in the interviews.

By directly referring to me one woman said: 'If I speak to people like you, you used to dealing with women that have a problem so you'll understand…' Her use of 'people like you' indicates that she placed me in a category of a certain type of person, such as a counsellor or social worker, and related to me as such, which may have influenced what was shared with me. Without my having given any history about speaking to women previously, she stated 'you used to dealing with women that have a problem'. This could suggest that the interview context shaped her positioning of me as 'an interviewer of women in abusive relationships'. Her assumption or judgement that I

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am experienced in speaking to women survivors of intimate partner violence may have influenced what she said and did not say to me. By positioning me as having spoken to women before and that I will 'understand', she may have left details out of her story assuming that I would have known them already.

Women positioned me as both similar and different from them. Two women compared me to their daughters, as one said: 'she has a light complexion like you, just a little whiter than you…she looks just like you, with long hair, just a little bit longer than you'. Comparing me to her daughter appears to be an attempt to establish some similarity with me in the interview context. Drawing similarities between myself and her daughter could have been a way to bring me closer into her world or situation. She constructed me as very similar to her daughter (and thereby perhaps herself too), however the similarity is followed by 'just a little bit more/less' which could indicate that I am nevertheless just not similar enough to really fit or enter into her world. This may have influenced how she positioned me socially and what she felt able and comfortable to talk to me about. The above two examples show how my presence, including my appearance, experience and position as interviewer, influenced women's positionings of me and what was said in the interviews.

I was 'racially' different from all of the participants I interviewed. I am of mixed race (Indian and white) and I am unsure into which racial category participants may have placed me. When talking about my race, people in general often do not know into which racial category I fall, and often remark that I do not look South African. People often do not categorise me as either Indian or white or a mix of the two. This previous experience could suggest that the participants in my study did not place me in a specific racial category and may have been unsure as to my race.

However, during my first contact with participants by telephone, I introduced myself as a student at the University of Cape Town (UCT). As UCT is a traditionally white university, I may have come across as a white woman. It is unclear whether during the interview participants positioned me as white or as being another race.

During these interviews race was not clearly made salient other than comparing me to the daughters of two participants. Making comparisons and referring to my skin

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colour may have reflected participants' attempt to place me racially. However this was not clear in the interview and was not done by all participants.

Being different in race from the participants may have prevented them from sharing experiences with me. Coming from a different cultural background to my participants may have influenced my attitude and how I responded to participants as they told their stories. Moreover, coming from a university and doing an academic project may have shaped how I presented myself, questioned, and replied to participants, which could have influenced what participants said to me.

Having different races may have led to me being removed from participants in a concrete way as race has determined access to resources in South Africa. They may have felt that I could not understand their experience in a real way due to my being from a very different background. This difference was exacerbated by my not speaking fluent Afrikaans, thereby symbolising linguistically that I am different from them. This also led to participants needing to communicate in English, which was the language most comfortable for me as the interviewer, which could have symbolised my power as researcher in the interview context.

Racism and prejudice are arguably still very present within South African society and can manifest in complex ways. Being different from participants in terms of race may have affected the type of rapport established, the perceived power I had as a white/Indian/other researcher, and how participants experienced my positioning of them as either 'coloured' or 'white'.

The discussions and discourses that emerged within the interviews were also a function of my presence as the researcher. During the interview the questions I asked may have indicated the discourses within which I situate myself and draw on to understand romantic relationships. Participants' awareness of how I situate myself may have influenced their responses to me, as well as what they chose to share in the interview. This may also have influenced the variety of discourses that they drew on.

My aims of empowering women and stopping intimate partner violence against women may also have influenced the research process and the conclusions drawn.

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Ethical Considerations and Challenges

Consent to participate in this research was gained at multiple levels. After being contacted by me, social workers first gained consent from women who would like to participate before putting me in contact with participants. During telephonic contact (to explain the research and arrange a meeting time) and later face to face contact, participants were informed of the voluntary nature of participation. Participants were presented with a consent form (see Appendix B) and informed of their right to end their participation at any time without any penalty, negative consequences, or loss of their or their partner's right to receive assistance from the organisation. However, due to access being obtained through the organisation where women received support, and their male partners attended programmes, women may have felt that they should or had to participate in the research as part of their commitment to their relationship and the intervention. Although I emphasised that I was not part of the organisation and would not report to social workers what individual participants had said, women may still have considered me in some way connected to the organisation, which may have influenced what was said.

I made contact with a coordinator at the organisation who gave me the location and details of a counsellor. This person's name and number was used in the event of a participant needing or requesting counselling. At the end of each interview I asked the participant how they felt about participating in the study and referred them for counselling if necessary. This acted as debriefing after the interview. Participants were reimbursed for their travel costs. All information given by the interviewees is kept confidential and used solely for the purpose of the study. Excerpts are kept as few and as short as possible in order to prevent participants from being identified. However, as noted by Boonzaier (2008) although it is unlikely that participants will read this research, which, as a feminist researcher is an uncomfortable acknowledgement to make, it is not possible to claim that there remain no risks.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Psychology Department Research Ethics Committee at the University of Cape Town.

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Conclusion

In this chapter I presented my research methodology. I outlined the feminist poststructuralist theory that framed my approach and analysis. This was followed by the qualitative design of the research, data collection procedure, and the form of discourse analysis used. I provided reflections on my impact on the research, which was followed by ethical considerations pertinent to this research. In the following chapter I present the analysis of the data presented in the interviews.

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CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION: DISCOURSES OF ROMANCE

The women in this study drew on various discourses, some dominant and others marginalised, to explain and understand the violence that they experience from intimate partners. The first section of the analysis presents the discourses that were dominant in women's accounts. The discourses are organised in accordance with Wood's (2001) romantic narratives as these are particularly applicable to my data and findings. The romantic narrative took two discursive forms: *fairytale romance discourses* and *dark romance discourses*. In this study, the first was characterised by discourses that justify the violence, dissociate the man from the violence, and position the woman as able to control or stop the violence. The dark romance discourse was characterised by discourses that position romantic relationships as naturally abusive, and that abuse is not a valid reason to leave a relationship. These justifications, beliefs, and understandings of the abuse appeared to make sense within hegemonic gender discourses, which framed women's narratives.

The second section of this chapter presents the 'discursive battle' (Gavey, 1989, p. 471) that women engaged in between the various positionings offered by different discourses. Women struggled to find a coherent subject position between the positionings offered by dominant patriarchal and marginalised feminist discourses.

The third section analyses the silences that emerged when women attempted to name or explain the violence in their relationships. Women appeared not to have easy access to a discourse that could adequately capture the complexity of their experiences.

Hegemonic gender discourses

Framing both the fairytale and dark romance versions of the romantic discourse were an acceptance, internalisation, and knowledge of dominant gender discourses. Traditional patriarchal gender discourses position men as authoritative and women as subservient (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Jackson, 2001; Towns & Adams, 2000) and present these

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positionings as natural and appropriate (Wood, 2001). When talking about the abuse in their relationships hegemonic discourses of romance, love, femininity, and marriage appeared to emerge. Women's stories were embedded with gender discourses and showed an internalisation of dominant prescriptions of femininity and romantic love. When talking about a wife's duties Tora explains:

> At home there is such a lot you can do. That's why I say if she says there's nothing to do at home then she's a lazy wife 'cause there's always something to do. (Tora)

Hegemonic gender discourses provide and require women to take up the subject positions which embody submissiveness, passivity, motherliness, and self-sacrifice (Boonzaier, 2008; Towns & Adams, 2000). In turn, these discourses provide men with the subject positions of authority, dominance, and rule in the household (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004; Jackson, 2001). As expressed below:

> I've learned how to control my temper, how to be like a wife for my husband, for my children a mother. I don't care about my own feelings over theirs…I've learnt how to cut back and be the least when he is in charge and I have to be obedient. (Tracy)

> I don't know where to draw the line because her [mother's] voice comes into my head: 'you can be the least and you will be okay'. (Alice)

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Present throughout women's stories was an internalisation of the expectation that they should love and care for their partners even if they are abused by them (Wood, 2001). After talking about her partner's violence, Alice remarks '*I want to help him*'. This appears related to women positioning themselves as responsible for changing their partners' violent behaviour as well as self-blame for allowing the abuse to happen. This internalisation was dominant in women's narratives and often framed what appeared to be their understandings of the abuse from their partners. Dominant gender discourses formed the framework from which both forms of the romantic discourse emerged.

Romantic discourse

What follows in an exploration of the discourses at work within romantic stories based on Wood's (2001) romantic narratives. Women's accounts were infused with romantic discourse. The romantic discourse emerged in two forms. The first is the fairytale romance discourse, which comprises of an idealised form of romantic discourse. The second is the dark romance discourse, which is the malignant form of romantic discourse. The romance narrative, in conjunction with hegemonic gender discourse, functioned as a coherent frame which women used to tell their stories and position their relationships and the abuse that occurred within them (Wood, 2001).

Fairytale romance narrative

The fairytale narrative is characterised by a Prince Charming who sweeps the Princess off her feet and is her soul mate (Wood, 2001). The fairytale discourses at work within this narrative support romantic love, giving up everything and taking risks for romantic partners, and that Mr. Right is worth any hardships that may arise. Although the fairytale narrative does not preclude problems, it maintains that love can conquer all (Wood, 2001). The fairytale narrative positions violent relationships as still having hope and as containing ways to overcome the abuse and become perfect again. By drawing on this narrative the violence was dissociated from the 'real man' and attributed to factors that he does not have control over, such as alcohol abuse and his own early childhood abuse.

Within the fairytale romance narrative and discourses male partners are positioned as having positive qualities that outweigh the abuse (Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001). Women in my study positioned their partners as talented, caring men who supported them. When talking about their husbands, Alice and Tracy remark:

> He's got **so**[2] much talent. When he puts his head to something he can do it, he can do anything he wants to do…I can see that talent in him. (Alice)

[2] Bold indicates emphasis in speech.

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> [He says] "I miss you" or "didn't talk today, how was your day?" He kisses me…we are there for each other. (Tracy)

The over-arching fairytale narrative presents the picture that the good qualities of the man can conquer his violence. Within the fairytale romance discourse the abuse is also normalised and presented as acceptable because it is not as bad as it could have been or not as bad as the abuse other women experience (Wood, 2001):

> And then sometimes I thought, okay, my situation was bad but then others is worse than mine, you see? Like their partners beat them up to a pulp or something. (Laura)

The fairytale romance discourse normalises her relationship and presents it as something that she should be grateful for as it is not as bad as other relationships. Further discourses supporting the fairytale romance narrative are explored in more detail below.

The good outweighs the bad: patriarchal family discourse

One of the discourses that bolstered the belief that the good parts of the man outweigh the bad abusive parts was a dominant patriarchal family discourse. Within this discourse women occupied the position of caring mother and men were provided with the position of the father-figure who is needed in the family. Within western patriarchal society dominant family discourse prescribes that a traditional nuclear family is the 'normal' and perhaps best family, and is essential to the wellbeing and development of children (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Families that are different from this norm, for example single parent families, are positioned as unfavourable for the wellbeing and development of children. Within dominant patriarchal family discourse children are positioned as needing their biological fathers as father-figures (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

> And I want him to be a part of her [daughter] life… Because she needs a father figure and he is her father. (Jennifer)

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Jennifer positions herself as the mother who is responsible for maintaining a relationship between the child and the father. By drawing on patriarchal family discourse the negative impact that the man's continued abuse of her as the mother will have on her relationship and treatment of her daughter is not fully accounted for. Research has shown that negative interactions between parents are strongly related to the development of depression in children (Kaslow, Deering, & Racusin, 1994). His position as biological father appears to override the damaging effect of his abuse of the woman and daughter.

The contradiction of the man not being good for the daughter's wellbeing and the woman stating that she wants him to be part of her life and as a father-figure is illustrated by the following quote, which was said earlier in the same interview:

> The situation that we were living in it was very horrible for her [daughter], the language, the things she heard and saw. It wasn't nice for a baby to live in. (Jennifer)

Within patriarchal family discourses fathers are positioned as possessing an essential quality for their children that only fathers can provide. This suggests that something essential about 'fatherliness' is constructed as only available in fathers and as something that mothers cannot provide. Although family discourses are useful given that both parents can be very beneficial for their children, it can be adverse in cases of intimate partner violence where the father is abusive.

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I can control/stop it: psychological discourses

Participants sustained the fairytale romance by believing that they could help their male partners and avoid the violence happening in future. This is also linked to hegemonic gender discourse, as mentioned above, implicit in which is the expectation that women should care for, please, and nurture male partners (Boonzaier, 2008; Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001). Psychological discourses provide women with a discursive framework where the man's abuse is excusable and stoppable by women partners.

In investigating intergenerational transmission of abuse, studies have found that physical and psychological abuse in the family-of-origin is predictive of both types of abuse in later intimate relationships (Kwong et al., 2003; Sappington, 2000). These

results are often explained from a social learning perspective (Corvo & Carpenter, 2000), where children observe and learn that abuse is an acceptable form of interaction and way of dealing with conflict from their parents, which increases the likelihood of them modelling and using the same methods later in life.

Psychological discourses of intergenerational transmission of abuse formed a discursive framework that was used to understand male partners' violence. By drawing on this discourse men were positioned as victims of the abuse they experienced as children and not as perpetrators of the abuse they inflicted against their wives. Women positioned themselves as saviour-like figures whose duty it is to help the man overcome the abuse he experienced. As one woman expressed:

> Sometimes when I think of his father and I just feel like taking his father and shaking him and saying "do you know what you've done to your child?" but then I'll have to go shake his father, because his father, what was my husband's grandfather, did worse things to his father. You know, then you think ahhh, the sins of the fathers just pass from one generation to the next! And I said to my husband, "you are the one that can break that chain". (Alice)

A psychological discourse of intergenerational transmission of abuse appears to be used to redirect the woman's feelings of anger, blame, and rage away from her husband and towards the husband's father. By constructing the abuse as previously perpetrated by her husband's father the woman positions her husband as a victim and his father as the perpetrator. By drawing on psychological discourse and positioning her husband as a victim the abuse is constructed as out of the man's control and something that he should not be blamed for. This is also consistent with dominant discourses on male perpetrated violence against female partners being beyond the man's control (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004).

A fairytale romance is therefore maintained within a psychological discursive framework, which in this case positions men who abuse as not entirely blameworthy due to their own experiences of abuse. It is important to note that over psychologising intimate partner violence can lead to ignoring the social and cultural contexts that support it (Bograd, 1990; Boonzaier, 2008). As Kwong and colleagues (2003) note, social

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learning theory can explain only a small part of the complex nature of intimate partner violence against women.

Not the real him

A third way of bolstering the belief in the fairytale romance was to dissociate the violence from the man who perpetrated it. Women unwittingly separated their husbands from the abuse they perpetrated. The abuse was constructed as caused by alcohol. By understanding the abuse within a romantic fairytale framework, women resisted positioning their partners as criminals or abusers and tried to protect them from imprisonment.

Substance abuse and intimate partner violence frequently co-occur (Corvo & Carpenter, 2000; Wood & Jewkes, 2001) with a large proportion of men who attend intervention programmes being found to have concurrent alcohol addiction (Stuart et al., 2007). Previous studies have found that violent men are twenty times more likely to physically abuse their female partners on a heavy-drinking day than on a non-drinking day (Stuart et al., 2007). In a study exploring how young men discuss their violence against intimate partners, Wood and Jewkes (2001) found that mood changes due to alcohol consumption were frequently referred to when explaining their violence. Women in my study drew on similar discourses of alcohol consumption leading to violence.

> It's when he drinks, that's when the problems [violence] start. When he's sober and that he's fine, but the minute it comes to weekend then the problems start. Ya, so that has been our problem in our house. (Susan)

Susan positions her husband as basically non-violent by stating that '*when he's sober he's fine*', which attributes the '*problems*' to the alcohol and not the man himself. The abuse is not caused by 'him' but by his drinking. Therefore, it appears that the man is dissociated from the violence he perpetrates. This is similar to Boonzaier and de la Rey's (2003) finding that women create a split between the 'sober/good husband' and the 'drunk/beast' when talking about the abuse performed when the man is intoxicated (p. 1012). This construction appears to eliminate the possibility that he wants to drink *so that*

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he can become violent. It places the blame on the alcohol intake and not on her husband himself. This is complicated by the following, said later in the same interview:

> I'll tell him like "no drinking in the week because you've got to go to work, because if you drink you're tired you don't wanna go to work". So it's mainly been over the weekend that he'll like drink because I feel I can't **restrict** to take away **everything from him.** He's got to have **some kind of** like relaxation – what he calls it – relaxation, so I give him that time also. (Susan)

In this extract drinking alcohol is constructed as relaxation by the man. One could argue that he constructs the drinking as relaxation in order to convince his wife that he needs or deserves to drink alcohol. The merging of alcohol and relaxation by her husband could also be a method of making his wife feel guilty if she tries to stop him from drinking, as she would be stopping him from relaxing. By constructing drinking alcohol as relaxation the man justifies drinking alcohol and so justifies his violence. As stated in the previous extract, drinking alcohol leads to '*problems*'. Therefore, it appears that the man is justifying his violent behaviour when he is intoxicated by calling it '*relaxation*'.

Dissociating the violence from male partners who perpetrate it appeared to be linked to protecting partners from punishment, such as imprisonment. Women positioned their husbands as not criminals but rather as men who needed help.

> I don't think my husband is a criminal that needs to be locked up in prison, um, at all, and I just pleaded with them [court] I said please can't he just go in a programme where he can get help because he won't go to a psychologist wilfully, we went for marriage counselling but he walked out of it. … Prison is not a place for abusers like this, that can be helped by a company like [intervention organisation] or by a psychologist. They shouldn't go to jail, they will come out worse, come out with resentment, more resentment. (Alice)

Fairytale discourses and narratives promote understanding and forgiveness of partners' abuse (Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001). The fairytale discursive frame provides Alice with a way of understanding her experience of her partner's abuse as something that he needs

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help with as opposed to punishment. Her use of '*like this*' positions the man in a different category from other abusers. This could also stem from discourses of male dominance that promote ownership and possession of women by male partners (Boonzaier, 2008; Jackson, 2001), where certain behaviours towards the woman are permissible and allowed to be kept private.

Susan illustrated that prison is too harsh a punishment for her partner:

> Because he had to spend, he spent a week in prison… And terrible things happen there so I don't think he wants to go **back** to that situation. Because I mean it's the first time that he's been in prison you know so, it was like, **traumatic** for him…Because you see after a week of being in prison then he got bail and then I withdrew the case because I sort of like felt sorry for him and you know he'd like got **sick**, he got very sick in prison, it's almost like um we thought that he had TB, that he picked up TB and he was sick when he came out of there. I couldn't believe it was the same person. He'd lost **so much** weight in that one week and you know like I felt sorry for him so I withdrew the case. (Susan)

In her description of prison being '*traumatic*' and making her partner '*very sick*' that she '*could not believe it was the same person*' Susan evokes the sense that the punishment of prison was too much for him to pay for the abuse he perpetrated against her. This positions his experience in jail as more damaging than the violence he perpetrated against his partner.

The extract evokes a sense of guilt for calling the police and perhaps causing her husband to spend time in jail. There is a tension between wanting to protect herself and being a 'good wife' as dictated by dominant patriarchal discourse. There is a sense of being responsible for the man's wellbeing conveyed in the narrative, which positions the woman as a 'bad wife' for sending him to jail and making him sick. In order to maintain the fairytale romance she positions her husband as not deserving jail and describes his jail experience as '*traumatic for him*'.

In order to maintain a fairytale romance women drew on discourses that positioned the good parts of their partners as outweighing the abusive parts. Women drew on patriarchal family discourses, which offer fathers an important position in the family. Psychological discourses position the man as not to blame for his abuse and afford

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women the position of being able to stop it. Women unwittingly dissociated men from their violence by drawing on alcohol discourse and positioned the man as not deserving imprisonment. These discourses construct the relationships as ultimately saveable and still maintaining a fairytale romance. When a fairytale romance was not possible to maintain, dark romance discourses that construct relationships as naturally abusive were drawn upon.

Dark romance narrative

The dark romance narrative prescribes that it is normal for men to sometimes be violent and for romantic relationships to be hurtful towards women (Wood, 2001). Within this narrative, violence is constructed as typical in romantic heterosexual relationships. The dark romance narrative prescribes that abuse is not a valid reason to leave a relationship and discourses at work within this narrative prescribe that women should forgive abuse from men because it is expected and they need a man in order to have value (Boonzaier, 2008; Towns & Adams, 2000). This discourse is heavily laden with hegemonic heteronormative gendered discourses.

Within the dark romance narrative women are positioned as to blame for and deserving of the abuse (Wood, 2001). Women occupied the position of being unable to leave the relationship despite the abuse. Women were also invested in religious beliefs about the sanctity of marriage.

I allowed/deserved it

Women in abusive relationships often feel that they are to blame for the abuse occurring (Grauwiler, 2008; Hydén, 2005; Wood, 2001). When exploring forms of resistance that women engage in against perpetrators with whom they are in a close relationship, Hydén (2005) points out that the everyday resistance that these women engage in may not be recognised by dominant discourses of resistance because the preconceptions of what characterises resistance leave no space for the everyday actions that might comprise resistance. For instance, dominant conceptions of resistance leave little leeway for feelings of ambivalence. Within dominant discourse there is a common conception that if the woman had offered resistance, the man would not have been able to do what he did.

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This type of understanding appeared to have been internalised by women in my sample, who felt that they 'allowed' the abuse and if they had not allowed it he would not have done it.

> I'm still using that time to also work on my behaviour, my reactions, because I also feel that although I'm not responsible for my husband's behaviour I have **allowed** him to first start abusing me emotionally and later on he became more physical. And I allowed that because he would have stopped if I didn't allow him. He is that kind of person. (Alice)

Alice positions herself within dominant conceptions of intimate partner violence where the woman is to blame for the abuse (Kelly, 1990; Wood, 2001). She positions her husband as a perpetrator in the relationship but only because she '*allowed*' him to abuse her. Towns and Adams (2000) found that in women's accounts of the violence the focus was on the woman's actions that led to the man becoming violent. The woman was positioned as both responsible for acting in ways that brought on his violence and as having the power to cure him. Even though Alice states that she is not responsible for her husband's behaviour, her argument that she '*allowed*' him perhaps implies that she actually does feel responsible for him becoming violent. She therefore appears to position herself as the agent who allowed the relationship to become so violent.

Alice also states that the man '*is that kind of person*'. This suggests that she constructs the abuse as something he does not have control over because it is part of the kind of person he is. This relieves the man of blame for the abuse and places the onus on the woman to control what behaviour he perpetrates.

However, later in the interview Alice constructs the abuse as something that she would not have been able to stop if the court did not intervene:

> Because we are now in the relationship where we are at now I said to him I'm not going to allow [the abuse] any more. **But I must say** if it wasn't for the court that intervened I don't think, I don't know whether he would have stopped. (Alice)

This suggests that even if she had not allowed the abuse, he would not have stopped abusing her. In the first extract she positions herself as to blame for allowing the abuse to

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continue, thereby positioning herself as a type of co-offender of the abuse (Hydén, 2005), but later she positions herself as a victim who needed state assistance to stop the abuse. This shifting is often found in abused women's narratives (e.g. Boonzaier, 2008; Hydén, 2005) and appears to result from internalising hegemonic discourses that are not able to capture women's experiences of intimate partner violence. Stating that she really needed court intervention implies that dominant prescriptions that the woman can stop the abuse by being a good enough wife (Towns & Adams, 2000) did not fit her experience or situation.

Abuse is a normal part of a relationship

Another discourse that supported the dark romance was that abuse is a normal part of a heterosexual relationship. This discourse constructs relationships as naturally containing abuse. The position provided to women is one of subservience, passivity and acceptance towards abuse. Participants cited this discourse as being drawn on and emphasised by members of their community, which appeared to perpetuate the dark romance.

Also found by Ahmed and colleagues (2009), women described the social pressure put on them by their communities to conform to dominant discourses on femininity, perfect love, and marriage and the stigmatisation and rejection that they experience when they did not conform. This was used to explain the social isolation and silence around women abuse in intimate relationships that women continue to experience in their communities.

> Lots of people told me in church "you're really strong". I know the lord did make it so, I can really see I will never give up like that [leave her husband]. They can see how he's rude sometimes, come to the church late, two hours or so then he come fetch me. (Janet)

By positioning Janet as '*strong*' to stay in an abusive relationship the discourse which the people at the church draw on functions as an encouragement for her to stay with a husband who abuses her. Calling her '*strong*' also appears to be a way of commending her for staying with her husband. The woman is therefore positioned positively for accepting her husband's abuse and not leaving. This is typical of the dark romance within

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which women are supposed to accept that abuse is a normal part of a relationship and not a reason to end the relationship (Wood, 2001).

Her descriptions of his abuse appear to be used to illustrate how 'strong' she is and could express a type of pride that she feels for being able to stay with a man who abuses her in this way. This could show the power of dominant discourses on love and marriage in shaping how women construct abuse from male partners and how they should respond to that abuse. As previously found (Jackson, 2001; Towns & Adams, 2000), within dominant discourses of perfect love and marriage, this woman presents the picture that it is her duty to remain with her husband even if he abuses her. This is further expressed by her saying '*I will never give up like that*', which suggests that leaving her husband because of how he treats her is constructed within this discourse as 'giving up' and not something that she could be commended for. 'Giving up' here appears to denote weak or undesirable behaviour.

Women who do leave when husbands become violent are criticised for 'running away', as illustrated in the following excerpt:

> You know people criticise you and so on. Like "ya, things are going better with your husband now and now you run back. And then when things don't go right you want to run." See? But, I don't usually talk a lot with outsiders like other people and I'm very careful who I'm talking to. (Tracy)

Tracy identifies the dominant discourses that people draw on to pressurise her to stay with her husband when he is abusive as '*criticis[m]*'. By drawing on dominant gender discourses of male authority and female submission, which minimize the seriousness of violence against women in the home, violent abuse is described as '*when things don't go right*', which also makes it less reasonable and understandable for the wife to chose to leave. One could argue that describing the violence in this way is also aimed at making the woman *think* that the abuse is not that serious and that she is therefore 'wrong' and, as suggested by the previous excerpt, 'giving up' for leaving. Patriarchal discourse that structure heterosexual relationships and marriage dictates that women are expected to

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endure a certain amount of abuse from husbands, but the limit at which point the violence becomes unacceptable is not specified (Hydén, 2005).

Tracy deals with the social criticism posed against her for leaving by not talking to '*other people*' and being careful about who she talks to. This evokes a sense that she does not have easy access to discourses that she can use to counter dominant patriarchal discourses that position her negatively. The excerpt suggests that her only way to avoid this negative positioning is by avoiding talking to '*outsiders*', which often leaves women socially isolated. This suggests that discourses that appropriately capture and explain why abused women leave when 'things get difficult' is not easily accessible. Abused women are disempowered in relation to dominant patriarchal discourse because they do not have access to discourses that they can draw on to counter dominant discourses and support their actions in a way that fits their experience and makes sense to them.

Susan describes the gossip and stigmatisation that follows if she talks to others about the abuse:

> …you get buckled up inside, you know, it's not always that you can speak to anybody, because you know people like talk, or they'll look at you badly. But if I like speak to people like you, you used to dealing with women that have a problem so you'll **understand** more or less what, what I'm trying to, how I'm coming across and that. (Susan)

Susan positions herself as isolated and perhaps also a victim in her community. She describes being '*buckled up inside*' which suggests that she is physically and discursively unable to talk about the abuse she experiences from her male partner. She presents people in her community as drawing on dominant patriarchal discourses where abused women are blamed for the abuse from their husbands and that people therefore '*look at you badly*'.

Similarly to the previous extract, this extract illustrates the difficulty women face in talking about the abuse. It is an expression of the social silence that still surrounds the abuse of women in many South African communities. This silence may also be a result of the social stigma surrounding women abuse.

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In the second part of this extract Susan makes reference to my being '*used to*' talking to women who have husbands who abuse them. She appears to rely on my experience as a woman who is '*used to dealing with women that have a problem*' in order that I will understand her. She explains that because I have spoken to other abused women I'll understand '*more or less*' what she is saying. This could indicate that she doubts that I will be able to fully understand what she wants to say, suggesting a kind of isolation and silence that she cannot escape from even when in the context of an interview wanting to hear her story from her point of view at an intervention organisation supporting women's rights. This shows the pervasive nature and power of dominant patriarchal discourses which dominate even in contexts where gender equality is supported.

Dominant patriarchal discourses were at times drawn on by women to justify remaining with a husband who abuses them. However, women in my study also seemed to identify these discourses by referring to them as 'criticism', 'talk', or being looked at badly. Women used the fact that people in their communities positioned themselves and others within these discourses as the reason why they could not talk to others about the abuse. In this way, dominant discourse maintains the silence and isolation around violence against women in intimate relationships.

These discourses at work within the dark romance narrative are disempowering to women and encourage passivity in a context of extreme violence, and prioritise the traditional patriarchal values of love and marriage over the health and wellbeing of women. The discourse instils guilt and shame in women who try to leave abusive relationships.

Religious discourse

A further discourse that bolstered the dark romance was traditional religious discourse. Women drew on religious discourses in conjunction with other discourses to help construct their understanding of the abuse in their intimate relationships. Within this discourse women stayed in relationships where men were physically violent because they believed God would stop the abuse or that divorce was morally wrong. However, some women resisted religious discourse, which I have also included below.

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Within their communities, religious discourses were drawn on to encourage the woman to not resist abuse from her husband and remain silent about it. Religion has been found to be particularly important to people in times of stress and religious doctrine has been found to influence women's decisions when faced with an abusive male partner (Levitt & Ware, 2006b). Therefore, the ways in which religious morals and values are used and understood in a context of domestic violence is important to elicit.

Below Janet draws on religious discourse in conjunction with other discourses to explain why, even though she makes a criminal case against her husband who abuses her, she withdraws it each time:

> All these years every time I make a case…And so the last time I think I'm not going to do it [withdraw the case], and the church people come speak to me: I must withdraw the case. I do it for the church people, they say "will you ask forgiveness", they take the pastor, bring the pastor to me and he asks forgiveness and then every time I go to the court, just withdraw the case. (Janet)

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By expressing her repeated desire to make a case against her husband, and at times with determination '*the last time I think I'm not going to do it [withdraw the case]*', Janet appears to position herself in a discourse supporting women's rights against violence from male partners. The '*church people*' and pastor draw on what seems to be conservative religious discourse, prescribing that she should continually forgive her husband and not make a case against him despite his violence. Religious discourse is therefore enforced by the '*church people*' who, each time she makes a case, come and speak to her and pressurise her to withdraw it. The pervasive nature of dominant religious discourse appears to result in its taking precedence over the less dominant discourse of women's rights.

Janet appears to position herself in two discourses: one of women's rights and another of powerlessness. Although these discourses are not mutually exclusive, it seems that in her narrative they present two different types of positions, one which is active and the other passive. Janet tells her story from the active position of wanting to make a case against the man, which could be drawn from a type of women's rights discourse. However she also tells her story from the position of being powerless and unable to resist

the pressure that church people put on her. This could suggest that the women's rights discourse and the support structures around it are not strong enough or dominant enough to override the religious discourses and structures which the woman is confronted with.

Religious leaders are often the first to hear about a woman's experience of abuse from her male partner and are heavily relied on for support against this (Levitt & Ware, 2006b). Therefore, being confronted with discourses of forgiveness from religious leaders may be particularly disempowering for abused women. Religious gender roles and traditional attitudes within religious communities have been found to be experienced as supporting and prolonging women abuse (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Levitt & Ware, 2006b). By asking the woman to withdraw the case against the man, the church people can be positioned as complicit in the man's abuse of the woman (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003).

Women also drew on religious discourses promoting forgiveness of abuse perpetrated by intimate partners. Boonzaier and de la Rey (2004) also found that women draw on religious discourses of forgiveness to justify remaining with a violent male partner. In my sample, forgiving the man for his violence was constructed in two ways. At times women constructed 'forgiveness' as unhelpful and even dangerous for the woman's safety. However, at other times 'forgiveness' was constructed as morally right and the woman's only option. Below is an example of 'forgiveness' being constructed as unhelpful and not useful when trying to end or decrease the man's violence:

> I can keep on forgiving and forgiving and forgiving him but am I gonna keep on forgiving him 'til he's slapped me silly? You know until he really takes his knife and slits my throat you know? (Alice)

Alice appears to position herself partly within but mainly outside of dominant discourses prescribing forgiveness of the violence perpetrated against her. She is positioned within this discourse by asserting that she does forgive him, but criticises this by saying '*am I gonna keep on forgiving him 'til he's slapped me silly?*' which could imply that forgiving him will not stop the violence or prevent it from escalating. Forgiving him appears to

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make her more vulnerable to further abuse as it does not reduce but rather maintains the abuse. She therefore constructs '*forgiving*' as unhelpful and in her case dangerous.

Importantly, 'forgiveness' is constructed as running alongside the violence as opposed to intercepting it. Her repetition of '*forgiving*' suggests that it is continuous and evokes the sense that it is not enough and does not work, and that she perhaps needs an alternative response to the abuse. She therefore hints at an alternative discourse, perhaps one which prescribes resistance as opposed to forgiveness, but does not firmly position herself within this discourse.

Later in the same interview Alice constructs 'forgiveness' as most important:

> I think the most important thing about it all is forgiveness. To go back and not to think 'oh this is what he's done to me, this is what he's done to me, this is what he's done to me'…you must **forget** about the past and allow yourself to start fresh, and that is the most difficult part for me because a lot of the hurt is still there, the memory are still there. You know, the memory are sometimes there, sometimes when he behaves in a certain way that memory comes back and you're immediately on your back foot. So you have to forgive completely and forgive means to forget and to give it a chance. (Alice)

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Alice positions herself within dominant religious discourses, which prescribe '*forgiveness*' towards the wrongs that others have done to you, by stating '*I think the most important thing about it all is forgiveness*'. Stating '*you have to forgive completely*' also evokes the sense of relieving the man of blame for the violence he perpetrated against her. By constructing '*forgiveness*' as the only way forward after an earlier construction of its being dangerous and not useful suggests that even though she acknowledges that it is not helpful, she still appeals to it. This is an example of the power of the dominant discourses in a domestic violence context.

The following is a further excerpt drawing on religious discourses including those of forgiveness to explain why Janet does not divorce her husband:

> The reason that I keep him actually is that every time he ask forgiveness and his mother come to me and she ask forgiveness, the church actually, I'm Christian, I converted, and our church thing is you must, the lord must, until death must us part. (Janet)

By drawing on religious Christian discourse Janet explains that she must remain with her husband until death. For some religions a literal interpretation of religious texts is used to justify prohibiting divorce in cases of domestic violence. For example, literalist interpretations of Christian religious text provide only two cases where divorce is justified: desertion and infidelity, which renders domestic violence an unjustifiable reason for divorce (Levitt & Ware, 2006b). The phrase '*until death must us part*' takes on a new meaning in a domestic violence context, where death at the hands of an intimate partner is a very real threat.

Janet appears to position herself within religious discourses of forgiveness to explain why she remains with her partner. The notion of 'forgiveness' towards men who abuse women appears to be linked to religious constructions of morality, which promote forgiving the sins of others, as well as religious constructions of femininity and dominant patriarchal constructions of femininity, both of which encourage female submission and male dominance (Jackson, 2001; Levitt & Ware, 2006a; Wood, 2001).

Janet is faced with social pressure from her partner, his mother, and perhaps the church to forgive and remain married. The mother of the man appears to be a type of co-offender (Hydén, 2005) in the abuse in that she colludes with the man to convince the woman to forgive his violence and continue to stay with him.

It is important to note that religious discourses could also provide vital support to women who face violence from their intimate partners (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). Giesbrecht and Sevcik (2000) found that religion functioned as a meaning-making framework that provided insight, social support and practical assistance in the face of intimate partner violence, as well as enabled women to rebuild their spiritual identity after abuse.

Resistance against traditional religious discourse

After first positioning herself within traditional religious discourse by explaining that she should not act against the abuse but rather wait for the lord to stop the abuse, Janet said the following:

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> The lord is there but there **are** people that help you…the court is there to help us, police is, people is there to help me, I'm not going after church people anymore, I say that because they don't **stay** with me. They go lekker at home. (Janet)

Janet appears to position herself outside of the religious discourse by expressing that although the '*lord is there*' there are people that can help her. She appears to be drawing on a women's rights discourse and taking on an active resistance as opposed to a passive position in relation to violence from her husband. She positions herself outside of traditional discourses of femininity that prescribe passivity, patience, and forgiveness in women by emphasising that the court and police are there to help her, and that she will not continue to listen to '*church people*'. This is similar to what was found in a study done by Knickmeyer and colleagues (2003) where, faced with contradictory messages from religious leaders, women reconstructed their faith so that they believed that God supported divorce in cases of abuse.

In Janet's interview she on the one hand provides reasons for why she cannot leave her husband or resist his violence but on the other hand she criticises these reasons and positions herself as having more agency and ability to leave him. Her story presents a discourse of shifting positions between powerlessness and agency. This could be an expression of the internal dialogue between hegemonic patriarchal discourses and feminist discourses that promote the empowerment of women. The presence of feminist and women's rights discourse is also present in the following excerpt where Alice describes the resistance she faced from religious leaders when trying to change her behaviour in order to not allow her husband to abuse her:

> And even the pastor said he'd also be scared if his wife said she's changed, 'cause I said to my husband I've changed, I said I've changed in the way that I will not allow you to act like this to me. See, I'm still the same person but I will not allow you to act like this towards me. And it even scared the pastor, he's a very good pastor but he's also a man. And they don't like to hear about change, and they don't like to hear that someone is different. (Alice)

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Alice draws on traditional discourses of masculinity by saying that '*he's a very good pastor but he's also a man*', which suggests that 'men' are not able to see or understand things the way women do, and that because he is a man he is opposed to assertive or '*different*' women. Stating that '*he's a very good pastor but he's also a man*' indicates that as a pastor he fulfils his role well, but that this becomes complicated when dealing with issues such as intimate partner violence where gendered power relations come into play.

Using the word '*even*' evokes the sense that perhaps the pastor should not have been scared that she wanted to change because of his role as a pastor, which is perhaps socially constructed as promoting goodness and peace. She positions the pastor as constructing a wife who changes as something 'not done' and unwanted. This positions women who resist patriarchal norms as frightening, which reinforces the 'normalcy' of women who are passive and who do not resist male dominance. This could be interpreted as the pastor attempting to maintain the patriarchal status quo and keep the wife obedient to the husband.

She positions herself within an active women's rights position, where she feels justified in not allowing her husband to abuse her. She also positions herself outside of religious discourse by separating the pastor's views from her own. As opposed to positioning herself as a victim of the pastor's view, she positions herself as resisting his view despite her religious affiliation. She is therefore able to position herself as pro-women's rights while still maintaining her religious identity. This is perhaps an encouraging finding for feminist work as it suggests that some women are able to draw on feminist discourse to justify their resistance against abuse while still being able to maintain the parts of their identity that are positioned within other discourses, such as religious discourse.

Dark romance discourses, which construct romantic relationships as typically abusive and which encourage women to remain with male partners even if they are abusive, were drawn on to narrate women's relationships and why they choose not to or are unable to leave. Women also spoke of the social stigmatisation that confronts them when they try to resist abusive male partners. Women appeared to be positioned within dominant gender discourse which prescribes dependency in women as well as traditional

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religious discourses which tend to discourage divorce. In addition, women also showed resistance towards some dominant discourses.

Discursive battle between dominant patriarchal discourses and marginalised feminist discourses

Women's experiences of loving and feeling deeply for a man who abuses her are difficult to understand or explain without access to a discourse that can account for these feelings given the type of abuse the woman is experiencing. It is also difficult to make sense of her experience in a coherent way without words with which to name that experience and a discourse to explain it (Gavey, 1996; Kelly, 1990). The traumatic narratives of abused women can therefore often appear at times incoherent and contradictory.

A 'discursive battle' is the struggle to find a coherent position between the different positionings offered by various discourses (Gavey, 1989, p. 471). In this section I interpret the contradictions and inconsistencies in women's stories in terms of a discursive battle between various positionings. An easily accessible discourse is needed that can account for and perhaps help explain the experiences of violence from one's intimate partner (Gavey, 1996). The patriarchal structure and content of language (MacKinnon, 1983) as well as dominant patriarchal discourses that are familiar, easily available, and within which women feel comfortable positioning themselves appear to not adequately account for or capture their experiences of intimate partner violence in a way that appears coherent or meaningful. Therefore, when drawing on these discourses to try to understand and talk about their experiences and feelings the narratives, which include familiar and often hegemonic discourses, appear inconsistent and contradictory. Not having easy access to such a discourse could result in having to draw on different and often conflicting discourses, which do not fully capture the woman's experience.

There were two types of 'inconsistencies' found in the narratives of my sample. The one type of inconsistency arose from the discursive battle between dominant patriarchal discourses and what appeared to be marginalised feminist discourses supporting women's rights. Different discourses offer competing and often contradictory ways of giving meaning to the world (Gavey, 1989). Therefore, drawing on these two

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groups of discourses at different times when retelling the same story led to parts of the story being inconsistent with other parts. Another inconsistency arose from the lack of access to an appropriate discourse that could accurately capture the women's experiences of intimate partner abuse. By drawing on only dominant or hegemonic discourses around femininity and woman abuse women struggled to retell their experiences. This resulted in narratives that appeared to not 'make sense' because, in order to maintain a positive identity within dominant discourses, the women were forced to leave out parts of their experience or to construct their experiences in ways that were not reflective of what they later revealed had happened to them.

Because women are unable to fully relinquish themselves or escape from dominant patriarchal discourse their narratives appear inconsistent when they draw on both these and feminist discourses. The 'contradiction' or 'inconsistency' could be understood as a necessary battle between dominant discourse and less dominant discourses, such as feminist discourses promoting women's rights, and as a necessary part of the process of empowerment of abused women. Women's narratives and stories of violence may therefore not be contradictory or inconsistent, but rather appear so because of the range of discourses, both dominant and marginalised, that are being drawn on to capture their story. However, patriarchal discourses are still used to a far greater extent than women's rights discourses, which leaves women in a continued disempowered position.

In my sample women drew predominantly on hegemonic discourses of femininity and the patriarchal family as well as traditional religious discourses, but also at times positioned themselves within and drew on more egalitarian feminist discourses. Below I have highlighted just a few examples of what appear to be 'inconsistencies' found in the interviews.

> She [social worker] just asked me what if he do it [physically abuse her]. She just want to ask me. I said straight I don't believe in divorce…I think I'm going to divorce if he do it once more. (Janet)

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There appears to be a shift in positioning between dominant patriarchal religious discourse, which prescribes that divorce is morally wrong despite woman abuse (Levitt & Ware, 2006b), and feminist or gender equality discourse, which is drawn on when she asserts that she may divorce him if he physically abuses her again. The apparent inconsistency of not believing in divorce but also thinking that she will choose divorce can be accounted for by the *discursive battle* between the world views and positionings of dominant patriarchal and feminist discourses. In addition, her shift from not believing in divorce but later stating that she thinks she would choose divorce may be a result of her positioning of me as the researcher as potentially supporting divorce in contexts of intimate partner violence.

Another participant, by drawing on conflicting discourses, argues that she stays with her husband for her children's own good, despite the fact that they are also physically abused by him.

> They say "you mustn't let him hit your children again" and that one "you must go to the police!" and the teacher had seen the blue eye and said "he's going to mess up her face like he mess up your face!" … but I do it [stay] actually for my children. (Laura)

Through her talk about the advice given to her by teachers and others, Laura positions herself within dominant discourses on the family and femininity, which prescribe that a good mother stays with the father for the sake of the children and suffers and sacrifices herself for this. By using this discourse it appears that the 'right action' is to stay with the man for the sake of the children.

Laura's quotes of other women who describe the abuse in feminist type discourse seem to be significant here because within the interview it is as if she is speaking through them, using what they have said to be able to say it herself. By quoting what these people have said she is communicating the gravity of the abuse towards herself and her child, and the fact that others think she should contact the police. She is therefore communicating a powerful message about the seriousness of the abuse, which she is perhaps unable to do using a patriarchal discourse. She is therefore implicitly drawing on feminist discourses around women and child abuse. However, by not fully and openly

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positioning herself within this discourse she is still able to maintain a positive identity as a ‘good mother’ within dominant patriarchal discourse. She is therefore still able to position herself within dominant discourses on femininity, which, as mentioned earlier, prescribe self-sacrifice, passivity, and subservience in women (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001), and the patriarchal family, which encourage the male-headed nuclear family (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Because it may be important for her to position herself as a ‘good mother’, which she appears to struggle to do within feminist discourse, she more firmly positions herself within dominant patriarchal discourse on femininity and motherhood, as evoked by ‘*I do it actually for my children*’ where her use of ‘*I*’ positions her in this discourse as opposed to ‘*they*’ which was used when referring to more feminist discourses. This appears to allow her to maintain a positive identity as a good mother within dominant discourse, while at the same time expressing the seriousness of her husband’s violence. Therefore, dominant patriarchal discourse alone does not appear to capture the seriousness and nature of the abuse and her need for police assistance but it does appear to still provide her with a positive identity as a mother if she continues to stay with her husband.

Remaining with her husband is consistent with dominant social and religious discourses, which prescribe lifelong marriage, self-sacrifice in women, and male dominance over women (Hydén, 2005; Levitt & Ware, 2006a; Walker, 1984; Wood, 2001). However, remaining with him is inconsistent with her desire to protect her children from the violence that he is already perpetrating against them. Moreover, research has found that high levels of conflict, which undermine the quality of parenting, are more detrimental to children than divorce (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). As found by Towns and Adams (2000), the acknowledgement that one is living a reality that is not ‘perfect-love’ is portrayed as ‘such a terror’ and separation is viewed as an outcome of articulating that the relationship is not ideal (p. 582). Therefore, silence and maintaining the status quo of the relationship can be easier options.

The second type of ‘inconsistency’ arose due to a lack of access to a discourse that could appropriately capture women’s experiences of abuse while maintaining a positive identity and dignity:

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> For twenty years I was in an abusive marriage. Not physically. Emotional, verbally. But at the end of the day you isolate yourself, then it's 'what is these people gonna think?' …One week we had a discussion about self image. So [social worker] had this mirror, sending around and you must now tell what you see. Then I said "there, I'm proud of myself, because why? I don't see any blue marks and nothing on my face and I can smile". In the past I never used to look at a mirror because then it's a blue mark here or a bruise there and that. So for me I was proud to look at myself that day and say it's clear. (Tora)

It appears that in the first part of the excerpt although Tora is able to label her marriage as '*abusive*' with emotional and verbal abuse, she is still positioning herself within a type of dominant patriarchal discourse that does not offer a woman a positive identity or maintain her dignity if she was physically abused by her partner. This could lead to her stating '*not physically*' when the abuse was in fact physical as well. This is also emphasised by her following her descriptions of the abuse by '*you isolate yourself*' and '*what is these people gonna think?*' indicating the social shame that she felt in relation to being abused by her husband. However, in the second part of the excerpt Tora mentions the '*blue marks*' and '*bruise[s]*' that had been on her face. The 'inconsistency' of stating that the abuse was not physical and her later description of bruises on her face can therefore be accounted for by her inability to disclose within dominant discourse that the abuse was physical.

This could be explained as an inconsistency produced by drawing only on dominant discourse and not having easy access to another, perhaps feminist, discourse wherein she could more easily talk about the physical abuse while maintaining a positive identity. This also appears related to the stigma associated with having been abused by an intimate partner (Boonzaier & van Schalkwyk, in press). Using only dominant discourse produces an inconsistency with what appeared to have happened in her marriage. In order to maintain a positive identity within dominant patriarchal discourse she has left out parts of her experience, the physical abuse, and has constructed the abuse in ways that are not reflective of what she later reveals happened.

The woman positions herself within dominant patriarchal discourse which prescribes that abused women should hide the abuse and not talk about it because an

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'abused woman' is stereotypically constructed as nagging, weak, ill-educated, and deserving to be hit (Kelly, 1990). Research has found that both women and men blame women for men's violence against them (Wood, 2001). She states '*I'm proud of myself*' and '*I was proud*' for not having blue marks, which indicates a continued sense of blame for the abuse she experienced.

Although feminist discourses on intimate partner violence against women may provide coherent understandings of the abuse and its link to patriarchal society and the conflicting feelings that women have as a result of the abuse, these discourses do not seem to be easily accessible to women in my sample. Moreover, when presented with these discourses, such as at a feminist-orientated organisation, it appears that women do not feel comfortable positioning themselves in these discourses given their commitment to the prescriptions of dominant religious, patriarchal family, and femininity discourses.

Can't name the abusive event

Women make meaning of their experiences by drawing on the cultural and social discourses available to them (Wood, 2001). In order for something to exist socially words need to exist with which to name it, without a name the thing is socially invisible (Kelly, 1990). Therefore, the ways in which women experience and talk about abuse from intimate male partners is linked to the types of discourses available to her and to which she has access (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). Jackson (2001) argues that women make meaning out of and understand their romantic relationships from 'texts of meanings' provided by fairytales and popular culture (p. 306). Moreover, Towns and Adams (2000) argue that perfect-love discourses inform how women respond to intimate partner violence and at times silence women's talk about violence from male partners. Importantly, women's ability to name abuse is also linked to public awareness of intimate partner violence against women (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003).

Common conceptions provided by dominant discourse, as well as public education campaigns on intimate partner violence against women tend to emphasise extreme stereotypes of abuse and the types of women who get abused (Grauwiler, 2008; Kelly, 1990). As a consequence, many women have struggled to name their experiences

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as abuse because they do not identify with or fit the stereotypes of 'abused women' (Gavey, 1996; Grauwiler, 2008; Kelly, 1990). In their research on women whose male partners abused them, Grauwiler (2008) and Kelly (1990) found that women were unable to name the abuse, which indicated a lack of access to a language that could adequately capture their experiences. This was also found in my study, where women showed difficulty naming the abuse that they experienced:

> He spent a week in prison because of um [short pause] what happened at home… (Susan)

Susan states '*what happened at home*' as opposed to naming or describing the abuse. '*What happened at home*' does not capture or express the violence that she experienced; rather, it indicates that 'what happened' happened at home, in the private space of her house. The location is described, as opposed to the action. One could argue that her choice of terms with which to refer to the violence is drawn from a patriarchal discourse, which prescribes that what happens in the home is private and should not be disclosed.

Without a language which can explain and describe intimate abuse, it is difficult to even begin to think clearly about that abuse. Language and a discourse are necessary in order to think about a concept, talk about it, and describe it to others. Hegemonic discourse has left a gap in its names, labels, and terms in the area of violence perpetrated against women by their intimate partners, which results in this type of abuse being left silent and unnameable (Kelly, 1990). Therefore, without knowing that the excerpt above was said by a woman whose male partner is in a programme aimed specifically at combating abuse against woman partners, one may not know that she is referring to his violent abuse of her by '*what happened at home*'.

Laura expressed:

> It's after all these stuff that things are like this now. It's almost that we had to um start from scratch, but it's not like it's..[3] I can't even explain it to you. (Laura)

[3] .. indicates short pause in speech.

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Laura's use of the word '*stuff*' suggests that there are not words that can accurately capture the events that have passed between her and her partner. Lay knowledge suggests that the word '*stuff*' does not refer to anything in specific, which perhaps makes it a word that she could use to refer to what is un-nameable. She also expresses that she cannot explain it to me. In the interview this was said with frustration, suggesting that she wanted to explain it, to make me understand, but was unable to do so. This could suggest that she was unable to appeal to a discourse that could accurately explain and capture her experience.

The cycle of abuse and kindness typical of abusive relationships (Walker, 1984) often creates an incoherent experience, which is difficult to explain. One cannot understand it in a coherent way without a language that accounts for and explains it. Not having language that can accurately label women abuse is a further form of dominance over women. It makes women powerless because they do not have words to explain the abuse they experience.

Jennifer tells me about abuse perpetrated by her husband without mentioning what he actually did:

> Before he started the session the incident happened but before that he already got the letters to be in the group, he was already sent by the court to be in the group. Just a week before he started the sessions and then he did that. (Jennifer)

She uses '*the incident happened*' and '*he did that*' to explain the abuse that happened before her partner started sessions at an intervention organisation. This evokes the sense that she does not have words to accurately capture what he did, and so uses '*incident*' and '*that*', which are non-specific terms. When reading the transcript, '*that*' gives a sense of the abuse being un-nameable. This could be an expression of the gravity of the abuse, but at the same time illustrates an inability to name it.

The following extract expresses Jennifer's difficulty in understanding and labelling her feelings, as well as difficulty in naming and explaining what she feels she needs:

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> Maybe it's that hurting the most. I don't know, I really can't say…I don't know if it's a wrong something but maybe it's.. Maybe it's just.. I don't know what it is, maybe it's something that I just want, I don't know if it's called closure or something. Maybe it's something that I just want to feel ok to move on. I just assume it's closure that it is. Can't really explain it properly…It's just very hard, it's, I don't know how to explain. (Jennifer)

The extract evokes the experience of the abuse and the emotions around it being incomprehensible and indescribable. There is a sense of being lost in the damaging effects of the abuse without a language to explain it. Jennifer states that she needs something but questions whether it is a '*wrong something*', which indicates that she may not trust her feelings or her judgement, which is a symptom of eroded self-esteem that often follows abuse (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997; Walker, 1984). She appears not to have access to words that can explain the '*something*' that she is referring to. She suggests that it might be '*closure*' but is unsure and feels she can't explain it. This indicates that although it is similar, '*closure*' does not adequately capture what she means or is trying to explain.

Laura expresses that she doesn't talk to friends about the abuse, which she does not term 'abuse':

> You know when I speak to a friend I won't blah blah all these things out to them about the nitty gritties what's going on in my house and all that. (Laura)

Laura refers to the abuse as the '*nitty gritties*' that happen at home. She is using terms that do not capture the seriousness, danger, and pain of violence from her husband. She is also appealing to the 'home as private' discourse which positions events that happen in the home as private. Again, when reading the extract, one would not immediately think that she is talking about serious physical violence perpetrated against her by her intimate partner by her use of '*all these things*' and '*nitty gritties*'. This shows the need for a new discourse that can accurately capture what she is saying and expressing.

In order for society to adequately respond to and end violence against women, intimate partner violence against women needs to exist in the realm of language and

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discourse so that it can be discussed and understood. Although women's difficulty in naming the abusive event suggests that they did not have easy access to language that they could draw on to name these events, it is also possible that the interview context affected their ability to disclose information about the nature of the abuse experienced. Therefore, situational factors may have played a role in their difficulty to name the abuse.

Summary

Women's stories were framed by hegemonic heteronormative gendered discourses, which promote subservience, passivity, self-sacrifice, and romance in women. Women's accounts of their relationships fell into two broad romantic discourses: fairytale romances, which position the man as ultimately not to blame for his violence and construct the relationship as having hope, and dark romances, which construct relationships as naturally abusive and position the woman as unable to leave the relationship. Dominant in women's narratives was the discursive battle between the positionings offered by dominant and marginalised discourses and the silences around abuse when no discourse was available within which women could express what happened to them.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I briefly restate the main findings of the study and how they relate to the broader critical feminist literature on women's understandings of abuse in romantic relationships. This chapter presents the limitations of the study and some tentative recommendations for future research.

Main findings and their relation to critical feminist literature

Using feminist poststructuralist theory as my theoretical framework and discourse analysis as the analytical method, three main findings emerged in women's accounts: romance discourses, a *discursive battle* between the positionings offered by various discourses, and the silences that surround naming the abuse. The romance discourses were discourses at work within romance narratives found by Wood (2001).

As found by previous research (Boonzaier, 2008; Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003, 2004; Jackson, 2001; Towns & Adams, 2000; Wood, 2001), women in my sample showed an internalisation of hegemonic gender discourses. Dominant femininity discourses position women as self-sacrificing, passive, nurturing and submissive towards men who abuse them, and blameworthy for abuse in romantic relationships (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Jackson, 2001; Towns & Adams, 2000; Wood, 2001). Dominant masculinity discourses provide men with positions of authority, dominance, and rule over the woman and in the household (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004; Jackson, 2001). These dominant gender discourses framed women's accounts and the romance discourses that emerged.

The romance discourses corresponded with Wood's (2001) narrative findings and were organised in accordance with the fairly tale romance and dark romance narratives. At work within the fairytale romance narrative were romance discourses characterised by discourses that justify the violence, dissociate the man from the violence, and position the woman as able to control or stop the violence. By drawing on the fairytale romance

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women constructed the relationship as having hope and a possibility of becoming perfect again. The fairytale romance narrative contained three sub-discourses. The first of which is *the good outweighs the bad: patriarchal family discourse*, which positioned the man's potentially good qualities, such as being a father-figure, as outweighing the abuse he perpetrates against both the woman and children. As found by Wood (2001), women constructed the abuse as not as bad as it could have been or as bad as other women experience. This appeared to be linked to hegemonic gender discourses positioning women as needing a man to have value, which has previously been found by Boonzaier (2008) and Towns and Adams (2000).

The second fairytale romance discourse, *I can control/stop it: psychological discourse*, positioned the women as a caring wife who could help the man overcome his violent behaviour that he perpetrates due to his own childhood abuse. This was similar to Boonzaier's (2008) finding that discourses on the intergenerational transmission of abuse are drawn on to explain the perpetration of intimate partner violence and suggests that this is a cultural resource that is drawn on to make meaning of abuse in romantic relationships. This is linked to dominant conceptions that men's violence is out of their control, which has also been found by Boonzaier and de la Rey (2004) and Wood and Jewkes (2001), and hegemonic femininity discourses that encourage nurturance and care towards male partners, as found by Boonzaier (2008), Jackson (2001), and Wood (2001).

Understanding the violence as out of the man's control was linked to a dual construction of the man where his violence is not the real him. This was expressed in the third fairytale discourse, *not the real him*, which dissociates the man from the abuse he perpetrates. This dual construction or 'splitting' has been found by previous feminist researchers (e.g. Boonzaier, 2008; Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Jackson, 2001; Towns & Adams, 2000; Wood, 2001) and resonates with cultural resources such as romantic narratives and fairytales that constitute romantic male partners with a certain duality, such as *Beauty and the Beast* (Jackson, 2001; Towns & Adams, 2000). As previously found by Wood and Jewkes (2001) alcohol consumption was referred to when explaining abuse from intimate male partners. Women in my sample constructed the abuse as perpetrated by partners when they are intoxicated and not by the 'real' him when he is

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sober. Moreover, dual constructions of male partners also appeared to lead to women protecting men from punishment and imprisonment.

The dark romance discourses at work within the dark romance narrative constructed romantic relationships as naturally hurtful to women and position abuse as not a valid reason to leave (Wood, 2001). As found by Wood (2001), the overarching dark romance was heavily laden with hegemonic gender discourses where women are subservient to male partners. Three main discourses composed the dark romance. The first, *I allowed/deserved it*, is characterised by self-blame for the abuse. Self-blame has been previously found (Grauwiler, 2008; Hydén, 2005; Towns & Adams, 2000; Wood, 2001) and blaming the woman for the abuse is common in dominant conceptions of intimate partner violence (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Kelly, 1990). My findings support those of Hydén (2005) where women blamed themselves for the abuse and positioned themselves as co-offenders of the abuse due to the construction that they allowed the abuse to happen to them.

The second dark romance discourse is *abuse is a normal part of a relationship*, which positioned abuse as naturally occurring in relationships and therefore not an adequate reason to leave or resist the abuse. This was perpetuated by the social community that surrounded women. Also found by Ahmed and colleagues (2009), social isolation and stigmatisation surrounded women who tried to leave abusive relationships. This appeared to be fuelled by dominant conceptions of femininity, which prescribe that it is a woman's duty to stay with her husband even if he abuses her; this supports findings by Jackson (2001) and Towns and Adams (2000).

The third discourse in the dark romance was *religious discourse*, characterised by women positioned as unable to leave the relationship for religious reasons. As previously found (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Knickmeyer et al., 2003; Levitt & Ware, 2006a, 2006b; Lundgren, 1998), religious leaders and church members were experienced as supporting traditional gender roles in cases of intimate partner violence and urged women to remain with an abusive male partner. This supports previous research that has found that some religious leaders and literalist interpretations of religious texts can be disempowering to women whose male partners are abusive.

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Although not dominant in women's accounts, women also showed resistance against hegemonic gender roles and abuse from male partners. Resistance against abuse and hegemonic gender roles has been previously found by feminist researchers such as Hydén (1999, 2005), Boonzaier (2008), and Jackson (2001) and supports Hydén's (2005) assertion that a story of resistance against abuse often accompanies a story of oppression.

The second main finding comprised of the *discursive battle* between the positionings offered by different discourses. As found by Gavey (1989), there appeared to be evidence of a *discursive battle* in women's accounts between the different positionings offered by dominant patriarchal or marginalised feminist discourses. By drawing on discourses which are in conflict with each other, women's accounts appeared at times inconsistent and contradictory. My findings therefore provide some support for Gavey's (1989) finding that women draw on conflicting discourses and that this can result in a story that appears inconsistent, with the inconsistencies not necessarily being resolved within the story. Importantly, this is a new finding which has not been previously elucidated by South African research on women's talk about intimate partner violence.

The third main finding is the silences that emerged around naming and explaining the abuse. This was similarly found by Gavey (1996), Grauwiler (2008), and Kelly (1990). Women struggled to name and at times explain the abuse in the interviews. As argued by feminist researchers (Gavey, 1989, 1996; Kelly, 1990; MacKinnon, 1983), the patriarchal structure of language inhibits women from talking about and naming abuse from male partners. In this section I highlight the silences around the abuse and link this to both the shame associated with being abused and common conceptions and stereotypes of abuse in intimate relationships. This provides support for arguments put forward by Kelly (1990) and Gavey (1996) that new names need to be developed in order for women to talk about the abuse they experience and, as proposed by Burns (2009), that we need to problematise the dominant discourses that constrain women's lives and make them dangerous.

As found by Boonzaier (2008) and Gavey (1989), this study showed the value of feminist poststructuralist theory when investigating women's talk about abuse in intimate relationships. Feminist poststructuralism allowed me to acknowledge and investigate the contradictions and inconsistencies in women's accounts. It showed that women position

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themselves as both passive and active, as victims and agents of resistance. Within the same interview women shifted from positioning herself as to blame for the abuse to positioning herself as able to resist the abuse. Although compliance to hegemonic gender and romantic discourses was dominant, women evidenced a move away from this at times and engaged in women's rights discourses that prioritised their wellbeing and safety.

International theory developments applicable to the South African context

The three main findings of this study are similar to the findings of international research on women's talk about violent relationships. Drawing on romantic narratives has been done by Wood (2001) (USA), drawing on romantic discourses has been found by international researchers Wood (2001) (USA), Jackson (2001) (New Zealand), and Towns and Adams (2000) (New Zealand). Secondly, evidence of a *discursive battle* has been previously found by Gavey (1989) (New Zealand). And thirdly, an inability to name or explain the abusive event has been found by Gavey (1996) (New Zealand), Grauwiler (2008) (USA), and Kelly (1990) (Britain).

This study contributes to the field by showing that women in South Africa draw on similar discourses to those found in international research. This is an important finding as it suggests that theory and findings by international research on this topic can potentially be applied to South Africa. As mentioned in the introductory chapter of this study, it is vital to ascertain whether South African women in abusive relationships draw on the same discourses as North American and European women, such as western traditional femininity, perfect love and fairytales, and therefore whether much of the international literature on female talk about intimate partner violence can be applicable to women in South Africa. The results of this study show that South African women draw on similar discourses as those found in international research. Given the high level of intimate partner violence in South Africa and the need for research development in this area, this study makes a valuable contribution and presents an important finding.

As previously found by Gavey (1989), women in this study engaged in a *discursive battle* between positionings offered by various discourses. This finding

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suggests that Gavey's findings and theory development in this area are applicable to South African women's talk about violence in their intimate relationships.

In addition, as has also been found by international researchers Gavey (1996), Kelly (1990), and Grauwiler (2008), women in this study struggled to name the abusive event. This is a very important finding because it suggests that research by Gavey and Kelly can be applied to the South African context. Moreover, because my findings are similar to those of Gavey and Kelly, this suggests that theory developed by these researchers is applicable to South Africa. Gavey, Kelly, and Burns (2009) theorise the need for new discourses to be developed that are more empowering to women who experience abuse from male partners. My findings suggest that South African research will benefit from these theories, and perhaps further development of them in a South African context, given the similarity of our findings.

Limitations

Because many of the interviewees were not mother-tongue English speakers, the accounts that I received were limited by the interviewee's ability to translate their understanding into English. The interviews were conducted in English, which means that if the interviewee was not sufficiently fluent in English then this may have influenced and limited the type of account she was able to present. A limitation presented by feminist poststructuralism is that because the theory decentres the individual and views her experiences as never independent from social and linguistic processes, it does not give priority to individual female experience (Gavey, 1989; Wilkinson, 1986). A second limitation to the theory is its relativism (Gavey, 1989). The theory suggests that there is no objective basis for distinguishing between true and false beliefs, which may have the consequence that power alone will determine the outcome of competing claims to truth (Flax, 1987).

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Recommendations

Given that a discourse analysis of women's stories in South Africa produced similar results to those done internationally, further research investigating international theorising about how to bring about change through discourse in gender relations is recommended.

Parker (2004) theorises that some discourses are open to be changed and rewritten. Further research on the possibilities for change in dominant and marginalised discourses that women draw on when talking about abuse in relationships is recommended in the South African context. This will include investigating how discourses and texts can be useful as a way of changing oppressive gender relations as opposed to simply representing them. Part of this research would include the deconstruction of hegemonic discourses and investigating possibilities for change within these discourses.

Many of the discourses drawn on by women in this study contained patriarchal assumptions about perfect-love, marriage, and femininity. Further research into the deconstruction of patriarchal assumptions inherent in hegemonic heteronormative gendered discourses drawn on by women in South Africa may prove useful. Given the similarity in discourses found internationally and in my study, research into international theory on and attempts at deconstructing patriarchal assumptions inherent in dominant discourses may be useful when attempting to deconstruct patriarchal assumptions in discourses drawn on by women in South Africa. Such attempts and theorising have been made by Burns (2009), Gavey (1989, 1996), Kelly (1990), Kelly and Radford (1998), MacKinnon (1983), Parker (2004), and Weedon (1987).

In addition, I recommend further research into the subject positions offered to women by various dominant and marginalised discourses in South Africa. A discourse analysis on this topic may provide further insights into the ways in which dominant discourses constrain women's subjectivities. As argued by Gavey (1989), feminist poststructuralist theory opens up possibilities for deconstructing assumptions within language and investigating the process of producing subjectivities. Given that this has

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also been valuable in my study, I recommended feminist poststructuralist theory as an epistemological framework when investigating discourse and subjectivities.

Burns (2009), Gavey (1996), and Kelly (1990) suggest that the creation of new names, labels, discourses and stories are needed in order to empower women and counter dominant patriarchal gendered discourses. This study showed that South African women struggle to name and explain abusive events, as has been similarly found by Gavey (1996), Grauwiler (2008), and Kelly (1990). Therefore, international attempts at addressing this issue may be useful in the South African context. Women make meaning of their experiences by drawing on the cultural and social discourses available to them (Wood, 2001). Discourses inform how women respond to abusive partners (Towns & Adams, 2000) and make meaning out of abusive relationships (Jackson, 2001). Moreover, stories and discourses construct women's identities (Burns, 2009). In order for women to be more empowered, discourses, stories, and other texts need to be available that enable women to occupy more empowered positions in relation to men (Burns, 2009). Burns (2009) suggests problematising the dominant discourses that constrain women's identity and keep women oppressed. She argues that political action and resistance to stereotypical oppressive behaviour can come from mobilizing discourses, narratives, texts, and ways of giving meaning to the world, which open up new possibilities for women.

I recommend further South African research into problematising dominant discourses that shape South African women's experience and constrain their choices in relation to violent male partners. As this has been suggested as useful internationally, I propose that it may be useful in South Africa given the similarities in discourse that were drawn on in my study and in international research. Further research into the creation of new discourses and stories in South Africa may therefore prove beneficial. Mobilising the creation of alternate stories and texts that also take account of the different cultures and social histories in South Africa may contribute to disrupting the power of dominant patriarchal discourse.

Burns (2009) argues that from a discursive perspective, fiction is valid data for analysis as it forms part of the cultural resource available to women to draw on when constructing reality and their identities. Creating new discourses through fictional texts

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has been attempted by, for example, Le Guin (1980 cited in Burns, 2009) who depicts women and men as sexless. Further attempts at problematising hegemonic discourses and developing alternative more empowering discourses for women, while paying attention to the specific South African context, can also be achieved through the creation of new fictional texts. The creation of texts, including films, novels, comic books, and fairytales that challenge dominant concepts of gender as presented in South Africa, may enable women to take up new subject positions and draw on discourses that encourage resistance against male perpetrated violence against women.

The findings of Gavey (1989, 1996), Jackson (2001), Kelly (1990), Towns and Adams (2000), and Wood (2001) are similar to my findings which could suggest that theory development by these researchers is applicable and can be useful in a South African context. I recommend that future researchers investigate the theories of these researchers and their applicability in South Africa and how they can contribute to further theory development on the discourses women draw on to talk about violence in intimate relationships in South Africa.

Conclusion

This study supports previous local and international research on the discourses women draw on to understand abuse in romantic intimate relationships. This chapter provided a concise reiteration of my findings and their relation to the literature. A discussion of the limitations of the research and tentative recommendations for future research were provided.

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APPENDIX A

Interview schedule

[*I ask one of the following to start the interview*]:
Can you tell me about your relationship with your boyfriend/husband?
What have been the reasons for you coming to this organisation/support group?

[*The interviewer will follow up on comments made by the interviewee and may ask her to elaborate on things said*].

[*At the end of the interview the interviewer will thank the interviewee followed by a debriefing*].

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APPENDIX B

Consent form

You are invited to take part in my research project about intervention programmes for domestically violent men and support groups for women at an organisation. I would like to find out how effective the intervention programme is in reducing domestic violence. I would also like to know what your experience has been of the support group. The information you give me will be used to write a report and to help improve support groups for women and interventions for domestically violent men.

I am a student from the University of Cape Town. I am not connected to or working for the organisation or any intervention programme. I will not be giving any personal details that you give to me about your experience to the organisation.

Participating in this research will not affect your involvement with any intervention programme.

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Participation

- Participating in this study is voluntary.
- You are free to stop participating in this study at any time with no penalty or any other consequences.
- Any information you give to me is strictly confidential and you have the right to request that any information that you have given be removed from the study.
- You will be reimbursed for your travel costs to the venue of the interview.
- You will not be paid money for your participation in this study beyond travel reimbursement.
- Participating in this study will involve an interview with a tape recorder.
- You will have control over the tape recorder and be able to stop it or delete information from it at any time during or after the interview.

Benefits

The benefit of participating in this research is that you will be given a chance to voice your experiences. Your information will form part of my understanding of relationships and what is needed in order to end abuse against women.

Risks

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this research. All information will remain strictly confidential. Should any information be used in an article your personal details, such your and your partner's names, ages, or time of participation in the programme will not be revealed.

If you have any question about the study or decide that you would not like your interview included in the study, you can contact me on ___or my research supervisor Dr. Floretta Boonzaier on 021 650 3429.

If you would like to contact a counsellor to talk further about your experiences, you can call this number (name and number of counselling contact person at the organisation).

Thank you.
Kim de la Harpe

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