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**Battered and Bruised:
A Case Study Illustrating the Complex Nature of a Woman's
Separation from her Physically Abusive Husband**

by

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ABSTRACT

This research study employed the single case-study method with the aim of illustrating the complex nature of a woman's separation from her physically abusive husband. An alternative framework for analysis is proposed, which incorporates literature stemming from psychoanalytic and feminist origins into a unified understanding of the battering and escape process. Instead of focussing on society and context, the proposed model initially takes into account the effect of the battered woman's impoverished developmental history in relation to her paradoxical attachment to her abuser. Thereafter, the impact of such an upbringing is kept in mind when considering the broader factors that such a woman encounters within society and her context as she negotiates her separation and escape process. Material was gathered over an eleven-month treatment period that highlighted ambivalence on the part of a 37-year-old woman to truly separate and prosecute her abusive partner. It was shown in this study how it is possible to make sense of this behaviour by utilising the psychoanalytic concept of splitting, as well as by taking account of the developmental hurdle of separation-individuation. The impact of socialised, patriarchal religious values about a woman's role in relationships was also taken into account and shown to reinforce her powerful psychological defences and attachment to her abusive partner. In addition, inefficiency on the part of the police and the courts were shown to exacerbate her sense of helplessness, and frequent courtroom postponements served as a vehicle for ongoing harassment. Within this context, her ongoing exposure to violence, harassment and verbal abuse served to isolate and tap her already limited resources, which further hindered her ability to manage herself and the complex process of severing her ties to her abusive partner.

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“As a child, she learned very quickly to disregard the Father Bear Mother Bear stories she was given to read. In her version, Father Bear beat Mother Bear with brass vases. Mother Bear suffered those beatings with mute resignation.

In her growing years, Ammu watched her father weave his hideous web. He was charming and urbane with visitors, and stopped just short of fawning on them if they happened to be white. He donated money to orphanages and leprosy clinics. He worked hard on his public profile as a sophisticated, generous, moral man. But alone with his wife and children he turned into a monstrous, suspicious bully, with a streak of vicious cunning. They were beaten, humiliated and then made to suffer the envy of friends and relations for having such a wonderful husband and father”.

Arundhati Roy (1997) **The God of Small Things**

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This research study utilises a single case study approach to illustrate the complex nature of a woman's separation from her physically abusive partner. Within this context, it is worth noting that according to James & Gilliland (2001, p.332), one of the "most frustrating components of intervention with clients who are victims of domestic violence is their seeming inability to extricate themselves from the terrible situation they face". The reality is such that research has shown that "most women leave a battering relationship an average of three to six times, but do so with varying degrees of permanency" (James & Gilliland, 2001, p.295). There are two implicit questions embedded in these reported statements, which this qualitative research study seeks to address: The first concerns why women *stay* in abusive relationships. The second puzzling question considers why women who are beaten *return*, often again and again, to the very same abusive relationship (Celani, 1994).

The participant in this study was a 37-year-old woman, named Susan, who was seen in individual therapy for an eleven-month period. Susan had already separated from her abusive husband (named Greg) by the time she referred herself for psychotherapy. However, it soon became apparent that her husband continued to harass, stalk and physically abuse her at times even though they were no longer living together. It also emerged during the course of therapy that Susan experienced difficulty in truly severing her ties to Greg even though they were already separated. Given these circumstances, Susan was strategically positioned to provide useful insight into the battering dynamic for the following reasons:

- She was in a position to reflect on the factors that influenced her decision *to stay* with her abusive husband during the two-and-half years of their marriage.
- Given that they were now separated, she was also able to reflect on the difficulties that she experienced when she finally made the decision to leave him.
- Given that she appeared to be reluctant to conclusively sever her ties to Greg and give up her attachment to him, she was also in a position to provide information concerning why she was in danger of *returning to* or *reuniting with* her abusive partner.

In addressing its focal questions, this research study adopts a theoretical perspective that strives to achieve a unified understanding of the factors that influence the battered women's separation from

her abuser. As such, it is relevant to note that historically there has been a clash between feminist and psychoanalytic conceptions as to why battered women experience difficulty in extricating themselves from abusive relationships, with writers situating themselves strategically within one particular camp or the other (Hoff, 1990). This research study synthesises the various strains of thought on this topic by proposing a framework for analysis that modifies the original design of Grigsby and Hartman's (1997) Barriers Model. While this proposed framework for analysis is primarily informed by psychoanalytic thinking, the approach is taken, in line with Labe's (2001, p.5) study, that the "psychoanalytic object relations perspective and the feminist perspective are complementary". In essence, such an approach holds that the "patriarchal ideologies which organise [women's] beliefs about themselves and their relationships, intersect with the powerful psychological defences which enable them to preserve their attachment to their abusers". By adopting such an approach, this study permits a dialogue between psychoanalytic and feminist perspectives relating to this complex phenomenon.

The importance of this study lies in the reality that globally domestic violence is a very serious social problem (Van der Hoven, 2001). Although there are no reliable national statistics on the prevalence of domestic violence in South Africa, it is estimated that one out of every six women in this country has been battered by a male partner. It is further estimated that of these women, one in every four or 25 percent are assaulted by their boyfriends or husbands *every week* (Van der Hoven, 2001). South Africa is not alone in this regard, as the "pervasiveness of domestic violence is so great that it cuts across social, ethnic, sexual orientation, economic, cultural, religious, race, and geographical boundaries" (James & Gilliland, 2001, p.282). For example, studies have shown that in the United States a woman is beaten every 15 seconds (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1991 in James & Gilliland, 2001).

It must be noted within this context that physical abuse in domestic situations is not limited to husband-and-wife relationships as single, separated and divorced women are also at risk (James & Gilliland, 2001). Indeed, physical abuse within such a context is not restricted to male-on-female violence, as men are also assaulted by women (Langhinrichsen-Roling, Nedig & Thorn, 1995). Furthermore, lesbians, gays and bisexuals have also been shown to batter one another (Coleman, 1994; Renzetti & Miley, 1996). However, because women form the major target group of severe domestic violence (James & Gilliland, 2001) and because the participant in this study happened to be a heterosexual female, the focus of this research study is on *women* who are involved in domestic violence and the *men* who batter them.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

“You are more likely to be physically assaulted, beaten and killed in your own home at the hands of a loved one than anyplace else, or by anyone else in our society”

(Gelles & Straus, 1989, p.18 in Harway & Hansen, 1993, p.1).

The above statement reflects a growing recognition that domestic violence is a social problem of alarming proportions (Gortner, Jacobsen, Berns, Gottman, 1997). For example, estimates indicate that between 18% and 36% of women are physically abused by a male partner at some time in their lives (Avis, 1992 and Browne, 1993 in Wandrei & Rupert, 2000). In addition, battered women who leave violent relationships are at significant risk of returning to those relationships in the future, as estimates indicate that half of all attempts to leave an abusive relationship ultimately result in reunion with the batterer (Martin *et al.*, 2000).

The above statistics beg various questions and the discussion in this literature review will be on the following: “Why do women stay in such relationships?” (Rossman, Hughes, Rosenberg, 2000) and in particular, “Why do women who are beaten return, often again and again, to the very same abusive relationship? (Celani, 1994, p.4)”.

In considering these questions, two models from the literature that address this phenomenon are presented below. Part one of this literature review provides a description of the Barriers Model (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997) and part two addresses this issue from a psychoanalytic perspective. As will become apparent (in part three), these two divergent views reflect the contentious nature of this topic, as well as its history and political context. Part four of this review proposes an alternative “framework for analysis” that represents my attempt to provide a synthesis of the divergent views relating to this phenomenon.

2.1 THEORETICAL ORIENTATION I: THE BARRIERS MODEL (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997)

The Barriers Model represents the product of Grigsby and Hartman’s (1997, p.485) “combined experience of 23 years of work with thousands of battered women in shelter and non-shelter settings”. Its integrative design represents a useful tool within which to conceptualise the

difficulties faced by battered women in their attempts to extricate themselves from abusive relationships, as it takes into account the multitude of factors influencing such decisions.

Visually represented, the Barriers Model places the battered woman in the centre of four concentric circles, each circle representing a cluster of barriers in the battered woman's experience that potentially impedes her safety (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997). Each layer is not independent of the other; indeed, each influences the other and a victim is likely to experience barriers in all four layers or in some combination of them (McCloskey and Fraser 1997).

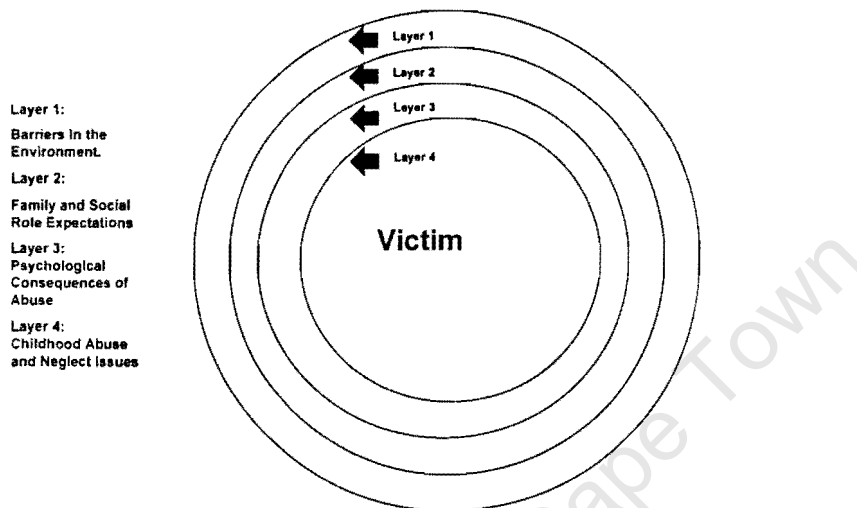


Figure 1: Model of Barriers: Effects of External Environmental and Life Experiences on Victims of Domestic Violence (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997, p.486)

Contrary to traditional therapy training and practise, which often focuses exclusively on a client's struggles from an individualistic, purely intrapsychic perspective, the primary locus of analysis in the Barriers Model is on society and context rather than the individual. Hence the model proposes that when working with domestic violence victims, it is essential to begin with a focus on the barriers in the outer layer (Layer 1). Once these barriers have been addressed, the therapist's task is to continue to move sequentially through the progressive layers towards Layer 4, which more closely approximates the traditional issues covered in individual psychotherapy.

2.1.1 Layer 1: Barriers in the Environment

Numerous factors are highlighted in the literature as barriers in the environment that may influence a victim's perception and experience of the availability of resources needed to escape a violent partner (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997; Schornstein, 1997; McHugh, 1993; Kirkwood, 1993). Three of

these factors will be discussed in this review, namely the influence of the batterer, the police and the criminal justice system.

2.1.1.1 The Batterer

Grigsby & Hartman (1997) make the point that the danger exists that trained therapists become so focused on the internal workings of the victim's psyche that they often forget tangible, even physical barriers to her leaving. For example, in severe battering scenarios, the abuser physically prevents the victim from leaving. In addition, most victims are in greater danger of increased violence after they leave the abuser (Schornstein, 1997) as it is estimated that more than half of the women who leave abusive relationships are followed, harassed, or further attacked after separation (Mahoney, 1994). In fact, separation is often the moment when the batterer's quest for control becomes lethal. Goodwin and McHugh (1990, referred to in McHugh, 1993, p.61) have labelled the "stalking, coercive harassment, and threats of violence that occur in the context of the attempted break-up of a romantic relationship 'termination terrorism'". As a consequence, many women live in a state of fear of retaliation before and after separating which is grounded precisely in their having a detailed knowledge from their experiences during the marriage of exactly what their ex-partners are capable of doing (Kirkwood, 1993).

The term "stalking" conveys some understanding of the potential dangers of separation, as it has become synonymous with some of the hardships and dangers that accompany the decision to leave an abusive relationship. However, Mahoney (1994) makes the important point that "stalking" does not describe women's resistance to violence prior to or after separation. It further does not address the many times that a decision to leave or threat of separation triggers an assault and it does little to recognise that violence does not end when a woman decides to leave a relationship. Mahoney (1994, p.79) therefore uses the term "separation assault" to describe "the violent attack on a women's body and volition by which a batterer seeks to keep her from leaving, force her to return, or retaliate against her departure". These attacks occur when the abuser feels his control eroding and it is at the times when a woman makes a decision to leave, at the moment that she actually walks out, or shortly after she has left that are often the most dangerous.

Mohoney (1994) is of the opinion that separation assault "may be understood to answer the question: Why didn't she leave? with a twist emphasising the batterer's power and control" (Mahoney, 1994, p.81). She further believes that "[n]aming this assault is one way to help show the relationship between control and coercion during and after relationships, and to help transform the cultural presumptions embodied in the question: Why do they stay?" (Mahoney, 1994, p.79).

2.1.1.2 Police Assistance and the Criminal Justice System

The decision by a battered woman to involve outsiders, especially powerful entities such as the police, is a risky and potentially dangerous venture if the police do not respond firmly against the offender. In addition to increasing the risk of further violence, an ineffectual response conveys the powerful message that no one will stop the violence and hold the abuser accountable for his actions (Grigsby and Hartman, 1997).

In South Africa, domestic violence is currently regulated in terms of the Domestic Violence Act of 1998, which is reported to represent a vast improvement on the Prevention of Family Violence Act, which it replaced. While the new Act is said to be revolutionary in its scope, Artz (2001a, p.29) makes the point that “it is worthless if it is not implemented properly and institutional inertia is great”. Artz (2001b, p.4) in fact writes “that the inconsistent and faulty application of the law by the police and other criminal justice agents, has in many cases illustrated that progressive legislation ... can be more of a theoretical exercise than a pragmatic one”.

Artz (2001b, p.7) reports that her research has begun to reveal particular patterns surrounding the inconsistent and sometimes erroneous application of the Act by the police. For example, although the new Act attempts to limit police discretion, “the police continue to make decisions about domestic violence cases that leave women with little protection and limited options at hand”. This does not appear to be a uniquely South African phenomenon, as in the United Kingdom, studies revealed that police response to complaints of violence within the home largely left women on their own with no legal recourse or protection against violent intimates or former intimates (Radford & Stanko, 1996). In addition, it has been found that many women do not seek criminal sanctions because sanctions are unlikely to help end the violence (Hoyle & Sanders, 2000). Although increased litigation has exerted additional pressure on law enforcement in the United States to act diligently to protect the victims of domestic violence (Hart, 1993), the reality is that psychologists still hear stories of inconsistent police responses to domestic violence (Grigsby and Hartman, 1997). This leads Hart (1993, p.15) to conclude: “the reality is that men still use violence against wives without fear of reprisal in many jurisdictions”.

As Kirkwood (1993, pp.104-5) notes this “denial of protection heighten[s] the sense of vulnerability which originally led these women to seek police aid and, in this sense, worsen[s] their circumstances”. In this way, the abuser’s “message that ‘no one will help you if you try to leave [or distance yourself from me]’ is validated” (Grigsby and Hartman, 1997, p.488). This has obvious negative implications for a woman’s perception that she is able to truly extricate herself from such a relationship.

Similar concerns as voiced above in relation to police assistance arise as victims attempt to use the criminal justice system. Grigsby and Hartman (1997) state that the legal system expects women to initiate action within a confusing system in which the outcome is uncertain and hence it is unclear as to whether engaging with the system in the first place will have the desired impact on the abusive situation.

The reality is such that instead of ensuring protection, the legal system can also obstruct women's safety through for example, creating more dangerous circumstances by requiring drawn-out court proceedings. In addition to affording the abuser a continued opportunity to continue his contact with his partner, such proceedings offer the abuser a "tool to continue his harassment of a partner" (Kirkwood, 1993, pp.105-6). Barron (1990 referred to in Kirkwood, 1993, p.106) goes on to point out that delays in court proceedings and complications in serving batterers with papers may create even more dangerous circumstances for women in such situations and hence deter women from seeking court action. This is because abusers are often aware of women's attempts to gain legal protection and that such protection has yet to be granted, or is granted but is not respected by abusers. These considerations lead Barnett and LaViolette (1993, p.39) to conclude: "although spouse abuse is condemned in theory, the law still allows it to continue in practise".

Grigsby and Hartman (1997) write further on this topic that it is not uncommon for women to find that their abuser has been released directly from jail, usually without notice to them, or that typical sentences of a suspended fine, a suspended sentence, or unsupervised probation have simply been meted out. This leads them to conclude that as in the case with the police, "abusers and victims can learn powerful messages from the inaction of the courts. Offenders can learn that the system is a joke, and that it is unprepared to hold them accountable. Victims often learn that there is no help for them here, and may turn to other strategies such as buying weapons" (Grigsby and Hartman, 1997, p.489).

2.1.2 Layer 2: Barriers due to Family/Socialisation/Role Expectations

Several factors within the battered woman's life are identified in this layer of barriers, which in the main examines the influence of female socialisation on battered women. According to Grigsby and Hartman (1997) and Kirkwood (1993), female socialisation in a patriarchal society has resulted in many women believing that they need a man to have value. To survive within this system of domination many women learn to put themselves last and to sacrifice their needs for those of their partners or children. It is argued that asking battered women who have made this compromise to

leave their partners is akin to “asking them to leave that which they may believe they need to survive” (Grigsby and Hartman, 1997, p.492).

Rules learnt in battered women’s families of origin are important in this regard, as the family represents one of the most important vehicles for socialisation in society (Grigsby and Hartman, 1997). Thus the family of origin might convey powerful messages concerning a woman’s role in a relationship and the importance of staying in a marriage at the expense of personal safety, which influences a battered woman’s response to her abusive situation. Even though parents and religious leaders may provide guidance and support, “patriarchal beliefs are often reinforced in religious institutions [and by parents] that tell women to obey their husbands as their husbands obey God, and refuse to sanction divorce despite knowledge of abuse within the family” (Grigsby and Hartman, 1997, p.493). In this way, religious and parental beliefs may hinder a woman’s movement towards separation.

Another important focal point in this layer is that women in general and battered women in particular, struggle to form healthy identities in a patriarchal society. This is the result of investing energy in attempts to placate abusive mates, which leaves little time for introspection concerning one’s own wants, needs and dreams for the future (Grigsby and Hartman, 1997). Kirkwood (1993) states in this regard that the continual presentation by abusers of conflicting perceptions causes women caught in such abusive relationships to question the validity of their own subjective reality, which amounts to a type of ‘crazy-making’. This serves to shatter women’s confidence in their own perceptions and often their loss of identity occurs subtly, almost imperceptibly through increased experiences of confusion and uncertainty.

The unfortunate end-result of this process is that it serves to cement potent cautionary messages in society about any woman’s ability to survive on her own (Grigsby and Hartman, 1997). The effect of this process is twofold: Firstly, asking a battered woman who has been stripped in this way of her identity and perceived ability to survive on her own to give up her abusive relationship may be asking her to do what feels impossible (Grigsby and Hartman, 1997). Secondly, Kirkwood (1993) writes that in order to escape from such a relationship, women need to be able to draw upon skills and abilities that they once possessed and that formed part of their identity. She is however, of the belief that the effects of the abuse results in them no longer having access to this knowledge “because they no longer [hold] a sense of identity or they [believe] their identity [does] not include such skills and abilities” (Kirkwood, 1993, p.70). As a result, a vicious cycle is set up which impedes battered women’s ability to extricate themselves from such abusive relationships.

Grigsby and Hartman (1997) make the further point in this regard that contemporary culture is such that it romanticises jealousy and obsession. As a result, many women come to expect some form of abuse in their lives, believing “that a certain level of obsession or jealousy is merely confirmation of their desirability and an indication of their partner’s commitment” (p.493). Within this context, Barnett (2001) documents a number of internal socialised beliefs, of which one is the acceptance of partner abuse, the existence of which obviously impedes a battered woman’s ability to separate from her abusive partner. The presence of such beliefs may be tied into the erosion of a battered woman’s self-worth as a consequence of their exposure to continual physical and emotional abuse by their partners (Kirkwood, 1993).

2.1.3 Layer 3: Barriers from Psychological Consequences of Domestic Violence

This layer considers the manner in which the psychological consequences of being the victim of spousal abuse impacts negatively on a woman’s ability to extricate herself from such a relationship. For example, Grigsby and Hartman (1997) note that in response to terror, an abused woman develops complex defence mechanisms, most commonly minimisation of danger and denial but also dissociative responses such as numbing, that act as barriers by impairing her ability to judge how much danger she is in.

Battering can also produce a variety of abuse-related physical health problems as well as stress-related conditions for battered women. For a detailed description of the many physical and somatic consequences of battering, the reader is referred to Sharps & Campbell (1999) and Grigsby & Hartman (1997). Grigsby and Hartman (1997, p.494) make the point that the experience of living with the physical and somatic consequences of battering “drain the victim’s physical resources and become barriers to her having the kind of energy needed to manage escape and safety”.

Studies have also shown higher rates of mental health problems in abused women compared to non-abused women (Sharps & Campbell, 1999). The most common psychological symptoms reported include anxiety, depression, helplessness, shame, guilt, eroded self-esteem, loneliness and pessimism, and memory impairment (Arias, 1999; Walker, 1994 in Grigsby & Hartman, 1997). Substance abuse or dependency problems have also been found amongst victims of domestic abuse (Arias, 1999; Grigsby & Hartman, 1997), which is postulated as being a form of self-medication that attempts to numb the terror or other overwhelming feelings associated with the abuse (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997). The result is that “almost all survivors of ongoing abuse have minimal emotional resources left by the time they need them most: when they are trying to escape for good” (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997, p.494).

Isolation often represents a further consequence of being a victim of domestic violence, as many battered women lose family ties and friendships as their relationship progresses. This often occurs in response to the coercive controls that the abusive partner imposes that gradually minimise the victim's exposure to people outside of their relationship. The battered woman's isolation also often occurs in response to feelings of shame in relation to the abuse that influences her decision not to disclose the abuse to family or friends (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997; Geller, 1992). In addition to creating intense feelings of loneliness, such absence of support limits the chances of a battered woman believing that she has the necessary resources to extricate herself from an abusive relationship. In fact, without outside intervention, her strategies to control the violence by for example, responding obligingly to the abuser's domination and controls, often enhance her isolation within the violent relationship (Stark & Flitcraft, 1996). It is therefore not surprising that Johnson (1988, referred to in Barnett & LaViolette, 1993, p.124) found that "63% of battered women who had little or no support returned to their abusers".

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is also commonly found amongst battered women (Arias, 1999) as victims are often emotionally depleted by nightmares, intrusive recollections of violent assaults, and so on (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997). Arias (1999, p.155) found that termination of an abusive relationship "appeared less likely in the context of PTSD and PTSD-like reactions, apparently no matter how badly a woman was treated by her partner". This is explained in that these women were *only* viably able to conceive of terminating an abusive relationship *if* high levels of psychological distress did not hamper them. PTSD is therefore "both an effect of domestic violence and a barrier to escaping it" (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997, p.495), as managing PTSD symptoms takes energy, skill and expertise.

2.1.4 Layer 4: Childhood Abuse and Neglect Issues

Grigsby and Hartman (1997, p.495) recognise in this layer of their model that childhood trauma or neglect "sets the stage for, and increases the power of, the barriers in each of the other three layers".

Within this context, it is relevant to note that Walker's (1984b in Berman, 1993) study found that 66% of battered women were themselves victims of or witnesses to violence as children. In addition, it is estimated that between 35 and 60 percent of battered women were victims of childhood sexual abuse (Carlson, 1984 in Labe, 2001). As a consequence many battered women carry the long-term psychological effects of their traumatic childhood upbringing into their relationships with their abusive partners.

In addition to impacting negatively on their efforts to extricate themselves from abusive relationships, these long-term effects may contribute towards women being vulnerable to further abuse (Grigsby and Hartman, 1997). This is because when “trusted figures abuse children in their care, children assume that anyone is capable, and perhaps entitled, to abuse them”. In this way, for survivors of childhood trauma “adult partner violence merely confirms an already suspect world view” (p.495), which affects a battered woman’s decision whether or not to stay in an abusive relationship. Recognition must also be made within this context that battered women who have histories of childhood trauma seem to overlook cues or behaviours in men that non-abused women would see as danger signs, such as aggressiveness or extreme sexism (Briere, 1989). It is almost as if their “internal radar system” no longer functions, or in cases of early abuse, it may never have developed (Grigsby and Hartman, 1997, p.495). Also, the survivor may be prone to “forgive and forget” her partner’s abusive behaviour because “she learned long ago to expel such painful events from memory in the hope that her current abuser will redeem himself in ways that her original perpetrator(s) did not” (Briere, 1989, pp. 20-21).

In addition to the above, the reality is such that the impact of childhood abuse and trauma has been associated with a wide range of long-term psychological consequences, such as depression, anxiety, eating/body image issues, sexual dysfunction, dissociative reactions, personality disorders, post-traumatic stress reactions and substance abuse¹ (Read, 1997). As a result, Grigsby and Hartman (1997, p.496) acknowledge that the impact of a woman’s “childhood experiences may have been so severe that they resulted in long-term mental health problems (e.g. depression, anxiety, or personality disorders) that have now created a second presenting problem”. Recognition is made within this context that the existence of such mental health problems would “constitute a serious barrier to the battered woman’s ability to escape” from an abusive relationship.

2.2 THEORETICAL ORIENTATION II: DEVELOPING A PSYCHOANALYTIC UNDERSTANDING

The emphasis in the design of the Barriers Model shifts the initial therapeutic focus away from psychological factors to an “analysis of primary environmental barriers” (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997, p.496). The reason for this is because the model “presupposes that symptoms displayed by clients are often the result of colliding with socially imposed barriers to well-being rather than

¹ Mullen *et al.* (1996, p.7) found that a history of any form of abuse, be it physical, emotional or sexual, was “associated with increased rates of psychopathology, sexual difficulties, decreased self-esteem, and interpersonal problems”. More specifically, sexual abuse was most strongly associated with sexual problems in later life, emotional abuse to low self-esteem, and physical abuse to marital breakdown. For a detailed discussion of the impact of childhood sexual abuse, the reader is directed Finkelhor (1988), Finkelhor and Browne (1985), Beitchman *et al.* (1992), and Briere and Runtz (1988).

deep-seated, individually rooted pathology” (p.486). As will be shown below, this focus on society and context rather than the individual results in Grigsby and Hartman’s (1997) model clashing directly with psychoanalytic understandings of the battering phenomenon.

2.2.1 Developing a Sense of Separateness

The battered woman’s difficulty in separating from her abusive partner appears, according to psychoanalytic thought, to have its origin in infancy when problems occurred during the process when the infant separated from another crucial relationship, namely that with his or her primary caretaker. In order to understand what is meant by this statement, it is necessary to draw on the relevant psychoanalytic literature which traces the development of an infant’s sense of itself as a separate person with its own identity. For this purpose, the work of Donald Winnicott and Margaret Mahler will be explicated, upon which its connection to the battered woman’s difficulty in extricating herself from an abusive relationship will be made.

Winnicott (1965a, p. 177) believed that “early infancy is truly a period in which it is not possible to describe an infant without describing the mother” as the infant is not yet able separate himself or herself from his or her mother. This led to the conclusion that during this period “there is no such thing as an infant”, rather a mother-infant unit (Winnicott, 1965b, p.39fn.). Ideally for its optimal development the infant should not be confronted with the premature awareness of his or her separateness, as he or she requires time to make this discovery. For this reason, the mother’s role during the first four to six weeks of life is to provide an environment in which postponement of separateness can occur (Ogden, 1990). This is largely achieved by the mother meeting the infant’s needs before need becomes desire.

If its mothering is ‘good-enough’² (Winnicott, 1971), Winnicott believed that the infant gradually develops the capacity to generate and maintain his or her own psychological matrix (i.e. sense of him or herself as a separate entity). In the process of developing such awareness, the infant exists for a period in the “potential space” *between* mother and infant. In order to grasp this elusive concept, it is useful to think of the “potential space” as being an intermediate area of experiencing that lies between the inner world and actual external reality. The infant is near the end of being merged with the mother but is not yet ready to recognise the mother as a “not-me” extension (i.e. a

² The task of the ‘good-enough mother’ is to shield the infant from an awareness of desire and separateness, but also paradoxically to safeguard the infant’s opportunity to experience desire and the accompanying knowledge of separateness (Ogden, 1990). The ‘good-enough mother’ is able to accomplish this seemingly impossible task through meeting the infant’s needs most of the time but as is natural, also occasionally failing to do so through her ministrations.

separate person) (Ogden 1990). During this period, the infant begins to weave “other-than-me objects” into his or her personal world, which Winnicott termed “transitional phenomena”. These transitional phenomena (e.g. a piece of a blanket, etc.) facilitate the infant’s journey from the purely subjective to objectivity, as well as the infant’s ability to conceptualise, as the transitional object “stands for [or symbolises] the breast, or the object of the first relationship” but it is not the breast (Winnicott, 1986, p.263). Such a transitional object is neither under the infant’s magical control like the previously perceived internalised mother/object was, nor is it as outside control as the real mother is. In this way, transitional phenomena precede but facilitate the process of reality testing, which includes the ability to perceive what is “me” and “not-me” in world (i.e. an awareness of separateness).

2.2.2 Separation-Individuation

Although Mahler’s work is linked to the traditional instinct model as well as the work of Klein, Winnicott, and others, she does not fall into a distinct category. She may best be described “as a developmentalist because she ... used object relations concepts to focus on the psychological birth of a person” (St Clair, 1986, pp. 105-106). For Mahler and her colleagues, ‘psychological birth’ refers to the gradual, unfolding process during which an infant becomes an individual by separating from the mother and individuating, a process that runs approximately from 4 or 5 months of age to 30 or 36 months (Mahler, 1986; St Clair, 1986).

Mahler and her colleagues carefully studied mothers and infants and developed a series of descriptions of normal stages that a child goes through during development (Celani, 1994). Like Winnicott, she believed that “growing up” entails a “gradual growing away from the normal state of human symbiosis, of ‘one-ness’ with the mother” (Mahler, 1986, p.222). In line with Winnicott’s views, the mother’s role during this process is to prevent the infant from prematurely developing his or her own resources by providing gratification of needs and preventing excessive frustration (St Clair, 1986).

Mahler’s model (1968) assumes that for about the first month of its life, the infant exists in an objectless phase (Mahler, 1986) during which time he or she “spends most of [his or her] time sleeping, seemingly in a state of primitive, hallucinatory disorientation” (St Clair, 1986, p.108). This phase, called *normal autism*, is followed by the *normal symbiotic* period during which time (from the second month of life) the infant has a dim awareness of his or her need-satisfying object. The infant behaves during this period as though the mother and himself or herself are an omnipotent system, a dual unity (Mahler *et al.*, 1975; Mahler, 1968) as he or she is not yet able to differentiate self from other (St Clair, 1986).

Good mothering pulls the infant gradually toward an increased sensory experience of the environment (Mahler, 1968). This is accomplished through repeated need-satisfying experiences from a source outside the infant that eventually conveys a vague affective discrimination between self and non-self. The infant gradually develops a body image and the core of his or her nascent feeling self (around which his or her sense of identity will be formed (Mahler, 1968)) is built around the infant's inner sensations. Mahler believed that the switch from the biological to the psychobiological occurs by the third month when the existence of memory traces allows for the beginnings of psychological forms of learning (St Clair, 1986).

At or about the fourth or fifth months of age, at the peak of symbiosis, the infant shows signs of moving into the four sequentially unfolding sub-phases of the *separation-individuation* process³ (Mahler, 1986; Fonagy, 2001). *Separation* and *individuation* are two simultaneous paths of development (St Clair, 1986), the former referring to the child's emergence from symbiosis and the latter consists of "those achievements marking the child's assumption of his own individual characteristics" (Mahler et al. 1975, p.166). This process is characterised by the following stages: *differentiation* or *hatching*⁴, *practising*⁵, *rapprochement*⁶, and finally, the *consolidation of individuality* and the attainment of some degree *emotional object constancy*⁷. From the above, it is apparent that Mahler's emphasis "is on the process of separation-individuation, the gradual distancing of the child from the mother, the transition from dependent to independent functioning" (Fonagy, 2001, p. 76).

It must be pointed out at this juncture that evidence from modern day infant research (Bahrack and Watson, 1985; Meltzoff and Moore, 1989 in Fonagy, 2001; Stern 1985, 1995) has cast doubt on Mahler's observation that during the first year of life the structuralisation of the infant's mind is such that it cannot differentiate self from other, inner from outer (Fonagy, 2001). Although Stern (1995, p.70) is likewise not in total agreement with Mahler's identified stages of development, he makes the important point in this regard that issues such as dependence, independence, autonomy and individuation are lifelong issues. It is his view that the "manner in which they get worked on and the forms these issues take change across developmental epochs". By this he means that these life course issues will "be negotiated differently and in the new terms of the capacities for

³ A detailed description of the four sequentially unfolding sub-phases of the *separation-individuation* process, as described by Mahler, can be found in Appendix A of this research study.

⁴ See Appendix A.

⁵ See Appendix A.

⁶ See Appendix A.

⁷ See Appendix A.

relatedness that the infant has ... acquired” at well identified nodal points of change in an infant’s development⁸.

Stern (1995, p.70) therefore does not refute the existence of these clinically relevant issues and their negotiation during infancy, he simply disputes that there are critical periods in early life in which the failure to resolve these issues results in the “irreversible consolidation of these issues”. He believes that “no one early period of life is specially devoted to the indelible writing of a definitive version of any of these issues” as “they are being worked on all the time.” This does not seem that far removed from Mahler’s thinking, as she believed that the transition from dependent to independent functioning extends to the entire life cycle, which she regards as constituting a more or less successful process of distancing “from the introjection of the lost symbiotic mother” (Mahler, 1972a, p.130 in Fonagy, 2001, p.77).

The above-mentioned debate appears to mirror disputes as to the distinction between oedipal and preoedipal issues in the analyses of adults. However, Bergman (1987, p.382) notes that even if issues have been reworked by the reorganisation of the oedipal period, the “feelings and fantasies connected with one’s separateness and the losses as well the gratification’s that are entailed in it, the identifications that begin to be formed during the period of separation-individuation, the pleasure in or conflict about autonomous functioning ... continue to colour to a greater or lesser degree, analytic work with adult patients”.

2.2.3 Separation-Individuation: Its Relevance to Battered Women

Celani (1994) utilises Mahler’s research on the stages of separation and individuation to describe the process of differentiation. According to Celani (1994, p.35), the term “differentiation” has two closely related meanings: “one refers to differentiation of the self from other persons; the other refers to differentiation within the self.” In his clinical work, Celani (1994) observed that adults who were unable to differentiate from their mothers during childhood, experience extreme anxiety if they are forced to function independently in adulthood because they never developed a stable sense of self that is independent of those around them. He notes that such adults tend to seek out and remain in undifferentiated relationships, which he also refers to as “merged”, “enmeshed” or “engulfed” relationships. By this he means that they invite “others ‘on the outside’ to come ‘inside’ [themselves] in order to make them feel whole” (Celani, 1994, p.42). This acts as a defence against the feelings of emptiness, aloneness and abandonment that stalk such individuals with poor early histories.

⁸ Which Stern (1995) identifies at about 2-3 months, 5-6 months, 8-12 months, and about 18 months

Celani (1994, p.41) states that “[I]ack of differentiation is the key to understanding both males and females who desperately return to destructive relationships”. In fact, he views “[I]ack of differentiation between adult partners [as being] the most commonly seen characteristic in couples engaged in the battering scenario”. This statement refers to his observation that it is commonly the case that both the batterer and his abused partner are poorly differentiated from each other. When they are together, their separate, inadequate senses of self merge together so as to give each party enough of a sense of safety and wholeness to function. “For these individuals, the loss of the object [i.e. an undifferentiated partner] (or the loss of the hope of a relationship with [such] an object) can lead to a collapse of the sense of self and to the terror of abandonment depression” (Celani, 1994, p.150). Such extreme dependency may be the result of an insufficiency of memories of being comforted during childhood, which Celani (1994, p.49) terms as constituting an “introjective insufficiency”. This results in such individuals being unable to soothe their inner turmoil. “They use their partner to reassure them and calm their inner chaos. Loss of their object can plunge them into the turmoil of their inner world, with no one to calm or reassure them” (Celani, 1994, p.151).

Celani (1994) postulates that this paradoxical combination of extreme dependency and lack of differentiation partly explains why an abused woman returns to her abuser because she is less fearful when the batterer is present even though he may assault her, as she needs him to stabilise her damaged sense of self. In her study, Walker (2001) appears to have obtained partial confirmation for Celani’s (1994) hypothesis as she found that battered women achieved significantly lower levels of object representations and self-other differentiation when describing themselves, their partners, and their descriptions of their fathers than did the non-battered women in her study. This leads Walker (2001) to conclude that her results suggest that early developmental patterns, specifically in significant relationships, are related to exposure to abusive relationships in adulthood.

2.2.4 The Attraction of the Abusive Partner/Return to the Bad Object

Celani (1994, pp. 5-6) views the return of the victim to the batterer after a severe beating as falling on the “extreme end of a continuum of a large number of behaviours, all of which involve the return of one person to others who are (more or less) abusive or rejecting”. Examples of milder forms of such behaviour occurs when people return repeatedly to rejecting romantic partners and when (now) adult children continue to live with or constantly visit their previously neglectful and abusing parents at the expense of other more appropriate relationships.

Celani (1999; 1994) is further of the view that ongoing domestic violence is the consequence of the relationship between two personality-disordered individuals. The proposal is made that the traumas in the childhood of these individuals were chronic rather than acute in that they suffered *cumulative traumas*; small undramatic hurts and disappointments that built up year after year, distorting and stunting the individual's growth and devaluing his or her sense of self. Celani (1999; 1994) postulates how such an early developmental environment predisposes certain individuals to unconsciously seek out relationships with partners who repeatedly abuse them by drawing heavily on Fairbairn's (1952) object relations theory.

Fairbairn (1952) noted that the neglected or abused child has no choice but to accept his or her mother because his or her complete dependency on her means that without her, he or she will not survive. This acceptance is based on the reality that the child has no power to change his or her parents and no ability to meet his or her own needs. In the case of the deprived child, the lack of alternative sources of support, coupled with occasional gratification that comes from even the most neglectful parents, causes the child to narrow his or her focus and increase his or her vigilance so as to ensure that he or she will not miss even a scrap of needed attention (Celani, 1999). The result of this is that the greater the child's deprivation, the more fixated he or she becomes on his or her maternal object. This led to Fairbairn's paradoxical observation that a rejected child is *more* rather than less attached to his or her mother than is the loved or accepted child (Celani, 1994). In this manner, Fairbairn noted that a child's dependency on his or her object is absolute, whether it is a nurturing or alcoholic mother (Celani, 1999).

As the parental object is often so unavailable and elusive, the child has to internalise it (frustrations and all) in order to maintain his or her essential attachment to the unavailable parent. In this manner, the child ends up developmentally frozen and fixated on the very parental objects that have rejected him or her (Celani, 1999). The child internalises his or her bad objects not only because they force themselves upon him or her and he (or she) seeks to control them, "but also, and above all, because he (sic) *needs* them. ... Even if [a child's parents] neglected him, he cannot reject them: for, if they neglect him, his need for them is increased" (Fairbairn, 1986). The tragic result of this process is that the child's ego structures become filled with internalisations of his or her abusive and rejecting objects. Due to the continual frustration of his or her legitimate needs, such a child is going to have large numbers of bad-object memories in his or her inner world (Celani, 1999).

In this regard, Fairbairn argued that it is psychologically intolerable for the young child to have an object that is simultaneously good and bad because he or she needs his or her object to be good so

that he or she can remain attached to it. “The only way out is for the child to split his (sic) internal (and external) object/s into two separate part-objects” (Celani, 1999, p. 62): “(1) the needed excited object and, (2) the frustrating, rejecting object” (Fairbairn, 1952, p.111). As the reality is such that the child is unable to control the external object/s, “he (sic) does his best to transfer the traumatic factor to the field of internal reality, within which he feels situations to be more under his control. This means that he internalises his mother as a bad [unsatisfying] object” (Fairbairn, 1952, p.110). The effect of this is that the badness now resides within him (or her), rather than in the mother. Fairbairn (1952, p.65) argues that “the child would rather be bad himself (sic) than have bad objects; and accordingly we have some justification for surmising that one of his motives in becoming bad is to make his objects good. In becoming bad he is really taking on the burden of badness which appears to reside in his [external] objects”.

Fairbairn (1952, p.111) suggests that on the one hand, the child’s internalised unsatisfying bad object frustrates “and on the other hand it tempts and allures. Indeed its essential ‘badness’ consists precisely in the fact that it combines allurements with frustration”. It is through this process that the child’s internalised world comes to consist of, as previously mentioned, the needed, exciting object and the frustrating, rejecting object. Through the use of splitting, the (spilt-off) frustrating object is separated from the (smaller) exciting object to ensure that the child’s rage at the frustrating object no longer threatens the loving, exciting (part) object. Fairbairn (1952) contended that this process of splitting paves the way for the formation of two mutually exclusive sub-egos within the child’s internalised world, which he termed the libidinal and anti-libidinal egos.

Fairbairn labelled the ‘anti-libidinal ego’ that part of the child’s sub-ego that relates exclusively to the frustrating and rejecting mother. The ‘libidinal ego’ refers to the feelings of excitement within the child when he or she is filled with the hope that love and caring are within his or her reach. By using this splitting defence, the child can remain full of hope for his or her exciting object, despite the fact that his or her object may have failed him or her, either through neglect or abuse, hundreds upon hundreds of times. The two egos remain in balance to prevent the collapse of the child’s entire ego structure: the larger the child’s anti-libidinal ego the greater the libidinal ego needs to be to keep him or her attached to his or her extremely frustrating objects (Celani, 1999).

Utilising this theory, Celani (1999, p.69, italics inserted) concludes:

The ideal man for the adult female who experienced a rejecting and exciting childhood is one who promises enormous love and conversely, is capable of great cruelty. *This type of man brings both sub-egos from her inner world to life in her external reality.* Often such males are blatantly characterological: they go to extremes to exaggerate their potency, masculinity, and

desirability. Normal women have little interest in men of this type, who appear to be shallow, superficial, and manipulative. However, the borderline⁹ woman finds them both extremely exciting and fascinating.

The reason why such a deeply split woman displaces her unmet needs from her original to a substitute object is explained by the following:

Thus, the deprived child becomes accustomed to inhibiting her rage toward her original objects because it would bring about complete abandonment. Despite this inhibition towards her original objects, the enormity of the rage in her anti-libidinal sub-ego, as well as the enormity of her hope in her libidinal ego demand expression. A “safer” object must, therefore be found who can (1) behave in a rejecting and abusive manner without abandoning the now-adult woman, and (2) at the next moment split into a completely separate ego state and offer promises of undying love. The most likely candidate for this extreme and unintegrated role is a partner who has a similar personality structure (Celani, 1999, pp. 69-70).

2.2.5 Applying Fairbairn’s Object Relations Theory to the Dynamics of the Battered Woman (Celani, 1999, 1994)

Lenore Walker’s (1979) model of the battering cycle, termed the “Cycle Theory of Violence”, provides a description of the repeated cycle that occurs in relationships between the battering victim and her abuser. Celani (1994; 1999) utilises Walker’s (1979) model to illustrate how Fairbairn’s theory as described above can be used as an explanatory model to understand how a physically abused woman is able to return to her abuser oblivious to the danger that will surely come in the next cycle of violence.

Celani (1994, 1999) postulates that during the Tension-Building Stage (Phase 1), which is characterised by verbal abuse or mild forms of physical aggression, the woman’s libidinal ego is dominant, based on her fear of abandonment, since her partner is lost to her when she sees him as a rejecting object. The onset of phase two, called the Acute Battering Incident” by Walker (1979) forces the woman to shift to her anti-libidinal ego. Her partner’s attempts to injure or kill her act as a metaphor for her parent’s destruction of her sense of self during childhood. Her anti-libidinal ego gets to discharge all the rage, contempt and hate from her developmental history as well as from

⁹ As will become apparent during the course of this literature review, the diagnosis of borderline personality is often assigned to battered woman (Harway, 1993; Celani, 1994,1999). The connection between borderline personality and battered woman forms the focal point of section 2.2.7, on p.21 of this review.

previous acts of violence towards her by her abuser. She is however seldom able to injure her much stronger partner (Celani, 1999, 1994).

In the final phase, described as Kindness and Contrite Loving Behaviour, the abuser tries frantically to get her to split back into her libidinal view of him as an exciting object. By transforming himself into a larger-than-life lover once again, promising undying love, and begging for forgiveness, the abuser's artful manipulations sadly resonate with the split-off libidinal ego of the battered woman. Once the abuser is seen as containing potential for love once again, the pull of the libidinal ego, which contains the hope that the reservoir of unmet needs stemming from childhood will be met, is often too powerful and this part-ego becomes dominant once again. The unfortunate result is that the woman then returns to her abuser, and the splitting defence is often so strong that the woman views her partner solely in terms of the dominant libidinal ego and is hence oblivious to the danger that will come in the next cycle of violence (Celani, 1999; 1994).

2.2.6 Repetition Compulsion and the Battered Woman

The psychoanalytic concept of *repetition compulsion* also offers insight into the battering dynamic. In order to appreciate the relevance within the context of this discussion of the compulsion to repeat, it is necessary to take cognisance of the extent to which exposure to and experience with violence in one generation increases the likelihood of violence occurring in the next generation (Stith & Rosen, 1990). Research has in fact demonstrated that "the only factor that differentiated battered women from non-battered women was that battered women were more likely to have witnessed violence between parents/caregivers while growing up" (Stith & Rosen, 1990, p. 8). Similarly Corvo and Carpenter (2000, p.123) note that "one of the most commonly reported findings about the aetiology of interspousal violence has been its intergenerational transmission". A further correlation noted in the literature is that female *sexual* abuse survivors are also several more times likely to be re-victimised again in later life (e.g. via rape or battering) than are women with no history of childhood sexual abuse (Briere, 1989).

The psychoanalytic concept of *repetition compulsion* offers an explanation for this phenomenon, as it refers to the human pattern of unconsciously choosing marital partners, friends, or lovers who reject the individual in the very same manner as he or she was rejected in childhood (Celani, 1994). Freud (1920) observed that the unconscious seeks to return to the major unresolved traumas of childhood in an attempt to master the conflict. This was theoretically troubling for him as it violated the pleasure principle, upon which his drive-based or instinct model was founded. To explain this state of affairs, Freud was constrained by his belief in instincts to invent a new instinct-based drive, which he called the 'death instinct'. In terms of this new instinct, such repetitious

behaviour occurred in an attempt to restore the organism or individual to an earlier state, to a condition prior to life (Brothers, 1995; Celani, 1994).

Fairbairn was able to shift attention away from instinct theory towards attachment theory by postulating “that these patients were recreating their earliest relationships.” This shift in thinking came about when Fairbairn recognised that when his patients returned to abusive parents, or to new individuals that treated them badly, they were recreating the emotional reality of their earliest attachment. He understood that the “histories of his abused children *contained a toxic combination of negative, frustrating feelings mixed in with a small amount of love*. Thus, the poorly reared child feels that ‘love’ is defined by the combination of antithetical feelings rather than the straightforward feeling of being accepted and treasured by a caring person. Conversely, the freely given love from a normal person is not perceived to be love but rather is experienced as something foreign” (Celani, 1994, p.145). This led Fairbairn to conclude that “repetition compulsion was, in actuality, a return to the bad object rather than an attempt to master early trauma” (p.145) as Freud postulated. In other words, the larger part of the repetition is the recreation of the identical emotional experience of childhood, with the result that the battered woman “lives in the identical emotional world as the one in which she was raised”¹⁰ (Celani, 1994, p.147).

2.2.7 The Borderline Personality Organisation and its Common Features with the Battered Woman

The diagnosis of borderline personality¹¹ is often assigned to battered women (Harway, 1993; Celani, 1994, 1999). In fact, Celani (1994, p.65) is of the opinion that “nearly all adult batterers and adult victims of repeated abuse” have personality disorders. The result is that Celani (1994, p.74) views “the battering relationship as part of a larger dysfunctional system that involves many inappropriate behaviours in addition to the battering behaviour itself”. This begs the question: “What are the links between such a borderline personality organisation and battered women?” Not

¹⁰ The above discussion represents the ‘object-relations’ viewpoint relating to the *compulsion to repeat*; an alternate, ‘self-psychological’ viewpoint is delivered in Brothers (1995, p.83), which holds that “trauma survivors may attempt to change the meaning of the old trauma through enactments in their present lives”. In other words, “what appear to be efforts to recreate trauma as it originally occurred turns out, on closer examination, to be efforts to revise it, or ... to rescript the original trauma scenario.” This view appears to be more closely aligned to Freud, who viewed the compulsion to repeat as involving some form of attempt at mastery.

¹¹ It felt important to clarify at this point that as Aronson (1985, p.209) notes, “considerable confusion and disagreement” has pervaded psychiatric literature “over the meaning of the term *borderline*”. Similarly Fonagy and Target (2000) note that “many writers have criticised the term *borderline* as [being] too imprecise”. It would be inappropriate to venture into a complex discussion concerning this issue at this juncture, but the reader is alerted to this particular debate, a useful discussion of which can be found in the two above-mentioned texts, as well as in particular in Gunderson and Singer (1975).

surprisingly, the answer to this complex question has its root in the borderline individual being developmentally fixated at precisely the same stage of development as Celani (1994) noted in relation to the battered woman. This connection and similarity will be illustrated below by drawing on the information already described in relation to Mahler's stages of development.

This is necessary, as Mahler's work has been extensively applied, particularly productively in the understanding of severe borderline pathology (Masterson, 1976; Masterson & Rinsley, 1975; Fonagy 2001). Masterson & Rinsley (1975, p.165) elaborate on Mahler's view of borderline pathology and it is their contention that "the determining cause of the fixation of the borderline individual is to be found in the mother's withdrawal of her libidinal availability (i.e. of her libidinal supplies) as the child makes efforts towards separation-individuation during the rapprochement sub-phase"¹². Masterson (1976 referred to in Fonagy, 2001, p.75) "suggested that the mother of the borderline individual is likely to have been borderline herself, thus encouraging symbiotic clinging and withdrawing her love when the child strives for independence". In this way, the child becomes fixated at the rapprochement sub-phase because it is exactly at this time that the "child's individuation constitutes a major threat to the mother's defensive need to cling to her infant and, as a consequence, drives her toward removal of her libidinal availability" (Masterson & Rinsley, 1975, p.165).

While describing the difficulties experienced by borderline individuals, Masterson (1988, p.75) writes that "[c]ertain functions of the ego – reality perception, impulse control, frustration tolerance, and stable ego boundaries – can only develop through successful separation and individuation. The child who cannot separate from his mother will not internalise these functions, which she had performed for him, and make them his own. Consequently, he exhibits deficiencies in all these areas". In relation to these difficulties, "Masterson believes that the borderline patient experiences a deep conflict between the wish for independence and the threat of loss of love, and thus searches for a clinging attachment bond with a mother substitute. Such a tie will temporarily ensure a feeling of safety, but any wish for self-assertiveness will present him with the terror of abandonment. A lifelong and vicious cycle of brief blissful unions, ruptures and emptiness and depression will ensue" (Fonagy, 2001, p.75). These statements echo and resonate strongly with Celani's (1994) observations and contentions in relation to the battered woman's relationship with and return to her abusive partner as previously described. In this way, the pieces of the complex

¹² A detailed description of the *rapprochement* sub-phase of development can be found in Appendix A.

puzzle in relation to this complex issue appear to fit together through the links drawn above between the various strains of psychoanalytic thought on this topic¹³.

2.3 DICHOTOMY AND ONGOING DEBATE

The description thus far has presented two very different understandings in the literature concerning why a battered woman stays with or returns to her abuser. This discrepancy reflects the deeply polarised nature of the field of domestic violence research (Labe, 2001). An analysis of the literature reveals that women are *either* assumed to be damaged and/or personally responsible for their inability to extricate themselves from abusive relationships (as depicted to a degree in the psychoanalytic understanding described above); *or* they are helpless victims of men in a sexist patriarchal society (as evinced by the primary focus being on society and context in the Barriers Model) (Hoff, 1990). This divide reflects the contentious nature of this topic, as well as its history and political context.

Historically, violence against wives has been exercised with impunity for centuries, as it was regarded as corrective discipline and chastisement of erring wives and hence necessary for the 'well-being' of women (Hart, 1993). In fact, right up to the 1960's and 1970's, intimate violence and controlling behaviours of men against women were viewed as private, family business (McCloskey & Fraser, 1997).

The first wave of "explanation" for the presence of domestic violence was initially focused on discussions subscribing to the view that women were inherently masochistic (McCloskey & Fraser, 1997). The foundation for such arguments seem to be based on Freud's (1924, p.162) contentious viewpoint stated in his paper titled *The Economic Problem of Masochism* that "[m]asochism comes under observation... [*inter alia*] as an expression of the feminine nature". Feminism, through its social-construction stance and its focus on learned gender roles, economics and reproduction issues, created a "pathway out of the quagmire of 'women *want* to be beaten, assaulted, and raped' and instead focused on uses of power by those who were benefiting from the situation" (McCloskey & Fraser, 1997, p.434). This led to the drive to provide political and legal remedies for domestic violence from the early 1970's to the present.

¹³ It is felt necessary to add that clinical descriptions of psychoanalytic treatment with borderline persons describe individuals "who regress dramatically... showing psychotic-type phenomena, and evoke intense feelings in the analyst. These feelings, in combination with the patient's intense emotional lability, create a troubled and troublesome analytic process. Their journey through analysis is marked by transference and often by countertransference enactments, with periods of intense dependence punctuated by ruptures in the treatment process" (Fonagy and Target, 2000, p.854).

As is evident from the discussion thus far, the various explanations relating to domestic violence tend to situate themselves strategically within either the *feminist* or *psychological* camps, and each camp is disparaging of the other.

For example, Walker (1979, p.43) states:

Prior research on family violence has tended to be clinically oriented and to focus on the pathology of the individuals involved, primarily the intrapsychic conflicts of the man and the woman. The research that I have been conducting ... suggests that this approach is inadequate for understanding the battered woman problem.

Harway (1993, pp. 30-31) takes this further, as she sees some writers from the psychoanalytic school as applying “pathological labels” to battered women. She states that in terms of such a view, battered women are described “as having a basic need to provoke violence, as displaying passive hostility that contributes to violence, and as having a masochistic motivation that promotes continued violence”. She is of the opinion that “no empirical support for these postulates exist”. In addition, she states that the diagnosis of borderline personality disorder, which is “commonly given to battered women”, views the battered woman in terms of “coping skills deficits or characterological weaknesses”. This approach is adopted at the expense of “looking at her behaviour as the result of an interaction between the woman and the context within which she is traumatised”. The danger inherent in such treatment, according to Harway (1993, p.31) is that it may be seen as “blaming the victim” which may serve to re-traumatise the woman. Similar criticism of this “labelling perspective”, which suggests that the woman “is personally responsible for her problems”, is voiced by Hoff (1990, p.48).

Psychoanalytically oriented thinkers are also not shy to voice criticism of feminist explanations of ongoing abuse. For example, Celani (1994, 1999) recognises that Walker’s (1979) model (termed the “Cycle Theory of Violence”) provides an accurate description of the repeated battering cycle, but regards it as being an exceedingly weak explanatory model. In her model, Walker (1979) makes use of the concept of “learned helplessness”¹⁴ to explain the dynamics of battering, as do Barnett and LaViolette (1993). Similarly, Harway (1993, p.32) contends that the theory of learned helplessness “remains a leading explanation of the learned behaviour of battered women”. In delivering his criticism, Celani (1994, pp. 174-175) has the following to say:

¹⁴ Learning theory approaches operate on the “principle that both the perpetration and acceptance of physical and psychological abuse is conditioned and learned behaviour” (James & Gilliland, 2001, p.288).

This model fits nicely with the politically based goal of eliminating all possibility that the victim has any conscious or unconscious role in the battering scenario by focusing on the consequences of beating on the victim's behaviour. It denies that the victim has a deep abiding attachment to the abuser, and instead assumes that she is with him because she is too damaged by the abuse to escape... Walker has missed the key issue, which is that the victim *does not want to flee the batterer*... The learned helplessness that Walker cites as the key to understanding the behaviour of the victim is not as a consequence of the battering but rather the consequence of the victim's developmental history. Walker cannot accept this because it suggests that the victim has character problems, and this opens up the possibility of another round of blaming the victim.

2.3.1 Critique of Divergent Understandings

Both the Barriers Model (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997) and the psychoanalytic understanding (as described earlier) fall into the above historical and politicised trap of adopting polarised and dichotomous thinking in relation to the battering scenario. As will be shown below, this results in both these models offering an impoverished understanding, when considered in isolation, of the battered woman's separation and escape process.

2.3.1.1 Critique of the Barriers Model

While the integrative design of the Barriers Model (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997) represents a useful tool within which to conceptualise the difficulties faced by battered women, this model has its shortcomings. It is submitted that these shortcomings stem from Grigsby and Hartman (1997, p.486) positioning themselves primarily within the feminist camp as evinced by their model's primary focus being on society and context rather than "deep-seated, individually rooted pathology". It is further submitted that this results in the influence of a battered woman's impoverished developmental upbringing not being practically considered in relation to its effect on her ability to negotiate her way through layers 1 through 3 of their model. As will be illustrated in the points below, this translates into the model presenting a partial or incomplete understanding of the separation and escape process. The following key points are highlighted for discussion in this regard:

- (i.) As described above, Grigsby and Hartman's (1997) focus on society and context emphasises the role of the *batterer* in layer one¹⁵ of their model. The reality may well be that fear, coercion and control do play a crucial role in a woman's decision to *stay* in an abusive relationship.

¹⁵ See 2.1.1.1 on p.5 above

In addition, it seems realistic to assume that “separation assaults” (Mahoney, 1994, p.79) do most likely make it that much more difficult for women to separate and move on with their lives once they have made the decision to leave an abusive partner. However the term “separation assault” does not cast light on the battered woman’s decision to *return* to an abuser, particularly if one examines it in connection with the third phase in Walker’s (1979) description of the “cycle of violence”. In this phase, Walker (1979, pp. 65-66) writes that following an assault, the abused women in her study “were thoroughly convinced of their desire to stop being victims, until the batterer arrived”. The batterer then “constantly behaves in a charming and loving manner. He begs her forgiveness and promises her that he will never do it again”. This is often accompanied by a “profusion of flowers, candy, cards, and other gifts in her hospital room. He usually engages others in his fierce battle to hold onto her ... anyone he could commandeer would call and plead his case to her”.

Walker (1979, pp. 67-68) then goes on to state the following:

The battered woman wants to believe that she will no longer have to suffer abuse. The batterer’s reasonableness supports her belief that he really can change, as does his loving behaviour during this phase. She convinces herself that he can do what he says he wants to do. It is during this phase that the woman gets a glimpse of her original dream of how wonderful he is. ... The battered woman chooses to believe that the behaviour she sees during phase three signifies what her man really is like. She identifies the good man with the man she loves. He is now everything she ever wanted in a man. ... Helpers of battered women become exasperated at this point, since the women will usually drop charges, back down on separation or divorce, and generally try to patch things up until the next acute incident.

At the risk of sounding redundant, the first point that needs to be highlighted in view of the above is that reunification does not appear to be the result of fear, coercion and control, and hence does not appear to be explained in terms of these factors. Secondly, Celani (1994, p.172) argues that this “striking, stunning, almost unbelievable reversal on the part of the victim” cannot be based on a “moment of faulty logic” as Walker and other learning theorists imply. Celani (1994, 1999) in fact is of the opinion that this shift can only be explained if one has knowledge about the splitting defence and an understanding of the victim’s inner world, as described earlier in the psychoanalytic component of this review.

(ii.) Criticism was levelled at the *police* and the *criminal justice system* within layer one¹⁶ of the Barriers Model (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997) concerning the inefficient protection that is delivered to battered women, which hinders their movement towards separation. Bearing this in mind, Labe (2001) conducted a study within the South African context that explored how the battered woman's attachment to her abusive partner impacts on her interactions with the legal system and non-legal resources. Utilising the theoretical frameworks of object relations theory and feminism to inform her study, she reached the following conclusion:

The participants' interactions with the legal system and with non-legal sources of help were structured by their reliance on splitting... and by the dictates of patriarchal ideology. Whilst it is undoubtedly true that at one level the participants sought help to get protection from abuse, the study shows that their help-seeking was motivated by their conflicting desires to punish and reform their husbands. The participants sought help in ways which enabled them to strike a compromise between expressing their anger at their husbands, whilst simultaneously preserving their psychological attachment to them. The study concludes that the woman's interaction with the law and with other helping resources reflect their attempts to preserve their paradoxical attachments to their husbands, and to stabilise their own fragile sense of self and gender identity. (Labe, 2001, ii)

Studies such as Labe's (2001) provide further evidence that a battered woman's difficulties cannot be considered in isolation, ignoring the impact of her developmental history, as it has the potential to effect her help-seeking behaviour and her interactions with the legal system and non-legal resources.

2.3.1.2 Critique of Celani's (1999, 1994) psychoanalytic conceptualisation of the battering dynamic

Similar criticisms can also be made in respect of the above-described psychoanalytic understanding of the battered woman's separation and escape process as it too provides a partial and incomplete account of the difficulties faced by women in such relationships. It is within this context that feminist criticism is justified (Harway, 1993; Mahoney, 1994; Walker, 1979). The psychoanalytic theory in relation to the battering dynamic (as discussed in layer 4 above) was based primarily on Celani's (1999, 1994) application of theories originally formulated by Fairbairn, Mahler and Winnicott. The following are some of the shortcomings of this approach:

¹⁶ See 2.1.1.2 on p.5 above.

(i.) Celani's (1999, 1994) psychoanalytic account focuses exclusively on the internal psychic structure of the battered woman in explaining her attraction to her abuser, with the result that it ignores the *context* within which she is abused. The implication of this is that Celani fails to consider just how difficult it is for the battered woman to separate from her abuser in the context of his ongoing separation attacks (Mahoney, 1994). In addition, Celani does not consider the inefficient protection granted to battered women within this context by the police and the legal system and the role that this plays in hindering her separation process.

(ii.) Celani (1999, 1994) "cannot explain why it is that women are more likely than men to fall victim to the type of paradoxical attachments to bad objects which he describes so forcefully in his book" (Labe, 2001, p.32). This is largely because even though he acknowledges the patriarchal context of abuse, his psychoanalytic account of the battered women's attachment to her abuser does not address the issue of gender and the development of gender identity in both men and women. It is also largely due the lack of consideration given within his approach to the impact of socialisation within patriarchal society, and the effect that this has on a woman's ability to extricate herself from a violent relationship.

(iii.) Celani's predominant focus on the battered woman's impoverished developmental *history* results in him ignoring the *current* consequences of the battered woman's ongoing exposure to violence within the battering relationship. He devotes an entire chapter of his book to describing the "observable characteristics" found in the battered women (Celani, 1994, p.74) and considers in great detail the consequences of what he describes as the battered woman's "ego immaturity and identity problems" (p.102). However, he does not consider the psychological consequences on battered women of their ongoing exposure to abuse within the battering relationship and in so doing, ignores the effect of such consequences on a woman's ability to separate from her abuser.

2.4 PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

It is apparent from the above discussion that both the Barriers Model (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997) and the psychoanalytic understanding do not in isolation "take into account the whole of the battered woman's experience", which was Grigsby and Hartman's (1997, p.496) intention when designing their model. As a result, an alternative framework for analysis is proposed in this literature review that represents my attempt to incorporate literature stemming from psychoanalytic and feminist origins (as described above) into a unified understanding of the battering and escape process.

The proposed framework for analysis utilises the comprehensiveness of the Barriers Model (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997) as its basic structure, yet makes a modification to its basic design by inverting the process suggested by the model. Instead of focusing on society and context, the proposed model initially takes into account the effect of the battered woman's impoverished developmental history in relation to her paradoxical attachment to her abuser. Thereafter, the impact of such an upbringing is kept in mind when considering the broader factors that such a woman encounters within society and her context as she negotiates her separation and escape process. Practically considered, this proposed framework for analysis therefore amounts to a shift from the 'outside in' approach in the Barriers Model (from Layers 1 to 4) to an "inside out" approach, focussing initially on Layer 4 and then considering the cumulative effect through Layers 1, 2 and 3.

By adopting such an approach, it will be shown that it is possible to draw on literature stemming from psychoanalytic and feminist origins and to incorporate them into a unified understanding of the battering and escape process. It is believed that the proposed modification to Grigsby and Hartman's (1997) model is not too great a leap from the original design of the model, as psychoanalytic and feminist perspectives were already incorporated implicitly and explicitly (respectively) into the model at its inception.

The hypothesis underlying the above-described proposed alteration to the model is that it is possible to cultivate a deep understanding of how early childhood experiences set the stage and act as a barrier that impede a woman's movement towards safety, by drawing upon the psychoanalytic literature described earlier. Such an approach would take into account the infant's early development and attempts to link issues such as separation-individuation with a woman's return to or decision to stay with her abusive partner. Fairbairn's (1952) object relations theory would also be utilised where possible to expand on this understanding, as well as to further explain the battered woman's attachment to her abusive partner in terms of her internal psychic structure. The compulsion to repeat that seems evident in battered women would also be kept in mind, as well as the difficulties that an individual diagnosed with 'borderline personality' experiences.

The assumption underpinning this approach is that it is possible that a woman's impoverished childhood experiences impacted upon her developing, internal psychic structure in such a way that it resulted in long-term mental health problems that exacerbate her difficulty in extricating herself from an abusive relationship. If this were the case, her internal psychic structure would constitute a serious barrier to her ability to escape. While it is not always necessary that a woman caught up in an abusive relationship invariably has such a psychological make-up, writers such as Celani (1994;

1999) seem to feel that this is predominantly the case. It is submitted that the evidence relating to the intergenerational transmission of domestic violence appears to add credence to such claims.

It is further submitted that a consideration of the above factors would result in the reader being well placed to comprehend the numerous *other* difficulties that a woman *with such a psychological history and make-up* will face in her attempts to extricate herself from an abusive relationship. As a result, in terms of the proposed framework for analysis, attention would then shift to a consideration of the factors described in layers 1, 2 and 3 above of the Barriers Model (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997). However, the influence of the battered woman's internal psychic structure and impoverished developmental upbringing would be kept in mind and critically woven into the discussion of the remaining layers.

Such an approach would not discount the numerous barriers that the battered woman encounters in her *environment*, but would also consider how her personality structure influences her interaction with the batterer, the police and the criminal justice system. In addition, the influence of *socialisation* within patriarchal society, religious institutions, the family and the battering relationship would also be considered and incorporated into the psychoanalytic discussion that preceded it. Practically, such a discussion would therefore facilitate a dialogue between psychoanalytic and feminist thinking.

Within this context, it is worth noting that the psychoanalytic theory in relation to the battering dynamic (as discussed in layer 4 above) was primarily based on Celani's (1999, 1994) application of theories belonging to the object relations school of thought, which is a post-Freudian field of psychoanalysis. It is also important to note in this regard that Colleen Heenen (1998, p.96, italics inserted) states that the "theory and practise of psychoanalytic *object relations* therapy constitutes a major part of the developing field of *feminist* psychotherapies". This realisation is important, so that the reader can appreciate that the proposed framework for analysis does not amount to the 'mixing of apples and pears'¹⁷.

¹⁷ An example of the application of feminist object relations theory is offered by Colleen Heenen (1998). Eichenbaum and Orbach's (1982, p.15) writings, which are based on Chodorow's (1978) initial feminist object relations theory, see the "unconscious as the intra-psychic reflection of our present child-rearing and gender relations". Applying this view, Colleen Heenen (1998, p.100) describes how in contemporary modern society, "women's role is to defer to men, to follow their lead and to articulate themselves in relation to others. As such they must be connected to others; in particular in shaping their lives according to their male partners. In order to do this, women must develop 'emotional antennae' (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1982, p.29) which enable them to anticipate and thus duly meet others' needs. A psychological requirement in performing this nurturing and caretaking role is for woman to 'put her needs second' (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1982, p.29)".

In order to weave psychoanalytic thoughts into a consideration of the impact on the battered woman of *socialisation* and/or *role expectations*, it is necessary to adopt a similar approach as in Labe (2001, p.5), which regarded the “object relations perspective and the feminist perspective [as being] complementary”. Within this context, the reader should note that the psychoanalytic discussion above illustrated how in the case of the poorly individuated woman, the loss of an undifferentiated partner “can lead to a collapse of the sense of self and to the terror of abandonment depression” (Celani, 1994, pp. 150-151). In addition, it was described how the borderline patient experiences “a deep conflict between the wish for independence and the threat of loss of love, and thus searches for a clinging attachment bond with a mother substitute” (Fonagy, 2001, p.75). If one keeps these psychoanalytic thoughts in mind, it is submitted that one can obtain deep insight into the extent of a battered woman’s socialised belief that she “needs a man to survive” (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997, p.492). It is believed that the proposed framework for analysis would allow in the above manner, for a dialogue to be set up between feminist and psychoanalytic understandings of difficulties that a battered woman encounters in attempting to extricate herself from an abusive relationship. In this way, one can develop an appreciation of the manner in which socialised, patriarchal religious values about a woman’s role in relationships reinforce a battered woman’s powerful psychological defences and attachment to her abusive partner (Labe, 2001).

The final layer in the proposed framework for analysis would take into account the psychological consequences of a battered woman’s ongoing exposure to domestic violence. Recognition would be made within this layer that the consequences of such ongoing exposure to abuse drains the battered woman’s physical and emotional resources such that she does not have the energy needed to manage escape and safety (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997). However, it must be borne in mind that the psychological consequences of her exposure to domestic violence do not occur in a vacuum or in isolation. What this means is that, as discussed previously, it is common for battered women to come from abusive backgrounds. This factor is mentioned, as women who have suffered emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse during childhood carry the legacy of such a traumatic upbringing, with its host of psychological implications as also discussed above, into their adult life. The unfortunate implication of this is that the psychological consequences from battered women’s *subsequent* abusive relationships *add* to the difficulties that such women possibly experience as a result of their childhood upbringing. It is postulated that the effect of this is ‘symptoms building upon (earlier) symptoms’ each in turn negatively effecting the other. It is submitted that if one keeps such an understanding of the impact of a battered woman’s impoverished developmental history in mind, one could appreciate that her internal supply of the resources that she needs to manage separation and escape may have *initially* been depleted prior to its further depletion,

through her ongoing subsequent exposure to domestic violence. If one keeps such awareness in mind, it is submitted that one can truly appreciate the complexity of the difficulties that a battered woman encounters in her journey towards separation.

2.4.1 Conclusion

This review initially traced two different conceptualisations in the literature of the difficulty that a battered woman encounters in extricating herself from a physically abusive relationship. It was shown that such dichotomous understandings of the separation and escape process belong to the type of polarised, politicised thinking that has in general characterised domestic violence research. Shortcomings in both these approaches were highlighted and it was demonstrated that in isolation, both the Barriers Model (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997) and the psychoanalytic understanding as described, offer an impoverished and partial account of the battered woman's separation and escape process. As a result, an alternative framework for analysis was proposed based on a modification of the original design of the Barriers Model that attempts to bridge this divide and address some of the shortcomings in the above-described approaches.

It will be shown during the course of the remaining chapters of this research study that the proposed modification of the Barriers Model (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997) allows for increased dialogue between psychoanalytic and feminist perspectives relating to the battering phenomenon. In this way, the proposed framework for analysis adds to the comprehensiveness of the original design of Grigsby and Hartman's (1997) model. It will be illustrated how the complexity of the battered woman's experience is brought home in an even stronger fashion, if one truly takes account of her life history of which her current abusive relationship forms part. Taking into account the legacy of her *upbringing* offers a richer and more convincing understanding of the enormity of the battered woman's difficulties that she encounters in *society* and in the *context* of her partner's ongoing abusive behaviour. It is submitted that only in this manner, is it possible to more fully understand the complexity of the battered woman's difficulty in extricating herself from an abusive relationship.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter briefly outlines the methodology of single-case study research employed in this study. A case study is “a case-based research project that examines a single case, usually in considerable depth” (Edwards, 1998, p.37). Edwards (1996, p.10) makes the point that in “the field of psychotherapy, careful and systematic observation and description of individual cases has been the cornerstone on which the development of scientific knowledge has been built”. An immediate advantage of this methodology is that “case studies can take us to places where most of us would not have an opportunity to go” (Donmoyer, 2000, p.61). However, this particular methodology is not without controversy, as the case study, as a research method, has struggled over time to acquire the status associated with other forms of research (Yin, 1984).

This struggle for legitimacy appears to centre on two key issues. The first concerns the recognition that because the “analyst herself is so embedded in the process (in influencing it both directly and indirectly and also in terms of understanding what is taking place), it is difficult for current scientists to regard the analytic situation as a kind of laboratory or the analyst as simply a neutral observer” (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p.225). Alderfer (1985, p.37) has dubbed the inevitable involvement of the researcher (in case studies) in the research itself as “self effects”, and he considers researchers’ unwillingness to acknowledge their own influence a major impediment to valid and useful research. However, this critique when taken to its natural conclusion should not be limited to case study research alone. For as Donmoyer (2000, p.51) points out, whatever type of research methodology is employed, discussion of the “role of paradigms in research reminds us that researchers must inevitably rely on an *a priori* conceptualisation that is not determined by the data but, rather, determines what the data are”. As a result, when “clinicians utilise social scientists’ cause-and-effect findings, for instance, they are also influenced by social scientists’ *a priori* conceptions of social action and social relationships”.

The second critique of case studies concerns the notion of *generalisation*, and how it applies to case study research. As a case study is often thought of as a “constituent member of a target population”, and since “single members poorly represent whole populations, one case study is seen to be a poor basis for generalisation” (Stake, 2000, p.23). This view stems from the “nature of (ruling) ascendant, accepted paradigms of research methodology”, which, modelled on physics, holds that the task of research on any phenomenon is concerned with the “identification and

measurement of its key predictors and the mathematical functions that link them” (Edwards, 1996, p.11). This prevailing view, however, is itself open to criticism. For example, even “statistically significant findings from studies with huge, randomly selected samples cannot be applied directly to individuals in particular situations; skilled clinicians will always be required to determine whether a research generalisation applies to a particular individual” (Donmoyer, 2000, pp.50-51). A further critique is delivered by Donmoyer (2000, p.66), who poignantly illustrates how “schema theory – in particular the Piagetian notions of assimilation, accommodation, integration, and differentiation – provides an alternative way of talking about generalisability”.

Briefly, schema theorists believe that all knowledge of the empirical world must be filtered through cognitive structures, which shape what we know. Piaget called this shaping process *assimilation*. Through the complementary process, termed *accommodation*, cognitive structures are reshaped to accommodate novel aspects of what is being perceived. “After the dual processes of assimilation and accommodation have occurred, Piaget’s theory indicates, a cognitive structure will be more *integrated* (a particular structure will accommodate more things) and more *differentiated* (a particular structure will be divided into sub-structures)” (Donmoyer, 2000, p.59). According to this theory, novelty stimulates accommodation and consequently, the knower’s cognitive structures become more integrated and differentiated with the result that he or she can perceive more richly and hopefully more intelligently (Donmoyer, 2000).

Based on this view, Donmoyer (2000, pp.62-63) argues that viewed from a “schema theory view of generalisability, the purpose of research is simply to expand the range of interpretations available to the research consumer”. This is because by so doing, the research consumer’s cognitive structures expand, and for this reason, from the perspective of schema theory, “the outlier is prized because it has great heuristic value” (which is not the case within quantitative, multivariate research methodologies (Edwards, 1996) that support the more traditional notion of generalisation) (Donmoyer, 2000, p.63).

The value of this schema theory notion of generalisation and its relevance to case study research is firstly that case studies have the advantage in that they are concerned with *particulars*. They hence have the advantage that “resources can be used for a much more thorough investigation of each individual, yielding a complex set of psychologically rich, qualitative information that provides an in-depth understanding” (Edwards, 1996, p.11). In this way, from a schema theory perspective of generalisation, knowledge is gained. Secondly, case studies “allow us to look at the world through the researcher’s eyes” (which, as described above, has been used within the traditional view of generalisation to fuel critique of case study research). However, Donmoyer (2000, pp. 63-64)

points out that in the process of seeing through the researcher's eyes, we are able to see things we otherwise might not have seen. "In short, case studies can help those who are uninitiated into a particular theoretical viewpoint to come to understand that viewpoint... If the theoretically coloured case studies are well done, they can add depth and dimension to theoretical understanding".

Based on the above, and other arguments (Edwards, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Schofield, 2000; Stake, 2000), it should not be surprising that the claim is made that the case study method is not simply "a somewhat useful secondary tool for the serious work of scientific hypothesis testing" (Mahrer, 1988, p.697). Rather, case study research has a "central place in the development of systematic" and valid knowledge (Edwards, 1996, p.12). Edwards (1990, p. 13) points to Eksteen and Bromley as exponents on the validity of the case study, and states that "the intensive, largely retrospective study of individual cases can be as rigorous and informative as the extensive, prospective study of samples of people, whether in survey or experiments. One can generalise from individual cases, and many important real-life problems cannot be studied effectively, or at all by experimental methods of enquiry".

Edwards (1996) describes a continuum of case research, ranging from largely descriptive accounts to those designated to challenge and test developed theories. The basic method employed in this research study, which describes the complex nature of a woman's separation from her physically abusive partner, is *theoretic-heuristic* in nature in that "descriptions are used as a basis for the generation and experimentation with theory" (Edwards, 1998, p.47). This study attempts to develop grounded theory, in that "theory is built up step by step and is based on well-substantiated observations". The aim is to develop, or in this case to refine and modify, and in so doing extend, Grigsby and Hartman's (1997) Barriers Model as a conceptual framework for understanding the phenomenon associated with a battered woman's escape from her abusive partner. As Edwards (1998, p.47) states, the "aim [of theoretic-heuristic research] is to develop a conceptualisation, or a framework of distinctions and relationships, that opens up the essential qualities of the type of case being investigated and whose value can be re-examined against further cases".

The procedure adopted in this study was to arrive at a deeper understanding of the battered women's separation and escape process based on 35 therapy sessions conducted over an eleven-month period with a woman (named Susan) who was struggling to extricate herself from an abusive relationship. Extensive clinical notes were kept throughout the therapeutic process. All of the sessions were audio-taped, some of which were transcribed verbatim; for the remaining sessions, detailed therapy notes were made immediately after each session, based on the

researcher's memory of the events that transpired during the session. The sessions were then presented to my supervisor each week, which allowed for intersubjective interpretation of the case material.

The typewritten therapy and supervision notes were processed using an adaptation of the interpretative approach outlined by Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999). The first step in the analysis procedure was that of *familiarisation and immersion* (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999) during which time each therapy session was read a number of times. Notes, drawings and brainstorming were then used, based on the findings in the literature, in considering all the sessions as a whole. This was done in an attempt to arrive at a detailed understanding of the factors that influenced Susan's separation and escape process. This paved the way for the second stage, which involved the *inducing of global themes* from the text. This involved reading across the sessions and was very much a bottom-up approach in that the data was not forced into any predetermined categories. Instead, the aim was to identify the organising principles that were naturally embedded in the material provided during the therapy sessions (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999).

During the activity of developing themes, sections of the data in each session were marked off as being instances of, or relevant to, one of the global themes. This facilitated the third phase in the analysis during which the data was *coded*. This entailed using the cut-and-paste function in a word processor to break down the data obtained from the sessions into labelled meaningful pieces under the global code headings (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). Once the data was organised in this fashion, the various global themes could be *elaborated* upon, as subtle differences and nuances in the material grouped under each thematic heading became more apparent. This offered an opportunity to further refine the original coding system (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999).

In this way, a hermeneutic spiral was created in that a continuous back and forth process was established between the literature and the text whereby different parts of the text were interpreted, which were then related to the totality of the text, and then re-evaluated accordingly. In this way, a deeper understanding of the factors that influenced Susan's separation process was built up as the hermeneutic spiral developed (Kvale, 1996). This formed part of the final and fifth stage of the analysis procedure, which involved *interpretation and checking*, and it yielded the results that are described in chapter five of this study.

It is worth noting that a potential drawback of the approach adopted in this study was that there was no opportunity for Susan to reflect upon the conclusions arrived at in this study. This was precisely because the material on which this study is based was gathered during the course of therapy. Be

this as it may, the adopted approach had certain distinct advantages. The reality of the therapeutic process was such that Susan determined the content of what was discussed based on what she chose to bring to each session. As a result, I did not purposively set out and make it a focus of therapy to address questions relating to the decision to stay with or return to an abusive partner. Rather, information in this regard emerged naturally during the course of therapy. The value of this approach was that it allowed for a freedom in which other relevant and important factors could emerge over an eleven-month period that provided a valuable and rich context within which to situate her struggles in relation to her separation and escape from her abusive husband, named Greg. As a result, it is felt that this single case study allowed for the emergence of material that in all likelihood might not have emerged had a more purposive study been conducted.

Even though I was both therapist as well as investigator in this study, and much of my interpretation and understanding has been influenced by this role, I have attempted to provide as accurate a perspective as possible on Susan's experience. In this regard, my ongoing supervision allowed for necessary distance and reflection. What I can also add in this regard is that this particular case represented the first long-term individual adult therapy case that was assigned to me during my clinical psychology internship. It is my impression that my relative naiveté in terms of my exposure to both theory and the practise of giving therapy acted as a buffer that tempered my couching my clinical notes and impressions in terms of any particular paradigm or frame of reference. This was precisely because I lacked such knowledge and understanding at such a time. As a result, I simply attempted to record as accurate a recollection as possible of the events that transpired in sessions that were not typed verbatim from the audio recordings. In addition, by far the majority of the therapeutic process involved the provision of support and containment, which ensured that I did not steer the process in terms of trying to box or fit Susan's experience into any theoretical understanding of the battering dynamic. This understanding was largely arrived at in retrospect, while writing this study.

It must be noted at this point that Susan terminated her therapy prematurely (after eleven months). As this termination occurred prior to my broaching the subject of my utilising her case for the purposes of this study, I did not have the opportunity to obtain her permission to do so. However, as a client in a training unit, she was aware that material from therapy would be discussed with colleagues as an integral part of the training process. She signed permission for this. These factors were taken into consideration when considering the ethical issues involved with this study, particularly in view of the personal material contained in the research data. It is important to note in this regard that, in accordance with ethical guidelines, any identifying features in the case material

(such as the patient's name or any names associated with the patient or the treatment venue) have either been omitted or changed.

It is also necessary at this juncture to note that the aim of this research study is to elucidate the factors associated with Susan's separation from her abusive husband. As such, other areas, although highly interesting, are beyond the scope of this case study. Some of these excluded areas include in-depth discussions relating to my experience of conducting therapy with Susan, the potential impact that my being a male had on this process, and my understanding of the therapeutic process and why therapy terminated when it did. Any discussion relating to such matters are only included where it is felt that it will further enhance the focal issue of this study, which is concerned with understanding the complex nature of Susan's separation from her physically abusive husband.

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER FOUR

HISTORY AND FORMULATION

4.1 HISTORY

Susan was a thirty-seven year old woman who referred herself to the clinic (where I was completing the first year of my clinical psychology internship) for individual therapy stating that she was experiencing difficulty since she had separated from her husband. She presented as a tall, attractive, articulate, neatly dressed black woman with medium length curly, black hair. She had a confident, flirtatious, comical demeanour, which oscillated with a more vulnerable, scared, confused and lonely appearance. She attempted to conceal this latter aspect of her experience of herself in her world, but was finding it increasingly difficult to do so as she was struggling on a host of different levels since the termination of her two-and-a-half year marital relationship.

The nature of her marital relationship

Susan was 30 years of age when she met her future husband, named Greg, who was two years her senior. She was initially reluctant to marry him as her parents' abusive relationship had left her believing that she would never want to get married. However, Susan eventually agreed to marry Greg, two-and-a-half years after she met him after he had proposed for the third time. She was however shattered to discover a few months into their marriage that Greg suffered from a drug addiction. The severity of his addiction came home to her after she had supported him through five unsuccessful stints at various rehabilitation clinics.

In addition, Susan revealed that her marriage to Greg had been physically abusive in nature. As if to provide confirmation for this statement, she pointed to a scar above her left eyebrow and told me that she had twice needed stitches on the same place on her face after Greg had assaulted her. Susan and Greg frequently became involved in physical confrontations and many of their fights resulted after Susan challenged him when he arrived home intoxicated. As Susan's face was frequently bruised, she saw less and less of her parents and friends so as to avoid having to answer embarrassing questions concerning the nature of her bruises. Susan was also subjected to other emotionally distressing experiences during the course of her marriage. For example, she described how she once walked into a room when Greg had a gun in his mouth and on another occasion, he took a gas canister with him to the bathroom and threatened to "blow himself up". Susan was unsure if he seriously intended killing himself or if he was simply trying to get her attention

through these gestures. She said that she would still be feeling the effects of these incidents weeks later while he just got on with things as if they never happened.

Susan painted a picture of how Greg and she gradually drifted apart from one another to the extent that they hardly spoke and were less sexually active. Greg's response was to then physically beat her up. After each beating Susan said that she "couldn't even look at him". Her marriage exerted such a strain on her that she decided to resign from her job because she found that she was preoccupied while at work, which she feared would impact negatively on her performance. She then started a business with her husband, but as his drug problems worsened, he began selling their belongings including their business computer and her jewellery in an effort to finance his addiction. She stated that in addition to losing her flat, car and numerous possessions, she also lost her dignity and self-respect during the marriage. She said that she compromised herself because she wanted to make it work and was in denial for a long time as she thought it was her "Christian duty" to support her husband and to "turn the other cheek".

Susan had a miscarriage three months after their marriage, following which she was so distraught that she ingested a large supply of sleeping tablets in an effort to take her life. She then phoned her parents and a friend came over, who fed her yoghurt and kept her awake, as her doctor had instructed. Susan has limited recollection of the events that transpired during a twenty-four hour time frame extending over this period. After this incident, her doctor suggested that she should start taking anti-depressants, which she did for one month before stopping because she did not like the side effects.

She suffered a second miscarriage (in May 1999) when in the midst of a violent interaction Greg kicked her in the stomach while she was pregnant. Susan went for an ultrasound after this attack and when she was later called back for a second ultrasound, she initially thought that it was because she might be having twins. Susan told me that the tests revealed that the foetus had had a heart attack and she became tearful as she described how hard it was for her to lose this child. At the same time, she chastised herself for allowing herself to fall pregnant. She said a part of her was "relieved" because she did not want to bring children into a marriage like theirs, but she added, "the other side of me hoped that things would get better". She said that through this miscarriage, it was almost as if "G-d was telling [her] that [she] had to find another way". She finally moved out in November that same year after she discovered that Greg had been fired from his job for being intoxicated while at work. Greg helped her pack her boxes, but she later realised that while doing so, he was in reality putting a number of her possessions aside, which he then later sold to buy drugs.

Early upbringing and childhood experiences

Rather than being an unusual occurrence, the physical and emotional abuse that Susan experienced during her marriage represented the continuation of a common theme in her life. Although her family was financially “very comfortable”, her childhood experiences appear to be characterised by extreme feelings of powerlessness and helplessness in the face of physical and sexual abuse and emotional neglect.

Susan’s pregnancy was unplanned and resulted in the marriage of her parents. As the eldest of two children and only daughter born to her parents, she recalls that they were very overprotective towards her while growing up. She felt that she had little freedom as there were numerous restrictions placed on her, which her brother, three years her junior, was not subjected to. Susan cried as she told me that her father had a drinking problem and that from a young age, she frequently witnessed him assaulting her mother such that she needed to be hospitalised on a number of occasions. By the time Susan reached twelve years of age, her father started physically assaulting her in addition to her mother. Susan said that she used to be beaten “quite often, at least once a week”. He would often lash out at her after he had been drinking or when Susan intervened in an attempt to protect her mother from his attacks, both verbal and physical.

Her father hit her to the extent that at times “clumps of [her] hair would come out”. She also related a story of how her father reacted after he had caught her kissing a boy on her sixteenth birthday. She described how he made her drop her panties in front of all her party guests to ensure that this boy had not had intercourse with her. She cried and spoke in depth of how shaming this had been for her. She was unable to attend school for one week thereafter because of the welts on her back after her father then beat her with the branch of a quince tree. She broke down crying as she said, “Everyone talked about it at school and everyone in the community thought I’d slept with the boy when I hadn’t ... So I started bunking school without my parents’ permission, which they found out about and then I got a hiding as well”. She said that she still has the scars on her back from the beating that she received on her sixteenth birthday.

While Susan’s grandmother lived in the same neighbourhood and tried to be a source of support for her at times, she was powerless to prevent Susan’s ongoing exposure and experience of violence. For example, Susan relayed a story of how she once attempted to move in with her grandmother when she could no longer tolerate the abuse and circumstances at home. Her effort to remove herself from the situation proved fruitless however, as her father collected her from her grandmother later that same evening. All her grandmother could say to Susan was: “What can I do,

he's your father?" Susan sobbed as she said that as a result, there was no one that she could turn to, as everyone including her grandmother was scared of her father.

Her relationship with her younger brother (David) was also strained and highly charged. He was physically much bigger and stronger than her and he used to threaten "to "kill [her]" at times while they were growing up. He also physically assaulted her on occasions. One of these incidents occurred when Susan was invited to join him and his friends in a game of 'cops and robbers'. Susan was caught, tied up, beaten and left for hours in her parents' garage. She said that she could not tell her mother what had happened, as her mother would have blamed her, telling her that she was "silly for getting involved with them". Susan also used to get physically punished by her father when her brother failed to do his household chores even though she was powerless to ensure that he completed his tasks. Her brother only ever received a hiding from her father on one occasion while they were growing up. As a result, she grew up believing that her parents showed favouritism towards David. In her adult life, she is still very sensitive towards noticing instances when she perceives her parents displaying special treatment towards her brother.

In the midst of the above experiences, Susan indicated that her mother did little to protect her from her father (and David's) aggression. Instead, at times, her mother would report instances when Susan failed to do her household chores, with the result that Susan was beaten once again by her father. Susan also relayed a story of how her mother slapped her in the face after she gashed her knee open as a child. Her mother's response was to then slap her a second time after it emerged that she needed to be taken to hospital for stitches.

It also emerged during the course of therapy that Susan was chronically sexually abused by a man who lived in her neighbourhood from the age of 8 years old. He would pick her up and give her a ride to the shops and abuse her along the way. Susan never told anyone about his abuse and seemed angry that her "parents suspected nothing even when he gave [her] a pen that matched [her] school uniform in junior as well as high school". Susan even suspected that this man was having an affair with her mother as she recalled that he brought her mother flowers on one occasion. She expressed shame because she felt that she "should have known better because [she] still went to her abuser's house when [she] was 17 or 18 years old and [she] could have said 'No' at that age". She said that he initially gave her suckers and then money in exchange for sex. She said she looks at prostitutes today and "feels like [she's] done the same thing that they do for a living".

There were strong indications that Susan was raped by her cousin when she was in Std 7 or 8. She once again voiced anger in relation to her parents; in particular towards her mother, as after this

suspected rape, her mother did not ask her what had happened even though she had phoned her mother to collect her. Susan asked me: “Surely she should have suspected that something had happened?”

Susan matriculated from a private school in Cape Town. Her sense of isolation that she felt at home appeared to be continued at school as revealed when she said, “what made school particularly difficult was that at that time if you were dark-skinned, you weren’t in the in-crowd at school. You weren’t invited to parties – you were like an outcast”. Given this context, she found it excruciatingly embarrassing that everyone from school witnessed what happened to her on her sixteenth birthday, and she felt that this incident served to make her even more of an “outcast”.

When Susan was approximately 20 years old, her mother decided to divorce her father. Her father responded by admitting publicly in church that he had physically abused both Susan and her mother in the past. He stated that he had accepted Christ and he promised that he would never do so again. Although Susan was reluctant to believe him, she said that she came to see a change within him and he has never subsequently assaulted her (or her mother). Even though she grew up hating him, she said she is now closer to her father in her adult years than she ever was while she was growing up.

After school, Susan obtained a university degree. She continued to live at home until the age of 27 years. Even though she started working in her early twenties, she gave her salary during this period to her mother who then gave her monthly “pocket money”. When Susan finally decided to move out (at the age of 27 years), she said that her mother refused to speak to her and tried to “manipulate” her into staying at home. For example, her mother told her that she was moving out solely for the reason that it would enable her “to get up to naughty things”. She said her mother acted in this way because she did not think that Susan was “responsible enough” to move out on her own. During the course of therapy, Susan revealed that prior to meeting Greg, she was involved in a relationship that was also abusive in nature. As mentioned above, Susan resigned from her job during the course of her marriage to Greg, and has subsequently found work in a variety of other areas, with limited success. Her parents have once again become a very important part of her life since her separation from Greg. Susan said that she has found herself being constantly drawn and pulled towards spending her spare time with her mother even though it is contrary to her better judgement, as her mother’s company generally tends to irritate her.

Presenting Problem

The pattern of violence and abuse that had been prevalent in her life did not terminate with Susan's decision to separate from her husband. When she arrived at her initial appointment she reported that Greg had been stalking her ever since their separation. She complained that he seemed to be a constant presence outside her flat and that he then followed her to wherever she went once she left her apartment. For example, on one occasion he followed her and sat opposite her pretending to read a book in the library. In addition, he had threatened to physically harm both herself and her friends and stated that he would see to it that she was never again gainfully employed in Cape Town. He often hurled abuse at her from her kitchen window so that Susan was unable to cook food on some nights. Susan sometimes left her entire flat in darkness except for her bedroom light which was not visible from the street so that Greg could not tell that she was home.

Not surprisingly, Susan felt that in the midst of all of this she was "coming to pieces". She was struggling to hold herself together and she appeared to be depressed. She complained of anhedonia, constant fatigue, reduced appetite, and lack of energy, concentration difficulties and social withdrawal. She appeared genuinely confused about her identity stating that she "did not like the person she had become" and wanted to be the "happy-go-lucky person" she used to be prior to marrying Greg. She stated: "I want to find out who the real me is ... I'm sick and tired of being this piece of garbage that everyone does what they want to!" While not being actively suicidal, she entertained thoughts of death as at times she thought that everyone would perhaps be better off if she was no longer around. She also indicated that she frequently woke in the middle of the night and went for walks on her own on the street, on one occasion choosing the most dangerous street that she could find. She reported feeling disappointed when she then came home unscathed. An example of other risk-taking behaviour that she displayed involved her driving her car recklessly, such as overtaking three cars at once on blind rises at night.

4.2 DIAGNOSIS

The following provisional diagnosis was made, which was confirmed during the course of her therapy:

Axis I:	300.4	Dysthymic Disorder
	V61.12	Physical Abuse of Adult (by partner)
Axis II:	301.83	Borderline Personality Disorder
Axis III:		None

4.3 THERAPEUTIC PROCESS

Therapy with Susan proved to be a difficult and stressful process. All in all, 35 sessions were conducted with Susan between an 11-month period extending from early June 2000 until the middle of May 2001.

When Susan first arrived for therapy, she presented as a woman who was the helpless victim of an ongoing torment at the hands of her ex-husband. The law had not protected her and as she put it she “felt like [she] was coming to pieces”. My own counter-transference response at this time was to feel equally helpless. Susan mentioned at this time that she felt that she would only obtain relief from Greg’s abuse by relocating overseas. I recall thinking a similar thought at this time. To complicate matters, her attendance was incredibly infrequent during this early stage in her treatment. She would voice suicidal intent and then fail to show up for a subsequent session; or Greg would confront her wielding a gun and she would attend one session and then miss the next two. As a result, I was forced to sit with the uncertainty as to whether she had either done some harm to herself or been hurt at the hands of Greg. This proved to be a difficult situation for me to hold. It was apparent over this period that Susan found it difficult to attend therapy at a time when in my opinion she was in dire need of support. This was so, as her infrequent attendance coincided with a period of real instability in her life, which included in addition to the above, her being hospitalised for a perforated ulcer as well as her changing jobs.

Initially it was contracted that she would be seen once weekly, but this was extended to two sessions a week (after her fourth appointment) as it was my opinion that she needed this additional support given the severity of Greg’s ongoing harassment and the strain she was under. However, her attendance only stabilised after we agreed that she would be seen once weekly for therapy and after I referred her to a lawyer who specialised in the area of domestic violence. This referral freed me in that in my mind her lawyer now shared the responsibility for ensuring her physical safety. Susan and myself were then able to examine deeper underlying issues in therapy seeing that the frame was now adequately in place.

Susan initially used much of the space afforded to her in therapy over this time to voice criticism regarding the treatment that she was receiving at the hands of the police and the legal system. As mentioned, this together with Greg’s continued unwanted involvement in her life fostered feelings of real helplessness within her. It was apparent that although she complained in this regard, she also harboured some reluctance to press charges against Greg because she felt guilty about possibly having him jailed. Gradually in time, Susan felt safe enough to acknowledge that a part of her still needed Greg’s ongoing involvement in her life even though she complained that he was making her

life miserable. She also disclosed during this period, the ongoing nature of her sexual abuse that she suffered at the hands of her neighbour, as well as her apparent rape when she was in Std 7 or 8.

Susan took it upon herself during this period of her therapy to formally press charges against Greg and she successfully had him arrested on a charge of assault. However, it became apparent that Greg still exerted a major influence on her even though his *physical* harassment (of her) was reduced considerably after he was arrested. Susan appeared to become increasingly depressed over this period and her doctor placed her on an antidepressant (Luvox). Her condition seemed to stabilise before I took a 3-week vacation in December and it was mutually agreed that she would recommence therapy at the beginning of January 2001.

Susan however did not respond well to the break and I had to work hard to re-establish the frame once again. She had taken herself off her anti-depressants, and once again lost her job and been hospitalised (during the vacation) for a medical condition. For this reason, the pattern seemed to be repeating itself in that as beforehand, her attendance was very inconsistent at a time when it appeared that she had little control over the events in her life. When Susan threatened suicide at the end of the second appointment that she attended in 2001, I once again took on a caretaker role in trying to ensure her safety. Only once I had actively acted in this fashion did her attendance at therapy sessions stabilise once again.

It seemed that Greg's harassment took on a much-reduced tone in the remaining four months that she attended therapy. Therapy however continued to be a difficult process during this period, as her mood lability ensured that there was reduced continuity between sessions. She also continued to give the impression that she was reluctant to truly 'show herself' within the therapeutic space. Susan did however manage to verbalise anger in relation to Greg to the extent that she acknowledged that she entertained thoughts about killing him on occasions. At other times, she was able to recognise that she had not had time to mourn the loss associated with the termination of their relationship.

Susan spent much time during the latter part of her therapy focusing on her relationship with her mother; in particular voicing frustration and irritation in relation to her failed attempts to get her mother to stop treating her as a child. Yet, Susan was clearly still attached or connected to her mother, as evinced by instances when her mother's behaviour represented a source of embarrassment for Susan, almost as if Susan had acted or behaved in such instances. As was the case during Susan's childhood, it seemed that her mother was reluctant to allow Susan to separate and step into adulthood, as she continued to use Susan as an object to satisfy her needs as opposed

to Susan's. Her underlying depression appeared to worsen after her mother ostracised her by excluding her from family gatherings and ignored her on her birthday following an argument. As her depression continued, Susan began to run the real risk that she would have to return to her parental home as she had not taken active steps to find a new apartment even though she had terminated her lease in an effort to finally end Greg's harassment. As it was my impression that her returning to live with her parents would have severely hindered her ongoing struggle towards separation and individuation, she was actively encouraged to find a new apartment.

When Susan arrived at her second last appointment her mood appeared to have changed considerably in that she was very excited and she indicated that she had indeed found a new apartment. She then verbalised a very strong desire to see Greg "one last time" and she kept on asking me if I thought this was wrong. My response was to examine her reasons for wanting to see him and I linked it to previous patterns that they had engaged in since they had separated. Susan arrived at her final appointment and immediately spoke about the nature of her own aggression and its links to her expression of intimacy. We were able to make links between the manner in which intimacy was somehow always connected to abuse while she was growing up. Given this understanding, Susan indicated that she no longer wanted to see Greg one final time, as she had expressed in the previous session.

I am not in a position to comment on the nature of Susan and Greg's ongoing relationship and whether they made or still are in ongoing contact with one another, as Susan failed to return to therapy after she took a vacation to travel abroad at this point.

4.4 FORMULATION

The following factors were taken into account in order to understand the repetitive pattern of abusive relationships in Susan's life, as well as her underlying feelings of depression and risk-taking behaviour since her separation from Greg:

Susan was born into a severely dysfunctional family in which her mother was repeatedly the target of her father's physical aggression throughout her childhood years. Given the reality that Susan's pregnancy was unplanned and led to the marriage of her parents, it seems understandable that her mother may have had feelings of ambivalence towards Susan during her infancy. In addition, the ongoing nature of the abuse that her mother was subjected to must have in all likelihood severely impacted on her ability to mother Susan during her infant years. Caught up in her own distressing world and emotional turmoil, it is unlikely that her mother had resources available to meet Susan's needs.

It is hypothesised that this impacted negatively on Susan's development such that she did not receive the containment that she needed during her early years. As she had no one to soothe her inner turmoil, she was forced to keep unpleasant experiences and affective states separate from pleasurable experiences and affective states so as to avoid feeling overwhelmed by her emotions. As a result, she came to utilise the defence of splitting as a defence against the harsh, frightening, violent reality of her familial environment. In this manner, she succeeded in keeping separate, fears of abandonment from her drive towards separation (and associated feelings of aggression for the manner in which this drive was thwarted). Her internal world thus came to be composed of split-object experiences.

This was the primitive defence that Susan had at her disposal at the onset of her sexual abuse in middle childhood. Her abuser in all likelihood came to play an important caregiver role in her young life in light of the hostile environment and lack of attention that she received at home. As such, Susan possibly enacted the same pattern that she engaged in with other parental figures in her life. As steps towards separation were also possibly met by complete withdrawal by her abuser and even possibly hostility and threats, it is possible that Susan came to need her sexual abuser in some way to ward off feelings of abandonment depression. In this way, Susan must have found herself in a vulnerable and powerless position, needing someone who evoked feelings of shame within her. The sexual abuse that she suffered must hence have been highly distressing and confusing for her given these ambivalent feelings. As such, Susan was possibly forced to split off feelings of shame and aggression towards her abuser from any pleasure and feelings of neediness, which served to further cement her split object world.

From the above, it is apparent that Susan was possibly socialised into a world in which the expression of intimacy and love was associated with abuse, which raised ambivalent feelings within her, as she was in the unenviable position of needing her abusers. Based on her mother's experience, Susan probably further imbibed the message from a young age that it is a woman's 'Christian duty to support her husband' no matter what, which represents a further strong socialising influence within a patriarchal society.

Such feelings of powerlessness related to abuse were in all likelihood intensified during adolescence when her father started to physically abuse her at home. The rage that her father flew into on her sixteenth birthday possibly communicated to her the power associated with the expression of her sexuality. It is also possible that Susan had realised by this time that her abuser also needed her on a level. In this way, Susan may have come to learn that it was possible for her

ward off feelings of powerlessness that she had experienced throughout her childhood through the expression of her sexuality. Her later being able to get her abuser to pay for sex was an indication of this sense of power. In her internal world, pleasure came to be associated with expressions of sexuality and associated feelings of power. However, her exercise of control through sexual means also evoked feelings of shame within her, which once again brought about feelings of powerlessness. In this manner, her internal world came to be constructed of split-off polarities – pleasure from pain and shame, aggression and feelings of power from subservience and powerlessness.

Given this dynamic, it is hypothesised that Susan would only be drawn to men who could satisfy all the demands of her deeply split personality structure. As such, she would be attracted to men who were capable of evoking feelings of power and powerlessness, aggression and submission, pleasure and shame within her. This could explain why Susan would see Greg as being all-powerful at times and other times meek and vulnerable, as it would depend on which of her split-off object needs he was satisfying in that particular instance. It is within this context that one can come to understand the manner in which Susan chooses to express her sexuality and the string of abusive relationships that she has experienced, and her ongoing difficulty in separating from Greg. Her feelings of depression may be regarded as an expression of abandonment depression stemming from years of unmet childhood needs that still yearn to be fulfilled that have been triggered since her separation from Greg. And her risk-taking behaviour may be regarded as an attempt by her to compensate for feelings of anxiety associated with the loss of her partner, as her separation from Greg has plunged her into the turmoil of her inner world. It is also speculated that her risk-taking represents a further attempt to satisfy feelings of power and powerlessness associated with her diverse split-object needs.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter has a dual purpose. It will present selected case material in the form of themes in such a way so as to make sense of Susan's difficulty in extricating herself from her relationship with Greg. As mentioned, Susan had already separated from Greg when she referred herself for therapy. Even so, much valuable case material emerged which cast light on the factors that limited her ability to separate from Greg while she was living with him. In short, these themes can be understood as addressing questions as to *how she came to be involved in a physically abusive relationship* and *why she stayed* with Greg. The remainder of the themes consider the ongoing difficulty that she experienced in truly severing ties with Greg even though they were no longer living together. In other words, these themes consider *why she is in danger of reuniting, returning or reconnecting* with Greg in some way. Each of the themes is discussed in terms of the position that it occupies in the modified version of the Barriers Model (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997) as described in the literature review, starting with Layer 4 and then considering the cumulative impact of the factors in Layers, 1, 2 and 3.

5.1 LAYER FOUR: CHILDHOOD ABUSE AND NEGLECT ISSUES

5.1.1 Early Childhood Abuse within Family

Much has been written about how early childhood experiences set the tone for problems experienced in later life. A strong indication has already been provided in chapter four of the *physical* abuse that Susan witnessed as well as experienced within her family at the hands of her father, and to a lesser extent, her brother and mother. This was a topic that featured regularly in numerous sessions, as Susan struggled to come to terms with her childhood experiences during the course of therapy. The incident described (in chapter four) when Susan was physically assaulted and humiliated on her sixteenth birthday serves as merely one illustration of the many frightening abusive experiences that she endured during her childhood. Within this context, it is important to keep in mind that the experience of being subjected to abuse in childhood has been shown in the literature to be highly correlated with future abusive experiences in later adult life (Corvo & Carpenter, 2000; Stith & Rosen, 1990; Briere, 1989). For this reason, it is regarded as a factor that may have influenced her later exposure to physical abuse at the hands of Greg.

5.1.2 Physical Abuse and the Repetition Compulsion

The close resemblance between Susan's adult life and the emotional world in which she was raised, as postulated in Fairbairn's (1952) notion of the repetition compulsion, became increasingly apparent during the course of therapy. The most obvious resemblance noted initially was that physical abuse was a common theme in both Susan's childhood and married life. However, as will be illustrated the similarities extended much further.

Upon reflecting on my therapy notes, I could not help but recognise a similarity between the manner in which Susan stood up to her father to protect her mother and the manner in which she was not afraid to stand up to Greg. This is brought home in the excerpt below in which Susan said the following:

“During the marriage I was scared when he went into rages but not scared to stand up to him. That's what caused the fights. He would lie about using drugs until I learnt to look at his hands (to see if he'd used a pipe). I was not scared to stand up to him”. (Session 1)

From the outset, it appeared as if Susan already had some awareness of the links between Greg's physical abuse and her childhood experiences. This was hinted at in session 4 in which she said, “I feel like such a loser and a failure because what do I have to show for 37 years? *If I had learnt a lesson why did I allow Greg to hurt me like he did?*” Further signs were provided that Susan appreciated the impact of her childhood experiences when she told me that her brother (David) had beaten his wife on at least one occasion using a sjambok. She went on to tell me that she had told her father that David had seen him hitting his wife and daughter *so this was why he now thought it was okay for him to hit his own wife.*

It became further apparent that Susan was becoming increasingly conscious of links between the past and the present in relation to her own life in session 11. Susan verbalised in this session that she had begun asking her mother all sorts of questions about what she was like when she was growing up and how her parents reacted. She said that she was doing this *because she wanted to find out how she got to be involved in a relationship like she had with Greg.* In this same session, Susan revealed that she had been engaged prior to marrying Greg to a man named Patrick, and that this relationship had also been physically abusive in nature. This provided further strong evidence of the extent to which physical abuse had been a prevalent feature throughout her life.

Susan was able to make further links in Session 35 between her experiences during childhood and her adult experiences of abuse. The events that transpired in this session led to my commenting that it seemed that from a young age that *abuse was somehow connected with people that were*

supposed to love her. Susan responded by being silent for a few seconds, which caused me to wonder if I had pushed her too far, by making this interpretation. However, she then told me that she had *witnessed spousal abuse from a young age and she had always got beaten up herself when she tried to intervene, so this “added to the link between abuse and love”*. Susan then made the connection to her current life herself by saying, *“It’s no wonder I got married to Greg”*. I indicated that I was unsure what she meant by this, to which she responded by speaking about how she had felt that she *“attracted or drew an abusive relationship into her life because of her past”*. She then spoke of how she had once told Greg that she *“needed to be in an abusive relationship to feel normal”*.

What the above description of Susan’s process of unfolding awareness hopefully serves to illustrate is that Susan’s adult world served to recreate “the identical emotional world in which she was raised” (Celain, 1994, p.144). Viewed within this light, the above discussion serves to highlight some of the links that were drawn during the course of therapy between Susan’s childhood experiences and later adult experiences of abuse.

5.1.3 Sexual Abuse, Intimacy and Power

Susan’s 13th and 14th sessions revolved around her disclosing how she was sexually abused as a child.

She described in session 13 how an older cousin of hers had “locked the door of a room and lifted [her] dress” when she went on holiday with his family in Std 7 or 8. She became silent at this point but seemed to be reliving an incident in the therapy room, which gave me the impression that her cousin had raped her on this occasion. Once she came out of what appeared to be a type of ‘trance’, she broke into sobs and simply said, “I did nothing. I just lay there”, which seemed to confirm my suspicion that she had been raped. It was also during this session that she disclosed that she was chronically sexually abused from the age of 8 years old. Susan had never told anyone about these experiences. She voiced anger that her mother in particular had not picked up on her distress and had not suspected that something had happened to her. At one point, she burst into tears (in session 13) after I reflected upon how lonely and painful it must have been for her growing up with these type of experiences especially since she did not have anyone to share them with.

Susan arrived at session 14 and immediately placed two sweets on my table, which she said were for me. After a short while, she stated that she felt humiliation and shame after last week’s session. As I gently explored the nature of her feelings, she stated that she had feelings of shame because she “should have known better because she still went to [her] abuser’s house when [she] was 17 or

18 years old and [she] could have said ‘No’ at that age”. I asked her whether the 8-year-old could have said “No”, to which she responded by saying that the 8-year-old did not know any better but the 17-year-old should have. I understood this statement (as well as the gift of sweets that she brought me) as providing me with a cue to explore why she went to her sexual abuser as a 17-year-old.

At first Susan said that she was unsure why she went to him. She told me that he initially gave her suckers and then money. It was at this point that she made the statement that she looks at prostitutes today and feels like she’s done the same thing that they do for a living. A short while later she said that she thought that she went to him “because she needed something”. My response was to reflect that it sounded like she did “need something”. Susan looked at me after I said this and then asked whether it could have been due to her brother being her father’s favourite and due to the abuse that she suffered at home?

This paved the way for her opening up and describing in detail the beating that her father gave her on her sixteenth birthday and the feelings of shame that she carries with her about this incident. She spoke about how everyone in the community did not believe her and thought that she was about to have sex with the boy that her father “caught” her with (on her sixteenth birthday). She then reflected signs of confusion around the expression of her sexuality, when she said that she “realised that [she] had a lot of boys who were interested in [her] and that maybe it was because of what [she] put out to them”. Her sense of helplessness was further revealed when she said, “A lot of it [the shame] was not my fault”. She then said by way of providing an example of what she was alluding to that “it was not [her] fault that her brother had a lighter skin colour and slicker hair than [she] does”. Further evidence of her helplessness was revealed when she reflected upon how lonely and scary it was to experience the extent of the physical abuse that she had to endure at home without having anyone to confide in and to protect her. She was able to recognise that perhaps she had gone to her sexual abuser’s house because of the manner in which he made her feel special and needed, which stood in stark comparison to what she experienced at home.

It is hard to comment on what the impact of this ongoing sexual abuse and apparent rape was on Susan’s development. What did become apparent is that Susan came to utilise her sexuality at times as a means with which to express her power or strength over others. It is possible that this was to compensate for underlying feelings of powerlessness and helplessness that permeated her childhood, as described. Although there were prior indications, this became explicit in session 35, in which she described how she used to fight with a previous lover (named Mark). After such a fight, she would phone him for a casual sexual encounter and then be incredibly dismissive of him

after she had slept with him. She initially said this behaviour on her part must have been prompted by her “low self-esteem”, but then revealed that these sexual encounters made her feel “*victorious, powerful and better than*” Mark because of the manner in which she dismissed him. She also said that she felt “*powerful*” when she saw Mark at a party with his new girlfriend because she knew that they had had sex a few days previously. In addition, she told me that she used to note (at parties, for example) how many of the men she had previously had sex with.

Susan then commented that what fuelled these experiences was not only her “low self-esteem”, but also her “violent side”. This was not the first time that Susan had alluded to what she termed her “violent side” as there were numerous other instances during therapy that she voiced fear and shame in relation to the expression of her own aggressiveness. This was revealed for example, when she arrived at session 12 and asked whether she “caused the fights with Greg” and when she spoke in session 17 of how embarrassed she was that she had once resorted to hitting Greg on his head using a rock to protect herself. This theme came to the fore once again when she brought up an instance in session 35 when she “hit Greg so hard that his eardrum later ruptured” and she said she felt “ashamed” if she was indeed a violent person.

It is possible to infer that Susan was, with the aid of these examples, indirectly making links between the nature of her aggression and her expression and experience of intimacy. The relevance of this to the difficulties she experienced in finally cutting ties with Greg (even though they had already separated) came to the fore in session 34. During this session, Susan voiced the strong desire to see Greg “one last time” before relocating to show him that she was “*stronger or better than him*” and to show him what he was “losing (in her)”. She spoke about how she needed this encounter to finally “close the door” on her relationship with Greg and how it would leave her feeling “*strong*”, “*elated*” and “*powerful*”. (It is relevant to note within this context that in the following session, Susan was able to make the connection between her desire to see Greg one final time and her feeling “*powerful and victorious*” when she dismissed Mark in the past, after having had sex with him).

What the above discussion hopefully serves to provide is some insight into how in Susan’s world the expression of intimacy was connected to feelings of power and powerlessness, strength and weakness, victory and defeat. If one takes cognisance of her physically and emotionally abusive familial environment as well as the impact of her chronic sexual abuse, it is possible to speculate about the potential origins for this dynamic. Although it is open to debate, this relationship between intimacy and power may have played a role in her being drawn to Greg in the first place. What can be stated with greater certainty though is that this relationship played a role in influencing her

ability to sever ties with him, as witnessed in the events that played out (during session 34) when she expressed the strong desire to see him “one last time”.

5.1.4 Separation-Individuation

a) *Attempts to frustrate her movements towards independent functioning*

As described in the literature review, the fixation of borderlines is believed to be due to the withdrawal of libidinal supplies during the rapprochement sub-phase of development, which hinders such an individual’s efforts toward separation-individuation (Masterson & Rinsley, 1975). Ample indications were indeed provided throughout her therapy that Susan *was* frustrated during her childhood in her attempts to strive for age-appropriate levels of independence. The significance of this relates to Celani’s (1994) previously described observation that lack of differentiation is the key to understanding the battering cycle that is played out between a battered woman and her abusive partner.

The first indication that Susan was delayed in her movement towards independence was provided when she said that she lived at home until the age of 27 and gave her salary to her mother who then gave her “pocket money” (Session 1). Further evidence was provided in session 16 on the extent to which her parents were reluctant to treat her as an adult, as Susan described how even when she was in her twenties she “had to be home by a certain hour” if she went out on a date. In addition, she spoke of how embarrassing it was that her dates were always required to introduce themselves to her father and he would then ask them “what their intentions were” regarding Susan. There was also “absolutely no way that [she] was allowed to entertain boys in [her] room”. She said that even though she had keys for the house, her mother would lock the latch so that she had to ring the bell to be let into the house. She said, “I had keys but used to wake them when I came home which led to arguments... I didn’t have freedom”.

This was a pattern that seemed to have become entrenched during her childhood. Susan showed insight in this regard, as shown in the excerpt below:

“Both mom and dad were very overprotective. There were strict rules in the household where a girl was concerned... I felt overcrowded, without freedom. I could not go to my school dance... There were lots of restrictions”. (Session 4)

As described in the literature (Bergman, 1987), Susan seemed to be aware that her mother had not rewarded her attempts to separate and individuate while growing up. For example, in session 16,

she said: “My mother never supported me when I was younger. If I had wanted to join the choir (then), she would have probably discouraged me by telling me that I had a very deep voice”. She also spoke of how her attempts to move out of her parental home were not encouraged but rather met with resistance and/or withdrawal, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

“I felt I had to get out. My mom was manipulative, but I had made up my mind *even though she threw a tantrum...*”
(Session 1)

“The moment I spoke about moving, Mom would say it was because I wanted to get up to naughty things. Eventually I told her that she could not manipulate me anymore... *When I moved out she refused to speak to me...* I think she acted this way because she thought I was not responsible enough to move out.”
(Session 2)

During session 25, Susan showed insight into how her mother continued to successfully manipulate her into feeling “small”, as she did during her childhood. She said that this was possibly because her mother’s childhood was cut short by her unplanned pregnancy (with Susan) so she tried to live vicariously through Susan and was jealous of her at times. In addition, in session 28, Susan described how her mother used “to give [her] the cold shoulder” whenever she tried to assert herself while growing up. Susan said that she used to respond to this by trying to “be there” for her mother. This appears to further indicate how steps toward independence were indeed met with her mother’s withdrawal, which resulted in a form of “symbiotic clinging” behaviour on Susan’s part as predicted in the literature (Masterson & Rinsley, 1975). Later in this same session, Susan spoke of how she recognised that she also “plays a similar game in [her] own relationships” like her mother did and that she “hates” this aspect of her mother that was “inside of [her]”. Susan indicated that she plays these “power games” because it makes her feel “special”, “important” and “powerful” in her world.

b) *Ongoing attempts to Separate and Individuate*

Susan indicated strongly that she was aware that she needed to separate from her parents and develop more independence. Yet despite this awareness, she struggled to master this task. The manner in which she engaged with this difficulty in relation to her parents, and in particular with her mother, was a common feature throughout her therapy. The extracts below from various sessions provide some indication of her awareness and ongoing struggle in this regard:

“She (mother) irks me quite a bit. *Yet, I’m drawn to her.* For example, today I went and picked her up and took her home. I did not need to. I can kick myself. I’m a sucker for

punishment. When she's in the car, she starts irritating me after 5 minutes. Maybe, I'm going cuckoo. Why do I say that? *Because I'm drawn to it all. I so much want to break away from it, but I can't ... to take a long break from my parents.* Since I broke up with Greg I see them every second day and *it's too much...*" (Session 2)

"In my life there is a space that needs to be filled. Loneliness. There's always been someone and now I'm lonely. Some days its okay for me to walk alone, other times its not – *so I go to mommy and ask her to come for a walk.* It's not good enough even though I'm lonely and *I want to break away.* And I cannot expect that hole or emptiness to disappear immediately. I should just give myself time to work through things, but I'm so impatient I think..." (Session 3)

"Like this afternoon I went to her (mother) knowing that I want a break from this 'mothering, nurturing, manipulating' woman – *yet I still find myself going there ...* I was immediately angry for going to her". (Session 8)

It appeared that Greg's ongoing harassment since they separated represented a complicating factor in that it resulted in Susan's mother being concerned about her safety, which further frustrated Susan's movement towards independence. An example of what I am referring to is provided below:

"Even when I told them about the divorce, she (mother) *said I should come back into their home.* I told her that I would stay at my place until I found a new place. *She was not happy with this.* She would say I should stay over whenever I visited them. *She couldn't understand that I wanted to go to my home...* She said it's because she's ...scared of Greg's threats. *It's stifling. I feel like I don't have any time of my own. I'm not my own person. She needs to know my every move...*" (Session 2)

On the occasions that she did succeed in asserting herself in relation to her mother, she reported feelings of elation and gratification, as Bergman (1987) predicts. For example, in session 6 she illustrated how well she was doing by telling me that she "had not seen [her] parents all week even though [her] mother had tried to make [her] feel guilty about it". At the beginning of session 17, she stated that she was doing "fine" and then proceeded to describe an incident involving her mother in which her mother did not "hassle" her and gave her the space that she needed.

The extent however to which Susan still relied on her parents became apparent during sessions 31 to 33. During this period, Susan was ostracised by her mother after she interfered in a fight between her parents (which again can be viewed as a form of withdrawal of much-needed libidinal

supplies). After being ostracised in this manner, Susan broke down telling me she felt “out of control”. Her lack of involvement with her family appeared to have triggered severe anxiety, which included racing thoughts, being wide awake and hyper-alert at night, and going for drives at nights and engaging in excessive cleaning rituals at home, as well as signs of possible (abandonment) depression.

c) *Extreme anxiety when forced to function independently (Celani, 1994)*

It is worth noting at this juncture that Susan provided numerous indications during the course of therapy that since she had separated from Greg, she experienced periods of intense anxiety at times. It was at these times that she engaged in risk-taking behaviour, which I understood to represent attempts by her to displace her uncontained feelings of anxiety. As mentioned earlier, Celani (1994, p.151) postulates that such anxiety is the result of an “insufficiency of memories of being comforted during childhood, which results in such individuals being unable to calm their inner turmoil”. Given Susan’s childhood environment, it is likely that she did suffer from such an “introjective insufficiency”.

An example of what I am referring to was provided in session 3, when Susan described how she drove to Chapman’s Peak and contemplated suicide following an unpleasant experience in court. Further evidence was provided in session 4, when Susan said that she often woke up feeling anxious in the middle of the night. She said that she then went for walks on her own and that she “doesn’t care what happens to [her]” as she had no fear. She said, “I just feel that I need to get out there and when I come back I feel disappointed”. When elaborating on this behaviour pattern, she told me that recently she stood on her balcony late one night and looked at the city lights and considered where would be the most dangerous place to walk. After safely walking down this street she was once again disappointed that she came home unscathed. She told me in this session that she had been going for such walks about once a week, but in the past she had “needed to do it more frequently”. Further evidence of how difficult Susan found it to manage her feelings of anxiety were provided in sessions 13 and 23, in which Susan indicated that she had been “going for drives in the middle of the night once again and going for walks in strange places on [her] own”.

The relevance of this in relation to the developmental hurdle of separation-individuation is that, as explained, Celani (1994) noted that for couples engaged in the battering dynamic, the loss of the abusive partner can lead to the collapse of the sense of self and the terror of abandonment depression. The reason for this is postulated to be because such individuals failed to successfully negotiate the separation-individuation stage of development and the loss of their partner hence plunges them into the turmoil of their inner world. This is the result of their partner no longer being

available to soothe their inner chaos. As described, Celani (1994) believes that this internal dynamic plays a role in why an abused woman returns to her abuser. It is postulated that this dynamic may have influenced Susan's difficulty in completely severing ties with Greg since they had separated. If this was indeed the case, this internal dynamic possibly represents a risk factor that may influence her re-engaging with him in the future.

5.1.5 The Ongoing Attachment to the Abusive Partner

a) *"Dancing the 'dance' " with Greg since separating*

During the course of her therapy, Susan was able to acknowledge that even though he was harassing her, at times Greg succeeded in "hooking" her such that she found it difficult to refrain from having contact with him. We coined the phrase that they tended to continue to 'dance a type of *power dance*' to refer to their interactions at such times.

Susan's process of verbalising her awareness in this regard occurred gradually. Indications were provided early on that she was on occasions not simply a hapless victim of his violence. At these times, as much as she complained about how his harassment was making her life a "misery", she provided indications that she was also drawn towards him. For example, in session 2, she spoke about how close she came to visiting him over the previous weekend, which would have been their third wedding anniversary. She said, "And a part of me wanted to see him. I actually drove past the house and stopped myself and drove home as fast as I could. I was angry with myself for driving past there. I drove past there because I felt guilty for forgetting about him and getting on... I've been hurt so much yet I still put myself out to get hurt again".

Susan appeared more willing to acknowledge her attraction to her abusive husband in session 11. For this reason, an excerpt from my therapy notes from this session is provided below:

During this session, Susan acknowledged that she would have sex in the past with an ex-boyfriend (Patrick) after their relationship terminated just to confirm that he still needed her on a level. When she later told me that she "no longer looks for Greg when [she] goes out on [her] balcony", my response was to ask her why she used to look for him? Susan answered my question by smiling knowingly and then telling me that she used to look for Greg "*partly out fear, but also out of curiosity*". She was then able to acknowledge that *just as she had needed to know that Patrick still needed her, Greg's stalking behaviour also served as confirmation that he still needed her.*

The extent to which they continued to ‘dance their dance’ and the role that Susan played in this process came to the fore once again during session 34. In this session, Susan told me she had signed a lease for a new flat (as she was hoping to sever all her ties to Greg by relocating). She seemed in a jovial mood indicating to me that she felt like a “new person”. However, a short while into this session, she told me that she had bumped into Greg at a garage and told him that she was moving but gave him the wrong suburb “to send him off track”. Given the manner, in which he had stalked her in the past, this seemed to create the very real possibility that Greg would follow her to her new abode, as he was now alerted to the fact that she was moving. Strong indications were later revealed in this session that this may indeed have been Susan’s unconscious motive, as she went on to voice the strong desire to see Greg before moving in an attempt to show him that she was “stronger or better than him”.

Hopefully the above discussion serves to illustrate that on occasions the ongoing contact that Susan had with Greg (even if it was abusive in nature) seemed to fulfil a need within her. In this manner, this identified theme constitutes a further factor that hindered her movement towards safety and clearly influenced her ability to separate from him.

b) *Indications of Splitting*

During the course of therapy, it appeared as if Susan related very differently to Greg at various times. On some occasions, she saw him as this ‘powerful tormentor’ whose reach and power extended far and wide in terms of the harm that he could inflict on her. At these times, she spoke of how fearful she was of him. For example, in session 6 she spoke of how afraid she was when she arrived home on her own at night and how scared she was to go onto her balcony as she once saw the beam on her from Greg’s laser sights from his gun. She told me that she used to be such an outdoors type of person and that she no longer even hung her washing up outside. In addition to experiencing fear in relation to his harassment, she also responded with aggression at times. For example, in session 12 she described how Greg’s perpetual telephone calls had resulted in her becoming so enraged and angry that she drove around late one night looking for him.

However, instead of relating to him exclusively as a source of aggression and “power” (as described above), on some occasions, she viewed him as weak and even vulnerable. This came to the fore for example in session 4, when she expressed fear and guilt that he would kill himself after she swore at him and told him “that she no longer loved him”. At times such as these, Susan had to resist the urge to reach out and make contact with Greg. For example, in session 4 she said she attempted to phone him after he walked away and when this failed, she contemplated getting into her car and going after him.

If one accepts Celani's (1994, 1999) view that the battered women's ego is split into two mutually exclusive sub-egos then it is possible to speculate that Susan viewed Greg in these different ways depending on her dominant ego at the time. On the occasions that she saw him as all-powerful and as an abusive person to be feared, she was possibly relating to him in terms of her anti-libidinal ego. When this sub-ego was dominant, Susan also possibly on occasions experienced the desire to express the pent up rage stemming from all her unmet needs emanating from her childhood. This would possibly account for her becoming "enraged" at times and seeking out Greg in an effort to act out these feelings. Her allusions to "her violent side" (as described above), as well as her desire to be more "powerful or stronger" than Greg at times, may also possibly be associated with her anti-libidinal ego. On the other hand, on the occasions that she viewed him as more vulnerable and when she had to resist her urges to reunite with him, it is possible to speculate that she was relating to him in terms of her libidinal ego. At these times, she was possibly filled with the hope that love and caring were within her reach, as Celani (1999) postulates. If Susan indeed has this personality structure, which it is acknowledged is open for debate, it would represent a further factor that hindered her efforts to separate completely from Greg, as his abusive and vulnerable behaviour would bring both her sub-egos from her inner world to life.

A further observation, which I wish to highlight under this theme, is that it seemed at times that Susan was fascinated and perhaps excited by Greg's efforts to exaggerate his potency and masculinity, as Celani (1999) predicts. This appeared to come to the fore for example, in session 5, when Susan *smiled broadly* as she told me amongst other things that Greg was working for a covert company as a mercenary to go and fight in Uganda. It also seemed to emerge in the theatrical, rather than fearful manner, in which she demonstrated in this session how she often "peeked" around corners to see if Greg was perhaps in her flat.

5.2 BUILDING ON THE LAYERS

The intention throughout the above discussion was not to pathologise Susan, but rather to take cognisance of her childhood experiences and the impact they possibly had on her subsequent involvement in an abusive relationship with Greg. By taking into account the effects of her poor developmental history and her internal psychic structure, it was also possible to gain further understanding of the complexity and difficulty associated with her ongoing movement away from Greg. However, to truly grasp this complexity, the various other factors in the remaining layers of the Barriers Model (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997) also need to be considered.

5.3 LAYER ONE: BARRIERS IN THE ENVIRONMENT

5.3.1 The Batterer: Continued Abuse since Separation

Mention has already been made that Greg continued to harass and torment Susan after their separation. However, to truly grasp the impact of his ongoing abuse on Susan, a chronological account will be given of his behaviour during the course of her therapy. In this way, it will be shown that the terms stalking, “separation assaults” (Mahoney, 1994) and “termination terrorism” (McHugh, 1993) are apt descriptions that convey some sense of the ongoing torment that Susan had to endure at his hands since she decided to separate from him.

For example, Susan reported in her initial session that since their separation, Greg had watched her house, taken down the registration numbers of people who visited her, tried to get her to lose her job and even attempted to get her arrested.

Greg’s torment was an ongoing theme throughout sessions 3 and 4 that evoked much distress and anger within Susan. For example, he threatened her telling her “he’d see to it that she never worked again in Cape Town and that he’d trash her place of work”. In addition, it seemed as if he was watching virtually her every move, as every time she put a foot outside of her apartment “there he was standing leaning against her car”. He often hurled threats at her through her kitchen window. Susan said that she tried mostly to ignore his comments, but had resorted to cooking her supper in the dark. She acknowledged that this is not a healthy or pleasant way to live, yet said she felt powerless to do anything else. She told me that she “was often too afraid to go out” and just stayed indoors the whole time and slept and slept.

On the weekend before session 5, Greg forced himself into Susan’s apartment wielding a gun. Susan told me that it was only with God’s help that she managed survive this attack as she remained calm and was able to switch her husband’s aggression by offering to make him tea. She said that he then acted “all sweet” when she arrived home on the night following this incident and told her that he had bought her a typewriter as a gift.

This “gift” contained a symbolic expression of the manner in which he was succeeding in invading her world because straddled between its keys was a letter that had been posted to Susan which Greg had intercepted, opened, read and was now returning to her. Susan’s response was to ask him how he could expect her to accept a gift given what he had put her through on the previous night. Susan said that Greg then started to swear at her and that everyone could hear him, which she found particularly embarrassing.

During session 6 Susan became tearful as she described how she was afraid to come home on her own at night. Her fears appeared to be justified, as Greg physically assaulted her in her apartment on the Monday prior to her seventh appointment. He forced his way into her apartment as she was removing the garbage and when he refused to leave, Susan threatened to pour boiling water in a kettle onto him if he stayed. Greg then grabbed her hand and tried to pour the contents of the kettle onto her. Susan said she managed to tip her hand over so that the boiling water poured over his arm. She said he then “went wild” and attacked her. He kned her in her groin and as she went down, she defended herself by trying to dig her nails into his neck and his groin. At one point she managed to wriggle free of him and get him into a headlock. However, Greg managed to stand up and throw her over his back as he bent forward. As Susan hit the ground, she said that she “knew that [she] was dead” because of the vulnerable position she was lying in. Fortunately her neighbour heard her screams and came into the apartment and said, “Leave her alone” at which point Greg left.

In our eighth session Susan told me that Greg had recently asked her to make love to him from the fence outside her flat as she was walking into her apartment block. Susan told him that she found it strange how he could beat her up one week and then request to make love to her the next.

There was a lull in Greg’s ongoing harassment until session 12. In the weeks prior to this session, Susan had had him arrested following his assault on her and he spent some time in jail before being released on bail. Following his release, it appeared that Greg no longer posed as much of a *physical* threat to Susan. He however pursued a different type of harassment as Susan reported in sessions 12 and 13 that he had started phoning her daily, often phoning her a number of times on the same day. Sometimes she would pick up the phone simply to hear his laughter on the other end. Susan said she confronted him on the phone and told him to leave her alone but this was to no avail. She felt that the effect of this type of harassment on her “was worse than before”.

Fortunately however, for the remainder of Susan’s therapy prior to my vacation in December, Greg’s abuse never attained the levels that it had during the earlier course of her therapy. It was also my impression that even though Susan continued to have contact with Greg in the new year, the effect of his harassment on her was not as severe as it had been during the earlier part of her therapy. It seemed as if the level of her fear in relation to him was much reduced. Even so, she reported in session 27 that she had in anger “called his bluff” (that he would hurt her), to which he responded by placing his hands on her throat. Her response was then to knee him in the groin. Greg then struck her on her right temple and she showed me her bruise that was still visible. She reported

not being scared but rather having a feeling of futility that he would never leave her alone. When describing her anger in relation to Greg, Susan indicated in this session that she had been thinking about taking the law into her own hands given that the police and courts had been so ineffectual in the past.

In session 29, Susan stated that her “divorce was being made final on this coming Wednesday”. She complained that Greg had been phoning her and her parents constantly (on the hour every hour) and had been outside her window and flat for the last week and had threatened to plant drugs in her flat. She later told me in this session that she had been entertaining thoughts about harming Greg and had even asked her brother if he would be able to obtain an illegal gun on her behalf. During session 33, Susan reported that she was reluctant to look for a new flat. She said that part of the reason for this reluctance was that she feared that Greg would find her wherever she moved to.

The above discussion clearly illustrates how Greg’s ongoing abuse severely impinged on her ability to move on with her life once she decided to separate from him. The fear that she lived with (particularly during the earlier stages of her therapy) impacted negatively on her already limited resources such that at times she was unable to cope. In this manner, it is possible to attain greater insight into the risks that she had to bear in *not returning* to Greg given the nature of his assaults and harassment. It was a testament to her strength that she did not succumb to his torment and return to him in an effort to minimise her fear and general sense of powerlessness that she lived with in the face of his aggression.

5.3.2 Interactions with the legal system

The factors described below represented obstacles within the context of the legal system that impinged upon Susan’s process of extricating herself from her relationship with Greg:

a) Police inefficiency

As described in the literature review, the police and the legal system have been subject of heated criticism concerning their inability to protect the victims of domestic violence from their abusive partners (Artz, 2001b; Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Grigsby & Hartman, 1997; Hoyle & Sanders, 2000; Kirkwood, 1993; Radford & Stanko, 1996). There were indeed numerous occasions during the course of her therapy that Susan felt that the *police* were ineffective in preventing Greg from harassing her since she left him. Greg seemed to share a similar perception as Susan in relation to the police, as during her first session, Susan complained that when he was recently at her window, he taunted her when she threatened to call the police, saying that “they would have to catch him first”.

The inefficiency on the part of the police was further revealed when Susan complained in session 5 that she had attempted to report that Greg had been wielding a gun in her apartment, but an officer “had told [her over the phone] that it was pointless to lay a charge”. She said that the officer said it would be useless, as in effect it was her word against her husband’s. During session 6, Susan said she had reported Greg’s wielding of a gun to the police, but “the police officer had made it difficult for [her] once again”.

During session 7 she complained that “the police had not responded to [her] call” after Greg had assaulted her. Instead she later received a phone call from an officer saying “that Greg was at the station and if [she] did not return his property [she] would be arrested”. Susan told the officer that the property he was referring to was acquired during the course of their marriage and that they were in the process of getting a divorce, so it was not Greg’s. Susan conveyed the impression that the officer then threatened her in relation to the sanctions that would be meted out against her if she did not return the property. It seemed ludicrous to me that Susan could receive this type of treatment, given that she had just been the victim of an assault.

From the above, it is apparent that Susan not only experienced the police as largely ineffectual, but it was also her perception that the police pandered to Greg’s demands and not hers. In this manner, she experienced the police as representing an obstacle that hindered her ability to feel safe enough to move on with her life since she separated from Greg.

b) The inefficiency of the legal system

Prior to session 6, Susan had complained on a number of occasions that she was dissatisfied with the legal assistance that she was receiving in trying to ensure her protection. She had in fact changed her lawyers on more than one occasion in an attempt to remedy this problem. As the nature of Greg’s violence escalated in the early part of her therapy, there appeared to be a strong likelihood that Greg might fatally injure her. I therefore took it upon myself to refer Susan to a lawyer, named Allison, who specialises in the area of domestic violence. Susan was open to this referral and told me in session seven that she had made an appointment with Allison, whom she “hoped would be better than the other lawyers that [she] had used in the past”.

The functioning of the *courts* also drew criticism from Susan for a variety of reasons:

Firstly, Susan complained about the insensitive and incompetent treatment that she received in court. For example, in session 7 she described how she had recently tried (not for the first time) to

enforce her restraining order against Greg, but was not called into the court even though she had been waiting outside as she had been instructed to do. As a result, the case against Greg was dismissed and she now had to repeat the whole process of pressing charges against him.

Susan's lack of confidence in the criminal justice system was apparent in sessions 9 and 14 in that following Greg's arrest, she expressed fear that justice would not be served and that he would be released when his case was heard. She said that as per Allison's instructions, she had been gathering all her evidence (which consisted of letters and presents that Greg had written or given to her since their separation). She said she was trying to not be intimidated "even though Greg had a lawyer". She expressed very little confidence in the state prosecutor and spoke of how the investigative team "seemed to be dragging its heels" – how she had to run after the prosecutor and police to do their work. She said that she "could not even entertain the hope" that he would be convicted as he could be very convincing in court and in the end it would be his word against hers. In this manner, Susan's interactions with the legal system appeared to be leaving her feeling more vulnerable and insecure in her predicament.

At the start of session 15, Susan offered a further example of how she recently had a less than desirable experience in court. She described how Greg had admitted in court that he had attempted to obtain a restraining order against her in an act of spite in response to the temporary restraining order that Susan had obtained against him. The magistrate congratulated Greg for making this admission. Susan was outraged that Greg could be the recipient of praise given the stress that his phoney application had placed on her. Susan felt like she had been "forgotten" in court as this stress had been ignored, as well as all the preparation she had made in gathering evidence against Greg to prosecute him (as the case was once again postponed). She also voiced fear that "Greg was now in the magistrate's good books", and that the magistrate would look favourably upon him when his assault charge was tried at later stage.

From the above, it is apparent that as with the police, Susan's interactions with the *legal system* were less than favourable, which impacted negatively on her process of extricating herself from her relationship with Greg.

c) How the court procedures can be used as a vehicle for ongoing intimidation and abuse

The manner in which the criminal justice system can act as a vehicle that not only frustrates but also *prolongs* the torment of an abused woman came to the fore at various times during therapy.

For example, in session 3 Susan spoke of a recent court appearance in which she tried to enforce a charge against Greg. During this appearance, Greg's lawyer tried to dispute the charges against his client by claiming that Susan was not of sound mind. To back up this claim, the lawyer referred to the incident when Susan attempted to take her own life following the first of her miscarriages. Susan was visibly hurt and embarrassed by this claim. What upset her most was that Greg had exposed an incident that she regarded as highly personal and confidential to his lawyer and the court.

The nature of the toll that such an unpleasant experience within the legal system exacted on Susan became apparent when she revealed in this session that she was so distressed by this allegation regarding her sanity that she drove to Chapman's Peak and "thought about ending it all". She broke into tears as she told me that she was angry with her ex-husband and "everything felt like it was just too much for [her] to handle". The tears streamed from her eyes as she told me she might indeed have "ended it all" by taking her life, had it not been for the timely intervention by two tourists who fortuitously stopped where she had parked her car. (The tourists picked up on her distress and managed to persuade her to come and have a drink with them).

The *contents of court papers/documents* also have the potential to be a source of anguish for an abuse victim. This became apparent in session 4, in which Susan was visibly distressed that her husband was alleging in his court papers that *she* had caused the fights. She said she had tried unsuccessfully to explain to him why she had responded in the way that she did. Session 9 provided a further example in this regard, as Susan was aggrieved that Greg was alleging in his pre-trial papers that she had invited him back into her life and that he had a witness to back up this claim.

However, one of the most troubling factors was the manner in which the *frequent postponements and drawn out court procedures* afforded Greg the opportunity to continue his contact and harassment of Susan. For example, Susan complained in sessions 13, 15 and 20 that the court case in relation to the charge of assault against him had been postponed, which in total amounted to five postponements. This left Susan in suspense, as she was anxious about the stories that he would concoct about her in his defence. Her frustrations in this regard were explored during these sessions, as well as the possibility that all the postponements represented an attempt on Greg's part to maintain contact with her. For example, in session 20, she described how Greg appeared to be harassing her *in the courthouse* as he had followed her around prior to their case being heard despite her efforts to distance herself from him. She also later spoke about being "furious" when he

tormented her even further by approaching her after the court appearance and asking her if she was angry that the matter had been postponed *once again*.

The danger associated with such drawn out court procedures was revealed in session 13 where Susan voiced irritation that Greg had come across as being “so smug” in court when his case was postponed. There had in fact been a relative lull in Susan and Greg’s interactions between sessions 11 and 13, which was something that we had worked hard to achieve. However Susan’s response in this session to his attitude in court and the subsequent postponement was to tell me that “if he wants a war then that’s what he’s going to get!” This represented just one of the examples in which it became apparent how through the prolonged court procedures, Greg succeeded in “hooking” Susan at times, with the result that she once again engaged with him on a personal level. At such times, she appeared to find it hard to detach from him, and appeared willing to “battle” against him. This had the effect of increasing the level of their interactions, which was most often accompanied by a concurrent increase in Greg’s harassment and associated distress on Susan’s part.

d) *Ambivalence about prosecuting her abuser*

In line with Labe’s (2001) study, indications of ambivalence about prosecuting Greg emerged on Susan’s part, which provided signs that she possibly wanted to preserve her attachment to him. Susan’s fifth session was interesting in this regard in that the inefficiency of the police initially came to the fore only to later be counterbalanced by indications that Susan was reluctant to report instances of Greg’s abuse to the police. This counter view emerged as I encouraged her to report such instances (as her lawyer had advised) in an effort to empower herself against his abusive behaviour. Susan’s response was to mention that she “*felt bad* that [she] might send him to jail”, but she immediately qualified this by saying that he was not leaving her a choice. This remark provided the first indication of possible ambivalence on her part concerning truly bringing an end to Greg’s harassment. Further evidence was revealed later in this session when Susan *seemed reluctant* to take a letter that he stole of hers to the police for fingerprinting. She said that the police told her that it “would probably have been handled by a lot of people”.

A degree of resistance was once again encountered in session 6, as Susan said that when Greg leaves her alone, she “feels less of a need to report his abuse to the police”. I felt increasingly frustrated when Susan later quoted a passage from the bible and said that she was striving to live a “godly existence” and hence “felt safe”, which by implication downplayed the importance of her need to report instances of his abuse to the police.

On the day after Susan's eighth appointment, Allison telephoned to tell me that Susan had successfully had Greg arrested for assaulting her in her apartment. I was informed that Greg had then attempted to take his own life in his cell by slitting his wrists with a blade. The recommendation was given to Allison that an application should be made to have Greg detained as a State Patient for psychiatric observation. Allison felt that if this application was unsuccessful, there was a strong probability that Greg would be released on bail, which she felt, would place Susan's life at risk.

Allison later phoned to inform me that Greg was in fact denied bail. She told me that Susan "was crying tears of joy" following this decision and that Susan had told her that it was the first time the legal system had actually helped her and that she was going out to celebrate. However when Susan arrived for session 9, she immediately began the session by mentioning that she felt "guilty that [she] had sent Greg to jail". She told me that she had even phoned her mother to ask if she was doing the "'Christian thing' by sending him to jail", which provided further confirmation of ambivalence on her part in relation to prosecuting Greg.

It is possible to speculate that Susan's ambivalence about prosecuting Greg and her changing attitude in this regard was due to her unconsciously employing the splitting defence when it dawned on her that his prosecution might end their ongoing 'dance' and threaten her attachment to him. Viewed within this context her decision to prosecute him may have been made when her anger and fear was in the ascendancy. If this were the case, she would have been behaving in terms of the feelings associated with her anti-libidinal ego, as described earlier (Celani, 1994; Labe, 2001). Her subsequent feelings of guilt, on the other hand, appeared to surface when she viewed Greg as being needy and vulnerable. As mentioned earlier, it was at these times that Susan had to resist the urge to reunite with him. She may have been relating to him in terms of her libidinal ego in such instances, hoping that a loving and caring relationship with Greg was still within her reach, which may account for her feelings of guilt in prosecuting him. Viewed within this light, it seems that Susan's help-seeking behaviour fitted in this manner into Labe's (2001, p.109) findings in which the following was one of the conclusions reached:

"The splitting defence was evident in the pattern whereby several women sought help when their feelings of anger, fear and loss were in ascendancy and withdrew from helping processes when these feelings abated".

It seemed that I was not the only person picking up on Susan's hesitancy as Allison informed me after session 9 that I might be called to "testify about Susan's *guilt about convicting Greg* and her fears around him continuing to harass her if he was not convicted". During this conversation I also

spoke to Allison about Susan's complaint that she had to "run after the prosecutors". Allison responded by telling me that she had instructed Susan to phone the investigating officer on the Friday of the previous week, but that when she phoned Susan on the Monday thereafter, Susan had not yet done so. Allison's response seemed to imply that perhaps Susan was also 'dragging her heels', which could be construed as further indication of possible ambivalence and splitting on her part.

e) The difficulty in distinguishing fantasy from reality in the context of interactions with the legal system

During session 6, Susan mentioned the possibility that Greg had "connections at the police" as on one occasion, she received notification that he had also pressed charges against her. She also told me that a police officer had knocked at her door late one evening and said that he "wanted to sleep over at [her] on [her] couch". This officer said he had a court appearance early the next day in that area and he did not want to go all the way home. Susan did not let him in. I reflected that this incident sounded "bizarre". Susan agreed with me and said that her mother "thought that the officer was acting on Greg's instructions". I am not in a position to validate or dispute this claim, but as will become further apparent, there were a number of times during therapy that Susan seemed to believe that Greg had enormous power and reach in terms of his influence. As mentioned earlier, it seems possible that at such times Susan was relating to Greg in terms of the feelings associated with her anti-libidinal ego (Celani, 1994).

The difficulty in discerning fact from fiction came especially to the fore in session 14 when Susan told me that her case against Greg had been postponed because it had emerged in court that "Greg had connections to PAGAD (People against Gangsterism and Drugs)". She said that he was either a member of PAGAD or a NIA (National Intelligence Agency) detective assigned to investigating PAGAD. She said it seemed like he had been exposed to information while in jail about the assassination of a Magistrate that had recently taken place. There was hence minimal time for their trial to be heard because he apparently had to go and testify in another courthouse.

As mentioned earlier, Susan had in an earlier session (session 3) stated that Greg had told her that he was a "mercenary" and that he had been hired to do some work in central Africa. Susan appeared to believe this and stated that he had actually received "extensive military training in the past". In this way, Greg's alleged connections to PAGAD or the NIA represented a continuation of a similar theme.

Susan expressed real fear in session 14 about Greg's apparent connections to PAGAD. She said that Greg had told the investigating officer in her case that "[she] should not park her car on the street because he could not guarantee [her] safety" as she could become a target for a bomb given that he was now a police informant. She told me that the investigating officer had told her that Greg was "full of big stories" but he could not reassure her that Greg was not a police informant. She said that the officer told her that he would look into this claim. This was an instance when I felt overwhelmed by the information that Susan was bringing to therapy, as I found myself questioning whether it belonged to the realm of fantasy or reality. My own inability to know for certain where to draw this line was unsettling for me, and this distinction was made especially difficult by the wave of urban terror that was prevalent in Cape Town around the time of this session. Either way, it was apparent that Susan's perception of the extent of Greg's power and influence represented a factor that hindered her attempts to separate from him.

5.4 LAYER TWO: BARRIERS DUE TO FAMILY/SOCIALISATION/ROLE EXPECTATIONS

5.4.1 Religious Values and Socialisation

Even though her religious values were a source of strength that she drew on from time to time, there were numerous instances when it became apparent that Susan's religious beliefs represented an obstacle that hindered her ability to extricate herself from Greg while they lived together as husband and wife. For example, in session 1, she stated, "I tried 'to be a Christian' and 'turn the other cheek'. I thought it was my 'Christian' duty to support my husband".

Even when Greg continued to harass her once she had separated from him, it became apparent that her religious beliefs continued to be an obstacle that influenced her thinking in such a way that it made it difficult for her to ensure her safety. For example, in session 4, she seemed to be questioning her decision to separate from Greg. She stated that she was having difficulty with a number of passages in the bible and that she wanted to go and speak to her Minister about these difficulties. She then referred to Corinthians 1.13, which she said speaks of being "long suffering". She said she was questioning whether she was "long suffering" enough with her husband because she used to get angry with him when he came home intoxicated and that would result in fights.

As mentioned previously, she also quoted a passage from the bible in session 6 and said that as she was striving to live a "godly existence", and hence felt less of a need to report Greg's harassment to the police because "[she] felt safe". She also expressed anger and hate towards Greg in sessions 6 and 29, but said that she did not like these feelings as it was contrary to what the bible preached. In

addition, in session 9 she said she phoned her mother to ask if she was doing the “‘Christian thing’ by sending Greg to jail”. Based on the above discussion, it appears that as Labe (2001, p.5) predicts, in Susan’s case the “patriarchal ideologies which organised [her] beliefs about [herself and her] relationships intersected with the powerful psychological defences which enabled [her] to preserve [her] attachments to [her] abusive [partner]”.

5.4.2 Socialisation within the Family and Beyond

Rules learnt in the battered woman’s family of origin have been argued to exert a powerful socialising force that may hinder an abused woman’s ability to extricate herself from her abusive partner (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997).

The argument can be made that Susan’s belief that it was “her duty to support [her] husband” was not only the result of her socialisation within a patriarchal society, but also that she learnt powerful messages in this regard within her family of origin. Within this context, it seems highly likely that she was socialised into a world of violence from a very young age, given that she witnessed her father physically assaulting her mother throughout her childhood and that her father later physically abused her. In this manner, her expectations of what behaviour was tolerable within intimate relationships may have been extended beyond the realm of what a person growing up in a loving, nurturing household would regard as ‘normality’. In addition, her grandmother’s sense of powerlessness in the face of her father’s authority may have reinforced beliefs within Susan regarding the oppression of women within a patriarchal society. The sexual abuse that she experienced on an ongoing basis *at the hands of a man* would have in all likelihood further cemented such messages.

In addition, her mother’s decision to stay in her abusive marriage throughout Susan’s childhood may have conveyed further powerful messages in this regard. In this manner, Susan may have learnt (as she said) to “turn the other cheek”, her sense of “duty to support [her] husband” at all costs and to sacrifice her needs for those of her partner, as witnessed by her supporting her husband through numerous drug rehabilitation clinics. It is also possible that she imbibed in this way the message that a ‘woman needs a man to survive’. Although Susan never directly made such a comment, it seemed to be implicitly stated when she said the following in session 2: “Once, the first time that I kicked Greg out, his cousin said I was scared to be on my own and I was”.

5.4.3 Identity Issues/Confusion

Susan implied on a number of occasions that the abusive nature of her marriage had negatively affected her identity. For example in her fourth session, she stated that she used to be the type of

person who was helpful towards others and made them laugh but that she was no longer this person anymore. Susan's experience was not unique in this regard, as the energy that battered women invest in attempting to placate their abusive partners has been shown in the literature to gradually erode their sense of identity (Kirkwood, 1993). This was brought home strongly in Susan's case when she said in session 8 that she used to be a friendly driver who gave others the right of way, but Greg had shouted at her for doing this. She felt that Greg had "killed this part of herself" and she desperately wanted it back.

The severity of the impact that her marriage (and life history of abuse) exacted on her sense of herself was poignantly expressed in session 1, when she said the following:

"I just want to find out who the real me is! And I want to be that person. I'm sick and tired of being this wreck, this piece of garbage that everyone does what they want to. I just want to be that person that's in there deep (touches her chest)... I'm sick and tired of pretending that I'm happy and carefree when I haven't been for a long time".

Such loss of identity has been shown to be a factor that limits the battered women's belief that she has the necessary resources to leave her partner (Kirkwood, 1993). In addition, it has been found to be associated with increased experiences of confusion and uncertainty, and to further cement the battered women's socialised perception that she needs a man to have value or to survive (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997). It seems that Susan defined herself during their marriage as a 'woman that dutifully supported her husband', and that as her personal identity was increasingly eroded, it became harder for her to envision removing herself from the relationship. Confirmatory evidence in this regard was revealed when Susan stated in session 3 that she "[couldn't] believe how bad things got in [her] marriage" as the reality of what she endured during the course of her marriage began to dawn upon her. She began to gradually realise and reflect upon the strength that it took on her part to actually separate from Greg. For example, during session 11, she spoke of how she had to tap her internal resources not only in relation to Greg, but also in relation to his family members, and in particular Greg's mother, who tried her utmost to keep them together.

Once Susan succeeded in separating from Greg, she began the process of reconnecting with her sense of herself once again, and she expressed feelings of satisfaction as this process unfolded. This was revealed in sessions 2 for example, when she said: "*Now* I feel good about myself ... my way of dressing. I feel good about myself and some days I even feel attractive".

5.5 LAYER THREE: BARRIERS FROM THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

5.5.1 Isolation and Shame

A battered woman's sense of isolation has been shown to be both a common consequence of domestic violence and an impediment that hinders her chances of successfully separating from her abuser as it results in her having minimal sources of external support to draw upon in her time of need (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Geller, 1992; Grigsby & Hartman, 1997; Stark & Flitcraft, 1996). In this manner, the climate of secrecy and isolation associated with abuse creates an environment that enables the batterer to continue abusing his partner. Susan appeared to be no exception in this regard. For example, in session 1 she said, "I now spend a lot of time with [my parents] *because I didn't do so during marriage* because I often had a bruised face which I did not want them to see". She later also added, "My mom once said to me: 'You pretend to be happy, but your eyes tell a different story'. So after that I avoided my parents while I was married".

It emerged that feelings of *shame* on Susan's part in relation to the abuse contributed towards her keeping it a secret. Susan hinted at this in the early part of her therapy, as revealed in the excerpts below:

"My mother once said to me: 'I don't know how you could have made a mistake like this, marrying someone like him', so I excluded my parents from my relationship with him".

(Session 1)

"That's why I couldn't tell them (my parents) about my marriage because she (mother) would say: 'I had a bad feeling about him from the beginning', so I couldn't go to them for advice and I resolved to sort it out on my own".

(Session 2)

In session 35, Susan spoke openly about how such feelings of "shame" on her part led to her covering up Greg's violence from her parents. She said that she now understood that she perpetuated his violence in this way.

Susan was not only shamed by the physically abusive nature of her marriage; she also carried a strong charge in relation to the reality that she was married to a drug abuser, as revealed in the following excerpt:

"It's embarrassing what I've been through... This would never have been accepted in the class I was brought up in. My dad knew of some people who smoked buttons and I was told from a very young age that it was very bad and I actually went and lived with someone

like that, which is quite ‘Yuck!’ I spend a lot of time judging myself for being such an idiot”.

(Session 1)

It was interesting to note that feelings of embarrassment and shame on Susan’s part continued to play a role in influencing Greg’s harassment of her *once they separated*. For example, in session 4 she said that her mother had told her to simply ignore the buzzer when he rang to see her. She ignored her mother’s advice as she said, “I find it embarrassing when everyone hears him swearing at me through the intercom. I don’t want other people in the building to hear him speaking like that”. As a result, Susan made the choice on a number of occasions to allow Greg access into her apartment block so that he could then hurl abuse at her from her kitchen window rather than over the intercom.

Greg’s ongoing harassment was also shown during the early part of therapy to be limiting her ability to engage with others *even though they had separated*. In this manner, it served to perpetuate the cycle of abuse leading to isolation that was prevalent during their marriage. For example, in session 3 Susan said that she was reluctant to spend time with her friends because Greg had threatened them in the past. She told me that he had actually made her best friend’s life a misery in the past, and that her friend was very distraught and shaken-up afterwards. She felt that her friends were not as strong and resilient as she was when it came to dealing with him and therefore it was unfair to place their lives at risk by exposing them to his abuse.

It is worth noting in the context of this particular theme that there was an interesting progression during the course of her therapy in the manner that Susan gradually lifted the veil of secrecy and shame that surrounded her abusive marriage and subsequent separation. This seemed to coincide with her becoming more accepting of her decisions and herself during the course of therapy. For example, in session 1 she said, “I only recently told a friend about *one* incident that happened during my marriage. I still keep things to myself”. She went on to say, “My mom is encouraging me to talk about it and tells me it’s nothing to be ashamed of given what she (her mother) has been through. But I find it very difficult”. By session 11, Susan told me that she was going to be giving a talk to a number of women with whom she worked about the ordeal that she had been through with Greg. She seemed to be drawing strength from speaking to others about her experiences and from discovering that other people had had similar difficulties in their relationships.

5.5.2 Physical complaints

The strain that Susan’s husband placed on her during their marriage continued, through his ongoing harassment, to exact its toll on her once they separated. An example of how this became apparent

was provided by the numerous illnesses and complaints that she manifested, which appeared to be stress-related. For example, in session 3, Susan complained that she had been unwell in that she had lost a lot of weight and developed an ulcer as a result of the stress that her husband's stalking had placed on her, as well as a recent court appearance. She then missed her next appointment, as she needed to be hospitalised when her ulcer later perforated and she bled both rectally and orally. She told me that "this had caused [her] a lot of stress".

Susan needed to be hospitalised for a twelve-day period once again during my December vacation and when she arrived at session 22 she told me it was the result of her eating "a pineapple which reacted badly with her ulcers". She said she had also developed a "lump on [her] head" that caused her a great deal of pain. In short, she said she had "been through a hell of a period" and at times she had even contemplated jumping from the hospital window "to end it all", which revealed the emotional toll that her physical condition was exacting on her. In session 24, she said that she was waking up each morning with nosebleeds, which she thought was due to her high blood pressure due to her high stress levels. Other physical complaints that Susan voiced during the course of therapy included a sore throat (in session 27), sinusitis (in session 32) and repetitive headaches (in sessions 28, 32 and 35).

In this way, her physical illnesses served to further deplete the limited resources that she had at her disposal at a time when she needed to carefully manage her safety. In this manner, it is possible to view her physical complaints as complicating factors that hindered her ability to extricate herself completely from her relationship with Greg.

5.5.3 PTSD/Trauma-related Responses

A similar argument as above can be made in respect of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as it has been shown in the literature to be both an effect of domestic violence and a barrier to escaping it (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997). Even though Susan was no longer living with Greg, she continued to display numerous trauma-related responses as a result of his ongoing harassment. For example, in session 5 she described how she sometimes crawled on all fours in the dark in her house when she heard a noise in the house because she was afraid that Greg was inside. In session 7, which followed Greg's assaulting her in her apartment, Susan said that when she later slept at home, every sound that she heard would make her jump and she kept on hearing Greg's car driving round and round her apartment block. She cried as she told me that she was scared to be at home, but did not feel comfortable anywhere else.

During session 9 she spoke about how she was now fearful that “Greg’s connections would start terrorising [her]”. She described how two men in a taxi stared at her and that she was now fearful that Greg had given them her car registration number and that they were following her. She said that she was afraid that Greg or one of his friends would tamper with the breaks on her car, as they would find it easy to do so. Susan questioned herself in this session whether she was becoming “paranoid”.

In session 10, she said that she “still placed her ironing board behind her front door” so that she would hear if someone opened the door while she was sleeping, but that she was no longer as fearful. Once again, she complained in session 12 that the slightest noise disturbed her at night. She also described an almost compulsive need to check that the doors were locked and that Greg was not hiding under her bed. She reported in session 13 waking up feeling incredibly anxious after having a “terrible dream”. She spoke once again in session 14 about her sleeping difficulties and said that she was having nightmares in which people were chasing her. In one dream she ended up pleading for life with an assailant. She described in session 29, how she placed a strip of cellotape on her door and on her (packed) boxes, which she then used as a sign to indicate whether Greg had entered her house or not, or opened her sealed boxes.

It has been noted in the literature that heightened levels of psychological distress hamper a battered woman’s ability to extricate herself from an abusive relationship (Arias, 1999; Grigsby & Hartman, 1997). Susan appeared to be no exception in this regard, as even though she was no longer living with her abuser, her heightened levels of stress clearly affected her functioning and decision-making ability at a time that her life continued to be at risk at the hands of her partner.

5.5.4 Depressive Symptoms

In addition to the above-mentioned trauma-related symptoms, Susan displayed a number of symptoms indicating that she was depressed. For example, in session 4 she complained of feeling depressed and irritable and said that she spent the entire weekend in bed and that she was not interested in seeing anybody. She broke into tears in session 5 as she told me that she was “coming to pieces”. She had been struggling to get out of bed and hinted at possible suicidal feelings when she said, “I can’t wait for it all to come to an end”. She said that all she wanted to do was sleep and that she slept so deeply that she could not remember the last time that she had a dream. She had lost her appetite and started eating more junk food and was not really interested in doing anything. She also complained of concentration difficulties in that she had to start reading her book “all over again” because she could not remember what she had last read. Susan was so distressed by session 15 that she told me that she had contemplated suicide. She said that she had looked at the sleeping

tablets that her doctor had prescribed for her and “thought about how easy it would be to take [her] life”.

Susan had reservations about going onto anti-depressants but after gentle encouragement on her doctor’s and my part, decided to start taking them around the time that coincided with her sixteenth session. However, she proved to be non-compliant after taking them for a number of weeks and continued to battle with feelings of depression during the remaining course of her therapy. Her depression appeared to worsen at times when Greg’s harassment was particularly severe. As mentioned earlier, Susan’s functioning also severely deteriorated during the time period extending from session 31 to 33 when her mother cut ties with her following Susan getting caught up and involved in argument between her mother and father.

One cannot say with any degree of certainty that her depressive symptoms were solely the result of the impact that that her abusive marriage had exerted upon her, particularly if one takes into account her impoverished developmental background. However, what was apparent was that the ongoing harassment by her husband once they had separated was exacting its toll upon her and exacerbating the depressive picture that she painted at times during her therapy. Susan’s thinking appeared to be negatively affected at these times when it was imperative that she took active steps to ensure her safety. In this way, Greg’s ongoing abuse appeared to impact negatively on her underlying feelings of depression, which in turn hindered her movement towards safety.

5.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

5.6.1 Counter-transference, Separation-Individuation and the Frame

What the above discussion hopefully served to illustrate is the diverse nature of the factors that influenced Susan’s separation from her abusive husband. It should be apparent from the above discussion that the adoption of a single theoretical viewpoint (be it psychodynamic, feminist or any other approach) in isolation would fail to grasp the complexity of the battering dynamic. Hence one of the major strengths of the proposed modification of the Barriers Model (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997) is that it allows for such a multiplicity of perspectives.

However on a personal level, it was my experience as a trainee therapist that the adoption of such multiple perspectives was a very difficult situation to hold and manage at times. It influenced what material Susan brought to therapy, and I found myself having to balance issues emanating from the different perspectives (or layers) at different times. For example, Susan would arrive at one session and the issue of her physical safety (layer 1) in the face of Greg’s harassment would be the focus of

her attention. In the next session, her childhood experiences of for example, abuse and lack of support and protection at home (layer 4) would assume centre stage. It was also not uncommon for issues from different layers to be brought up in the same session.

The issue of *separation-individuation* and how this played out in relation to the *frame* serves as a useful illustration of the difficulty in holding such multiplicity of thinking. As mentioned earlier, Susan's attendance at therapy sessions only appeared to stabilise once she was referred to a lawyer who specialised in the area of domestic violence. The impression was conveyed that prior to this point, the (environmental) events in her life were so overwhelming that they impacted negatively on her ability to find the time and space to attend therapy. Clearly, her referral to a specialised lawyer offered an element of stability in the chaotic nature of her life at that time. Similarly, Susan's attendance only stabilised after my December vacation once I contracted with her that she would phone me at prearranged times after she threatened suicide in a session. (She had said in this session that she was unsure if she would attend the next week's session because she was unsure whether she would still be alive by that time). Yet, after setting up such a contract, Susan made out that she was phoning me for *my benefit*, which communicated to me, that perhaps some deeper issue was being played out in this instance.

It was only in retrospect that I realised that I may have been inadvertently drawn into enacting Susan's developmental dynamic in relation to separation-individuation in both these instances. Viewed in this light, it is possible to regard Susan's irregular attendance as representing an example of the approach and avoidance behaviour that she encountered from her mother during her childhood that she played out in relation to her experience of the therapeutic relationship. If this was the case, my assumption of the caretaking role in both these instances may have encouraged a symbiotic type of clinging behaviour on her part that translated into her attending therapy more consistently. As a result, my understanding was possibly enhanced of how Susan's behaviour may have fed into the dynamic that she complained of in relation to her mother, as described earlier. By this I mean that as much as Susan complained of her mother's over involvement in her life, she possibly played a role in eliciting such responses from her mother.

In addition, I had to work hard to temper my urge to contact Susan during periods when her attendance was irregular, as when she did attend therapy she strongly conveyed the impression that either Greg might fatally injure her or that she was in danger of taking her own life. As my attempts to contact her over this period were simply greeted by her answering machine, it was impossible to obtain information concerning her well being. At this time, I recognised that if I acted on my urges (to contact her) there was a danger that I too (like Greg) would become another

'stalker' in her life (albeit in a much more diluted form). This made me wonder if Susan somehow played a part or contributed towards Greg's ongoing harassment in some way. I also felt that I gained further insight during this period into why her mother felt the need to hear from Susan on a daily basis to make sure that she was safe and secure. In this way, my understanding was enhanced of how Susan's behaviour (by not communicating with those who were close to her) may have fed into the dynamic that existed between herself and her mother. In this way, it gave me further insight into her ongoing struggle with separation-individuation, as previously described.

It is interesting to note within this context that Grigsby and Hartman (1997, p.497) recognise the challenges posed by their model if therapists expand their focus beyond the "inner psychological structure of the client". They are of the opinion that their model presents a call for a paradigm shift as "[n]ot only does it present an alternative view of the battering and escape process, it presents an alternative model for therapy". They state the following:

"Full use of the Barriers Model requires therapists to expand their role beyond traditional definition, to become educated about local public policy and law in the area in which they practise, to engage in interdisciplinary intervention, to provide information, linkage, case management and advocacy for battered clients, to help build a community response through participation on local task forces, and to become a force for change in their own communities."

From the above discussion, it is apparent that when this conceptualisation is combined with a meaningful understanding of how a battered woman's poor developmental history impacts on, for example, her ability to attend and make use of therapy, the full extent of the enormity of the task confronted by therapists becomes apparent. As mentioned in the literature review, it is my impression that Grigsby and Hartman's (1997) broad-minded "alternative model for therapy" fails to consider in a meaningful way, the impact of such factors associated with a battered woman's history and how this impacts on her ability to make use of therapy. This was one of the motivations underlying the alteration made to their model in this study.

CHAPTER SIX

<h3><u>CONCLUSION</u></h3>

This research study employed the single case-study method with the aim of illustrating the complex nature of a woman's separation from her physically abusive husband. As I was an intern therapist still in training and Susan represented my first long-term therapy case, much of my understanding of the events that played out in Susan's life and in the course of her therapy has come after I have reflected upon her case (while writing this thesis). What I however did recognise relatively early on was that even though Susan complained bitterly about her ongoing torment at the hands of Greg and about the inefficiency of the police and the legal system in protecting her, the matter was complex and intricate. And in time, I came to recognise traces of ambivalence and paradox in the manner in which Susan engaged with Greg and with the police and criminal justice system.

As my theoretical understanding developed, I came to realise that it is only possible to obtain a deep understanding of Susan's difficulties with the barriers identified in layer 1 of the Barriers Model (1997), if one is equipped with an appreciation of the lasting effects of her impoverished developmental upbringing. For this reason, the decision was made to invert the Barriers Model as designed by Grigsby and Hartman (1997). In this manner, it has hopefully been illustrated that the model's applicability has been greatly enhanced.

It has hopefully been demonstrated that a richer understanding can be obtained of

- Susan's reactions to Greg's abuse and her ongoing involvement with him; and
- her interactions with the police and the criminal justice system

if one understands the concepts of splitting, as well as the developmental hurdle of separation-individuation. By utilising a psychodynamic understanding of Susan's internal psychic reality, it was possible to make sense of her perplexing behaviour at times. This was achieved by recognising that in these instances, she was possibly guided in her help-seeking endeavours by her internal object relations as much as she was influenced by external circumstances. In other words, the contradictions and splits that appear to structure her internal world were found to underpin her interactions with helping resources at times. In line with Labe's (2001, p.163) approach, the adoption of such a view holds that "the battered woman is a victim of her own unconscious forces as much as she is the victim of her husband's abuse". Given the relative paucity of psychodynamic literature that considers the battering dynamic compared to feminist and learning theory

explanations, this represents an area worthy of further psychoanalytic research, discussion and debate.

The intention behind this alteration of Grigsby and Hartman's (1997) model was not however, to detract from illustrating just how difficult Greg made it for Susan to move on with her life, even though they were no longer living together. By utilising a single case study approach, it was possible to gather material showing the extent of his harassment over an eleven-month period that poignantly brought this point home. In this manner, feminist arguments that describe ongoing "separation assaults" (Mahoney, 1994, p.79) against the battered woman, which McHugh (1993, p.61) describes as "termination terrorism", were integrated with a psychoanalytic understanding of Susan's response to such attacks.

Although ambivalence to prosecute Greg on Susan's part was encountered, it was also shown how the police and the criminal justice system were experienced to be ineffective in protecting Susan and hence exacerbated her felt sense of helplessness in the face of Greg's ongoing abusive behaviour. In addition, the frequent postponements of court proceedings were extremely frustrating and as such, represented a further vehicle for ongoing intimidation and abuse. In this manner, Susan's case was shown to provide confirmatory evidence for Artz' (2001) conclusions concerning the improper application of the Domestic Violence Act of 1998 by the police and other criminal justice agents within the South African context. Given the extent and severity of domestic violence in South Africa, this is a cause for concern and worthy of further research that serves to evaluate, monitor and address this issue.

It is further felt that if the police and the officers of the court were to be provided with a deeper understanding of the complex psychological factors at play between the batterer and his partner, they would be better equipped to exercise their responsibilities. However, such an endeavour would have to be undertaken with the necessary sensitivity and care so as not to overly pathologise battered women as this may further detract from the manner in which the police and the courts exercise their duties. It would also be important to convey the message that the batterer also brings his psychological make-up to the battering dynamic, which was however not the focus of this study. Given this understanding, the police and the officers of the court may then be well placed to refer battered women for counselling and support, which could provide assistance to such women and validate their decisions to institute legal procedures against their abusive partners.

The integrative nature of the proposed framework for analysis also afforded the opportunity to further consider the manner in which Susan's religious values and socialisation within her family

influenced her ability to separate from Greg. It was shown how patriarchal ideologies which helped to organise her beliefs about herself and relationships intersected with powerful psychological defences that enabled her to preserve her attachment to Greg (Labe, 2001). The above discussion also illustrated how Greg's attacks served to negatively impact on Susan's identity, which appeared to further effect her ability to separate from him. Finally it was shown how Greg's ongoing harassment served to isolate her from her support structures and also exacted a considerable physical and emotional toll on her that tapped her already limited resources, which also impacted negatively on her separation process.

In this manner, by utilising a modified version of the Barriers Model (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997, p.496) framework, it was shown that it is indeed possible "to take into account the whole of the battered woman's experience". It was possible to integrate psychodynamic and feminist thought and to illustrate areas where these approaches overlap or where one theory expands on another's conception of this complex phenomenon. In this manner, a rich and deep understanding has hopefully been cultivated of the complex nature of a battered woman's separation from her abusive partner.

The process of providing therapy to Susan in the midst of all the above factors was highly challenging. Her attendance proved to inconsistent for periods, and therapy ended prematurely after Susan failed to return to therapy after taking a self-imposed vacation. Hence I am not in a position to comment on whether Susan managed to complete her process of severing her ties with Greg. It was however, my impression that when Susan did attend therapy, it offered her a much-needed sense of stability. She was able to utilise the space to reflect to a degree on the impact of her upbringing, her history of abusive relationships and find support that she needed in managing her separation process. In this manner, it is my impression that therapy can provide an invaluable tool and referral source to help manage the complex process of a woman's separation from her abusive partner. The more the therapist is able to take cognisance of the vast array of factors that influence this process, the better. For this reason, if the therapist is equipped with a thorough understanding of the complex factors associated with the separation process, as described in this research study, he or she will better placed to provide much-needed support and containment to a battered woman in her journey towards separation.

CHAPTER SIX

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APPENDIX A

At or about the fourth or fifth months of age, at the peak of symbiosis, the infant shows signs of moving into the four sequentially unfolding sub-phases of the *separation-individuation* process (Mahler, 1986; Fonagy, 2001). The first sub-phase, which Mahler called *differentiation* (Mahler, 1986) or *hatching* is characterised by the infant's exploration of the mother's body, which indicates that he or she has started to see her as a separate person (Celani, 1994). It is then followed by a more active phase, called *practising*, which begins proper when the infant is capable of free upright walking and extends to approximately 15-18 months. Although locomotion allows increased ability for exploration, during the early stages of the practising sub-phase the child still needs "a 'home base' to fulfil [his or her] need for refuelling through physical contact" and the child may go through a brief period of increased separation anxiety (Mahler, 1986, p. 227). During the practising sub-phase proper though, the child is often so absorbed with his or her own activities that for long periods of time he or she may appear oblivious of the mother's presence, although refuelling is still required periodically from time to time (Mahler, 1986). During this phase the child is still unaware of its mother's separateness (Celani, 1994).

The third sub-phase of separation was termed *rapprochement* by Mahler and it extends on average from 16 to 25 months (Mahler, 1986). The infant's maturing ego now enables him or her to recognise his or her separateness from mother as well as his or her inability to really be alone without her (St Clair, 1986). The toddler discovers to his or her perplexity that if, for example, he or she gets hurt, his or her mother is not always around (because of the toddler's increased ability to venture further away from his or her mother) and this produces increased separation anxiety (Mahler, 1986; St Clair, 1986, Celani, 1994). The junior toddler may employ all kinds of mechanisms to resist separation from his or her mother but gradually it comes to realise that his or her love objects (parents) are separate individuals with their own interests. The toddler must therefore gradually and painfully give up his or her delusion of grandeur and omnipotence in relation to his or her caregiver(s) and this is therefore a vulnerable period when the child's self-esteem may suffer deflation (Mahler, 1986; St Clair, 1986). It is a conflict-laden stage of development for the child because increasing needs for autonomy create a clash between the child's desire to separate and his or her opposing fear of getting lost. The child may therefore on occasions demand his or her mother's presence while at the next moment, express the opposite desire to be alone as this internal conflict is played out (Celani, 1994). Mahler believed that the *rapprochement* sub-phase is "the mainspring of man's eternal struggle against both fusion and isolation" (Mahler, 1986, p.231).

The fourth sub-phase begins mainly in the third year of life and its main tasks involve the *consolidation of individuality* and the attainment of some degree *emotional object constancy* (Mahler et al., 1975; St Clair, 1986). During this period the child gradually learns to merge or integrate separate views of his or her mother (as “good” or “bad”) into a unified view and reciprocally, is able to hold a single view of him or herself (St Clair, 1986; Celani, 1994). This phase does not have a distinct ending point (St. Clair, 1986) and the process of differentiation through individuation-separation continues through young adulthood (Celani, 1994). From the above, it is apparent that Mahler’s emphasis “is on the process of separation-individuation, the gradual distancing of the child from the mother, the transition from dependent to independent functioning” (Fonagy, 2001, p. 76).