CHAPTER FOUR

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

4.1 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

4.1.1 THEORETICAL LIMITATIONS

The use of a qualitative method incorporates various disadvantages. It should be noted that every effort was made to address these in the study. Qualitative research is often criticised for being subjective and uncontrolled. However, themes explored in the study were directed by literature rather than the researcher, with additional topics being introduced by participants. It is nevertheless recognised that despite attempts at an unbiased, explorative piece of research, the analysis may have been coloured by the assumptions of the researcher. However, the researcher did not have many assumptions prior to the study, given the inconsistencies presented in the literature.

One of the most cogent criticisms of qualitative research is the lack of criteria by which to judge the trustworthiness and relevance of the results. The proposed study acknowledges that, given the nature and size of the study, the truth of the results would not stand for itself but would rely on further research for validation.

Many of the themes being explored in the study were of a personal and sensitive nature. Participants may have felt uncomfortable to disclose such information in a face-to-face interview with the researcher, a stranger to the participant. This was perhaps evidenced by the idealisation that permeated the interviews, particularly towards the beginning. It is possible that additional themes may have emerged with subsequent interviews and rapport. However, it should be noted that sensitive material, such as sexual abuse and discharge, was nevertheless discussed by participants.

Many of the themes identified in the literature are of an unconscious or latent nature. However, the fact that the study comprised only one set of interviews, limited the
Further interviews would have allowed for more in-depth investigation of unconscious themes. Nevertheless, the interviews were felt to be sufficiently detailed to allow for analysis of tensions, contradictions and the interpretation of themes that were implied rather than being overt.

4.1.2 PRACTICAL LIMITATIONS

The study was complicated by the fact that the sample did not have uniform features in many respects, such as marital status, relationship status and colour. In addition, one of the participants suffered from vulvodynia. Differences in themes may be related to these factors rather than distinctions as a result of vaginismus.

There are also several problems inherent in the use of a semi-structured interview. Open-ended questions may prompt participants into providing ambiguous or vague answers, as occurred with parental figures in this study. Participants may also not have understood the questions in the same way. This was seen with the conceptualisation of femininity, which made the comparison of themes more complex. In addition, the use of a semi-structured interview, combined with spontaneous probing, may elicit information in a way that confirms preconceived notions of the topic. With regard to this topic, however, there were very few pre-conceived notions.

4.1.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Much more research needs to be undertaken in general with regards to vaginismus, on both a quantitative and qualitative level. However, instead of attempting to categorise women suffering from vaginismus into profiles, research should be directed at understanding the experiential dimension of vaginismus. Possible avenues for such research have been suggested in this study.
Further research needs to be undertaken regarding the influence of treatment. The medical community needs to have a greater awareness of how what aspects of treatment are effective, and how this impacts on the experience of vaginismus.

This study found that there were no differences in the experiences of vaginismus based on culture. However, given the size of the study, this finding is tentative. Most of the research to date has incorporated white westernised samples. Understandings of the condition may therefore be biased, which needs to be remedied.