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# **Charming or harming:**

**Case studies of emotional abuse in heterosexual intimate  
partner relationships.**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of

Master of Social Sciences

In

Psychology

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# ABSTRACT

Emotional abuse in the absence of physical abuse is often unrecognised. Although the literature identifies the insidious nature of this type of abuse and the physiological, psychological and emotional harm it often causes, knowledge of how women come to recognise they are being emotionally abused is underdeveloped.

In response to this, the purpose of this research was to investigate the dynamics of emotionally abusive heterosexual intimate partner relationships and establish how women came to recognise their relationship as such. Four women who identified as having been emotionally abused by their male partner each took part in two in-depth semi-structured interviews about their experiences. The analysis and methodology of the research was underpinned by a feminist framework.

The interviews are presented in case study form, showing in context the undermining effects of the abuse and any difficulties the women faced in pinpointing what was so wrong with their relationships.

Gender socialisation, myths surrounding abuse, and mixed messages from potential support systems, all influenced recognition. Theories useful for disentangling the complex social structure which may support emotional abuse of women included gender theories from Goffman and Connell, relational theory, and total institution theory among others.

The research highlights the importance of rethinking the nature of abuse from individual explosive acts of violence perpetrated by a certain type of person, to a continual process of more subtle undermining factors which are underpinned by patriarchy and gender inequality. For a more comprehensive picture of emotional abuse it becomes clear there is a need to step away from conceptualising it in a similar manner to physical abuse and to look not only in terms of acts done, but also in terms of reciprocity and neglect.

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# CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

The wounded child inside many males is a boy who, when he spoke his first truths, was silenced by paternal sadism, by a patriarchal world that did not want him to claim his true feelings. The wounded child inside many females is a girl who was taught from early childhood that she must become something other than herself, deny her true feelings, in order to attract and please others.

bell hooks

The primary aim of this research is to further the understanding of emotional abuse in heterosexual intimate partner relationships in the absence of physical abuse, with a particular focus on identifying how women come to recognise emotional abuse in their relationships. By exploring women's perceptions, information was obtained that gives a unique insight to this often hidden type of abuse.

In order to set the context for this study, this chapter includes literature relevant to the gendered nature of emotional abuse. In addition literature not covered in this chapter is referred to in the case studies when relevant to specific issues. Much of the research regarding emotional abuse has been done in conjunction with physical abuse and will reflect this.

Chapter Two describes the methodological approach taken in this study and the specific procedures used.

Chapter Three contains the case studies of each woman's story. The case studies have been structured around specific themes: The relationship; the break up;

recognising the abuse (what helped and what did not); and participants suggestions for raising awareness of emotional abuse.

Chapter Four is a discussion of the key themes emerging from the case studies, along with the conclusions that have been reached. The thesis closes with some personal and general reflections on the research process and possibilities for future research are discussed.

### **Significance of this study**

There are two reasons why this study is significant. Firstly domestic violence is a serious social problem. It is estimated that up to one in three women will experience some kind of gender based violence during her lifetime (Hearn & McKie, 2010). The World Health Organisation has identified it as a human rights issue in which the consequences are not only limited to the domestic sphere (Yamawaki, Ostenson & Brown, 2009). Domestic violence accrues significant costs on a multitude of levels including direct and indirect costs.

Secondly, many physically abused women say the most hurtful and long lasting damage to them was caused by the emotional abuse they also endured (Loring, 1994). There has been little research conducted which examines emotional abuse in the absence of physical abuse. This may influence the way professionals and lay people respond to its victims and hinder the recognition process for the victims. It is possible that the more traditional focus on individual physically violent events has limited understanding of the role continual coercive and controlling behaviours play in abuse, perhaps excluding millions of women from receiving the help they need to recover from emotional abuse.

### **Use of terms**

This thesis is looking at women who have experienced emotional abuse in an intimate heterosexual relationship. The terms *wife*, *woman* or *partner* will be used interchangeably as will the terms *husband*, *man* or *partner*. I will also use the term *she* to refer to the victim and *he* to refer to the perpetrator of abuse. Emotional

abuse is sometimes referred to as psychological abuse and non-physical violence, and the terms will be used interchangeably in this research.

### **Gender symmetry/asymmetry in abusive relationships**

Some researchers contend that both males and females are responsible for perpetrating intimate partner violence (Esqueda & Harrison, 2005; Ferguson & Negy, 2004; Michael P. Johnson, 2006; Robertson, 2005). These studies tend to use the Conflicts Tactic Scale (CTS) to measure incidents of domestic violence (Leone, Johnson, & Cohan, 2007), and focus on physical violence only (Zavala & Spohn, 2010). Feminist researchers dispute these arguments because they believe the CTS does not consider for the context or the motivation behind the violence. They claim the CTS fails to look at controlling behaviours or the effects of emotional, mental and verbal abuse in relationships (Kaukinen, 2004; Loring, 1994; Zavala & Spohn, 2010) and fails to take into account abuse during and after separation (Fergusson, Horwood, & Ridder, 2005). Another aspect of intimate partner violence not taken into account by the CTS is the evidence that suggests women experience greater negative effects to their wellbeing as a result of abuse than men seem to do (Doherty & Berglund, 2008; M. P. Johnson & Ferrero, 2000). Importantly, women are frequently very afraid of their male partners, while men seldom report feeling afraid (Giles, 2004). And, in a similar vein, it is understood that after abuse in their lives, women fear the future in greater numbers than men seem to do and they are also more likely to seek medical help (DeMaris & Kaukinen, 2008). The CTS also does not measure the outcome of abuse between partners in a mutually aggressive relationship.

While there is no denying violence can be a two way streak in an intimate relationship and can sometimes be perpetrated by females (Coney & Mackey, 1999), feminists argue that when a female uses violence in a relationship, she is more often than not retaliating at or defending herself from a male partner (Esqueda & Harrison, 2005; Melton & Belknap, 2003). M. P. Johnson and Ferrero (2000) developed a theory of two distinct types of violence in intimate relationships, the first, in which males and females are both engaged to some degree and the second which is purely perpetrated by males. These two different

types are named common couple violence (CCV) and intimate (or patriarchal) terrorism. Johnson contends that CCV is not the same as abuse or intimate terrorism. CCV covers situations where conflict occasionally gets out of hand, does not follow a pattern and is usually minor. Johnson believes it is not directly related to oppressive gender power relations. On the other hand intimate terrorism is motivated by a male's desire to completely control 'his' female partner. He systematically initiates acts of psychological or physical violence on a regular basis in order to maintain a position of power (M. P. Johnson & Ferrero, 2000).

Evan Stark (2010, p. 202) states,

I believe that special societal attention is merited by coercion that occurs in the context of and reinforces inequality, in this case gender inequality. This is both an ethical position that derives from the special vulnerability of persons who are unequal because of their age, race, sex or societal status, and reflects the fact that coercion in the context of structural inequality has different dynamics and individual and societal consequence even when it is bi-directional than the use of force among relative equals.

### **Sex and gender**

Along with the CTS, there are domestic violence studies which emphasize that aggression and violence in intimate relationships emerge as a result of biological sex differences. Indeed, (Archer, 2000) found biological sex differences to be the cause of violence in relationships rather than cultural or social factors.

However, one of the many feminist contributions to research has been the distinction between the terms sex and gender. The idea of sex and gender as two distinctly different concepts has become widely recognised. Sex has been acknowledged as the biological differences between female and male and gender as the socially imposed characteristics and social position attached to being female or male (Dragiewicz, 2008; Macionis, 2005). Gender notions of femininity and masculinity are constructed and fluid and can be likened to 'performing or doing' an expected role (Risman, 2004). Gender shapes the way we interact with others and shapes how we think of ourselves. It also shapes a social hierarchy where men and women are viewed differently in terms of wealth, power and other resources (Macionis, 2005) affecting opportunities and adding varying degrees of

constraints. Within the social hierarchies behaving outside of the sanctioned 'role' disrupts shared meanings and likewise, the status quo.

The distinction between sex and gender may be rudimentary yet is important as it challenges ideas that certain hierarchies in society are biologically structured and therefore 'natural' (Risman, 2004), bringing into question the notion that domestic violence is an inevitable result of biological sex differences. If certain natural biological characteristics determine social hierarchies then it follows that social change to these structures is unlikely. However, history has shown deeply imbedded ideas of so called 'natural' biological hierarchies can be challenged and changed. It was once assumed that female biology meant women 'naturally' lacked the intelligence needed to take part in political life. That attitude was more a reflection of a society at that time, than it was anything to do with biology. Some of the traits associated with each gender are listed in the following table.

**Table 1: Traits associated with gender**

FEMININE TRAITS	MASCULINE TRAITS
Submissive	Dominant
Dependent	Independent
Unintelligent and incapable	Intelligent and competent
Emotional	Rational
Receptive	Assertive
Intuitive	Analytical
Weak	Strong
Timid	Brave
Content	Ambitious
Passive	Active
Cooperative	Competitive
Sensitive	Insensitive
Sex object	Sexually aggressive
Attractive because of physical appearance	Attractive because of achievement

(Macionis, 2005)

These gender traits show that in Western society men can be expected to be powerful, rational and dominant while women can be expected to be passive, emotional and submissive.

## **Relevant theories**

Children quickly learn that society thinks males and females are 'different'. This learning continues as children grow up and can become influenced by gender roles shown on television, in music videos, in novels and in jokes (Bancroft, 2002). As shown above, there are certain gender traits associated with being male or female, and although research shows most people do not consistently fit into these characteristics, we can grow up thinking of the genders as being opposite (Macionis, 2005). Gender role ideology can be particularly detrimental to females as it leads to cultural norms that are not only restrictive, but also invasive and contradictory (Schwartz & Lindley, 2008). To explain this, theories of how gender operates and organizes the social structures we live in have been suggested by Connell and others.

### **Gender and power**

Connell (1987) proposed three structures which give rise to gendered social relations (1) sexual division of labour; (2) sexual division of power; (3) cathexis, the sexualisation of social relationships.

The sexual division of labour refers to the roles distributed to the genders, both paid and unpaid, parent, sibling, and worker, for example, as well as the production, consumption, division of resources and opportunities that are available for these roles. Connell states the division of these roles gives males an economic benefit which in turn means being male becomes an economic resource. Secondly the sexual division of power refers to an association of masculinity with authority which is supported by an imbalance of resources and economic advantages in the workplace, home, family and personal relationships. Finally

cathexis, or the social norms regarding emotion and sexuality in relationship. Here Connell argues, the norms of society deem what is acceptable or deviant, including the normalization of females as sexual objects readily available for male desires. As a result of these divisions females are often thought of as objects whom have things done to them while males are thought of as subjects who do things.

These social divisions can be reinforced at community levels. These are defined as areas such as the workplace, religious institutions and the local neighbourhood. According to Hall Smith, White, and Moracco (2009) at a community level gendered social relationships are strengthened by the allocation and limitations' placed on certain roles for each gender, the design, organization and learned skills assigned to these roles and any inequitable allocation of wealth and social standing gained from this. Hall Smith et al. (2009) go on to state that the sexual division of power is replicated at a community level by determining who is allowed to use aggression or authority and so on, when it comes to making decisions on what will be discussed, where it will be discussed and on whose terms it will be discussed. When it comes to the sexualisation of relationships at a community level, Hall Smith et al. (2009) found that expression of emotion, love and sexuality for each gender was governed by social rules which became normalized through cultural messages in the media. The objectification of females and the normalization of male promiscuity are two of the main messages promoted (Hall Smith et al. 2009). This has been shown to lead to woman sometimes believing their only power lies in their 'attractiveness' to others and that their attractiveness is based upon submissiveness. All in all the unequal access to certain privileges is replicated from personal relationships through to the different levels of society and the community.

Much of the unequal distribution is made to look 'natural' and 'just the way things are' (Feenberg & Leiss, 2007). There are some arguments which take great pains to point out that biological differences predispose men and women to act differently and hence this makes them better suited to different roles in society. Yet, as demonstrated above, from an early age children learn how they should be behaving according to their gender by strong messages of approval and disapproval from outside sources. Indeed regarding females, the philosopher

Marcuse argued society “transforms a biological fact into an ethical and cultural value and thus it supports and justifies her social repression” (Feenberg & Leiss, 2007, p246).

### **Relational theory: empowering relationships**

Jean Baker Miller began developing a theory in the 1970’s which posited the idea that many aspects of women’s characteristics and behaviour had been ‘pathologised’ by mainstream thought. Miller believed people may have internalized the deficiency model of women therefore making it difficult for some to recognize and value the strengths associated with females. She wrote of women “We can still find it hard to believe that what we tend to think or feel or what we tend to want or like is valuable” (Jean. Baker. Miller, 1991, p. 2).

The characteristics and behaviour associated with being male has become seen as the ideal, with autonomy and independence being promoted as the goal to achieving full-personhood (Oliver, 1991). Under existing belief systems the assumption has been that as an individual matures they become separated or independent and ready for adult relationships. As many males and females in society are encouraged to do.

On top of this, women are often encouraged to be the nurturers and carers of society. It could be argued that women who do not adhere to these types of roles are seen as somewhat deficient females. While on the other hand, caring and nurturing are not placed on the same level as many male attributes can be. Women may find themselves in a double bind because of these assumptions.

A model developed by the Stone Center at Wellesley College found *mutual* and *empathetic* relationships are a basic human need for all people although this is particularly the case for women. This suggests that many of the psychological problems women face can be traced to disconnections or violations in relationships, be these intimate relationships, family relationships or within larger relationships based in society (J . B. Miller, 1976).

*Mutuality* means that each person in a relationship can represent her feelings, thoughts, and perceptions, and can both move with and be moved by the feelings,



thoughts, and perceptions of the other person. Each person, as well as the relationship, can change and move forward because there is mutual influence and mutual responsiveness.

*Empathy* is a complex, highly developed ability to join with another at a cognitive and affective level without losing connection with one's own experience. An empathic person both feels personally authentic in the relationship and feels she can "see" and "know" the other person. A growth-fostering relationship requires mutual empathy, which in turn requires that both parties have the capacity to connect empathically.

In relationships where there is a disconnection, as abusive relationships often can be, the opportunity for mutuality and empathy are diminished. This can result in a downward spiral of diminished vitality, disempowerment, confusion, diminished self-worth and a turning away from relationships (J. B. Miller, 1990).

### **Abuse as a consequence of social hierarchies**

Examination of these theories suggests that men and women live their lives surrounded by systems of hierarchies coupled with social ideas of the expected roles they will take in them. Therefore violence against women, including non-physical forms, plays out in a much larger social context.

It may well be that rather than a conscious effort used by individual males to maintain positions of power and authority, in the majority of cases, violence against women is more likely to be a consequence of the social hierarchies we live in.

Gramsci (1972) argued that social hierarchies generally reinforce themselves in a consensual manner. He went on to posit that violence is only needed when the hegemony breaks down, and then it is only used to reinstate the status quo (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). From this it could be taken that when a female steps away from her submissive gender role she may well upset the status quo determined by hegemony. As the 'gender contract' has undergone some re-negotiation, particularly with the advent of the women's movement in the 1970s, it can be argued that men appear to have more invested in maintaining the

traditional contract than women seem to do (Giles, 2004). Hunnicutt (2009) believes an examination of patriarchy within the context of broader social hierarchies may be a means to explain the patterns of violence against women which can occur within ethnicity, class and age.

In summary, the literature suggests the vast majority of violence against women is committed by men. Not only that, we can also determine that this occurs within a hegemonic society which assigns certain characteristics to each gender, where male is seen as dominant and female subordinate. Rather than looking for the roots of violence within individual characteristics, we should be looking towards the structures of society which allow this behaviour to happen, as Gramsci and others suggest.

## **Sexism, patriarchy and social power**

### **Patriarchy**

A fundamental assumption of the feminist movement is that society is structured by patriarchy. The oppression of women is the inevitable result of the underlying structures of social organisation that have valorised male achievement and underplayed women's work (Case et al., 2012). In short, patriarchy gives to males' privileges in the home, and socially, which females do not receive. In order to maintain their privilege, males dominate females and hold a monopoly over social institutions. Under a patriarchal system unequal hierarchies allow males the power to control women's production, reproduction and sexuality.

### **Male dominance**

Society is male dominated in as much as positions of power are generally reserved for men. Heads of state, religious leaders, CEOs, the military, heads of educational institutes, and law makers, through to the 'head of the household' are all thought of as male positions under patriarchy (Johnson, 2005). This means males are in a position to shape society in a way which serves male collective

interests. This can promote the idea that men are of more worth than women. It is thought all males benefit from this social structure.

### **Male identification**

Simply put, this is a society that identifies with male attributes as the desirable standard through which everything else is judged. Men who may not identify themselves as powerful still have the advantage of a connection to the idea of male dominance in ways females do not (Johnson, 2005).

### **Male centeredness**

Pick up a newspaper or watch a movie and the notion of a male centred society becomes clear. The focus is usually on male achievements, which are written by and delivered for males. As Johnson writes “With rare exceptions, women are portrayed as along for the ride, fussing over their support work of domestic labour and maintaining love relationships, providing something for men to fight over (2005, p 10).

### **Defining male privilege**

Privilege as a concept involves large social groups having unearned access to benefits that others do not receive. It is self-perpetuating and males, as a social group and in particular, white, middle class males are believed to have access to more unearned privilege than any other social group (Case, Iuzzini, & Hopkins, 2012; Macionis, 2005). Institutional and social factors reinforce privilege while at the same time establish the ‘norms’ of society by which members of less privileged groups are expected to adhere to. As Case et al. (2012, p. 3) state, privilege allows “dominant group members the option of remaining ignorant and avoidant of awareness and oppression.” Male privilege ensures that while not all men experience it in the same manner, typically at each level of social standing they will have more income, wealth, education and power than their female equivalent (Macionis, 2005). Male privilege has created social inequalities which can result in oppressive career, family and social roles for females (Schwartz & Lindley, 2008). Male privilege has been tied to notions of males being ‘the head of the household’ with whom the right to make decisions for other members is an assumed given, due to unearned social status (Flaherty, 1996).

Patriarchy cannot be understood in terms of a fixed constant. Like gender, it is socially constructed and changeable as certain components become more important than others (Hearn, 2012). It would be unwise to consider that patriarchy gives privilege to all males in the same way. Other systems such as class and race interact within the overarching umbrella that is patriarchy (Dragiewicz, 2008; McPhail, Busch, Kulkarni, & Rice, 2007). Likewise, women do not experience patriarchy in similar ways.

Institutions such as the legal system have reinforced patriarchy while at the same time have also contributed to it. MacKinnon (1993) stated that “the law sees and treats women the way men see and treat women” (p. 207). Historically the laws relating to domestic violence gave men the right to chastise their wives as long as it was within the privacy of their home, tacitly supporting the use of physical violence (Cassidy & Trafimow, 2002).

From the legal system to the health systems, to education and through to the family, patriarchy constructs our knowledge, our language and defines social problems. The invisible web woven through society is accepted by many as ‘just the way things are’ and is rarely questioned.

### **Hostile and benevolent sexism**

Norman. T. Feather and McKee (2012) found that people who held strong values associated with social dominance, social status, and personal safety were more likely to endorse sexist attitudes than those who held values associated with tolerance, appreciation and protection for the welfare of society as a whole. Albee (1981) defined sexism as “perceiving and acting toward females as if they are categorically inferior.” Studies of sexist attitudes directed at females have been distinguished as hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism is usually directed at women who do not conform to traditional gender roles (Swim, Mallett, & Russo-Devosa, 2005), whereas benevolent sexism is that of “subjectively benevolent but patronising” attitudes that cast “women as wonderful but fragile creatures who ought to be protected and provided for by men” (Travaglia, Overall, & Sibley, 2009). It seems a more pleasant co-operative way of coercing a subordinate group, by giving perks and affection “for knowing their place” (Glick & Fiske, 1997, p121). Glick and Fiske found that in terms of living within hostile

sexist situations, females are more likely to be accepting of benevolent sexism in situations where there is hostile sexism.

Sexist attitudes have been found to have significant consequences for males also. “Research has found that socialized masculine gender roles lead to multiple negative intrapersonal (i.e., psychological distress, health concerns) and interpersonal outcomes (hostility, abusive behaviour)” (Scharwtz & Lindley, 2008, p29).

### **Neo-sexism**

Social attitudes towards the position of women in society have changed towards a more egalitarian stance. As Herzog argues “old-fashioned, overt, or blatant manifestations of traditional gender-role attitudes toward women....are less likely in our current social-political climate....contemporary modern sexists are under pressure to adopt more egalitarian norms toward women” (2007). Therefore it can mean safer or more socially acceptable forms of sexism have been adopted, although some sexist attitudes may not have changed.

There is some belief that sexism is no longer a problem and that women are no longer discriminated against. However, evidence shows the more subtle forms of sexism (resistance to women’s rights and efforts to address sexism) are insidious and difficult to detect which means people are less likely to label them as sexist (Swim, Mallett, & Stangor, 2004). Martinez, Paterna, Roux and Flalomir found that males are more likely to hold these types of neo-sexist beliefs while at the same time endorse traditional gender roles (2010).

### **Power and control**

Patriarchy encourages males to see power and control as primary to their social standing and sense of self. As Johnson contends,

As with any system of privilege that elevates one group by oppressing the other, control is an essential element of patriarchy: Men maintain their privilege by controlling women and anyone else who might threaten it. Given the primacy of control, it becomes the standard for becoming a truly superior human being, which is then used to justify men’s privileged position. Men are assumed (and expected) to be in control at all times, to be unemotional (except for anger and rage), to present themselves as invulnerable, autonomous, independent, strong, rational, logical, dispassionate, knowledgeable, always right, and in

command of every situation, especially those involving women (2005, p14).

## **Feminist theory and domestic violence**

As shown above, feminist researchers contend that male violence in an intimate partner relationship is based in the unequal power differences which occur in a patriarchal society such as New Zealand (Anderson & Umberson, 2001). Kay Douglas posits that a male who uses abuse to gain power and control over his female partner is reflecting the larger issues of a hierarchal society (Douglas, 2008). This is mirrored in other research. Patriarchal theories of men's violence towards women suggests that domestic violence is only present because it has become socially acceptable for males to exert their dominance in this way (Malik & Lindahl, 1998). Therefore, traditional gender role beliefs of male dominance and female subordination in society quite possibly contribute to domestic violence and at the same time sanction the behaviour.

In support of this, studies have shown that males who abuse are usually very traditional in their gender role expectations of their female partners (Chabot, Tracy, Manning, & Poisson, 2009; Yick, 2000). Likewise, literature suggests that women who hold very traditional beliefs of their role may be more likely to become vulnerable to abuse (Yick, 2000). In their findings, Mori and colleagues speculated that people who hold strong traditional gender role beliefs are also more likely to endorse negative attitudes towards victims and victim blaming (Mori, Bernat, Glenn, Selle, & Zarate, 1995).

Alternatively, Ellington and Marshall (1997) found women who held egalitarian rather than traditional gender perceptions of themselves were most at risk to experience some form of domestic violence. In support of this, Jewkes (2002) found the degree of personal liberality is associated with empowering education for women. However, until a high enough level of education and empowerment are reached, women are at an increased risk of violence during transition periods of gender relations. Likewise, Lammers, Ritchie, and Robertson (2005) suggest

that as women struggle to change their traditional gender role, emotional abuse can result from men's frustrations to the change.

These pre-existing norms, values and practices are instilled through gender socialisation, which conditions boys to become aggressive, 'tough', dominant, and in control, while girls are socialised to be passive and to sustain dysfunctional and even violent relationships (Michelle & Weaver, 2003)

The previous sections show (1) the vast majority of domestic abuse is perpetrated by men against women; (2) this takes place in a society that is clearly male dominated, male centred and male identified, in other words, a patriarchal society. This is a society which bestows unearned greater power to males both in the context of the domestic and social sphere.

## **Emotional abuse**

Often interspersed through research articles and books are quotes from women who, when discussing emotional abuse, say things like "I wish he had hit me. Then I would have known it was abuse." Being able to clearly label emotional abuse has been a problem, not only for the women who are abused, but also for the people who are working in the field. To date there is no established criterion used for defining emotional abuse (Follingstad & DeHart, 2000; O'Leary, 1999; Seff, Beaulaurier, & Newman, 2008) although recent studies have advanced the knowledge and understanding of its' context (Henning & Klesges, 2003). Within the studies which have advanced the knowledge there have been few which have looked at emotional abuse which has occurred in the absence of any other form of abuse (Doherty & Berglund, 2008; Lammers et al., 2005; C. Murphy, 2002). This means that although there have been advances, there are questions still remaining over how to identify and recognise it in relationships (C. M. Murphy & Hoover, 1999). Research has shown over again that women and professionals have difficulty naming emotional abuse. It is often not until women have been out of the relationship for a period of time that they come to understand what happened to them (Stark, 2007). Given the difficulties, it is not unreasonable to deduce that

friends and family of emotionally abused women may also struggle to name it and offer helpful support.

When it comes to physical abuse, things like hitting, kicking or pushing are fairly recognisable as intimidating controlling abusive behaviours. And, for many of us, it can be said these behaviours are what we think of when we think of intimate partner violence or domestic abuse (Hunter, 2010). This is what we see defined as abuse most often in the media, in the cinema and in other forms of popular culture (Canfield, 2007; Evans, 2001; Michelle & Weaver, 2003; Nettleton, 2011). Along with what we see framed as abuse, there is evidence that representations of domestic violence in the media are often simplistically portrayed within individual pathology or within explosive, violent, brutal and isolated events (Meyers, 1994. Berns, 2001). Not only that, the media tends to present abusers as easily identifiable misfits (Throsby & Alexander, 2008). Therefore, the public make assumptions based upon these representations and decide who is a victim, who is an abuser and what domestic violence looks like (Nicolson & Wilson, 2004). Feminists argue the one thing the media does not seem to take into account or presents, is the fact that the common link between all abuses is its (usually) male perpetrator. Hence the old saying “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me” may still be believed (N. M. Capazza & X. B. Arriaga, 2008b) in some circumstances.

When it comes to emotional abuse there are no obvious wounds or scars on the outside, and in general, there are not many obvious explosive isolated events. The controlling intimidating behaviours which characterise abuse are used to bruise and scar the mind instead of the body and can be extremely subtle (C. M. Murphy & Hoover, 1999). At times all that is needed is a lift of an eyebrow from the male to convey his message of control to his partner (Stark, 2007). When emotional abuse is used by a male to dominate his female partner, it is being used to coerce and control her into doing what he wants (Douglas, 2008; Henning & Klesges, 2003; Margolin & Burman, 1993), with the same intention as a male who uses physical violence. The abusive partner seeks to win this control at any cost and he will do this by undermining and wearing down his partner to the extent that eventually she loses self-belief, feels defeated and becomes compliant (Hirigoyen, 2004).



Unlike physical abuse which is often described in terms of a cyclical pattern of control, Loring (1994) describes the pattern of emotional abuse as an almost constant pattern of overt and covert control. Beverley Engel describes overt abuse as openly demeaning, something which others may witness. She goes on to describe covert or hidden abuse as subtle and devastating (2002). In a similar vein, Evan Stark's thirty years of research point to a continual pattern of domination and control in these types of relationships. He believes it is not enough to only look at the periods of explosive overt behaviour. It is what is happening in-between the outbursts that holds the key to unlocking and understanding of all forms of abuse (Stark, 2007). This is repeated by Bancroft who states that to understand emotional abuse it is important to look at the whole picture and what is happening in-between these episodes (Bancroft, 2002).

It could be just as important to look at what is not happening in these relationships. A lack of attention and unsupportive or indifferent behaviours may also be just as effective in diminishing a persons' self-worth as direct forms of abuse can be. Montminy (2005) found older women were undermined by these types of behaviours from emotionally abusive husbands. The men avoided their share of responsibilities, and were indifferent towards the women, causing the wives to question their own existence and identity as a result. This is supported by Marshall who states "[the]conceptualization of psychological abuse should be expanded beyond the predominante approach which associates emotional or psychological abuse too closely with obviously dominating and controlling acts such as physical violence" (1999, p. 84). Emotional abuse can then be understood not only in terms of an action 'done' to another, but also in terms of inaction.

### **Emotionally abusive behaviour versus emotional abuse**

People who have spoken with me about emotional abuse often comment that some of the power and control behaviours seem similar to what occurs in their intimate relationship at times. This is something I would agree with: they do, particularly when they are looked at without any context. Jealousy, insults, demands for compliance and attempts at restricting certain behaviours can be common between couples. This does not however mean these behaviours can be defined as abuse.

Consequently, I will ask if the feeling of fear or anxiety present at these times of dispute? Are the disagreements and the outcomes always one-sided favouring a certain partner? Do they feel as though they have to continually walk on eggshells so not to upset their partner? Is there a feeling that something is just not right, but they can't put a finger on what it is? Does merely the raise of an eyebrow ensure compliance? It cannot be denied that emotionally abusive behaviour often resembles emotional abuse. But it is important to differentiate between the two. Emotional abuse is a pattern of recurrent behaviours, with on-going efforts to demean and control, resulting in long term negative consequences for the victim (Engel, 2002; Lammers et al., 2005).

### **Tactics of emotional abuse**

It can be the abusers goal to make his victim feel as though she is responsible for his actions and that she deserves to be treated that way. Often using notions that are situated in the social norm of male privilege: the abuser demands of his partner that she comply with certain gender role expectations, expectations which he defines within the context of his male privilege (Hirigoyen, 2004). Falling short of his demands can trigger an episode of abuse. The victim can be led to believe that only through her actions can she stop his abusive behaviour, because it is simply a reaction to her 'faults', and therefore it is acceptable. This possibly contributes towards the difficulty in naming emotional abuse as the source of unease and distress a woman may feel in a relationship (Loring, 1994), particularly if her 'faults' are merely independence and autonomy.

Hirigoyen describes the slow insidious process employed by people who are emotionally abusive as "capturing the victim in a spiders web, held captive at another's disposal, bound psychologically and anesthetised" (2004, p. 91). Lundy Bancroft writes the abusive angry controlling man needs to get away with his behaviour and most importantly he needs his partner to focus on anything except the real causes of it (2002). As the abusive partner takes more and more control over his victim, she focuses more and more on his demanding behaviour. This process is demonstrated in Biderman's Chart of Coercion which follows. Often, emotionally abusive men believe their behaviour is justified (male privilege) and

show little willingness to change and little remorse (Lundy. Bancroft, 2002; Loring, 1994). As a result, the emotionally abused woman can lose objectivity, creativity, self-esteem, rights and freedom (Douglas, 2008).

Acts of overt and covert emotional abuse are particularly problematic when they appear to be done out of love or concern or in a joking manner (Marshall, 1999).

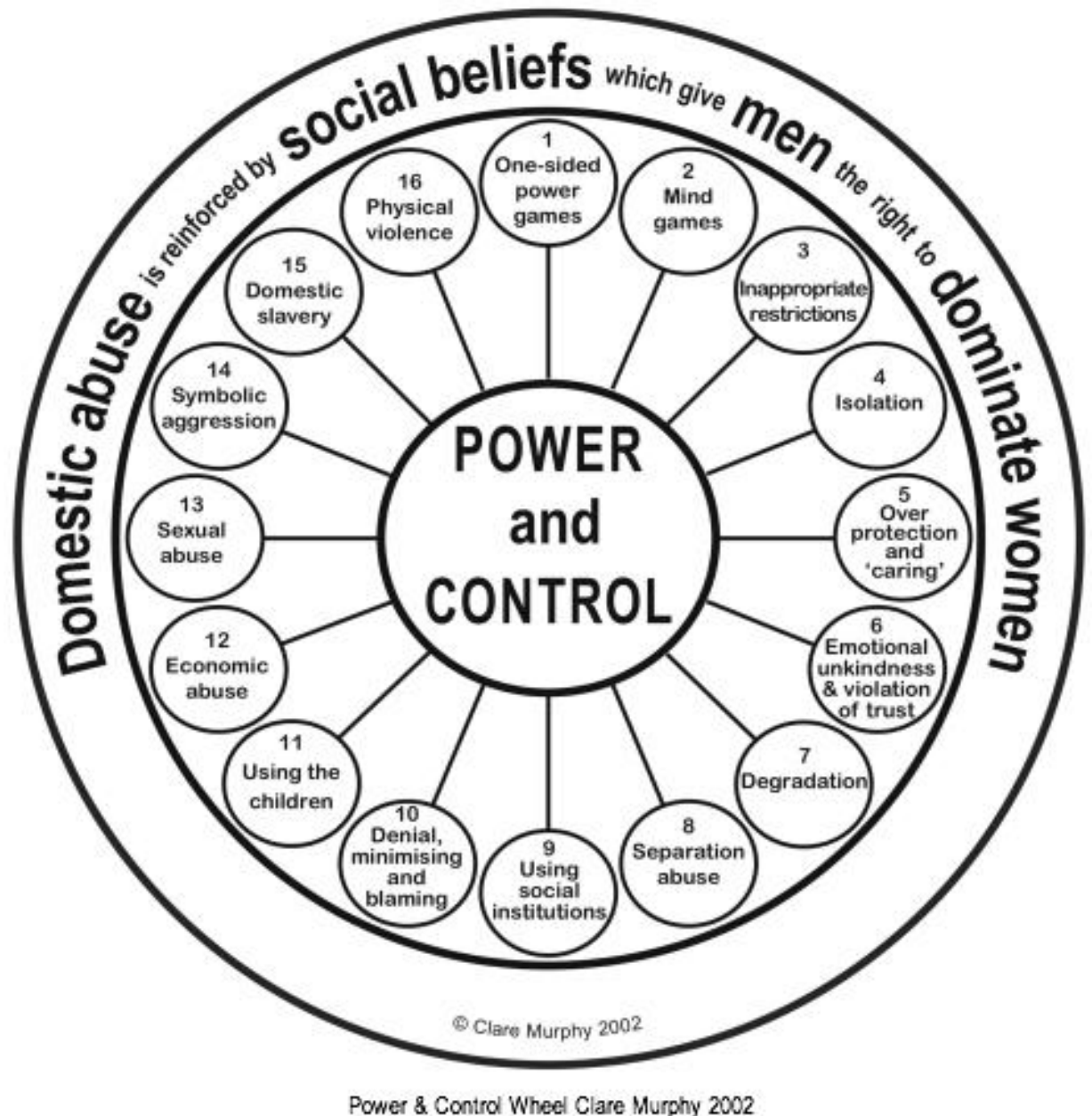
Finding research articles which consistently described the tactics of emotional abuse using similar terms proved to be difficult. It may be that, as Evan Stark (2007) has suggested, any list of the tactics employed by emotional abusers would be pages long. However he goes on to state that abusers use similar strategies and techniques, as if they all went to the same school to learn them. What follows are two of the more comprehensive descriptions of tactics I found in the relevant literature. Table 2 shows a list drawn up by Loring (1994) and covers many of the overt and covert behaviours the participants in this study experienced from their male partners. Table 3, a power and control wheel specifically representing emotional abuse, drawn up by C. Murphy (2002) shows the sixteen tactics which she believes are supported by social beliefs that men employed to undermine their female partners.

**Table 2: Tactics of emotional abusers**

<b>OVERT MECHANISMS OF ABUSE</b>	
1.	Belittling
2.	Yelling
3.	Name-calling
4.	Criticizing
5.	Ordering around
6.	Sulking
7.	Withholding affection
8.	Ignoring
9.	Isolating from family and friends
10.	Monitoring time and activities
11.	Attempting to restrict resources (finances, telephone)
12.	Interfering with opportunities (job, medical care, education)

13.	Accusing the victim of engaging in repeated, hurtful behaviours
14.	Throwing objects, not necessarily at the victim
15.	Slamming of objects or doors
16.	Ridiculing the victim
17.	Expressing disgust toward the victim
18.	Threatening to abandon (physically or emotionally)
19.	Expressing excessive jealousy
20.	Threatening life, pets, property, family
21.	Exposing the victim to abuse of her children, pets or family
22.	Coercing the victim into illegal activity
23.	Provoking the victim into helpless flailing
<b>COVERT MECHANISIMS OF ABUSE</b>	
1.	Discounting
2.	Negation
3.	Projection/accusation
4.	Denial (of abuse by abuser)
5.	Negative labelling
6.	Subtle threats of physical and or emotional abandonment, or actual physical and or emotional abandonment

(Loring, 1994)



**Figure 1. The emotional abuse power and control wheel**

Given the vast array of tactics alluded to by Stark (2007) perhaps the outcome of the tactics is as important or is more important, to the recognition of emotional abuse than recognition of the tactics. Hoffman (1984) found defining psychological abuse by its outcome rather than the methods was more useful to his research.

Living with domestic abuse has been likened to a process of dehumanisation. The female victim can become an object to her partner: A person who is then

considered unequal or inferior with respect to their basic human rights of freedom and wellbeing (LeMoncheck, 1985). Research comparing the methods used to break the will of prisoners and some of the methods used by male abusers to restrict their partners' freedoms have shown some interesting similarities useful for understanding how power and control can become a tool for destabilising a sense of self.

### **Total institution theory**

As a concept developed by Goffman (1961), a total institution is a social system designed to isolate and enclose its inhabitants with the primary goal of controlling their lives. Mental institutions, prisons, and military training camps are all examples of a total institution where inmates are cut off from wider society for long periods of time. Within the institution there are managed people whose lives are organised for them and managers who make the decisions about the organisation practices. This arrangement often leaves the managed feeling inferior, weak and guilty while the managers feel superior and self-righteous (Avni, 1991). Institutions such as these block people from being able to fulfil basic human roles like lover, friend, wife and parent (DeWard & Moe, 2010).

Avni (1991) applied this concept to the lives of thirty five women abused by their intimate partner and found similarities between the lives of people living and working within a total institution and the lives of the women and their partners. Some of the tactics used to maintain control over the inmates in a total institution were not that dissimilar to those used by the abusive male. Unprovoked, some of the women even described their situation as 'being in a prison.' What also became clear was that in a home, possibly due to a difference in the number of people being controlled by the manager, the negative aspects of isolation and organisation associated with a total institution were felt more strongly by the women. Whether the health of the women was also affected to stronger degree was not covered by the study.

### **Biderman's chart of coercion**

A study conducted in the 1950's of US prisoners of the Korean War researched the methods used by the captors in order to brainwash and force compliance. Biderman's chart of coercion was developed from that research. The research went on to be applied to domestic abuse when it was recognised that many of the methods used to break the will of a prisoner, appeared to be similar as those used by a perpetrator of abuse.

**Table 3: Biderman's chart of coercion**

<b>Method</b>	<b>Effect</b>
Isolation	Deprives victim of all social support for resistance Develops an intense concern with self Makes victim dependent on interrogator
Monopolization of perception	Fixes attention on immediate predicament Fosters introspection Eliminates any stimuli competing with those controlled by captor Frustrates all action not consistent with compliance
Induced debility and exhaustion	Weaken mental and physical ability to resist
Threats	Cultivates anxiety and despair
Occasional indulgences	Provide positive motivation for compliance Hinder adjustment to deprivation
Demonstrations of omnipotence	Suggests futility of resistance
Degradation	Makes resistance appear more damaging to self-esteem than capitulation
Enforcement of trivial demands	Develops habits of compliance

Throughout the case studies in this research there is evidence to support these claims.

### **The health costs of emotional abuse on women**

The cost of intimate partner abuse to women's health is multifaceted. It has been linked to a wide range of negative outcomes for the victim. Both physical and mental health can be affected. When comparing emotional abuse to other forms

of abuse, Loring (1994) found it caused greater feelings of despair and loneliness than other kinds. Women who experienced both physical and non-physical abuse often describe emotional abuse as being more damaging and leaving longer lasting effects than the physical abuse they experienced (Lawrence, Yoon, Langer, & Ro, 2009; O'Leary, 1999; Saunders, Kilpatrick, Hanson, Resnick, & Walker, 1999; Vitanza, Vogel, & Marshall, 1995). When questioned about their experiences of physical and psychological abuse, the women in these studies described the humiliation, degradation, and the sense of loss of self as far more painful than any physical assault. Jacobson and Gottman write that psychological abuse is especially dangerous as it causes women to doubt their own sanity: therefore, it is the ultimate form of control (1998).

Women who reported being emotionally abused had significant levels of low self-esteem (Loring, 1994; O'Leary, 1999; Sackett & Saunders, 1999). Due to ongoing chronic abuse, stress levels become raised and continue to stay raised for prolonged periods of time. This often leads to breathlessness, palpitations, headaches, insomnia, nervousness, irritability, stomach pains, and fatigue (Hirigoyen, 2004; Koopman, Gore-Feltman, & Spiegel, 1997). Major depression and anxiety have been consistently linked to abuse in intimate partner relationships (A. Ali, Oatley, & Toner, 1999; Coker et al., 2002; Gavin, 2011; Leone et al., 2007). Although the abused woman is likely to recognise these symptoms, she may not be aware of what is causing them. Therefore she may seek help from a professional for the somatic and psychological symptoms she is experiencing without any disclosure of her home life or, as Loring acknowledges, "In many cases the fear of being 'crazy' or 'losing it' prevents the victim from volunteering information" (1994, p. 37). Just as likely, she will not be asked appropriate questions which may uncover the cause of the symptoms (Giles, 2004).

Heavy alcohol use has been associated with all forms of abuse. Holahan, Moos, Holahan, Cronkite, and Randall (2001) found that drinking alcohol was often a way to manage emotional distress. Several studies looking at long term health outcomes for people who experienced abuse from an intimate partner found emotional abuse had a greater association with alcohol and recreational drug use than any other form of abuse (Coker et al., 2002; Holahan et al., 2001). Zavala



and Spohn found an increase in the number of units of alcohol consumed was directly related to an increase in the level of emotionally abusive actions (2010).

Intrusive memories, nightmares, avoidance and hyper-vigilance are among some of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a disorder previously most often associated with wartime atrocities and life threatening situations (Ford, Hawke, Alessi, Ledgerwood, & Petry, 2007). The victim of trauma often feels stunned, shocked, bewildered and betrayed as they struggle to understand what happened to them and come to terms with the reality of feeling unable to control their own safety (Loring, 1994). PTSD symptoms occurring as a result of emotional abuse have been found in significant numbers of women (Arias & Pape, 1999; Loring, 1994; Vitanza et al., 1995). Furthermore, perhaps surprisingly, a greater consistent link has been found between PTSD and psychological aggression than for PTSD and physical aggression (Mechanic, Weaver, & Resick, 2008).

Research shows that the health consequences of living with emotional abuse can be severe. Perhaps the most worrying aspect is that the women and the people around them often do not recognise that the negative physical and mental health symptoms women are experiencing and the behaviours they may display, as a result, are related to a reasonable outcome of living with undetected emotional abuse. Instead women are often pathologised, given some form of anti-depressant or tranquiliser and sent home to the abusive situation, perhaps in a more vulnerable state, due to sedation, than they were beforehand (Flaherty, 1996).

Women are driven 'crazy' by abuse from intimate partners and "there is very little understanding and therefore no appropriate response to this phenomenon" (Hagar, 2001, p.155). This may go some way to support Hoffman's (1984) notion that we should be placing more emphasis on defining emotional abuse by its outcome on the victim rather than by the tactics employed to undermine her.

### **Other costs associated with emotional abuse**

Emotional abuse creates not only negative personal costs for the victim. Society also bears some negative costs. Women who are abused are more likely to be using medical and counselling services than women who are not abused (Flaherty,

1996). When women are diagnosed purely on the symptoms, including depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, manifesting from emotional abuse, the underlying causes are not being addressed. This may result in the long term use of health services for some women, and increased costs of long term medication and possible addictions problems. Other tangible costs to society include property damage and loss, the use of social services and legal services and the loss of workplace productivity (Chan & Cho, 2010; Max, Rice, Finkelstein, Bardwell, & Leadbetter, 2004).

I could find no estimate of the cost of emotional abuse specifically. However there have been studies conducted of the estimated economic cost of domestic abuse in general. In the United Kingdom domestic violence is estimated to cost NZ\$50 billion a year. These costs include the health care system, the criminal justice system, social services, housing services and the legal aid system (Joseph, 2006). In terms of economic output and the costs to employers, the figure for the United Kingdom is estimated at NZ\$6 billion (Joseph, 2006). In New Zealand estimates range from NZ\$1.2 – 5.8 billion (Snively, 1996). A Canadian study found some estimates of the cost of domestic violence were put at US\$1.2 billion a year and others estimated the health costs alone at US\$1.1 billion a year (Chan & Cho, 2010). The total costs of intimate partner violence in the United States were estimated at US\$5.8 billion a year in 1995 (Max et al., 2004). The costs of emotional abuse are not separated from these figures and I would hazard a guess (given the propensity to place physical assaults at the centre of domestic violence statistics) these figures may show differently if emotional abuse were more easily recognised.

## **Help seeking**

More often than not one of the first methods of help-seeking a woman in an abusive relationship will employ is reaching out to family and friends (Moe, 2007; West & Wandrei, 2002). Two recent New Zealand studies show victims of violence are much more likely to initially talk to a friend or family member about the violence than they are to talk to a formal source of help. Additionally Fugate and colleagues found an informal community of helpers is the most often accessed

overall form of support, and perceived as the most useful in terms of supporting the victim to evaluate her situation (Fugate, Landis, Riordan, Naureckas, & Engel, 2005).

### **Formal and informal helpers**

Help and intervention for a victim of abuse can come from formal or informal sources. Formal sources of help can be required to intervene, and are professionals such as the police, medical staff, and counsellors. They will have some training to recognise signs of abuse and how best to help the situation. The interventions used by formal helpers are guided by laws, policies and best practice which have been formed through research focusing specifically on these areas.

Friends, family, work colleagues and strangers can also all find themselves in the role of an informal helper for a victim of abuse. It is thought that informal helpers are often more available and more trusted than formal sources, and that the informal helper may be in a better position to understand the situation as they will likely know both the victim and perpetrator (Budde & Schene, 2004). It is believed that often the victim may be looking for conformation from an informal helper that what is happening in the relationship is actually abuse, before they seek more formal help (Fugate et al., 2005). As Prah states the boundaries between conflict and abuse are sometimes vague and hard to discern between (2006).

Studies looking at the role informal helper's play in abusive relationships have shown that there may be some responses from them which are viewed by the help seeker to be positive and some which are viewed as negative. Abused women found helpful responses such as listening without judgement, reassurance that she was not to blame, and encouragement to seek professional help and support with decision making (Mahlstedt & Keeny, 1993). Women who had experienced some form of domestic violence themselves were seen as more helpful than any other source of informal support (Wilcox, 2000).

Negative responses to help seeking include trivialising the situation, excessive advice giving, seeing the victim as a failure, telling her 'I told you so' and

wanting to seek revenge on the abuser (Mahlstedt & Keeny, 1993). Budde and Schene point out that informal helpers can be problematic, as any existing relationships between the helper and the abused woman may already be rooted in undetected destructive patterns (2004). Another study found mixed and negative reactions from family and friends are not uncommon when a woman seeks help for intimate partner violence (Trotter & Allen, 2009). Additionally Kocot and Goodman found women who were given mixed advice about their relationship from their closest friends and family members showed greater symptoms of depression and PTSD and their coping mechanisms worsened (2003).

## **Myths and victim blaming**

Common myths about domestic and family violence abound. I looked at domestic violence and women's refuge websites to find some of the primary myths or beliefs held by the general public. Among those I found were:

- If it was that bad she could just leave.
- A certain type of woman attracts an abusive relationship.
- It mainly happens to poor women from bad neighbourhoods.
- Alcohol or drugs cause men to become violent.
- Men who abuse were abused as children.
- Domestic violence is quite rare.

Drawing upon these popular beliefs it could be assumed that when domestic abuse does occur, it happens to people who are natural victims and perpetrators, who come from relatively deprived backgrounds and who fit into neat little boxes.

Although advocates, psychologists, campaigners and feminists have challenged these myths and shown abuse can and does happen across the social spectrum, and that no-one is to blame for the abuse except the abuser, some of these myths may play a role in the general public's perceptions of who is a victim and who is to blame.

Perhaps one of the most common myths or statements about intimate partner violence is “Why doesn’t she just leave?” Professionals who work with abused women have recognised that the majority of people do not understand the complex factors which can prevent women from just leaving (Throsby & Alexander, 2008). It is believed many of the social and cultural factors that affect apparent ‘choices’ when it comes to domestic violence are hidden from view and not taken into account. Lempart found when women did try to explain their choices to others, the focus of the conversation more often than not turned away from the complexity of the situation to a more simplistic discussion of obvious violent behaviours (1997). Perhaps this is a reflection of current discourse surrounding abuse and as discussed previously the result of a media which focuses on individual acts of physical violence. This may point towards a situation that could be problematic for a woman seeking help for emotional abuse in her relationship.

The ‘decision’ to stay in an abusive relationship can be taken to mean the woman is incapable of making the correct decisions for herself (Goodkind, Gillum, Bybee, & Sullivan, 2003) and that she is responsible for putting herself in the situation (McDermott & Garofalo, 2004) and she may be perceived to be masochistic by allowing herself to be further victimised (West & Wandrei, 2002).

For women who are abused, and for any potential helpers, these myths may form part of their understanding of domestic abuse. In turn it may affect help-seeking behaviours and the ability to recognise emotional abuse. Likewise the responses from formal and informal help systems may be affected by these myths.

### **Victim blaming**

Doctrines of individuality in Western culture have paved the way for fundamental assumptions of where blame should be placed in order to negate the evidence that the world is not as it ‘should’ be (Allport, 1958). Research on victims of rape shows there are certain things people take into consideration when making sense of what happens. For instance a woman wearing a short dress or who was drunk or who walked alone in the dark when she was attacked, can be made to seem in some way responsible for her part in the crime as these type of things often get

called into question. Woven into the myths about rape and other violent crimes in society are a system of beliefs linked to the constructed female roles society deems appropriate. Rape myths can have the effect of reducing perceptions of the seriousness of the case and reducing sympathy for the victim (Peters, 2008). Peters goes as far as saying these myths help support patriarchy and violence against women in three ways. They reduce support for the victim, they exonerate the perpetrator, and minimise the seriousness of the crime (Peters, 2008).

Victim blaming appears to happen with intimate partner violence. One study found that stereotypes, supported by notions of women's roles in society, played a role in perceptions of blame. Women who did not fit the traditional house wife role, those who were perceived to lack warmth as a result, and those who held occupations associated with power were more likely to be blamed for the abuse (Nicole M. Capezza & Ximena B. Arriaga, 2008). This finding is consistent with the negative attributions given to females who do not fit traditional stereotypical roles in society in general (Becker, 2010; Pavlou & Knowles, 2001). These findings are supported in research conducted by Yick (2000) who found that endorsement of traditional gender roles in patriarchal societies contributes to domestic violence.

Other recent studies showed people were more tolerant when a male assaulted his female partner than when a male assaulted a female stranger (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Shlien-Dellinger, Huss, & Kramer, 2004; Pavlou & Knowles, 2001), suggesting that domestic violence is still not recognised in the same manner as other violent crimes. Finally the type of violence used also made a difference to perceptions of harm to the victim. In general, people rated physical violence as more damaging and threatening than they did psychological violence (N. M. Capezza & X. B. Arriaga, 2008a). This appears to be in direct contradiction to what abused women say. A combination of these factors could result in less social support for a woman who wishes to understand, receive help for or to leave an emotionally abusive relationship than for a physically abusive relationship.

### **Reduced social support for victims**

So, a curious thing can happen when people are victims of abuse. Sometimes they are blamed for it. When a woman confides in a friend or family member that she is being abused by her male partner, she may be asked what she did to provoke it, why she does not just leave or she may not be taken seriously (Douglas, 2008). Whether this type of blame is a result of the myths which surround domestic abuse, whether it is because people don't like to think that they too could become a victim, or whether something else is responsible is unclear. Yet the literature shows victim blaming is quite a common phenomenon (Pavlou & Knowles, 2001). The impacts of reduced social support for any victim of domestic violence may lead women to further internalise the belief that violence is an inevitable result of their failing as a woman, wife and mother.

## **Research aims and objectives**

As can be seen from the literature review, there is relatively little research of emotional abuse in the absence of physical abuse. The gendered nature of emotional abuse in terms of power and control in society has received little attention. In addition there is a paucity of information regarding women's recognition of emotional abuse in their heterosexual intimate relationships.

Consequently, I established the following aims for my research. Firstly I wanted to further the knowledge, from the woman's point of view, of the dynamics of emotional abuse in intimate heterosexual relationships. Then I wanted to identify the process through which women come to understand their intimate partner relationship as emotionally abusive. Following that, the next step was to develop an understanding of the role power and control, traditional gendered beliefs and negative attitudes towards women play in keeping emotional abuse hidden and unrecognised. Finally I was interested in uncovering the role popular culture plays in the process of identifying abuse.

# CHAPTER TWO - METHOD

The point is not to describe the world but also to change it.

Gorelick

This chapter outlines how my approach to the research is designed to capture women's experiences of living with emotional abuse and at the same time engage them and I in critical reflection of the social-cultural-political practices that surround our lives. An explanation for the application of a feminist lens to this study is provided. Ethical considerations are clarified. The research process is explained, including participant selection and the researcher's position in this study.

## **Participants**

I intended to interview women about their experiences of emotional abuse in a heterosexual intimate partner relationship. The women decided for themselves if they had experienced this type of abuse.

Four participants were interviewed and they ranged in age from the twenties through to the forties. The relationships they talked to me about had all ended. None of them had any fear of the abuse re-occurring. Three participants had had de-facto relationships and one had been married, the shortest relationship being two years and the longest being over twenty years. One of the participants had two children from the relationship. Three of the participants are now in new long term intimate partner relationships which are egalitarian and the other has decided to stay single and work on her personal empowerment as a female. All of the participants had or were at the time of this research studying at tertiary level.



### **The researcher**

I am a Pakeha woman who emigrated from the United Kingdom to live in New Zealand fifteen years ago. I come from a fragmented family within which, I've come to understand, are power and control issues. I have studied at tertiary level full time in New Zealand for five years. During this time I learned of feminism and now strongly identify as feminist. Although on reflection I believe I have always held feminist values and it is the people I have met at University who have encouraged and allowed me to be my authentic self. As my critical awareness of social inequalities has grown so has a desire to raise awareness of the many issues associated with power and control in society, with a particular focus on those that affect women disproportionately.

As an adult, I experienced long term emotional abuse in an intimate relationship. This severely affected my physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. However, as is often the case, I was unaware that emotional abuse was the underlying factor contributing to the downward spiral I found myself in. It was a psychologist who helped me see the patterns of power and control in my life and set me on the path to reclaiming my autonomy. This is an on-going process for me and it includes disentangling destructive patterns rooted in my childhood, in my understanding of gender roles and in the pervasive messages received through the media. I do now see the abuse I experienced as a positive life changing event.

I chose to research emotional abuse because I wanted to contribute to the creation of knowledge of this largely un-recognised abuse. This was based upon a desire to help other women who are affected by emotional abuse. I believe my own experience has given me an understanding which was helpful during the interviews and for analysing the data I collected. My research was shaped by my belief that any abuse is never excusable and in that I cannot claim to be neutral.

### **Ethics approval**

Ethics approval was granted by the University of Waikato, Psychology Department Ethics Review Committee.

### **Participant recruitment**

Recruitment for participants began after ethical approval for the research had been obtained. Flyers (Appendix A) were posted at various spots around the University of Waikato and in the Hamilton community. As it turned out all the women who took part had heard of my research topic through word of mouth and approached me to take part. With each potential participant I checked that they fit the criteria, and sent them a copy of the information sheet and consent form (Appendix B and C).

### **The interview process**

The interviews were arranged at a time and place the women felt comfortable with. Some were held at The University of Waikato and others were held at my home. Before the interviews began I checked that each participant had read the information sheet and was aware of what she could expect during the interview. Each participant was then asked to sign a consent form.

I then began the interview proper. I asked each participant general questions on any opinions she may have had of domestic violence prior to the emotionally abusive relationship. However, the majority of the interview focused upon her experiences of emotional abuse. The questioning was guided by the participant's responses. I probed the participant (when required) for clarification on the information offered although I tried to keep any input from me to a minimum. Probing questions appeared to be more successful when the participant seemed excited to discuss a certain topic. Once each interview was finished I thanked the participant for her time and discussed what she could expect from me next.

Each interview was audio-recorded then transcribed word for word, proof read and sent to the participant for her approval. Follow up interviews were conducted in the same manner but without any need for re-signing a consent form. The areas covered in the follow up interview varied for each participant. Some women continued to tell their story as time constraints had interrupted the first interview. For others we discussed the themes which had begun to emerge from the initial data.

### **Preventing potential harm to the participants**

It was possible participants' safety would be compromised by their involvement with the research. Anyone reading the thesis could recognise a certain participant and may learn things about her that she would rather keep to herself. In order to avoid that as much as possible, the participants and people involved in the participants' story were given pseudonyms. Any identifiable street names, locations and events were also disguised. Although great care was taken, it was explained to the participants that some people who were familiar with their story may identify them. After each interview ended I gave each participant a contact list of phone numbers for people and agencies that would be of help if she needed it. A day after each interview I contacted each participant to make sure they were not feeling distressed and that they were comfortable with the interview process. None of the participants required any further support.

It was important to me that the research should address the feminist principle of challenging any power differences between the researcher and researched. (Kirsch, 1999). Before the interview process began, I asked the participants if they would like to meet informally to ask any questions about me. It was made clear at this stage that I was willing to share my story with them. The idea of sharing stories is one way to increase rapport and reciprocity between the researched and researcher (D. Davies & Dodd, 2002). This can help shift the balance of power during the interview process, building a relationship which is more likely to facilitate the disclosure of information (Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). Sharing stories can be a powerful experience in research and one which is increasingly being taken seriously by psychologists and other social scientists (Nicolson, 2010). During the interviews the idea of sharing stories came up in conversation: it was viewed as a positive step in the healing process for abuse. This was described by one participant as helping to remove some of the shame she felt by knowing it wasn't just her that emotional abuse had happened to. If it was happening to other women it was no longer her 'fault.'

Once I had summarised the participants' interviews, that and a copy of their interview transcript was sent to them. To ensure participant confidentiality was not compromised I asked for a safe mailing address to use. Each participant was asked to read through the document and make any amendments that they saw necessary. Engaging the participant in collaboration with the research at this stage ensures the transcripts are accurately representing the participant's own experiences. It is believed that together researcher and researched can find the vocabulary to express the findings in a mutually agreed and understood manner (Kirsch, 1999).

Along with any amendments participants made I asked them to note any other thoughts or issues they wished to discuss at any follow up interview. One participant asked for some changes to be made to her transcript. The changes made were more to do with the tone she had meant to imply, sarcasm for example, than with the wording of the transcript. Another participant made some minor changes to details involving other people in her story. She was concerned they may be recognized. Some follow up interviews with the women were necessary to fully capture their stories. I found the women were all happy to participate in any follow up interviews. When I approached each of them about taking part in a second interview the overall response was that the first experience had been cathartic and they viewed it positively. Every woman expressed a desire to help in any way they could with the research in the hopes it would make a difference to other women who find themselves in similar situations.

## **Approach to collecting data**

Qualitative research is helpful for gaining insights into problematic and complex issues (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p. 558). By its very nature qualitative research is perfectly suited to gaining an understanding of the contextual nature of emotional abuse. It allows the researcher to look at the social, political and cultural practices which influence day to day life experiences. By approaching the

research using feminist theory we can challenge the norms of traditional research. It can open doors to different ways of knowing and knowledge.

### **Qualitative research**

I wanted the data I collected and my findings to be useful to anyone who reads this document and I wanted it to be easy to understand. Gesa Kirsch writes that one of the things that we (feminist researchers) do differently from other researchers is we do try to write for the general public of women (1999, p. 74). This became especially important to me as it became apparent during the interviews with my participants that other women's stories had had a big impact on uncovering emotional abuse in their own relationships.

Given the hidden and complex nature of emotional abuse (difficult to define, to explain, to measure) it would have been near on impossible to fully capture the experience of the relationships through a series of quantitative measures (Engel, 2002, p. 13; Loring, 1994, p. 7). Stiles writes that although there has been a profusion of quantitative research in recent psychological studies, qualitative studies of human experience are probably as old as human experience (1993, p. 594). Asking my participants to describe what they were feeling at any moment in their relationships by use of a scale from 1-10, for example, would have taken any meaning or social and political context out of the study. A case study approach using qualitative data to capture the human experience was far better suited to what I was attempting to achieve.

When a researcher wants to ask 'what' and 'how' questions in a study, qualitative research is often used (Qu & Dumay, 2011). It differs from quantitative research in that it uses an inductive logic rather than deductive logic (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010). As Smith and Davis (2007) suggest, the problems studied in a qualitative way can often have significantly less reported research. When I began to look at literature this was definitely the case with emotional abuse, compared to physical and sexual abuse. Given the relatively small number of studies an exploratory

research design which permits the focuses on gaining insights and familiarity with the subject may pave the way for further investigation into emotional abuse.

Researching this way can help give credence to the participants by allowing them to express and guide the researcher to what they feel is important in their story. Using open ended questions and following a semi-structured interview schedule I was able to ask the women in-depth questions, particularly when issues arose which required a deeper explanation. This allowed for contextual meaning to be given to those experiences. In any human interaction there is what Stiles (1993) names 'a chain of choices'. Described in similar terms to a chess game, one experience is based upon another and that depends on predicting the outcome of the first experience. The participants were best in articulating their experiences, needs and desires and how they were affected by the chain of choices in their relationship. (Merrick, 1999) describes qualitative data collection and analysis as a process that is interlinked, each building on the other.

Gathering qualitative data allows for analysis of the data to take place at any time (Merrick, 1999; Smith & Davis, 2007). During the data gathering stage of my research I expected to conduct more than one interview with the participants as definitions and information were expanded upon.

### **Feminist research**

No single methodology is feminist in itself: nor have feminists invented new research methods. Rather, it is a feminist perspective, including a commitment to improve women's lives and to eliminate inequalities between researchers and participants that characterizes' feminist research (Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000; Kirsch, 1999).

Reconstructing women's experiences as legitimate knowledge is one way of challenging the assumptions about gender which are part of the status quo in society (Hepburn, 2003). Some feminists believe patriarchal societies have controlled information and often overlooked or ignored female contributions (Lammers et al., 2005; Zavos & Biglia, 2009). According to those arguments the perspective that one holds can shape and limit knowledge. Therefore the

production of knowledge by a certain dominant group is shaped by its own perspective. According to M. E. Hawkesworth (1989), it is thought most likely this occurs without recognition that it is happening, and without any recognition that there are different perspectives held. Men's history, experiences and knowledge have been recorded for thousands of years which has, as McCarl Nielson (1990) puts it, relegated women's culture, history and lives to the underside of men's. Therefore feminist standpoints can begin to challenge the dominant perspectives and generate more complete histories and knowledge.

Arguably feminist standpoint theory has been one of the most influential approaches to constructing knowledge from women's experiences and also one of the most debated (Bowell, 2011; Grasswick, 2008; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007; O'Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2012). Some argue, it shows how the world really works while giving knowledge which will help make the world a better place (Houle, 2009). It gives a voice to the reality of women's lives rather than a voice to the assumptions made about women's lives. Some feminist researchers point out that new or alternative ways of knowing and thinking can be developed for women by women, with a deliberate emphasis on empowerment (M. E. Hawkesworth, 1989; Van Wormer, 2009).

Because women have held a position subjugated to men in patriarchal society it is thought that they have developed what is coined as 'double consciousness' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007; Kirsch, 1999; McClish & Bacon, 2002). As women have had to live in a world which is dominated by men's understanding and knowledge, double consciousness allows women, unlike men, to have a perspective which is based in knowledge and understanding of both male and female worlds. It could be argued that this gives women an advantage when it comes to understanding some social concepts (McClish & Bacon, 2002).

Claims have been made by some feminists that men benefit from a society which is organised on patriarchal beliefs. These benefits include political, economic and psychological advantages (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000; M. Hawkesworth, 1999). In science, including psychology, an androcentric bias has occurred which has relegated women to a disadvantaged position (Ali, 2007). This has limited what we know to be 'reasonable and logical' behaviour to experiences defined by and

for men (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Although there have been significant steps taken to remove the bias, particularly in psychology, Alisha Ali (2007) posits that much of the research regarding emotional abuse still reflects those biases.

Feminist standpoint theory challenges what we know and adds a less distorted truth to science, politics and psychology (Swigonski, 1994). Not only does it add the voices of the oppressed to ways of knowing. Research undertaken following feminist standpoint theory is inherently political as it is committed to social action on behalf of the group researched (Van Wormer, 2009).

When it comes to understanding and detecting emotional abuse, it is possible that because we live in a patriarchal society which holds less value in feminine traits (Ali, 2007), this type of abuse has not been considered 'real' trauma. What is considered abuse has been defined by the types of trauma men are likely to have experienced and subsequently defined as such. As Hatch (2002) and Sorsoli (2004) comment, having one's 'feelings hurt' automatically implies weakness in a male-dominated society and may go un-discussed as a form of trauma or abuse. Rather, women who show signs of trauma as a result of emotionally abusive relationships are pathologised (Loring, 1994; Nicolson, 2010). Therefore adopting a feminist standpoint to decipher the lived experiences of women who have been exposed to this type of abuse may help to uncover new mechanisms for detecting it in intimate partner relationships, at the same time giving voice to an experience which has traditionally been ignored in a patriarchal society.

## **Analysis**

As stated by Hatch (2002),

Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning. It is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others. Analysis means organizing and interrogating in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques or generate theories. It often involves synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, categorization, hypothesizing, comparison and pattern finding. It always involves what Wolcott calls 'mind work'... Researchers always engage their own intellectual capacities to make sense of qualitative data (pp. 148).



## **Reflexivity**

As a tool for examining the researcher's position in the research, reflexivity is considered important in feminist research practice. Our beliefs and background are part of how we construct knowledge of the world around us. This can affect the assumptions we make as we conduct and analyse data. According to Davies and Dodd (2002) maintaining a reflexive attitude during research can provide more insightful findings. Therefore it was important to look at my position in this research before I began to collect data, as well as during the process.

Before I began my research I questioned how my life story shaped my decision to investigate emotional abuse, how it contributed to the type of approach I chose to use and the questions I would ask during interviewing. Keeping a journal of my thoughts during the process allowed me to reflect on my experiences throughout my research. This incorporated both personal thoughts and my interpretation of the thoughts of professionals and others with whom I came into contact.

Empowerment for women is a fundamental part of reflexivity. Feminist research should seek to create reciprocal knowledge, engage the researcher in critical reflection and most importantly have the potential to change women's lives (Kirsch, 1999, p. 3).

A problem often raised with qualitative research is credibility of the findings. Miles & Huberman, (1994) state this is due to qualitative researchers often working alone, that they focus on describing the findings rather than how the results were reached and the limitations in information processing. One way to combat this issue is to apply techniques often used in qualitative research (Meyer, 2001).

Triangulation is used in research when it contributes to the understanding of a phenomenon (Thurmond, 2001). It is the combination of two or more approaches in order to create a multi-layered analysis of the data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). Often used to enhance confidence in social science research, it reduces the uncertainty of interpretation (Bryman, n.d.). Thomas (2011) describes triangulation as a prerequisite for an approach using qualitative case study interviews.

Engaging with multiple case studies is one method of triangulation. In this research it allowed for each woman's story to reveal any general commonalities between their experiences. Additionally, engaging the participants in giving feedback on their transcripts strengthened the trustworthiness of the research as they had the option to correct anything that had been wrongly interpreted.

Investigator triangulation is achieved through open and honest interpretation. Negotiation of the meaning of findings between skilled and knowledgeable practitioners in the field allows for alternative constructions to be explored (Merrick, 1999). Throughout my research I engaged in discussion with my two supervisors who are both skilled in qualitative research processes.

### **Internal validity**

It is possible given the nature of qualitative research that the data is open to the interpretation of the researcher, and according to Sykes (1990), the researcher can always provide a plausible account with careful editing. To counteract that in this research, a documented account of the process of data collection, the data itself and my interpretative contribution have been clearly laid out.

### **Content analysis**

Quantitative data collection which has traditionally focused on a specific narrowed down hypothesis (Smith & Davis, 2007), where there is a systemised, and ordered approach to research which can be replicated to show validity (Davies & Dodd, 2002). Qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to place more emphasis on the meaning of data. This makes for a more holistic analysis rather than an atomistic analysis (Breakwell, Hammond, Fife-Shaw, & Smith, 2006; Thomas, 2011). As emotional abuse is an on-going process which systematically breaks down the victim's sense of wellbeing and self it would be impossible to gain a full picture of its course by analysing separate incidences of abuse. Instead it is the overall pattern that is important. Thomas (2011) describes a case study interview as a container or wrapper of a set of circumstances, some of which may take more unpacking than others. Large amounts of data can be collected when

using interviews to gather information, and content analysis allows the researcher to break this information down into more manageable size chunks (Breakwell et al., 2006). Breaking the information down can take the form of themes, categories or networks (Breakwell et al., 2006).

During the time information is being collected in this way the researcher is already involved in data analysis. Themes or categories may be emerging from the interviews which become a basis for deciding how things fit together (Cramer & Alexitch, 2005). These can then be used to re-analyse the data already collected or to develop further questions to be used in following interviews (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007).

### **Representing participants voices**

Because feminist research seeks to empower the participants through the research process, researchers need to ask themselves some serious questions. Are they representing the voices of their participants or are they potentially silencing them through the process of interpretation of the data (Kirsch, 1999)? The researcher's understanding of the issues which surround power and authority or oppression due to gender, class or age and so on can be an advantage when exploring women's experiences (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). When thinking about and designing my research project one thing I kept in mind was that although I wanted the research to be useful in terms of raising awareness for the women who took part, it started life as a personal project in which I invited women who had been emotionally abused to participate. As it was, the possibility of projecting my own expectations along with interpretation was ever present.

The women were aware I recorded their conversations and that they could ask to have the recorder switched off. Yet none of them did so, even when sharing some very personal and painful information, it was a gift of trust from them and this made me more aware of the responsibility of care I had for them.

# CHAPTER THREE - CASE STUDIES

The following chapter presents the four case studies. Each case has been broken into specific concepts and each follows a similar pattern. The following case studies are primarily about how each woman entered into, experienced, ended and recognised an emotionally abusive relationship. In Chapter Four I will discuss the common key themes emerging from them.

The first case considers Glenda and her relationship with Percy. Glenda was a minor when she and Percy became a de-facto couple. Her account of her experiences is filled with descriptions of feeling like a lesser person than the others around her at the time. She makes connections to individual factors which pre-disposed her to becoming an easy target for manipulation.

The second case presents Cameron's story of emotional abuse. She was the only participant who was married to the man who abused her. Religious ideology and isolation went towards creating a situation where there was little opportunity to consider perspectives other than those held by her husband.

The third case is an analysis of Amber's experience. She was the only participant who had children from the relationship. This added a different dynamic to the abuse. Her efforts to maintain a family life went unrewarded. This was something she blamed herself for and made efforts to fix.

The final case considers Sophie's story. Sophie's relationship began a little differently to the others. She entered her relationship with certain expectations that the partnership would be based upon reciprocity and equality, she did not expect to take up a traditional female role. Some of those expectations were in part created by her partner Tony's initial words and deeds.

## Case study one: Glenda

### Glenda and Percy

Glenda and Percy had been in a relationship for five years. Their relationship began when Glenda was thirteen years of age and Percy was eighteen. They met while they were both on holiday. Glenda described Percy as *“my first proper boyfriend and it was one of those summertime romances really.”* She was not expecting the relationship to continue once the holiday was over and they both returned to their homes. However the couple kept in touch by letter until Glenda wrote to say she wanted to end things. Percy arrived at Glenda’s family home the following weekend with a bunch of flowers and *“he made it seem like it would have been incredibly heart-breaking”* for him if the relationship ended. It appears Percy had already begun to dismiss Glenda’s wishes at this stage. By the time Glenda was fourteen, Percy had moved into her family home and they were living as a de-facto couple. Glenda talked of this as *“the point when I was pretty much screwed.”*

### The relationship

Before the relationship with Percy began Glenda had low self-esteem, she was shy and her relationship with her family was strained. In retrospect Glenda identified her youth, her family dysfunction and that she had experienced severe bullying at school as possible factors which may have made her vulnerable to manipulation.

*I was a non- catholic in a catholic school. It was a small school of around 30 pupils and I was the only non-Catholic, and the boys liked me and I got better grades than everyone else. Those three things made me very unpopular.*

The relationship between Glenda and her mother was strained around the time she met Percy. Things in the family home were difficult and Glenda felt that she was a *“problem child.”* Her mother had tried *“to ship me off”* to social services a couple of times, and it felt to her that she wasn’t wanted. *“So I guess in that she had painted me as a shit person.....So I thought I was pretty shit anyway.”* Glenda

described her mothers' parenting as authoritarian and very cold "*I can remember doing something wrong when I was little and saying sorry. She just completely ignored me, I was invisible.*" Attachment theory based upon parent-child interaction has shown children raised in authoritarian homes are more likely to feel insecure, have low self-esteem, and a negative internal working model (Riggs, 2010). As the child matures this can affect interpersonal relationships with peer groups and can contribute to insecurity in adult romantic relationships (Riggs, 2010). Along with that, family relationships with Glenda's birth father (who was living in another home) and siblings were also difficult.

*I'm sure these guys know. They don't pick on strong women with well-functioning families who wouldn't put up with it. They find people who are vulnerable because of their family position, their economic position and their self-esteem. Then they exploit all three.*

After Percy arrived at her family home, Glenda found it difficult to turn him away. She described the feeling as "*the idea of hurting someone else. That was the only pressure point that he really needed.*" It was decided that Percy would be allowed to stay with the family for two weeks. However no one asked to him to leave and once established, Percy began to threaten suicide if Glenda was to finish things. At this stage Glenda was not physically afraid of Percy as he hadn't shown any overt signs of aggression towards her. The threat of suicide may have been all it took to make Glenda fearful, particularly if she felt responsible for other peoples' feelings.

Recognising that Glenda's relationship with her mother was tense Percy would act as a messenger between them "*he knew that I didn't get on with mum and used it to his advantage.....he'd say to her, oh she's upset, I'll take care of it and he would say to me oh your mum doesn't want to talk about it.*" This may have had the effect of ensuring Glenda was more dependent on him, as the ties with her mother were cut off. He also used his alleged past childhood abuse as "*leverage*" with Glenda's mother.

*Mum would get home and he would be sitting on the door step crying. Mum would be like 'what are you crying for'? He would say 'I'm thinking about how my father abused me'. He tried that and got a lot of sympathy*

Having Glenda's mother feeling sorry for him had the potential to gain her support when it came to other matters including any relationship issues between Glenda and Percy. He often would be found sitting on the doorstep. However, after a situation where Glenda's mother told Percy to stop "*snivelling like a pre-menstrual teenager*," he no longer talked of the abuse. Glenda believed this was because this story had stopped working as leverage for manipulation.

The bullying at school intensified as a result of her 'adult' relationship, with Glenda counting seventy bullying incidents within an hour period at one stage. Feeling trapped by her situation and unable to see a way of escaping it, Glenda attempted suicide. While recovering, she continued her schooling through correspondence as a way to reduce the bullying. However, because of this she felt isolated from any potential friendships at school. Not only that, communication with her family was being monitored and halted by Percy as he became the messenger between them. "*So yeah, he was going to kill himself, I was isolated and had no-one else.*" Research has shown that it is to their peer group that teenagers will most often turn, particularly when it comes to problems within a romantic relationship (Black, Tolman, Callahan, Saunders, & Weisz, 2008). Seeking help from adults has been correlated with reducing already fragile self-esteem in some adolescents. Glenda felt she was unable to talk to her family without Percy intervening and she had no peer network as such to turn to.

Percy became controlling in other aspects, adopting an almost paternal role, making decisions for Glenda in the guise of knowing what was best for her. The controlling behaviours of men who abuse can be broken down into some central spheres. These include an assumed right to make the decisions in the relationship (Bancroft, 2002). Such men feel it is their right to control most aspects of their partner's life, including denying her any personal freedom. These manipulative decisions can be hidden as being supportive and wanting the best for his partner while at the same time sending the message that she is not living up to his standards (Lammers et al., 2005) and this can increase feelings of inadequacy for the woman. Through-out their relationship Percy expected Glenda to wear clothes that he approved of, clothes which she didn't like. The small amount of pocket money she received while living at home had to be given to Percy and this was kept a secret from Glenda's mother. She was allowed to watch only certain

programmes on the television and was not allowed to talk about them. Percy decided which music she was to listen to and this was framed as concern for her wellbeing. Any existing friendships were made difficult to maintain. School balls went unattended because Percy would “*throw tantrums*” if Glenda wanted to go. He made it clear that “*you can do what you want, but I will not be happy.*”

*I didn't get to eat BK until after we broke up, because I didn't like burnt foods, therefore I wouldn't like flame grilled Burger King. I couldn't try it because it would be a waste of money. Or when we went to the service station I would be allowed to choose between lemonade, Fanta or coke. I wasn't allowed to try anything else because I might not like it, because I didn't really know what I liked, because I was such a child..... I didn't think that he was right, because I had seen Burger King, I knew I would like it. I was confident in my ability to wear jeans and pick a soft drink. But at the same time it was just that he had absolute authority. I wasn't scared, like there was no physical violence, so I wasn't scared of that. I think it was just a combination of experiences with him over the years and having nothing else to compare it to, that he had absolute authority over my conduct. That was it, I was [Glenda felt this at the time] a piece of a shit..... he was such a good man. He was taking care of me and only doing it out of my best interest. It was so absolute, you know, I could protest and say no I want something else, but it just wasn't happening.*

In this quote from Glenda, she describes her choices or lack of them, from an individual perspective. Yet the authority Tony had over her to make decisions about what she would or would not like appear to come from his collective male privilege, creating an environment of fault finding that would have been difficult to challenge.

The couple moved out of the family home after three years and set up their own home. Glenda was now seventeen. Percy expected her to take care of their household shopping with the money he gave her and no transport of her own. She walked from one end of the town to the other looking for the cheapest groceries. This was because the couple's vehicle was for Percy's use as his needs were deemed more important. Reserving the car for his use only also helped to isolate Glenda. Likewise Percy's budding career took precedence over any path Glenda wanted to follow. She had wanted to become a doctor or to join the army but “*he had cut off so many possibilities, everything that I wanted to do he cut off.*” It was important that she train for a job which he felt complemented and wouldn't interfere with his.



Sex with Percy in general was something she didn't enjoy, describing it as rather one-sided, "*I got no joy out of it and it wasn't something that I wanted.*" It has been suggested some Western women are socialised to believe it is their duty to have sex with their partner whether they want to or not. Glenda felt "*it was something I had to do as part of my wifely duties, you know. I ended up not feeling anything because it used to make me feel such rage.*" This can also be an example of male entitlement disguised as biological needs and normal or natural behaviour. Tied up with entitlement may be the right to sex when the male desires it. Marriage is often seen as a guarantee of sexual consent (Flood & Pease, 2009). Until 1985, that was literally the case when it came to criminal law in New Zealand (Robertson, 1999). Before then, a man could not be charged with rape if the victim was his (cohabiting) wife. It may be that the notion of conjugal rights is still prevalent in some areas of society. Glenda described how Percy would expect and justify sex which suited him.

*We started having sex when I was thirteen and a half, there were numerous pregnancy scares along the way. It wasn't something that I really wanted to carry on doing but because I had started I couldn't stop. That's how he justified it, with those books [self-help]. Men need quickies, the book says men need quickies and I'll give you lots of time and gentle love-making later.....So one time when I was about 15 there was a time when I said no, I really don't want to. He said are you serious and then he pinned me down and raped me. That was the only time he had to show physical violence, because that was my stand, and that didn't work. I didn't know that was rape because we were partners.....[sometime after] I remember saying to him so that time when you raped me, and he said so what do you want me to do about it.*

Percy led Glenda to believe there was something wrong with her sex drive, that she was "*frigid*" and "*somehow deficient*" and that it was her responsibility to fix it. Sex was also used as a bargaining tool. There would be trade-offs. For example if Glenda wanted to spend time with friends Percy would, at times, expect sexual acts as payment for allowing her do so. She described how it seemed very unfair but something she had to do. In hindsight it seemed to be an attempt by Percy to humiliate and let her know her position within the relationship. By minimising her feelings, enjoyment and importance as equal sexual partners, Percy may have been communicating his perceived dominance and reinforcing the notion she was of less worth. When Percy raped her it was strong message that if she didn't

comply he could and would use force to get his way. This use of physical force could also be taken to apply to other areas of the relationship. Although Glenda did not recognise it as rape until some years later it is worth noting that just 12% of teenage victims of rape report it to any kind of authority figure (Saunders et al., 1999). It can also be argued that sex gained through acts of coercion and manipulation is not consensual and therefore it is also rape. Although Glenda did not describe any other times Percy raped her, when looked at from another perspective, Percy had probably raped Glenda many times.

*I guess that was it with everything, it was put down to my deficiency. You believe it and that had been the message from my youth. So he was just someone else saying it and I still believed it.*

### **Breaking up**

The couple had planned on getting married, and this became more and more concerning to Glenda as the wedding drew closer. With little family support and friends to turn to or financial independence, Glenda said *“I was trapped, it wasn’t just I felt trapped, I was trapped.”* The circumstances which can lead women to believe they are trapped in abusive relationships are complex. Isolation, no money, embarrassment, lack of transport and feelings of guilt are among some reasons identified in research (Fugate et al., 2005) As a result of Percy’s suicide threats, getting him to break up with her seemed like the best option to Glenda. *“He would kill himself, so I had to make it his choice. You know, I had to make him leave me so I wouldn’t be responsible for this person killing themselves.”* By encouraging Percy to end things Glenda showed she was actively putting strategies into place. She was not passive or helpless as some domestic violence research suggests victims can be (Schwartz, 1989).

Having sex with other people was the worst act of betrayal she could think of in an intimate relationship. Believing this would encourage Percy to leave, she slept with different partners. *“So I tried that and he told me how much he forgave me every time, until he realized we were actually breaking up at the end, when he told me what a whore I was.”* Percy may have forgiven her each time when she slept

with other people. However, this could have been a tactic used to reinforce the notion of his benevolence within the relationship, raising his status as a kind, forgiving partner to his unfaithful girlfriend. Bancroft (2002) suggests control is sometimes exercised through ‘credits’ which can be spent when the urge to control arises. It is possible Percy was banking ‘credits’ for giving his forgiveness, expecting to use them later.

When Percy forgave her for having sex with other people, Glenda enlisted the help of a counsellor. Although her parents had divorced, remarried other people and divorced again, Glenda didn’t believe in divorce so it was not an option for her. *“I knew that if we got married that would be it. That would be it forever.”* It was not that she realised she was being controlled at this stage, she *“just knew that I wasn’t happy”* so she asked the counsellor for help in ‘getting rid’ of Percy. An hour spent talking to the counsellor and Percy had been convinced he would better off without his *“immature whore of girlfriend.”*

Percy packed his things and left their home.

*Then of course when we broke up and because my family relationships had been so broken up that I didn’t think I could go home. I was so shy, I couldn’t talk to anyone and I had no job skills and I didn’t know how to get a job, and I was too young to get a benefit. So I had no money. When he left he wiped out the bank account and he didn’t kill himself. He was fine, he was fine he took all the money and left me with a household of furniture and the bills.*

Glenda is now married to Stephen, and they have children. The relationship is based in equality, mutual respect and trust.

### **Recognising the abuse: What helped and what did not**

Believing the problems in the relationship were her fault, Glenda didn’t talk to people about her concerns. She may have internalised the self-blame, and it is possible the subordinate status sometimes given to females in society could have contributed to this. Women can be given the message that in order to be good wives they must support their partner, put their own needs last and it is their job to make it work (Wood, 2001). This suggests it would have been her failure as a woman if the relationship was seen as less than perfect. Women can also be

socialised to believe their value and worth are linked to having a male partner, a Prince Charming who will sweep them of their feet (Wood, 2001).

*Because I thought it was my fault, I put on such a front in front of the family and I had to do the wife thing. He convinced me that he was so fantastic and it was my fault, that, that, is what I would parrot to everyone. Basically, he's so nice, he's so wonderful and we are getting married. I was trapped and I had to make the most of it.*

Never showing any outward signs of physical aggression, “*he was going to be a good partner, so everything he did, he framed as being a good partner,*” Percy believed he was “*nothing like his abusive father.*” This contributed to Glenda having difficulty recognising the abuse because “*none of it was abusive. It all came from a place of love.*” Believing that in order for someone to be identified as abusive, it required physical violence, and it was difficult for Glenda to think otherwise. While a focus on the physical aspect of domestic violence was effective in first gaining attention for the problem, it could be that it has become problematic in some circumstances. It can limit the understanding of other forms of violence and victims do not identify as being abused unless the abuse is severe (Barnett, Miller-Perrin, & Perrin, 2005). A New Zealand study found women who perceive abuse in their relationship as not serious are less likely to acknowledge it or seek help to end it (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010). Likewise when women seek help for emotional abuse any potential support systems may be influenced by the focus on physical violence.

In hindsight, as a result of her low self-esteem Glenda thought if someone had named the abuse she would not have believed them. After mentally ticking off nineteen out of twenty traits of an abusive relationship she saw on a poster while in a waiting room, “*he hit every one of them except the one which said hit, slap or punches you. He hit all nineteen and I went, no, what a load of twaddle, that poster, that poster is just wrong.*”

She felt that she couldn't get away from Percy, “*I wasn't going to acknowledge that he was abusive.*” With the evidence of what contributed towards an abusive relationship, she still believed it was something that was wrong with her, “*that had been the message from my youth. So he was just someone else saying it and I still believed it.*” Glenda described the difficulty she faced in first naming Percy's

behaviour as abusive and eventually as naming herself as abused. *“That was a hard statement to put on myself. I had kind of distanced it from myself.”*

It may be because domestic violence is often viewed as an individualistic problem, putting a name to the abuse had the potential of representing some kind of failure on her behalf to choose to a suitable partner. Chung (2005) found women like to position themselves as equal partners in a relationship. Identifying as a victim of violence, means acknowledging one has little agency in one’s relationship. This highlights the problem associated with ‘choices’ and ‘blame’ when power and male privilege are not taken into account within abusive heterosexual relationships. Women may find themselves trapped by a socially constructed belief system when this is their dominant paradigm.

Once the relationship ended there was little support from Glenda’s extended family. They tended to disbelieve that Percy would have been abusive. It is beyond this study to determine why the family thought as they did. However, there have been factors determined which are associated with people being more accepting of or normalising certain abusive behaviours. In particular this seems to be the case with psychological abuse (N. M. Capezza & X. B. Arriaga, 2008; Nicole M. Capezza & Ximena B. Arriaga, 2008). Flood and Pease (2009) found families who hold more traditional gender role beliefs are more willing to excuse abusive behaviour. Alongside this, as discussed in chapter one, many victim blaming myths act to serve as a buffer for minimising the perpetrators behaviour. Research shows women and men often blame women for men’s violence (Wood, 2001)

With Glenda’s grandmother describing him as *“such a nice boy,”* and her half-sister dismissing Glenda’s story of Percy’s rape, telling her *“I don’t want to hear about it.”* Percy continued to manipulate the family and cut off any supports. There had been a relationship with her half-sister.

*He absolutely destroyed that. After we broke up he went to her and stayed at her home multiple times. After he stayed, her daughter phoned me and screamed at me that I was a whore. He had told them how awful I was.*

These family beliefs about Percy's character may have hindered the recognition process for Glenda by reinforcing the notion she was the problem in the relationship.

Education helped Glenda to recognise the abuse. She identified reading the feminist novel 'The Women's Room' as a turning point. She was sixteen at the time.

*The main message was that no matter how hard women try, because of the way society is structured we always end up dealing with the shit and string beans. Men somehow skate through life and don't have to deal with them, and women do. I read that and I was reading about women's struggles and the idea that there were other women who didn't want to have sex, but had to because it was part of their wifely duties. And they had to do the shopping and everything.....reading about these women in the 70's who then went to Harvard and were starting to do things differently.*

Classes at University which covered domestic violence helped with recognising the abuse. "I guess there were so many examples, there were those stories and they were things that I had experienced. It provided me with evidence that I wasn't being a drama queen, that I wasn't lying and that I wasn't exaggerating." Learning of the feminist notion of power and control in abusive relationships allowed Glenda to see what happened in her relationship.

Since leaving Percy, Glenda struggles to understand just what it was about the relationship that was so bad. She knew there were problems, she knew how they made her feel, but she felt that society today continues to reinforce the notion that abuse is only physical and that when women complain about un-recognised or recognised emotional abuse in their relationships, they are viewed as "being drama queens."

*I think he probably knew that as well because your partner is not abusive if he doesn't hit you. He's just caring for you, he's looking out for your interests, he's forgiven you for being a slut, he's making sure you eat nice food, he's making sure you dress in a nice way which is becoming.....got the right friends, and he's protecting you from your evil family and you know that you are fulfilling your wifely obligations and duties as far as sex goes, just generally making me a better human being.*

The far-reaching effects of the abuse in Glenda's relationship continue to some degree today showing the pervasiveness of emotional abuse and its continued ability to cause her to doubt her own judgement.

*That's it, I know that's all lies, but that's still what I feel when I think about it and when I talk about it. There's still that voice inside which goes but it's still all your fault... I look at the bigger picture and think that was really quite controlling. But when I look at the things individually, they are not much. He wouldn't let me buy anything other than three soft drinks. That's not much, you know.*

### **Suggested improvements for raising awareness of emotional abuse**

Glenda suggested several ways she believed would help women recognise emotional abuse in their relationships. She thought it was important emotional abuse was specifically targeted in advertising campaigns for family violence.

*I mean we have that 'violence is not ok', and 'smacking your children is not ok' campaigns. What about the having to give your husband sex every night because he wants it and you don't: is not ok. What about the having no control over your finances, even though it upsets you: is not ok. Identifying some of those things and singling them out as 'not ok' behaviours. This is abuse and you have the right to be treated different and better. You know, violence is so obvious, these things are not obvious. I think these things need to be explicitly talked about and singled out. Have the spotlight put upon them so people can consider that this is abusive.*

Glenda recognised from her own situation how difficult it was to identify the signs of abuse because there was no physical violence. She talked of how her awareness of the tactics of non-physical abuse changed after learning through her university classes about power and control in society in general.

*When I learned about the power and control thing, I thought 'well that's how it worked'. I never knew how it worked. I could never understand how I was always the underdog in the relationship.*

One aspect which Glenda found extremely helpful was hearing other women's stories of emotional abuse. She described how it provided validation of her

experience which in turn led to questioning any previous self-blame and shame she felt about her role in the relationship.

*That's it with physical abuse you have got something solid. But with the other stuff you don't. I think it helps like in the family violence course, to see your experience reflected in the stories of others. Because when it is more than just you, it is kind of external validation, that it matters, that these things that I felt didn't just happen to me. There are more of us and it is not ok and it doesn't happen because I am a piece of shit.*



## Case study two: Cameron

### Cameron and Gregory

Cameron and Gregory had a relationship for approximately twenty one years. Cameron was seventeen when the relationship began and Gregory was forty one. They were married with no shared children although Gregory had teenage children from a previous marriage. During the relationship Cameron recognized some of Gregory's behaviour as controlling and possessive, and towards the end she began to link that with the panic attacks she was experiencing. Maybe she had begun distancing herself from her husband a long time before she left him. It wasn't until after the relationship finished that she became aware of emotional abuse and could put a name to what she had experienced.

### The relationship

Raised in a fundamentalist Christian family, Cameron and her sisters were taught to respect their elders. Her father was head of the household and no-one questioned his right to make decisions, *"If Dad wanted to do it, that's what we were doing."* There was no denying the family dynamics were based in patriarchy and religious beliefs. She and her sisters learned from an early age that they were *"going to be great wives and have lots of children."* The idea of doing things differently never crossed Cameron's mind. Watching her Mother *"run around after Dad"* prepared Cameron for what she thought was expected from her in married life. Research has shown parents can pass on attitudes about gender roles to their children. For example, children can observe their mother typically spending more time on care giving than their father does (Marks, Lam, & McHale, 2009). It is possible Cameron learned from a young age that men and women were expected to act differently.

*There was never any talk of your girls are so intelligent they are going to go to university or whatever, or they are going to do something..... All we used to talk about as teenagers was marrying a dairy farmer and having five kids.....[The] ultimate goal.....was to be a good*

*wife..... The concept that I might have had any rights in a relationship just never occurred to me.....I would never have said no to anything because I didn't think I had the right to. The husband is always right. Whatever he wanted to do, it was always right.*

Children raised in religious homes are often taught the rules of the right and wrong based upon their respective religion. The status of men and women, and the appropriate behaviours expected from them in an adult relationship are set out from a young age. In most major religions of the world women are clearly told to 'submit' to their fathers and then to their husbands in order to be a good wife (Bancroft, 2002).

Prior to her relationship with Gregory, Cameron knew his first wife and family. She would visit them and saw "*what the family dynamics were like.*" Gregory would "*emotionally blackmail*" his wife and she would "*give it back*" to him. In hindsight Cameron thought that because Gregory and his wife were closer in age than she and Gregory, this may have acted as some kind of buffer against his abusive behaviour.

After Gregory's first marriage ended, he and Cameron began a relationship. As she was the eldest daughter in her family Cameron was supposed to set a good example for her younger sisters. Her parent's "*weren't happy*" when she moved in with a divorced man and was not yet married at this stage.

*Dad came around and just went ballistic. Mum's big concern was that I was going to get pregnant. [It was a] big worry that I was going to cause even more shame to the family. She didn't really seem to be all that concerned for my welfare. Although I guess she was but she just didn't come across that way.*

As soon as the couple moved in together Gregory put Cameron on a diet and exercise regime because he liked "*ultra -skinny girls.*" She weighed just forty six kilograms at the time. Initially Gregory showed interest in "*what I was doing*" by giving advice on what clothes would suit her, buying her "*Barbie doll*" outfits she couldn't afford and by showing interest in the type of movies they watched together. In retrospect this was the beginning of Gregory's controlling behaviours. Before long even the type of underwear Cameron wore was determined for her and hiring a movie had become stressful "*if I went to the video shop.....I had to*

*really scrutinize what I was going to get. That he was going to like it and that there was nothing that was going to set him off.”*

*About six months after I moved in with him I was already starting to think maybe I had made a huge mistake. But because of my upbringing I thought you’ve done it now, you’re stuck with it. And thinking optimistically I was thinking things will get better, this will change and it’ll get better. In reality it just got worse.*

Gregory began to isolate Cameron from her family and friends.

*He created so much shit between me and my parents that there was no hope of maintaining a relationship, after dad came round and had a go at him. He just didn’t want anything to do with them. He wouldn’t let me have anything to do with them either. I couldn’t ring them.....He would stand there listening in, saying tell them this and that.....it got to the point where my mother would say I’m not going to have a conversation with you because he’s there. So there was no point in ringing.....I could write to them but he would get my mail and open it.....he was still doing that when I left him, opening my mail. I said to him that is not appropriate, opening other people’s mail is just rude. He said ‘I am your husband I can do what I want to’.*

Shortly after the couple began living together they moved to a different town. “*I think it was partly due to the scandal.*” Cameron left her family and friends behind for a new life. The concept of isolation is described by Avni (1991) in which the victims lives are managed and is also covered in Biderman’s analysis of coercion (1950) in which isolation encourages the victim to become dependent and deprives her of social support. Cameron didn’t know anyone in the town they moved to. Socially the couple spent time with Gregory’s acquaintances who were mainly other couples made up of older men with young female partners. Having had no other serious relationships Cameron had only these couples as a reference for what an adult relationship looked like. “*The women were very dominated by the older men. That became the norm because we were all like that. So I didn’t really think anything of it.*”

After securing her-self a new job in a takeaway restaurant, Cameron spent some time away from Gregory and she began to make some new friends of her own “*I would be going to work and having a good time with my work mates.*” However, after three months, Gregory decided that he didn’t want her working there and asked her to work in the family business instead. The leaving party her work

mates threw was “ruined” because Gregory had “a hissy fit” as he didn’t want her to go. This left Cameron upset and worried about how Gregory would behave when she returned home from the party and she felt unable to enjoy herself. Gregory had made the decision for Cameron: there was no negotiation or recognition of her needs or wants. Bancroft (2002) explains the importance of having one’s needs taken seriously. Once the abusive partner takes over these decisions there will be constant disappointment and constant sacrifice for the victim. The abusive partner, however, rarely has to make any compromise. Gregory would choose who the couple socialised with. Almost exclusively, these were his friends and acquaintances.

Not long after the move away from her home town threats of suicide began “*It was because I was such a useless wife [girlfriend], and I had enraged him to the point where he didn’t want to go on living.*” This caused Cameron to become fearful of what Gregory would do. Once “*he ran off onto one of the bridges on the motorway and I chased him down there because I thought he was being serious.*” She tried to reason with him, although after a while she left “*because he just wouldn’t listen. I was like ok you are going to hit me in a minute.*” Gregory didn’t throw himself off the bridge and returned home later. Cameron was however “*always fearful of what he was going to do.....I was always like in the back of my mind, one day he is going to snap and kill me.*”

Sexually controlling, Gregory showed a “*blatant disregard for my health and safety*” putting Cameron at risk. “*I went to our family doctor and asked for a STD test.....he said but you have been married for 6 years.....I was like well actually it is not a monogamous relationship.*” Looking back Cameron described her embarrassment in discussing Gregory’s sexual behaviour, with other people. “*I can see why men like him would use that [as a means of control] because it is not the type of thing you would want to be telling anyone.*” It is not uncommon for men who abuse to use sex as a way to establish power and control over his partner. Bancroft (2002) suggests any sexual contact in an abusive relationship is rarely consensual. A woman who is worried how her partner will react if she says no to any type of unwanted sexual behaviour is not freely giving consent and the potential for sexual abuse is heightened.

Gregory would sabotage any attempts made by Cameron to expand her horizons. She began a correspondence course, spending roughly four hours a week on the work. A couple of months into it Gregory began *“not giving me time to do it, so I never finished it.”* Some years later on, the couple joined a Toastmasters club, and Cameron really enjoyed the social side of it. *“I was starting to talk to people and having intellectual conversations and he didn’t like that if he couldn’t follow [the conversation] .....that was going to be a bad influence on me.”* Gregory made the decision that neither of them would continue going to Toastmasters. One means of establishing control can be undermining independence.

Adapt at manipulating people around him, Gregory was *“good”* at being *“charming”* and people *“would really like him when they first met him.”* This has the potential for confusion. The victim can begin to question herself as everybody else seems to like him, maybe the problem does lie with her (Bancroft, 2002). He would *“humiliate”* Cameron in front of other people making her look *“bad”* and lacking in *“integrity.”* Consequently, Cameron recalled that somehow she always came across as looking like the difficult one who had problems. *“I specifically remember asking him not to do it. Don’t do that and he went ahead and did it anyway. It was just like he was going to show me who’s in charge.”*

Public humiliation can have a two-fold effect. Firstly it has the possibility to manipulate others as Cameron found to her detriment. This could result in greater isolation from people and furthermore it has the potential to reduce the victim’s self-esteem. Because this kind of aggression is so subtle, witnesses to it are likely to put it down to simple conflicts or ‘spats.’ When in fact it is an attempt by the abuser to undermine and destroy the victim (Hirigoyen, 2004).

On the other hand Cameron was never allowed to humiliate Gregory, even unintentionally. *“If we were somewhere and I made a joke and people got it and he didn’t. He would get really shitty about that.”*

Talking about the relationship with other people was also forbidden. Gregory told Cameron that his first wife *“had run me down to all her friends. They had been bitching about me behind my back and you had better not being doing that.”* By making Cameron walk on egg-shells just in case she upset him, Gregory effectively had Cameron self-monitoring what she talked about and unable to be

her authentic self. This kind of manipulation allows for some respite from more overt forms of abuse for the abuser and can serve to further confuse and upset the victim (Bancroft, 2002) because it does not look like ‘typical’ abuse to the abused or most other people. Gregory showed a double standard in which he was exempt from the rules. He was allowed to say whatever he pleased and talk about Cameron in a negative manner. She had to conform to his rules of what was acceptable conversation or he would make her pay for it. As Bancroft states, “The abusive man has the privilege of living by a special set of criteria that are designed just for him” (p.157).

With what appeared to be a low opinion of women Gregory would make comments along the lines of “*what bitches*” and how “*evil, conniving and manipulative*” they are. He thought “*all women were out to get him personally.*” Negative attitudes towards women, seeing them as inferior, stupid or conniving (Bancroft, 2002) can become a serious problem, particularly when a female partner doesn’t live up to his expectations. Gregory also expressed fairly strong opinions on domestic abuse. Stereotypical beliefs about women’s roles can lead some men who use violence against their female partner to argue that they had the right to discipline her when she disrespected his authority as a man (Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Wood, 2001).

*He used to talk about people in violent relationships and would say well she must have deserved it because no man would hit a woman for no reason at all....he would say men don’t do that that, it is just a nasty feminist kind of carry on. Yes making shit up. I think that was his justification in his mind for the times that he did hit. It was that I had provoked him beyond all reasonable measure, by putting one too many sugars in his coffee. I think he justified if men were beating their women then they clearly deserved it.*

Cameron identified definite cycles of abuse in the beginning of the relationship. Every argument was somehow Cameron’s fault. Gregory would sulk for weeks at a time over small issues. Too much sugar in his coffee would become grounds for ignoring Cameron and it was impossible to start a conversation with him. “*You can’t win with that. Whatever you do is never ever good enough.*” Eventually, walking on eggshells became an everyday occurrence for Cameron. The abuse had become almost constant, “*I’d wake up in the morning thinking ‘what is he going to go off about today’. Some days he would just wake up angry, and*

*sometimes he'd dream that I done something and wake up and sulk about it for a week.*" Hirigoyen (2004) states this form of refusal to communicate sends the message that the victim is of no consequence or that she doesn't even exist to the abuser. Hirigoyen goes on to state this is an effective way of avoiding dialogue and silently blame the victim (2004).

In refusing to acknowledge Cameron or what had happened, Gregory denied her the right to be heard or defend herself. This form of abuse clearly had an effect on her. Women taking part in Loring's 1994 study of emotional abuse described their partners 'sulking' as harder to bear than some of the more overt forms of abuse. Partly due to Gregory's sulking, Cameron came to believe that keeping him happy was the answer to stopping this behaviour.

*I felt responsible for him.....it was my job to make him happy.....I really thought it was my job to make sure he was happy and stable and calm all the time. I can't ever remember him saying he was sorry to me for anything. He did some really fucking horrible things. Things you just don't do to your partner..... when there was a fight, I felt like it was always my job to make things right.*

If things were not done to his standard Gregory would threaten to throw her out of the family home. A few times he followed through with his threats, but within a few hours he would tell her to come home after *"blatantly pointing out that I had no-where to go."* Gregory viewed the couple's assets as his: *"it was always his house, his property, his business, his car. Everything was in his name.....he used to point out that the house was in his name and I didn't have my name on the titles so it was his house and if anybody would have to leave it would be me."* It was ten years into the relationship before Cameron had her own bank account after being given some advice from a bank teller, *"so I did that and he wasn't all that happy."*

Towards the end of their relationship Gregory became seriously ill and began taking medication which Cameron believes had a direct effect on his personality. He became *"a monster"* to live with and seemed to be *"out of control"* with his *"worst personality traits amplified."* One afternoon at their customer service business Cameron asked Gregory for something. He took *"exception"* to the request and *"punched"* her *"in the head"* in front of customers and staff, *"none of them said anything"* at the time. Because no-one said anything at the time this

possibly reinforced the notion that Gregory's behaviour was justified in some way.

Cameron wanted to leave Gregory at this stage but felt she couldn't because of his illness. She thought she would be judged: *"the whole town is going to say there's that horrible woman who left her husband while he was very sick. So I stayed. It was probably 6 months and it was just a living hell."* It is thought that stereotypes of how women should behave in different circumstances affects the levels of blame attributed to them (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008). Capezza and Arriaga found women who didn't fit in the traditional warm caring motherly role were likely to receive less support and more judgment from others (2008). Likewise (Becker, 2010) found women who endorse sexist beliefs were more hostile towards other women who didn't match their concept of traditional roles. In Cameron's case it was possible she had internalized the stereotypical messages from a young age and was using them as a measure to judge her behaviour towards an ill partner. The consequence of stereotypical messages meant she was less likely to leave Gregory and receive the support and help she needed.

### **Breaking up**

The beginning of the end came when Gregory wanted Cameron to buy a mobile phone. She felt he would use it as an excuse to keep a check on her, where she was, what she was doing and who she was talking too. She felt she had the *"right to spend fifteen minutes wandering around aimlessly comparing brands of coffee"* at the supermarket *"if want I to,"* without Gregory phoning and asking *"what was taking so long."* Previously to this incident Cameron had thought about leaving Gregory but had felt trapped in the relationship and unable to break away. A common myth associated with domestic violence is 'why won't she just leave.' Evidence shows it is not simply a case of 'leaving:' there can be many reasons why women stay in relationships (Peled, Eisikovits, Enosh, & Winstock, 2000). From Cameron's description of why she found it difficult to leave, it was factors other than an attachment to Gregory which came into play.

*I would be like this is the last straw, the end. Then I would start to think of the reality, where am I going to go, I have no money, I will*



*have no home, all my family has been cut off from me. I've got no friends..... he told me I couldn't go to Women's Refuge, consistently; he would say you can only go to a Women's refuge if you are being beaten.....I am going to be living on the streets under a bridge in a cardboard box.*

She talked of the mobile phone as a turning point because it was when she realized “*I was losing my identity.*” Loring (1994) described women’s struggles with feeling “panicked, horrified, scared and petrified” at the sense of facing the destruction of their identity.

Once the decision had been made to end the relationship, Cameron went to her mother to ask for a loan. Gregory had led her to believe that she would owe him money for the two jointly owned businesses if she ever left him. After assuring Cameron that she was entitled to half of the couple’s assets her mother asked why she was leaving Gregory and if he was hitting her. As Cameron wasn’t being hit “*on a regular basis*” her mother’s advice was “*well, God said you should stay where you are.*” As Janice Giles (2004) argues, women can find themselves experiencing disapproval for not staying in a relationship and at the same time experience disapproval for staying in an abusive situation for so long. However Cameron had made her decision, she was going to leave the relationship. “*I felt I didn't deserve to be treated like that and I had done twenty years and put the effort in*” and things had never become any better.

Once she had made up her mind things moved quickly. Cameron told Gregory “*I can't do this anymore, the relationship. I'm done and I want out.*” He had a “*meltdown*” and “*kept on and on*” at Cameron. Then he began to make promises to change his behaviour, although Cameron had heard that before and chose not to believe him.

*He said why are you doing this? I said I want to start doing things for myself. I want to go to university. I want to become a lawyer. He said you can do that. I said you know that's not going to fucking work. I going to be there for 3 months and you're going to be ringing me all the time.*

Cameron decided she didn’t want a drawn- out divorce.

*In the end he gave me one of the cars and as I was packing my stuff into the car and driving down the drive way I thought I'm driving away with exactly what I came into this marriage with. My car and my*

*clothes and that was it. When we signed the papers my lawyer said to me you are mad, you could take this bastard for half and you are not even doing it. I said I just want out, I don't want it protracted, I don't want it prolonged, I just want out, just cut it off.*

She went to her parents' home and stayed with them, surprising herself at how quickly she began to feel better. It was the first time Cameron had spent a night on her own *"I actually felt really secure there and I slept better than I had done probably for years.....as soon as I moved out [away from Gregory] I stopped stressing, I started eating and put on weight."* The full impact of how controlled she had been in the relationship didn't hit until after it ended.

*Just after I left him, I went to the supermarket. I was wandering around thinking I don't even know what to buy. I couldn't remember what I liked to eat. So I bought some coffee and I went home and cried. I thought how can I be thirty nine years old and not know what I like to eat.*

### **Recognising the abuse: What helped and what did not**

In Cameron's eyes she saw the relationship was unbalanced and unfair, but she didn't think herself a victim of abuse. She believed that was *"the way all men are."* A few people had mentioned to Gregory that *"the way you treat your wife is disgusting."* Cameron dismissed their comments because *"they didn't know"* about the relationship. Gregory had taken Cameron on holiday a few times and bought her clothes when she needed them, so she thought things were not that bad. Looking back at the relationship Cameron explained she could see that *"he controlled every aspect of my life. If he could have controlled my thoughts he would have done."*

Roughly fifteen years into the relationship, during which time she had always felt responsible for Gregory's happiness, Cameron began to change her thinking. While in the relationship, she wasn't allowed to read novels although she was allowed to read self-help books and it was one of them which helped plant the seed of change.

*[The] whole philosophy was you are the only one responsible for your happiness, and you can choose to be happy or you can choose to be not happy.....I thought that is so true. Then after that I thought well if*

*he wants to be a miserable bugger that's his problem not mine, because by then I had realized that nothing was ever going to make him happy, so it was no use bending over backwards to make him happy, because it was never going to happen.*

She identified a hindrance in the process of separating the responsibility she felt for Gregory's happiness from his behaviour. She thought that may have been *"because when he was good, he could be really nice and really lovely."* She held onto the hope that this time maybe he had changed his behaviour and *"then the cycle would start again."*

Cameron made an appointment with her doctor. She had been finding herself having trouble breathing and sometimes had the feeling of having a heart attack. Between making the appointment and going to it, she *"realized that if I got out of the house, round the corner and half a block away I was able to breathe again. By the time I got down to the lake I felt so much better. Then I realized god dam it's him."* Explaining this to her doctor, he suggested *"I'll give you some medication for now, but you've got to get out....I can't put you on valium for the rest of your life."* This *"validation"* from a health professional helped Cameron to trust her intuition on the cause of her symptoms. Cameron described her-self as *"lucky"* in visiting a locum doctor who practiced *"holistically."* Under other circumstances she thought the outcome could have been very different.

Modern medicine has been criticized for ignoring the bigger picture of domestic abuse and treating only the resulting symptoms. Likewise, the over prescription of psychotropic drugs to women in abusive relationships has come under scrutiny in recent years (Flaherty, 1996). Bowker and Maurer (1987) go further suggesting prescribing these drugs can be dangerous, putting women at greater risk from their partner who abuses them. When a health professional fails to identify abuse as an explanation for physical symptoms, the woman can become labelled as the problem and victim blaming can occur. This can also send the message that talking about domestic abuse is taboo, inadvertently keeping women dependent on their abusers (Flaherty, 1996).

Gregory had used religion as a means to justify his controlling behaviour during the relationship. He would say *"God put the man in charge, so you have to do what he says because he is the boss."* The association between Judeo-Christian

beliefs and male dominance has been investigated. Many have found patriarchy can be supported by different religious beliefs. Jeffords (1984) and St. Lawrence and Joyner (1991) suggest women are assigned a subordinate role to men by some religious beliefs. Some abusers can use religious beliefs to legitimize and absolve themselves of any guilt, therefore maintaining a positive self-image (Novsak, Rahne Mandelj, & Simonic, 2012). Likewise religious commitment has been shown to support stereotypical gender role beliefs. Jeffords (1984) found these attitudes endorse a system “*in which a woman was viewed as the property of her father and later of her husband*” (p. 543). Individuals who adhere to the gender roles are more likely to support men’s misuse of power to subordinate women.

Because of her religious upbringing Cameron felt this had caused her to doubt herself at times, so she thought seeking help from religious counsellors may help to make sense of things. Lundy Bancroft (2002) describes how women raised in fundamentalist religion can be viewed as ‘evil’ if they resist any domination from the unquestioned ruler of the household, the husband or father.

*I thought what if you are a really bad wife and you should learn to behave yourself. I think a big part of why I stayed in the relationship so long was because mum and dad always told us that once you got married that was it.*

The counselling was a mixed bag, it helped in some ways. Cameron came to recognize that some people may be more vulnerable to abuse for various reasons and as a result can move from one controlling relationship to another. This is now something she is mindful of in her interactions with other people. But as the counselling was based in religious beliefs, this proved to be less helpful to Cameron. She found it was quite biased. The counsellors “*said to me that I really hated my ex-husband and was blaming him for everything.....they said that although he had done some bad things, he may not be a bad person.....but I thought, you know I actually think he is a bad person.*”

Another possible hindrance in recognizing the abuse was growing up in a family which didn’t discuss feelings and was very patriarchal. This led Cameron to believe that was “*just the way things are.*”

Reconnecting with her family and receiving non-judgmental support from them after the relationship split became part of the healing process. Although her family had struggled initially with many aspects of the relationship, including the enforced isolation Gregory imposed upon Cameron, the family ties were quickly re-established. Cameron felt this gave them the opportunity to discuss what had happened. It wasn't until Cameron began to tell them just how the relationship had been that she thought her family really understood the abuse. *“When we talked about it dad nearly cried because he said he felt responsible, but he didn't know what to do at the time.....They had seen for twenty years what was going on, but they didn't see how bad it actually was.”*

*Our family really don't talk about their emotions. They don't talk about sex, they don't talk about relationships. So for dad to say, hey this guy is probably using you, manipulating you and is probably some kind of sexual deviant. He wouldn't have been able to come out with that.*

Realizing her dream, Cameron began to study at university. She identified one of her chosen subjects as extremely helpful for recognizing the emotional abuse for what it was. Women and gender study classes opened her eyes to feminism and women's rights. In retrospect Cameron now questions *“how could I ever have been that ignorant.....it never really occurred to me that in a relationship you might actually be equal.”* Unable to pinpoint specific factors which helped from those classes, Cameron thought it was *“the whole thing.....eighteen months of learning.”* Women's studies courses aim to engage critical thinking, and raise awareness of male privilege and sexism (Case, 2007). After completing women and gender studies classes Case (2007) found students had a greater appreciation for diversity, a raised awareness of sexism and more egalitarian attitude towards gender roles.

### **Suggested improvements for raising awareness of emotional abuse**

Hearing her story reflected in others' was a revelation and relief. Cameron identified this as a positive step towards raising awareness of emotional abuse in her life and potentially could be for others. Being able to name the experience

and analyse the situation was an important step in making different choices for the future.

*Other people have that done to them. I think that was what brought it home to me, that it wasn't unique to me. It wasn't something that was my fault. So I think that was when I went ah ok there are probably heaps of other people out there like that. I thought it was just me because on the surface everybody wants to present themselves as having a great relationship.*

Cameron thought it was difficult to explain to people the context of emotional abuse. This caused her problems when people asked what happened. Education on the nature and the path of emotional abuse and the differences and similarities to physical violence could be of value here. *“Maybe if you could pinpoint certain behaviours, maybe educate people that this is what to look out for and that it is an accelerating sort of thing, it will start of small and then get worse and worse and worse.”*

*You say oh he called me a fucking bitch, they will say oh well what did you do? Then you think well I just kept quiet because I didn't want it to get any worse. And they think ok well it can't have been that bad.....If you don't have a black eye.....there's no evidence of someone calling you an arsehole every day..... I used to find too that I would defend him. I would be like he has had a bad day, you know..... Having to apologize for his behaviour, after a while I stopped doing that.*

## Case study three: Amber

### Amber and Richard

Amber and Richard were in a relationship for approximately six years. She was eighteen and Richard was twenty eight when they first became a couple. Two children, Casey and Logan, were born during their time together. Amber didn't identify herself as being emotionally abused by her partner while they were together. She ended the relationship after Richard began to behave in an inappropriate sexual manner with their daughter Casey. During a first consultation over custody of the children, Amber's lawyer drew her attention to emotional abuse. *"I was like what is an emotionally abusive relationship? I didn't know what it was, I had never heard of it before. As far as I'm aware you need cuts and bruises to be in an abusive relationship."*

### The relationship

As a girl Amber lived in a family home where her mother was abused by her father: *"Dad had put a knife to mums throat and everything."* Although she rarely witnessed the violence, she heard the stories. *"Mum always used to talk about it openly to us kids."* The research shows children who witness or are aware of abuse towards their mother can be affected in a similar manner to experiencing the abuse themselves (Berzenski & Yates, 2010; Messman-Moore & Coates, 2007).

Often Amber and her sister would be driven to *"friends"* during the night and returned to their family home a few days later. *"It was just routine, like I remember one night waking up in the car and thinking it has happened again and going back to sleep. I stopped reacting."* Amber may have internalized some messages about abuse at this early stage of her life. One consequence of exposure to abuse as a child can be an increased likelihood of re-victimization in adult life (Berzenski & Yates, 2010). Likewise, for children who witness parental abuse, it is possible that the meaning given to these experiences differs for the genders. Nicolson and Wilson (2004) claim a female child witness is more likely to live with a perpetrator of violence than to become a perpetrator herself.

Hiding behind furniture listening for sounds of abuse became a normal part of life for the sisters. Amber would become annoyed at her mother, *“I would think you keep getting hit, leaving and then going back.”* In order to rationalize her mother’s decision to stay in the abusive relationship with her father, Amber began to believe *“maybe it needs to be worse, maybe it is not bad enough for mum to leave.”* Amber became quite *“used to a man being in control.”* She became *“scared”* of people *“and as an adult.....avoided confrontation.”*

Prior to meeting Richard, Amber was living and working away from her home town. The hours were long, the work was intense and the conditions were poor at the care home where she was employed. Amber became depressed and attempted to commit suicide. She was hospitalized in a *“psyc (psychiatric) unit”* for a short period of time. When she left the unit her mother collected her and took her back to their home town. Not wishing to stay with her mother Amber went to live her sister. It was not long after this that Richard came into Amber’s social circle.

Marijuana featured heavily in her sister’s life. She would take Amber to *“hang out”* in the garage at a friend’s and they *“used to smoke heaps of pot”* together. Richard would be there *“dealing.”*

*I used to buy off him, and he used to start giving me freebies and stuff, you know, like when someone likes you. It wasn’t sexy or anything. I remember when I was living in Wellington and all I wanted was a boyfriend.....he (Richard) gave me attention. At that time my self-esteem was pretty shit, I had just tried to kill myself and this guy was giving me attention and I didn’t think I was even worthy of him. You know and he was amazing as far as my eyes were concerned.*

According to Loring (1994, p. 28) a child exposed to emotional trauma will, as an adult, develop *“a desperate hope for intimacy”* along with *“a suspicion she may never get it.”* Richard may have become amazing to Amber *“because he was nice to me.... he gave me that little bit of attention that I didn’t get from anywhere else.”* Amber explained she wasn’t used to people being *“nice”* to her, and it helped boost her *“low self–confidence.”*

Things moved quickly, from the initial meeting to starting a relationship with Richard. It was just a few weeks when Richard came to live with Amber at her sister’s house until they found their own flat. Once they began living together the



couple moved around to various addresses. There were problems in the relationship. Amber wanted to “*stop the drug thing*” which caused arguments and the couple split up and got back together a few times. Richard would say to Amber “*I’m scared of who I’m going to turn into if I’m not stoned. And then I [Amber] would feel guilty. He would walk around.....all sad.*” Richard placed the responsibility for his emotional wellbeing onto Amber’s shoulders. Not only did he make her feel guilty, he also covertly threatened that things may change in their relationship if he stopped taking the drugs.

Debt began to mount, but there was always “*money for pot and alcohol.*” Although there was often no food in the pantry and the power was disconnected several times. Any hire purchases were taken out in Amber’s name. Richard seemed unconcerned about the mounting debt: “*he never cared about paying anything.*” Richard was showing signs of his entitlement to use drugs, no matter the consequences. His addiction was also leading him to abuse Amber economically. Things got so bad Amber eventually applied for bankruptcy, something she felt a lot of embarrassment over. Nonetheless Amber continued to “*buy nice things for Richard.*” This was important to Amber, for at the time she “*never felt good enough*” and thought he may think more of her if she gave him gifts.

As the relationship progressed Richard began to cause problems between Amber and her family and friends. He would “*moan to me about my family and slowly chip them away.*” Isolation is a tactic often used by abusers. It can result in the victim becoming more dependent on the abuser as his point of view becomes the only other reference point. As a result she can become confused about her own perceptions and feel herself eroding away (Loring, 1994). Once Richard claimed a good friend of Ambers kissed him, when he drove her home after an evening spent drinking in town. This caused a split in the friendship.

*When I used to confront him about things, he would say stuff to me like ‘ah don’t be stupid. That’s just what you are thinking. You know I wouldn’t do that.....he just had this way of turning it to make it feel like it was my fault. I would look at myself and think ok what are you doing wrong.*

Amber's body shape became an issue. *"He told me he didn't like it when I was thin."* When she wasn't training Richard would make comments about any weight gain. *"He even said to me one day that he liked that I'd put on weight because it meant I wouldn't get attention from other men.....he would encourage me to eat and try and hold me back from training and stuff."* Claire Murphy (2009) described this type of control as 'inappropriate restrictions'. The abuser will try to undermine outside interests and try to make it impossible for the victim to engage in activities. Yet, he would also make contradictory comments when Amber gained weight. In the bedroom Richard made it clear how Amber's weight gain negatively affected their sex life. He told Amber *"what was better and what wasn't and how I needed to be."* Richard appears to have been objectifying Amber, and viewing her as a body rather than a full human being. This could have affected Amber's self-confidence.

During Amber's pregnancies, Richard did little to help. Amber recalled she became *"quite sick"* with her second child. At the time, the couple had been living with Amber's mother. Richard would go to work and when finished would *"clock out..... he would just strip down and leave his pants and shoes exactly where he had taken them off,"* leaving all the childcare and household chores to Amber. He would say things to justify not helping, *"I went to work, now my working day is over."* It is not uncommon for an abuser to over-value his work and under-value the work his female partner does. According to Bancroft (2002, p. 56) "He sees her as an unpaid servant" and expects her to continue this while he has time off to engage in his interests.

Any annoyance Amber felt was tempered by what she thought was expected of her as a woman and mother. *"Cook tea, do the dishes, and clean up."* Amber had watched her mother and believed that was what was expected from her. She thought that if the household jobs were done *"well enough"* things may become better between Richard and her. *"I used to look for some praise, or thanks, or this is done well, something like that. I did look for some compliments, the uplifting reward sort of thing."*

In keeping with the social messages some women receive about certain roles they are expected to fulfil, Amber believed she was responsible for the household

duties. When she looked to Richard for some acknowledgement of the important role she played in the relationship she received no validation. Yet, on occasion, when Richard would do the dishes it seemed like he was doing something “*amazing*” and “*nice*” for Amber and it made up “*for the all crap he just put me through.*” This was reinforced by her sister who would say “*that’s so cool!*” when Richard had helped out with housework.

When Amber raised any grievances she felt, Richard would dismiss them as ‘nagging’. “*I used to think about the nagging, if I didn’t nag him so much. He always used to say that I nagged at him.*” Perhaps Richard felt he was above accountability for any of his actions or lack of them. Accusing Amber of ‘nagging’ was a way of retaliating and deflecting any responsibility. The idea of ‘nagging’ has some negative connotations associated with it. Because of this, Amber would have potentially become less likely to challenge Richard and more likely to comply with his wishes. “*It was like the whole sex thing, you know. I used to give him sex like how he wanted it. I thought it would fix or make him love me more, or fix some sort of behaviour he was doing.*”

Once the children came along Richard wanted to spend less and less time with them and Amber. He would shirk his responsibilities as a father in favour of spending time with friends telling Amber that “*I just want to go by myself*” or “*I didn’t want the kids coming*” to social events the couple had been invited to. Amber may have wondered what it was about her and the children that Richard would rather spend time with others than them.

*When it came to doing family things together, even taking the kids to the lake, he never used to want to come.....He had all the time in the world to do things with everyone else. But when it came to us, to doing things with us he never wanted a bar of it.....Richard never wanted me to leave the kids with him.....He would get angry if I didn’t take the kids.....I remember being really hurt by the fact that he just didn’t want to be with us.*

Things took a turn for the worse when Amber came across Richard masturbating in front of their daughter. When she confronted him, he denied any wrong doing. After a few more incidents which appeared suspicious, Amber caught Richard doing the same thing again. In total Amber recalled between four and five such incidents. Lundy Bancroft describes “the mentality and tactics of the incest

perpetrator are very similar to those of the partner abuser.....multiple research studies have found that men who abuse their partners perpetrate incest at a much higher rate than do nonabusive men” (2002, p. 246).

*He was like are you alright and just disregarded it.....I can't even remember what he said to me. But I was walking around really confused. That's sexual abuse. Because I was like, this is wrong isn't it. Like isn't this wrong and I remember questioning and questioning it in my head..... I can't even remember what he said to me. I know it's wrong, but is he right. Is it ok because he wasn't doing because of her?*

It could be argued that under different circumstances Amber may have removed the children and herself from the relationship on the first occasion she caught Richard. However, the confusion Amber described in naming Richard's behaviour is in keeping with the effects of on-going emotional abuse, as described by Terr. That is in order to cope with repeated psychological trauma certain defences and coping mechanisms are mobilized (e.g., dissociation, repression, denial, and identification with the aggressor), the use of which often lead to distinct character changes (Terr, 1991).

### **Breaking up**

An accumulation of incidents became the catalyst for ending the relationship with Richard. The “constant lying” undermined any trust Amber felt towards him. “I don't even know if anything coming out of his mouth is true.” When she caught him lying about where he had taken the children one day, Amber had had enough “like finally my strength snapped.” The feeling of emotional betrayal was too great to ignore as it became clear “it was never going to stop.” She told Richard “I can't do this anymore. And he said ‘Do what’. And I said us, we're done.”

*And that's when the roller coaster began really, being in the relationship with him felt smoother than post him. I don't know how to explain that, but the emotional turmoil, it was like everything got spewed up and then I had to deal with the things I had suppressed during the relationship, you know. I had just seemed to flatten everything out during the relationship. But when I left him it was like there was no other option but to let it all explode, to actually start feeling again. Stopping the drugs; Stopping the drinking; Stopping that intense rollercoaster of drink, drugs and sex.*

Bowker (1993) described the experience of splitting up with an abusive partner as sometimes more difficult than staying put. Negative reactions from friends and family, shame, stigma, and loss of social identity were among the reasons identified which impacted upon any choices. Perhaps a fear of the future had contributed to Amber's decisions.

Once the couple had split up Amber began to experience separation abuse from Richard. While she was at work, "*Richard broke in and starting throwing my stuff out of the windows. That was his way of getting me back for when I threw his stuff out when we broke up.*" Richard's extended family began to arrive spontaneously at her work place to verbally abuse and intimidate her. Separation abuse can be used to force a woman back into an abusive relationship or as retaliation after they have left (Toews, McKenry, & Catlett, 2003). Richard may have engaged in this behaviour for any of those reasons, although the end result caused Amber to feel intimidated.

Amber got a protection order. Although Richard "*breached*" it by turning up at her property, Amber didn't contact the Police.

*I thought it had to be something really serious. Not just him coming over. In my head I thought I'm not going to ring the police just because he has come round. I didn't want to be a burden.*

Using Amber's previous history of mental illness, Richard attempted to gain custody of the children. "*He had written in this affidavit that I was a danger to the kids and that they shouldn't be in my care and that they should be removed immediately.*" Requiring conformation for the court that her mental health was stable and well managed, Amber visited her GP. During the conversation about her depression over the years, the GP mentioned,

*It's funny that this situation happens.....the men are taking the women to court, when they are actually the reason why the women have gone this way. That was like a moment for me. I was just like hanging by a thread. And as far as anyone else was concerned I was the problem.*

Often an abuser's perception can be highly distorted, according to Bancroft (2002). He will try to prove the mother's inability to look after the children competently, oftentimes using the symptoms of his abuse, depression and emotional volatility, against her. As he loses control over his partner, the children

become one of the only ways he can maintain some form of contact with her. He will try and make her parenting life as difficult as possible, because if she thrives post-separation, it could prove that he was the problem after all (Bancroft, 2002). Likewise, custody battles can provide a space for the abuser to continue his abuse (L. Davies, Ford-Gilboe, & Hammerton, 2009).

At court Richard defended masturbating around Casey by shifting some of the blame onto Amber. *“Even when we went to court he said to all the lawyers Amber didn’t have a problem with me doing it. She just didn’t like that she thought I was doing it [thinking of or because of] over Casey.”*

*Even the kids lawyer said to Richard, ‘you know it is not ok to do that, whether you are doing it over her or not. You do not expose yourself in front of a child like that..... He just couldn’t register that. He didn’t see any problem with it. That’s what scared me, the fact that he didn’t see anything wrong with it.*

Amber was given full custody of the children and Richard was given supervised access to the children.

*When I got my stuff in the mail saying that I had full custody and he wasn’t allowed contact unless it was through a centre.....it felt like a really lonely time.....I had spent that whole year fighting for my kids. Learning how to stand up for myself and fighting for my kids.....after receiving that letter everything just stopped and I didn’t know what to do. I had come out of that and into this clear air, and all this turmoil was behind me.....I felt like I should celebrate, then I was happy then I was sad and then I was angry and then I was in this euphoric state.*

### **Recognizing the abuse: What helped and what did not**

During the relationship Amber discussed various aspects of it with different people. She specifically chose certain ones to talk over an issue with. Not one friend or family member had the full story of what was happening. The advice she received was, at times, conflicting.

When Amber caught Richard masturbating around Casey, she talked to a close friend about what she had discovered. Richard’s denial that he was doing something unacceptable had previously confused Amber. She specifically chose this friend, hoping for some clarification, and to talk things over *“because I*

*considered her not as screwed up as my family.....her [Jenny] response was, oh no. I don't think Richard would do something like that.*" Amber had doubted herself and the response she received from her friend was less than helpful in clearing up the confusion.

Likewise, Amber's mother dismissed the masturbation episodes. "*Mum said something to me like he's a good worker*" which seemed to Amber to take precedence over anything else in her mother's eyes.

*No one was super shocked or anything and even when I told Jenny..... No one was really shocked, so in my head he was saying to me about it not being a big deal, and they were reiterating and I was like so I am the one with the problem. And he used to say to me that there was nothing wrong with it, it's just you. He would feed it into my head and then I would go to other people and they would say the same thing.*

Having two people she trusted dismiss Richard's behaviour with Casey, Amber recognised this as a point when she began "*withdrawing into myself and as more things started happening.....I felt like ok so I'm actually the one that's the problem.*" Sorsoli has commented on reactions from potential support people, such as Amber experienced: the "unfortunate irony is that because society often echoes exactly what the abusers themselves might say (a lack of empathy, after all, is actually at the root of emotional abuse), enlisting the assistance of others often serves to further traumatize survivors" Sorsoli (2004, p. 17).

*I think it may have helped to talk to someone who was actually educated about it and knew something about it. Because, most people didn't do me wrong, because they didn't know anything about it. Most of them had been through some abuse, so it was like a bundle of victims going to other victims who didn't know how to deal with it.*

Amber chose not to discuss Richard's behaviour with any other people, "*I didn't want Richard to look bad, I didn't want him to look like this awful person.*" She felt he needed protecting. "*I always tried to make him look better.....I don't even know why, I just felt sorry for him sometimes. I just felt sorry for him, like when he was always curling up in a foetal position.*" When Amber would confront Richard about things which were troubling her in the relationship, Richard would often turn away from her and roll up into ball. Bancroft believes that once an abuser has his victim feeling sorry for him, she is less likely to follow through with any complaints she has towards him or in turn complain to others about him (2002).

When the relationship was over Amber stopped “*prettying him up*” to other people and found talking openly about Richard’s behaviour was part of the process of understanding and healing.

Other people’s views of Richard served to further confuse things. The couple’s friends “*used to say to me Richard is so nice.*” He painted a different picture of himself to people outside of the relationship. Amber found that when Richard talked of any joint issues or disagreements to friends he neglected to acknowledge any role his behaviour may have played. His versions portrayed Amber as unreasonable and demanding. Again any abuse went unrecognised as it seemed that Amber was the one causing problems as he was such a “*nice guy.*” Bancroft (2002, p. 69) theorises “this may be a key reason abusers get away with what they do as people struggle to see through the charming persona.”

Feeling the physical symptoms of abuse “*heart palpitations and stuff like that*” Amber visited a GP who asked certain questions from a depression rating questionnaire, consequently identifying stress as a probable cause for the palpitations. This was unhelpful to Amber as it missed diagnosing the underlying causes of her stress and was more of a patch you up and send you home solution.

Hearing from her lawyer that she had been abused helped Amber make sense of the confusion she had felt about the relationship. The confusion had caused her to doubt her own feelings and thoughts in favour of listening to others.

*If you don't know what emotional abuse is, or you haven't experienced it and it's not out there publicly for you to actually read anything about it. Then you are not going to know, like when I went to the lawyers I still didn't know what emotional abuse was, even though she had said that to me.....when you are confused and you are feeling this way about this and this has happened, and your partner is saying it's not and you are so confused. To actually have a name on that broad thing that is happening to you makes it easier to come to terms with.....Then you can go, ok so what actually constitutes emotional abuse.....[the abuser] going, this, this, and this and this and then actually being able to see what it is that you are going through.*

During the year spent going for custody of the children Amber identified that it would have been “*good if there had been some good places to go to talk to people.*” It was in that year that Amber reconnected with the church. She found the support there that she felt was lacking from her family “*Just believing in*



*something gave me a foundation, morals and values, something to step off. I never had that growing up so the standard of morals and stuff was quite hazy.”* The church offered counselling which Amber found useful. It helped her to re-define the “boundaries” she set for herself. It was also an opportunity to process much of the guilt she felt over “*the stuff with Richard and Casey.*”

Amber still questions herself over the abuse “*I keep wondering if my story is even serious enough for this (research). It’s back to that thing of is this actually serious enough, you know.*” Sorsoli (2004, p. 13) sums up the difficulty some women experience

The idea that we can be hurt emotionally, even when we are not hurt physically, seems unacceptable to society as a whole but even to those who have experienced years of emotional abuse and exhibit classic symptoms of trauma. In fact, survivors of emotional abuse can often report the symptoms of abuse without ever realizing, or being able to admit, that they have been abused.

### **Suggested improvements for raising awareness of emotional abuse**

Education was the key to raising awareness of emotional abuse in Amber’s eyes. Information showing what emotional abuse looks like and how it manifests in relationships could be of benefit for those in that type of relationship and could also benefit those who are in a position to support the victim.

*I just think more information. It is like you’ve got all this stuff like it’s not ok and all these campaigns on telly and stuff, about abuse, violent abuse. But I think television commercials and television campaigns on emotional abuse would be really good. Because people do acknowledge it, people do watch those ad’s and if it gets them questioning, if one seed gets planted that’s all that is needed for the process to begin. The process is long, but it’s worth it.*

Amber also thought a society that was more connected would be of benefit.

*There are so many closed doors in society these days.*

## Case study four: Sophie

Sophie had written a journal during her time in this relationship. She used it as tool to express the things she felt unable to talk to Tony about. She gave me permission to use verbatim excerpts from the journal. Some are included in the case study as indicated.

### Sophie and Tony

Sophie described herself as *“quite naïve going into that relationship with Tony.”* She was in her early twenties and *“here is this guy promising me all these things and that he is going to love me forever.”* Societal expectations and the idea of fairy-tale romances helped to form Sophie’s ideas of *“what you are supposed to be doing”* in an intimate heterosexual relationship. In hindsight she thought perhaps having emotional abuse in adult relationships modelled for her during childhood may have also contributed towards an increased vulnerability towards manipulation. On reflection of her relationship with Tony, Sophie noted *“I should have been on my guard a lot more and I shouldn’t have trusted as easily as I did.”*

### The relationship

Sophie and a girlfriend had arranged a road trip holiday together. A male friend of Sophie’s girlfriend *“ended up coming along.”* While *“travelling around together,”* Tony and Sophie got to know each other. Although Sophie wasn’t attracted to Tony at this time he made her feel *“like I was the best person he had ever come across.”* Very quickly Tony’s conversations turned to *“promises like he wanted us to grow old together.”* Both Hirigoyen (2004) and Bancroft (2002) describe the process of abusive seduction as, usually intense and as a deliberate manoeuvre from the abuser. It can set the stage for future confusion, as the victim may well struggle to disentangle the two very different emerging personas of the man she fell for.

The holiday ended and before returning home, the group stayed for a few days at Tony's parents' house. It was around this time that Sophie and Tony became a couple.

*He took me on a drive around the city to all the pretty spots and we saw the city lights and we talked about stuff. It was really romantic. It was lovely.....he didn't promise me anything at that stage but he was saying he wanted to grow old with me. It was just really touching and sweet.*

Sophie returned to her home town and the couple “*missed each other a lot and we would talk to each other for hours a day.*” Tony continued to talk of “*really important deal breaking stuff like marriage and kids. We had talked about all that within the first three months. It was really intense.*” Sophie acknowledged her expectations of adult romance had been influenced by the notion of “*fairy-tale romances,*” and romance in popular culture is flooded with ideas of accommodating women who seek and please men (Wood, 2001).

Men who abuse often learn manipulative behaviours from an early age (Bancroft, 2002), Here, it is possible that Tony also would have learned social ideas of ‘fairy-tale romances and Prince Charming type roles’ and then incorporated the messages from these into his early interactions with Sophie.

Tony became “*like....my hero.*” Sophie had been unwell with an undiagnosed chronic illness. Suffering from “*horrible embarrassing symptoms*” and no successful diagnoses from a doctor she had lost faith in the medical system and was reluctant to make further appointments. “*I could trust him (Tony).*”

Knowledge of vulnerabilities can be of benefit to some men who abuse. There are those who will deliberately seek out a partner who has health problems in order to be seen as a rescuer (Bancroft, 2002), and in other circumstances the vulnerabilities will be used as a means to exploit the woman later in the relationship. When Sophie explained how ill she had been “*he said to me you really need to see a doctor, that's not good for you.*” The support Tony provided during this period was “*amazing,*” he went to specialist appointments and was “*always there for me to talk to.*” Hirigoyen (2004, p. 137) notes that “an abuser shows tremendous intuition about where the weaknesses lie.”

Before long they were discussing moving in together. Initially Sophie didn't like the idea: nevertheless she felt pressured to make a decision. Tony would say things such as "*I think we should move in together or I don't know what is going to happen,*" creating doubt about the future of their relationship and at the same time implying that he is not to be held responsible for what might happen. This caused Sophie to worry about their future. She didn't want to lose Tony and wanted "*to be with someone I trusted.*" Over time, and partially because of the embarrassing symptoms of her illness, the thought of sharing a flat with Tony became more appealing than sharing with flat mates. It could have been that Sophie was more or less manipulated into agreeing to move in together. This may well have been a big commitment to the relationship on her behalf but, perhaps the 'trust' she felt was based upon false pretences.

*"So we found this place and it was lovely. But we.....started fighting almost immediately just about lots of little things."* There were arguments over baking, who was going to do the dishes, and whether to get a pet or not. Tony "*wanted to get a pet and I didn't really want to get a pet. But we ended up getting one.*" Often times, abusive relationship arguments are less about resolving problems and more about an abuser establishing their dominance in all aspects (Bancroft, 2002). Bancroft likens the mind-set of an abusive man in an argument, to a war. You are either a dominator or a submitter, definitely not both.

However the bad times appeared to be balanced by good times. The return of the good times has been shown to be in keeping with the 'fairy-tale' notion of romance (Wood, 2001). Persevering through the 'hard times' and waiting for a loved one (a male) to change, are commendable behaviours for a female to engage in.

*We did lots of cool stuff together though. It felt like it kind of made up for it, you know. So we did lots of really cool things like we went to concerts, we had a vege garden and we had this lovely pet.....I didn't want the responsibility of a pet and so when we got the pet, who gets the responsibility? Me. I had to clean the litter box and do all these things. He was at work from nine to six and I'm studying so I have all this free time [sarcasm].*

Tony showed signs that he didn't value Sophie's work quite as much as he valued the work he was doing. His mind-set may have justified a double standard when it

came to household responsibilities as research shows abusive men can feel entitled to expect women to take care of the household duties and, as in Sophie's case, the pet care.

Sophie thought the arguments would be "*a passing thing*" because Tony had so desperately wanted to move in with her that he wouldn't be treating her badly. The arguments, she reasoned, must have been down to other things. Sophie looked for reasons for why Tony's behaviour may have changed. She thought it may have been due to the move away from his friends and family, maybe he "*was lonely and stressed*." Sophie believed Tony genuinely cared about her. The power of his intense charming behaviour at the beginning of the relationship had set the scene and clouded Sophie's judgment making it difficult to separate the charming and the harming behaviour. He had, at times, also made her feel responsible for keeping him away from his home town. Sophie began to question if she was, after all, somehow to blame. "*Is the price to pay.....maybe I'm to blame for this, maybe it is my fault, maybe I deserve to be treated so badly.*"

The couple spent some time apart when Sophie went overseas for a conference. On her return Tony "*dropped a bombshell*." As she wrote in her journal,

*You're not happy because since I got back I have failed to recognize all that you have done and are doing for me and that I was neglecting you or something similar. You told me that you didn't think it was working out and you were seriously considering breaking up with me. I promised.....I would try harder.*

It was possible Tony was punishing Sophie for going to the conference. Maybe, in his mind, his feelings should have been the centre of Sophie's attention. In giving her an ultimatum of try harder or you will lose me, he again placed the responsibility for the relationship at her feet. In return Sophie agreed to his demands and thus may have become reluctant to be away from Tony in future.

Things became "*better*" for a while then became "*worse and worse*." An argument over a proposed "*catch up*" with Sophie's ex-partner left her feeling "*really bad and upset and I didn't understand*." Tony became "*insanely jealous*" and "*blew me up about it*." At this stage Tony appeared to be showing some form of ownership over Sophie along with the 'right' to control who she interacted with. "*Things like that made me feel I couldn't be away from him. I had to be*

*with him all the time. Otherwise I would get into trouble.*” Male behaviour labelled as jealousy can often be used to cause fear and coerce a female partner into complying with the ‘rules’ (Silverman & Williamson, 1997). Yet on the other hand, male jealousy can be seen as a positive emotion ‘proving’ just how much he loves his partner (Bancroft, 2002). So Sophie may have felt conflicted as she felt both ‘loved’ and fearful at the same time. It could be argued that when Tony vented his anger it was an overt form of abuse, yet it was the social message of jealousy ‘proving’ love and the subsequent confusion which form part the insidiousness of emotional abuse.

Tony openly discussed aspects of his relationship with his ex-fiancée, explaining in detail to Sophie what had “*made her so great,*” suggesting Sophie take on similar roles. Hirigoyen (2004, p. 111) states that “cultivating doubt and jealousy by allusions and implications is an effective way of tormenting and keeping the partner dependent.” Some of the expectations Tony had of Sophie were quite deeply entrenched in stereotypical gender roles.

*She [Tony’s ex-fiancée] would make his lunch every day before he went to work and I would not do that. He expected me to get up and make him breakfast in the morning when I got up, because I got up before him.*

Intimate details about his ex- fiancée cropped up in conversation with the expectation Sophie would follow suit. Sophie also learned that Tony had cheated “*a lot*” during his previous relationship.

*It made me quite insecure. If he cheated on his fiancée what was he going to do to me? When I first started using Facebook and I would go to her profile and look at her pictures because I was jealous. Just to see who was this person that he talks about all the time and used to be with because I felt I could never live up to that standard.*

In some ways Sophie felt she was “*lucky to get this guy,*” and on the other hand she felt “*I couldn’t trust Tony*” around other females. Wood (2001) has noted that some abused women will tolerate bad behaviour from their male partner because ‘an abusive man is better than no man’. Here Sophie appears to have made an emotional investment and, potentially, was defining a flawed relationship with Tony preferable to no relationship.

Tony began to give Sophie advice. This appeared to be said in the guise of Tony caring for Sophie's wellbeing, but as the relationship progressed "*it turned into not living up to his expectations.*" It felt as though "*he was trying to control me into doing the things he wanted me to do.....He would drop little hints about wanting me to dress a certain way.....He would berate me if I slept in.*"

*You were meant to have a routine, because you are going to be in the real world soon.....I have always been good at taking constructive criticism well and I try not to get defensive, because constructive criticism is not meant to be personal. But when it is personal like when Tony did it, it was really hurtful*

Communication between the couple became stilted. Tony would often refuse to talk or discuss any problems. It felt to Sophie that he was actively avoiding her even when they spent time together. As she wrote in her journal "*You spend hours on the internet every night.....you barely say a word or ask me how my day has gone. You will say something to me if you think there is house or garden work to be done.*" When she raised any issues regarding their relationship with Tony, he would turn the tables on her. By using Sophie's annoyance at unresolved problems, Tony would show her how irrational she was while all the time ignoring the damage his behaviour was doing. By this he would reinforce the message that she was not allowed to show anger towards him no matter how he behaved.

*I have the issue, it's my problem. It's not his because I'm the one with the problem, you know. The responsibility, it was always my responsibility to keep our relationship ok. It really pissed me off as well because it completely contradicted everything he had told me before we got together. Everything about communication, relationships require work, always communicate. He said this to me from the very beginning, so I thought oh yeah he's alright. He'll be good. He'll communicate with me, but no. He went back on his word and I think that was one of the main things that kept me there. He created that expectation, so I expected him to follow through with that. I knew that maybe he was stressed out or whatever. I kept accepting that. That maybe he was this way for a time and then he would change.*

When in the company of friends and family Tony would neglect to include Sophie. At times, the frustration she felt at being ignored while they were in the company of other people would come to the surface. She recalled raising her voice to "*get my point across*" although this caused her some embarrassment.

Whenever Sophie was witnessed reacting to Tony's neglect it is possible others began to see her as the aggressive partner, all the while allowing Tony to become the victim in the situation. It is also probable, according to (Hirigoyen, 2004), that because of this Sophie would be the one who would take steps to make amends. Sophie shared some journal excerpts written while on holiday to a Pacific island.

*Because you didn't want to communicate I got really frustrated. I wanted to sort it out so we could get on with our holiday, but you didn't want to talk. So I got angry and threw my drink bottle and I ran away. If you just talked to me and not let things escalate, a fight like that would not happen. It just makes an already bad situation much worse.....You were not going to stay and talk to me until I pleaded for you to stay and raised my voice. It is so embarrassing to do that with the knowledge that people might hear you.....When I confronted you about it you did not want to hear about it. I tried to do it as quietly as possible so I could explain why you need to be patient and how much it hurt me to keep getting left behind. You didn't care because you were having fun and I was trying to ruin it.*

After the holiday Tony admitted "that what he wanted the most was space from me." This annoyed Sophie, "he could never just be honest with me."

*It just became like this wall, this giant wall of silence. Sometimes when he would engage it would be just anger. It just all would be anger and it would be about me shaking the boat, rocking the boat.*

To Sophie the relationship began to feel that it was based upon some fairly strict unequal gender role expectations. She was emotionally investing more and more into the relationship and receiving little back in return. A relationship based on strict gender roles was something Sophie struggled with: "How does that even work when there is no reciprocity." A journal entry shows the confusion and self-questioning she felt at the time.

*Why am I willing to tolerate so much of you being a bad boyfriend when you are not willing to tolerate much from me? Is it because I care more about you and this relationship, because you don't seem to? I feel that you have become comfortable in the situation and do not feel that you need to make a lot of effort to be a good boyfriend to me. The thing is because you were not trying I was trying harder and harder and becoming so caught up and involved that whenever you put a foot wrong you would hear it from me. This is why I am now trying less harder to be a good girlfriend. I want you to remember that I exist and that I have feelings. I want you to show that you care about me again without me having to prompt you.*



Sophie's gut instincts were proved to be correct when she discovered that towards the end of the relationship Tony had begun using the internet as an opportunity to meet other females, although he denied any responsibility for his actions. She wrote,

*You had gone behind my back and been chatting to random women on the internet and then continuing conversations by adding (phone) numbers and then texting. You said you did it because you were insecure and had nobody to talk to.....[the next day] you had deleted all of these random women's numbers and were still receiving messages from people that I was super suspicious about. So the next morning I went through your message history and found a photo of another woman.....Your explanation of course denied anything on your part. But it doesn't explain why it was still there. Why you didn't delete it straight away.*

### **Breaking up**

It took some time from recognizing the abuse to coming to terms with the idea of finishing things. The decision to end the relationship with Tony was complex and compounded by financial choices, *"particularly when you feel you should thank them because they have financially supported you."*

*I didn't want to leave because there was this sense of financial security and this person always being there for me when I was really unwell. So no matter how badly he was treating me, he was still there for me and he wasn't going to go anywhere, because he didn't want to go anywhere. When I used to bring it up with him he would say well if you are so unhappy, why don't you just leave. He would try and shut me down like that and I would say well no I don't want to leave I want to talk about it. He wouldn't talk about it.*

Already feeling fragile and with little energy left, the thought of shaking everything up and dealing with the fallout was too much to deal with. Sophie was nearing the end of a long project, *"I needed to finish it.....so I would just plod on and keep going and deal with the shitty situation at the same time."* Once the project was finished *"there was always the hope that things might get better"* as the pressures reduced.

Eventually the time came when Sophie was ready to break things off with Tony. *"Somehow you become brave enough to make the decision."* There was not a

single incident which provoked the split. Rather it was an accumulation of negative experiences.

*I just had enough.....I just was so drained and so sick of crying every night and being sick. I think the day that I actually did it, when I told him that I was breaking up with him, he looked amused. He actually looked amused.....I was actually rolling around on the floor in tears. I felt I was just so sad, so sad for myself and so sad about the situation.*

At this time Sophie went to live with a friend, Violet, who had helped her recognize the abuse. Violet provided a space for Sophie to think and gave her unconditional support. Tony continued to keep in contact. The couple met a few times and Sophie felt she had reclaimed her independence *“I felt good. I felt strong and proud that I was still away from him. I rubbed it in his face.”*

A few months later Sophie became unwell.

*I was so down and the only person that I knew, that knew what I was going through and who I felt comfortable sharing that experience with was Tony. I didn't really actively seek him out because he was always in contact with me anyway, but we got back together again. He treated me really well for about three hours and then it sort of came back that he had all these expectations again and that I was going to have sex with him.....He bought me jewellery I think and tried to do all these nice things for me.*

There was an *“on again off again”* relationship for a while. When things ended for the final time, Tony kept in contact *“pretty much every day.”* This continued for around a year, Sophie noted in her journal *“[I] haven't heard from the original subject of this journal, Tony, for what feels like a long time, at least two weeks.”*

### **Recognising the abuse: What helped and what did not**

With her academic background in social science Sophie had an understanding of societal expectations and gender roles in relationships. She also had some knowledge of domestic violence and its dynamics. She had taken a graduate level paper on family violence which involved attending a lecture about emotional abuse. She described this as *“very influential”* and it *“resonated”* with her. She recognized some content from the lecture in a different relationship she was in at that time, one she described as *“emotionally difficult.”* Despite this, uncovering emotional abuse in her relationship with Tony proved to be difficult, *“there is a*

*lot to say about, you don't know what something is until you go through it.*" Much of Tony's abuse was covert. He didn't create control through fear from outward signs of aggression or displays of anger. Nonetheless he created a controlling atmosphere.

*That theme comes through really strongly where it did kind of sneak up. You know he promised everything to me, he wanted to be there for me and he was my hero. He encouraged me to go to the doctor and he was supportive. He wanted us to live together and all this really positive stuff was wrapped around this really controlling behaviour.*

Hirigoyen (2004, p. 153) describes this process: "What makes a seizure of power so difficult to describe is the fact that it happens gradually.....it makes pinpointing the exact onset of violence and abuse almost impossible."

The desire to care for Tony also clouded Sophie's ability to recognize his abuse. *"He actually seemed like he was a really broken person from his previous relationship. So there was this kind of want to fix something that was broken and to show him that there are way better people out there."*

Popular culture can lead us to believe that all a 'broken' male needs is the 'love of a good woman'. And, on the other hand, as Bancroft (2002) believes, stories from an abusive man about his emotional devastation from previous relationships can have powerful effects on a new partner. They play on compassion and empathy while he avoids dealing with his underlying problems.

Some friends picked up that Sophie wasn't happy in her relationship, although it seemed they didn't recognize the relationship as an abusive one. At the time, Sophie wrote,

*Jackie was really concerned that I wasn't happy. She remembered how I used to be so happy when we first got together and how I would always talk about doing fun things with you.....[Susan] thought that you didn't want to agree with me about things because that would mean that you are wrong and you don't want to admit defeat. The only way you can win a disagreement is by not communicating with me.*

When she first saw the Power and Control wheel Sophie made excuses for Tony's behaviour even though she recognized some of the things he would do. *"I'm the sort of person who will always give people the benefit of the doubt."* It was her

friend Violet who worked in the domestic violence field who helped make things clearer.

*She was able to show me how it was abusive, just through using the power and control wheel. She would relate back to me with her stories which were considerably more horrific than mine because he (Violet's ex-partner) was violent. I guess it made me think this is not so bad because he (Tony) is not putting his hands on me or anything like that. I guess that is what made me stay, the thought that he could get better..... It actually baffles me that I normalized that kind of behaviour. That I thought that was normal in relationships and I accepted it.*

### **Suggested improvements for raising awareness of emotional abuse**

Reiterating the difficulty in recognizing emotional abuse, Sophie felt raising awareness could prove difficult. She thought teaching young people what they should expect from a healthy relationship may prove to be of more use.

*Talking about relationships and what makes a healthy relationship, in high school that stuff needs to be taught. Because for people like me who have crappy relationships modelled for them and wasn't able to realize it until they had been through one themselves. You know, I probably wouldn't have had to go through that, maybe I would have, maybe even that kind of program would have to be quite developed.....making sure that it is framed appropriately for the audience as well. I guess seeing that kind of stuff for some people it might be a bit of a rude awakening. Some people might be able to recognize a few things because I guess for people like me, you always have your mum and dad to go off. If they haven't had a good relationship and they have just stayed together, you normalize bad behaviour.*

Sophie talked positively about the "It's not ok" television advertisements run in New Zealand.

*I remember the ads with the woman and she is just really upset and everybody is like a cardboard cut-out. Then just one person makes a difference and asks if you are ok.....that kind of thing is good for me and it is kind of good because it gives responsibility to everybody because abuse is not just the responsibility of the people in a partnership. It should always be solely responsible on the person who is perpetrating the abuse, absolutely, one hundred per cent. But it doesn't mean that people around us can't do something about it. I like*

*that there have been campaigns to encourage people to not turn a blind eye because people do all the time. That reaching out is a really important thing to do.*

# CHAPTER FOUR- DISCUSSION

The safest place for men is the home, the home is, by contrast the least safe place for women.

Edwards

This study aimed to present further understanding of the dynamics of emotionally abusive heterosexual intimate partner relationships. The women in this study described their experiences; their background, the initial stages of the relationship, the process of change to an abusive relationship, the break-up and the difficulties they faced. Each case study draws us into the differences and similarities between the stories allowing for a detailed insight into the complexity of each situation which I hope will be useful for further research into this topic.

Underlying the wish to explore the dynamics, a core question of this thesis has been: how do women come to understand that their relationship is emotionally abusive? The short answer to this question is that each woman did not until after the relationship had ended. The participants' felt differing degrees of frustration at what seemed to be unfair treatment, unbalanced responsibilities and a lack of reciprocity, yet were unable to label their partner's treatment at the time as abuse for varying reasons. Post the relationship, a change in perspective of gender roles appeared to be one of the strongest factors contributing towards recognition for the participants, as was learning the stories of other women who had experienced similar abuse.

The women committed to their relationships with some degree of naivety and generally with trust the relationship would be based in reciprocity. In most cases traditional notions of female gender roles formed their ideas of what would be expected from them and what they could expect from their partner (Macionis,

2005). Sophie, for example, felt societal expectations of fairy tale like romances contributed to her expectations and also clouded her perspective of gender roles in intimate relationships (Wood, 2001). Amber explained she did not question the notion of assumed female responsibility for housework and childcare. Research shows us that not only do women sometimes form their ideas of relationships from gender role expectations, they can also be encouraged to believe part of their worth is determined by 'being in' a relationship and can be socialised to believe "their place in the world is centred around being a wife and mother" (Murphy, 2002, p132).

During the early stages of courtship each of the men presented a positive, caring, even charming side of their personality to their new partners, possibly increasing the level of trust and investment the participants' felt towards them (Hirigoyen, 2004; Bancroft, 2002). This stage was described as "*intense (Sophie); he was really nice to me (Amber).*" Woven into the courtship stories were words and what can only be described as 'scripts' for how heterosexual relationships are expected to progress (Wood, 2001), there was nothing that stood out as extraordinary, which might have raised a red flag of warning. However, the early controlling behaviours may have been masked (Adams, 2012). For example, Tony appeared to be supporting Sophie during the diagnosis of her illness, but in reality he may have been staking his claim to micro-manage her by undermining her authority in subtle ways (Bancroft, 2002). It is interesting to note Adams' thoughts on courtship in heterosexual relationships, as they describe the process from a perspective of male privilege. This goes some way to show how each gender may approach making a commitment to each other.

*From the outside the processes of courtship appear to include notions of reciprocation and consent, as displayed in the ritual of men making proposals of marriage. But from the inside.....men will understand and speak of intimacy in terms of establishing territory, and even of pursuing conquest.....The entire apparatus of masculine empire.....will enable and support male entitlement to such ownership (Adams, 2012, p99).*

Once the women were committed to the relationship all of the men appeared to begin a process of undermining them using various tactics (Bancroft, 2002;

Douglas, 2008; Loring, 1994; Murphy, 2002)). Some of these are listed for easy cross reference in the following table.

**Table 4: Tactics experienced by the participants**

<b>BEHAVIOUR</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>	<b>EXAMPLES FROM INTERVIEWS</b>	<b>PARTICIPANT AFFECTED</b>
<b>One-sided power games</b>	Ensures one person's needs are made more important than others	<i>If I went to the video shop - I had to really scrutinize what I was going to get. That he was going to like it and that there was nothing that was going to set him off</i>	Glenda, Cameron, Amber & Sophie
<b>Mind games</b>	Not recognising the existence of an event. Adapts or changes reality	<i>I remember questioning and questioning it in my head - I can't even remember what he said to me. I know it's wrong, but is he right.</i>	Glenda, Cameron, Amber & Sophie
<b>Inappropriate restrictions</b>	Outside interests curtailed and monitored	<i>[He would] throw tantrums - you can do what you want, but I will not be happy - I was starting to talk to people - he didn't like that</i>	Glenda & Cameron
<b>Isolation</b>	Restricts contact with friends, family and outside world	<i>He created so much shit between me and my parents that there was no hope of maintaining a relationship</i>	Glenda, Cameron, Amber & Sophie
<b>Over-protection and caring</b>	Makes decisions for and treats partner like a child	<i>He would drop little hints about wanting me to dress a certain way - I didn't get to eat BK until after we broke up</i>	Glenda, Cameron & Sophie



<b>Emotional unkindness and violation of trust</b>	Ignoring, sulking, humiliation and a lack of concern	<i>It just became like this wall, this giant wall of silence. Sometimes when he would engage it would be just anger</i>	Glenda, Cameron, Amber & Sophie
<b>Denial, minimizing and blame</b>	A failure to acknowledge or recognise the impact of events. Makes partner feel guilty or responsible	<i>I had provoked him beyond all reasonable measure, by putting one too many sugars in his coffee</i>	Glenda, Cameron, Amber & Sophie
<b>Domestic slavery</b>	Abdicates responsibilities (childcare, household chores)	<i>[He] never wanted me to leave the kids with him - He would get angry if I didn't take the kids – [Richard] I went to work, now my working day is over</i>	Glenda, Cameron, Amber & Sophie
<b>Symbolic aggression</b>	Creates atmosphere of intimidation	<i>- always fearful of what he was going to do - I was always like in the back of my mind, one day he is going to snap and kill me</i>	Cameron & Sophie
<b>Sexual abuse</b>	Inappropriate or coerced sexual behaviour	<i>It was something I had to do as part of my wifely duties, you know. I ended up not feeling anything because it used to make me feel such rage</i>	Glenda, Cameron, Amber & Sophie
<b>Using the children</b>	Creates divisions between child and parent. Paints other as a bad parent	<i>He had written in this affidavit that I was a danger to the kids and that they shouldn't be in my care and that they should be removed immediately</i>	Amber
<b>Separation abuse</b>	Creates atmosphere of control post separation	<i>In my head I thought I'm not going to ring the police just because he has come round. I didn't want to be a burden</i>	Glenda & Amber

<b>Economic abuse</b>	Refusal to take responsibility for or takes complete control of finances	<i>It was always his house, his property, his business, his car. Everything was in his name- he used to point out that the house was in his name</i>	Glenda, Cameron & Amber
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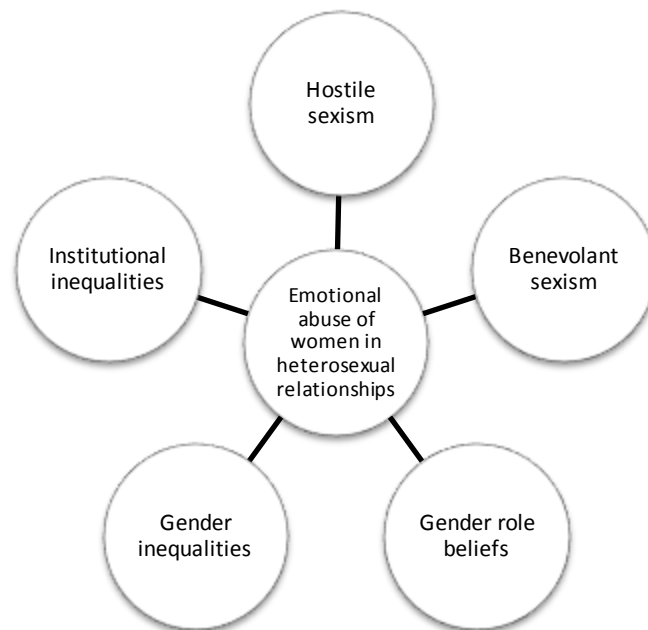
As the relationship progressed the women attempted to make sense of the negative changes occurring by using various coping techniques. Often this involved self-blame and this was found to hinder the process of recognising the abuse (Hirigoyen, 2004; Loring, 1994). Three of the women sought help outside of the relationship to make sense of the distress they were feeling, and, at times, to understand certain incidents occurring in it (Moe, 2007; West & Wandrei, 2002). This included seeking help from formal and informal sources. In some cases this was helpful and in others it served to further confuse the participants as to the nature of their distress (Trotter & Allen, 2009; Malhstedt & Keeny, 1993). Advice from helpers proved problematic when it focused on simplistic issues, was victim-blaming and sometimes colluded with the abuser (Budde and Schene, 2004; Kocot & Goodman, 2003; Throsby & Alexander, 2008).

In general, recognising the abuse was a problem for the women (Stark, 2007, Loring, 1994. Murphy, 2002). Much of it was disguised as ‘normal’ interactions between the genders, and often it seemed to be socially supported and justified. The participants’ felt emotional abuse is often overlooked in society because of the widespread focus on physical abuse and this added to the difficulty of pinpointing the cause of the distress they were feeling (Hunter, 2010).

While there were variations and exceptions in the women’s stories there were some themes which came across more strongly than others. It is these I shall focus on in this following discussion.

- Abuse is associated with physical assault
- Expected gender ‘performance’ masked controlling restrictive behaviours, sometimes creating a cycle of self-blame

It is important to note while I realise oppressive social and power inequalities are not the sole determinates of emotional abuse they are my analytical approach. In order to highlight this focus for my research I developed a simple model of the core concepts explored in Chapter One.



**Figure 2: Social influences contributing towards emotional abuse of women**

### **Abuse is associated with physical assault**

Coming through strongly during the interviews was evidence of a common view that abuse is associated with something that is physical in nature (rape was not included in these descriptions and will be covered later in the discussion).

Physical abuse was described as something that is well recognized by most people including, the women themselves, their family and friends and professionals such as medical staff (Mildorf, 2004; Johnson & Sigler, 2000; Straka & Montminy, 2008). A couple of participants mentioned that perhaps being hit by their partner would have made the abuse easier to recognize. This finding was mirrored in Claire Murphy's (2002) research on emotional abuse. Some of her participants made very similar comments. If this is reflective of a society that may have normalised the emotional abuse of women it suggests one major hurdle to overcome in respect to recognising emotional abuse occurring in relationships is

to bring it to the same level of public awareness as physical abuse currently is. It points to a need for discussion over the environment which is allowing this to occur and for conversation about the role of patriarchy in this.

As discussed in chapter one there has traditionally been a focus on physical abuse in research, and in the media. That is not to detract from the significance of previous research, however, from my participants' points of view this focus proved problematic as they did not view themselves as women who were being abused. From this there are a couple of conclusions that can be drawn. Firstly, for some women, when they are not being physically assaulted they do not think they are being abused. Secondly, in agreement with Sorso (2004) and Hatch (2002) the focus on physical abuse defines harm in abusive relationships as physical, excluding any mental harm done to ones 'feelings' and perhaps dismissing the harm of PTSD from being considered a serious problem for women in or post these types of relationships (Mechanic, Weaver & Resick, 2008). As Glenda put it, it reduces the suffering some women feel to the possibility of being viewed as "*drama queens*." It seems very likely defining harm as physical is perpetuated by, and perpetuating the current system of patriarchy for a variety of reasons which I shall continue to discuss.

The public's perception of abuse may become influenced by the violent acts of physical attacks that are deemed worthy of becoming news stories in the male dominated media (Evans, 2001; Michelle & Weaver, 2004; Canfield, 2007; Nettleton, 2011; Nicolson & Wilson, 2004). A research project which surveyed perceptions held by the American public and found this to be the case. In that study there was public agreement that abuse is a serious criminal issue, although abuse was generally defined as one or more physical attacks (Johnson & Sigler, 2000). There was significant ambiguity when it came to labelling other types of abuse. Overall, females were more likely than males to label acts of emotional abuse as abuse. Similar findings have been replicated in other studies (N. M. Capezza & X. B. Arriaga, 2008a; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Shlien-Dellinger, Huss, & Kramer, 2004; Pavlou & Knowles, 2001). Interestingly, as Sorso points out, located within these perceptions are male definitions of what 'hurts' (2004) and by this, it seems societal definitions of violence and trauma are reflective of

patriarchal influences. These findings are consistent with my participants' perceptions of domestic abuse prior to the emotional abuse in their lives.

From the stories the women told me there seemed to be a distinct line drawn between two types of men, those who abuse and those who do not. It is possible to presume these distinctions were made or influenced in a similar manner to those taking part in Johnson and Sigler's and others research. Those who abuse cause physical hurts, as evidenced in Amber's reference to her father's physical abuse of her mother. She had come to believe that abuse was physical and, not only that, for abuse to be considered serious enough for attention from outsiders it needed to be pretty brutal. And, then there are those who do not abuse, men such as Percy, who believed he was "*nothing like his physically abusive father (Glenda).*"

Further evidence of a distinction between abusive and non-abusive men came from the responses of informal helpers when they were approached by the participants, "*He's a good worker (Amber); such a nice boy (Glenda).*" Some of the informal helpers responses discussed in this study appeared to dismiss any abusive actions on the basis of no obvious violent behaviours (Lempart, 1997) and in some cases it was enough that the men were financially providing for their partner to dismiss other undesirable behaviours (Stark, 2007). It can be argued patriarchal societies shape the notion of bread-winning independent men who engage in 'real work' for long hours to provide for and take care of dependant women and children (Johnson, 2005) who perhaps should be grateful for this no matter how they are treated. Sophie illustrated this point in her description of the barriers she faced when making a decision to end her relationship. It was difficult to leave "*when you feel you should thank them because they have financially supported you.*" Connell's association of power, economic resources and masculinity goes some way to explain unequal gender standings which may put females in a financially vulnerable position. Supporting this is the illusion of the home as a work free space where females can be expected to make up for their lack of material input by putting their (emotional) needs last in favour of the earning male (Stark, 2007). When value is placed in men's work the support work women do to enable this goes undervalued, which in turn puts males in a position to be valued and rewarded for their contribution.

Women turn to informal helpers for a variety of reasons. Included in those are trust, the helpers knowledge of the situation and both parties involved, and confirmation that it is abuse and not conflict which occurring (Budde and Schene, 2004; Prah, 2006; Fugate et al., 2005). However, if informal helpers are sometimes making similar distinctions between different forms of abuse and the men who perpetrate it, it is unlikely they will be in a position to distinguish emotional abuse from common couple violence (M. P. Johnson & Ferrero, 2000) or from what is considered normal every day interactions in intimate heterosexual relationships.

Any help received from informal sources may be further influenced by the charming persona the men often presented to outsiders of the relationship. Always ready to help others and spend time conversing or socialising.

From these responses it could be assumed that as long as a male is fulfilling his expected role of provider under patriarchy and not physically abusing his female partner he is a 'decent' man. If he is occasionally helping out with housework or taking care not to behave in an overtly sexist way then he may even be seen as going out of his way to support women (Johnson, 2005). What becomes evident however with only one certain type of male behaviour associated as abusive, is a potential problem, for it can mean there is little room for consideration that other behaviours may also be abusive (Adams, 2012). It follows then that perhaps we should not be surprised that the participants in this study struggled to separate and label emotional abuse from 'normal' heterosexual gender interactions.

Interestingly, some of the women discussed times in their relationships when, to others, they covered up aspects of their partner's undesirable behaviour. There was a desire to present him to others as good man, "*I didn't want to make him look bad* (Amber)." There was recognition on an individual level that certain behaviours were unacceptable although they may not have been recognised as abusive collectively.

Despite knowing they were being interviewed about their experience of emotional abuse in the absence of physical abuse, the women discussed (perhaps unknowingly) aspects of their relationships where either the symbolic threat of physical violence was present, or violence was literally taking place in the form of

rape and other sexual abuses. Located within these descriptions were beliefs consistent with 'wifely duties' or going through the motions (Bancroft, 2002; Chang, 1996). Because the women were not asked specifically about sexual abuse or coercion, the actual extent of the sexual violence they experienced during their relationships may have been different to what is discussed here.

Rape is often framed by the media as a single violent act committed by a stranger lurking in the darkness of an alley or similar (Throsby & Alexander, 2008), therefore, potentially limiting public knowledge of rape to a narrow perspective. Rape occurring in a marital context however, is often taking place in the home, in circumstances that allow it to happen regularly and is seated within subordination, and dependence (Stark, 2007). For each of the women in this study, memories of past acts, sulking, the silent treatment or snide comments about frigidity and weight may have had the effect of quickly ensuring their compliance with coerced sexual abuse.

Women are often led to believe differences in sexual desire and behaviour are something that they need to fix, not something that their partner needs to fix (Johnson, 2005). Under patriarchy 'normal' sexual behaviour is defined by male identified and male dominated standards. Johnson (2005, p 152) describes male power and privilege in these terms,

*It is important to see how patriarchal culture defines mainstream sexuality in terms of power and male privilege, and how power and male dominance are routinely conceived in sexual terms. All this means it is hard to participate in heterosexual relations without issues of power coming up.....to avoid seeing how sexuality has become contaminated with the potential for violence, we can't see the problem for what it truly is.*

Therefore it would be unwise to believe the acts of coercion and control played out in other areas of emotionally abusive relationships are not also being used to sexually abuse women. Emotional abuse may be thought of as something that is separate from what happens in the bedroom, when in reality the issues of power and control, and a males right to a sexually available female at all times became evident in this study.

This point is well illustrated by Glenda who did not frame Percy's sexual attack as rape until several years later. Perhaps she had internalised societal messages of females as sexually submissive and expected to consent to sex at all times when in a committed relationship. Female sexuality is often defined in terms of its appeal and accessibility to males. So it stands to reason that when gender and sexuality are linked to patriarchal values it may make it pretty challenging to see beyond what is seemingly a natural experience of sexuality (Johnson, 2005). Glenda noted it was only when discussing rape in a school class that she began to make the connections which allowed her to reframe the time when Percy pinned her down and had sex, into the time when Percy raped her.

In summary, the current way abuse is associated with physical violence is perpetuating patriarchy. Those who engage in emotional abuse look nothing like the 'true' abusers in society. Hence, it stops questions being asked about other undesirable male behaviours when it assumed that any quality in a male other than physical violence is acceptable. By pointing the finger at the physical abusers the more subtle abusers go unchallenged and are not seen as participating in, or creating a society that oppresses and abuses women. It is even allowing some men to rape and sexually abuse their partners, in some cases, without recognition and reprimand for their crimes. It also assumes that abusers will be dealt with by the criminal system and that their victims will be supported.

Following on from the distinction between abusive and non-abusive men, a logical progression assumes that certain expected interactions between heterosexual intimate partners are open to unequal and abusive behaviour going unquestioned because it can-not be abusive if there is no physical violence involved.

### **Expected gender performance**

It became clear from the descriptions given by the participants that when they made a commitment to the relationship, there was no obvious evidence that it was later to become abusive. However, within a patriarchal system there are a number of powerful societal and cultural supports for male dominance and which condone male violence against women (Robertson, 1999). The controlling and restrictive



nature of some expected female gender behaviours are masked as normal interactions in heterosexual intimate partner relationships.

For some of the participants, entering into a committed relationship meant they were to adopt certain roles which they associated with 'being' female. Amber expected to cook and clean, and Cameron expected to be deferential to her husband. Both these women recounted they undertook these roles without question or knowledge of alternative ways of being. Sophie on the other hand recalled that traditional gender role constructs in heterosexual relationships did not sit well with her as they did not seem reciprocal.

Under patriarchal gender role beliefs, women are often socialised to be nurturing (Macionis, 2005; Hirigoyen, 2004). It may have been that some of the annoyances my participants' felt towards a partner's bad behaviour during the relationship were excused because of this (Bancroft, 2002). Rather than naming the behaviour for what it was, it was attributed to other factors such as his stress, tiredness or as Sophie thought "*loneliness*" and Amber thought "*his abusive childhood.*" This could have paved the way for subtle acts of abuse to take place which were undermining the participants sense of self, and of which the women were unaware, yet perhaps were contributing towards an un-healthy cycle of self-blame. Marshall (1994) notes it is the subtle acts of emotional abuse which are particularly harmful. They are more likely to harm the women's sense of self, mental health and well-being rather than harm her perception of the relationship (Marshall, 2004). This supports my findings that early on my participants may have unconsciously or consciously begun the process of questioning themselves, engaging in self-blame (Loring, 1994) or looking for reasons other than undesirable behaviour to explain away any difficulties they came across (Bancroft, 2002).

Relevant to women's experiences of emotional abuse is the notion of selflessness as a requisite female quality. If she must put her own needs last, then she cannot challenge any demands made of her (Ali, 2007). In a relationship, this may send her the message that she is not as significant as her male partner. Not only that if she does complain, as for example Amber did, she was told she was 'nagging'. Re-labelling legitimate concerns as 'nagging' is one way of turning them into

unreasonable demands which do not require attending to (Adams, 2012). Similarly, Avni referred to “house rules” in abusive relationships; one such rule allows the man to say “whatever occurs to them, while women may not” (1991, p141). Avni goes on to state that many of the house rules are reflective of a patriarchal attitude which assumes male domination of the household (1991) a point that is supported by Johnson (2005) and Flaherty (1996). A wife who ‘nags’ is the butt of many jokes in popular culture, and often portrayed as a shrill harpy who will not stop making trivial demands of her partner. When Richard labelled Amber as a ‘nag’ she may have thought twice before raising her concerns in the future. This would have put her in an un-equal position when it came to having her needs attended to. For Richard, avoiding attending to any of Amber’s needs or concerns may have become easier and easier. This behaviour may avoid becoming labelled as abusive because Richard was not actively engaging in any overt acts of abuse.

Whether the participants wanted to or not they all took on responsibilities for household duties which at times they felt obligated to do and which they felt went undervalued in comparison to the paid work their partner carried out. According to Stark (2007) one area of female inequality that is up for negotiation is the home. Therefore, it can be argued this is also an area which is, at present, a place where males can exert their control in private when questioned about unequal expectations. Sophie indicated the first sign of problems in her relationship were the arguments over who was doing the household chores. Sophie resisted taking on the traditional female role of responsibility for household duties which may have resulted in an opportunity for Tony to exert some male privilege. As Bancroft posits, arguments with a controlling man are often not about resolving the issue at hand, but rather they are about who comes out with the upper hand (2002) and male privilege creates this expectation of dominance. If Tony believed Sophie should be responsible for washing the dishes then it becomes perfectly justified for him to react in a negative manner when she resists. Without condoning Tony’s behaviour, it becomes easier to see it as a result of gender role conditioning than as the result of biological differences or any other influence. Similarly, obedience tests are often used as an initiation in a total institution, designed to test for signs of resistance to the rules, they may involve a “will

breaking contest” (Avni, 1991, p141). The tests will continue until they achieve submission.

Glenda was expected to take on the household duties on top of her full-time studies. Amber was a stay-at-home mum responsible for just about all of the childcare and housework, the unpaid double-shift that is often referred to in feminist literature (Stark, 2007). Richard appeared to treat Amber like domestic help, as though she was there to pick up after him when he dropped his work clothes on the floor after his paid working day was over. It is often assumed that because of biological differences, women are more pre-disposed to be care givers (Risman, 2004) and innately possess the desire to be ‘domestic’. Similarly if males fail to take up their fair share of household duties they are to be forgiven because they lack the biological skills required (Walter, 2010). When a male does take on his share or does the washing up occasionally, it is viewed as he has made more of an effort than a female who does the same thing; *“That’s so cool”* said Amber’s sister when Richard washed the dishes. On top of gaining rewards for being the bread-winner in the family, Richard gets rewarded for doing a job that Amber receives no reward or acknowledgement for doing day in and day out.

Women are often judged harshly when the home is not clean and the children are running wild (Walter, 2010). This is again indicative of an assumed female responsibility for household duties. In Amber’s case Richard failed to acknowledge the work she put in at home. He had already labelled her as a ‘nag’ and to ask for some acknowledgement or to complain about not being recognised for cleaning the home and looking after the children may perhaps have become a problem for Amber. Experiencing a lack of recognition of her accomplishments, plus facing a ‘put down’ each time she expressed herself could have resulted in a feeling of defeat, and wearing down (Hirigoyen, 2004) making it easier to encourage her compliance in other areas.

All in all, the expected heterosexual ‘norm’ of female responsibility for nurturing, domestic duties and selflessness, not just in intimate relationships but in other relationships too, can set the stage for emotional abuse to take place.

Each of my participants could of course have put their own needs first. Indeed Sophie did just that and went to an overseas conference, only to be greeted with

recriminations when she arrived home. There were in fact times when each of the women resisted their partner's demands. This can become a double-bind for women in abusive situations. She can put her needs first and be blamed for being overly powerful and therefore deserving of the abuse. Yet, on the other hand if she is submissive, she may not be thought of as deserving abuse, but she will be thought of as masochistic for putting up with it (West & Wandrei, 2002). Either she way is blamed and has no-where to turn.

In any intimate relationship there can be signs and behaviours which are seen as expressions of care or love. Wanting to spend time alone together as a couple is not uncommon, as can be frequent communication in the form of phone calls or text messages. However, this may mask certain aspects of control and manipulation in heterosexual relationships, particularly when they are played out within the constraints of normal and acceptable behaviour.

Over protection and caring can send a double edged message. On the one hand it may come across as male partner who is caring and taking an interest in his female partner. He is buying his partner gifts of clothes or romantically choosing her meals, *making sure you eat nice food and protecting you from your evil family* (Glenda). These kind of male behaviours are supported as 'romantic' in the media (Wood, 2001). This may also send a similar message of a caring partner to others outside of the relationship, limiting any support a victim may receive when she seeks help or attempts to understand what is causing her distress.

On the other hand over protection and caring is subtly sending the message to the female 'that you are not capable of making decisions for yourself without my help', perhaps affecting her confidence in her own ability to act independently (Bancroft, 2002). Once a belief that she is incapable of making decisions is established then it becomes justified for him to take control and become angry when she doesn't follow his lead (Stark, 2007). It also appears to suggest that she is somewhat inferior to his superiority in the relationship.

Surveillance and isolation can also be disguised as protection and caring. Over time women may develop a sense of being constantly watched and monitored by their male partner (Avni, 1991). Cameron described feeling as though Gregory wanted her to have a mobile phone in order for him to keep track of her

movements. To others, who do not understand the dynamics of emotionally abusive relationships, it may seem romantic that Gregory wanted to keep in close contact with Cameron and she may have been seen as the ungrateful or difficult wife for resisting. Under a patriarchal society it is often assumed 'normal' for a male to expect his female partner to keep him informed of what she is doing at any time and then it becomes reasonable and justified for him to become annoyed when she does not (Adams, 2012).

According to Adams (2012) the feeling of being monitored can stop women from engaging in activities and actions which may be met with disapproval. The feeling of being constantly monitored contributed to the anxiety Cameron felt, consequently she began to self-monitor, avoided certain situations and things, until eventually she "*couldn't remember what I liked to eat.*" Similarly, outside activities to the relationship have the potential to become limited, restricting contact and the influence of others (Avni, 1991). Women can be discouraged from seeking their own success and be encouraged to seek it through their male partner instead (Tendayi, Abrams & Hutchinson, 2003). Percy created a situation where he held a monopoly over Glenda's interactions with others, gave her little agency over decision making, and engaged in 'romantic' over protective behaviours which may have allowed him to manipulate Glenda into a position where she gave up her career dreams in order to support his.

According to Connell (1987) gender hierarchies give males the authority to decide what gets discussed, when it gets discussed and on whose terms the discussion will take place. On the other hand females are expected to be submissive and accepting. Tony often refused to discuss any problems and would bury himself in other activities. When things came to head while on holiday; Sophie recalled her embarrassment at losing her temper with Tony or raising her voice in front of other people. Societal expectations of which gender is allowed to become angry and use aggression (Connell, 1987; Hall Smith et al. 2009) to get their point across appear to play directly into the hands of a man who emotionally abuses his partner. Sophie's embarrassment may have contributed to any self-blame she was feeling (Jean. Baker. Miller, 1991), effectively putting barriers of guilt and blame in place to stop the progress of any change in communication between the couple. When Sophie's frustration at being ignored spilled over into an angry outburst she

found herself in the position of being judged as “*trying to ruin it*” in comparison to Tony who was just having fun with their friends.

Looking at the bigger picture, for all the women there seemed to have been a lack of acknowledgement of her value, her rights and her personal abilities. At the core of many of the tactics of emotional abuse employed appears to be a sense of injustice and of little empathy (Sorsoli, 2004). The male partners sometimes acted as though they held sexist beliefs and at times as if they thought of their female partner as inferior (LeMoncheck, 1985). It may not have been an intentional behaviour on behalf of some of the men, but there is no denying it appears to be contemptuous and contradicts the assumed idea of reciprocity and support in a relationship. Rather than actively denying her, sometimes the participants’ needs were being devalued by subtle acts of omission, just as Montminy (2005) found in her study of abuse of older women. This also supports Marshall’s (1999) notion that we need to expand the conceptualisation of emotional abuse beyond the cyclical notion of acts deliberately done, such as those that are currently associated with physical violence.

### **The consequences of emotional abuse on the participants’ health**

The health outcomes of living in emotionally abusive relationships were not something specifically asked about during the interviews, although the women touched on some of the negative impacts the abuse caused to their mental and physical health. Prior to the abuse two women stated they had low self-esteem, yet, all the women alluded to low self-esteem and changes in confidence levels post abuse. Physical and mental health symptoms experienced by the women included anxiety, palpitations, depression, and suicidal thoughts and attempts (Hirigoyen, 2004; Gavin, 2011; Leone et al, 2007). It is worth noting that the full extent of any health problems the women faced were not discussed during the interviews and, in some cases, the women may not have connected specific health problems to the abuse. This would be consistent with the findings of Loring (1994) and others.

Mentioned during the interviews and in the conversations when I checked in with the women a day after the interviews, were the bodily reactions the women

experienced as they recollected their stories. Glenda felt her body shaking while she was talking and jokingly suggested a punching bag would be good to have present during the interview to release some tense feelings onto. Amber mirrored Glenda in that she was surprised how affected she was physically (shaky and tense) talking about the relationship. Sophie and Cameron talked of similar feelings. Each of the women also felt varying degrees of emotional upset and talked of how emotionally drained they felt. For some, this continued for a number of days after each interview.

The findings of this study suggest consistencies with existing literature. Aside from injuries caused by a physically abusive attack, the women reported a similar range of negative health outcomes as physically abused women experience (Vitanza, Vogel & Marshall, 1995; Loring, 1994). Perhaps the mental and physical symptoms the participants' experienced as a result of taking part in this study are indicative of the trauma they are still carrying with them. Two of the women were, at the time of the interviews, seeking therapy to help them deal with the after effects of being in an emotionally abusive relationship.

Making the connection to Sorsoli (2004), Hatch (2002) and Mechanic Weaver and Resick (2008) knowledge of the harms abuse can bring to health are somewhat limited to those associated with physical harm. There is no doubting that the harms done by physical abuse can be life threatening and this obviously deserves attention. Yet what became evident from this research is that the harm of emotional abuse can also be life threatening. Half of the participants in this study either attempted or considered suicide whilst in the abusive relationship. As Hagar (2001) and Flaherty (1996) allude to, women in this situation are often unfairly pathologised and labelled 'crazy' when in reality the harm done to them deserves the same amount of care and consideration as the harm done by a physical attack.

### **Gender socialisation and the normalisation of emotional abuse towards women**

Many studies of abuse towards women, including those with an emphasis on psychological/emotional abuse, have focused upon acts of aggression which appear to follow some kind of cyclical pattern, along with propositions of

personal attributes found in individuals that may predispose them to becoming victims or perpetrators. This could have had the effect of promoting images of helpless women who are trapped in a cycle of abuse perpetrated by a 'sick' male within which there are periods of relative calm and perhaps a return to honeymoon like circumstances. As a result of this the acts of coercion and control which seem often to occur in abusive relationships have by and large not featured heavily in our knowledge, perhaps leading to a skewed view of abuse (Stark, 2007).

The women who shared their stories for this research did not point to many specific acts of physical aggression they felt were directed towards them and they did not express being particularly fearful of physical attack from their male partner. In fact to others, their relationships may not seem all that different to what could be considered a 'normal' heterosexual relationship. The difference being, perhaps, was in how the participants' felt about themselves due to the way the relationship played out. It may have been that some of the participants were simply less pre-disposed to tolerate fitting a more traditional female gender role.

Emotional abuse may be a continuum along the scale of what is considered 'normal' at present. Rather than being a pathological behaviour or a sign of 'weakness and docility' on the females behalf, it may be that for some women emotional abuse is felt more strongly because she un/knowingly resists an unequal gender role. When a female embraces the traditional gender role she can receive the perks associated with her subordinated position. However, if she chooses to expect a more equal role there could be relationship conflict and she may not receive any perks. Conversely if she assumes the traditional role she could feel devalued and inferior. Either way the odds of some kind of negative outcome are stacked against her if she challenges the status quo of patriarchal heterosexual intimate relationships. In support of this, the participants in this study were generally unaware of the subtle manipulations occurring in their relationships although they did recognise having feelings of unfairness and distress associated with it.



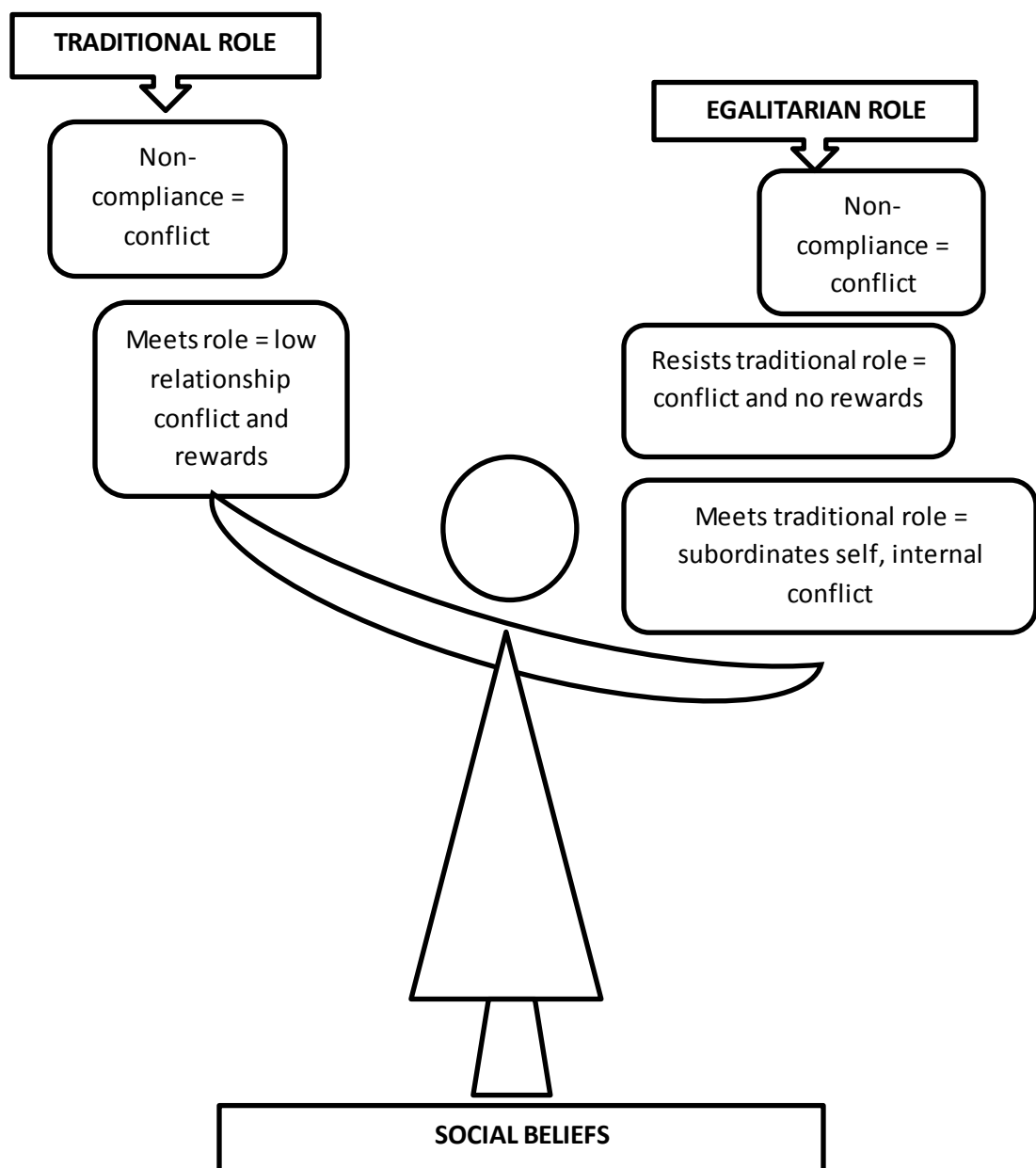


Figure 3: Traditional versus egalitarian female gender role

What may be happening in these types of relationships is that a male with strong ideas of traditional gender roles meets a female who does not adhere so strongly to them. Once in a committed relationship he struggles to shape her into what he believes is a more traditional role using the privileges and justification society has given him. If the male partner feels she is resisting filling the traditional gender role he expects, he merely exerts more of his privilege in trying to mould her. Something he may not do if he was in a relationship with a female who was less inclined towards egalitarianism.

Traditional gender hierarchies within patriarchy as discussed in chapter one, sanction male power and privilege both in society and in intimate relationships through self-perpetuation. Violence (in this case emotional violence) is only needed if the hierarchy begins to break down (Gramsci, 1972; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The male partners in this study did appear to have an investment in maintaining their privilege (Giles, 2004) and seemed to hold some sexist beliefs. Johnson (2005) believes males who understand how patriarchy gives them certain privileges and power are unlikely to engage in resistance to the changing gender roles in society.

If the normalization of emotional abuse towards women in society is at the root of the problem when it comes to recognizing it occurring in an adult heterosexual relationship, then quite possibly it is the privileges males have inherited from various social structures and not the severity or frequency of violent acts that are allowing men to dominate and abuse their female partners in ways which have yet to become the focus of domestic violence research.

# CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to investigate the dynamics of emotional abuse in a heterosexual relationship from the point of view of the woman who experienced it and investigate how they came to see their relationship as abusive. This study describes some of the key issues the women faced in disentangling emotional abuse from the socio/cultural norms women live their lives in.

The stories of the four women who took part gave evidence of the insidious nature of emotional abuse. Acts of benevolent sexism seemed to cause confusion for the participants as often they were framed as concern or caring gestures. The case studies show the accumulated effects of continual covert emotional abuse alongside some more explosive acts of overt abuse and illustrate the impacts of non-physical abuse on psychological and physical wellbeing. The amount of time each woman had been out of the relationship varied from a couple of years to over ten years, yet the far reaching effects of emotional abuse were still being felt by the women at the time of this study.

As a researcher my interest was in how women came to recognise emotional abuse and what aided their efforts. It quickly became clear during the interviews that this was far from a straight forward process for the women. In fact not one of the women ended their relationship because they recognised it as abusive. It was not until after the relationship was over and, for some women, a period of reflection and change in perspective that their experience became clearer.

All but one of the women discussed aspects of their relationships with others. A range of factors influenced who they chose to talk to and what they chose to discuss, included in these chosen to talk to were trusted friends and family for any general discussion, and medical professionals for help with physical and psychological symptoms.

Among friends and family the responses were varied, sometimes victim blaming and sometimes helpful. However, only one friend was able to name the abuse for what it was. She worked in the domestic violence field and had knowledge of the power and control wheel.

Help received from the medical profession was varied. Sometimes there was positive advice and other times negative. Responses varied from prescriptions for anxiety and depression medication, without consultation over the possible causes, through to validation that abuse was at the centre of any physical or psychological problems the women were encountering.

For all the women recognising the abuse for what it was a process helped by outside influence. For some, this process was facilitated by professionals, (a lawyer, doctors and a domestic violence worker) and for others it was personal moments of insight and clarity aided by newly discovered ideas of women's rights and feminism. Each women who noted changes in her perspective as her awareness of women's rights increased felt that she was better able to recognise abuse and abusive situations than perhaps previously she had been. Not only that, the general consensus seemed to be that they all would be much more likely to voice any concerns over unfair treatment in future.

### **Personal reflections**

On a personal note, the study raised some self-care issues that I think are important for qualitative researchers to take into account. I have experienced long term emotional abuse in a relationship and while that changed my life and was eventually to become the inspiration behind this study it also brought with it some lingering effects. The stories the women spoke of raised PTSD like symptoms for them and for me also. When undertaking research of this nature it is important to have support available for the participants and for the researcher. Another factor to take into account is that a great deal of time during qualitative research study is spent in isolation, researching, writing up transcripts and analysing. I found there were times when it was necessary to step away from anything related to abuse; reading, writing or talking of it, as it became overwhelming and at times very depressing, and take a decent break for my own sanity and for those around me.

### **Methodological reflections**

The case study approach taken in this research proved to be a successful method for capturing the women's stories in context. The in-depth semi-structured interviews allowed the women to reflect on issues that were important to them. Follow-up interviews a couple of weeks after the initial interview were a good opportunity to further explore any issues that emerged. Often the women's memories were triggered by engaging in the first interview and as they read through their transcripts. It also gave me the opportunity to reflect and do so simple analyses before the participant and I met again. Any early emerging themes enabled me to raise the issue with other participants.

At times some of the interviews veered wildly away from the focus I had perhaps naively expected, to include aspects of abuse (particularly sexual) that had or was still causing deep pain for the women. It may have been practical to allow more time for the interview process than I originally thought.

Because the methodological approach taken in this study required a large time investment at the interviewing, transcribing, and analysing stages, the number of participants was small. Often qualitative studies are costly and time consuming and the participants are likely to be drawn from a less randomised sample than a quantitative study may use. As with other qualitative studies the results of this research are not generalizable. Because events described by this type of research are often deeply personal, it has been said that the results are highly subjective (Kneale & Santy, 1999). However, some researchers have argued that the elimination of subjectivity in any science research is at best improbable as bias begins with choosing a research topic (Davies & Dodd, 2002). Overall, however carefully a researcher evaluates their own bias through reflexive practice, it would be wrong to assume that other cultures or future generations would not see the research as biased or misleading (Zavos & Biglia, 2009).

I would recommend this approach to anyone wishing to study issues of this nature. Becoming actively involved and developing relationships with the people you are researching turns what could become an academic process into so much

more. It becomes research with a definite purpose to enhance the lives of those who may not always get to have a voice.

### **Suggestions for future research**

The findings of this study suggest some further ideas for future research. Other research in this area could include:

- **Further qualitative case studies of emotional abuse**

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of this type of abuse, more in-depth case studies of women's experiences would expand the knowledge base and contribute towards future theory building for prevention and intervention.

- **An investigation into changing patterns of women's victimisation**

As women have made greater strides towards equality, have the dynamics of abuse changed? A study investigating any changes of the victimisation of women over recent decades may identify factors which could be useful for the on-going development of appropriate responses from professionals working in the field.

- **In-depth research of approaches used to teach young adults about healthy relationships.**

Research in this area could explore possibilities for the best approach to ensuring teenagers and young adults receive the best education about healthy relationships. Qualitative studies could identify factors that are inhibiting or promoting notions of reciprocity, shared responsibilities and respect in intimate relationships.

- **Qualitative research into men's experiences of emotional abuse**

Do men experience emotional abuse in similar ways to women? Outcomes from this research may challenge or help to confirm the role of patriarchy and the social construction of gender in the outcomes of emotional abuse.

### **Implications of the research**

The case studies revealed the complex nature of emotional abuse. It is an abuse which appears to be underpinned by gender roles and personal expectations. This seems to make it difficult to recognise as it is often sanctioned by our patriarchal society. Because of the confusion surrounding this type of abuse at present; for some people it feels abusive and for others it may not, it suggests intervention responses are going to be limited, but not impossible. One method of detecting and intervening in emotional abuse may be to focus less on the tactics used to undermine the woman and focus more on the negative physical and mental health outcomes she is experiencing as a result of being abused.

Therefore, public awareness campaigns of abuse should be including more specifically targeted messages towards emotional abuse. Not only explaining the dynamics and why it is not ok to emotionally abuse, but also explaining reciprocity and what a healthy relationship looks like. It may be beneficial for campaigns to link certain abusive situations or tactics together with the negative health outcomes it can cause, in order to provide a more holistic picture of emotional abuse.

This study suggests how confusing the current campaign messages can be for women experiencing emotional abuse. It is likely this is also the case for potential support people. Studies show abused women respond well to positive support which is not victim blaming and that they are more likely to stop seeking help if responses are negative. Therefore focusing attention on aspects of abuse not generally covered in campaigns is likely to increase awareness for both the abused and her support systems, potentially paving the way for more positive help and intervention.

In terms of preventative measures to effectively combat emotional abuse a social justice approach targeting multiple levels could address many of the oppressive issues many women face every-day in their lives, including discrimination, sexism, restriction, and exploitation in the home. Prevention measures which only target individuals are unlikely to prove effective if the larger social and political inequalities are not also targeted. Until patriarchy and male privilege are

addressed in our society, there will continue to be an environment which allows the emotional abuse of women to go un-detected and sanctioned.



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## Would you like to participate in some research?

My name is Catherine Corbett and I am a Masters student in Psychology at the University of Waikato. For my thesis I am researching women's experiences of emotional abuse by their male partner. I am particularly interested in emotional abuse which occurs in the absence of physical violence because this is often difficult to identify.

I am looking for 5 women who have experienced emotional (but not physical) abuse, who would like to be interviewed about their experience.

I expect interviews to be between 1 – 3 hours long and they will be conducted at a place you feel most comfortable and safe. Anything you tell me will remain confidential.

If you would like to take part in this research, please phone or email me to discuss this opportunity and ask any questions about it.

Catherine Corbett: 0211540892 Email [clc22@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:clc22@waikato.ac.nz)

If you would like any information about me you can contact my supervisors

Neville Robertson: 07 8384466 ext 8300 Email [scorpio@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:scorpio@waikato.ac.nz)

Cate Curtis: 07 8384466 ext 8669 Email [ccurtis@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:ccurtis@waikato.ac.nz)

## **APPENDIX B: Participant information sheet**

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*Charming or Harming: How women came to recognise their intimate heterosexual partner relationship as emotionally abusive.*

*Information for case study participants*

*What is the project about?*

I would like to understand women's experiences of emotional abuse and how they came to recognise the abuse. My own experiences of an emotionally abusive relationship led me to believe that early detection of this type of insidious abuse is important. Emotional abuse often goes undetected as it is not as recognisable as other forms of abuse.

*Who is the researcher?*

This is a project being carried out under the supervision of the School of Psychology at Waikato University. I am a graduate student and will be supervised by *Dr Neville Robertson* and *Dr Cate Curtis*. Their contact details (and mine) are provided at the bottom of this information sheet. You are welcome to make contact with my supervisors or myself if you have any questions regarding this research.

*Why am I being asked to participate?*

If you identify as a woman who has experienced emotional abuse in the absence of any physical violence I believe you can help this project by sharing your experiences of emotional abuse. You will have a unique perspective and this will help to build a picture of how women recognise emotional abuse and of emotional abuse in

general. I am hoping any information I collect from this study will add to the growing bank of knowledge of this kind of abuse.

*What will I be asked to do?*

I would like to interview you about your experiences of emotional abuse. This will be a one to one interview, although you are welcome to have a support person of your choice with you during the interview. I expect the interview will take about one to two hours to complete. We can arrange a time and place that suits you. There may be a need for additional interviews to take place in order to fully capture your experiences.

*What will I be asked in the interview?*

I am really interested in your experiences of emotional abuse and how you came to recognise it. I would like to discuss things such as,

- Your relationships prior to the abusive relationship
- What was different about the abusive relationship
- What helped you to recognise the emotional abuse
- How did friends or family make a difference to your experience
- Any general comments

*What will happen with my information?*

Our conversation will be audio-taped with your permission; in addition I may take notes of our conversation. From these, I will develop a summary of our discussion, which I will send to you for comment or correction. You will also be able to delete any information you feel should not be included.

You will be asked to give any feedback within two weeks of receiving the summary. If I do not hear from you by then I will assume that you are fine with it.

The summary will be added to any other information I collect and used to complete a university thesis. It is possible the information I collect from you will also be used to write articles for submission to academic journals. Thesis and academic journals are potentially

accessible by the public. If you wish a summary of my findings will be made available to you when completed.

*Will other people know who I am?*

Generally no. In writing up my research I will use pseudonyms unless you would like your name to be used instead. I will disguise any potentially identifying information such as place names and easily identifiable events. However, while I will take all possible care in protecting your privacy, it is possible you may be recognised by some readers who know your story.

*What are my rights, and what can I expect from the researcher?*

You can

- Ask questions at any time
- Ask for the audio recording device to be turned off at any time if you would rather not have a specific point recorded.
- Decline to answer any questions
- Withdraw from the research at any point during the interview, or after the interview up to two weeks after I send you the summary
- To have the information you have provided added to, corrected or have any information removed within the two week time limit
- Expect to receive a summary, and be given details of how to access the full thesis
- Expect that your information will be kept in secure storage (it will be kept for up to five years after my thesis is completed and then after that it will be destroyed)
- Expect myself or my supervisors to answer any questions, or concerns you may have about this project.

*What do I need to do now?*

If you would like to take part in this study, please contact me. We can arrange a time and place where you feel comfortable to meet. I would like to talk with you in person, but if that is not possible, I

could interview you over the phone. You could also email me your thoughts (contact details below).

This project has been approved by The University of Waikato Psychology Research and Ethics Committee.

*Contact details*

Researcher: *Catherine Corbett*: Graduate student. School of Psychology, University of Waikato. Phone 021 154 0892 Email [clc22@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:clc22@waikato.ac.nz)

Research Supervisor: *Dr Cate Curtis*: School of Psychology, University of Waikato. Phone 07 8384466 ext 8669 Email [ccurtis@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:ccurtis@waikato.ac.nz)

Research Supervisor: *Dr Neville Robertson*: School of Psychology, University of Waikato. Phone 07 8384466 ext 8300 Email [scorpio@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:scorpio@waikato.ac.nz)

## **APPENDIX C: Interview schedule and example of follow up interview questions**

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### **Charming or Harming: How women came to recognise their intimate heterosexual partner relationship as emotionally abusive**

#### **Interview Guide**

##### **Introductions and consent**

- Introductions
- Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today
- Before we get started I would like to reiterate the key points of the information sheet with you, do you have any questions you would like to ask about it?
- Sign the consent form

##### **Briefing**

- I hope this interview will be an interesting experience for both of us, have you done an interview like this before? I would like our time to be as relaxed and informal as possible
- I realise that what we will be discussing may not be easy at times, if you would like to take a break at any time just let me know.
- If there are any questions you don't feel comfortable answering, just tell me and we will skip them
- Whilst I can never know what you have experienced, I think it is important to tell you that I have experienced an emotionally abusive relationship. This is why I am interested in researching this topic
- I think that as I am asking you to share your experiences, I am also willing to share mine with you



- It is important that sharing my experiences won't guide you so I may leave it until the end of the interview to share some information.
- There are no right or wrong answers and everything you tell me is of importance to this project
- I may jot down some notes, this will be to remind me of anything I want to ask you more about later
- Do you have any questions before we start

### **Generative questions**

- Firstly I would like to learn about your background. Where you are from, where you grew up. Can you tell me about your family life?
- Next we will move onto adult relationships. Prior to the relationship which was abusive, had you been in any other relationships? What were they like?
- Now we will focus more on the relationship which was abusive. How did you meet the partner who was abusive? What was the relationship like at the beginning? Looking back at the relationship now, were there any signs of emotional abuse in the early stages.
- During the early stages, did you discuss your relationship with family members or friends? Did they have any opinions, good or bad, about your new partner or relationship?
- How did the relationship progress? What was it like?
- Help seeking strategies: Can you tell me about any help seeking strategies you used at that time?
- How did the role of outsiders to the relationship responses affect your thoughts?
- Who did you discuss any perceptions of your relationship with? If you had a response, what effect did this have on your reactions?
- Were there any costs from not discussing your relationship?
- Have you had any experiences of victim blaming from family, friends or others? Can you explain them?

- Knowing what you know of emotional abuse now, were there any early warning signs in the relationship you can think of?
- What could have helped you label his behaviour as abusive earlier?
- Do you have any advice for women who are currently in an emotionally abusive relationship at the moment?
- Are there any changes to services such as medical, Winz etc that you think would be helpful for women who are in or have left an emotionally abusive relationship.
- Is there anything you would like to talk about that we haven't discussed?

### **Closing**

- I am just going to check over my notes to make sure I have understood everything you have told me.

Thank the participant. Ensure she has support if she needs it. Confirm that I will get in touch the following day to see how she is.

### **Follow up interview questions for Sophie.**

- Before the relationship with Tony did you have any views on how abuse may look or how abusers may behave?
- Would any of those views or non – views have fed into the difficulty in recognizing emotional abuse
- You talked about having emotional abuse modeled for you by your parents. Can you elaborate on that some more?
- When you met Tony and he promised you so much, then things began to change after you moved into together. What did you think about the change?
- The incident with your ex when Tony got annoyed at him visiting your home. How did that affect any future contact with your ex? How about with other people you wanted to have over?
- You mentioned that the good times made up for the horrible stuff. Were there cycles of abuse where tension would build and then explode or did it manifest in other ways?
- The friend you confided in about your relationship. Why did you choose to talk to her originally?
- What stopped you from talking to other people about the relationship problems?
- I'm really interested in how your friend explained the power and control side of abuse to you. She related the wheel to stories of her own experiences which you found helpful.
- Did you use any other forms of help to understand what was going on? Things like books or on-line sites.
- Once the decision was made to end the relationship how did Tony react? How about afterwards how did he behave?
- Has anyone blamed you or held you responsible for the problems in the relationship?

- How did the emotional abuse affect you mentally and physically? Some people experience mental health issues or get skin problems, headaches that kind of stuff. Did you find anything like that happening?
- Is there anything you can think of which may have helped you label his behaviors earlier?
- If you were to devise some ways which may help raise awareness of emotional abuse in the general population, what would they be?
- Is there anything else you would like to add that I may have missed?

## **APPENDIX D: Letter attached to participant transcript**

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Dear ...

Enclosed is a copy of your transcript. Would you please read both to ensure,

- It is correct.
- The names used ensure confidentiality.
- Check any other details such as place names and identifying locations to ensure confidentiality.
- Note down any more issues you may have recalled since the interview that you wish to tell me about at the follow up interview.

If I don't hear from you within the two week dead-line for making any changes, I will assume everything is fine with the summary and portrait. The cut-off date will be .....

I will be in touch in a few weeks to arrange a follow up interview with you.

Many Thanks

Kind regards

Catherine Corbett

## APPENDIX E: Consent form

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### CONSENT FORM: Participants copy

Research Project: Charming or harming

Name of Researcher: Catherine Corbett

Name of Supervisor (if applicable): Neville Robertson

I have received an information sheet about this research project or the researcher has explained the study to me. I have had the chance to ask any questions and discuss my participation with other people. Any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this research project and I understand that I may withdraw at any time. If I have any concerns about this project, I may contact the convenor of the Research and Ethics Committee (Dr Nicola Starkey, phone: 838 4466 ext.6472, e-mail [nstarkey@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:nstarkey@waikato.ac.nz))

Participant's  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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### CONSENT FORM: Researchers copy

Research Project: Charming or harming

Name of Researcher: Catherine Corbett

Name of Supervisor (if applicable): Neville Robertson

I have received an information sheet about this research project or the researcher has explained the study to me. I have had the chance to ask any questions and discuss my participation with other people. Any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this research project and I understand that I may withdraw at any time. If I have any concerns about this project, I may contact the convenor of the Research and Ethics Committee.

Participant's Name:

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_